



BIBLE STORIES EVERYONE OUGHT TO KNOW

Main and Oklahoma Church of Christ ^ Adult Bible Studies ^ Winter-Spring 2010

March 14, 2010

Esther, Esther 1-10

Getting Started

Because of the unfaithfulness of God's people, God allows Nebuchadnezzar to carry them into captivity in Babylon. The story of Esther takes place 103 years later. It is a story from the time when God's people lived in exile. It is not a story of God abandoning his people; it is a story that shows that the Israelites still enjoyed the love and protection of a faithful God.

What's the story?

The story of Esther starts with the removal of Queen Vashti. During a weeklong banquet, which followed six months of celebrating, King Xerxes orders his wife Queen Vashti to appear so that the men present can see her beauty. When the Queen refuses to appear, Xerxes removes her. Several years pass and the king orders a search for a new queen. Esther is among the beautiful young virgins brought to the palace and she is made the new queen.

Meanwhile Esther's uncle Mordecai uncovers a plot to assassinate the king and reports it to Esther. She in turn tells the king. The men are convicted and the events recorded.

Now the third character in the drama enters. Haman is one of the King's honored officials. He is so honored that those at the king's gate are to kneel down and honor him. Mordecai enrages Haman by refusing to kneel. Haman plots revenge, not only on Mordecai, but on the whole Jewish race. He convinces the King that he should destroy these subversive people.

When Mordecai hears that the king has signed a law that will allow for the total destruction of the Jewish people, he sends Esther a copy of the order and urges her to go to the king and plead for her people. Esther is not convinced she will be successful. It has been 30 days since the king sent for her, and if she enters the king's presence uninvited she may be killed.

Mordecai reminds Esther that her life is also in the balance. He reminds her that she is in a God-given position to act (Esther 4:12-14). Esther decides to approach the king but asks Mordecai and all the Jews of Susa to join her and her maids in a three day fast before she approaches the king. After three days, Esther approaches the king and he meets her with favor, willing to grant her request. She invites the king and Haman to a banquet where the king once again asks Esther what she wants. She invites Haman and the King to a second banquet the next night. Haman leaves the first banquet happy until he notices that Mordecai still does not pay him honor. Mordecai's actions dampen Haman's joy in his invitation to the queen's banquet. Haman's wife and friend convince him to build a 75-foot gallows and ask the king the next morning to have Mordecai hanged.

That very night the king cannot sleep and orders the record of his reign read to him. The king discovers that Mordecai had never received proper honor for thwarting the attempted assassination. The next morning the king asks Haman for advice on how to honor someone. Haman cannot imagine anyone more deserving of honor than himself so he outlines an elaborate plan and then is charged with the task of carrying it out to honor Mordecai! Haman's day goes from bad to worse. At the banquet Esther asks the king to save her and her people from annihilation by Haman. The king leaves the room in a rage and Haman falls upon Esther's couch to plead for his life. Unfortunately, the king walks back in and catches Haman in this compromising position. Haman is hung on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. The king issues a new order allowing the Jewish people to prepare for their defense and the Jewish people fight back and are saved.

So, what does this story say about God?

Nowhere in the book of Esther is God mentioned. Instead the story of Esther reveals the behind-the-scenes working of God to deliver his people. A Jewish girl replaces a deposed queen at just the right time to intervene for her people. The king's insomnia provides the event to remind him of his rescue by Mordecai. The world looks at the story of Esther and says, "That sure was lucky," or "What a fortunate coincidence." To the Christian, however, Esther is the story of the hand of God in the lives of his people.

Now, what about our faith?

Like Esther, we will all face times of decision. God has placed each of us in unique situations with unique abilities. What circumstances in your life can God use for his glory? Whose life can you influence for God because you are in just the right place at just the right time?

Monday: Esther 1 and 2

1. Describe the character and actions of King Xerxes.
2. Esther 1:20 records the passing of a law requiring women to respect their husbands. What do you think about the effectiveness of such a law?
3. What events in her life could Esther have taken as proof that God is not present?

Tuesday: Esther 3 and 4

1. How is Mordecai able to convince Esther to approach the King?
2. Why does Esther ask all of the Jews in Susa to fast?
3. Have you had an experience where you felt placed "for such a time as this"?

Wednesday: Esther 5-6

1. By putting off asking the king to save her and her people what advantage does Esther gain? What does this say about waiting?
2. How does one know when to wait and when to act?

Thursday: Esther 7-8; Proverbs 3:33-35; 11:2; 14:22; 16:5,18

1. How does the story of Esther relate to these proverbs?
2. Compare the character of Mordecai and Haman.

Friday: Readings Scripture, Lesson Text

1. It is said that God works in our world in three ways: Miracles, Natural Order, and Providence. Give examples of each from the story of Esther.
2. Where in your own life have you seen the providence of God?