



REDEMPTION

MAKING MUCH OF JESUS

Esther 1-2

BE STRONG IN THE LORD

8/9/2020 - 8/15/2020

MAIN POINT

No matter what it looks like or how great a power that stands against Him, nothing will prevent God from defeating His enemies and fulfilling His redemptive purposes.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

When you look at the world today, do you tend to ask and expect God to do big things, little things, or not much of anything at all? Why?

When have you seen God show His glory in a situation where all hope seemed lost?

The Book of Esther tells the story of God's sovereign control and protection of His people, the Jews, in a time when all hope seemed lost. The rulers of the day did not seek or know God and evil was having its way. However, Esther was brought to the king's court "for such a time as this" (4:14). In a time when it looked like evil was in control, God was at work revealing His greater gospel story.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Esther took place during the time when Israel was living in captivity under the Persians. Ahasuerus, who is also known by his Greek name Xerxes, was king of the Persian empire. The Persians allowed some of the Jews to return to Israel while still others were forced to continue living in captivity.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ESTHER 1:1-12; 2:1-18.

Based on the party and the pageant detailed in these two chapters, how would you characterize the Persian culture in which God's people were living in captivity?

When you look at society today which, like Persia during Esther's time, is focused entirely on appearances and lives as though what we have is more important than who we are, is it easier or more difficult to see God at work? Explain.

We read about the parting of the Red Sea, Elijah calling down fire from heaven, and a whale spitting Jonah onto land and we know that God was at work. We read about the apostles healing the sick and the growth of the early church and again clearly see that God was at work. But when we read in Esther that a pagan king got drunk and demanded his wife parade in front of his buddies so they could gawk at her, we might be tempted to think, "Where was God?" When he got rid of that wife and held a misogynistic contest to find his next queen, we again wonder, "Where was God when those women were being devalued in such a disgusting way?" Similarly, in the world today we look around and see all manner of evil seemingly unchecked, and we might think God isn't paying attention. But God was at work behind the scenes in Esther, and He is at work behind the scenes today—to defend His people and glorify Himself.

The Book of Esther makes no mention of the name of God. Why should the seeming absence of God's name in this story actually encourage us when it seems as if God isn't with us?

Esther was unaware that she was part of God's divine plan. How is God's providence, in and of itself, a reason for hope?

Esther, a Jew, became the queen of Persia through the providential work of God which would have far-reaching consequences for God's people. Only when we understand the link between providence and sovereignty can we recognize God's fingerprints in the midst of His apparent absence.

As Esther's story unfolded, the king elevated Haman the Agagite to a powerful position (3:2), Haman felt snubbed by Mordecai, another official who, unbeknownst to the court, was Queen Esther's relative and guardian. Haman wanted revenge, so he aimed to destroy Mordecai and all the Jews. Not knowing Esther's heritage and close relationship to Mordecai, he manipulated King Xerxes into issuing an edict authorizing the systematic killing of all Jews in the Persian Empire. But Haman's plans began to unravel as the king remembered Mordecai had previously uncovered a conspiracy to assassinate him (Esther 6). The king honored Mordecai, and this began Haman's downfall. In chapter 7, we find King Xerxes and Haman at the banquet Esther requested in order to expose Haman's evil (5:8).

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What do you learn from Esther about God's activity in the world? In what situation do you need to apply these truths to your own life?

How does the story of Esther point you further to God's redemptive story in the gospel?

Who can you share the gospel with using the story of Esther?

PRAYER

Thank God that He is continually working all things together toward His redemptive purpose in your life and in the world. Ask Him to help you trust Him and to act in faith, even when He seems silent.

COMMENTARY

ESTHER 1-2

1:1-2. Ahasuerus is the Hebrew name for King Xerxes, who ruled from 486-465 B.C. Chapter 1 of Esther is set in the fortress (Hb “birah”) at Susa, one of the three capital cities of the Persian Empire. It is located in what is today southwestern Iran. During Xerxes’ rule Susa was the usual location of his winter palace.

1:3-4. In the third year of Ahasuerus, probably 483 b.c., there occurred the first of 10 feasts recorded in Esther, which are important structural and thematic markers in the book. The “feast” was more of a drinking bout than a meal. The ancient Greek writers mentioned that the Persians were famous (or infamous) for their prodigious drinking.

1:5-8. Unlike the first feast, the second banquet was not for the nobility but for all the citizenry in the fortress of Susa. The event is described in great detail (v. 6) to highlight the opulence and wealth of the king. For the Persians, it must have been regarded as a fabulous party because the royal wine flowed freely, according to the king’s bounty. Moreover, by royal decree each guest could drink as much as he desired or was capable of drinking since no restraint was placed on the drinking.

1:9. The third feast was given by Queen Vashti, who is first introduced in this verse, and it was only for the women.

1:10-12. No one was as shocked as King Ahasuerus when Queen Vashti refused his royal command. Ahasuerus's intense fury was predictable. His own wife had publicly disobeyed the most powerful man in the Persian Empire.

2:7-8 Mordecai had adopted Esther, who was his cousin.

2:9 Esther's beauty was overpowering. After thirty-one verses of narrative covering a significant period of time, Esther is finally in the harem of the king.

2:10 One wonders why Mordecai insisted on her concealing her identity. Esther might have had no chance of becoming queen if her nationality had been disclosed. Ambition, however, does not seem to characterize Mordecai elsewhere. He may have thought the knowledge of her identity might prove dangerous to her.

2:12-14 Apparently most of the girls spent only one night with the king. They moved on to the house of Shaashgaz, where they were concubines. There was no guarantee that the king would call them again, so many were confined to virtual widowhood.

2:15 Esther is finally introduced into the narrative. Apparently each girl had certain liberty in choosing her adornment (v. 13). It is said that some took advantage of this to deck themselves with many jewels. Esther was content to stay with Hegai's advice. That was wise since certainly he knew what pleased the king.

2:16 "The tenth month" in the Jewish religious calendar was a cold, wet month in the middle of winter (Dec.-Jan.). "The seventh year" would have been 479 b.c. What happened during the four years since chap. 1? We know that Xerxes waged war against Greece in 480-479, but this fact is of no interest in the story. The only point is that the search for a new wife had taken a long time. Now Esther's arrival changes the entire complexion of the narrative.

2:17 In this key verse in the narrative, Esther became queen instead of Vashti. The future of the story depends on this event. The sudden decision on the part of Xerxes reveals that he was overwhelmed by the sight of Esther. Readers can only imagine. Such beauty can only be made manifest through the presence of God. Such an overwhelmed king probably reflects that as he had done with Pharaoh and Cyrus, God had influenced this foreign king as well.