



## **"Reading the Bible Together"**

**Issue 14.**

**Books of Nehemiah (cont'd), Esther and Job.**

**March 2010.**

### **Introduction:**

We're nearly there!! I don't know about you but 1 and 2 Chronicles have been a bit heavy duty. Its a reminder though that God is there in and through all the ups and downs of history, whether we can clearly see Him at the time or not.

During this coming month we move on into the return of God's people to Israel (the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah – discussed in last month's sheet) and so into the period known as the "period of the Second Temple." This lasted from approx 510BC to AD70 (with the fall of the Temple on Temple Mount in Jerusalem, predicted by Jesus, as part of the great purging and siege by the Romans. Interestingly, the stones of the Temple still lie where they fell to this day underneath the outer wall of Temple Mount.)

### **This month:**

Sees the introduction of two new books, Esther and Job, both from this Second Temple period. Of the two, Job is probably the better known and we'll look at Job next month.

### **The Book of Esther:**

The Book is thought to date from approx 460-430BC during the time of the Persian Empire. It takes place at the Persian Court and involves Esther and Mordechai, her uncle. The story line is an epic.

The book commences with a feast organized by Ahasuerus (otherwise thought to be Artaxerxes – King of Babylon), initially for his court and dignitaries and afterwards for all inhabitants of city. Ahasuerus orders his wife Vashti to display her beauty before the guests. She refuses. Ahasuerus removes her as queen. Ahasuerus then orders all "beautiful young girls to be presented to him, so he can choose a new queen to replace Vashti. One of these is Esther, who had no parents and is being fostered by her uncle Mordechai. She finds favour in the king's eyes, and is made his new wife. Esther does not reveal that she is Jewish. Shortly afterwards, Mordechai discovers a plot by courtiers Bigthan and Teresh to assassinate Ahasuerus. They are apprehended and executed, and Mordechai's service to the king is recorded.

Ahasuerus appoints Haman as his prime minister. Mordechai, who sits at the palace gates, falls into Haman's disfavor as he refuses to bow down to him. Having found out that Mordechai is Jewish, Haman plans to kill not just Mordechai but all the Jews in the empire. He obtains Ahasuerus' permission to execute this plan, against payment of ten thousand talents of silver, and he casts lots to choose the date on which to do this - the thirteenth of the month of Adar. When Mordechai finds out about the plans he orders fasting. Mordechai informs Esther what has happened and tells her to intercede with the King. She is afraid to break the law and go to the King uninvited. This entails the death penalty. Mordechai tells her that she must. She requests that all Jews fast and pray for three days together with her, and on the third day she goes to Ahasuerus, who stretches out his sceptre to her which shows that she is not to be punished. She invites him to a feast in the company of Haman. During the feast, she asks them to attend a further feast the next evening. Meanwhile, Haman is again offended by Mordechai and builds a gallows for him. That night, Ahasuerus suffers from insomnia, and when the court's records are read to him to help him sleep, he learns of the services rendered by Mordechai in the previous plot against his life. Ahasuerus is told that Mordechai has not received any recognition for saving the king's life. Just then, Haman appears, and King Ahasuerus asks Haman what should be done for the man that he wishes to honour. Thinking that the man that the king wishes to honour is him, Haman says that the man should be dressed in the king's royal robes and led around on the king's royal horse, while a

herald calls: "See how the king honours a man he wishes to reward!" To his horror, the king instructs Haman to do so to Mordechai.

Later that evening, Ahasuerus and Haman attend Esther's second banquet, at which she reveals that she is Jewish and that Haman is planning to exterminate her people, including her. Overcome by rage, Ahasuerus leaves the room; meanwhile Haman stays behind and begs Esther for his life, falling upon her in desperation. The king comes back in at this moment and thinks Haman is assaulting the queen; this makes him angrier than before and he orders Haman hanged on the gallows that had been prepared for Mordechai. The previous decree against the Jews cannot be annulled, but the king allows the Jews to defend themselves during attacks. As a result, five hundred attackers and Haman's ten sons are killed. Mordechai assumes a prominent position in Ahasuerus' court, and commands an annual commemoration of the delivery of the Jewish people from annihilation - Purim.

