

Reading Schedule for June 11-17, 2018

After reading Nehemiah with his concluding chapters about the final reforms and new policies, along with adhering to the law of God, we are ready for the story of Esther. Esther actually takes place before the Book of Nehemiah, and even before Ezra arrives on the scene. The Book of Ezra begins with 50,000 Jews returning to Jerusalem to build the temple. The temple is completed, but many Jews are still living in exile in Babylon, which was overthrown by Persia. I am excited for us to reread this inspiring story about how God sovereignly takes care of our lives.

June 11 - Esther 1: “This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush . . .” (v.1) This really sets up the story, with the historical context. Esther’s parents must have been among those exiles who chose not to return to Jerusalem, even though Cyrus had issued a decree allowing them to do so. As we read this chapter, we see the power of the king. A Persian king was thought to be a god by many of his people. The story shows how Xerxes was so cruel to his wife Vashti. This was to show you how much courage it would take Esther to speak to the king about such a crucial matter as she risks her life. I think that is the main reason for this chapter, along with setting up the historical background. What do you recognize in this chapter that gets your attention? Why?

June 12 - Esther 2: “But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai.” (v.22) Even though it is fascinating to read about how Esther became queen, it is also important to realize that God was working to bring favor to the Jews through Mordecai. Mordecai will play a very important role in the story, as Mordecai was essentially Esther’s dad through adoption. It was obviously God’s plan to put Esther in such a key position, as our God would always protect his own people when they are vulnerable. No human overthrow could thwart God’s plan to send the Messiah to earth as a Jew. We begin to see how God is orchestrating the events to lead up to a marvelous outcome that elevates the Jews rather than annihilates them. How do you respond to this interesting chapter as our story begins to unfold?

June 13 - Esther 3: “When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged.” (v.5) We will learn to despise Haman. He is an arrogant man who uses his position to make other people small and for him to elevate himself even more. Why did Haman want to destroy all Jews just because of one man’s action? Haman loved his power and authority. The Jews looked to God as their final authority. Haman was always prejudice against the Jewish people that he hated. Haman realized that the only way he could keep his self-centered desires fully in force he would have to eliminate all those who disregarded his authority. His quest for personal power and his hatred for the Jewish race consumed him. He is the picture of darkness, and his hatred is stirred by the devil himself. How do you respond to a seemingly desperate situation in this chapter?

June 14 - Esther 4: “For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?” (v.14) This has to be the most significant verse in the chapter. The story

is very intense at this point. But even though it seems like the Jewish fate is sealed, Mordecai believes that God will intervene, even if Esther does not have the courage to act on behalf of her people. But we know that she does, even as she calls for a fast. Esther is asking the Jews to pray for God’s help concerning her dangerous mission. It is a powerful statement that she makes at the conclusion of this chapter, “And if I perish, I perish.” God honors such incredible courage as she trusts in God to use her for the benefit of her people. How does this chapter inspire you?

June 15 - Esther 5: “If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king’s question.” (v.8) I am fascinated with Esther’s approach in dealing with the king. She seemed very wise and realizes that her request must be tenderized by time, as well as cause the king to be somewhat curious about her request. The flip side of this is that Haman’s friends and family are as confident as could be. This is a group of arrogant people who only think of themselves. I am especially mindful of Esther’s wisdom and patience. These two qualities are so important and so rare in our day. We live in a world of instant gratification and instant answers through the push of a button, or the click of a mouse. What do we learn from Esther as she is on this important mission?

June 16 - Esther 6: “Afterward Mordecai returned to the king’s gate. But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief.” (v.12) This is an exciting chapter for us as we see God’s plan unfolding. God is at work in several ways, all at the same time. You can count on that fact, even now. The events that are coming together in this story are not mere coincidence. They are the result of God’s sovereign control over the course of people’s lives. God was waiting for Mordecai’s reward and recognition for just the right time. Just as Haman was about to hang Mordecai unjustly, the king was ready to give the reward. We have a sense of delight in Haman’s remorse for he lives out this spiritual principle: The one who exalts himself will be humbled. How do you respond to this turn of events?

June 17 - Esther 7: “So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai. Then the king’s fury subsided.” (v.10) Haman’s hatred and evil plot were turned against him when the king discovered his true intentions. He was hanged on the gallows he had built for someone else, which was meant for Mordecai. Proverbs 26:27 teaches us that a person who digs a pit for others will fall into it themselves. This short chapter is the conclusion of the devilish man named Haman. We have been reading in Romans that it is not God’s plan that we avenge a wrong done to us. As followers of Christ, we are not to retaliate. But that does not mean that justice is unimportant. Justice was served in this story because God was at work to bring about the right outcome. You can trust him because this is the kind of God we serve. How do you respond to this succinct story of the Lord’s sovereignty and justice over evil?

PRAYER: Pray for our Dads because this coming Sunday is Father’s Day.