

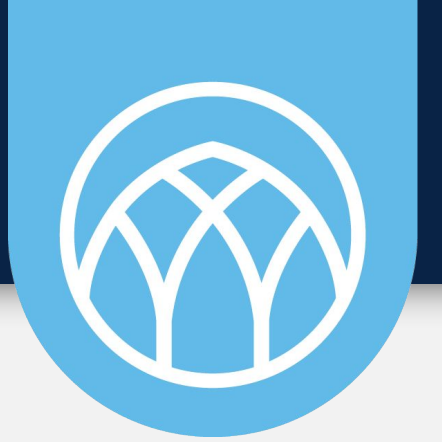


Esther 2 — Power, Pageants, Parties, and Providence



Perimeter
CHURCH

Review – Historical Context



586 BC – Jerusalem sacked by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar and Jews of Judah are exiled

539 BC – King Belshazzar and Babylon conquered by King Cyrus, founder of the Persian Empire (Daniel 5)

539 BC - Cyrus issues a decree that Jews can return to their homeland (Ezra 1:1-4, Nehemiah)

486 – 465 – Reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) over Persian Empire who unsuccessfully tries to conquer Greece (Esther)

330 BC – Alexander the Great Conquers the Persian Empire

Review – Timeline in Esther

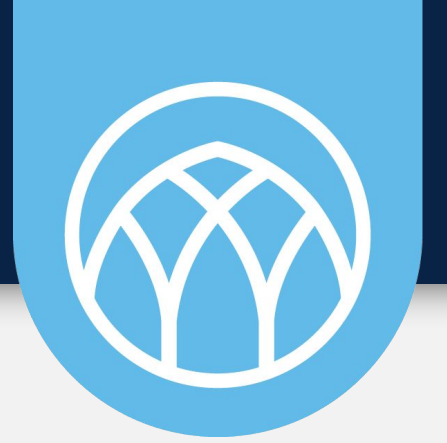


Chronology in Esther

The events of Esther unfold over a period of 10 years.

Reference	Event	Month	Day	Year of Ahasuerus's Reign	Year
1:3	Ahasuerus holds his banquets			3	483 B.C.
2:16	Esther goes to Ahasuerus	10		7	479
3:7	Haman casts his lots	1		12	474
3:12	Haman issues his decree	1	13	13	474
3:13	Date planned for annihilation of the Jews	12	13	13	473
8:9	Mordecai issues his decree	3	23	13	474
8:12; 9:1	Day upon which Jews could defend themselves from attack	12	13	13	473
9:6–10, 20-22	Ten sons of Haman executed; Feast of Purim celebrated	12	14, 15	13	473

Review – Timeline in Esther



Review – Timeline in Esther

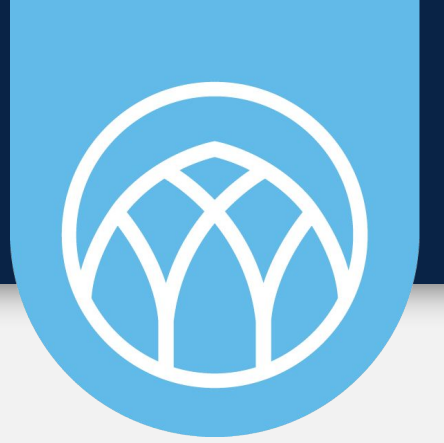


Esther 2:1-4



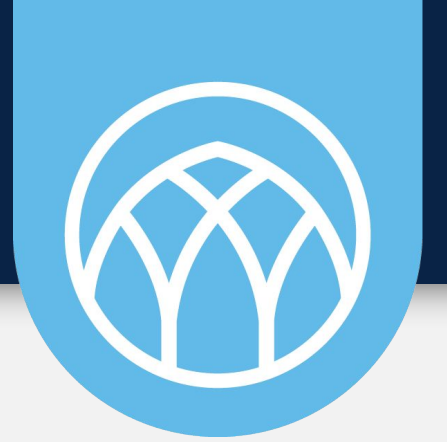
After these things, when the anger of King Ahasuerus had abated, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her. ² Then the king's young men who attended him said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king. ³ And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in Susa the citadel, under custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women. Let their cosmetics be given them. ⁴ And let the young woman who pleases the king^[a] be queen instead of Vashti." This pleased the king, and he did so.

