

Esther, Ezra/Nehemiah

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Background to Esther

100 Years After Babylonian Exile

Jews Living in Susa, the Persian Capital

God is Never Mentioned But Providentially in the Background

Theme

Despite Exile, "God's Absence," and Israel's Moral Compromise, God Has Not Abandoned His Promises.

Key Verses

2:23 - Mordecai's Deeds Chronicled

6:1-3 - Mordecai's Deeds Revisited

3:2 - Mordecai's Loyalty to Yahweh

3:6; 6:13; 8:17 - Fear of the Jews

3:7 - Haman Cast Pur to Determine the Day of Destruction for the Jews

4:14 - Deliverance Will Arise From Elsewhere

4:16 - Esther's Bold Statement

9:26 - Purim, the Feast of Celebration for Overcoming Haman's Conspiracy

Discussion

The "Coincidences" in Esther are How God Works In Our Lives Today

God's Activity In Our Lives Is Either Acknowledged or Explained Away

I think the encouraging thought from this book is that as Christ's Church, even though God seems at times to be distant or even completely absent, He is certainly in the background working all things together for our good and His glory (Romans 8:28).

Does anything come to mind when you think about God's providential activity in your life?

Background to Ezra/Nehemiah

Unified Work / Single Author

Set After the Babylonians Destroyed the Temple and Babylon Falls to Persia

Unified Book Structured Around Three Jewish Leaders:

Zerubbabel - The Temple Guy (Leads First Group of Jews)

Ezra - The Law Guy (60 years after Temple Guy)

Nehemiah - The Wall Guy (After Ezra)

Parallel Design:

- (1) Proclamation
- (2) Opposition
- (3) Anti-Climax

Theme

Ezra/Nehemiah Points Out Israel's Need For A New Heart From God

Key Verses

Parallel Design:	Zerubbabel	Ezra	Nehemiah
(1) Proclamation	1:1-4	7:1, 6	2:1-6
(2) Opposition	4:1-5; 23-24	9:1	4:1-10
(3) Anti-Climax	4:6	10:1-4, 9-12, 15	13:6-13, 15, 19

Ezra 3:12-13 Weeping Over Foundation

Ezra 5:1-2 Haggai/Zechariah Appearance

Discussion

Each leaders' endeavors began with hope but ended with disappointment because all political/social/spiritual reforms put in place failed to change the heart of God's people and ultimately they wandered away again.

Similarly for us, we must acknowledge that heart transformation comes only from God because no one is good except God (Mark 10:18). Therefore, only He can "circumcise" the heart (Rom. 2:29) and restore man to his former glory.

So that being said, what is the balance between putting forth effort to keep the commandments of God and depending on God to transform our hearts and conform us to Christ's image?