

Esther – The Fingerprints of God – Chapter 1 7.14.2021

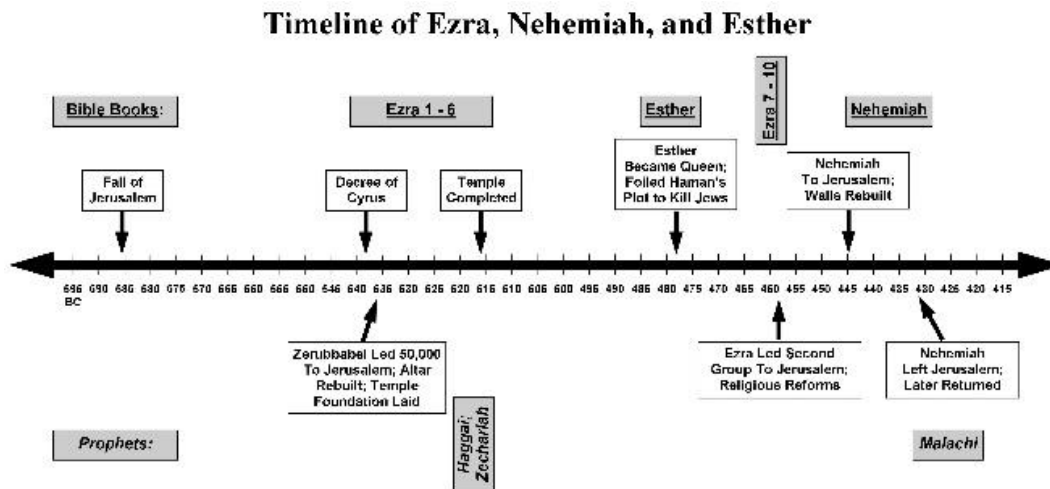
Turn in your Bibles tonight to the book of Esther. We begin our Wednesday night study called, “The Finger Prints of God!” Esther is the book right after Ezra and Nehemiah. One of the most unique facts about the book of Esther is that the name of God is never mentioned through the whole 10 chapters. But we see his fingerprints all through the events of during this time of the nation of Israel. There are no coincidences in the life of those that seek to live and honor God. When God puts forth a plan, his will, will be brought to fruition.

God’s sovereignty is on display throughout the history of time, and it is no different at this time for the nation of Israel and this young woman named Esther. We never know what God has in store for us, but we must be prepared to be ready to step out in faith, trust, and obedience to the Lord. For God may say to us just as Mordecai, another important figure in this book, said to Esther in Chapter 4 verse 14.

Esther 4:14

“For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

As I mentioned the book of Esther is after Ezra and Nehemiah. But the historical events that happened during this time is pretty much right in the middle. So, to set the stage I would like to describe the historical context of all that is going on at this time. We are going to look at a several timelines and maps tonight so hang in there. Look at this timeline.



As you look at this timeline you will see the heading of Esther which is just a bit to the right of center. Esther became queen of Persia around 480 B.C. But what else was going on prior to and exactly at this time in the history of the Jewish nation. Remember the Jews were in a time of decline because of their disobedience to the God and the commandments of his Word. They were worshiping all these false gods from these other nations because of the intermarrying with these nations that God specifically said not to do.

Why? It wasn't a race issue! It was a holiness issue! The nation of Israel was set apart to show the holiness and righteousness of God so that these nations would repent and surrender their lives to the one and only true God. God Jehovah!

palace to do as each man desired.⁹ Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women in the palace that belonged to King Ahasuerus.

Look at this map:



During this time Persia controlled all the area indicated by the gold color broken up into 127 provinces. A nation with that much power and that much territory, “What eventually becomes the goal of that nation?” To rule the world. The Israelites return to Jerusalem was not the sole focus of the Kings of Persia.

Who is King Ahasuerus and where did he fall in line of the Kings of Persia? The simplest description is that he is the son of King Darius the 1st. It is under King Darius that the Temple was completed in Jerusalem led by Zerubbabel and Jeshua. But again, as I mentioned this did not have all the attention of the Kings of Persia. World dominance was the plan.

In 499 BC, King Darius went on a campaign to conquer Greece which became known as the Greco-Persian wars. After a series of small defeats, the Persians experienced a large defeat at the hands of the Greeks at Marathon. Then in 486 King Darius died, and this ended the conquest of Greece for a time.

