

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

PREACHING THROUGH THE BIBLE: ESTHER Esth 4:13-14

I. INTRODUCTION

A. TITLE

1. HEBREW BIBLE

- *Hadassah* = Esther's Jewish name—[2:7](#)
- Meaning = 'myrtle'

2. SEPTUAGINT = *Esther*

3. LATIN VERSIONS = *Hester*

B. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. POST-EXILIC—AFTER BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

- Cyrus's Decree—for exiles to return—538 BC

2. DURING EVENTS IN BOOK OF [EZRA](#)—BETWEEN [CHAPTERS 6 AND 7](#)

- **538—First Return**—Zerubbabel—made governor of Israel
- **536-515**—Rebuilding of Temple
- **534**—Temple-building discontinued
- **520**—Temple-building resumed
- **520** and following—ministry of Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
- **515**—Temple completed
- **483-473—Esther was queen—under Xerxes**
- **458—Second Return**—Ezra—under Artaxerxes
- **[444—Third Return—Nehemiah—under Artaxerxes]**

3. SECULAR HISTORY

a. Persian Rulers—Archaeminid Dynasty

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| 1. Cyrus the Great | Ruled 560-530 BC |
| 2. Cambyses II | Ruled 530-522 BC |
| 3. Bardiya | Ruled 522 |
| 4. Darius | Ruled 521-486 |
| 5. Xerxes I | Ruled 486-465 |

b. **Xerxes I** (518-465)

1. Ruler in Book of Esther
 - a. Hebrew Bible—calls him—Ahasuerus
 - b. Septuagint—calls him—Artaxerxes
2. Extent of empire—**Es 1:1-2**
 - a. From India to Ethiopia—including Egypt and Babylonia
 - b. 127 provinces
 - c. Capital—Susa
3. Failed invasion of Greece—defeated at Salamis and Plataea—480-79
 - a. **Herodotus** says—he sought consolation in his harem
 - b. 180-day celebration (**1:4**)—7-day feast (**1:5-9**)—and beauty pageant (**1:9-2:4**)
4. Period of Esther = 483-473
 - a. Began—**483**—3rd year of Xerxes’s reign—**Es 1:3**
 - b. Main plot occurred—474-**473**—throughout 12th year of reign—**Es 3:7-15**
5. Succession
 - a. Xerxes assassinated by Artabanus—commander of royal bodyguard—465 BC
 - b. Succeeded by **Artaxerxes I**—465-424
 1. **Ezra**—second wave of remnant—5th year of his reign—458—**Ez 7:8**
 2. **Nehemiah**—third wave of remnant—20th year of his reign—**Neh 1:1**
 - c. Possibly—favor for Jews during this period—came through step-mother **Esther**

C. COMPOSITION

1. AUTHOR

- a. No attribution in Scripture
- b. Some scholars say Ezra
- c. More likely—a Persian Jew—who *remained* in Persia
 - With detailed knowledge of events and policies of royal court
- d. Some scholars say Mordecai
 - Doubtful—since **chapter 10**—speaks of Mordecai in past tense
- e. Probably—younger contemporary of Mordecai

2. DATE OF WRITING

- a. Probably **465-424 BC**
- b. Xerxes—spoken of in past tense—in **chapter 10**
- c. Fire destroyed Palace at Susa—during reign of Artaxerxes I—465-424
 - Might have been mentioned if it occurred before writing of **Esther**
- d. Certainly before 4th century conquest by Alexander—no mention of Greek influence

D. PURPOSE OF BOOK

1. EZRA—TELLS ABOUT RELIGIOUS RESTORATION OF JEWS

- a. Rebuilding of Temple
- b. Reformation of people

2. NEHEMIAH—TELLS ABOUT POLITICAL RESTORATION OF JEWS

- a. Rebuilding of city walls—and resettlement of people
- b. Further reformation of people

3. ESTHER—TELLS ABOUT PRESERVATION OF JEWS FROM DESTRUCTION

E. PLACE IN OT CANON

1. IN HEBREW BIBLE—PART OF ‘WRITINGS’—THE ‘KETUVIM’

- a. **Ketuvim** = Writings
 1. Three poetic books—Psalms—Proverbs—Job
 2. Esther—one of the five **Megilloth**
 3. Two other historical books—Ezra-Nehemiah—Chronicles
- b. Five **Megilloth** = Five ‘Scrolls’
 - Song of Songs
 - Ruth
 - Lamentations
 - Ecclesiastes
 - Esther

2. IN SEPTUAGINT

- Between two apocryphal books—*Wisdom of Sirach* and *Judith*

3. DEBATE ABOUT INCLUSION

- a. Adopted as part of the official Hebrew canon—late first century—[at Jamnia?]

