

Esther 06-02-21A

This is Tuesday, the 21st of February, 2006. We continue tonight our study in the book of Esther. This will be our second foray into the first chapter of that book.

Let's take a moment as we begin to clear our minds and prepare our hearts and recognize the importance of the ministry of God's Holy Spirit. Shall we pray? Father, we know that we cannot live this life in any meaningful way, bearing any eternal fruit in our own power. It requires your strength, your grace, and your wisdom.

We thank you for the scriptures that we have before us and the ministry of your Holy Spirit to enable us to understand them and to remember them and put them into practice the truths that we gleaned from studying these different portions of your word. We thank you most of all for the Lord Jesus Christ, that he loved us and gave himself for us so that we could be entered into relationship with you and have this great potential to convert our short earthly life into something of eternal value. We pray that our study tonight will contribute to that goal.

We ask it in Jesus name. Amen. Last time, when we began our study of the book of Esther, I mentioned that the historical context from the standpoint of the government of Persia, the government at the citadel and the palace at Shushan under Xerxes, and from our studies in both Ezekiel and Daniel, you have some frame of reference for this because we know that Nebuchadnezzar came to power back in the early 600s, 605.

He carries away the first group of captives from Jerusalem to Babylon, which includes Daniel. Later on in the 590s, he's going to carry away a group that includes Ezekiel, and he will continue to reign all the way down until he dies in 563 BC. So, his reign is from the time that Daniel comes to the palace and comes to prominence in the palace, Nebuchadnezzar has almost exactly a 40 year reign.

So, he dies in 563. We know that after him comes his son and then a couple of ne'er-do-wells culminating in the nephew of the king who is away, Belshazzar. And we saw in Daniel chapter 5, the writing on the wall, handwriting on the wall culminating that very night with the fall of Babylon and Belshazzar.

And that is 539 BC. So, this is a little over 20 years after the death of Nebuchadnezzar. What about 20, 24 years? I was an English major, but that's pretty close.

About 24 years after the death of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, the feast, the writing, the draining of the water, the Medo-Median empire, the Median army comes swarming, not the whole empire, just the army, comes swarming up under the wall there and attacks and away they go. Well, Cyrus is the king, the first king of the Medo-Persian empire that succeeds the Babylonian empire. He first came to power in 559 BC.

So, he's been on the throne for 20 years when Jerusalem falls. And it's his general, Darius, who

comes in and captures the city. But Cyrus is the Medo-Persian king.

He's going to continue to rule for another nine years after the capture of Babylon, after the fall of Babylon. Daniel is going to go continue on into his reign and then he dies in 530 BC. Now, these may just seem like numbers, but at least keep the century straight.

Daniel went into captivity in 605 BC, right? 604, 605, 603, somewhere along in there. And so now, 70 years after the initial captivity, Cyrus, the Persian, dies. And Cambyses, very famous, old time ruling guy, comes to power.

He's going to be on the throne for about eight years. And that gets us down to 522. Now, remember, how long did God say the captivity for Israel would last when Jerusalem fell? The land had to get its Sabbaths, how many years? Seventy years.

Jerusalem fell in 586 BC. What's 586 minus 70? Remember, the years are getting smaller as you go toward Christ, right? So somewhere around 516 is when we would expect the captivity to end, right? Everybody with me? I know this is a lot of numbers, but I don't want you to fall off the wagon here and be left by the trail. So, Cambyses, we're down to 522 BC.

So, the 70 years are still not up, and the citizens of Judah are still in captivity when Cambyses goes away. You have a brief popping up of a guy named Smyrdas, but you know, anybody with that kind of a name isn't going to last very long, and he just comes and goes within a single year. So that's 522.

Smyrdas comes and goes. Then you have Darius I. Darius I. He's not the same Darius that took the city. That Darius that came in and knocked over Belshazzar was a great general, but this is Darius I in terms of rulers.

