

Esther: Hidden, but not Hiding



This will be our seventeenth exit on Route 66, the twelfth book in the historical section of the Old Testament. The year is 482 BC. Just imagine being a female Jewish orphan, and the year is about 500 BC. At that time, there would not have been much hope for you. Now being on this side of the cross, we realize that God sometimes chooses the weak to confound the strong, and the unwise to confound the wise. Sometimes, He chooses those who don't have a noble birth, those who are kind of despised in life, to bring to nothing those that think they are something. In 1st Corinthians 1, Paul said the reason for that is because God does not want anyone to boast in His presence. We understand that in the Church. God does not want anyone taking credit for what He does. When Paul finished that letter to the church at Corinth, he would actually state that as an apostle, he was what he was because of the grace of God. Paul would even say that the very reason we are in Christ is because of God. There comes a time in the Christian life when you mature to a place where you realize that your life as a Christian is not about you, it is about God, and it is about others. But imagine you start out as an orphan, and you are a female, and you are Jewish, and you are living in Babylon. That is the context.

In 482 BC, the man sitting on the throne, by his Persian name, is Xerxes the 1st. According to secular historians, he started reigning in 485 BC and reigned to 465 BC. Many scholars believe that this is the man sitting on the throne during the time when those three hundred Spartans held off the mighty Persian army. This event was made into movie called 300. This is the timeframe of chapter 4, beginning with verse 12. Esther is now queen, yes, that orphan who is Jewish, who is a female. Do you think in her

wildest imagination, she could ever have dreamed she would be the queen? She is now sitting on the throne and Mordecai sends this word.

Scripture

"And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (The most famous line in the book of Esther) ***Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish." Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him."***

Xerxes the 1st (King Ahasuerus)

If Xerxes, also known as King Ahasuerus in the Hebrew language, started to reign in 485 BC, it would now be 482 BC because it is the third year of his reign, according to Esther chapter 1. He gathers the noblemen and his army leaders, and for a hundred and eighty days, he shows them all of the riches of the palace and the kingdom. Something historical is going on. One hundred eighty days is six months of time! Can you imagine gathering your cabinet and your army for that long? The Bible doesn't tell this, but secular historians tell us that at this time the king gathered all of his noblemen and his army for six months because Xerxes the 1st wanted to invade Greece. His father had been defeated by the Greeks. As he sat on the throne, he wanted to avenge that because it was a shameful day in the life of the Persians. Some of his closest advisors were against it. They had

already been defeated once, and they did not think it was wise. It took him six months to convince his cabinet and his army to invade Greece.

- **Queen's Refusal**

At the end of that strategic planning session, Xerxes the 1st ordered the best wine to be brought, and there was no limit on how much you could drink. There were no rules. For seven days, they partied like a rock star. At the end of that seven days, in a state of drunkenness, he commanded his queen to be brought to him, who scripture says was beautiful to look at. At the same time, she was throwing a feast for the women. So when the king ordered her to be brought before the men with her crown on so they could admire her beauty, she refused to come. Wow! Now today, it is one thing for a lady to refuse her husband, but when you were the queen to the king of Persia, you did not do that. She did. He now turned to his closest advisors, a group of seven men, and asked what he should do because the queen refused to come. It is amazing. Guys, there is a lesson for us; be careful when you ask other men what you ought to do when you have a wife problem. Someone steps up and says hey king, if you don't get her under control and word spreads, every lady in the kingdom will refuse to honor their husbands. You might could say they were afraid of women's lib, amen? They decided he should ban her for life from his presence and take the crown off her head, and they did.

Search for New Queen

After a time, there is a search throughout all the land among beautiful virgins. A Miss Persia contest is literally held to find a replacement for the queen. Once those girls are selected, they are put to six months of soothing baths, and six months of the best oils. Of all of those ladies chosen, each one will be brought before the king on different nights and he will make his selection of his queen.

We meet Esther, Hadassah by her Hebrew name, an orphan. In a time when you needed family to protect you, she did not have that. She had lost her mother and father, but her cousin, Mordecai, took her in. Scripture makes it clear that he didn't treat her as an orphan and just let her have

the crumbs that fell from his table, he reared her as his daughter, but she is still a female and she is Jewish.

We quickly understand that Esther is different than Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra and Nehemiah are being written to exiles who have left Babylon, they have went back into the Promised Land, and they are to rebuild the Temple, because God moved on the heart of King Cyrus, not Esther. We should be shocked at this point in Esther, because this book is being written to shock us to a certain degree. We should be shocked because we know that once that decree had been given for the Jews to leave Babylon, go back and repopulate, and rebuild the House of God, everybody should have got in on that. So imagine how you would feel if you were a Jew living in Jerusalem now. Your walls have broken down, you have rebuilt the Temple, but Zerubbabel's temple is nothing like Solomon's temple; it is tough because the enemy still rules the land, and now you remember the home you left in Babylon. All of a sudden, you are beginning to think not everybody is making the sacrifice you are making. Isn't it human nature to sometimes look at our circumstance compared to someone else's circumstance and make a judgement about them?