b. Reasons to **exclude**

1. No explicit of 'God'—but 187 references to the Persian king
2. No mention of typical OT themes—Law, sacrifices, worship, or supernatural
3. Esther is never quoted in the New Testament
4. Festival—**Purim**—is nationalistic celebration—not a religious observance

c. Reasons to **include**

1. Silence about God—possibly due to **censorship** in Persia
2. **Respect** for Jehovah's name—fear of Persian corruption with pagan name[s] for 'god'
3. **Intentional** silence—to show God's **providential** working through **hidden** means
 - **Notice**—'YHWY' *does* appear in acrostic form four times
 - **1:20—5:4—5:13—7:7**
4. This method *more effectively* communicates the following **themes**

F. THEMES

1. GOD'S SOVEREIGN CONTROL OF HISTORY
2. GOD'S PROTECTION OF HIS COVENANT PEOPLE
3. GOD USES ORDINARY PEOPLE IN MIGHTY WAYS
 - To overcome impossible circumstances—and accomplish his purposes

G. STORYLINE

1. ESTHER BECOMES QUEEN—**1:1-2:20**
 - a. **Divorce** of Vashti—**Chapter 1**
 - b. Selection and **Marriage** of Esther—**2:1-2:20**
2. HAMAN'S PLOT—**2:21—through chapter 3**
 - a. Background—**Mordecai**—**reveals plot** to assassinate Xerxes—**2:21-23**
 - b. Haman's Plot—**chapter 3**
 1. **Reason** for Plot—**3:1-6**
 2. Presentation of Haman's **Plan**—**3:7-9**
 3. Xerxes's **Decree**—**3:10-15**
3. RESPONSE OF JEWS—**chapter 4**

- a. Lamentation—[4:1-3](#)
 - b. Mordecai’s Plan—[4:4-14](#)
 - c. Esther’s Promise—[4:15-17](#)
4. MORDECAI’S TRIUMPH OVER HAMAN—[5:1-8:3](#)
- a. Background Setting—[chapter 5](#)
 - 1. Esther’s **first feast**—[5:1-8](#)
 - 2. **Haman plots** to kill Mordecai—[5:9-14](#)
 - b. Mordecai Victorious over Haman—[chapter 6](#)
 - 1. **Xerxes plans** to honor Mordecai—[6:1-3](#)
 - 2. **Haman plans** to honor himself—[6:4-9](#)
 - 3. Haman forced to **honor Mordecai**—[6:10-14](#)
 - c. Haman’s Downfall—[chapter 7](#)
 - 1. Esther’s **second feast**—and accusation of Haman—[7:1-6](#)
 - 2. Haman condemned and **hanged**—[7:7-10](#)
 - d. **Mordecai honored**: replaces Haman—and put over Haman’s house—[8:1-2](#)
5. ISRAEL’S TRIUMPH OVER ENEMIES—[8:3—9:16](#)
- a. Preparation for Victory—[8:4-14](#)
 - 1. **Esther petitions** Xerxes—to save the Jews from Haman’s plot—[8:4-7](#)
 - 2. Xerxes’s **counter-decree**—allowing Jews to defend themselves—[8:8-14](#)
 - b. Many **Gentiles Converted**—[8:15-17](#)
 - c. Israel’s **Victory**—[9:1-16](#)
6. ISRAEL’S CELEBRATION—[9:17—through chapter 10](#)
- a. Feast of **Purim**—[9:17-32](#)
 - b. Mordecai’s fame—[chapter 10](#)

H. FEAST OF PURIM

- 1. ‘Purim’—from Assyrian *puru*
 - Refers to ‘lots’—that Haman cast—to decide the date for exterminating the Jews
- 2. 14-15th days of Adar

- Adar = 6th month of civil year—12th month of religious year
- Adar—is roughly March—winter month of 29 days

II. BIBLICAL TEXT

4:13-14—*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. 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 attained royalty for such a time as this?”*

III. EXPOSITION

A. GOD WORKS THROUGHOUT HISTORY—BUT ESPECIALLY KEY TURNING POINTS

1. BIBLICAL TURNING POINTS—COVENANTAL PIVOT POINTS

- Noah
- Abraham-Isaac-Jacob
- Moses
- David
- Zerubbabel—Ezra—Nehemiah

2. EVEN IN NEGATIVE EVENTS

- The **Flood**—reclaiming—and cleansing
- Tower of **Babel**—divine sovereignty—and human diversity
- **Jacob**—stealing birthright—and blessing
- **Joseph**—sold into slavery
- **Moses**—in wilderness
- **David’s sin** with Bathsheba—messianic lineage through **Solomon**
- Babylonian **Captivity**—lineage through Jeconiah (Jehoiachin)—through **Zerubbabel**
- **Haman’s Plot**—God reversed through Mordecai and Esther
 1. It was **God** who enabled underdog Jews to **win the victory** over Persian enemies!
 2. God turned around Haman’s plan—to win many pagans to faith in Him