Quite a story. Notice how it echoes so much of the story of Joseph. Remember what we said about God's saving history seeming to repeat itself in style and pattern. Notice also the things that are different, not just that it takes place in a different country, Persia as opposed to Egypt, but that throughout the story there is little or no mention of God Himself. Some have argued this shows the book should not really be called "Scripture," but I would prefer to pick up the theme mentioned when we looked at Chronicles and the like, and see that the author assumes God works in and through all history, which includes today!

**Bible Together Meetings: March meetings will be:**

- Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 9.00am – 10.00am – in the Chancel as usual.
- Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> March 8.00pm – 9.00pm – in the Chancel as usual.

**Scheme of Reading for January:**

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reference:</u>	<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reference:</u>
Mon 1 <sup>st</sup> Mar	2Chron 35:1 - 36:1	Mon 22 <sup>nd</sup> Mar	Neh 9:1 – 9:37
Tues 2 <sup>nd</sup> Mar	2Chron 36:2 – 36:23	Tues 23 <sup>rd</sup> Mar	Neh 9:38 – 10:39
<b>Wed 3<sup>rd</sup> Mar</b>	<b>Ezra 1:1 – 2:70</b>	Wed 24 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Neh 11:1 – 11:36
<b>(Bible Together Meeting today @9.00am)</b>		Thurs 25 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Neh 12:1 – 12:47
Thurs 4 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Ezra 3:1 – 3:13	Fri 26 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Neh 13:1 – 11:31
Fri 5 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Ezra 4:1 – 4:24	Sat 27 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Esther 1:1 – 1:22
Sat 6 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Ezra 5:1 – 5:17	Sun 28 <sup>th</sup> Mar	-----
Sun 7 <sup>th</sup> Mar	-----	Mon 29 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Esther 2:1 – 2:23
Mon 8 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Ezra 6:1 – 6:22	Tues 30 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Esther 3:1 – 3:15
Tues 9 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Ezra 7:1 – 7:28	Wed 31 <sup>st</sup> Mar	Esther 4:1 – 4:17
Wed 10 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Ezra 8:1 – 8:36	Thurs 1 <sup>st</sup> Apr	Esther 5:1 – 6:14
Thurs 11 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Ezra 9:1 – 9:15	Fri 2 <sup>nd</sup> Apr	Esther 7:1 – 8:17
Fri 12 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Ezra 10:1 – 10:44	Sat 3 <sup>rd</sup> Apr	Esther 9:1 – 10:3
Sat 13 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Neh 1:1 – 2:10	Sun 4 <sup>th</sup> Apr	-----
<b>Sun 14<sup>th</sup> Mar</b>	-----	Mon 5 <sup>th</sup> Apr	Job 1:1 – 1:22
<b>(Mothering Sunday)</b>		Tues 6 <sup>th</sup> Apr	Job 2:1 – 2:13
Mon 15 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Neh 2:11 – 3:32	<b>Wed 7<sup>th</sup> Apr</b>	<b>Job 3:1 – 3:26</b>
Tues 16 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Neh 4:1 – 4:23	<b>(Bible Together Meeting today @9.00am)</b>	
<b>Wed 17<sup>th</sup> Mar</b>	<b>Neh 5:1 – 5:19</b>	Thurs 8 <sup>th</sup> Apr	Job 4:1 – 5:27
<b>(Bible Together Meeting today @ 8.00pm)</b>		Fri 9 <sup>th</sup> Apr	Job 6:1 – 7:21
Thurs 18 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Neh 6:1 – 7:3	Sat 10 <sup>th</sup> Apr	Job 8:1 – 8:22
Fri 19 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Neh 7:4 – 7:73a	Sun 11 <sup>th</sup> Apr	-----
Sat 20 <sup>th</sup> Mar	Neh 7:73b – 8:18	Mon 12 <sup>th</sup> Apr	Job 9:1 – 10:22
Sun 21 <sup>st</sup> Mar	-----	Tues 13 <sup>th</sup> Apr	Job 11:1 – 11:20