Group Discussion



- Read Jeremiah 29:1-7. What does this tell us about the posture Jews were supposed to have while in exile?
- In light of Jeremiah 29, what jumps out at you in these first four verses of Esther 2?
- In light of what we have read in chapters one and two, who would you say is running the kingdom?

Nothing New Under the Sun



“Although many commentators glamorize Esther’s Cinderella-like rag-to-riches story and imagine that all girls want to be queen, it is important to pause and reflect upon the sexual violation of the “voiceless” girls herded into the king’s harem where they were cared for by men whose boyhood castration signified another form of sexual violation.”

- Marion Ann Taylor, *The Story of God Bible Commentary*

“This herding of virgins offends our modern sensibilities...however, Herodotus also reports five hundred young boys were gathered each year and castrated to serve as eunuchs in the Persian court...The gathering of the virgins...is a brutal act typical of how power was used in the Persian court. Everyone, whether male or female, was at the disposal of the king’s personal whims.”

- Karen Jobes, *The NIV Application Commentary*

Esther 2:5-8



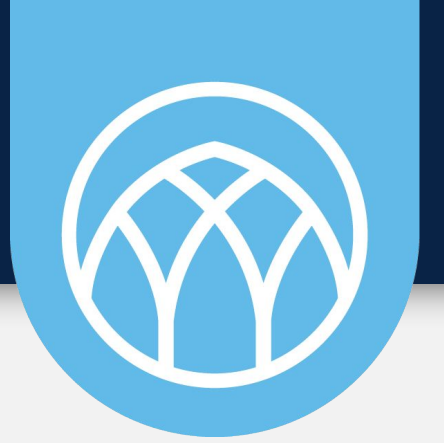
⁵ Now there was a Jew in Susa the citadel whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite, ⁶ who had been carried away from Jerusalem among the captives carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away. ⁷ He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter. ⁸ So when the king's order and his edict were proclaimed, and when many young women were gathered in Susa the citadel in custody of Hegai, Esther also was taken into the king's palace and put in custody of

Esther 2:9-11



⁹ And the young woman pleased him and won his favor. And he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and her portion of food, and with seven chosen young women from the king's palace, and advanced her and her young women to the best place in the harem. ¹⁰ Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mordecai had commanded her not to make it known. ¹¹ And every day Mordecai walked in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and what was happening to her.

Group Discussion



- What is significant about how the author introduces Mordecai?
Why do you think this is?
- What is significant about how the author introduces Esther?
Why do you think this is?
- Who does Esther remind you of?

Esther's Identity



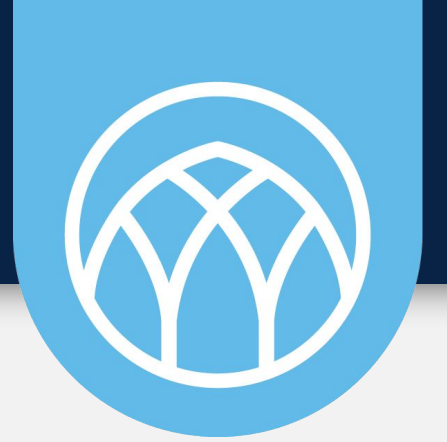
“Esther is the only person in the story with two names. Leland Ryken interprets this as the author’s way of depicting Esther as a young woman trying to live in two worlds – the Jewish world in which she was raised and the opulent world of the Persian court into which she was thrust.”

- Karen Jobes, *The NIV Application Commentary*

“Esther epitomizes the pathos of the Jewish people: she has neither father nor mother...[and] no home...[her] identity is the identity of the Jewish people.”

- Samuel Wells, *Esther & Daniel*

Moral Ambiguity in Esther



“Esther differentiates herself from Joseph and Daniel...in that she conceals her Jewish identity following the directive of Mordecai, and fails to comply with Torah laws as she prepares to sleep with the pagan king.”

- Marion Ann Taylor, *The Story of God Bible Commentary*

Esther 2:12-14



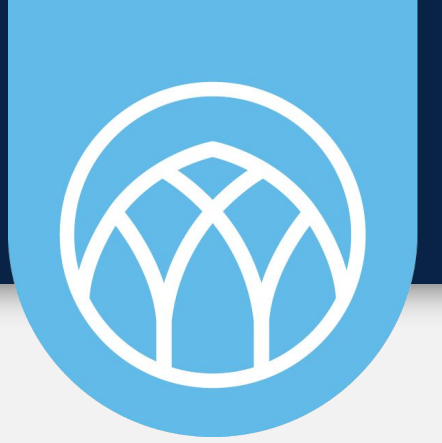
¹² Now when the turn came for each young woman to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their beautifying, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women—¹³ when the young woman went in to the king in this way, she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. ¹⁴ In the evening she would go in, and in the morning she would return to the second harem in custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the concubines. She would not go in to the king again, unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.

