

The events of the *Book of Esther* took place within the 58 years between *Ezra 1-6* and *Ezra 7-10*. The Jews returned to Jerusalem from captivity in three waves of people. The *Book of Esther* records the events during this time of many of the Jews who remained in Babylon. The main characters in this book are Esther, a beautiful Jewish maiden, her cousin Mordecai, a Benjamite Jew, who was also Esther's guardian (*Esther 2:7*), the Persian king, Ahasuerus (Xerxes), and an evil man named Haman. One of the main truths that shines forth in this book is the amazing providence of God working in history to preserve His chosen people against all who would have destroyed them. All of God's providence was determined to fulfill His promise of salvation by sending the Messiah into the world through the Jewish nation. It was God's purpose to preserve this nation, in spite of their sins and all opposition, to fulfill His promise to save His elect, Jew and Gentile, by His grace through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We see God's power and providence in several ways. First, Mordecai, a Jew, held an official position in the Persian government (*Esther 2:19*), and he had discovered and exposed a plot to kill the king, saving the king's life (*Esther 2:19-23*). Also, it was by God's sovereign and amazing providence that Esther became the king's wife. As queen of Persia, she rescued the Jewish people from a murderous plot to annihilate them by an evil man named Haman whom the king appointed over all his affairs and who hated Mordecai and all the Jews (*Esther 3:6*). Because of his hatred of Mordecai and all Jews, Haman had deceived the king into having a letter written and sealed by the king's ring and circulated throughout the land decreeing that all the Jews were to be killed and all that they had (their spoils) were to be taken. When Esther found out about Haman's plot, she sent a messenger to Mordecai to find out what was wrong. Mordecai sent her a copy of the edict and asked her "to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people" (*Esther 4:8*).

Esther agreed to approach the king and intercede for her people, but there was a problem. To approach the king and be accepted, the king had to bid the person to come to him, and this was symbolized by the king holding forth his golden sceptre (*Esther 4:11*). If the king did not hold forth the golden sceptre, the person who came in uninvited would die. Esther knew this and agreed to go to the king for her people (*Esther 4:16*). When Esther approached the king, she was literally risking her life. But Xerxes "was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand," a sign that he accepted her presence (*Esther 5:2*). Haman continued to plot to kill Mordecai and the Jews, but, again, by God's providence, his plot was exposed, and he was hanged on the very gallows he had built for Mordecai (*Esther 7:7-10*).

(Esther 8:1-14) - After Haman was dead, Xerxes gave Esther all of Haman's estate and gave Mordecai his signet ring, essentially giving Mordecai the same authority in the kingdom that Haman previously had. The law of the king's decree that had gone out from Haman, however, was irrevocable. We see in the next verses how Esther intercedes for her people, the national Israelites, and this is a picture of Christ's intercession for His people, spiritual Israelites. Consider the following -

(1) Esther interceded on behalf of her people as she entered the inner court of the king. Esther had said, "I will go in and if I perish, I perish." In the everlasting covenant of grace, our Lord and Savior, God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, took on the responsibility for His people and agreed to become incarnate in time and to go willingly to the cross of Calvary and actually die to pay the penalty before God's justice due unto their sins. And though He died, He did not perish. He was raised from the dead showing that, having perfectly satisfied all

that was required for their salvation, He and all whom He represented were accepted before a holy God. Oh, what beauty the Father sees in the Person and work of the Son to so accept Him and all He represented.

(2) Consider the golden scepter of the king. The beautiful Queen Esther risked her life to enter into the king's inner court. The law said that in doing so, Esther must die being condemned by the law of the land. But, instead, she found favor in the sight of the king who held out his golden scepter, sparing her life, declaring her accepted before the king. And this acceptance ultimately led to the deliverance of all her people for whom she interceded. A scepter is a staff held by a sovereign as an emblem of authority by which he rules. In the same way, there is an authority upon which the kingdom of God is established and upon which acceptance into God's presence is entered into. In *Hebrews 1:8* we read, "*But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom.*" So, we see that righteousness itself is the basis upon which this eternal kingdom is established, upon which it is entered into, and through which grace itself reigns in this kingdom. This illustrates God's grace - His favor based solely on the merits of Christ's finished work, His righteousness (*Rom. 5:21*). This eternal kingdom, inhabited by God's chosen people from every generation is based upon that which was finished and accomplished when God's justice was satisfied by Christ's obedience unto death (His righteousness) some 2000 years ago - the very righteousness which God has imputed to all for whom Christ lived, died, and arose again. And it's on that basis, the scepter of righteousness, that all of God's chosen people in Christ shall not perish, but rather are found accepted in the One Who interceded and still intercedes for them - in the beloved, the Lord Jesus Christ (*Rom. 8:33-34; 1 John 2:1-2*). It is on that same basis - His righteousness - that they are eternally delivered!

(3) Esther again pleaded with the king to intervene. Xerxes ordered another decree to be written to counter the first. This one gave the Jews the right to defend themselves against any who would attack them. Now there was joy throughout the provinces. Many even became Jews out of fear. Some enemies did attack on the previously appointed day, but the Jews were victorious over them. The king had issued a decree for the benefit of Esther, Mordecai, and the rest of the Jews. He sealed this decree with his ring (*Esther 8:8*). In the same way, any who have the seal of the King of Kings have an assurance of salvation that none can reverse (*Eph. 1:11-13; cf. Rom. 6:17-18*). To be "sealed" here speaks of having confirmed in our minds the absolute certainty of salvation by the free and sovereign grace of God in Christ wherein He truly redeemed a people, meeting every condition of their salvation through His shed blood, i.e. by His obedience unto death. And this confirmation is the work of God the Holy Spirit upon all those that God saves whereby they have a promise of the inheritance of life everlasting. This divine seal cannot be reversed (*John 10:27-29; Rom. 8:35-39*). Like the decree of the king, all who come to Christ for all salvation are accepted in their Mediator, based on the scepter of the kingdom - His righteousness imputed and received by God-given faith. They are sealed for all eternity!

(*Esther 8:15-17*) - The state of Mordecai and all the Jews is a picture of God's elect robed in the righteousness of Christ and filled with the joy and peace of salvation. This is all the work of God providentially and savingly through the merit of Christ, our Surety, Substitute, Redeemer, Life-Giver, Preserver, and our Intercessor forever and ever.