DAYBREAK

Section Introduction

Overview for Esther

Purpose: The author's purpose in writing the Book of Esther is not explicitly stated, but it clearly demonstrates Divine Providence working to preserve the Jewish race from whom the Messiah would come. Even though God's people had been disobedient to God and were in exile, they were still objects of His mercy and concern.

Author: The author is unknown, although some Bible scholars attribute the book to Mordecai, Ezra, or Nehemiah. Most agree that the author likely was a Jew writing for the remnant that had returned to Judah under Zerubbabel. He may have lived in a Persian city, possibly Shushan. The detailed descriptions of court life and traditions, as well as the events that occurred in the book, point to an eyewitness author.

Date Written: Sometime after 472 B.C.

Time Period Covered: Most historians estimate that the events in the book cover a period of about twelve years, from approximately 483-472 B.C.

History: King Ahasuerus (also known as Xerxes the Great) ruled over the Persian Empire from 486 to 465 B.C. He is best known by historians for his failed invasion of Greece, which took place several years after the account of Esther. Ahasuerus inherited his vast empire from his father, Darius I (who is mentioned in Bible passages such as Ezra 4:24; Daniel 6:1 and 25; and Haggai 1:15). His mother was Atossa, the eldest daughter of Cyrus the Great, who was prompted by God to decree that the Temple in Jerusalem should be rebuilt (see Ezra 1:1-4).

Key People: Esther, Mordecai, King Ahasuerus, and Haman, the king's advisor

Setting: Events in the Book of Esther took place in the Persian Empire, with most of the action occurring in the palace of King Ahasuerus in Shushan, the Persian capital (now located in western Iran). The existence of this king is extremely well attested; archaeologists have discovered the ruins of the very palace where these events occurred.

During this period, the Persian Empire was the largest the world had known to that point, incorporating the provinces of Media and Persia as well as the territories possessed by the previous empires of Assyria and Babylon. It covered what today is Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel, and parts of Egypt, Sudan, Libya, and Arabia.

At the time of the events of the Book of Esther, the first group of Jewish exiles had returned to Jerusalem after its overthrow by the Babylonians. The Temple had been rebuilt in Jerusalem, although it lacked the glory of Solomon's Temple, and the Jews there were struggling to reestablish Temple worship according to the Law of Moses. Approximately forty years after the time of Esther, under Ahasuerus' successor Artaxerxes I, Nehemiah would return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls.

Unique Features: The Book of Esther is the twelfth and final book in the historical section of the Old Testament, and one of only two books in Scripture that bear the name of a woman. (The other is Ruth.)

A notable feature of the Book is that no name, title, or pronoun for God appears in it, nor is there any direct reference to prayer. This omission seems to have been purposeful; it is possible that given its setting and timeframe, any reference to the Jewish God or faith would have resulted in its contents being destroyed. However, God's presence, sovereignty, and loving care for His people are evident throughout the text.

The Feast of Purim, which commemorates the deliverance of the Jews from Haman's plot, is still celebrated a month before Passover. The entire Book of Esther is read aloud in synagogues during that holiday.

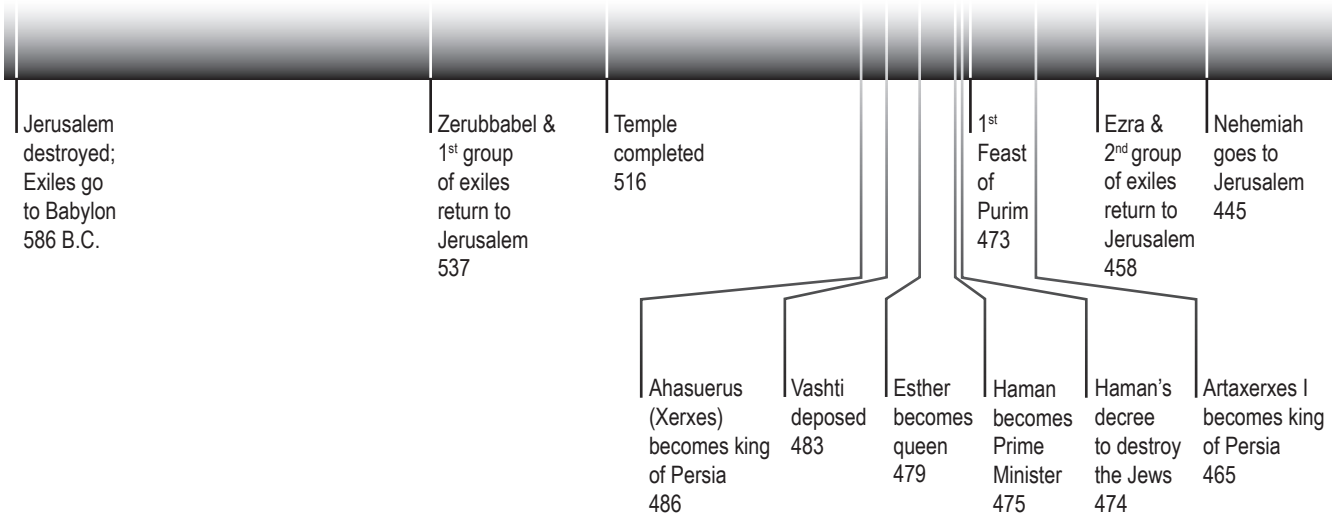
Summary: In chapters 1-2, Esther became the queen to Ahasuerus of Persia. She was personally chosen by the king after he exiled his first wife, Vashti, because she refused to make an appearance at an extravagant banquet he had prepared for the nobles and princes of his empire.

In chapters 3-4, Mordecai (Esther's relative and guardian) refused to pay homage to Haman, the king's advisor. Infuriated, Haman devised a plot to destroy all of the Jews in the kingdom. He convinced the king to issue a decree calling for the slaughter of all the Jews on a particular day. Mordecai heard of this plan, and challenged Esther to go before the king on behalf of her people.

In chapters 5-10, Esther took her petition to the king and pled for the protection of her people from Haman's wicked devices. As a result, Haman was executed and Mordecai promoted to a position of honor. The king issued a new decree allowing the Jewish people to defend themselves, thus sparing their lives.

Timeline

Some dates are approximate, as reference materials differ.



Outline

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A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.

I. The danger to the Jews (1:1—3:15)
  A. The background to the plot (1:1—2:23)
    1. The divorce of Vashti (1:1-22)
    2. The elevation of Esther (2:1-18)
    3. The service of Mordecai (2:19-23)
  B. The formation of the plot (3:1-15)
    1. The rage of Haman (3:1-6)
    2. The plans of Haman (3:7-15)

II. The deliverance of the Jews (4:1—10:3)
  A. The frustration of the plot (4:1—7:10)
    1. The decision of Esther (4:1-17)
    2. The reception of Esther (5:1-8)
    3. The humiliation of Haman (5:9—6:14)
    4. The hanging of Haman (7:1-10)
  B. The dissolve of the plot (8:1—9:16)
    1. The elevation of Mordecai (8:1-2)
    2. The revocation of Haman's edict (8:3-17)
    3. The defense of the Jews (9:1-16)
  C. The sequel to the plot (9:17—10:3)
    1. The institution of the feast of Purim (9:17-32)
    2. The greatness of Mordecai (10:1-3)