Esther 2:15-18



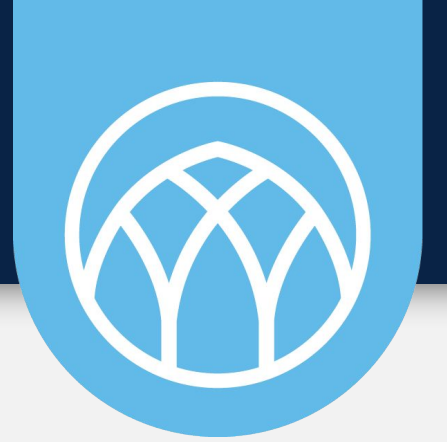
¹⁵ When the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his own daughter, to go in to the king, she asked for nothing except what Hegai the king's eunuch, who had charge of the women, advised. Now Esther was winning favor in the eyes of all who saw her. ¹⁶ And when Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign, ¹⁷ the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown^[b] on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. ¹⁸ Then the king gave a great feast for all his officials and servants; it was Esther's feast. He also granted a remission of taxes to the provinces and gave gifts with royal generosity.

Group Discussion



- What jumps out at you from this section?
- What are we to make of Mordecai and Esther's conduct? Are they righteous? Unfaithful?
- What kind of lessons can we learn from this passage to help us live as faithful followers in our day?

Providence in Esther



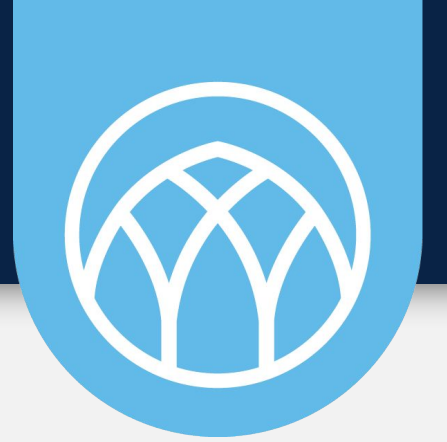
“The passive voice is used frequently throughout the story, suggesting that the characters are caught up in events by some unseen force that has ultimate control.”

- Karen Jobes, *The NIV Application Commentary*

“In a book which never mentions God directly it is necessary to find other ways of referring to his presence and activity, usually in an understated way. One method which had become quite popular by the time of the New Testament was using what is known as the divine passive. This technique allowed someone to refer to God’s actions without naming him directly.”

- David Firth, *The Message of Esther (BST Series)*

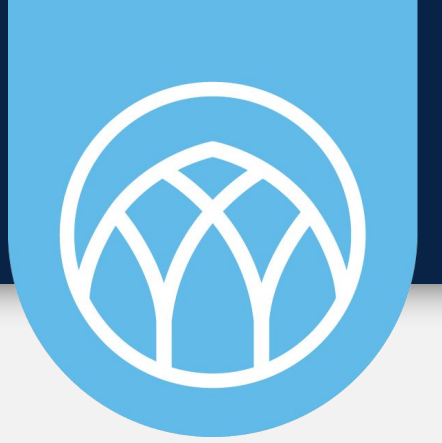
Providence in Esther



“The message of the book can also be considered from the viewpoint of systematic theology. The book of Esther is perhaps the most striking biblical statement of what systematic theologians call the providence of God. When we speak of God’s providence, we mean that God, in some invisible and inscrutable way, governs all creatures, actions, and circumstances through the normal and the ordinary course of human life, without the intervention of the miraculous...Even when his own people, like Esther and Mordecai, make decisions that come from ambiguous motives at best, or perhaps even outright disobedience, God is still providentially working through those very things to fulfill his covenant. Surely Romans 8:28 is a New Testament summary of the theological message of Esther: ‘And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose’”

- Karen Jobes, *The NIV Application Commentary*

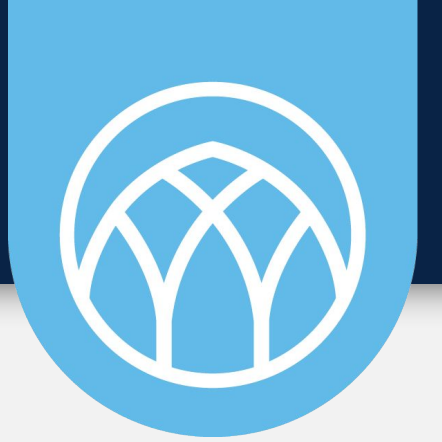
Providence in Esther



“If we believe that God placed Esther in a position where she could influence the king and save the Jews, we must also reflect upon what this means. This incident, John Goldingay suggests, “most scandalously invites us to assume God is involved in this world, even in its wickedness.”

