

SURVEY OF ESTHER

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Introduction

1. The name: Esther ("star of the East") is named for its principal character who became queen of the Persian king Ahasuerus/Xerxes
2. The setting: Esther takes place between the first and second return of the Jews from Persia between chapters 6 and 7 of the book of Ezra, about 480B.C.
3. The story: The book of Esther deals with the threatened destruction of those Jews which were left in Persia after Cyrus decreed that they could leave and return to Jerusalem to build the temple if they wanted to.

Outline

1. Esther made queen in place of Vashti (1-2).
2. Haman's plot to destroy the Jews and its defeat (3-8).
3. The Jews deliverance and feast of Purim (9-10).

Esther becomes queen (1-2)

1. King Ahasuerus and queen Vashti throw a party (1:1-3,9).
2. The king makes a drunk uncustomary request to have Vashti dance before him (1:10-12). Vashti is dethroned for her refusal.
3. Consider the proper interpretation of narrative—descriptive or prescriptive?
4. Esther is chosen as queen (2:16-17).
5. Esther's adopted father, Mordecai does the king a favor (2:21-23).

The plot to destroy the Jews (3-8)

1. Haman becomes the king's chief minister and is disturbed by Mordecai (3:1,2).
2. Haman seeks to kill the Jews and bribes the king to do so (3:6,9).
3. The Jews pray, fast, and weep (4:1-3).

4. Esther learns of the destructive plot and her place in Israel's deliverance (4:13-16).
5. Haman is impatient and is then trapped by his own evil plot (5:13-14, 6:1-12, 7:10).

The Jews deliverance and feast (9-10)

1. Mordecai replaces Haman (10:3).
2. The Jews hold a feast of Purim to remember God's deliverance.

Concluding applications

1. God wants his people preserved from extermination in order to bring forth through them the Savior Jesus Christ. Just as God preserved the Jews in Esther's time, he preserves us through Christ. He has promised to keep us as his kingdom and all who are his can rest assured of eternal protection.
2. It is interesting to note that nowhere in the book of Esther is the name of God mentioned or is there any reference made to him. Nevertheless, God's providential care for his people is everywhere implied in the book. We are aware of God's power and presence on every page. We should gain comfort from the fact that even when the name of God is no where mentioned around us, God is still working to save his people and to protect his people.
3. God uses and prepares his people for times of emergencies to help others (cf. 4:14). Consider who God may be preparing you to minister to and why. Maybe it is a relative, friend, or co-worker. God may be using us to evangelize others. We need to get a glimpse of the way God's providence works. Just like the ministry of Mordecai and Esther, our ministry though seemingly insignificant at the time, can have national or international significance when placed in the hands of our loving God.
4. God would have us to live for the deliverance and salvation of his people even when the world is against it (cf.4:16). Perhaps it wasn't customary for the Jews to talk about being saved and delivered by God during the time of Esther. Nevertheless, it took place by those who were prepared to live for the salvation of God's elect.
5. Esther shows the worthlessness of superstition as a guide to life. It is God and not some impersonal fate or thing called luck that controls the destinies of men.
6. Realize that God's sovereignty is at work in every particular situation accomplishing his purposes without in any way abolishing, overriding, or negating the decisions and actions of the people involved. God's working of his will does not eliminate our responsibility for moral decision and moral action. Even if Esther had failed, God's purposes would not have been thwarted for he would have brought deliverance from some other means (cf. 4:14).