

Bible-Reading Coach Podcast Transcript

Week 22: Esther & Job 1-14 *God Has a Plan*

Welcome to Week 22 of the Bible reading coach podcast. My name is Karl Vaters and I'm here to help you read through the entire Bible in 52 weeks.

This week, we're going to be taking a look at Esther and the beginning of Job, two very different looks, but they have some similarities. And so we'll talk about that. First of all, let's take a look at Esther. Esther is the last book in the history section of the Bible. But it isn't the last chronologically; it actually takes place between Second Chronicles and Ezra. After this, we'll go into the wisdom books, and then we'll go into the prophetic books.

But Esther, as we said, is the last of the history books. It happens actually during the time of exile before they come back in the book of Ezra. And it happens outside of Israel. Esther does not take place in the land of Israel. It takes place in the Persian town of Susa in modern day Iraq. So the Jews have been taken captive. They've been removed from their land and brought over to Babylon. They are now living in a pagan land among pagan idol worshippers. This is around the same season as the book of Daniel, which we'll get to in week 38 because he's among the prophets. So as you read Esther, don't expect to see Israelite laws and customs, you're going to see the customs and laws of the people of Persia, not Jewish ones.

Okay. So be aware that this is taking place in a completely foreign and pagan land in and around modern day Baghdad, Iraq, actually, okay. And the story that is described in Esther actually describes the events that will eventually inspire the Jewish festival of Purim, which is still honored by Jews today, usually in the month of March. In fact, let's talk about that for a moment. The holidays in Judaism can actually be subdivided into two main categories. Five of them are established in the Old Testament. In the first five books of the Bible, they're Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, Rosh HaShana, the Jewish New Year, Sukkot or the Feast of Tabernacles, Passover or Pesach, in Hebrew, and Shabbat, also known as Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks, those five were established by God. In the first five books of the Bible.

There are two other festivals and holidays that are still celebrated by Jews today that came later. This is the first of the two Purim from the book of Esther, which we'll be reading about this week. And that happened about 2500 years ago from today. And then the second one is Hanukkah, which comes from between the Testaments. And we'll talk about that a little bit when we get to that part between the Testaments a little bit. So this is the first of those two that are added after the first five books of the Bible. So let's get to it.

First of all, in the book of Esther. In Esther chapter one through two, we have an interesting story. Kings are not immune to doing stupid things. So the king of Persia, Xerxes, he's got a queen named Vashti. He calls Vashti to come into His presence Vashti says, No, I don't want to show up because you're drunk and stupid at a party. He gets mad and banishes her from his site, which is kind of rough for a king because the only way a king has the next king is he's got to have a baby and he's gotta have the queen around to do that. So he realizes, Oh, I've banished the queen from my site. I need a new queen.

So what do you do? Well, you hold a contest. And they actually did they had a contest of the women to come in and parade in front of, of the king and he chooses a woman named

Esther and he doesn't know she's a Jew. She is a slave. She is of the same slave class had he known it, she would not have been allowed to even enter. But he chooses Esther.

Now, then chapter two records an incident that's going to be huge later on. Esther's Cousin Mordecai, who was much older than Esther, had actually raised Esther as his daughter after Esther's parents had died. And her cousin, y'know, substitute father, uncovers a plot to kill the king. He tells Esther and they save the king's life. And then we have this important verse. Take note of what, when you get to it, Esther 2:23, "All this was recorded in the Book of the Annals in the presence of the king." So Mordecai saves his life, and they record it in a book this will pay off big time soon.

Then in Esther 3 a man named Haman is promoted by the king. And he hates it that every time he comes in, while everybody else bows before a Mordecai won't, because Mordecai is a Jew and Jews only bow to God. So because of that he decides I'm going to kill all the Jews, and he convinces the king to pass an irrefutable law that cannot be changed to kill all the Jews on a certain date. And they set this date. Mordecai then has a plan to save all the Jews life and that comes in in chapters four through six. He sends for Esther and says, you have the opportunity to do this, and he does so with one of the great Bible verses, Esther 4:14. When you get to it, pause for it, And who knows, but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this." It's a great little line. I love it.