- Marion Ann Taylor, *The Story of God Bible Commentary*

Providence in Esther

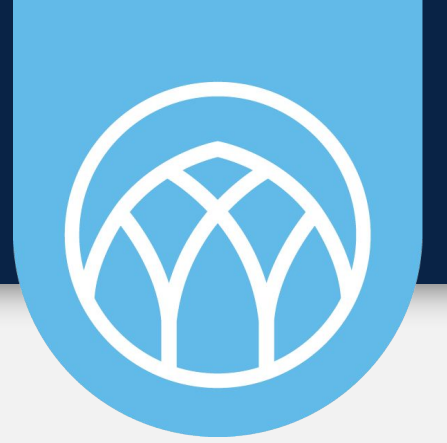


“The divinely inspired author chose not to reveal Esther’s reaction to being taken into the harem or Mordecai’s motives for commanding Esther to conceal her identity. It is natural to pass judgement on these two, whether positive or negative, but in doing so we may miss an important point. This deliberate silence is part of the message.

Regardless of their character, their motives, or their fidelity to God’s law, the decisions Esther and Mordecai make move events in some inscrutable way to fulfill the covenant promises God made to his people long ago.”

- Karen Jobes, *The NIV Application Commentary*

So What?

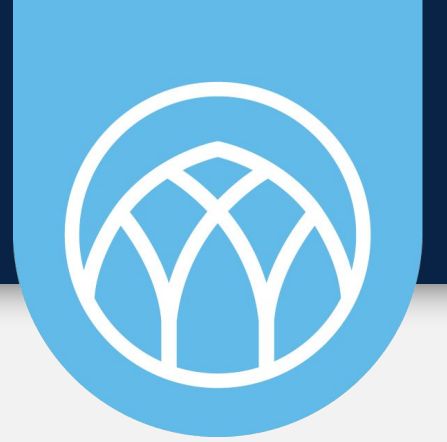


1. God faithfulness is greater than our unfaithfulness.

“the silence about Esther and Mordecai’s character and spiritual fidelity becomes a power encouragement. Regardless of whether they always knew what the right choice was or whether they had the best of motives, God was working through even their imperfect decisions and actions to fulfill his perfect purposes. Other than Jesus, even the godliest people of the Bible were flawed, often confused, and sometimes outright disobedient. We are no different from them. Yet our gracious God omnipotently works his perfect plan through them, through us, and most surprisingly, even through powerful political structures that sometimes operate in evil ways.”

- Karen Jobes, *The NIV Application Commentary*

So What?



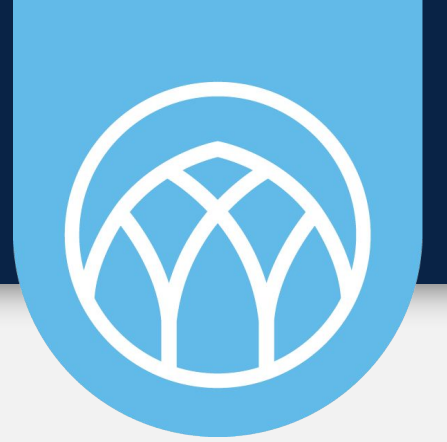
2. Living as exiles requires Jesus followers to be prayerful, thoughtful, and engaged.

“The extent to which a Christian adopts the culture and society in which she or he lives is a major issue...sincere Christians wishing to obey the Bible often disagree on how to dress, whether to drink alcohol, what music, movies, and other entertainment is appropriate, whether to run for public office, and so forth...The issue of relating one’s faith to one’s culture is ever-present, yet most Christians live without thinking deeply and seriously about its implications.”

- Karen Jobes, *The NIV Application Commentary*

We are called to be fight against oppression and injustice. Human trafficking continues today.

So What?



3. You are not the hero of your story. There is a greater hero and he is working all things together for His glory.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.

³ Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises^[a] of Israel.

⁴ In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.

⁵ To you they cried and were rescued;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

