

Esther - Courage

Background

The outstanding feature of the book of Esther is the complete absence of any explicit reference to God, worship, prayer or sacrifice. However, it appears that this literary style was the deliberate intention of the author to heighten the fact that it is God who controls and directs all the seemingly insignificant coincidences that make up the book of Esther. God's sovereign rule is assumed at every point!

The author of Esther is unknown, but the book is dated back to approximately the time that the events that took place occurred (~460BC). The purpose of the book of Esther is to remind the Jews about their deliverance from genocide and to record the institution of the annual festival of Purim as a result. The book is set during the reign of Xerxes, who ruled the Persian Empire between 486-465BC, in the fortified palace of Susa (the winter residence of Persian kings) ch. 1v1-2.

Who was Esther?

Hadassah "myrtle" in Hebrew, Esther "star" in Persian 2v7

Virgin – 2v8 Maiden, young girl Beautiful in form and features 2v7 Orphan – raised by cousin Mordecai 2v7

Jew of tribe of Benjamin 2v5 Lived in Citadel of Susa 2v5

We have split the story of Esther into four sections, though we will be focussing specifically on chapter 4 and 6, due to their significance in the book. Get your 5.20 to read through all of Esther during the week before the study to prepare them to answer questions and have some context from the book!

The problem

Why did Haman desire to kill the Jews? Ch.3 v2-6

Mordecai would not bow down to Haman because he was a Jew. Would not honour Mordecai. Haman was an Amalekite and they waged war constantly on the Jews, hence he wanted to eradicate them. God commanded the Jews to destroy all of Amalek (Deut 25:17-19)

What was the plot? Ch.3 v13-14

Totally eradicate all Jews and plunder their goods throughout all of Persian Empire - genocide

Esther's Response – read through chapter 4

How do Mordecai and the Jews respond? ch.4 v1-3

Mourning – sack cloth and ashes throughout Empire. Mordecai publicly mourned in Susa

In v8 Mordecai urges Esther to act, but what is Esther's problem? v11

Any man or woman that approaches the King without being summoned is sentenced to death unless pardoned.

Read v13-14. Where does Mordecai's confidence lie in the deliverance of the Jews?

Based on God's sovereignty in working out His purposes and fulfilling His promises. Their deliverance will come even if by some other means than Esther. However despite God's sovereignty, Esther must not remain silent, she must step up to mark.

What does the latter part of v14 teach us about God's sovereignty and His will? Discuss.

God's sovereignty is not fatalistic. Esther must exercise her individual responsibility otherwise she and her family will perish. God's plans always prevail – Proverbs 21:30, Isaiah 8:10. God's plans are certain and sure - Psalm 33:11

Matthew 26:24 and Acts 2:23 show how God used humans to bring about His will – specifically refer to the crucifixion. Relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

In light of this, what situations (i.e. with hall mates etc) has God placed us so that we may be instruments for His kingdom? Is He calling you to a particular place so that He may use you? Has he called you to "a position for such a time as this?" Discuss.

c.f. Gen 45:5-7 and 50:20 for Joseph – intended for evil but God used it to bring about the saving of many lives.

Ephesians 1:11-12 – God's plan for each of us in the conformity of His will – to the praise of His glory

How did Esther respond to God's call? v16

Fasting – prayer goes with fasting - presumed (Jdg 20:26, 1 Sa 7:6, 2 Sa 12:16 etc) Urged fellowship of Jews to fast and she and her maidservants fasted. They petitioned the Lord – Phil 4:6

Read the latter part of v16 again. Are we as courageous as Esther to step up to the mark that God has set us in the situations we are in despite the consequences? Discuss.

Situations where we know what the consequences could be, but we also know that we have a divine responsibility to act in accordance with God's will 2 Timothy 1:7 – Spirit of power, love and self-discipline, not of timidity

Acts 23:11 – Paul had courage in God's plans Philippians 1:19-21 – courage that Christ is honoured in our bodies

Deut 31:6 – strong and courageous for the Lord is with us and will never forsake us

God's Intervention – read chapter 6

What was the outcome of fasting? Ch.5v2

Esther pardoned and allowed to converse with the King

How do we see God's intervention in ch.6?

V1 – king couldn't sleep – read annals, remembered M. saved his life c.f Joseph (Ge 41:1-45), Daniel (Da 2:1; 6:18)

V4 – Haman in court to tell king about hanging Mordecai. v6 – Haman thinks king is honouring him – gives outrageous ideas for honour to the king. v10 – King rewards and honours Mordecai – v12-13 Haman humiliated

Incidental circumstances take on crucial significance – testify to God's sovereignty over events of narrative

Do we believe that God is in complete control of our lives? God has bought us back into relationship with Him through Jesus; therefore do we trust that He has a plan for us? Discuss.

Spiritual blessings are in Christ – Eph 1:3-14 Psalm 40:5, Jeremiah 29:11 – Plans to prosper, hope and future

Exodus 15:13; 33:14, Psalm 48:14, Proverbs 16:33 and Isaiah 30:21 – God desires to and does guide His people

Esther's Petition and Solution

Read ch.7 v3-6. and v9-10. What was Esther's petition and what was the result?

Petition – grant her life, request – spare her people. Exposed Haman's plot.

King enraged at Haman, has him hung on his own gallows which he'd prepared for Mordecai. Mordecai honoured

However, although Esther and Mordecai are now safe the genocide of the Jews has not yet been averted. Read ch.8 v5-8. How is this averted? What is the outcome of this new edict? ch.9 v5-10

Another decree is written that counteracts the first. Jews allowed to fight enemies and defend themselves.

Fear of the Jews fell upon people – Jews killed the Amalekites, as God had commanded them to do (Deut 25:17-19)

God delivered the Jews from genocide through a series of seemingly insignificant circumstances, which ultimately had crucial significance in His plan. Looking back, do we see God working through such circumstances in our lives? Discuss.

Proverbs 3:5-6 – Lord will make our paths straight. Hebrews 4:15-16, Acts 13:32-33, 1 Corinthians 10:13

Application: Courage to step out in faith. God is sovereign over all things, do we trust him? God has a plan for each of us, are we letting Him use us in the situations that He has placed us in? Are we salt and light to those around us?

Pray: Take time to look back over your life and praise God for His sovereignty and for the way that He has worked through the little things as well as the big to bring you closer to Him.

Do we petition God about His plan for us, our circumstances and for those around us? Pray and petition the Lord for these things and ask for His guidance in the situations that you are in.

Are we maybe clinging to areas of our lives that we feel we cannot entrust to God? Pray for Esther's courage so that we may lay our lives down at His feet and say 'If I perish, I perish, but I am yours God, use me as you see fit.'

Thank God for Jesus; that He is God's ultimate plan for our lives and that our hope and security is found in Him.

Memory Verse: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you." **Deuteronomy 31:6**