

ESTHER

INTRODUCTION

The Jews read the Book of Esther at the Feast of Purim celebrated in March. Esther was written in 479 B.C., and takes place between chapters 6 and 7 of the book of Ezra.

King Ahasuerus from the Book of Esther is the same person as Xerxes I, the king famous for his wars with Greece. The Book of Esther is peculiar in that it does not mention God's name. God's Divine providence can be seen throughout the book.

Haman obtained a decree from the king to destroy all Jews. If this decree had been carried out, all of God's promises to Abraham, to Moses, and to David—all the promises of the Messiah—would have failed. But through Esther and Mordecai the plan to kill all Jews was overcome.

Providence is the over-ruling hand of God in the affairs of nature and men to care for His people, and to see that His purpose and plan for the salvation of men, is accomplished according to His original design. All of creation works as God commands and functions only as He directs. The animal world also responds to His control.

The nations of the world are never out of God's control. They function only as God directs.

If all the Hebrew people were exterminated this would have ended the work of God providing a Savior through the seed of Abraham and David. God in His providence and direction will always provide a "savior" (Esther). Esther, even though it does not mention God's name, does refer to fasting, prayer, and providence.

CHAPTER 1

During the time between the first return of the Jews under Zerubbabel (536 B.C.) and the second return under Ezra (458 B.C.), incidents with far-reaching effects occurred in Susa, the winter-time capital of the Persian kings.

In 486 B.C. Darius I was succeeded by his son Xerxes. He is called Ahasuerus in the Book of Esther. During Ahasuerus' third year, before his campaign in Greece, he made a great feast in Susa, lasting 180 days. After this a seven-day banquet was held for all the people.

Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women. On the seventh day of the feast the drunken king orders Queen Vashti to display her beauty before the people and the princes, "for she was beautiful." She refused to display her beauty and the king became very angry.

Because she (1) disobeyed the law (the command of the king); (2) because all the women of the land would look with contempt on their husbands; (3) Vashti was forbidden to come into the presence of the king; (4) her royal position was to be given to another who is more worthy than she.

CHAPTER 2

Before a new queen was selected Ahasuerus made a trip to Greece with a great navy and was defeated, narrowly escaping annihilation at Plataea. He returned to Persia in his seventh year and sought consolation with his harem.

The king's attendants suggest that a new queen be selected. Every beautiful young virgin was brought to Susa and the one that pleased the king would become his queen. Esther was one of those beautiful young virgins brought to Susa. Esther's Hebrew name was Hadassah, which means Myrtle in Hebrew.

Esther's name means "Star" In the Greek language. Esther's father and mother had died and she was being raised by Mordecai, her cousin. She did not reveal that she was a Jewess.

Hegai, the king's eunuch in charge of the harem, treated Esther with extreme kindness and favor. She was made queen in place of Vashti.

Greek historians mention two wives of Ahasuerus that are not mentioned in the Bible and the Bible mentions two wives not mentioned in Greek history. Ahasuerus was notably polygamous.

Mordecai, while sitting at the king's gate, overheard a plot on the king's life, and reported it through Esther.

The plotters were hanged on a gallows and a record was made of Mordecai's deed.

CHAPTER 3

A prince of Ahasuerus named Haman is promoted to a high position. All the king's servants at the king's gate were commanded to bow down and pay homage to Haman.

Haman was filled with rage—Mordecai would not bow down to him, so Haman obtained a decree to destroy all the Jews throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus. The day for this massacre was selected by casting lots (dice) called Pur in Assyrian.

The twelfth month which is Adar (Hebrew) is the same as our month of March. If this decree had been carried out all of God's promises to Abraham, to Moses, to David, all the promises of the Messiah would have failed.

CHAPTER 4

When Mordecai learns of this decree, (1) he tore his clothes; (2) put on sackcloth and ashes; and (3) wept bitterly. Esther sent the eunuch appointed to attend her to Mordecai to learn why he was in great anguish and Mordecai reported to her the exact amount of money Haman had offered to put in the king's treasury for the destruction of the Jews as well as giving him a copy of the decree to take to Esther.

Esther did not immediately go into the king's presence with Mordecai's information. It meant death for anyone to enter the king's inner court with being summoned. Mordecai then sent word to Esther that she too would be killed because she was a Jew.

Verse 14 is a verse with a great meaning. Esther may have come to the kingdom "for such a time as this." God is always in control of all situations concerning the salvation of His people. Esther asks all the Jews to assemble and fast for her and she would go into the king's presence, "Which is not according to law, and if I perish, I perish."

CHAPTER 5

Esther's faith was rewarded. The king received her warmly and accepted an invitation to a banquet prepared by her that day. Haman was also invited and he and the king came to the banquet. At this banquet Esther invited them to another banquet, tomorrow, where she will tell the king what is troubling her.

Haman leaves the first banquet. He sees Mordecai and is again filled with anger. To his wife Zeresh, he recounts all his riches and fame and how Esther had invited only him to her banquets, along with the king.

Yet all this did not satisfy him because of Mordecai. Haman's wife, Zeresh suggested that Haman build a gallows on which to hang Mordecai, and then go joyfully to the banquet with the king.

CHAPTER 6

The king could not sleep that night and he requested that the chronicles of his kingdom be read to him. He hears Mordecai's report of the assassins and learns that no reward had been given Mordecai. The king asks Haman what should be done to one whom the king wishes to honor. Haman thought the king wanted to honor him so he proposed that the honored one be rapidly paraded through the city on a horse led by a most noble prince.

Mordecai is honored when Haman leads the horse throughout the city. This did not please Haman. He covered his head in shame and hurried home, mourning. Haman's wife says to him that he has started an irreversible fall before Mordecai the Jew and that he would not overcome him, but will fall before him. The unique power of the Jews was hated, but recognized.

CHAPTER 7

The king and Haman attend Esther's second banquet and the king asks Esther's petition. She explains that she is a Jew and that as a result of the king's decree she and her people would be destroyed. The king asks who prepared this decree and she tells him it was Haman.

Ahasuerus stalks out in anger and Haman fell at her feet begging for his life. The king mistook Haman's actions as an attack on his queen and the king ordered Haman's execution upon the gallows built for Mordecai.

CHAPTER 8

Mordecai was promoted to Haman's position. Esther begs the king to rescind the decree but under the laws of the Medes and Persians it could not be altered or taken away but other laws could be added to them.

A further decree was added permitting Jews to assemble to fight and defend themselves on the day that Haman had chosen for their execution. This decree brought joy to the Jews and caused many Gentiles to become proselytes to the Jewish faith.

CHAPTER 9

The fearsome day scheduled for the slaughter of the Jews arrived and the Jews throughout the empire gathered and defended themselves. They slew 800 enemies in Susa and 75,000 throughout the empire in two days but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

To commemorate this deliverance Mordecai sent out letters to Jews everywhere to keep a holiday on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the twelfth month (March) a feast called Purim after the name of the lots cast by Haman.

CHAPTER 10

Ahasuerus laid a tax on the people perhaps to pay for the expenses of his disastrous Greek wars. Mordecai became very great in the kingdom of Ahasuerus.

Mordecai's name has been found on a clay tablet verifying before all people his place in the history of Persia and of Israel.