

1. So far we have met Mordecai (whose pride did not allow him to bow to Haman), his niece Esther (who became the queen of Persia), King Xerxes, his deposed Queen Vashti, and Haman (who had a diabolical hatred of the Jews).
2. Providence and Esther's efforts have combined to thwart the plan of Haman and save the Jews.
3. The prominence of feasting in the Book of Esther - 10 different feasts are mentioned in the book - it tells us something about how affairs were conducted in Persia. Two feasts were mentioned in today's reading.
4. The name of God is not used; there is no reference to the Temple, religious ceremonies or practices; but fasting is talked about.
 - A. The Jews fasted when the word came of Haman's edict, issued for their destruction.
 - B. When Esther agreed to risk her life to try to save her people, she asked Mordecai to call for all the Jews to hold a 3-day fast.
 - C. We are not told if Esther fasted, also, or if anyone prayed.
 - D. They did put on sackcloth and ashes, a universal sign of mourning and humiliation.
5. Esther 4:12-16: "Do you think that because you are in the king's house, you alone of all the Jews will escape? For if you remain silent at this point, 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 the royal position for such a time as this?"
 - A. The immutability of God's will and purpose - you cannot thwart the will of God. (Also Isaiah 43:13; Numbers 23:19)
 - B. No single person is indispensable to God's plan. His plan will get done, but if we refuse to do what God is calling us to do, we will lose the blessing.
 - C. God is omnipotent, and He can and will do anything to accomplish His purpose.
 - D. Mordecai shows an understanding of the divine work of providence. "For such a time as this!"
 - 1) God, knowing what Haman was planning, put Mordecai in a position to uncover the plot against the king.
 - 2) He put Esther in a position to reveal it.
 - 3) She was positioned to plead for the lives of her people.
 - 4) The king was disposed to listen.
 - 5) Haman constructed the instrument of his own destruction.
 - 6) The king's sleeplessness brought Mordecai's service to him to his mind.
6. There is much irony in the scene where the king orders Haman to honor Mordecai.
7. There is no forgiveness toward Haman on Esther's part.
8. The persecutors of God's people will never prevail, though they will be with us right up to the end of time.

1. We finished the last historical book of the Old Testament today.

2. Esther 8-10 record for us the origin of the Feast of Purim.
 - A. "Pur" is a "lot". "Im" is the plural form for a Hebrew noun. So Purim is literally, the Feast of "the lots".
 - B. The edict of the king was irrevocable, even though Haman had been hanged for his crime and justice had been done.
 - C. After King Xerxes gives his signet ring to his new adviser Mordecai, Mordecai fashions a new edict to counter balance the original one.
 - 1) The new edict allows the Jews to defend themselves, attack their enemies and appropriate properties.
 - 2) The Jews attacked their enemies, killed 75,000 people but took no spoils.
 - 3) There is no indication that these orders were from God or approved by God. They seem to be acts of vengeance.
 - D. Esther 9 says that the Feast of Purim was initiated as a result of the letter Mordecai sent to the Jews in all the provinces of Persia... feasting and joys and giving gifts to each other and to the poor...celebrated in every generation, by every family, everywhere, forever.

3. Summary of the feasts and holidays of the Jewish year: (5 feasts and 3 holy days)
 - A. The Passover was celebrated on the 14th day of the first month of Abib commemorating Israel's deliverance from Egypt.
 - B. The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) comes in the third month, a festival of joy and giving thanks.
 - C. The Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah), celebrated in the seventh month, a one-day celebration.
 - D. 10 days later comes Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the year.
 - E. 5 days after that comes is the Feast of tabernacles (or Booths), memorializing the journey from Egypt to Canaan.
 - F. On the 25th day of Kislev (mid-December for us) Hanukkah is celebrated, commemorating the rededication of the Temple after Antiochus Epiphanes' desecration of it.
 - G. Purim is celebrated in the 12th month (February or March of our year).

4. Haman was an Agagite, a descendant of Agag the Amalekite. Agag had fought a battle with the King Saul, and Saul spared his life, contrary to God's instruction to Samuel. The booty that should have been destroyed was instead taken by Saul for Israel. This was the final act of Saul's that caused God to reject him as king. The kingdom was given to David instead. This is why the Jews took no booty - they were trying to right Saul's wrong.

5. This ends the historical books of the Old Testament. The books of Maccabees are good history, but the Jews never thought of them as part of the canon of Scripture. Those books take us to the second century before Christ, and then there is silence.

