

If I Perish, I Perish

Esther

Grace Chapel The Eve of Memorial Day, 2009 Dr. John Niemelä

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

1. The book occurs in the reign of Xerxes (called Ahasuerus in Esther):

Esther 1:3 happens in the third year of his reign: 483 BC

Esther 3:7 is at the end of his twelfth year: 473 BC

King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) wanted to repay Greece for defeating his father at Marathon. According to Herodotus Xerxes prepared for this for four years. The banquet in chapter 1 was likely connected with that, since he brought in nobles from throughout the empire and spent a fortune.

He went on his campaign in 480 BC, but (after initial successes) came back in defeat in 479 BC. That was also the year when Ester gained his favor (Esther 2:16)

In Esther 1, Queen Vashti probably was pregnant w/ Artaxerxes (born in 483)

2A. This is after the deportations to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar

2B. This is after Daniel endured seventy years in captivity

2C. This is after first group of exiles returned to Judah under Zerubbabel (538 BC)

As they were about to enter captivity, Isaiah and Jeremiah urged the people to return (in seventy years) before the captor nation was disciplined:

Isaiah 48²⁰ *Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! With a voice of singing, Declare, proclaim this, Utter it to the end of the earth; Say, "The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob!"*

²¹*And they did not thirst When He led them through the deserts; He caused the waters to flow from the rock for them; He also split the rock, and the waters gushed out.* ²² *"There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."*

Jeremiah 50⁸ *Move from the midst of Babylon, Go out of the land of the Chaldeans; And be like the rams before the flocks.*

Jeremiah 51⁶ *Flee from the midst of Babylon, And every one save his life! Do not be cut off in her iniquity, For this is the time of the LORD's vengeance; He shall recompense her.*

3. Mordecai and Esther find themselves in Susa (rather than in Judah) because their ancestors did not return to Judah. (473 BC is 65 years after 538 BC, so it was not these individuals, but their parents) that had failed to return to Judah. There is reason to suggest that Mordecai and Esther were not focused on the Lord:

A. The book of Esther never mentions God, prayer, or any Scripture.

B. Neither Mordecai nor Esther raise qualms about her situation in a Gentile king's harem (certainly, she did not volunteer). When Mordecai told Esther not to reveal her nationality (Esther 2:10), she could not protest based on the Bible, because it was a Jewish book.

If she did not say that she is Jewish, she cannot be like Daniel.

- A. Daniel refused to eat foods that the Hebrew Scriptures forbid (Daniel 1:11–13). She raised no qualms about her diet.
- B. Daniel told the king (before being thrown into the fiery furnace) he expected his God to deliver him, but even if He did not, they would not worship the idol (Daniel 3:16–18)
- C. Daniel prayed each day facing Jerusalem with the window open (Daniel 6:10) and was seen doing this.

When Mordecai refused to bow to Haman, he said that he would not do so, because he was Jewish (Esther 3:4). He does not give a Scriptural basis.

Haman was an underling, so I do not think that Haman claimed deity.

4. However, evidence exists within the book that Mordecai knew of the promises God made to Abraham. God unconditionally promised to give Abraham land, seed, and blessing forever. In light of this, God would not allow the destruction of the Jews. In Genesis 12:3 God promises to bless those who bless Israel, but to curse the one who curses Israel.

EXPOSITION:

(1:1–9) The king's 187-day celebration

The context for this would appear to be the preparations for invading Greece. He wanted to impress his nobles.

(1:10–22) Queen Vashti refused to come in royal garb before the nobles and was deposed

Observe that she was to come wearing all of her royal garb. This was not burlesque! We are not told why she refused, but chronology gives a plausible suggestion.

The relationship between this king and this queen (cf. Esther 4:11). Note his temper.

(2:1–4) Advisors stop the king from reinstating Queen Vashti, suggesting adding many young women to the harem, with the king selecting one to be the new queen

When he sobered up, the king realized that it had been a mistake to depose Vashti, but his advisors talked him out of it.

This passage reinforces the picture of the role of the queen (that came from 1:10–22)

(2:5–11) Esther taken from cousin Mordecai and put into the house of the women

As we said on page 1, the grandfather of Mordecai & Esther is the one who was deported. Otherwise, both of them would be old (Mordecai would be 110+ and Esther ≈80).

Mordecai told Esther not to say she was Jewish. He maintained as much (indirect) contact as was possible with Esther after she entered the house of the women

(2:12–20) After a year of preparation to be with the king, she entered the harem and he promoted her to queen at a royal banquet

The king had been in Greece on a military expedition (see page 1) from 480–479 BC, so her entrance into the harem occurred soon after he returned from Greece

(2:21–23) Mordecai's practice of entering the king's gate (to check on Esther) enabled him to thwart an assassination plot

(3:1–6) [Several years later] Haman received much power in a promotion, so he plotted to kill the Jews because Mordecai would not bow to him

Exposing the assassination plot

Refusing to bow to Haman, despite a royal decree

(3:7–15) Haman influences the king to authorize the extermination of Jews throughout the empire and distributes the decree to every province

(4:1–3) Mordecai mourned outside the king's gate

(4:4–17) Mordecai convinced Esther to intercede for her Jewish people

(5:1–8) Esther requests that Haman be invited to a banquet with the king and Esther and Haman attended the first of two banquets in his honor

(5:9–14) When Haman left the first banquet, Mordecai again refused to bow, so Haman decided to use his good fortune to build gallows for impaling Mordecai

(6:1–9) During a sleepless night, the king learned that Mordecai saved his life, but was not honored; so he asked Haman how the king might honor someone

(6:10–14) Haman (thinking that he was the honoree) made lavish suggestions, but the king ordered him to carry these out for Mordecai, which he (begrudgingly) did for Mordecai before asking his advisors what to do, but was interrupted by eunuchs coming to escort him to the banquet with Esther and the king

(7:1–9) At the banquet Esther made her request (concerning one who sought to destroy her people) and revealed that Haman was the man, so the king had him impaled on the gallows Haman had made for Mordecai

(8:1–2) The king appointed Mordecai to Haman's old position

(8:3–14) A decree was sent throughout the empire authorizing Jews to protect themselves against those carrying out Haman's decree

(8:15–17) Mordecai went out in royal apparel with the news, so Jews rejoiced and proclaimed a feast and many Gentiles became proselytes

(9:1–19) The Jews successfully defeated all their enemies throughout the empire

(9:20–32) The annual feast of Purim was established

It normally occurs in March

(10:1–3) Mordecai was elevated to the second in command over a great empire and was well received by the Jews

CONCLUSION

God is faithful to His promise to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants, even when they are not. It is in this context that the Feast of Purim originated.

Similarly, God is also faithful to believers, even when they are not faithful. Everlasting life is everlasting. God does discipline unfaithful believers and they will lose reward, but everlasting life is still everlasting.

God blesses those who bless Israel, but curses the one who curses Israel.