

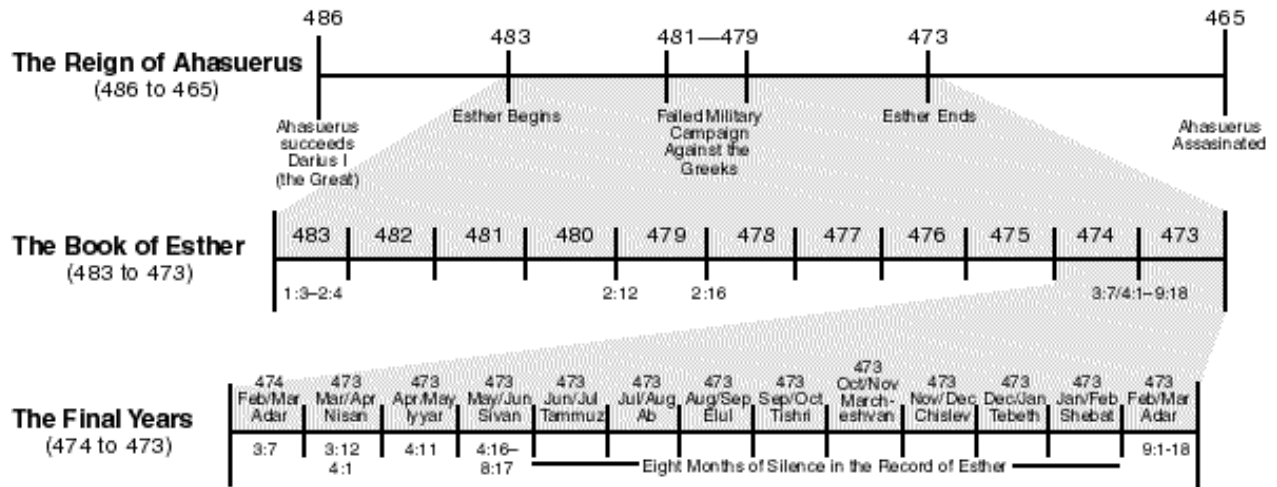
The Great Story

Week 20 – Esther

Bible Study

I. Introduction

- a. The book of Esther likely takes place over period of 10 years.
- b. King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) succeeded Darius I in 486 BC.
- c. The Jews were allowed to return to Judah 50-60 years before this period. At this time, Judah is still under the control of the Persian Empire.
- d. There is no mention of God in the book of Esther. Instead of focusing on miracles, the story focuses on the Providence of God.



The MacArthur Study Bible. Edited by MacArthur, John, Jr. electronic ed. Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997.

II. Queen Vashti

- a. When King Xerxes came to power, he instituted a 180 day festival to display his riches.
- b. After the 180 days, he made a feast that lasted 7 day for all the people in the court. Wine was served freely and served from golden vessels. No one was required to drink, but they could drink as much as they wanted.
- c. The King wanted Queen Vashti to appear before him and the rest of the court. Vashti refused.
 - i. Possible Reasons why:
 1. The rabbis thought the king wanted Vashti to appear naked since she was to wear (only, they said) “her royal crown.”¹

¹ Mervin Breneman, vol. 10, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, electronic ed., The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 307.

2. She could have been pregnant with the king's son
3. As the event was intended to show off her beauty, she would have had to remove her veil and that was against their custom.
- d. Because of Vashti's refusal, the king made a decree that she was no longer allowed to appear before him and her title as queen would be given to someone else.
 - i. This was done at the urging of his officials as they thought that the queen's refusal would influence the behavior of women throughout the kingdom.

III. Esther becomes a Queen

- a. Esther's Hebrew name was Hadassah
- b. She was raised by her cousin, Mordecai, after her parents died
 - i. Mordecai was a Benjaminite who could trace his lineage to Kish, father of King Saul.
- c. A new queen was to be selected for the king, so virgins were gathered from all over the kingdom to participate in a beauty competition. They were given a full year to prepare themselves for the King.
- d. Esther was taken to participate in this contest but at the urging of Mordecai, she was told not to reveal her heritage. Mordecai could have had a sense of Anti-Semitism in the kingdom.
- e. Each woman was brought to the king individually and he spent the night with them. In the morning, he would send them to his harem to serve as concubines.
- f. Esther was beautiful and won favor with everyone she met. The King loved her more than any other woman, so he made her his queen.

