

BOOK OF ESTHER

1. This is one of the 2 books named after a lady. The other one is the book of Ruth.
2. This is one of the 3 books written outside the Promised Land and after entry into the exile. The other 2 books are the books of Ezekiel and Daniel.
3. This is also one of the 2 books which has no explicit mention of the name of God. The other book is the Song of Solomon.
4. The book of Esther is an unusual and exciting story with lots of ironical twists and coincidences.
5. The author is unknown.
6. This story happened about 100 years after the exiles returned to Jerusalem.
 - a) Many Jews continued to stay in Persia (in exile) because they were prosperous there. This story happened during the Persian Empire and is about the Jewish community.
 - b) The Persian Empire that conquered Babylon was a massive empire with 127 provinces and the Jews were scattered everywhere within this huge empire. The empire stretched from India to Ethiopia and many Jews were traders traveling around.
7. Below is the background about the Jews at that time:
 - a) The Jews had mostly forgotten the Law and the Levites were assimilated into the local culture. They ate any type of food like the pagans. Esther and Mordecai also did the same.
 - b) The Jews married the Gentiles. Queen Esther was the wife of the Persian King.
 - c) So, the Jews were pretty much immersed into the local culture and sinned like the pagans. But God still remembered them though God's name was never mentioned at all. God was watching every move of Queen Esther and it was obvious that God was working behind the scenes. God always remember His elect even if they forget Him.
8. Esther lived in Susa which was the Persian capital and was married to a king of weak character who was always partying.
9. This story took place about 30 years before the book of Nehemiah and hence the books of Esther and Nehemiah are not arranged in chronological order.

THE STORY OF ESTHER

1. Esther 1:1-22. The Persian King threw a party of 180 days because his empire was huge, covering 127 provinces. He did this, probably to entertain the officials across his country, so as to unite them. At the summit finale, the king was drunk and requested his queen's presence. However, the queen refused to attend to these drunkards and the king was then advised to stop her arrogance and dethrone her to save the king's face. The empire then held a beauty pageant to select another queen.
2. Esther 2:1-18. Esther was selected but she did not reveal her Jewish origins nor heritage because of strong anti-Semitic sentiments. The Jews were still persecuted for their uniqueness, even in exile, because God gave them food laws, etc. to help

them realise they were unique. The Jews also tended to be independent, rich and strong. So it was common for them to hide their Jewish identity.

3. The beauty pageant was a 12-month event in which Esther, after being selected, was prepared for the king. She was then made queen.
4. Esther 2:19-23. Her uncle Mordecai brought Esther up as an orphan. Esther told the king that Mordecai heard about a plot by a eunuch to kill the king.
5. Esther 3:1-4. An Amalekite named Haman was the Prime Minister though he was not a Persian. The Amalekites were one of the original inhabitants in Canaan whom King Saul did not get rid of despite God's commandment to annihilate the whole race. Samuel hacked King Agag of the Amalekites in pieces (1 Samuel 15:33). Therefore, there had been strong animosity between the Amalekites and the Jews since then.
6. Esther 3:5-15. Haman expected everyone to bow to him but Mordecai refused (in verse 5). There was much hatred in Haman as he felt that he was not respected. Haman suspected that Mordecai was a Jew and so he convinced the King of Persia to issue a decree to kill the Jews by making a payment of 10,000 talents of silver into the treasury of the king. The king agreed and a dice was rolled to decide the date that the Jews should be killed and it fell on the 13th day of the 12th month of the Persian calendar. This is probably the origin of the superstition that number 13 is a bad or unlucky number.
7. Esther 4:1-5:8. Esther realised the bribery plot of Haman, from her uncle Mordecai. Mordecai advised Queen Esther that she was put in the position of a queen in order to save her people, the Jews. Esther agreed and said, "If I perish, I perish" because she herself was also a Jew and she would also die under the decree. She knew that she was taking a risk because anyone who went to see the king without being summoned could be killed by the king. However, she agreed to take the risk and she planned a party (Esther 5:7) followed by a second party for Haman and the king, knowing that the king loved parties.
8. Esther 5:9-14. Haman built a gallows and planned to hang Mordecai (verse 14) before Esther held the second party.
9. Esther 6:1-10. However, before the second party, the king had insomnia and could not sleep. He went to read the records (or chronicles) of the kingdom and saw Mordecai's name in it and realised that Mordecai had not been rewarded yet for saving his life. This looked like a coincidence again. The king wanted to reward Mordecai and he asked Haman how he should honour the person who should be honored (verse 6). Haman thought that the king wanted to honour him and he was shocked later when he realised that the person the king wanted to honour was Mordecai.
10. Esther 6:11-7:10. Haman had to honour Mordecai (in Esther 6:10-11). During the second party in Esther 7:4, Queen Esther revealed to the king that she was Jewish and that Haman planned to kill her and the person the king chose to honour. In his drunken state, the king put Haman to death on the same gallows that Haman himself had built earlier with the intention to hang Mordecai.
11. Esther 8:1-9:17. The decree to kill the Jews on the specified date was already issued and the king could not revoke it. Everyone was waiting to kill all the Jews on the 13th

