

Where is God?



The story of Esther is unique in many ways. One of the most unique aspects of the book may even be a bit startling: God isn't in it! At least, God is not mentioned in the book, that is. Throughout all 10 chapters, God is never once mentioned directly or indirectly. That certainly seems strange for a book of the Bible! Why isn't God mentioned in this book? Is He actually absent from this story? The absence is certainly intentional. The lack of direct references to the God of Israel highlight a couple of things. First of all, this story takes place in a foreign land while most of the Jewish people are still displaced from their homeland. Why are they there? Because they had rebelled against God and forsaken His law. But further, the story reminds us that even when it seems like God is absent, He is always present and working for His people. While God may not be mentioned specifically, there are plenty of occasions throughout the story in which we see His guiding hand. Of course, Mordecai the Jew happens to overhear a plot against the king. While the king plans to reward him, for some reason he forgets. Then of all the women in the kingdom for the king to take as wife, he chooses Esther. Later, the king has a sleepless night. To pass the time he peruses some records, and stumbles on the record of Mordecai uncovering the assassination plan. The king determines to reward Mordecai as he originally intended. The timing couldn't be more perfect—as the king is thinking about this Haman approaches with plans to request Mordecai's death. Behind the scenes, it seems apparent that God is working for His people. And of course, there's Mordecai's words to Esther in 4:14, *"For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"* Clearly, Mordecai trusted in the power of God to deliver the Jewish people, and encouraged Esther to trust in God's protection as well! Always remember, God is not absent; He is always working for His people!

Questions

1. Why did the king become angry with Queen Vashti? _____
2. What is another name for Esther? _____
3. Why did Haman hate Mordecai? _____
4. How was Mordecai related to Esther? _____
5. Why was it dangerous for Esther to approach the king unbidden, even though she was the queen? _____
6. What did Haman have built? _____
7. Why did the king want to honor Mordecai? _____
8. Where was Haman hanged? _____
9. Why didn't the king just revoke the edict he'd written concerning the killing of the Jews? _____
10. What celebratory feast was created as a result of the deliverance of the Jews during this period? _____

"That You May Grow Thereby..."

A weekly Bible reading plan



Esther

Orphan, Exile, Queen, Deliverer

Overview

This week we come to the last of the historical books in the Old Testament. The book of Esther records an incredible story that takes place during the return era of Hebrew history, and it takes place between the first return to Jerusalem led by Zerubbabel and the second return that would be led by Ezra. So, chronologically the book of Esther fits between Ezra chapters six and seven. While some Jews had returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel, many more remained in the territories of the Persian empire. Esther's story takes place among the Jews still in the empire. A devious plot was afoot to exterminate the Jewish people, but Esther would become the most unlikely of heroes. In one of the most unique stories of the Bible, a Jewish exile becomes queen of the empire and acts to save her entire race of people! It is a wonderful story of courage, faith, justice, and deliverance.

Suggested Reading Schedule

Monday: Esther 1-2
Tuesday: Esther 3-4
Wednesday: Esther 5-5
Thursday: Esther 7-8
Friday: Esther 9-10

Main Characters

The book of Esther is one of two Old Testament books named after a woman. It's not surprise then that Esther is a main character in the story that bears her name. There are a few other primary characters in this narrative however who play very important roles:

Ahasuerus: More commonly known as Xerxes, the king of Persia. Reigned from 486 to 464 B.C.

Mordecai: A Jewish exile from the tribe of Benjamin. He raised Esther and proved a great mentor to her. He discovered a plot against the king that later saved his own life!

Esther: Jewish exile and orphan who was raised by her relative Mordecai. She was a beautiful woman and chosen as the king's bride after the dismissal of Queen Vashti.

Haman: An Agagite (descendant of Agag) who was a high-ranking official in Xerxes's court. He despised the Jews, and sought to have them wiped out. His plans are foiled and he ends up dying on the very gallows he built for Mordecai.

An Age-Old Rivalry?

While Ahasuerus and Esther are the king and queen, the real conflict in the story of Esther is between Haman and Mordecai. There is an interesting connection between Haman and Mordecai. Haman is introduced as an "Agagite" meaning he is likely a descendant of Agag, the king of the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15). You may remember that king Saul was supposed to utterly destroy the Amalekites, but he spared Agag. We are given a condensed genealogy of Mordecai, and find out he is descended from Kish the Benjamite. Kish, of course, was Saul's father. So Mordecai is either descended from Saul or one of his brothers. Putting these together, it appears we have an ancient rivalry rekindled. Haman, the descendant of Agag, is seeking to destroy the Jews and Mordecai in particular. Had Saul done what was commanded in the first place, Haman wouldn't be a threat these hundreds of years later. But in the end, God's command is fulfilled. A descendant (or at least a relative) of Saul finally accomplishes what Saul did not. Saul may have spared Agag, but Agag's descendant meets his doom due to the faithfulness of one of Saul's distant descendants!

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