IV. Mordecai saves the King

- a. Esther 2:19 - Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate.
 - i. This shows that Mordecai was likely some type of official
 1. He could have been appointed by Esther after she was made queen to show her appreciation.
- b. Mordecai discovered that two guards, Bigthan and Teresh, were plotting to kill the king.
- c. He reported the plot to Esther who reported it to the king. After an investigation, the report proved to be valid.
- d. The two guards were killed and Mordecai's actions were recorded in the chronicles in the presence of the king.
 - i. This event shows God's plan at work in the lives of Mordecai and Esther. He had placed them both in the proper place for future needs.

V. Haman

- a. Esther 3:1-6
 - i. Haman was descended from the Amalekites and hated the Jews
 1. King Saul was told by God to wipe out the Amalekites, but he did not.
 - ii. Mordecai would not bow or pay homage to Haman

- iii. Haman sought to destroy all of the Jews in the Persian Empire.
- b. Esther 3:8-11
 - i. Haman asked the king that there was a people in the land that wouldn't keep the king's law and he wished to eliminate them.
 - ii. The king gave Haman leave without investigating and was not concerned about the money.
- c. According to the Law of the Medes and the Persians, once a law is enacted, it cannot be repealed.
 - i. The story of Daniel and the Lions' den alludes to this.

VI. A Time Such as This

- a. Upon hearing that Mordecai was in sackcloth and ashes, mourning in the city, Esther sent Hathach to inquire what was wrong.
- b. Esther 4:7-17
 - i. Esther was afraid that the king would kill her if she were to appear in his presence without being summoned.
 - 1. The only way she would not be killed is if the king held out his golden scepter and permitted her to stay.
 - ii. Mordecai told her that she would not escape destruction either, and that she may have been given her position, "For a time such as this"
- c. Even if Esther did not obey, another would be raised up to save the Jews.

VII. The Banquet

- a. Esther appeared before the King and she was accepted into his presence - Esther 5:2
- b. She invited both King Xerxes and Haman to a banquet that she had prepared for them.
- c. Both attended and were pleased. The King asked Esther what she wanted, and her request was that they both attend the banquet on the next evening as well.

VIII. Haman's plot

- a. Haman was full of pride because he alone was invited to dine with the king and queen.
- b. When Haman saw Mordecai at the King's gate, he was filled with anger because Mordecai refused to honor him.
- c. His friends and his wife suggested that he build a gallows that was 50 cubits high and execute Mordecai the next day, before the banquet.
- d. The gallows was built.

IX. The King honors Mordecai

- a. The same night, the king had issues sleeping and asked that the record of the chronicles be read – Esther 6:1
- b. He discovered that nothing had been done for Mordecai after he saved the king's life.
- c. Esther 6:6-10

- d. Haman was humiliated as he had to parade the man that he sought to kill through town in the honors that he thought were being given to him.

X. Haman's End

- a. After the second banquet was concluded, the king asked Esther what she wanted
- b. Esther 7:3-6
- c. The king was furious that Haman would try to kill the Queen's people, and he got up from the table to go into the garden.
- d. Haman was terrified and began pleading with Esther for his life.
- e. When the king returned he saw Haman had fallen on the couch with the queen.
 - i. The possibilities here are that the king thought Haman was either physically or sexually assaulting the queen, not just begging for his life.
- f. A eunuch told the king that Haman had made a gallows to hang Mordecai on, so the king had Haman hung on those same Gallows.

XI. The Jews Saved

- a. Mordecai was appointed over the house of Haman and was raised in position to second only to the King.
- b. Esther 8:11-12
- c. On the same day that people were permitted to kill the Jews, the Jews were allowed to defend themselves and plunder their spoil.
- d. The Jews were also allowed to destroy their enemies on a second day as well – Esther 9:13-14
- e. The Jews destroyed 75,000 of their enemies, but did not plunder from them.
- f. The Jews celebrate Purim in honor of Esther and the saving of the Jews.

XII. Lesson from the Story

- a. God puts His people in the right place, at the right time to do His will. Even when people do not want to cooperate, God will raise another in their place.

XIII. Sources

- a. *The MacArthur Study Bible*. Edited by MacArthur, John, Jr. electronic ed. Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997
- b. Breneman, Mervin. vol. 10. *Ezra. Nehemiah. Esther*. electronic ed., The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993.