So, he's going to come to the throne in 521, and it is under Darius that the captivity is going to end, because he's going to reign from 521 all the way down to 486, and his reign is going to end exactly 100 years after Jerusalem fell, 586 to 486. So, we're one century after the fall of Jerusalem. We're one century after Ezekiel hearing the messenger coming in saying, Jerusalem has fallen, and the whole pronouncement of woe, and the explanation of judgment, and so on.

Now, in 486 or 485, this is 100 years after what we've been looking at in Daniel and in Ezekiel. Is everybody with me now? 486 B.C. This is when Xerxes, or Ahasuerus, comes to the throne of the Medo-Persian Empire. It's a whole lot more Persia than it is Medo now.

Remember the one shoulder is higher than the other? Well, that's the Persian shoulder. So, this is Xerxes. He's the king of Persia, and they've got the Medes under there as well.

So, and I told you last time that Ahasuerus and Xerxes, it's the same word, just coming down to it's two different ways, and I won't give you all the gory linguistic details, but the word is the same. Ahasuerus is Xerxes. It's not two different names.

It's just been, that's how much a name can get garbled. A thousand years from now, if there were archaeologists running around, they found my name, they would probably call me Samu'il or some weird thing. Oh, Samu'il, Samu'il-ho, who lived back in 2006, and they would be all assassinated, our names.

Jesus sounds nothing like his name. His name was not Jesus. It was Yeshua.

And we're not even sure of that pronunciation, but that's a whole lot closer than Jesus. Jesus is a Latin translation of a Greek transliteration of an Aramaic rendering of a Hebrew name. And that's why, and of course, when you get in Spanish, it's Jesus.

And so, you know, it just gets worse and worse. Ahasuerus and Xerxes, same name. Well, that's where we are now.

So is everybody with me? We're a hundred years after the time of Daniel, a hundred years after the time of Ezekiel. And the captivity in which Ezekiel and Daniel labored and prophesied was supposed to last how many years? Seventy years. We're a hundred years after.

So I've given you the secular background. I've given you the Babylonio, Medo, Persia background now, right? And you know what's happening there. Well, what about the Jews? What about the people of Judah? Israel, the Northern Ten Tribes, they're long gone.

What is their history now? Well, Ezra has come back to Jerusalem. Nehemiah has come back to Jerusalem. And they have done their wall rebuilding and their temple rebuilding.

And many, many people from the captivity, because the decree went forth to release the people of Israel. And that's where a lot of them went. But it's been the better part of a century.

And a lot of people are doing pretty well. And when they're released and gain some freedom, they're comfortable where they are. And they don't necessarily want to go back.

So many of them stay abroad. This is another generation, isn't it? Seventy years ago would have been what, 1936? None of us in this room were alive in 1936. Our parents, if they were around, were young ones.

That 100 years ago was the time of our grandparents. That's when they were running the world and having their kids and so on, right? Well, these are the grandchildren of the people who went into captivity. And so they don't know any land but Persia or Babylonia or whatever.

And they're pretty comfortable. And they say, why should I go back? Do any of y'all know where your grandparents lived? My grandparents lived way out in West Texas. I've been out there.

It's dismal. I wouldn't move out there for anything. No internet out there.

No cable TV out there. No indoor plumbing out there. It's still pretty primitive.

Think about it. Your grandparents, where did your grandparents live? Italy and Ireland? You want it? Everybody want to pack up and go to Italy and Ireland? Probably not. You'd be going into the great unknown, wouldn't you? You might have heard stories.

Your grandparents might have said, oh, what a great place it is over there in Italy. What a great place it is over there in Ulster or somewhere. But you don't know anything about it.

And you say, well, I'm here in Texas and I kind of like it here. That's the situation of these people. So many of them, you can understand, wouldn't just want to pack up and go to some unknown land they've never seen, that their parents never saw, that grandma and grandpa say, oh, Jerusalem, what a beautiful city before it got wrecked.