Es 8:17—*In each and every province and in each and every city, wherever the king’s commandment and his decree arrived, there was gladness and joy for the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many among the peoples of the land became Jews, for the dread of the Jews had fallen on them.*

- **Diaspora** of the Church—**Acts 8**—spread the church—to the “uttermost parts”
- **Paul’s persecution**—God dramatically reversed—used his testimony/skills powerfully
- **Persecution**—Early Church—“**the blood of the martyrs became the seed**”—Tertullian

3. GOD IS THE MASTER OF IMPECCABLE TIMING

Gal 4:4—*But when the fulness of time came*—[at just the right time]—*God sent forth His son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive adoption as sons.*

B. GOD RAISES UP ORDINARY PEOPLE FOR EXTRAORDINARY TASKS

1. **ESTHER**—orphan—Mordecai’s cousin [not sister/daughter]—tribe of Benjamin—[not Judah!]

a. **Anonymous** author of **Esther!**

b. **Several anonymous** authors of books:

- Joshua—Joshua?
- Judges—Samuel?
- Ruth—?
- I Samuel—possibly Samuel
- II Samuel—?
- I Kings—Jeremiah?
- II Kings—Jeremiah?
- Esther—?
- Job—?
- About 50 Psalms—?
- Hebrews—?

2. **TAMAR**—Judah’s daughter-in-law—messianic line—8 generations Perez →David—**Gen 38**

3. **RAHAB**—Canaanite prostitute—David’s great-great-grandmother—roll call of faith—**Heb 11**

4. **RUTH**—Moabitess—David’s great-grandmother—through Boaz—**Ruth 4**

5. **DAVID**—youngest son—a mere shepherd—from a common family of Judah

6. **NATHAN**—Bathsheba’s 4th son—Solomon’s older brother—messianic line *via* Mary—**Luke 3**

7. **TWELVE DISCIPLES**—common fishermen—laborers—tax-collector—political rebel

Mt 11:25—*At that time Jesus said, ‘I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.*

8. **OBSCURE**—AND RATHER BIZARRE PEOPLE—ON THE EDGE OF ANONYMITY

a. First to proclaim the good news in the Temple—at Jesus’ dedication—**Lk 2**

b. An aged and forgotten common priest—**Simeon**

c. An elderly—lonely—prophetess—**Anna**

9. AN UNKNOWN BOY

- With only five loaves—and just two fish!

10. CHILDREN

- Offended religious leaders with—**“Hosanna to the Son of David!”**
- Jesus’ response—**Mt 21:16**—*Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babes, You have prepared praise for Yourself?’*

11. WOMEN

- Samaritan Woman**—married five times—and “living in sin”—**Jn 3**
- Woman with **“issue of blood”**—and faith to be healed—**Mk 5**
- Syro-Phoenician woman**—with a demon-possessed daughter—and “great faith”—**Mt 15**
- Those who **supported Jesus’ ministry**—and cared for Him in Galilee—**Mk 16**
- Mary Magdalen**—former demoniac—first to testify of the Resurrection—**Mk 16**

12. MARTIN LUTHER—500 YEARS AGO

- Just an **ordinary monk**—from **working class**
- Teacher in **new**—upstart—**university**—only 15 years old
- Defied all religious and political officials—at Worms—1521

**Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Holy Scriptures or by evident reason-
for I can believe neither pope nor councils alone, as it is clear that they have erred
repeatedly and contradicted themselves-I consider myself convicted by the testimony
of Holy Scripture, which is my basis; my conscience is captive to the Word of God.
Thus I cannot and will not recant, because acting against one's conscience is neither
safe nor sound. God help me. Amen.**

C. GOD CAN USE EVEN WORLDLY VALUES/ATTITUDES TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WILL

- A BEAUTY PAGEANT?—AND A HAREM?
- XERXES’S MECURIAL TEMPER AND FICKLE NATURE!

D. THINK NOT TOO HIGHLY OF OURSELVES— EVEN WHEN GOD ELEVATES US TO IMPORTANT POSITIONS

- ESTHER WAS HUMBLE—REMEMBERED HER ROOTS—AND OBLIGATIONS

E. GOD USES EACH OF US IN UNIQUE WAYS—FOR SPECIALLY DESIGNED TASKS

- EACH BODY PART IS NECESSARY—TO FUNCTION FULLY—**I Cor 12** and **ROM 12**

F. SOMETIME—GOD MAY CALL US TO PUT IT ALL ON THE LINE—AT GREAT RISK!

- BE READY—AND WILLING—TO BE USED BY GOD—IN A POWERFUL WAY!
- BE READY—TO TAKE THE HEAT AND PRESSURE—FOR DOING WHAT HE SAYS!