day of the 12th month of the Persian calendar. So, Mordecai, who became the Prime Minister in place of Haman, then made a counter decree to allow the Jews to defend themselves on the specified date and to kill those who tried to attack them. The people became afraid of the Jews and the Jews got rid of all the allies of Haman on the 14th and 15th of the same month.

12. Several times in history, people have tried to exterminate the Jews. For example, Pharaoh tried to kill all the babies of Moses' age and King Herod also tried to kill all the babies of Jesus' age. Hitler also tried to exterminate the Jews. It is a satanic plot to remove the Jews from the face of the Earth. God protected all the Jews in all those instances, including the one during Queen Esther's time. It is no coincidence that God continues to protect the royal line of David and His remnant.
13. Esther 9:18-32. Today, the 14th and 15th of the 12th month is still being celebrated by the Jews as Mordecai decreed that these days be celebrated as Purim. "Pur" means "dice" and "rim" means day. Because the day of 13th was selected by a throw of dice, hence the name Purim. The number 13 became a "bad luck" day. The Jews would read the story of Esther first before the celebration begins every year and they will yell out Haman's name. Purim is celebrated like a fun party unlike other sacred days which are solemnly observed by the Jews.
14. Though the book of Esther is a very Jewish book, it teaches us that we must never be anti-Jews. Our truth came through the Jews and the entire Bible was written by the Jews, except the book of Luke which was written by a Gentile physician.

What do we learn from the book of Esther?

1. There is no mention of God in the entire book but that does not mean there is no presence of God.
 - a) God works divinely behind the scenes. Many people never see the hand of God and hence attribute happenings to coincidences. They do not see God working in their lives unless they see miracles.
 - b) God makes things happen in favour of Christians like how Mordecai overheard the plot and saved the king. God caused the king to have insomnia so that he ended up reading that particular record of Mordecai's act of saving the king amongst all the scrolls in the chronicles.
 - c) If you examine your life carefully, you will also see many "coincidences". For example, even in the making of this Beautiful Book series, God raised a team to do this video recording of the entire series during Covid-19. In your quiet time, you will begin to see the hand of God in your life and you do not need to explicitly see miracles like healing, or seek out a renowned "faith healer".
 - d) God is present in our everyday life and working through imperfect people such as the drunken king, etc. God will work out His perfect plan to preserve the Jews and the Messianic line to deliver His promises. The term "Immanuel" in Matthew 1:23 means "God with us".

2. God will raise up His people e.g. Moses, Daniel, Mordecai, etc. in different empires to do His will. God did not and will never forget the Jews.
3. God chose His elect and He is faithful even though we may not be.
4. Therefore, the book of Esther is not just a story about the romance between a drunken king and his queen but the romance between God and His people.