Ahasuerus became king of Persia in 486 BC after his father died. But it was also in his mind to conquer Greece. So, in his 3rd year of his reign, he puts on this huge banquet. Look at the map again.



This banquet took place in Susa, which was called the Winter Capital for the Persian kings. You can see Susa at the end of the red line going left to right. For 180 days Ahasuerus put on this feast, this banquet. Let's see who it was for again and his purpose behind the feast. Verses 3 and 4.

Ezra 1:3

³ In the third year of his reign he gave a feast for all his officials and servants. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were before him, ⁴ while he showed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days, 180 days.

It would come to reason though that all the leaders were not there at the same time for those 180 days. That would have left the provinces vulnerable. So, I would say that he invited them at different times to the feast. But did you see the purpose.

He showed the riches of “his” royal glory” and the splendor and pomp of “his” greatness! Don't miss that in the description. That is a sign of how he reacts to different situations.

After the 180 days, for a week, as we read in verse 5, he put a feast on for the locals at his palace. The great and the small were able to attend, indicating that anyone could attend the feast. King Ahasuerus was really putting on a show for everyone as we just read. He had the court of his palace extravagantly decorated! Drinking out of golden vessels and the drink was flowing. But, I liked the edict Ahasuerus sent out in verse 8.

Esther 1:8

⁸ And drinking was according to this edict: “There is no compulsion.” For the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace to do as each man desired.

You didn't have to get drunk unless you wanted to. If they did it was their own fault. There was still to be some decorum at the feast.

Meanwhile during this weeklong feast, Queen Vashti was having a feast of her own in the palace. This separated the men from the women and as it said, the women were in the palace and the men outside in the courtyard.

Okay! Again, what was the purpose of the feast! Yes, it is to show the wealth and the power of King Ahasuerus. It was to remind the people of his greatness. Because he is about to take them off to war again and he needs to show them his strength and his power. But what is being displayed is his Pride! Ahasuerus was making sure everyone knew he was to be obeyed.

I personally believe there is a small positive side to pride. I am sure many of us would say we are proud of our children. As a coach we may say we are proud of how our team played. We may even say we are proud of a job well done. That type of pride does not puff up. It does not try to set someone above anyone else. What is being shown here by Ahasuerus is the pride that is sin in nature. Let's sit on that aspect of pride for a while.

Pride! The very essence of arrogance. The elevation of oneself above everyone else. Here is the definition from the 1828 Noah Webster dictionary.

Pride - Inordinate self-esteem; an unreasonable conceit of one's own superiority in talents, beauty, wealth, accomplishments, rank or elevation in office, which manifests itself in lofty airs, distance, reserve, and often in contempt of others. ---- 1828 Noah Webster Dictionary

I would add a couple of other things. Pride has issues with authority and if told no, the person can kind of throw a fit. How dare you tell me no! Which, we will see later in this chapter! Let's look at Scripture and see what it says about pride. Turn to Proverbs Chapter 16:18.

Proverbs 16:18

¹⁸ Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Pride can put you in a state where you think you are untouchable. Pride can also put you in a state where if people disagree with you that somehow, they are out to get you. You can be puffed up by a lot of compliments and you may not actually be all that, as we say. Pride can cause you to make rash decisions.

Pride can cause all you worked for or have been given to disappear in just an instance. There is a great warning that we studied in 1 Corinthians Chapter 10 verse 12.

1 Corinthians 10:12

¹² Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

Staying in Proverbs, turn to Chapter 6 and let's see how God feels about pride. Let's read verses 16 through 19.

Proverbs 6:16-19

¹⁶ There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: ¹⁷ haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, ¹⁹ a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.

At the forefront of all things that God finds detestable it begins with pride! Pride is at the forefront of all sin! All sin flows out of pride in the heart. Pride can also be described as self-worship. Here is a list if you were to study that shows what pride can cause.

1. In Isaiah 14 we have the 5 I will statements attributed to Satan as pride caused Satan to say that I will ascend the throne!
2. In Genesis 3:4, It was pride that caused Adam and Eve to disobey God as they ate of the fruit that brought sin into all our lives.

