

August 13, 2023

God's Good News Story

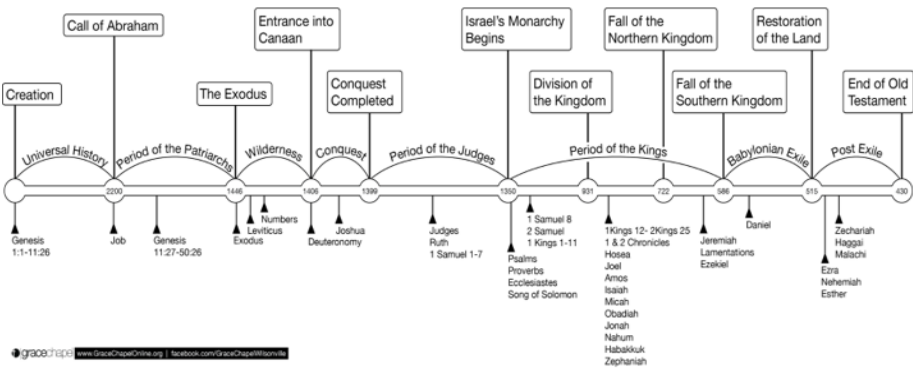
Esther

A Story of Courage, Faith & Action

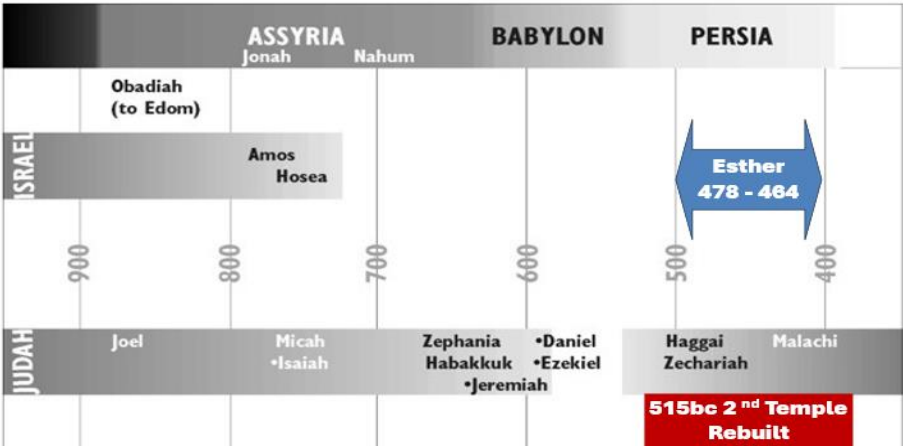
Today we continue with God's Good News Story and how God continues His **Scarlet Thread of Redemption** with the Book & Story of Esther. Also I think that this story is the motivation and background for several modern day things. The Jewish Festival of Purim come sform this story, and on a lighter note the inspiration for the Victoria Secret Model Show, the story of Cinderellas' Ball, and the reality show The Batchelor! Stay tuned to see how this works out. LOL.

But, first let's get our bearings on the **historical setting and dates.**

OLD TESTAMENT TIMELINE



Let's zero in a little tigher...



With that in mind let's zero in on today's story and book. The Book of Esther is the 17th book of the Bible – (10 chapters, 167 verses)

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Esther

Focus	Threat to the Jews		Triumph of The Jews	
	1:1	4:17	5:1	10:3
Divisions	Selection of Esther as Queen 1:1-2:20	Formulation of the plot by Haman 2:21-4:17	Renewal of the Covenant 5:1-8:3	Obedience to the Covenant 8:4-10:3
Topics	Feasts of Ahasuerus		Fests of Esther and Purim	
	Grave Danger		Great Deliverance	
Place	Persia			
Time	478 -484 BC			

Now, let's get personal about the key character... Esther (Babylonian for 'Star') was born @490 near the City of Sus/Shushan in Persia (Iran) (200 miles SW of Babylon). Her birth name was Hadassa (Hebrew = Myrtle). She was the daughter of Abihail (a Benjamite). Both parents died and she was raised by her Uncle Mordecai, who was a palace official at Shushan. She is described as a beautiful and intelligent young woman.

Now the story.... The city of Susa/Shushan was the capital of the Persian/Iranian Empire known in history as the Achaemenid Empire which up to that time in history was the largest empire ever known. It was founded by Cyrus the Great in 550BC until its fall in 330BC to Alexander the Great.

Now for a very brief historical background. The book of Esther (unknown author...maybe Ezra or her cousin Mordecai) is set during the reign of the 4th Ruler of the Great Persian Empire – Xerxes (aka Ahasuerus) ruled from around (485-464 BC). Xerxes is the Infamous Ruler who fought the Battle of Thermopylae (@480). Remember the Famous “Spartan 300”. This was the ruler who fought them. We pick up the book of Esther just before that great Battle of Thermopylae.