And they say, well, so you want us to go back to the wrecked city? Well, we don't want to go. So they stayed here. A hundred years after the fall of Jerusalem, many, many swarms and throngs and vast crowds of what we'll call the Jews, people of Judah or Judea, are still outside the land.

That's what's going on in Esther chapter one. We saw this last time it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus. This was the Ahasuerus who reigned over 127 provinces.

He's got a vast domain here. It's like 30 big subdomains. And each of those has got three or four or five divisions for a total of 127.

It stretches from India to Ethiopia. Now, Ethiopia, if you know your geography, some of you are taking geography, that's over in North Africa, right? And India is way over on the other side of the Persian Gulf and on the far side of Arabia and all that, right? So it's a big old empire. And looking to the south from Shushan, that's the sweep of it.

In those days, he sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan or Susa, the citadel. This would be in modern day, what country? Iran. Iran.

I'm not telling you what I did yesterday. This is the name of a modern day country, Iran. Then in the third year of his reign, he made a feast for all of his officials and servants.

And I told you last time, what's he fixing to do? He wants to go beat up the Greeks because they whipped his daddy, Darius I, in a couple of very famous battles. And he doesn't want to have that besmirching his family escutcheon there. He wants to get this fixed because he's the biggest fish in the pond and he doesn't want these upstart Greeks stopping him.

The Spartans and the Athenians and you remember that whole thing. So he's going to get everybody together from all of his provinces, get them all to contribute some money, get them all to contribute some troops. Well, how is he going to motivate them to join him in this war? He's rotating all the leaders up to the palace, like one week for each group from each of these 127 provinces.

It's going to take him about six months to do this whole thing. 180 days to rotate everybody

through, show them all of his riches, impress them with how wealthy and powerful he is and say, now, you want to be on the winning team? You want to get a part of the spoils and be able to tell your kids and your grandkids that you took part in the big whomp the Greeks wore over here? Well, here I am whining you and dining you and we're buddies and you send me some money and send me some troops and we'll go kick those Greeks off the map. That's what he's doing here.

That's what's going on. And he's puffing himself up. He's like the peacock spreading his tail, letting everybody know, I am the king of all that I survey.

Everything is under my dominion. It'll be a no problem war to go over here and battle these Greeks. So when these days are finished, he's going to wrap up with the Coup de Grace, the biggest party of them all.

He's been leading up to this for six months and now he has the big final party for the people in the local capital city. This would be the equivalent of the president of the United States bringing the governors and the state senators and some of the county commissioners from big counties from all of the different states up to Washington, D.C. and whining him and dining him, showing him the White House and showing him all the sites and things for six months and then ending up with bringing all the congressmen and the senators from Washington, D.C. and bringing them all in for a final big hurrah. So that's what he's doing.

And it's seven days for all the people present in Shushan, the citadel. From great to small, court of the garden of the king's palace. It's such a big crowd, they can't fit them in a room so they're in this outdoor open area.

If you could imagine this room, pretend like there's no ceiling and no roof and it's about ten times bigger. Just a big square courtyard lined on all sides so that you can find the restrooms and get in and out and the slaves and the caterers come in and refresh your wine and bring you more roasted pheasant and all the rest of it. So this is going on.

And now it's going to tell us a little bit about the decorations. It says there were white and blue linen curtains fastened with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars. Why do we get these colors? Why the white and blue? Well, these are the official royal colors of Xerxes.

This is his trademark. When you see the blue and white, you've seen these old King Arthur movies and the knights will have that thing on and you can tell the good guys from the bad guys because all the good guys have got a white thing on one side and blue on the other. Well, that's what this is.

Those are his colors. So when they come to the palace, everywhere they look there's white and blue, white and blue. We're going to see this later on, so make a note.

We're going to see these colors come up again. So he's got this everywhere. So the people, this

is what they call now branding.

This is marketing. Today you'll see companies and they have a logo and you'll see that logo. You notice how this didn't used to be this way, but now in the lower right corner of your TV screen, no matter what channel you go to, there's a little logo there.

That's branding. They want you to consciously and unconsciously get that logo in your mind and get comfortable with it and want to always see it there. So if it's TBS or if it's TNT or if it's the sci-fi channel or whoever, they've all got their little brand logo down there.

And now have you seen where they've got commercials running at the bottom or little animated things take place and sound effects go off while you're trying to watch another program? Got to write a letter about that. Anyway, this is branding. He's impressing on them.

His royal colors. If you ever work for a company and they have somebody doing their website and doing their promotional materials, they'll pick a set of colors and they'll always use those. You know, Purina, checkerboard square.

I don't even know if they're still around, but that kind of thing. That's what that's what this is. Silver rods, marble pillars, couches of gold and silver, alabaster, turquoise, white, black and marble.

He is impressing these people with his wealth. Now, why am I belaboring this? Why do we care about this? Because the whole idea is back up in verse four. He showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty.

This is just detail of how he did that. Now, what do we think about this? Do people try to impress you with their stuff? When I was a young lad, the age of some of you that are in your teenage years, I lived in a house that was well kept and nice in its way, but it was not fancy. It wasn't ornate.

It wasn't impressive to walk into. It was just very comfortable. I thought it was just a typical standard house.

Every once in a while, I would go home with somebody else and oh my goodness, have you ever had this experience? You go to someone's house and you look around, it's like a museum and I don't know, maybe both of their parents are like heart surgeons or something making, you know, \$600,000 a year because you look around and you see priceless furniture and giant 72-inch flat screen plasma TVs. You walk around and you feel like a Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court. You feel almost like a bumpkin, at least I would.

I would go around and see all these things. I think, boy, this is how the other half lives. These are the rich people.

Everything is plush. Everything is expensive. You look at the car in the driveway.

You look at the carpet. You look at the hangings, genuine oil paintings. I mean, it's just overwhelming.

Or you look at the house and the house, you know, you could fit like four or five of your house in that house and you think, oh my goodness. Well, that's the impression that he's going for. And people will try to do this to you in even, in large ways and small ways.

It, people will take this on as a project. They want to impress you. They'll wear the most expensive things that they've got.

They'll wear their expensive watch. They'll wear their expensive shoes. Some of you gals know the brands that are current.

And, you know, if you're wearing this, you wear it with the tag hanging out because you want everybody to know, yeah, it's a real Gucci or it's a real, you know, Oscar, Daylove, whatever. And, you know, you want people to know what you've got. And this ostentation is designed to impress.

It is designed to put somebody up and you down. That's what it's for. So, what is their agenda? What is their agenda? Well, people have an agenda when they do this.

What is their agenda? Maybe they just want to feel good about themselves. Maybe they're a little insecure. They can't just walk around in standard clothes because they don't stand out.

They're not remarkable. They don't draw attention and they crave attention and they crave approbation and they crave approval and envy and that's what they're after. Now, you know people like this.

I know you do. They have existed in every generation. I'm sure none of you are such people, but you know some people like this, don't you? Now, think about it.

You have two choices when you run into someone like this. You can be objective or you can be subjective. Does everybody remember the definition of subjectivity? Eyes on self, eyes on people, eyes on circumstances, and you become the thermometer that reflects whatever temperature is around you.

If people are upset, you get upset. If people are happy, you get happy. If people get all impressed with themselves, why then you want to try to get impressed with yourself and you just become the chameleon trying to blend in with whatever surroundings you're in.

Any wishy-washy, mush-brained, limp-wristed person can be a chameleon. Anybody can blend. Anybody can reflect what's going on.

You don't have to be smart. You don't have to be talented. You don't have to be impressive.

You don't have to be anything to be one of the sheep. Have you ever seen the films of sheep

where they'll put a bale of hay there and they'll start the sheep and the first sheep has to jump over the bale of hay. The second sheep jumps over the bale of hay.