She then risks her life to go to the king. Remember, the previous queen was banished because she wouldn't come when the king called? It is equally as problematic for you to show up when the king hasn't called. So Esther shows up, the king allows her to come into His presence. And she doesn't ask him directly for something, she says, I want to ask you for something but she's gonna soften them up first. She says I want to invite you and Haman to a banquet. Haman thinks, Well, I am really special, the Queen has invited just me and the king to a banquet. They have this banquet. He then says What can I give you and she says show up for one more banquet. Note her patience here.

And while waiting for the next banquet, Hamans ego now has been so inflated. He's been promoted by the king and now he's the only one in addition to the king having been invited to two of the Queen's banquets, he's really thinking something of himself. And the next time he sees Mordecai not bow again. He is so infuriated. He's determined, I'm going to kill Mordecai myself. And he orders a 75 foot high gallows to be built, like he's going to see every, everybody is going to see his revenge against Mordecai. While the gallows is being built, the story continues.

And then we have another key verse that at the time might seem insignificant, Esther 6:1 says this "That night, between the banquets, the king could not sleep. So he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign to be brought in and read." There weren't a lot of books. So he said, bring me my own biography at this point. And they start reading that book and what's in that book, but we've already heard it, the record of Mordecai saving the King's life. So when he hears about the story, he turns to the person who's reading and goes, did we ever reward him for doing that? He saved my life, did we ever give him something? And it turns out, No, we never rewarded him for that.

So the next day he asks Haman who's now become his right hand, man, how should I honor someone who is special to the king? Haman, his ego, so inflated, thinks, oh, he must be wanting to honor me. So he says, you want to do a huge parade and all kinds of stuff. You'll

read about it. And he says, Oh, that's a good idea. I want you to do that for Mordecai. And so Haman has to honor Mordecai, the man he's building a gallows to kill. Then after chapter seven, they get to the next banquet. A humiliated Haman shows up because he's had to parade Mordecai through the street as a man that the king honors. And the king finally asked for one more time. Come on, tell me what's this about Esther? What do you want? And Esther tells him about Haman's plot to kill the Jews, which includes her and which includes Mordecai.

The King is so angry that he orders Haman to be hanged on the gallows that he's building for Mordecai. At that point, he's wondering how do I save the Jews, I can't overturn the law, that's the kind of law that it is. But it doesn't stop him from passing another law. So he does, he passes another law that allows the Jews to defend themselves and he lets everyone know his true wishes. And then the holiday Purim, was established to honor this. And to this day, faithful Jews still celebrate the story every single year.

Well, that's the beautiful story of Esther. And then before the week ends, we're going to begin to get into the very different story of Job. So let's begin to talk about it. How do we understand this strange book that we're going to spend half of this week and all of the following week reading? Well, first of all, Job is set up in three very distinct parts. Chapters one and two set up the story where God allows Satan to inflict a godly man with unfathomable pain and loss. Then in the bulk of the story, chapters 3 through 37, Job and his friends argue back and forth as they try to understand what's going on. It's a long slog that we only begin to get into this week. I'm going to give you some idea of how to approach it this week. But next week, which we'll spend entirely in Job, I'm going to give you even more help.

But this week coming up, you'll get into some of it. And then next week, we'll finish up with the last few chapters where God responds to their anger into their arguments and tells them you've got it all wrong, but doesn't really give them a full explanation either. So again, that'll be the following week. All of that is coming.

But first, let's take a look at what we'll be looking at this week. First of all, Job chapters one and two. We have this strange segment where God and Satan talk at a time when the angels came before the throne of God. And they do this wager. And the question is, where does this even take place? Is it in heaven? Is it somewhere else? And we don't really know. The best explanation I ever heard about what this was was by a man Named Murray Dempster, who used to be the president of Vanguard University, here in Southern California here just just a couple of miles from my house, actually. And he talked about it like this.