Ahasuerus/Xerxes is 3 years into his reign and planning his next war attack. He throws a big party and asks Vashti his Queen to come ‘Display Her Beauty’... Early version of the Victoria Secret Model Show???

She bravely and audaciously says NO. The King and his manly pride were hurt and he quickly deposes her as Queen for the men thought that other woman may follow her example and refuse to follow their husbands advice...so they made an example of her.

Well, after a while the King began to miss having a Queen around so his attendants suggested a Cinderella Ball type contest. They would bring beautiful virgin girls from all over the empire for the original TV show ‘The Bachelor’, well you get the idea! The top contestants were treated to a yearlong cosmetic and beauty treatment program.

One of the many young girls that was chosen was a former orphan girl named Esther, a Jew, who had been adopted by her Uncle Mordecai. Now she kept the fact that she was a Jew a secret because even then, there seemed to be some antisemitic bias. Well, Esther made the top cut and then was the finalist chosen to be the new Queen. Listen to **Esther 2:17,18**... ***The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found favor and kindness with him more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. ¹⁸ Then the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his princes and his servants; he also made a holiday for the provinces and gave gifts according to the king's bounty.***

Time goes by and all seems well. The next event that comes up in this story actually involves Esther's Uncle and adoptive Father, Mordecai. Mordecai seem to be a rather important man and was doing business one day at the temple gates and overheard an assassination plot against the King. He alerted the authorities, and the King was saved. However, Mordecai went unnoticed and unrecognized for this act.

More time goes by and the King promotes a man by the name of Haman as head over all the princes. He was an ambitious, ruthless, prideful and evil man. He loved attention and expected everyone to bow down to him as his procession passed by. However, Mordecai would not bow down to Haman. The Bible does not give us a reason, whether it was because of his distaste for Haman or his faithfulness to bow only to God, or some combination of the two we don't know. This act was seen as defiance and disrespect by Haman and he was furious. Haman found out that Mordecai was a Jew and made it even worse. Haman concocted an evil plan (most likely planted in his mind by Satan, who has always hated the Hebrew/Jewish people, because he knows that Jesus Christ was prophesied to come through this Hebrew/Jewish lineage). He went to the King and made up a story about how the Jews were disloyal and a threat to the kingdom and suggested they set a date the 13th day of the 12th month (around late February) and

make a law that all the Jews were to be killed. So, he convinced the King to make an unbreakable edict or law to that effect.

Unbeknownst to the King or Haman, was the secret fact that Queen Esther was indeed a Jew herself. When her Uncle Mordecai heard about this death sentence he was overwhelmed with grief and anger. He sent a message to Queen Esther requesting that she gain an audience with the King and ask for favor and relief for the Jews. However, in those days even the Queen could not just waltz into the court of the King without permission or she could be killed by the King's body guards, who were instructed to keep anyone out that was not pre-authorized. On top of that the king had been greatly preoccupied with war plans and government details that he had not called her for over 30 days. Esther told her Uncle that she could not do it without being summoned. Then Mordecai said these famous words found in

Esther 4:13,14...¹³ *Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews."*¹⁴ *For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not been granted this position for such a time as this?"*

Mordecai was a brave and faithful man and obviously had raised Esther well for she responded with this equally famous and powerful response in

Esther 4:15-17...¹⁵ *Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai,* ¹⁶ *“Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.”* ¹⁷ *So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him.*

So they did what faithful followers of God do when in grave circumstances, they fasted and prayed. On the third day Esther bravely put on her best clothes and courageously went and stood at the entrance to the King's court. Thankfully, (and obviously with God's protective hand on her), the guards did not harm her, but the King saw her and granted her favor and extended his scepter as a sign that she could come to him. The King, rather surprised I'm sure at her appearance, asked what was wrong. Esther was very coy and a little sneaky, asked the King to come to a dinner she had prepared and to bring Haman with him. He was overjoyed, as was Haman, and agreed. The banquet came and at the end the King curiously asked what she wanted, again she slyly asked for one more meal the next night. It was almost like a cat and mouse game at this point. The King took the bait and he and Haman agreed to come the next night.

Segue into a subplot... Haman went home to his wife and family and was bragging pridefully about how he and he alone was invited to dine with the King and Queen. Haman was on top of the world. Everything seemed to be falling into place for Haman, except for one pesky, frustrating thing, Mordecai. He still would not bow down to Haman. Haman, now filled with pride and anger, had a hangman's gallows built that was 75 feet tall to hang Mordecai on and to make an example of him. Haman went to sleep with devious delight that tomorrow Mordecai would be hanged, and he would again have a private royal dinner with the King & Queen. Oh what a sleep he had that night (not knowing it would actually be his last night!)

