
Day 276 - October 3

Period of Restoration (535-425 BCE)

Esther and the Feast of Purim

Readings: *Esther 1:1-4:17*

Reflections:

- The rebuilding of Israel continues for the next 60 years after the temple is completed. Darius has complete control of Egypt but as was his approach allowed the people he ruled to maintain a high level of freedom. In 486 BCE his son Xerxes I becomes the ruler of Persia. He is a harsh ruler, demanding high taxes and even offending his own people by destroying the statue to the god Marduk. Scholars debate if Xerxes I is the same person as the ruler called Ahasuerus in other written records. Most seem to lean towards that conclusion and so the story of Esther is provided here.
- God is never mentioned in this story although it is a story of God's sovereignty and ability to complete his will through very unexpected circumstances.
- The first most notable element of this story is that although many have seen this as a great love story, it is more about sex than about love. Esther is basically selected to become the top woman to the king because she is beautiful, has a nice body and is the best lover the king can find, the best in his harem. This is a story that would probably offend many as being sexually scandalous – God's rescuer of the nation is a gorgeous woman who seduces the king.
- The story speaks for itself and needs little commentary. This story provides interesting cultural insights into how the ancients partied and how royalty indulged so excessively.
- Mordecai's statement, "And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?" is often used to for personal reflection when struggling with significant challenges, particularly among leaders. God is looking for people he can use, often times people who would never conceive of themselves as being well qualified. What were Esther's qualifications? What was her education or gifting as a leader? She was simply someone who was willing to be used by God. This makes me think of the quote from the Lord of the Rings, the Fellowship of the Ring. Frodo says, "I wish the ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened." Gandalf replies, "So do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us. There are other forces at work in this world Frodo, besides the will of evil. Bilbo was meant to find

the Ring. In which case, you were also meant to have it. And that is an encouraging thought.” We see Tolkien in this quote try to articulate that interplay between God’s will that enfolds us into his purposes and the role of our own will in deciding to partner with God’s purposes. Both God and I have a will. The question is, “how will I respond to his leading, his will, and his overarching purposes?”

- Esther’s desire to save her people came at a high risk. “When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.” We see in her willingness to lay down her life as the starting point for God to be able to use her in this very difficult situation. Those whose primary motivation is self-preservation will discover very few opportunities to serve God. Jesus makes it clear for all those who would come after him to be his follower, that the starting point is losing your life, depicted as carrying your own cross (Matthew 10:38; 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; 14:27). We see this story model the basic core truth of what it means to live in a deep trust relationship with God. This is what God has always sought from his people. Here again we see like Tamar and Rahab and Bathsheba, a woman who would be viewed as sexually promiscuous who at the same time has a real trust relationship with God and because of that is used by God to bring salvation. Another one of God’s scandalous women.