He says, Job presents itself like a play and I want you to imagine a play on stage, which is a lower stage and an upper stage. And the lower stage is not just below the upper stage, but it's in front of the upper stage, which means people on the lower stage can't see what's above and behind them. But the people above them behind them on the upper stage can see down and can see what's on the lower stage. Job and his friends live on the lower stage, they don't even know there's an upper stage, let alone know to look back at it. But those on the upper stage can look down. The spiritual world is the upper stage where God and Satan, you're having this conversation is the upper stage and they can look down at Job, the job and his friends don't have any idea that what they're doing is a part of what's happening on the upper stage up and behind them. It's not a literal way that this book plays out. But it's a great way to visualize what's actually happening here. So that's the first part of the way of kind of looking at Job.

Secondly, the question is, you know, when does all this take place, and there are actually two times to consider here, when the actual events took place. And when the events were written about, first of all, Job lived, probably around the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we don't have a time stamp on it. But everything about Job's life matches the era of what we call the patriarchs of the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So very, you know, back in Genesis is around the time that it took place, okay, before Moses, but after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all those cultural markings match that time. But then when was the book written, some believe that it may have been written as the oldest part of the Bible, because it has ideas and understanding about God that are very underdeveloped.

But while it was one of the oldest written we know, it had to have been after the Torah, after Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Why? Because in the book of Job, Yahweh is used as the name of God 25 times, and all but one is from the first and the last chapters on the upper stage. So somebody could not have written Job before God appeared to Moses, and Moses asked God, what's your name, and God gave him his name. And so Moses, then not long after that, you know, before the 40 years of wilderness wandering, you're done, he writes the first five books of the Bible. So this book, while it took place during the time of Abraham had to have been written after the time of Moses, because of that. It is really interesting, however, that again, we can't see it in English, because it's about the original Hebrew. But in the original Hebrew, it is only those on the upper stage who know God's name yet. And the people on the lower stage don't know God's name yet. So it's an interesting play there that the Bible shows us to understand how much is really known in the spiritual world, compared to what we know, in the physical world.

So they then have these arguments and go back and forth, and we begin to get into them this week. But we know that by the end of this book, God's gonna look at them all and go, y'all got it wrong. So the question becomes, what is it the arguers are missing? And there are two things that those who do the argument with Job are missing. First of all, there... well, actually, before we get to what they're missing, let's talk about what they did, right. Let's give them some benefit of the doubt. First of all, they show up wonderfully. Job 4:1 tells us that they come, they sit with their friend for seven days and seven nights and they don't say anything. And we read that in Job chapter two, sorry, not Job chapter four.

But then in Job chapter four, when they do begin to speak, here's where the trouble begins. Job chapter four, verse five says this, "But now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged." Well, yeah, I've lost all my loved ones, I've lost all my wealth, and I'm sick as can be, and sitting here in such misery that I'm scraping the skin off my body to get some relief. And then in verse seven, of Job four, he says, "Consider now, who being innocent has ever perished, where were the upright ever destroyed?" Today, we look around and go 'In a lot of places.' Christians are persecuted all over the place. But they had such an incomplete understanding of God and of what he did in the world. And what would happen to those who followed God that they couldn't conceive of it, they had a wrong theology that is still around today, unfortunately, that if you do well, God will bless you with stuff. And if you haven't been blessed with stuff, then you probably haven't had enough faith. That is the wrong theology that they primarily have here.