Then they pull out the bale of hay and all the rest of the sheep will jump in that very same place because the sheep in front of them did. And the bale of hay is not even there anymore. But that's what sheep do.

Sheep are programmed to follow. And as soon as a couple of sheep jump, all the rest of the sheep will jump in that very same place. It's the silliest looking thing you ever saw.

That's subjectivity. You've got your eyes on the rear end of the sheep right in front of you and you do whatever he does. Listen, people will get nervous if you're not another sheep.

If you don't conform and if you don't blend in, will the other sheep get nervous? Wait a minute. There's something in the flock that's not a sheep. Oh, no.

What's the matter with it? And it's, you know, a lot of animals, chickens will do this. If there's one chicken that doesn't look the same, if you pull one feather out of a white chicken and it gets a little blood spot, the other chickens will see that and say, that's an odd chicken and they'll peck it to death. If you ever have a wounded chicken, you have to get it away from the rest of them or it'll kill them.

Trust me, I was a chicken farmer and I know. That's subjectivity. Looking at everybody around you, trying to blend, trying to be the same.

Oh, I hope nobody says anything about me, especially nothing bad. If they say anything, I hope it's good. This is subjectivity.

You have no independence. You have no freedom. You're just a thermometer reflecting what's going on.

Objectivity looks at things as they are. What really counts? All of us who are adults here, we're in crowds just like you young people are in right now. And all of the worrying that we may or may not have done about our junior high crowd or our high school crowd or people that we mingled with at the time.

What do they think of my clothes? What do they think of my house? What do they think of my car? What do they think of this, that and the other? You know what it has counted for in all of our lives up to this point? Absolutely zero, zilch, nothing. I can't even remember their names now, a lot of them. I went to school with some of them for 7, 8, 9 years.

I can barely remember their faces, barely remember their names. The things that seemed so important and loomed so huge made no difference in my life. You know the things that have made a difference in the lives of a lot of us are objective things.

Do you have integrity? Are you trustworthy? Can you be counted on? Are you a loyal friend? And

some friends that I had when I was young, I still have now decades later because we had a friendship based on integrity, not based on being impressed with each other's clothes. We had a friendship based on loyalty, not based on subjectivity, based on integrity, based on character. If you want to have worthy friends, if you want to attract quality company around you, you know what has to be true? You have to be a quality person.

People of quality don't hang around with cruddy people, fickle people, disloyal people, changeable, unreliable, unpredictable people. You don't find people with character and integrity and quality of soul associating with that kind of person. So if you want to hang around with nice people, you've got to become a nice person.

That's what Daniel learned to do. And he was respected through three different changes of government because he wasn't a conformist. He wasn't a sheep.

Well, this is a strategy by Ahasuerus to influence people not with the quality of his plan, not with the worthiness of his goals, not with the benefit that we'll obtain for the empire in fighting this war. He wants to do it all with charisma. He wants to do it with personal magnetism.

He wants to impress these people with his stuff so that he can get their loyalty. Loyalty based on stuff, loyalty based on appearance, loyalty based on fair weather isn't worth anything. It doesn't last.

It won't stand the test of pressure. And one of the problems that Xerxes is going to have when he goes and tries to fight this war is division in the ranks because this is a superficial coalition. It's a superficial loyalty.

And he's not going to succeed in his war because this is how he went about it. If you want good relationships, if you want to find people that you can be loyal to and who will be loyal to you, don't try this method of impressing them. Be a person of integrity.

Be an objective person and seek out those who are objective. It doesn't matter if they're popular or unpopular. Popularity is a ghost and a wraith.

It means something today. It won't mean something next week. Think back three years ago.

Can you think of some people who were popular? Where are they now? Who knows and who cares? Don't do the Xerxes PR thing if you want genuine quality relationships. Well, that's what he's trying to do. He's hanging out his flags.

He's got his marble and his gold and his silver and all this stuff out. And he's going to try to impress these people. And you're going to see what kind of person he is as soon as we come back from the break.