



Session 1 | October 5, 2016 | Luke 15:11-32, Esther 1:1

### The timing of the book

- Queen Esther (Hadassah) was a Persian Jewish Queen in the days *after* the exile.
- Who is Ahasuerus?
  - Xerxes I – the most common scholarly view
    - Reigned in Persia 486-465 BC.
    - Famous for the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BC, which was made famous by the movie “300.”
    - The name Xerxes is used in the NIV, NLT, NCV, GNB, “The Message,” and others. This is interpretation, not translation.
    - Varied interpretations of his life: weak king ruled by his advisors or strong king with skilled insight.
    - Assassinated by the captain of his bodyguard.
  - Artaxerxes – the view of Josephus
    - Third son of Xerxes I, who reigned from 465 – 424 BC.
    - This is the king under whom Nehemiah served.
    - Roger Williams wrote “The Bloody Tenent of Persecution” based on his interpretation of Artaxerxes as a “good gentile King.” Williams wrote about religious freedom, and did not believe that modern practical theology should be based on anything from within the Jewish covenants, since America was not within those covenants.
- Whichever King it was; the events of the book align with the historical scene after the return of the exiles.

### The relationship between Nehemiah and Esther

- Depending on the identity of Ahasuerus, Nehemiah was either before or after the events of Esther.
- The book of Nehemiah shows God’s relationship with the Jewish people who are living inside the land of Israel, from the return of the exiles to the time of Christ.
- The book of Esther shows God’s relationship with the Jewish people who are living outside the land of Israel.
  - It is no mistake that God is never explicitly mentioned in the book.
  - The work of God is totally “providential,” that is, the invisible hand of God caring for the people who are living in rejection of Him.

## Is there implicit prophecy in Esther?

- Any implicit prophesy would be applicable to Jews living *outside* the land and in a state of disobedience with the covenants of Israel (or, at minimum, outside of a right-relationship with God).
  - The state of the Jews who remained in Babylon after the return of the exiles (From Roy Gingrich):
    - They became a numerous people (Esther 9:16)
    - They became a widely-scattered but unassimilated people (Esther 3:8; 9:2; 9:20)
    - They became a very wealthy people (Esther 3:9)
    - They became a carnal, secular, materialistic people (a wayward people, following a self-chosen way)
    - They became a people who had lost all their desire to return to the homeland and be a part of God's theocratic program centered there
    - They became a people that God providentially watched over but refused to identify Himself with.<sup>1</sup>
  - From the Baker Biblical Encyclopedia:
    - "The book appears to be anthropocentric, and apart from fasting ( 4:16 ), there are no distinctly religious practices or concepts. God, prayer, the covenant, sacrifice, the temple, the promised land, as well as virtues such as love, kindness, mercy, and forgiveness are not mentioned...Moreover, a number of the moral and ethical practices of Esther have been considered questionable. Esther hid her identity from the king, was willing to marry a Gentile, did not feel out of place in a harem, had no mercy on Haman, did not observe dietary laws, was at first not willing to help her own people, and sanctioned the plundering of enemies. Furthermore, the author never explicitly condemns her shortcomings, but seems to describe her triumphs with approval."<sup>2 2</sup>
- Assumption and consequence:
  - Assumption: Every portion of the Bible is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim 3:16-17).
  - Consequence: The book of Esther, like every book of the Bible, must have some doctrinal instruction and cannot be viewed as history alone.
- Who's who? (A preliminary analysis)
  - Esther: The Jewish Bride
  - Mordecai: The Jewish Messiah, in a period of rejection but soon to be the Savior
  - Hamaan: The Oppressor of the Jews
- What's what?
  - We should expect that God will refuse to associate with the Jewish people who have rejected Him.
  - We should expect that God is faithful to His promises to the Jewish people, even when they reject Him.
  - We should expect that, since God is not dealing directly with His people, there will be no miracles in the truest sense. Rather, God's work will be done by natural means.

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<sup>1</sup> Gingrich, Roy E. *The Book of Esther*. Memphis, TN: Riverside Printing, 2004. Print.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/esther-theology-of.html>