1. Today we read Malachi 1-4 and Psalm 113. Malachi means “My messenger.”
2. Malachi wrote after Nehemiah was Governor of Jerusalem but addresses the same issues as Nehemiah.
 - A. Priests who are not faithful
 - B. Marriages that do not honor God
 - C. Tithes that are not being brought to the Lord
3. Malachi, Psalm 113, Isaiah 45: “From the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, the Lord’s name is to be praised.” It is God who is quoting Psalm 113 here, underscoring the divine nature of the Bible.
4. Malachi writes in a time of relative peace and quiet. He is confronting complacency. Chapters 1 and 2 of Malachi:
 - A. He begins by affirming God’s great love for His people.
 - B. He rebukes the unfaithfulness of the priests and the people.
5. Malachi was a great preacher. As you read this book:
 - A. Find the thesis that God is posting.
 - B. Note the question that follows...”But you ask...”
 - C. See the response of the prophet to the question.
6. The Theses that are posted:
 - A. Thesis #1: “I have loved you.”
Question: “But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’”
Answer: The Jews have returned from exile, but Edom, even if it is rebuilt, will again be destroyed.
 - B. Thesis #2: “Israel’s priests have not respected God.”
Question: “How have we shown contempt for your name?”
Answer: The sacrifice of blemished animals and contemptuous treatment of the Lord’s sacrifices.
 - C. Thesis #3: “You have wearied the Lord with your words.”
Question: “How have we wearied him?”
Answer: By questioning the justice of God
 - D. Thesis #4: “You have robbed God.”
Question: “How do we rob God?”
Answer: By not tithing!
 - E. Thesis #5: “You have spoken harshly against God.”
Question: “What did we say?”
Answer: You have said it is futile to serve God - it doesn’t do any good.
7. Relevant Principles:
 - A. #1 - We bring less than our best to God.
 - B. #2 - God hates divorce (there is forgiveness) and we should not marry unbelievers.
 - C. #3 - Justice will be done. “...My messenger will prepare the way for the Lord who will suddenly come to His Temple.” 3:2, 3 (used in Handel’s Messiah): “Who may abide the day of His coming, for He is like a refiner’s fire.”
 - D. #4 - If we tithe, God will bless - He promises to throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out on us a blessing we will not have room to contain.

1. Psalms 65-68 were chosen for today because of the connection of the last Psalm of this group of Psalms to Malachi.

A. The musical connection: "For He is like a refiner's fire" and "Great was the Company of the Preachers" - Handel used these verses from Malachi in the Messiah.

B. The thematic connection: Psalm 68 is David's attempt (long before there was a Temple) to describe the eschatological event of the Messiah coming to His Temple.

2. Psalm 68 also connects to that curious passage in Ephesians 4: "When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious - that you, O Lord, might dwell there" (the resurrection, ascension and present rule of Christ over His church). Paul takes what is referring to God in Psalm 68 and confidently applies it to Jesus.

3. Psalm 68 was meant to be used as a processional, which begins with a prayer: "May God arise, may His enemies be scattered...may the righteous be glad and rejoice before God..." Then the acts of God in the past are cited. When we know what He has done in the past, it enhances our faith for tomorrow.

4. The musicians lead the way in the processional. Music is important in our worship of God. And David sees the small tribe of Benjamin in the lead.

5. Psalms 65-68 were used as different parts of a "prayer book" service, so they are linked together.

A. Psalms 65 and 66 celebrate the fact that God answers the prayers of His people. "...Oh you who hear prayer, to you all men will come." "But surely God has listened and heard my prayer..."

B. Psalm 67 is a benediction, quoting from Numbers 6: "The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and give you peace..."

6. Prayer:

A. Confession comes first. "When we were overwhelmed by our sins, you forgave our transgressions." Psalm 65

B. Psalm 66 confirms that if sin had not been confessed, God is not obligated to listen to us. This is the reason for our lack of power in prayer.

C. "Keep short accounts with God." Deal immediately with any known sin in your life.

7. Psalm 65 is a "hymn in praise of God's goodness to His people. In response to their prayers, He pardons their sins...He orders the affairs of the world...He turns the Promised Land into a veritable Garden of Eden."

8. Psalm 66: 2 - Invitations to testify to the reality of God

A. Invitation #1: "Come and see what God has done."

B. Invitation #2: "Come and listen...let me tell you what He has done for me."

1. Psalms 47-50: The Psalms are meant to be sung.
2. Psalms 47-49 are attributed to the sons of Korah (the Levitical choir descended from Levi's son Kohath), and Psalm 50 to Asaph. Nehemiah used 2 choirs in the dedication of the walls of Jerusalem; David had 3 choirs.
3. Psalm 47: A processional Psalm used at one of the great feasts of Israel, perhaps the Feast of Tabernacles, later used at Rosh Hashanah. Early Christians saw in it a prophetic reference to Jesus' ascension and enthronement.
4. Psalm 48:8: "As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of the Lord Almighty, in the city of our God: God makes her secure forever." Israel could only depend upon God.
5. Psalm 49: "Why should I fear when evil days come, when wicked deceivers surround me?"
6. Psalm 50: "I will deliver you and you will honor me."
7. Perspective in Psalm 49: "All can see that wise men die; the foolish and the senseless alike perish and leave their wealth to others...Do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendor of his house increases, for he will take nothing with him when he dies."
8. Psalm 49 - The afterlife: "But God will redeem my life from the grave; He will surely take me to himself."
9. Psalm 50: God is not fooled, actions have not gone unnoted; His silence, taken for ignorance, tolerance or weakness is only temporary - God will judge evildoers.
10. The first part of Psalm 50: It is a reminder. God is honored by their obedience and will honor them for their faithfulness. The sacrifices benefit us. Obedience, however, is better than sacrifice.
11. Names of God in Psalm 50:
 - A. Verse 1, 3 names: The Mighty One; God; The Lord
 - B. The Judge; The Most High
 - C. Verse 22: Eloah - a rare name for God
12. With the finish of Week 76, we have read: Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, portions of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, 2/3 of the Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, James, and 1 and 2 Peter. That is 54 of the 66 books of the Bible! In 15 weeks we will finish.