

Esther

Lesson 1: Setting the Stage

Background Information

The Babylonian Captivity: The time period known as the Babylonian captivity spans from 597 B.C. to 538 B.C. Because of the idolatry and unbelief of so many people living in Judah (the southern kingdom of Palestine) the Lord said that judgment would come upon them. This judgment came in the form of a conquering Babylonian king named Nebuchadnezzar. Judah was conquered in 597 B.C. and the current king, King Jehoiachin, his court and many others were taken back to Babylon. A second deportation of Jews happened in 587 B.C. and a third in 582 B.C.

The first return under Zerubbabel: In 539 B.C. the Babylonian Empire was conquered by the Persian king Cyrus the Great. Cyrus was known for his leniency on religion and for encouraging the areas which he ruled to worship whomever they wished and in whatever manner they wished. It was for this reason that Cyrus allowed the Jews who had been conquered by the Babylonians to return to Judah and rebuild the temple; because worship at the temple in Jerusalem was the one way to really do worship for the Old Testament Jews.

The first group of people who returned to Jerusalem were led by Zerubbabel in 538 B.C. Other groups would follow Zerubbabel to help. The two main groups that left after him were led by Ezra in 458 B.C. and Nehemiah in 445 B.C.

King Xerxes: The reign of King Xerxes falls between the first return by Zerubbabel and the return of Ezra. Xerxes' reign lasted from 486 B.C. -465 B.C. During Xerxes' lifetime he attempted to conquer Greece, a prize that he longed for since his father King Darius was not able to conquer it. Xerxes was the famous king that clashed against the small Spartan force at Thermopylae. Though the Spartans were eventually defeated, they delayed the Persian army long enough for Athens to be evacuated.

Chapter 1

Q: What do we learn about King Xerxes' character in 1:1-8?

Q: What else do we learn about King Xerxes' character from verse 1:10-22?

Q: Does it seem a little extreme that he would issue this decree to the whole province?

Chapter 2

Q: If in 2:1 it says that the anger of Xerxes had subsided and he regretted the decision he had made, why didn't he just call Vashti back?

Read 2:2-11 According to historians, four years passed between when Vashti was deposed and Esther was made queen. There is good reason to believe that this is the time that Xerxes invaded Greece. He was eventually called back to Susa, his capital city, because of problems at home.

Q: What things do we learn about the character of Esther and Mordecai from verse 2-11?
Esther:

Mordecai:

Q: Daniel, the one who was thrown into the lion's den, was also an exile like Esther. How do Daniel and Esther seem different from one another in the way that they lived?

Read 2:12-18 Myrrh and oil is known to enhance the beauty of hair and skin. Perfume would be used to eliminate bodily odors and give Esther a sweet smell.

Q: How does Esther show her wisdom in verse 13?

Q: How do we know that Esther was not just a super model beauty?

Q: How do we see the Lord's hand working in verses 19-23?

God had a direct hand in both Esther becoming queen and in Mordecai overhearing the plot. Both were now in a position close to the king. Both had earned his trust. God is setting the stage for what is to come. He is putting all the pieces into place to save his people once again and fulfill the promise he made in the Garden of Eden to preserve the line of the Savior.