

**Episode:** Kings and Prophets Series No. 19

**Narrator:** Zechariah, Esther

**Primary Scriptures:** *Zechariah, Haggai, Esther*

**Story Summary:** The Jews in exile in Babylon and Persia

**Location:** Babylon, Persia

**Time:** 586-475 BC

**Suggested Memory Scriptures:** Esther 4:12-14, 16; 8:17; Haggai 1:4, 7; Zechariah 1:6; 4:10

The Jews from the Southern Kingdom were taken into exile into Babylon in 586 BC. The Babylonians were conquered by King Cyrus of the Persians in 538 or 539 BC. Shortly after that, he sent either one or two smallish delegations of Jews back to Jerusalem under the leadership of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel. Those stories are found in the book of *Ezra* and *Haggai*.

The purpose of those returns was to rebuild the Temple and reinstitute worship there. The Jews were not as diligent as they should have been. Also, the people who had been living in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas greatly opposed what the Jews were doing, and got the Persians to temporarily stop them.

Zechariah and Haggai wrote to warn the Jews of God's impending punishment for their behavior, including their laziness and their intermarriage with non-Jews.

Meanwhile, back in Persia, the remainder of Jews were becoming accustomed to exile, and many were prospering financially. One of them, Esther, became queen to King Xerxes, an opportunity that became available when his former queen, Vashti, did not respect him sufficiently.

Esther's uncle, Mordecai, had once saved the king's life. He kept his relationship to Esther a secret, and made sure nobody knew she was a Jew. A new advisor to the king, Haman, hated Mordecai because he would not bow down to Haman. That set the stage for a wonderful story of deliverance.

Haman hated Mordecai so badly that he tricked the king into signing an irrevocable law to greatly harm the Jews, and made arrangements to personally kill Mordecai. His plans went off track when Mordecai informed Queen Esther, and encouraged her to take countermeasures.

Esther's responses were so wise that she not only saved Mordecai and the Jews, but also turned the situation to the advantage of the Jews. Esther's actions are remembered by the Jews in the annual festival of Purim.

A little tidbit: Haman was an Agagite, very possibly related to King Agag, the king that Saul was supposed to have killed but didn't. Since he didn't, God took away Saul's dynasty. The story of Esther may not have occurred if King Saul had obeyed God.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did Queen Esther know Daniel?
2. Why did Queen Vashti get punished so harshly?

3. Why did Mordecai have Esther conceal her background?
4. How did Esther try to get protection when asked to put herself in danger by going to the king?
5. How have Jews celebrated Esther's actions throughout the centuries?

1. Queen Esther probably lived several decades after Daniel died. 2. According to Esther 1:15-18, the officials did not want her to set a back example for the other women of the empire. 3. The Jews may have attained a bad reputation among many of the Persians because of their desire to be separate from the rest of society. 4. She asked all the Jews to fast in support of her. 5. By having the feast of Purim.

#### Application Questions:

1. According to Esther 1:8, Esther may have been taken to the palace whether she wanted to go or not. The following verses indicate that she made the best of her situation. Have you learned to make the best of your situation when you really had no choice to be in it, or do you react negatively?
2. Esther 4:12-14 is a famous passage. Name a time when God obviously put you in a situation for you to do something. Did you do it? How do you know when God is placing you to do something?

#### Application Questions for Teens:

1. Esther 4:12-14 is one of the most famous passages in the Bible. Do you think God still puts people in places for specific reasons? Do you think God has placed you in your situation for a reason? If so, what do you think will happen after you've fulfilled that purpose?
2. Esther did not act irrationally when asked to put herself in danger. What did she do according to Esther 4:16? Have you ever asked your friends or relatives to pray and fast for you when you have to make an important decision? Would you do it if someone asked you to do so?