- **Esther is Crowned**

In the big picture of Esther, we see that Esther is not written about people who have left Babylon because they have been set free and returned home to build the House of God. No, some of the Jews didn't leave. Some of the Jews liked it so well where they were living in the world that they decided to just stay in the world, and that is Mordecai. He is now raising a daughter, and this daughter, (I mean Scripture says this, not me) she is a knockout. She is a ten. She has a beautiful figure and she is lovely to look at. I know that shocks some of us the Scripture would say that. Mordecai recognizes this beauty in his daughter, and the next thing you know, she is in the beauty contest. She is the favorite of the men who are grooming these ladies. They want her to win. When it comes her night, she pleases the king. She finds favor in his eyes, and before you know it, the contest is over and she is crowned queen.

Ladies, would you have ever in your wildest imagination dreamed you could be here? Now you and I, who are reading the book, know something is going on. This just doesn't happen! We discover that in the book of Esther, God is hidden, but not hiding. Did you catch that? I don't know if you realize that the book of Esther almost did not make it into our Bible. Of all the books in the Old Testament, the book of Esther is the only book that there is not a commentary written about by the early Church fathers. They totally neglected this book. When discussing if it should go in our Bible, Augustine put his foot down and said this book bears the mark of God. But others argued that it didn't even mention God's name! We know the great Martin Luther didn't like James, and he didn't like Esther. He is quoted as saying he is an "enemy" of Esther; wishing that it "had not come to us at all." I don't know about you, but I could not imagine being on record, saying I don't think one of the books should not have been put in. I would be afraid of lightning coming down from heaven! But looking at this book, we realize that while God is not mentioned, He is at work and His hand is everywhere. You do not start out like she started out and end up where she did without the hand of the Sovereign God, which is what would lead the Apostle Paul to one day say, I am what I am by the grace of God. We are going to realize that God is at work in this book.

Haman and Mordecai

Her father, Mordecai, hangs around the gate, so when he overhears a plot to assassinate the king, he quickly tells his daughter, Esther, the queen of Persia. Esther tells Xerxes and they investigate. She told that her source was Mordecai, the plot is spoiled, and it is written down in a book. Make note of that. That is important.

Next, we are introduced to the villain. There is always a villain in the story, and the villain is Haman. Haman has now been elevated to second in command. The Persians have been defeated by the Greeks. It is about eight or nine years later. Then Haman, whose name means 'magnificent one,' passes through the gate and meets Mordecai. Mordecai's name means 'little one.' This is cool, you have to get this picture... 'Magnificent One' meets 'Little One,' and 'Magnificent One' expects 'Little One' to bow down before him as everybody else does because he is second in

command under the king. But 'Little One' refuses to bow and it makes Haman angry.

Haman's Conspiracy

So now, some people are investigating Mordecai questioning why he would not bow. It is discovered that he is a Jew. Whoa, we don't have to say any more! Remember, this book is being written to Jews. So as the reader of the story, we realize there is a conflict between the way the Babylonians live and the way the Israelites live, and here is this Jewish family still living in Babylon. Therefore, Mordecai, being a Jew, refuses to bow to Haman because of who he is. He does not serve Haman, he serves the Lord God, and he refuses to bow. When Haman hears that, he is really ticked. As a matter of fact, he is so ticked that he decides to not only destroy Mordecai, but he wants to wipe out the entire Jewish population in the land. Now I don't know about you, but it appears to me like this guy has a chip on his shoulder. For a man to not only just want to take his anger out on Mordecai, (the man who offended him) but to wipe out his people, 'Magnificent One' has something going on inside of him.

It caused many to people to investigate what might be going on here, but Scripture does not tell us. In the story of Esther, we know that Mordecai was expected to bow down. He would not bow down; therefore, he and his people were to be wiped out. But let me tell you what I suspect here. I suspect this book was written and put in the Hebrew Bible, as well as our Christian Bible, for the purpose of showing us how the people of God are to live when they are in the world.

You see, the world takes a false view of itself. The world really believes that they are the magnificent ones and we are the little ones, and the magnificent ones expect little ones to bow down, to come around to their way of thinking, and to accept what they say is so. Have you ever gotten pressured to bow down? Do you bow down? You are not supposed to. But you and I realize there is a real danger in not bowing down. You could lose your job, you could lose the life you know; it could all be wiped out in a moment! Now, praise the Lord that we do not live in a society where our

life could be taken, but these things are why so many bow, so many compromise.

We have to understand that behind this is a belief system. That belief system is that we really should not be on the planet. We cannot imagine a people believing that Jews should not live on the planet, but there has always been a conspiracy to wipe out the Jews. You are seeing it first hand in the book of Esther. The reason is because there was a promise made in Genesis that there would be seed of a woman that would crush the seed of the serpent. God narrowed that seed down to the nation of Jews, people who descended from Abraham, then from Isaac, (not Ishmael) from Judah, and then from the family of David. We learned in the historical books that David would have a son who will sit on the throne. That son would build the house of God, and that kingdom will last forever! We are going to learn in the next lesson that God has an enemy. Man has a tempter, and his name is Satan. Ultimately, Genesis chapter 3 is talking about the defeat of Satan by Jesus Christ. So in the Old Testament, there is a conspiracy to prevent the birth of Jesus, the Messiah.

What we see in Esther is a plot to wipe out the Jews, not just living in Babylon, but over the whole face of the world. The reason is because if they are wiped out, there is no Messiah. Do you hear me? If Haman is successful, there is no New Testament. There is no Jesus. Now, you might believe God could have done it some other way. No, God could not have done it another way! Once He revealed what the plan was going to be, it has to be that way, or He is not God!

Some people believe that chip on Haman's shoulder may have been because he was an Agagite. Do you remember that the Amalekites were unkind to the children of Israel when they were coming out of wilderness into the Promised Land and God took offense? When King Saul was sitting on the throne, God told him to wipe out the Amalekites. The king of the Amalekites was Agag. So Saul wiped out the Amalekites with the sword, but he spared Agag. It cost Saul the kingdom, but Agag lived. Wow, that would put a chip on your shoulder, would it not, to know a man whose people helped wipe out your people; it would probably make you want to

take matters in your own hands. I am not saying that is why, but it is a thought.

Now, Haman cast the lot to determine the date of his plot to wipe out the Jews. The word for 'lot' in the Persian language is ***Pur***. They decide on that certain day they are going to get the king to pass a law that everyone can kill their Jewish neighbor. Mordecai hears the plot, sends word to his daughter, the queen. He tears his clothes, he sits in ash cloth, he fasts, and he is praying.

Now, just an interesting fact is that in our Bible, the book of Esther does not mention the prayer, or the name God. But in the Catholic Bible, the book of Esther is different than our book of Esther. Their book was translated from the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, which was translated in 250 BC. Our version of Esther does not come from the Septuagint; it comes from the Masoretic text, which is the Hebrew text of the Bible. There are no prayers in our version, but in the Catholic Bible, the prayer Mordecai prayed, the prayer Esther prayed, and the name, God, is mentioned.

For Such a Time as This

So Mordecai sends word to Esther again. He tells her she has to do something; she has to stop her husband, the king, from passing this law. She tells him she can't because it's against the law to go into his presence. Then Mordecai reminds her that she will not be saved by living in the palace if Haman's orders are carried out. She and her father's house will be wiped out too. Then, he reminds her that this is possibly the very reason she is where she is at.

Let's pause for just a second and think this thought...Is it possible that we were put on the planet for a moment, and everything in your life has been pointing to that moment, and then suddenly that moment comes? Would you want to let that moment pass by? Absolutely not! But what if the risk was that you might perish and you are the queen? Let me just say this...in this life, you have got it made!

She decides to pray and fast, and at the end of the praying and fasting, she decides she is going to say something, and if she loses her life, she loses her life. She decides to throw a feast for the king and Haman. Now remember, she is pretty to look at and she hadn't been in his presence in thirty days, so he acknowledged her and asks her what she wants, and said that he will give her up to a third of the kingdom. She says she just wants him and Haman to come and have a feast with her the next day. They go and have the feast, and at the feast, he asks her what she wants, and tells her he will give her half of the kingdom! She tells him she wants him to come back the next day for another feast. Haman now leaves, thinking, *wow, I have got the king on my side, I have got the queen on my side, and I was the only one invited to the feast, just me and the king!* But he knows as long as Mordecai lives, it doesn't mean a thing for him.

Can you imagine living your life that way? You have let what somebody has done cause you to not want to live if you don't deal with them! That is so anti-Christian thinking, so devilish, so evil; it is so sinful that it will drive a man to do what he normally would not do! Now Haman goes home and tells his wife. She tells him he should build the gallows because Mordecai is going to be hanged. Haman wanted to be honored, and he wanted to hang Mordecai. He goes back the next day to the feast. But the king has had a dream. He just couldn't sleep that night. Some of you may think this is coincidence. I read somewhere that "a coincidence is when a miracle happens, but God chooses to remain anonymous."

