

Lesson 17

ESTHER

Purpose: God preserves and delivers His people. He controls history according to His will.

Memory verses: Esther 4:14 & 8:17

For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.

INTRODUCTION

The Jews returned to Jerusalem from Babylon in B.C.536. Construction of the temple was from BC 536 to 516. Esther became Queen of Persia in BC 478. Esther saved the Jews from genocide in BC 473. Ezra came to Babylon in BC 457. Construction of the city wall by Nehemiah was in BC 444.

The history of Esther began about 40 years after the construction of the temple and 30 years before the construction of the wall by Nehemiah. Even though this was added in the Bible after Nehemiah, the incident of Esther took place before Nehemiah. The event of Esther becoming queen of King Xerxes was considered to be one of the milestones in the history of the Jewish people. None could imagine what would have happened to the Jewish people if Queen Esther was not there. This is not just a story with high moral value, but it is a very good example of how the Jewish people were saved from destruction. If this did not happen 500 years before the birth of the Jesus Christ, the existence of the Jewish people and the redemptive work by Jesus would have been different. This would have led the world in a different direction. This story paved the way for the saviour to come to the world through the courageous act of a young and beautiful Jewish girl. This incident happened in the city of Susa which was the winter capital of the Kings of Babylon. The name of Xerxes is another name for King Cyrus of Persia (BC 485-465). There are

two beliefs about the banquet. Some believe that it was a preparation party to attack Greece and the other one is that he was trying to get out of depression from being defeated in the war. He was defeated in the war at Salamis against Greece in the year BC 480. This banquet led to the rejection of Queen Vashti and the subsequent crowning of Queen Esther.

Esther is a Persian name and its corresponding name in Hebrew is “Hadassah”. The meaning of this word is star. It was the name of a great goddess in Babylon. Hadassah means myrtle, a plant which has a great colour and great fragrance.

The word God is not found anywhere in the book of Esther, but the name of a heathen King is mentioned 150 times in this book. The words prayer and worship are also not mentioned in this book. The name of this book was not mentioned in the New Testament at all. Despite all these facts, we see God’s provision in this book more than any other book.

Esther was the daughter of Abihail who was from the tribe of Benjamin. She was an orphan and was brought up by her uncle Mordecai. She was from the family of Kish that was taken as slaves by King Nebuchadnezzar.

The Hebrew name of this book is the Megilloth Esther. This means the history of Esther. This book was called Aster in Greek and known as Esther in English.

AUTHOR (UNKNOWN)

It is believed that a Jewish person who knew King Xerxes, the culture and practices of both the people in the city of Susa and the exile Jews wrote this book after the death of Xerxes, (10:2, 3). Since it is written in past tense, the book was likely written by Mordecai, or one of his contemporaries such as Ezra or Nehemiah. The writing style of this book however is different from Ezra and Nehemiah.

PERIOD OF WRITING

King Xerxes ruled during the period BC 486-464. Queen Esther was chosen in BC 483- 473 (ten years). The death of King Xerxes was in 464. It is believed that this book was written before B.C. 425.

CHRIST IN THE BOOK OF ESTHER

Esther was ready to suffer and die for her people. Christ also suffered and died for the redemption of His people and to give life. Esther interceded to the King for her people. Jesus Christ

is doing the same with God the Father for his people. Like the enemy fighting against the Jewish people, Satan is always fighting with the people of God. Christ always rescues His people from Satan as He did in the past.

MAIN TOPIC

The provision of God leads us to victory.

OBSERVATION ABOUT THE BOOK

The history of Esther took place between chapters 6 and 7 of the book of Ezra. The story of Esther took place between the first return of Jews under the leadership of Zerubbabel, and after the construction of Tabernacle when the second return took place under the leadership of Ezra.

The book may be divided into two parts.

1 Death threat against the Jewish people (chapter 1 to 4).

2 Victory of the Jewish people (chapters 5 to 10).

DEATH THREAT AGAINST JEWISH PEOPLE (1-4)

There was a banquet conducted in the capital city of Susa. All the dignitaries were invited. The King called Queen Vashti to display her beauty to these dignitaries, but Queen Vashti denied the request. The King became angry and removed her from her position. Later Esther, a young beautiful Jewish girl became the Queen with the help of her uncle Mordecai. Haman was angry at Mordecai because he would not kneel before Haman. Therefore, Haman decided to kill Mordecai, his family and his people. Haman obtained a command from the King to kill all the Jewish people. Mordecai informed Esther of Haman's plot. With fasting and prayer, she approached the King and informed him about Haman and his plot.

STORY OF JEWISH PEOPLE'S VICTORY

Esther arranged a banquet and invited the King and Haman. She asked Haman to come the following day also. Haman made 75-foot-tall gallows to hang Mordecai. The people of that township were eagerly awaiting to see the hanging of Mordecai. The king could not sleep that night. He was going through his diary and found that there was an incident in the past where Mordecai saved his life from the enemies. The king found that he had not given any reward to

Mordecai. The King called Haman and asked what the King would give to a man whom he would like to honour. Haman had to do all that he said to Mordecai hesitantly. On the second day Haman again came to the party. The King asked Esther about her desire. She asked the King to save her and her people from being killed by Haman. The King knew about gallows that was made by Haman. The King changed his decree and ordered that Haman and his family be hung from the same gallows that he built for Mordecai. Mordecai became minister in place of Haman. In remembrance of this incident the Jewish people celebrate the feast of Purim.

Questions

1. What is the message of the book of Esther?
2. In what time period did the story of Esther take place? Describe the incidents which occurred before and after.
3. Describe what would have happened if Esther did not act when she did?
4. How did Esther become the Queen?
5. Describe the history of Esther's family in few sentences.
6. What are the peculiarities of the Book of Esther compared to other books in the Bible?
7. Who was believed to be the author of book of Esther?
8. Describe the period in which the book was written?
9. Describe how Christ is seen in the book of Esther.
10. Explain the day of Purim.
11. Write an observation about the book of Esther.