SERIES

The Bible in a nutshell

Esther

By Peter Hammond

Background of Esther

Esther is the original, real life inspiration for the Cinderella stories. Esther was brought up in poverty, raised in obscurity. As her parents had died, she was raised by her elder cousin Mordecai, who was a keeper of the gate at the Persian palace at Susa. Esther gives us a link in God’s plan of Redemption, an important chapter in the history of the people through whom the Messiah came. The name ‘Esther’ means star and she certainly played a stellar role in the constellation of God’s people.

Colossal conflict

The historical context to Esther is one of the most famous chapters in world history. Xerxes, the King of Persia, was about to launch his famous invasion of Europe. His father, Darius I, had been defeated by the Greeks at the Battle of Marathon. The great feast described in Esther 1 was for planning the campaign against Greece in Europe. Xerxes’ mighty Persian army was ready to speak when we dare not remain silent. The book of Esther teaches us to be ready to contend for the Faith by fighting the good fight and being ready to speak when we dare not remain silent.

With his naval re-supply ships destroyed, Xerxes was forced to withdraw from Europe.

Understanding the times

Although the book of Esther occurs after Nehemiah in its order in the Bible, the events recorded in Nehemiah actually happened thirty years after Esther was crowned queen. The invasion of Greece occurred immediately after chapter 1 of Esther. Chaprer 2 begins with the word “Later…” It was four years after Vashti was dethroned and two years after Xerxes’ army had been defeated in Greece that he married Esther. Esther lived for many years into the reign of her stepson Artaxerxes, under whom Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. It was no doubt Esther and Mordecai’s influence that created the situation in which Nehemiah received the support of Artaxerxes for rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

God and His people

While many in Israel may have felt that God was silent at the time of their captivity, it was evident that God was with them, even in exile in Babylon and Persia. When the Temple was closed, God was still watching over His people. While the kings of the earth fulfilled their forget, God remembered, and with His Hand He wrote their doom, or moved their hands to work according to His perfect Will.

Capriciousness of Xerxes

The story begins in the third year of Xerxes reign, in his winter capital, Shushan (Susa). For 180 days he has a conference with his officials, no doubt in preparation for their coming invasion of Europe. Then he held a 7-day feast. Xerxes ordered Queen Vashti “to show her beauty to the people and the officials.” Queen Vashti refused to be paraded before drunken men.

Counsel of Mordecai

When Mordecai heard of the decree to kill all the Jews in the kingdom, he put on sackcloth and ashes and informed the queen: “If you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise...from another place, but if you declare to the king that you hide your people, you and your father’s house will perish. Yet, who knows, whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” Esther 4:13-14

Esther heeded Mordecai’s counsel and after much prayer, decided to approach the King. She had to move carefully, as she was...
Esther's courage

Esther accepted the challenge and counsel of Mordecai. We see her decisiveness, her resolution and courageous action. She mobilised the people to prayer. Prayer moves the hand that moves the world. She was willing to risk her life by going in, unsummoned, to Xerxes. Remembering how capricious Xerxes could be, and how he had deposed Vashti for not coming when he had called, she knew that the penalty for anyone to appear before the king unsummoned was instant death. Yet she determined that, even though it was against the law, she would go into the king’s court if necessary, I perish!” Esther 4:16.

Esther had not been spoiled by her great beauty being recognised, nor by her coronation as queen of the greatest empire of her day. She had not allowed luxury to turn her to selfishness. She was willing to risk it all, her life itself, to do her duty. Consequences of choices

The king could not sleep, so he commanded one of his attendants to read The Chronicles of Mordecai. We see her decisiveness, her constancy.

Catastrophic consequences

The king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther. The king asked: “What is your request, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you.” Then Queen Esther answered: “Let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we have been sold... to be destroyed...” (Esther 5:5-6).

Reversal of fortunes

Now at this crucial point Haman arrived and the king asked him: “What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honour?” (Esther 6:4). Esther was willing to risk her life by going in, unsummoned, to Xerxes and his warm offer to give her whatever she asked for, she merely asked for Haman and the king to join her for dinner.

We reap what we sow

The book of Esther shows us that transitory nature of earthly grandeur and the disastrous consequences of all ill-gotten power and possessions. Esther teaches us to seek Divine guidance in times of difficulty; to be ready to renounce self and be decisive in speaking up for those who cannot speak for themselves.

A call to decisive action

When the time comes to speak, we dare not remain silent. When the time comes to stand up, we must not remain seated. When the time comes to step out, we dare not hold back. We need to be ready to “contend for the Faith”, to “fight the good fight of Faith.” When the time comes to stand up, we dare not remain seated. When the time comes to step out, we dare not hold back. We need to be ready to “contend for the Faith”, to “fight the good fight of Faith.”

PETER HAMMOND is a missionary, Bible teacher and author. For more info: Tel 021 689 4480; www.frontline.org.za; mission@frontline.org.za.

God uses individuals. God preserves His people. God intervenes in history.

PLAN YOUR DREAM TRIP!

with JOY! Magazine

SPACE IS LIMITED! BOOK NOW!

JOY!

Israel

4-15 September 2014

• See all the top Biblical sites, explore the Holy Land
• Read your Bible in colour! See the Word come to life
• Optional Baptism in the Jordan River
• Travel with other Christian believers and enjoy special communion and fellowship times
• 5 Star Hotels, Breakfasts and Dinners
• Beautiful free gifts for every traveller
• Tour price, R28 910. Deposit due immediately.

Greece & Turkey

Cruise in May 2015

• Explore the areas of Paul’s Ministry
• Enjoy a Cruise and Christian tour as you visit Ephesus, Patmos, Athens, Ancient Corinth, Mykonos, Santorini, Istanbul and more!
• R2 500 deposit due in August 2014

Europe with musician Andre Rieu

• Luxury tour includes a cruise in Europe and an Andre Rieu concert in the Netherlands; July 2015 (tbc).

BOOK NOW!

• R2 500 deposit due in August 2014
• Explore the areas of Paul’s Ministry
• Enjoy a Cruise and Christian tour as you visit Ephesus, Patmos, Athens, Ancient Corinth, Mykonos, Santorini, Istanbul and more!
• R2 500 deposit due in August 2014
• Tour price, R28 910. Deposit due immediately.

PETER HAMMOND is a missionary, Bible teacher and author. For more info: Tel 021 689 4480; www.frontline.org.za; mission@frontline.org.za.