God Saves the Jews

You see, in Esther, God is hidden but not hiding. This is a book about God's providential care of His people as they live in the world. You have to remember that God took the children of Israel out of Babylon and put them in the land so that in the land, the Messiah will be born. And from the Messiah, all the nations of the world will experience salvation. God's purpose to get Israel out of Babylon was so that they could get back to the Promised Land, and ultimately, save the world. This is why the Jews are important to us today. We owe them a debt of gratitude; they brought us the Messiah! But there is a plot going on to wipe them out. If the Jews are going to save the world, who is going to save the Jews? That is what

Esther is about. Ultimately, we think Esther saves the Jews. But Esther does not save the Jews; God saves the Jews! But when God works, He works through people. And He worked through an orphan, who was a female, who was Jewish, who became a queen, so that ultimately, she or no one else would boast in the presence of God, but all glory would be given to God.

- **The King's Sleepless Night**

So, the king couldn't sleep. You have to remember that in those days he didn't have ESPN, he did not have a sports magazine. So he did what kings did, he had his own personal history read to him. Now, you and I don't have the privilege of someone sitting down writing our history. But imagine you cannot sleep, and you just decide you want to read about what you have been doing. He listened to his personal memoirs being read, and he hears about the plot to have him killed. So he asked what had been done to honor Mordecai, and they said, "Nothing..." So the king decides he should be honored.

The next morning, he gets up and Haman is the first one through the door. He asks Haman, what do you think I should do if I want to honor someone? Now, imagine you are at work; you think you are the best employee and you are going to get promoted. The boss comes to you and says, "I am going to promote somebody. What do you think the fringe benefit should be? What do you think the starting salary ought to be? What do you think the vacation plan should be?" You think it is you he is talking about, and you are going to get to tell your boss! Would you exaggerate it just a little bit? So Haman (thinking it was himself) said they ought to put clothes that the king has worn on him. I can't imagine wanting to do that! I do not want to wear somebody else's clothes, but these are the king's clothes. Haman said they should put him on the back of a horse that the king has personally ridden, and somebody should escort him through the city and say that this is how the king honors a man who he delights in. The king said, 'Amen! We will do it for Mordecai and you personally lead the horse.' Imagine leading your enemy around Babylon saying this is how the king honors him who delights in him, and when you get home, (chapter 6) your wife says, 'It is over for you boy. You are as good as dead.' The man

who wanted to be honored, honors Mordecai, the man he wanted to be hung. The man who wanted to be honored gets hung. Have you ever heard that phrase, "Give the devil enough rope and he will hang himself?" That is exactly what Esther is about. Haman hung himself.

The story ends this way. Once the king says something is going to happen, it has got to happen. So on March 14th, anybody in the kingdom could kill a Jew. Mordecai and Esther get together and the king gives them permission to write a new edict, because Mordecai is now second in command. The new edict said that on that day every Jew could defend themselves. When that day came they defended themselves, and seventy-five thousand Persians died, no Jews. The book ends, not with Haman sitting by the king, but with Mordecai sitting by the king.

For Esther, she had to be reminded it might be for this moment that she was sitting where she was sitting. Have you ever thought about who helped her get there? It was her dad, who was not really her dad, but her cousin. Have you ever noticed how generosity has a way of repaying itself? Have you ever thought about what might have happened to Mordecai if he had not been generous to his daughter? The question, "And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for a time such as this," was not just to Esther. The real question is did Mordecai realize he was born into the kingdom for a time like this, and it was his actions that God ultimately used to put his daughter on the throne to make the decision that ultimately saved, not just her life or her dad's life, but the life of an entire nation?

His by the Grace of God

Let's just sum this up this way. How do we treat the orphans? How do we treat those on the other side of the track? How do we treat those less fortunate than us? We know how Haman treated them. That is the world and the world would like to get us to bow down to that. We are the people of God. Our life is different. Esther ends with a feast, and they ordered that every Jew remember forever, and teach their kids, why they were alive, and why they were who they are. We are to remember who we are by the grace of God. There was a time when you were a spiritual orphan without

a Father. By God's grace, He adopted you into His family. But in order to adopt you into His family, it cost Him the life of His Son. He laid His life down on the cross for you. God raised up His Son to save us, and in saving us, He saved us for a purpose, and that is for a moment like this. We believe we are in the kingdom for this very moment, and while the world expects us to bow down and accept their way of thinking, we refuse to bow except to God. Who we are is revealed in our actions and our conduct.