

Lesson 35 Esther

Note: If you have the Oxford RSV Bible, additional parts of Esther are in the back of the Bible. The Protestant Bible version differs from the Catholic Bible in the length of this book.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. According to archaeologists the picture presented of the Persian court is very accurate, likely a first hand account. From *Era* and Nehemiah's time we know King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) was influenced against the Jews on other occasions. What was at stake then? Who were the enemies?
2. Haman is called an Agagite. What do you recall about Agag (I Samuel 15:32) What people did he lead? What was their relationship to the Israelites? (Ex.17:14-16) What does the hatred of Haman toward Mordecai symbolize?
3. What do you think of Vashti? How would Esther have handled this?
4. Three books in the Bible are named for women. Each deal with a different aspect of the original problem between man and God, the "authority problem." We saw how Ruth was a key person in her time, used by God to establish godly authority in a time of anarchy. What does this book teach about woman as a key to the authority problem?

Psalm 57 and prayer. *In this psalm of deliverance the NAB again changes hesed twice into "kindness", a weak translation for "steadfast love."*

Esther is one of the books of the Bible that differ in Protestant and Catholic texts. The older Hebrew part of the story is all that the Protestant Bible contains. The Catholic Bible is based on the Greek texts of the Bible. In the third century B.C. the Hebrew Bible began to be translated by a group of scholars in Alexandria, Jewish rabbis commissioned to bring the Holy Bible into the lives of the Greek speaking Jews. Greek was the language of the world, and it was time for the Jews everywhere to have their scriptures in a language they could understand. The translation took many years. Sometime during the work an editor added 107 verses to Esther. These verses had not been in the original Hebrew. Probably the addition was made because the scribe

felt that the book of Esther, never mentioning the name of God, needed to be made more Yahweh centered. So prayers and letters were added to places in the text to make sure the readers knew that the God of the Hebrews was behind this deliverance of His people. The Church approves of these additions as inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, and they are canonical.

This story adds imagined detail to an historical happening. A novelette, Esther is easy to read and reveals in its own way the deliverance power of God and the role of a woman in that deliverance. We know that King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) of Persia, who ruled the lives of Esther and Mordecai, reigned just ahead of Artaxerxes I whom Nehemiah, like Esther, approached in fear with the request that he be allowed to help save the Jews. If we look at Ezra 4:6 then skip to the end of the fourth chapter, we see that the enemies of the Jews have forced the Jews to stop working on the walls of Jerusalem. This happened because of a letter sent by these enemies first to Ahasuerus, and later to Artaxerxes, accusing the Jews of being rebellious enemies of the realm. Both kings' edicts forced the Jews to stop the reconstruction, which in fact stopped their progress toward becoming a coherent people. The walls of Jerusalem were important. We see Nehemiah, like Mordecai, a Jew in a high position in the Persian court, concerned about his own people. When Nehemiah finally approaches Artaxerxes he realizes that he too, like Esther, can be condemned to death for requesting permission to countermand the King's absolute decree. Like Esther, he too wept and fasted before the Lord for days before acting. And in Ezra 2:6 a mention is made of the Queen sitting beside the King in an aside, as though we should know what that meant! Is this an oblique reference to Esther?

Whoever wrote this story knew the Persian capital, Susa. He knew what went on there in the fifth century B.C. Archaeologists have confirmed that the description of the court life there is accurate even to physical details. He was an insider to the dynamics of the court. It was true that no one could come into the presence of the King without permission. Assassinations which are also a part of this story were common. One dared to come unbidden into the king's presence at the risk of one's own life. The reason to think that the story takes off from

the facts and is partially fictionalized rests more on the lack of any such name as Vashti in the Persian records, and on the incongruity of dates (Mordecai would have to be over one hundred years old). Also some other inconsistencies, that are more true of fiction - would the King not wonder why his Queen would risk her life just to invite him and his friend to a banquet? Also to this point in the historical investigations, no Persian King allowed pogroms against ethnic people on such a scale as suggested in the story - the entire destruction of the Jewish people. It would have been a terrible disruption to Persia which comes down to us as having been well managed. Would a Persian King have allowed the mayhem that resulted in the Jews defense of themselves? Why would the King hand out his signet ring to seal anything anybody wanted to write in his name? There are aspects of the story that seem fictional, written to enhance a true story - the Jews were oppressed by their enemies, their enemies did manipulate the powerful ruler to oppose their efforts, and only God could help them. In the real event perhaps there was an Esther who held the key to their deliverance, who did, in fact, help Nehemiah go back to Jerusalem to begin reconstruction.

An elaborate party introduces Vashti. The Catholic version of the story begins with one of the Greek additions - a dream by Mordecai which sets the stage. The solution to its symbolism is not made clear until the end. Then the elaborate party is described which is a celebration observed throughout the Persian empire. Using map B-18 examine the size and influence of the Persian Empire and find the places mentioned in the story - Susa, the capitol, and the second capitol, Persepolis. This celebration lasted 180 days and was ended with a seven day feast in Susa. At this party all the highest officials of the land were invited. Persia celebrated its 2,500th birthday party in 1971. The celebration put on by the Shah of Iran was a banquet and party that might have been lifted right out of the first chapter of Esther. The kings and great ones of the earth assembled. Protocol put the Vice-President of the U.S., Spiro Agnew, second from the bottom. At the top was the King of Ethiopia because of his connection to the House of Solomon, an unbroken line of kings, the longest on the earth. The expenditure was

immense - colored light bulbs alone cost \$840,000. In the Bible story the women also feasted with Queen Vashti. At one point she is called by Ahasuerus to come into the halls where all the drinking has been going on non-stop for days, to show off her beauty. She is offended by the request and refuses. This causes consternation among the men. They will lose the upper hand with their wives all over the country. As a result, to curb rebelliousness, and to keep women in their place, Vashti is deposed.

The next act is the royal beauty pageant. Virgins of beauty are sought throughout the king's empire and brought into a harem of virgins who are all prepared for a year to bring out their very best for the king. Then they have their opportunity to please the king, and from that point are put into the second harem. Unless they have been especially impressive, they will never be called back by him, and will live out their lives in the harem as "once used," but belonging to the king alone. This barbaric cultural practice is indicative of the Fall of mankind. When Esther's turn comes, she is so beautiful and good, so attentive to both the words of her uncle, Mordecai, who has raised her, and to the eunuch, Hagai, who has prompted her, that her spirit is all submission. Obviously, then, she is thoroughly pleasing, otherwise we are sure that Ahasuerus wouldn't have been impressed. She is named his next queen.

Israel is faithful to the Persian rulers. Together Esther and Mordecai save Ahasuerus' life (the overlaid meaning is that Israel has been faithful to the Persian Kings and has upheld their authority to rule by recognizing them as lawful ruling authority for The Lord). Mordecai overhears a plot among the eunuchs, a very frequent historical happening, in fact the RSV footnote says that Xerxes (Ahasuerus' Persian name) died in just this way. He reports the plot he has overheard to Esther who tells the king so that the assassination is averted this time. This is duly recorded in the court annals.

There is an enemy waiting to discredit Israel. At this time another favorite of the court is elevated and is in anguish. Haman is an Agagite (the overlaid meaning is that the Benjaminite, Mordecai, meets the ancient foe of the Jews, an Amalekite. The Amalekites' king was Agag -

see I Samuel. At that historic time when Saul, the Benjaminite, was told to kill all the Amalekites, he spared the King, Agag. This time, the Benjaminite, Mordecai, will carry through on all the commands in obedience, and Israel will triumph over its ancient enemy. When God commanded Saul not to take booty from Agag and the Amalekites, he disobeyed. This man, Mordecai, and the Jews he represents, will avenge themselves on the enemy but will not take booty.) So Haman has power second only to the King who seems to be unaware of the Jews and their historic enemies. Jews do obeisance to no man, only to God. So Haman is enraged when Mordecai does not bow down to him. So furious is he that he threatens revenge on not just this one man, but on the whole people who will not bow down to anyone but their God. He seeks to destroy all the Jews. In order to do this at a time approved and blessed by the gods, Haman draws lots, "pur". God, not the gods, is in charge of lots whenever it concerns the Jews, and He sets up the time that will be most propitious for Him and His People. Alas, poor Haman is dealing with a power he does not know. So the Pur is drawn. When the time is known, Haman goes to the king with a tremendous sum of money, \$18,000,000 as a bribe. He tells the story that the other enemies of the Jews actually have told Ahasuerus before (Ezra 4). These people are different, they do not keep the king's laws, and they should not be tolerated because they are so troublesome for the realm. (Unlike the real kings of Persia, this is not investigated, but merely accepted at face value and Haman is given carte blanche). Ahasuerus in historic truth received these accusations and did find that history supported the fact that the Jews had been troublesome to their rulers. Yet, the king does not accept the bribe. He is too honorable for that. Haman, like a Secretary of State, sends out the decree under the seal of the king's ring. The annihilation of the Jews is set for the date drawn by lot. Here Haman writes about himself, a pompous letter (a Greek addition), The appeal to God in the Hebrew text is not stated, but asking for utter destruction of the Hebrews wherever they are to be found. Ahasuerus and Haman are comfortable, but the people of Israel are in anguish. The appeal to God in the Hebrew text is not stated, but assumed; there is fasting and sackcloth, deep mourning for their fate. Once a Persian king's word is given it cannot be revoked. Through an exchange of messages, Esther is informed of the dire events. She protests that she cannot help carry the anguish of the Jews to the king; she has not been

summoned for thirty days and can only go on pain of death. After further encouragement from Mordecai she courageously faces the possibilities with, "If I die, I die."

Esther is called on to save her nation. Again the Hebrew text which otherwise does not mention God says, "help will come from another source," clearly referring to God. Esther takes up a fast for power and guidance. She must have God's help. After this clarifying and purifying she is ready, and she dresses elegantly and approaches the king. Here the Greek text adds a lot of frills: she leans and faints; but not so in the Hebrew where she acts with determination. Note that both of these texts, the Hebrew and the Greek are equally inspired writing - the rewriter during the Greek period was acting in his revision under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so that there would be further light for God's people on His ways and His love. However, in view of the story, the strong, faithful woman can also at times be swept with weakness. The king gladly accepts Esther and grants her request, and goes beyond that - offering her half of the kingdom - which doesn't interest her, she just makes her modest proposal. The first banquet with Haman and the king is held. Again Esther is told she can have anything, the king does love her and deeply admires her character. Again she asks only that he and Haman honor her with their presence at a second banquet. Haman goes home so puffed up with pride, he cannot see that he is about to be tripped. With the advice of his friends he builds a gallows 75 feet high, a monument to his pride and hatred.

Esther is helpless at this point, except that she trusts. God intervenes. Esther is powerless, simply trusting God and doing what is in her power to do. She has thoughtfully and carefully made a plan and without emotion is carrying that plan out. But God is in charge of the Pur, the time is His. And the timing of things throughout the story bears this out. Ahasuerus can't sleep, the Chronicles of the kingdom are brought and the deeds are read. There is the record of how Mordecai saved the King's life. And what has been done to honor this man? Nothing. Early in the morning Haman is in the court waiting for the king. Bring him in and I will get his advice about this, says the king. Haman filled with self-importance can only read into the question the king asks. He himself is due for new honors. Not so. The time is God's!

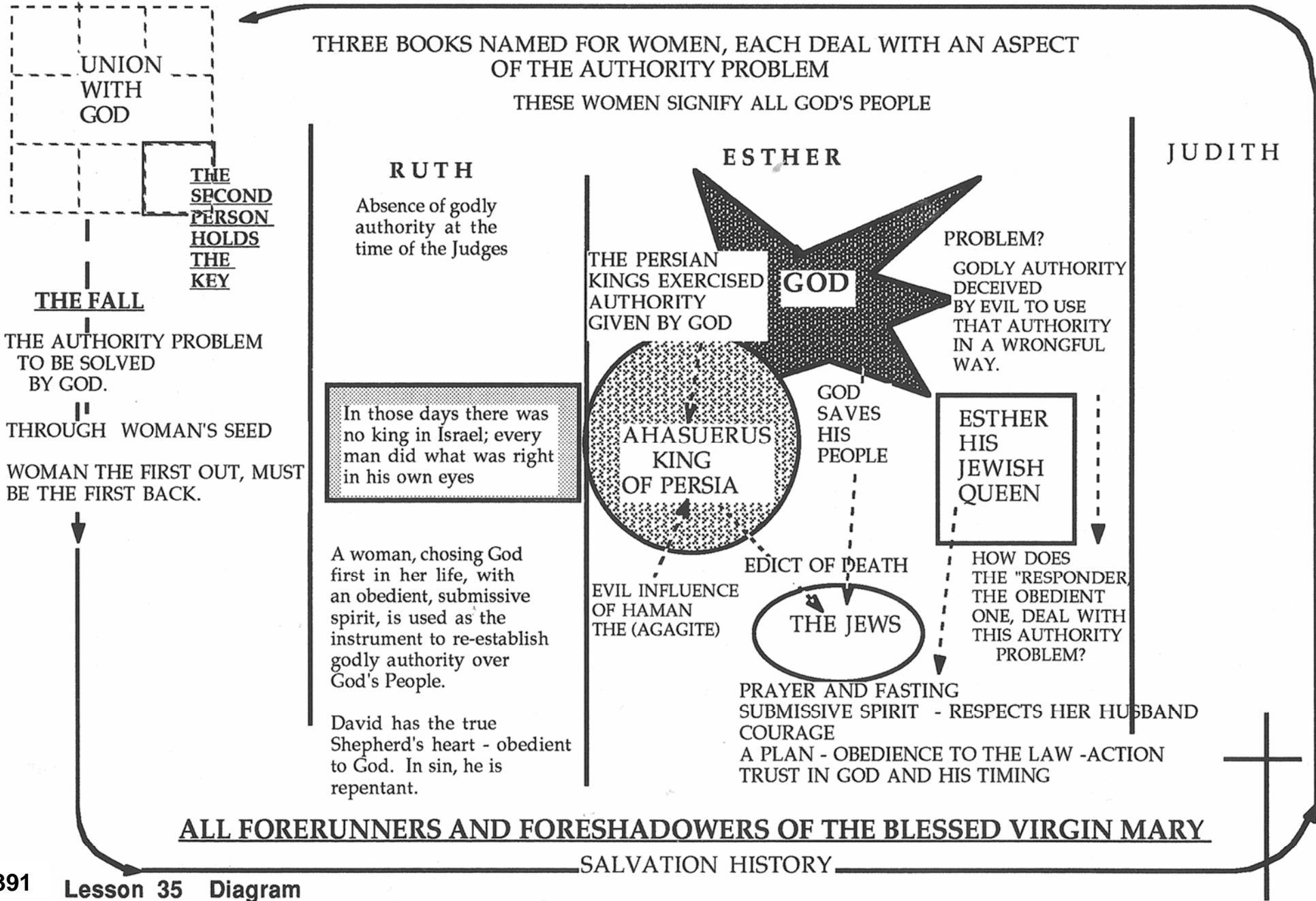
Mordecai is honored at Haman's hands. Haman goes home in confusion; but his wife knows, "If this Mordecai is a Jew, you will fall before him."

Haman is hurried toward his doom. The second banquet is held. Esther now reveals her anxiety and the plot against her people. Ahasuerus, totally captivated by her modesty, beauty and grace is in her camp now 100%, but he cannot believe what his ears tell him. He goes outdoors to collect himself and assess the situation. When he comes back Haman is lying all over the queen begging for mercy. He interprets this as effrontery; they hood Haman and lead him away to an executioner.

The king's edict is irrevocable. Esther gets Haman's household, Mordecai is elevated. But the revolt is still scheduled to transpire. The enemies of the Jews still have divine edict to exterminate them. What the king legislates must be carried out. But a counter edict can be given; the Jews can defend themselves, and in that defense they can take vengeance on those who would come to them with evil intent. This bloodbath is the end of the story. First, they are given permission to defend by murder and to plunder. However, they do not plunder. The edict is met with great celebrations and joy, in fact, many are converted to Judaism. The mayhem against enemies is continued through a second day. This is the origin of the Festival of Purim to be kept by the Jews in remembrance. These days of feasting and gladness, of sending choice portions to one another, and gifts to the poor, will be kept as remembrance of their deliverance that came through the faith of a woman. The Greek postscript then interprets the dream that began the story.

Esther furthers the understanding of woman's role in Salvation History. Redrawing the diagram, we remember that there are two on the face of the earth who reflect the essential relationship at the heart of Persons of the Trinity, male and female. Their morphology is rooted in masculine and feminine principle, based on the relationship of Father

and Son, and likewise imaging the relationship of God and mankind. In all three relationships, it is I to Thou. The interaction of these persons is marked by fruitfulness and creativity. Jesus the Bridegroom of our souls makes them fruitful - all these symbols and signs rest on the masculine as initiator, and the feminine as responder. The woman accepts the role that Mary does perfectly, or she refuses and is like Eve. Mary flows forward to new fruitfulness, Eve opens the door to death for her progeny. Whether woman likes it or not she is in that key position in Salvation History. Therefore, the three books in the Bible that are named for woman point to the significance of woman's role. Ruth faces the problem of lack of godly authority - the anarchy in the time of the Judges. By placing one foot in front of the other, trusting God, and doing what must be done, she ushers in the Kingdom of David. Esther carries it a step further. She works through the problems of an authority strongly influenced by the Enemy, but which, because it is an authority established by God, cannot be met with rebelliousness. Ahasuerus rules by authority of the God of the Universe even though he himself is not a believer or a Jew. He falls under the influence of the enemy of God's People. But a woman with no earthly power takes steps of faith which save the Jews. The book of Esther presents an aspect of the authority problem which finds God's lawful authority diverted by evil and ignorance. Esther's solution comes in steps, none of which exercise what the world understands as power. One is self-evident; Esther's trust in God's timing. Esther is without a certain kind of power, but in her humility she displays the power of God at work through faith. In a later lesson, we will study Judith, a book which presents a third side of the authority problem. Of course, in all these stories woman is only a sign of Israel, feminine to God, and of how all men must learn to relate to both the authority that is God's, and to those false authorities that attempt to depose God's rule.



Lesson 35 Esther Synopsis

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| <p>(11.) Mordecai has a dream of dragons he awoke to seek to understand it eunuchs' plot against king's life</p> <p>(12.) Mordecai overhears, informs king eunuchs confess and are hanged Ahasuerus' great banquet honors the great people of the kingdom on 7th day the king calls for Vashti the queen is to display her beauty she refuses the king he asks the princes what to do the deed will cause women to despise their husbands Vashti is deposed as queen so that all wives will not rebel</p> <p>2. a virgin harem is prepared to divert king's second thoughts of Vashti Esther is chosen for preparation as candidate for his new queen Mordecai, her cousin, and adoptive father counsels her to keep her Jewish origin secret Esther after a year's beautifying with supervision of eunuch Hegai goes to the king and pleases him she is chosen to be his queen he has a great banquet for her resuming - M. discovers a plot Esther reports it to the king plotters hanged - duly recorded</p> <p>3. Haman the Agagite promoted to Secretary of State above princes Mordecai refuses to do obeisance Haman's anger is against all Jews to destroy them in the kingdom draws lots for a vengeance time offers a great sum as a bribe</p> | <p>(13) makes complaint to Ahasuerus decree sent sealed by king's ring Grk. addition - (Artaxerxes') letter he wills peace throughout kingdom Haman who excels in judgment pointed out a hostile people they do harm everywhere every province to kill Jews, no pity and plunder their goods on 13th day of 12th month, Adar couriers deliver the letter in Susa</p> <p>4. Mordecai hears, fasts and wails puts on sackcloth, all Jews mourn Esther is told, seeks the reason Mordecai tells her thru Hathach asks Esther to go to the king replies it's death to go uncalled asks for fast of Jews for 3 days if I perish</p> <p>(13:8) prayers of Mordecai, it is for God he refused to bow to Haman O Lord, do not destroy our praise</p> <p>(14) Esther fled to the Lord, mortified she prayed, O Lord, help me we sinned, glorified other gods do not let them mock our downfall give me courage and speech I hate bed of the uncircumcised save us from hands of evildoers and save me from my fear</p> <p>(15) ended prayer on the third day arrayed herself in splendid attire radiant with perfect beauty the king terrifies her with majesty he looked at her with fierce anger she collapsed on maid before her the king comforted, soothed her embraced her, "speak to me" she again fell fainting</p> | <p>5. she goes to the king, finds favor "what is it, it shall be given" she invites the king and Haman "come to a banquet this day" Haman and the king attend she doesn't yet make her request invites both back the next day Haman glad; Mordecai angers him at home plans the 75 ft. gallows encouraged by friends and wife the king cannot sleep he reads the Chronicles record what has been done for Mordecai? Haman instructed to honor him by riding king's horse in his robes proclaiming, "this is a man the king delights to honor" Haman hurries home, mourning his wife knows he won't prevail but will fall before the Jew he goes to the second banquet Esther, the King and Haman drink wine at her feast; she begs "If I have found favor, grant my life and my people, do not destroy us" Ahasuerus is surprised and angry "who is he who has done this!" " wicked Haman", the king leaves Haman falls on Esther's couch the king takes it for an attack Haman is taken out for execution and is hung on his own gallows Esther receives Haman's house she sets Mordecai over it the signet ring given to Mordecai she begs king to revoke decree which cannot be done, however power given to write a counter one to 127 provinces in their language</p> <p>6. the king cannot sleep he reads the Chronicles record what has been done for Mordecai? Haman instructed to honor him by riding king's horse in his robes proclaiming, "this is a man the king delights to honor" Haman hurries home, mourning his wife knows he won't prevail but will fall before the Jew he goes to the second banquet Esther, the King and Haman drink wine at her feast; she begs "If I have found favor, grant my life and my people, do not destroy us" Ahasuerus is surprised and angry "who is he who has done this!" " wicked Haman", the king leaves Haman falls on Esther's couch the king takes it for an attack Haman is taken out for execution and is hung on his own gallows Esther receives Haman's house she sets Mordecai over it the signet ring given to Mordecai she begs king to revoke decree which cannot be done, however power given to write a counter one to 127 provinces in their language</p> <p>7. the king cannot sleep he reads the Chronicles record what has been done for Mordecai? Haman instructed to honor him by riding king's horse in his robes proclaiming, "this is a man the king delights to honor" Haman hurries home, mourning his wife knows he won't prevail but will fall before the Jew he goes to the second banquet Esther, the King and Haman drink wine at her feast; she begs "If I have found favor, grant my life and my people, do not destroy us" Ahasuerus is surprised and angry "who is he who has done this!" " wicked Haman", the king leaves Haman falls on Esther's couch the king takes it for an attack Haman is taken out for execution and is hung on his own gallows Esther receives Haman's house she sets Mordecai over it the signet ring given to Mordecai she begs king to revoke decree which cannot be done, however power given to write a counter one to 127 provinces in their language</p> <p>8. the king cannot sleep he reads the Chronicles record what has been done for Mordecai? Haman instructed to honor him by riding king's horse in his robes proclaiming, "this is a man the king delights to honor" Haman hurries home, mourning his wife knows he won't prevail but will fall before the Jew he goes to the second banquet Esther, the King and Haman drink wine at her feast; she begs "If I have found favor, grant my life and my people, do not destroy us" Ahasuerus is surprised and angry "who is he who has done this!" " wicked Haman", the king leaves Haman falls on Esther's couch the king takes it for an attack Haman is taken out for execution and is hung on his own gallows Esther receives Haman's house she sets Mordecai over it the signet ring given to Mordecai she begs king to revoke decree which cannot be done, however power given to write a counter one to 127 provinces in their language</p> <p>9. the king cannot sleep he reads the Chronicles record what has been done for Mordecai? Haman instructed to honor him by riding king's horse in his robes proclaiming, "this is a man the king delights to honor" Haman hurries home, mourning his wife knows he won't prevail but will fall before the Jew he goes to the second banquet Esther, the King and Haman drink wine at her feast; she begs "If I have found favor, grant my life and my people, do not destroy us" Ahasuerus is surprised and angry "who is he who has done this!" " wicked Haman", the king leaves Haman falls on Esther's couch the king takes it for an attack Haman is taken out for execution and is hung on his own gallows Esther receives Haman's house she sets Mordecai over it the signet ring given to Mordecai she begs king to revoke decree which cannot be done, however power given to write a counter one to 127 provinces in their language</p> <p>10. the king cannot sleep he reads the Chronicles record what has been done for Mordecai? Haman instructed to honor him by riding king's horse in his robes proclaiming, "this is a man the king delights to honor" Haman hurries home, mourning his wife knows he won't prevail but will fall before the Jew he goes to the second banquet Esther, the King and Haman drink wine at her feast; she begs "If I have found favor, grant my life and my people, do not destroy us" Ahasuerus is surprised and angry "who is he who has done this!" " wicked Haman", the king leaves Haman falls on Esther's couch the king takes it for an attack Haman is taken out for execution and is hung on his own gallows Esther receives Haman's house she sets Mordecai over it the signet ring given to Mordecai she begs king to revoke decree which cannot be done, however power given to write a counter one to 127 provinces in their language</p> | <p>(16) allowed Jews to gather to defend and annihilate any who attacked and plunder their goods a letter: Artaxerxes to provinces from India to Ethiopia the king's authority was misused a second to the king was deceitful the Jews are not evildoers and he who said so is hanged don't put his letter in execution or else be destroyed in wrath</p> <p>8:12 Mordecai goes out in royal robes the people shout and rejoice many declared themselves Jews</p> <p>9. the month of Adar , thirteenth day Jews gather to defend themselves they kill those who would kill them 500 enemies of Jews slain in Susa Haman's sons killed, no plunder the king hears, and gives Esther another killing day, but no plunder H's ten sons are hung on gallows 75, 000 are killed in the provinces all this is celebrated with feasts as the Jewish Feast of Purim in month of Adar, 14th and 15th these days remembered and kept the Queen gave written authority in words of peace and truth</p> <p>10. King Ahasuerus laid tribute and all this is written in Chronicles Mordecai was next in rank to king he sought welfare of his people finale: the dream interpreted the Lord has saved his people they will observe Purim with joy</p> <p>(11) in the 4th yr of Ptolemy, a priest brought Letter of Purim to Egypt translated by Lysimachus</p> |
|--|--|--|--|

Lesson 35 Esther Outline

I. The Book exists In Greek and Hebrew versions

- A. The Hebrew version is the older
- B. The Greek additions were added about 114 B.C. or possibly under Ptolemy VI Philometor as early as 178 B.C.
- C. Jerome took these Greek sections and put them at the end of the book, and questioned their canonicity
- D. They were declared canonical by the Council of Trent
- E. They are part of the Greek additions to the Hebrew scriptures, not included in the Protestant scriptures which include seven books and additions to Daniel and Esther
 - a. I and II Maccabees
 - b. Baruch
 - c. Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
 - d. Judith
 - e. Wisdom of Solomon
 - f. Tobit
- F. There are major differences in approach in the Hebrew and the Greek
 1. the attitudes of Esther differ between the two
 - a. in the Hebrew text she is dry-eyed, cool, and thinking
 - b. in the Greek version she is emotional, fainting, and loathing of the bed of the king
 2. there is no reference to Yahweh in the Hebrew text
 - a. a hidden presence is there, but was it written in a time of persecution? or because the writer considered direct reference to God presumptuous, even blasphemous in such a secular text?
 - b. in the Greek text the additions are prayers to God to be sure the readers do not miss the religious implications of the story.
 3. controversy attended the book's addition to the Jewish canon
 - a. no sanction for the Feast of Purim in the Law of Moses
 - b. Jewish Councils, Jerusalem and Jamnia ,1st C AD, added it
 - c. its extreme patriotism became very popular with the Jews

II. Background to the story

- A. Ezra 4:6 and following describes difficulties with the Persians and the Jews
- B. The Persian King is Xerxes, or Ahasuerus; in the Greek section he is called Artaxerxes

- C. Enemies of the Hebrews in their rebuilding attempts were many
 1. Nehemiah put life on the line to approach King Artaxerxes I.
 2. He, too, was a Jewish official in the court, like Mordecai
 2. Nehemiah ran into difficulties with enemies who tried to discredit him and the Jews, causing trouble with the reigning Persian monarch
- D. The old story of Saul and Agag lies behind the enmity of Haman and Mordecai
 1. the story is from I Samuel:15
 2. Agag is king of the Amalakites - Haman is of the Amalekite tribe, a traditional enemy of Israel
 3. Saul was of the tribe of Benjamin - Mordecai is of the tribe of Benjamin
 4. the question of taking of booty appears in both stories
 - a. Saul was told by God not to take booty in the war with Amalek he disobeyed
 - b. Mordecai is given permission to take booty in retaliation of the Jews, but he does not - that is not the motivation
- E. The casting of "pur"
 1. a Babylonian word the storyteller translates for us
 2. the ancients resorted to casting lots to get insight into the timing of the gods for certain important events
 3. here, only God determines the right "timing" for His people
 4. the "pur" is drawn before Haman, but God has determined the timing

III. The setting is Susa, the winter capitol of Persia

- A. The Persian court is well described in the narrative
- B. Account from **Life** of the 2,500 birthday of Iran (Persia)
 1. The Shah of Iran in 1971 threw a lavish party (Shah Reza Pahlavi) very reminiscent of the party described in Esther
 2. four fabulous days and nights
 3. on 60 acres of desert near Iran's ancient ruins of Persepolis
 4. leaders came from 69 nations of the world
 - a. Vice- Pres. Agnew of U.S., was second from last in protocol
 - b. King Haile Salassie was first - the oldest throne in the world related to King Solomon and the house of David
 5. accommodations were in 50 chateau-like air-conditioned tents
 6. to celebrate country's past splendors spared no expense
 - a. fifty gold threaded uniforms - \$1000 each
 - b. colored light bulbs \$840,000.
 - c. \$100 million in permanent improvements
 - d. dined on roast peacock; drank Chateau Lafite Rothchild 1945

- d. dined on roast peacock; drank Chateau Lafite Rothchild 1945
- 7. festivities included
 - a. a hundred plus chairs upholstered in silk, set out for dignitaries on Persepolis ruins to watch extravagant historical parade
 - b. parade of 6,200 marchers representing ten dynasties of Persian history

IV. The Authority Problem that Esther solves.

- A. The Authority Problem begins with the Fall
 - 1. God's *authoring* of all is rejected - His authority is the only true authority
 - 2. man and woman seek to determine their own "good and evil"
 - 3. Satan's values take over the world's view
 - a. the evil enemy Haman instigates the king's edict
 - b. the king, himself, exercises God's own authority over Jews
- B. To be solved through God's action in Salvation History
 - 1. He will find a way to forgive sins
 - 2. then Man's original nature can be restored by giving him again the gift of the Holy Spirit
- C. Scripture! shows the resolution of disobedience through woman's solving it in her own sphere - all mankind has her feminine stance toward God
 - 1. Eve, by the nature of the temptation was the first to turn away
 - 2. God promises that woman's seed will overcome the serpent
 - 3. Mary will say "yes" to God
 - 4. Esther is a forerunner of the Woman of the Gospel
 - a. she stands against lawful authority, unlawfully used
 - b. she confronts the evil one in a godly way and has victory
 - 1) by submission and obedience
 - 2) she motivates the one who has power to act rightly
- D. Ahasuerus is the Persian king who personifies rightful authority
 - 1. God's lawful political authority (the rule of the Persians considered so by the Bible see Ezra 1:1-2)
 - 2. this king was duped by the enemies of the Jews (Ezra 4:6, 23 ff) Haman of the story
 - 3. under powerful deception, he issues an edict to destroy the Jews
- E. Esther's attitudinal life is to be the ethos of all in the Redeemed Order
 - 1. she is a woman of submission to Mordecai and Hegai, the eunuch, as well as to Ahasuerus
 - 2. she is a woman of courage "If I die, I die," in relinquishment of her will

and ways

- 3. she is a woman of faith - fasting and prayer - of inner peace
 - 4. fine line between her despising his bed and her duty to him which she did well
 - 5. his respect of her is drawn out in the narrative
 - 6. she has a thoughtful, patient plan, trusting God's timing
 - 7. she is careful in communicating and uses all her resourcefulness
 - 8. her commitment to her people is complete unto death
- F. Contrast of Vashti and Esther.
- 1. obedience and submission versus pride and disobedience
 - 2. is Vashti's example a threat to home and family? to order and tranquility in the realm?
 - 3. Esther's obedient attitude, with trust in God, can be used by God to return righteous rule to His people

This lesson may be accompanied by audio-visuals that review the time from the Fall of Jerusalem through the rebuilding under the Persians.