

## God's Perfect Work, through Imperfect People!

### I. Slide#1 Intro:

- A. **Story:** The only **survivor** of a **shipwreck** washed up on a small uninhabited island. He cried out to God to save him, and every day he scanned the horizon for help, but none seemed forthcoming. Exhausted, he eventually managed to build a rough hut and put his few possessions in it. But then one day, after hunting for food, he arrived home to find **his little hut in flames, the smoke rolling up to the sky**. **The worst had happened**; he was stung with grief. Early the next day, though, a ship drew near the island and rescued him. “How did you know I was here?” he asked the crew. “We saw your smoke signal,” they replied.
1. Oh the sweet **Providence** of God.

### II. Slide#2 ESTHER, THE STORY

- A. When you & I read History we read for *the facts, & nothing but the facts*.
1. This History is not one of facts, like most ALL ancient texts.
  2. Slide#3a This is *Ancient Story Telling* at its finest-It tells History in the form of a **story**
  3. From our earliest attempts to communicate using language, we tell **stories** about ourselves & others.
    - a) Children first learn to read by **stories**. (only much later do they learn skills like *abstraction*)
    - b) *Storying* is a form of communication accessible to most people. [thus, why God revealed Himself in **stories**]
  4. Slide#3b When we are getting to know someone we ask, “tell me about yourself.”
    - a) And, we expect to hear a **story** that narrates what that person considers to be significant events & experiences in his/her life.
    - b) If we ask, “How was your day?” we expect a narrative of *selected highlights* in their day, **not**, “*I inserted my key into the door & it opened...*”
    - c) Slide#3c With stories we get to know each other. With biblical stories, *written under God's inspiration*, we learn about **God & His relationship with His people**.
      - (1) When you sit down to read the bible, *hear God saying*, “Come, hear My story. I've selected the most important ones for you to know right now. Regarding who I am & the relationship I desire with you.”
    - d) Slide#3d So, with **God's stories**, they're not about **bare facts** (though they are factual). They are about God promises towards us, about His redeeming us, Him helping us overcome obstacles, for His glory & for His purposes.
- B. The story of Esther consists of 6 sections, revealing a well-constructed literary piece. Ingenious writing tells the story through a flow of events, building suspense to a pivotal point. The

problems & tension then cascade downward until all is resolved, yet the final solutions are unexpected. The reader is never bored. [Shepherd's Notes, Ruth, Esther, pg.42]

### III. Slide#4 WHERE ESTHER FITS IN HISTORY

- A. **Slide#5a Date Written** - Events in this book are set in the era of **the Persian Empire**, sometime between 483-471 b.c.
  1. Extended from Sudan to Pakistan to Greece.
- B.
- C. **Slide#5b Chronologically** - Esther comes **between** the return of a **first group** of Jews to Judah from Babylon (538 b.c.) and the return of a **second group** led back by Ezra (458 b.c.).
  1. **Esther fits in between Ezra chapters 6 & 7. [a 60 yr. gap]**
  2. Esther covers a **10 year** time period.
- D. **Slide#5c Author** – **unknown**. Some think Mordecai (9:29). Some think Ezra or Nehemiah, because of similar writing styles.
- E. **Slide#5d Historical background**
  1. Civil war in Israel (divided kingdom) - both sides weren't walking w/the Lord - So God allowed **Assyria** take the north (Israel) into captivity; **& then Babylon** took the south (Judah) away for 70 years.
    - a) The Book of Daniel took place there while they were in exile.
  2. **Then, Babylon** was overpowered by the **Medes/Persians**.
    - a) The Jews were free to return to their land.
    - b) **Zerubbabel** led the 1st group back. **Ezra** the 2nd. **Nehemiah** the 3rd.
  3. Our story is about the many Jews who chose to "**stay back**" in Persia...Did God forget them...**No way!**

### IV. Slide#6 ESTHER, THE BOOK

- A. **Slide#7a The Place** – The story is set in the **Persian empire** (Iran).
- B. **Shushan the citadel**:
  1. **Slide#7b Shushan** – Or **Susa** (the capital of Persia). **Its ruins are located in SW Iran, about 150 miles N of the Persian Gulf. East of the Tigris.**
  2. **Slide#7c The citadel** – A fortified fortress. This **palace** became the winter residence of later Persian kings.
    - a) Most of the action of this book takes place right here in the winter palace.
  3. **Archeologists** have not recovered documents that mention either Esther or her uncle, Mordecai. **But** the detailed descriptions of **Persian court practices** and

