

# The Providence of God

Esther 1:1-3

## An Introduction to the book of Esther:

### 1. A troubling time in Israel's history.

It's the year 483 B.C. The Persians have been the world power for 56-years, when they defeated Babylon in 539. The Persian king Ahasuerus is now in power, and has been for three years. Ahasuerus is his Hebrew name, but he's better known by his Greek name, Xerxes. Esther covers a decade, **a troubling time in Israel's history**, from 483-473 B.C.

Judah, the southern kingdom of Israel, because of their stubborn, idolatrous rebellion against their God, entered into 70-years of captivity, exiled to Babylon, just as the prophets of God had prophesied. But, by now the exile is long past, having ended 55-years earlier. Almost immediately after the Persians came to power, the Jews were allowed to return to Judah and Jerusalem. But, they returned slowly, in three-waves. The first wave was under the leadership of Zerubbabel in 538 B.C. by the proclamation of Cyrus. **Ezra 1:1:** In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: <sup>2</sup>“Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. <sup>3</sup>Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem.”

### The dates when Israel returned to Palestine and Esther took place:

- The first return led by Zerubbabel: 538
- The beginning point of the book of Esther: 483
- The second return led by Ezra: 458
- The third return led by Nehemiah: 445

But, most Jews chose not to \_\_\_\_\_. They should have returned, they were urged by Isaiah and Jeremiah to return, but they didn't.

Wherever they were exiled in the Persian empire, spread throughout the provinces, they have settled in and are now at home—including, Esther and her older cousin Mordecai, who remained in Susa, one of the Persian capitals and the winter residence of the king.

When you enter the book of Esther, you enter a strange atmosphere. The Jews in Palestine are struggling to rebuild their nation and reestablish temple worship. And, when Ezra returned to Jerusalem he found the people in very poor spiritual condition. Meanwhile, back in Susa, there's no Jewish synagogue and the Law is lost to those still exiled—not once is the Law mentioned in Esther.

Even more surprising, in the ten chapters of this book, the name of \_\_\_\_\_ is not to be found. Susa is a bustling, pagan, Gentile city, and if there are any spiritual Jews in the city, they're all underground. There are signs that both Esther and Mordecai are at least somewhat spiritual, but they certainly don't wear their faith on their sleeves so everyone can see it. It was dangerous to do so. It's often still dangerous to do so.

So, in Susa, in 483 B.C., there was no outward worship of God, there was no written Word of God, and there was no witness for God. Consequently, I don't think the absence of God's name is all that strange. The Jews are much more secular than sacred. It's like Israel outside of Palestine has forgotten their God. However, as we will see clearly, even though Israel has forgotten God...

## 2. God has \_\_\_\_\_ forgotten Israel.

While His name is not mentioned, nonetheless, He is everywhere apparent and present in this book. He's undercover and unseen by those in the story but not to us, the readers of this amazing Spirit-inspired book. Also, Satan is not seen in this story by the naked, natural eye. But, he sure is seen by us spiritually sighted people. And, his great, grand \_\_\_\_\_ for Israel has never changed, and won't change until Jesus comes back. It has always been the devil's passion to destroy Israel. In the book of Esther, if God had not intervened, Satan surely would have succeeded in his diabolical plan. **But God...** *He will not forget His unconditional covenant promises that He made to Abraham and David.* For example, to Abraham, God's promises were that He would make of Abraham a great nation (Genesis 12:1-3), and He would

give to Him and His offspring all the land of Canaan and beyond, from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates (15:18), and it will be an everlasting possession, and God will be their God forever (17:8).

### 3. The purpose of the book.

**The purpose of Esther is to highlight the faithful, providential \_\_\_\_\_ of God for His people.** Providence simply means God faithfully, sovereignly purposes to provide for and protect His people according to His promises, and He has the awesome power to pull it off. *Esther is a classic illustration.* It doesn't matter that God is not named in this most worldly setting. He is clearly the main character in Esther, is clearly on every page, is clearly in control of the other characters in the narrative, and clearly, providentially rules and overrules \_\_\_\_\_ things. *Strong's Systematic Theology:* "Providence is God's attention concentrated everywhere," even in the heart of the great Persian empire. King Ahasuerus may issue his "unalterable decrees," **but God** overrules and accomplishes His purposes on behalf of His people.

### 4. But Satan keeps trying.

He tried to destroy Israel early in their history at the time of the Great Exodus (Holy Day of Remembrance: *Passover*). He tried in the days of the Maccabees (*Hanukkah, "The Feast of Lights"*). He tried during the days of the Nazis (*Holocaust Memorial Day*). He tried in Esther's day (*Purim*). And, he continues to try in our day. **Satan will keep trying**, but it can't be done. God's won't allow it, for He has holy and eternal \_\_\_\_\_ for Israel. So, it shouldn't surprise that Esther became...

### 5. A most beloved book.

The Jerusalem Talmud, an important book of Jewish laws, says the book of "Esther will never perish!" Even to this day, Jews hold the book in highest esteem. During Purim, the entire book is read and celebrated in Jewish synagogues around the world. But, not just Jews and Christians highly regard the book. Esther has often been described as "a masterpiece of literature" and "a literary treasure," even by secular literary standards. I encourage you to approach it like the masterpiece that it is, and read it straight through, from beginning to end.

## 6. Don't lose sight of the purpose.

**The Big Idea** of the entire narrative: To demonstrate how Divine Providence over \_\_\_\_\_ all things, even in a distant country where God's people have lost touch with God. **So, never forget:** He has the sovereign power and will to providentially keep His promises, accomplish His purposes, and complete His will.

Neither Esther or Mordecai are overtly Jewish. But I believe their spirituality grows as the story unfolds. But, this is for sure, God planted His undercover, secret agents in the heart of the Persian empire, as once again **Romans 8:28** is on full display: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." The vast majority of Jews in 483 B.C. scattered through the Persian empire didn't love Him. But, this is ever true: they were " \_\_\_\_\_ according to His purpose."

## 7. The king of Persia (1:1-3).

King Ahasuerus' father was King Darius I, and his grandfather was Cyrus the Great, the king we met in Ezra 1, who initiated the Persian empire. Ahasuerus comes from a royal family of renown. And, the empire was vast, divided into 127 provinces, and the king was absolute sovereign in absolute control, or so he and all others thought. So, it's not surprising that he is excessively proud! However, he only has the \_\_\_\_\_ God gives him, and God reserves the right to override the king's sovereignty with his own omnipotent, sovereign power and control.

In this series, we will witness a classic illustration of His faithful, providential care of His people. It's not the first time we've seen it.

## Classic illustrations of God's providential care:

**Joseph, 1900 B.C.**

**Exodus, 1500 B.C.**

**Esther, 473 B.C.**

**You and me, A.D. 2018 and beyond!**