



Esther

Lesson 1

Esther Chapter 1

The years following God's covenant with Abraham and the creation of the Jewish nation were tumultuous and difficult. God's promise to make a great nation from Abraham and Sarah, to bring them into a land that would be established under His rule, and the blessing that was to be extended to all nations was only going to be fulfilled after many years of rebellion and struggle. They endured 400 years of bondage in Egypt and then wandered in the desert for 40 more years before the second part of the promise was fulfilled, and they entered the promised land. But that was only the beginning of the troubles to come. God's command to them was to enter the land, follow Him only by living according to the precepts in the Law He had graciously given them, and specifically, they were not to intermarry with or take on the practices of the pagan people in the land. Instead, they were to destroy them and rid the land of the evil influences of their cultures. If they would obey Him and be faithful to the covenant agreement they had made, God would go before them and give them success in this task, and they would become a light to all nations that would magnify the glory of God. Though the people struggled to complete the assignment because of the temptations to compromise His standards, God provided many wise and godly leaders that would attempt to help them stay on task and trust Him for the outcome. But as the years went by, the nation fell into deeper and deeper sin. God warned them that, if they continued in this rebellion and unrepentance that was breaking their covenant agreements, He would discipline them by allowing their enemies to overcome them and remove them

out of the land. After many years of sending disasters as warnings and raising up prophets to foretell of impending ruin, He eventually followed through with the curses He had stated would be their demise. Israel, the ten tribes in the Northern Kingdom, was conquered by the Assyrians, and many were exiled to Assyria. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin that made up the Southern Kingdom eventually followed in the unholy activities of Israel, and they were conquered by the Babylonians and taken into captivity. The promised land was purged of their presence with only a few of the Jews left in the land that were not exiled.

Some of the prophecies declared by the prophets relayed God's promise of redemption after the time of discipline (70 years of captivity in Babylon approx. 608-538) was completed. Though the people rejected the covenant they had made with God, He would never reject or deny the promises He made to them. Therefore, by His grace, He would bring them back to the land and begin to rebuild the nation.

"Now the word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book. For behold, days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah.' The Lord says, 'I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers, and they shall possess it.'"
Jeremiah 30:1-3

In 539 BC Cyrus, King of Persia, conquered Babylonia and ruled over the empire as was prophesied by Isaiah the prophet (Is. 13:17-19). In the first year of his rule, he decreed that the Israelites would be allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the area, which was also foretold by Isaiah (Is. 44:26-28). Those who desired to return went in three phases: first with Zerubbabel, then Ezra, and then with Nehemiah. Despite much opposition from the rulers of the region around Jerusalem during the next 100 years, the temple was rebuilt, the priesthood reestablished, and the walls of the city repaired.

Although thousands of Jews returned to the land of Israel, many remained in Persia. The Persians, who had conquered the Babylonians in 539 BC, had expanded and now ruled their own massive empire. This empire was second in size only to the Babylonians and extended from Pakistan to Africa. King Darius, son of Cyrus, who reigned during part of the years

that the Jews were returning to their land (Ezra 4:5), had successfully conquered regions in Greece but had been defeated at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC in an attempt to take over Athens. When Darius died, his kingdom was given to his son, Xerxes, who ruled from 486-465 BC. Xerxes' Persian name was Khashayarsha and in Hebrew was Achashverosh, which is translated Ahasuerus as the Greek form of the name (Ezra 4:6; Esther 1:1). His reign began approximately 50 years after Zerubbabel returned (536 BC) with the first group to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. He died about 8 years before Ezra's group returned (457 BC), and around 20 years before Nehemiah's group (444 BC) returned. The events of Esther take place in the first ten years of Xerxes' reign. (sources: Key Word Study Bible; John MacArthur sermon "For such a Time")

READ ESTHER CHAPTER 1

1. According to Ezra 4:6, what interaction had Ahasuerus (Xerxes) had with the Jews before the events of Esther?
2. Give a short description of the events taking place in Esther 1:3-8.



These events took place in 483 BC, just prior to Xerxes' war campaign into Greece. His father, King Darius, had conquered several regions of Greece previously but had been defeated at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC. Darius died before he could return and seek vengeance for his loss, so now his son is left with the task. This banquet in Esther 1 is believed by most historians to be a part of the strategy meetings held to prepare for that battle.

3. What was Queen Vashti doing during that banquet? Vs. 9



In ancient Persia...”The king's mother and principal wife (known as the Shahbanu, “King's Lady”) traveled on their own as well as with him on military campaigns and in overseeing administrative affairs. They had their own entourage, staff to attend their needs, and were given places of honor at banquets alongside distinguished male guests. The principal wife held her own court, could sign agreements with her own seal, and had unlimited access to the king, even being welcomed at official visits from foreign dignitaries and participating in the meetings. (Mark, Joshua. “Women in Ancient Persia”)



In the Persepolis Inscriptions written by King Xerxes recovered from the ruins of his palace in Susa says, “...I am a friend of the right, of wrong I am not a friend. It is not my wish that the weak should have harm done to him by the strong, not is it my wish that the strong should have harm done him by the weak. The right, that is my desire. To a man who is a follower of the lie I am no friend. I am not hot-tempered. What things develop in my anger, I hold firmly under control by my thinking power. I am firmly ruling over my own impulses.” (Livius.org.)

4. *Because women in ancient Persia, especially the royal women, were usually treated with some respect coupled with Xerxes’ statement of his character above, what in these specific circumstances may have led King Xerxes to make this demand of her? What might have encouraged Vashti to deny the command? Vs 10-12*

5. *In regard to Vashti’s refusal, who did the king turn to for help, and what question did he ask them? Vs. 13-15*

6. *Since she apparently didn’t break a law that they could identify, what was their solution and their motivation for that solution? Vs. 16-20*

7. *What specifically did the new edict say? Vs. 22*

8. *The Hebrew word for “master” means “to rule as a prince” or “to exercise dominion.” In contrast, how does the Bible identify the position of a man to his home and those under his care? Ephesians 5:22-33*
9. *Knowing the character of God, in contrast to the character of man, what do you think was God’s purpose in the different roles of men and women?*

Prayer requests:

Group time notes:
