

Thank you for joining us today in our study of Esther. I really have not come to the book yet but am headed that way. In our first talk I reviewed the biblical background for the period of the Captivity and the Persian period in Israel's history. It might seem that we will never get through all of the introductory sort of material but it is needed in a detailed study of a book and while the last talk spoke of the period, in this talk I will speak of the Book of Esther in particular.

1. The book is the second one named for a woman and finds the woman being the chief participant in the account

Ruth

2. The name "Esther" is the translation for the word "Hadassah" which is the Hebrew word for the myrtle tree...a tree of beautiful blooms and stately appearance.

3. Its place in the canon has elicited a lot of arguments. Without being too technical the simple concepts are these. It is always found in the Hebrew Canon in the form in which we know it. It is found in the Greek canon with a number of additions throughout the book stressing the name of God. These are gathered together in the Apocryphal setting and referred to as the "rest of Esther". The Hebrew canon has never admitted these. That Esther has not been found among the literary pieces kept at Qumran has been an interesting and perhaps troublesome point but does not militate against its integrity or canonicity. Luther did not like the book of Esther at all....his anti-Jewishness made this a necessary conclusion, but the church, on the whole, has never questioned the validity or necessity of the book.

4. The overall plot in Esther is God's vindication of His people in the face of an extermination effort. The age-old contest of good vs. evil is dominant in this setting.

5. The chief persons are:

Esther ~~was~~ *was*

Mordecai, her uncle. He is the descendent of the earlier captives taken from Judea to the Mesopotamian territories.

Haman...the plotter against the Jews
the King....Ahasuerus, and I will offer some notes on him in our next talk.

He is most likely Xerxes, The successor to Darius the Great. His rule lasted about twenty years (486-465) and he made the great campaign against Greece that failed. Herodotus tells us a good bit about him and names one wife, Amistris, but the fact is that the Persian kings had lots of wives and we will discuss that later as well, maybe.

6. The absence of the Name of God is the troubling thing about Esther. The Divine Name does not appear but the Divine presences is obvious everywhere. That Esther calls for fasting and Mordecai knows that deliverance will come from one place or another indicates their implicit confidence in the providence that oversees the people of God. The added verses in the Septuagint (the Apocryphal Esther) seek to make this up by inserting the name of God in many places.