You see, while Haman was “*nestled all snug in his bed; while visions of sugar-plums danced in his head*” oops that another story... The King was having a restless night of insomnia, so he thought maybe if I read some boring old historical journals it will make me sleepy. It just so happened (actually it was God's providence) that he read the journal entry where Mordecai had discovered the plot about the assassination plot on his life. He asked his attendant, “Did we ever do anything to honor him?” The response was ‘No’, so the King determined to do something to honor him.

So the next morning is a strange twist of fate, Haman came to the King and the King asked him, “What should we do for a man who the King wants to show honor?” Well, Haman, being the prideful self-absorbed man that he was, he thought the king was talking about him. So, he came up with a grandiose plan.

Let's read this tantalizing story in **Esther 6:7-10**...

Esther 6:7-10...⁷ *So Haman answered the king, “For the man the king delights to honor, ⁸ have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. ⁹ Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king’s most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, ‘This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!’”*¹⁰ *“Go at once,” the king commanded Haman. “Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king’s gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended.”*

Choke, Choke, gasp, gasp. Haman’s grand world started to fall apart. Can you imagine what he must have felt, the sick, kick in the gut feeling as he had to hold the reins on **the King’s horse and parade his mortal** enemy Mordecai through the streets of the city saying **“This is what is done for the man the King delights in”**. To make matters worse, I am sure he had to walk past the gallows that he had instructed to be made to hang the very fellow he is now parading through the streets. Well, the story only gets worse for evil Haman. Just as he puts up the horse, he is called to a dinner with the King and Esther (remember she is Mordecai’s adopted daughter). Well, the dinner went along seemingly well, even though I am sure Haman had some serious indigestion, lol. Then it happened, the proverbial shoe hit the floor. The King asked Esther again, “What do you really want”. Then she spilled the beans, at first, she did not mention Haman

Esther 7:2-6... ² *and as they were drinking wine on the second day, the king again asked, “Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.”*³ *Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request....* ⁴ *For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king.”*⁵ *King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, “Who is he? Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?”* ⁶ *Esther said, “An adversary and enemy! **This vile Haman!**”*

Gulp, and gasp again. Haman was horrified. But the King was so angry that he stormed out of the room to catch his breath and come up with a plan. When the King walked out of the room, Haman was so scared that he went over to the couch that Esther was reclining on and threw himself at her feet to beg for mercy. **However**, when the King came back in, from his angle of view it looked as if Haman was trying to sexually molest Esther. The King was livid.

As soon as the King spoke the guards grabbed Haman and as they were dragging him out, one of the King’s servant by the name Harbonna, said there is a ‘conveniently’ built gallows just outside, that by the way King, you know the man Mordecai that saved your life.

This man Haman was planning to hang Mordecai on it, why don't we just hang Haman on it instead. The King shouted. "Hang Him on it"! Oooh. What a twist of fate. Esther then reveals that Mordecai is actually her adopted father and the King sets him in the same powerful office that Haman had previously occupied. Esther quickly set about to ask the King to rescind the order and save her people. But sadly, he said, "I cannot rescind a law that has been issued". It is an irrevocable law of the Medes and Persians. However, he allowed Mordecai to write another edict declaring the right of all Jews to defend themselves. In a sweet twist of providence, the Jews were able to defeat kill over 75,000 of their enemies, including 10 of the evil Haman's sons. This happened over a two-day period. The Jews then marked the occasion by declaring every year a festival which is still celebrated today in early spring and is known as the Feast of Purim. And Esther and Mordecai lived happily ever after! Well, anyway they were greatly blessed. There is so much we can learn from this marvelous story. But three key words come to mind...

1. Providence

This is from the Baker Bible Dictionary

Providence: Providence, then, is the sovereign, divine superintendence of all things, guiding them toward their divinely predetermined end in a way that is consistent with their created nature, all to the glory and praise of God. This divine, sovereign, and benevolent control of all things by God is the underlying premise of everything that is taught in the Scriptures. (*Baker Bible Dictionary*)

2. Along with God's Providence comes Protection.

3. Protection to Fulfill Our Purpose or Destiny

In Conclusion: The book of Esther teaches us:

1) Have Faith: Trust in God's Providential Care

God and the forces of good, will ultimately triumph over those of evil because God is at work in the background of life.

(2) Have Courage: Take Action to Follow God's Providential Plan

- **Courage to say NO – Vashti.**
- **Courage to Not Honor People Above God – Mordecai.**
- **Courage in the face of danger and confront evil– Esther.**
- **Courage to Stand up for the wellbeing of others- and not be silent – Esther.**

Choose to be a person of Faithful, Courageous action!