So what's missing is, they don't have an understanding of the upper stage of the theological world and of the spiritual world. In fact, at this point, it is probable that Job and his friends have no understanding that a being such as Satan actually exists. If you read through all

of that section, in the middle, you'll notice they talk about 'Where did all the bad stuff come from?' And no one says, 'Well, we have an enemy in the spiritual world. There's a Satan, there's the devil. What about the serpent?' They all can't figure out how these bad things happen, because they must have come from God. So they have an incomplete theology. Sometimes we do that today. We look around and go, God, why did you do this? And the answer is often, he didn't, Satan did. Or we allowed Satan to do so or by being tempted we stepped outside of God's will.

A full theology doesn't start and end with Satan, but it has to include the reality of evil and the person of Satan. And they don't know that yet. As an example, Job five, verses six and seven, "For hardship does not spring from the soil, nor does the trouble sprout from the ground. Yet man is born to trouble as surely as the sparks fly upward," one of their questions is where do bad things come from. It doesn't just grow from the ground. Well, it comes from the Father of Lies, lies come from the father of lies. Darkness comes from the father of darkness comes from the enemy, but they don't know that yet. So just like there were as a long time that passed with people worshiping God, and they didn't know his name until Moses asked it. There's a whole bunch of time that passes in the Old Testament without them having a full understanding of Satan either. And, of course, until the New Testament, they don't even have a fuller understanding of grace, right?

These understandings develop over time as, as we spend more time with God, as God communicates with us more clearly, and as more of his will is shown to us. So, as you read Job, note that Job's friends don't have an incorrect theology, as much as they have an incomplete theology, and they have incomplete compassion. And because of that, they express wrong thoughts about it.

So in Job 3 through 14, which is what we'll finish this week's reading with, the week we'll end with this, the beginning of this long section of back and forth arguments. And the essence of the argument is this. Job's friends will say to him chapter after chapter after chapter, you must have done something wrong to be treated like this by God, and Job insisting, "But I haven't done anything wrong". And that theological argument continues today.

So what do we do as we conclude? A lot of interesting stuff coming this week. First of all, note this, both of the books that we'll be reading out of this week have very unique takes on God and on the spiritual world. Esther, for instance, has almost no connection to the spiritual world. It's one of only two books in the entire Bible that don't mention God by title or by name. The other one is Song of Solomon. Read through Esther notice, God doesn't appear at all he's not he's not even talked about. But its theology and morality is so rich that it starts a Jewish holiday that they still observe today. Okay.

Job on the other side shows us that there's always something going on spiritually, even if we don't see it. So in both situations, Esther and Job, there's, there's people who choose to do the right thing, even without a full understanding of who God really is. Because we are made in the image of God and when we pay attention to how God made us, we will pay attention to living the way he wants us to, even if our theology isn't mature enough to understand everything altogether.

And then finally, note this. Note how a mature and godly person responds to suffering. Let me conclude with these two short passages out of the book of Job. We'll read these this week at the end of the week. Job 1:21, Job says this, "Naked I came from my mother's womb,

and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away may the name of the Lord be praised." In all of this Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing, what an extraordinary statement of faith. And then even later on, when his wife sees all this going on and thinks this is you've done something wrong. Let's just get out of this Job in 2:9 says this, "His wife said to him, 'Are you still maintaining your integrity, curse God and die.'" Verse 10, he replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman, shall we accept good from God and not trouble?" In all this Job did not sin. In what he said Job did not sin. Job never accused God with wrongdoing. You have endured the suffering he didn't understand at all. But he honored God and kept his integrity and what a lesson that is for us.

Sometimes it's challenging when we look at Job especially to wonder, what's the lesson? Well, there's a primary lesson. Sometimes bad things happen to good people. And if we happen to be the relatively good person, although in the New Testament, when Jesus is asked about that, right, there's further theology, we'll talk about goodness later. But when bad things happen to apparently good people, even if they happen to us, we have to look at it and go, You know what God knows better than I do. I will not reject God, I will not sin against God and what I do, or in what I say, that's the great lesson. Let's take that in this week. Hope you have a great time reading these two very different passages. But there's a lot of good stuff to get out of it. Thanks. We'll see you next week.

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