

Journey Through the Bible: A Year of Our Lord

Session 35: The Close of the Exile Period (Esther)

Remember Acts 17:11

The Books of the Post-Exile Period:

Ezra	Judea	The Rebuilding of the Temple
Nehemiah	Judea	The Rebuilding of Jerusalem
Esther	Persia	The Drama of Salvation

History of the Late Exile Period:

- Cyrus II "The Great" (559-530BC)
 - Crown Prince of Anshan (Persia)
 - Also Entitled to the Crown of Media (Mother)
 - United the Medio-Persian Empire
- Babylon was Conquered by Darius (General) in 539BC
 - The Euphrates was diverted into a canal to lower the water level "To the height of the middle of a man's thigh," enabling the Persian soldiers to enter the city by night through the riverbed.
 - Herodotus (1.191)
 - Cf. Dan. 5; Is. 44:26-28
 - The City Was Conquered Without a Battle
 - Became a Persian District Seat
 - Becomes a Regional Capitol (Alexander)
 - NOT DESTROYED
 - Cyrus Adds the Babylonian Territories to Persia
 - Ref. Is. 45:1-4
- The Response of Cyrus
 - Frees the Hebrew Captives
 - Returns the Temple Vessels
 - Offers Financial Incentives to Repopulate Judah
 - Province of Judea Reorganized
 - 536BC: 49,67 Return with Zerubbabel
 - 515BC: Temple Rebuilt
 - 483BC: Setting of Esther
 - 458BC: 2,000 Return with Ezra
 - 445BC: Nehemiah Receives Permission to Rebuild Jerusalem (Cf. Dan. 9)

The Cylinder of Cyrus

Translation by Mordechai Cogan: Ed. W.H. Hallo and K.L. Younger, *The Context of Scripture. Vol. II: Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World* (2003, Leiden and Boston)

Cyrus Takes Babylon:

^[16] His vast army, whose number, like water of the river, cannot be known, marched at his side fully armed. ^[17] He made him enter his city Babylon without fighting or battle; he saved Babylon from hardship. He delivered Nabonidus, the king who did not revere him, into his hands.

Religious Measures:

^[32] I returned the images of the gods, who had resided there, to their places and I let them dwell in eternal abodes. I gathered all their inhabitants and returned to them their dwellings.

Cf. Ezra 1:2-3 (Decree to Rebuild the Temple)

Impact of Persia on Israel:

- The Great Assembly of Sages is Established
 - o Precursor to the Sanhedrin
- The Tanach is Canonized (Old Testament)
- The Synagogue is Established
 - o Rabbis Become a Religious Authority
 - o Hebrew Education is Organized
 - o Torah Memorization Becomes Mandatory
- The Pharisees Emerge from the Exile
 - o Sadducees Emerge from the Residents of Judah
- Purim is Added to the Hebrew Calendar
 - o Easter Becomes Synonymous with First Fruits

Background to Esther:

Note: The traditional authorship of Esther and its place in the Bible was determined by “The Great Assembly” of circa 516-332 BC.

- Written by Mordecai (Tribe of Benjamin)
 - o Installed as a Vizier of Persia
 - o Declared a Sage of the Great Assembly
- Dated to c. 465 BC
 - o During the “Post-Exile” Period
 - o Many Hebrews Remained in Persia

Setting:

- Persian Capital of Susa (c. 483BC)
 - o Reign of King Ahasuerus (Hebrew Rendering)
 - **Xerxes I** (486-465BC)
 - Artaxerxes I (465-424BC) cf. Neh.
 - Artaxerxes II (404-358BC)

Central Figures:

King Ahasuerus King of Persia, characterized by
"I will be silent & poor" worldly & often unwise behavior.

Mordecai Jewish elder of Benjamin. Cousin
"Little man" and guardian of Esther.

Esther (Hadassah) Young Jewish girl, later queen
"Hidden" ("Myrtle") consort. Characterized by
obedience, courage, & wisdom.

Haman Chief minister of the king &
"Illustrious" embittered toward the Jewish
people. Characterized by scheming
& intrigue.

Outline of the Drama:

- After 3 Years of Rule the King Offers a Lavish Banquet (Ch. 1-2)
 - o The King Calls for Queen Vashti
 - o Vashti Refuses to Put Herself on Display
 - The King Banishes Her from Court
 - A Pageant is Called to Find a New King
 - o Esther (Orphaned Jewish Girl)
 - Hides Her Jewish Identity
 - Is Chosen for Her Beauty & Kindness
 - o Mordecai Accidentally Uncovers a Plot to Assassinate the King
 - Esther Informs the King, Saving His Life
- Haman: Agagite- Canaanite (Ch. 3)
 - o Requires All Kneel in His Presence
 - o Mordecai Refuses
 - o Haman Gives the King a Decree to Eliminate the Jewish Race (Cast Lots to Determine the Date)
 - o Die = Pur (Hebrew)
 - o Celebrate the Decree with Drink
- The Plan (Ch. 4)
 - o Esther is to Reveal Her Heritage
 - o Request that the Decree be Reversed
 - o Mordecai Declares His Faith & Ponders that Rescue May Have Been Esther's Purpose
 - o "If I perish, I perish" (4:16)

Outline of the Drama (Cont.):

- Esther Hosts a Banquet (Ch. 5)
 - o The King & Hamon are Invited
 - o Haman Gets Drunk & Rages at Mordecai
 - o Instructs that a Spire be Prepared to Execute Mordecai
- The King Can't Sleep (Ch. 6)
 - o The Royal Chronical is Brought to be Read
 - o The King Remembers Mordecai
 - o Orders Haman to Parade Mordecai to the Praise of the City
- Esther's 2nd Banquet (Ch. 7)
 - o Esther Reveals Her Heritage & the Plot
 - o Orders that Haman be Impaled on His Own Stake
- The Reverse of the Decree (Ch. 8)
 - o A Royal Decree Cannot be Overturned
 - o A New Decree is Authorized (13th of Adar)
 - All Jews are Authorized to Defend Themselves and Eliminate their Enemies
 - o Another Banquet is Held
 - Mordecai Declared a Vizier
- The 13th of Adar (Ch. 9-10)
 - o Haman's Sons are Killed
 - o The Jews Defend Themselves
 - o The Enemies Within the Kingdom are Destroyed
 - o A Two-Day Festival is Declared (Purim)
 - o Mordecai is Made 2nd Most Powerful Official in the Persian Empire

Practical Application:

- All Characters Have a Degree of Moral Ambiguity
 - o Marriage with Gentiles
 - o Eating of Unclean Foods
 - o Denial of Religious Heritage
 - o Shrewdness/Manipulation
- Central Truth: Nothing is By Chance (Cf. Rom. 8:28)
 - o Grace is Not an Indicator of God Condoning Sin
 - o God is Never Absent
 - o Trust in God through All Circumstances