**customs** in Esther have been shown to be completely accurate.

### C. The 5 Main Characters

- D. **Slide#8a King Ahasuerus** – “*Lion King*” (Smith’s Bible Dict.)
- E. This was **Xerxes** (Zerk-sees), surnamed Longimanus.
- F. **In Persian**, “*Ardsheer the long-handed*,” so called, according to the Greeks, from the **extra-ordinary length of his hands**, **but** according to the Easterners, from the **extent of his dominions**.
- G. **Ahasuerus** was actually a **title**, like Pharaoh.
- H. He ascended the Persian throne, B.C. 464, and reigned 41 years.
1. He is said to have been the most **handsome** person of his age, and to have been a prince of a very mild and generous disposition.
- I. **Note vs.4** – he showed all of his **riches & glory for 6 months!**
1. I can show you mine in about 10 minutes! - **But really, a man is very poor if he can show you all his glory & wealth in 6 months!**
  2. It’ll take **eternal ages** to begin to fathom the riches of God’s grace/glory that we have
    - a) Eph.1:11,18 **In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, ...that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.**
- J. **Slide#8b Queen Vashti** – Strong willed, independent-minded woman who refuses to cooperate w/her husband’s drunken demands. **Quickly whisked off the scene.**
- K. **Slide#8c Mighty Mordecai** – Exposes an assignation plot. Refuses to bow to anyone(Haman). He cared enough to adopt his cousin(Esther). Takes Haman’s place as Prime Minister.
- L. **Slide#8d A little Orphan named Myrtle**(Esther) –
1. **Hebrew name** – **Hadassah**, or **Myrtle** (see 2:7)
  2. **Persian name** – Ester, or Star (Stara) [She’s truly the “star” of our story! - A star is born]
  3. **Latin name** – **Hester**; Greek name – **Esther**
  4. **She’s a woman with chutzpah!** See 4:16b
  5. **Esther’s key to her success** was that she was, “**blind to the visible**(problems) **& saw the invisible**(God)!”
- M. **Slide#8e The Evil Haman**
1. **Every story has its Antagonist, prideful Arch-villain.**
    - a) Here is the **Adolph Hitler** of the 4th cent bc, as he tried to utterly exterminate the Jews (3:13)
  2. When read by the Jews (even today) you hear the boo, hiss & spin rattles when his name is read.
    - a) The book ends with a new feast...**Purim**...where they do this.
- N. **Slide#9a The Plot**

1. **Survival of the Jews.** They were so close to a Holocaust!
2. **Jew/Jews/Jewish** – is used **53** times.

O. **Slide#9b The Purpose**

1. To show Gods **Sovereignty & His care** for His people via **His Providence**.
2. Some say God's Sov. makes people *passive*?...**It makes me Active!** - "Lord I want to play, Coach put me in!"
3. The book of Esther testifies clearly to the "invisible hand of Providence!"

P. **Slide#9c The Key Verse** - Read vs. 4:14.

Q. **Slide#9d Special Features**

R. 1 of 2 books named for women (Ruth)

1. **Ruth** – A Gentile who married a Jew; **Esther** – A Jew who married a Gentile.
2. **Both** – women of faith & courage.
3. **Both** – helped to save the nation of Israel.
4. **Ruth** – by birth of a son(Obed, Jesse, David); **Esther** – by death of an enemy.

S. **Slide#9e Unusual Features**

T. **There is 8-10 Feast** - And this king knows how to party!

U. **The Name, Title, or a pronoun for God never appears!** (no Yahweh/Elohim)

1. It also doesn't mention the *Mosaic Law, sacrifice, prayer, or revelation*.
2. **Not mentioned in the NT.** (**nor** in *Dead Sea Scrolls*)
3. **Yet,** again and again the story told here shows our sovereign God working quietly, behind the scenes, shaping events so that His good purpose for His people is achieved.
4. **So the big question is...**Can we grab theology from a book *absent* of religious language?
  - a) **Answer: Yes!** When it bests suits the author to express theology through the vehicle of story, arranging the events & dialogue to accentuate that theology.
5. Though His name is not written we see His fingerprints all over it.
6. **Like Shakespeare plays** – every page bears testimony to **its author**.
7. **Or it's like burnt toast** - **If your standing in another room you may not see the burnt toast, yet it fills the whole house with its presence!**
  - a) Though our God is invisible to **our eyes** he is always present. **From the Middle east to Murrieta, from Susa to Temecula.**
  - b) As we go through this book I don't care if you learn about **Persian history** **but** do learn that **God is at work in His people & their lives!**
8. Though He's **Invisible** He is **never Indifferent** - Though **Invisible, yet Invincible!**

V. Another important contribution of Esther is to document what happened to *the Jews who did not return to Judah*.

1. Esther 3:8 shows that they had **scattered** throughout the empire “among the peoples in all the provinces” of the empire, and that there they kept “themselves separate.”

## V. Slide#10 ESTHER, A STORY FOR TODAY

A. Slide#11a God’s Perfect Work, through Imperfect People!

1. We’ll see **Esther** in the midst of a **Persian Harem** being all dolled up for a sensual night to please a pagan king...where we ask, “*What’s a nice Jewish Goyal like you doing in a place like this?*”
2. We’ll see **Mordecai**, not respecting the authority of Haman & thus putting **all** the Jews lives at risk.
  - a) God’s Perfect Work, through Imperfect People!

B. Slide#11b **Esther** answers the question, “*Is God only present in Jerusalem?*” **No**, even in the pagan places of godless palaces.

C. Slide#11c Maybe God used Esther because she was able to *ignore her impressive surroundings* & listen to the *still small voice* of **Providence**.

D. Read Ps.46:1-3,7,10 (esp.10)

1. NASB – **Cease striving and know that I am God**;
2. N.L.T. - **Be silent, and know that I am God!**
3. (10) **be still** = *let your hand drop* (2 Sam.24:16). *Take your hands off* (www). **Also** means to *relax, refrain* (Brown Driver Briggs).
  - a) “Be still, O troubled heart! The God of the nations. The God of pagan places. The God of impossible situations. The God behind the scenes...is your Father”
4. Slide#12blank 1st trust in **His person**(10a); then trust in **His plan**(10b)!
5. **Initially, be quiet** – Listen to the **whisper** of God behind the **roar** of your circumstances!
6. **Ultimately, be convinced** - God may **change your circumstances** as He did for Esther & Mordecai, but most of all He wants to **change YOU!**
  - a) God **IS** for you, not against you!
  - b) He is working behind the scenes for your **highest good!**

E. It answers the question, “*Is God only present in Jerusalem?*” **No**, even in the pagan places of godless palaces.