

Introduction

The events recorded in the book of Esther took place in the early 5th century B.C. To use Ezra-Nehemiah as a reference point, this was during the chronological gap between Ezra 6 and Ezra 7, between the first and second great migrations of Jewish exiles back to Jerusalem. While the events of Ezra-Nehemiah took place primarily in Jerusalem, our book's protagonists, Mordecai and Esther, lived 750 miles to the east in Susa, one of capital cities of the powerful Persian Empire (Susa was situated near what today is the border between Iraq and Iran).

Jewish exiles, clustered in communities throughout the Persian Empire, were surrounded by a hazardous world. Hazardous became perilous, however, when the nobleman Haman incited Emperor Ahasuerus (the Greeks called him "Xerxes") to issue a decree calling for the annihilation of the Jews. This simple sketch of the opening chapters of Esther explains why the book resonates with post-Holocaust Jews today. Christians make legitimate connections as well, for we also live as "foreigners and exiles" in an antagonistic world (1 Pet. 2:11).

Never explicitly mentioning God, the book of Esther enlightens beleaguered saints who are frustrated in their own day with the hiddenness of God. Seeming coincidences and surprising reversals appear throughout the book. Looking at any one of these as a lone event, a reader might suppose that the event came about by chance. Considered as an entire package, however, these events reveal God's behind-the-scenes orchestration of all things for the purpose of rescuing and preserving his people.

The final section of Esther recounts the establishment of the feast of Purim. Purim is the annual commemoration of the days when "their sorrow was turned into gladness" (Esth. 9:22). God's work of deliverance, his turning his people's sorrow into joy – these themes run throughout the entire Bible and reach their climax at the Cross, the Resurrection, the Ascension and Pentecost. By these means God delivers the followers of Jesus Christ, Jew and Gentile alike, from enemies more destructive than Haman: Satan, sin, judgment, and death. Praise be to the God of our salvation!

Schedule

Apr. 19: Esth. 1 *"The king became enraged, and his anger burned."* (Stefan Matzal)

Apr. 26: Esth. 2 *"Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king."* (Nathaniel Jackson)

May 3: Esth. 3 *"He disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone."* (Jeremy Jackson)

May 10: Esth. 4:1 – 5:8 *"Relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews."* (Stefan Matzal)

May 17: Esth. 5:9 – 6:14 *"On that night the king could not sleep."* (Nathaniel Jackson)

May 24: Esth. 7 *"A foe and an enemy! This wicked Haman!"* (Jeremy Jackson)

May 31: Esth. 8 *"How can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?"* (Stefan Matzal)

Jun. 7: Esth. 9:1-19 *"But they laid no hand on the plunder."* (Nathaniel Jackson)

Jun. 14: Esth. 9:20 – 10:3 *"They should make them days of feasting and gladness."* (Jeremy Jackson)

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