3. In 1 Samuel 13 it was pride that caused King Saul not to wait on the prophet Samuel and made the sacrifice to God before the battle against the Philistines that was not for him to do. Because of that he lost the kingdom.
4. In 2 Samuel 11 it was pride that caused King David to stay back in Jerusalem instead of going to battle with his troops and led to the sin of adultery with Bathsheba and then to murder her husband Uriah to try to cover his sin.
5. It was pride that the 12 disciples argued about who would be the greatest in Jesus' Kingdom. Not once and but twice. Luke 9, Luke 22, you will find that encounter referenced in Mark 9 and Matthew 18.

In C.S. Lewis' book *Mere Christianity* he wrote this about pride. Read along with me as you see the quote on the screens:

“The vice I am talking of is Pride or Self-Conceit: and the virtue opposite to it, in Christian morals, is called Humility...According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere flea bites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.”

— C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Well, I think we established quite well that Pride is something to be wary of in our lives. Back to Esther. What we will now see is how pride in King Ahasuerus' heart begins for God to play out the events that brings his will to fruition and people, primarily the nation of the Jews to once again see his power and his glory. Let's read verses 10 to 12.

¹⁰ On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, ¹¹ to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at. ¹² But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. At this the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him.

At the end of the last feast, Ahasuerus, being intoxicated, he was very happy, drunk. Let me make a point about that for a moment. As we read from C.S. Lewis, drunkenness is a vice of Pride. I also want to put a thought out there when it comes to drinking alcohol, and we try to use as a part of our Christian liberty that it is alright to drink adult beverages. The more important thing is not about your or my Christian liberty but the witness that is portrayed as it says in ***Romans 14:20-21 – Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything indeed is clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble.*** Something to think about!

Back to the King's request. Queen Vashti refused to come to the king upon his request. Was she wrong to do so? No! Now this is not in the Bible, and I know we must be careful with this. This is what ran through my mind. Here are a couple of scenarios.

1. Did she ask the men that delivered the request, “What's he like?”
2. Had this request happened before and she knew what he was going to do, and it humiliated her last time.
3. Maybe she just felt she should not leave her guests.
4. There was not a law against this. She just said no.

But in the king's pride he became enraged! His anger burned! Pride feeds anger! Sometimes being told no infuriates us doesn't it. Why? Tell me no! This is what I want, and I want it done now! But especially don't tell me no in front of people I am trying to impress.

Throughout the Epistles, letters of the Apostle Paul, we see when he addresses the fruit and the product of living in sin produces, anger is mentioned several times. Turn to Galatians 5 and begin with verse 19 and we see the warning to be aware of this in our lives.

Galatians 5:19-21

¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Now I am going to go through these other verses pretty quick and they won't be on the screens. So, please turn to ***Ephesians 4:31 – Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you , along with all malice.***

Turn to ***Colossians 3:8 – But now you must put them all away; anger, wrath, malice, slander and obscene talk from your mouth.***

Anger accompanied with our pride causes us to make rash and sometimes unwise decisions. When we do that and we don't want to look foolish in other people's eyes we have to begin to cover ourselves or make the other person look like the bad guy in the situation. Then that can cause even lies be devised also. Look at what King Ahasuerus did.

¹³ Then the king said to the wise men who knew the times (for this was the king's procedure toward all who were versed in law and judgment, ¹⁴ the men next to him being Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king's face, and sat first in the kingdom): ¹⁵ “According to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti, because she has not performed the command of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs?” ¹⁶ Then Memucan said in the presence of the king and the officials, “Not only against the king has Queen Vashti done wrong, but also against all the officials and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. ¹⁷ For the queen's behavior will be made known to all women, causing them to look at their husbands with contempt, since they will say, ‘King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come.’ ¹⁸ This very day the noble women of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's behavior will say the same to all the king's officials, and there will be contempt and wrath in plenty.

Wow! What a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive! The more I read that portion of Scripture the more humorous I found it. Maybe humorous is not the word, maybe sad is better! Here are the 7 closest confidants of King Ahasuerus. These men had audience to the King at about any time. They talked and discussed the happening of the kingdom. Here they are now huddled up.

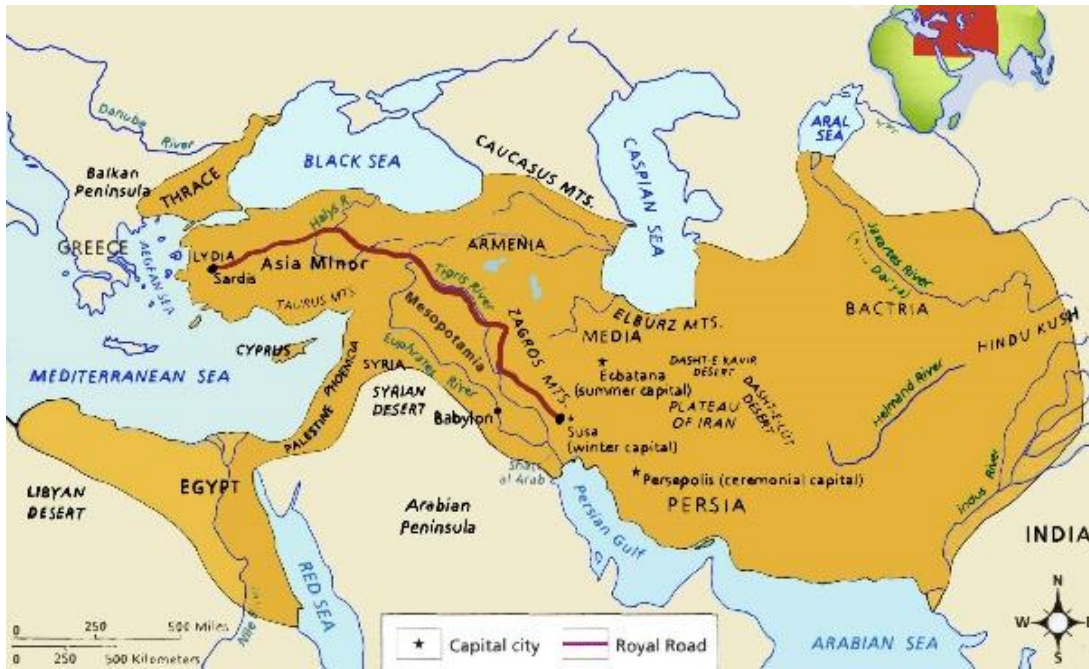
The King says, “What am I going to do?”, “What does the law say?” The more they talked the deeper it got! Talking about blowing something completely out of proportion!

Because of the pride of King Ahasuerus and the pride of these men they are going to destroy the Queen. Again, this is just a thought I had. Unless King Ahasuerus stood up and said, “And now I am going to send my servants to fetch Queen Vashti and I going to have her parade her beauty in front of you! Go get her!” The only men that may have known he even made the request were the seven eunuchs. They are not going to embarrass the King or the Queen!

Other than just complete and utter pride and self-conceit there is no other reason for what happens next.

¹⁹ If it please the king, let a royal order go out from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be repealed, that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus. And let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. ²⁰ So when the decree made by the king is proclaimed throughout all his kingdom, for it is vast, all women will give honor to their husbands, high and low alike.” ²¹ This advice pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed. ²² He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, that every man be master in his own household and speak according to the language of his people.

The King allows this order, this edict to go out! It goes out to all 127 provinces and in the language that was spoken in that province. Remember the map.



The Persian empire was a large territory, and it encompassed many areas that spoke a different language than the Persian and Media language. So, the command went out for the men to make sure that they were masters of their house. One item we see there is that the man is to make sure their household spoke the language of his people. There were marriages between different nations that spoke different languages. This was one way for the man to show he had control.

Ladies, if you were ordered by the government to love us more, is that going to cause you to love and respect us more? I thought not!

How about a word from God? ***Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it!*** Can I bring us both into this scenario? ***Ephesians 5:33 – However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.***

We don't know what happened to Queen Vashti. And in the historical timeline, Esther, which is her Persian name, Hadassah, is her Hebrew name. Did not become queen immediately after these events.

King Ahasuerus went to try to conquer Greece again and again experienced a very sound defeat.

Pride! It can lead to all of kind hardships, but do you see that again how sin does not just affect you? You may think that you are just getting back at one person but when you attack that person it affects a lot of people. Just

as we saw how the King's issue was with the Queen. Though he was wrong in the situation but then it spread to an area that covered 127 provinces.

But even in these circumstances we see the Fingerprints of God and his sovereignty as he guides through these events to show his power and glory in a young woman's life and eventually a nation.

Remember there are no coincidences in our lives as believers! But we will see God's sovereign hand if we will seek it and obey it in all our circumstances! Let's Pray!