Synopsis of the Books of the Bible

Esther

John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)

Public domain edition

Summary

The condition of the people in the land till Christ's coming as shown by Nehemiah

The Book of Nehemiah has shewn us Judah reinstated in the land, but deprived of the presence of God, except as to general blessing, and unacknowledged by God as His people; so that, whatever length of time may elapse, their condition leads us morally up to the moment when the Messiah should be presented to seal up prophecy, to finish the transgression, and to bring in everlasting righteousness. That book gave us the last word — until the coming of Christ — of the history of Israel; and that, in grace and patience on God's part.

The Jews' position out of the land but under God's hand shown in Esther

The Book of Esther shews us the position of Israel, or, to speak more accurately, the position of the Jews, out of their own land, and looked at as under the hand of God, and as the object of His care. That He still cared for them (which this book proves to us), when they no longer held any position owned by God, and had, on their part, lost all title to His protection, is an extremely touching and important fact in the dealings of God. If, when His people are in such a state as this, God cannot reveal Himself to them — which is manifest — He yet continues to think of them. God reveals to us here, not an open interposition on His part in favour of His people, which could no longer take place, but that providential care which secured their existence and their preservation in the midst of their enemies. Those who were in danger were of the captivity of Judah (Esther 2:5-6), and of those who had not returned to the land of Canaan. If this betrays a want of faith and energy on their part, and of affection for the house and city of God, we must see in it so much the greater proof of the absolute and sovereign goodness, absolute and sovereign faithfulness, of that God Himself.

God's secret, sovereign and unfailing care

We see then in this history, the secret and providential care that God takes of the Jews, when, although maintaining their position, as Jews, they have entirely fallen from all outward relation to Him, are deprived of all the rights of God's people, and are stripped of the promises, in the fulfilment of which, as offered them by the mercy of God at that time in Jerusalem, they take no interest. Even in this condition God watches over and takes care of them — a people beloved and blessed in spite of all their unfaithfulness; for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance. This, when well weighed, gives this book a very touching and instructive character. It is the sovereign unfailing care of God, come what will, and shews the place which this people hold in His mind.

It has been often remarked that the name of God is not found in the Book of Esther. This is characteristic. God does not shew Himself. But, behind the power and the mistakes of that throne to which the government of the world had fallen, God holds the reins by His providence; He watches over the accomplishment of His purposes and over everything necessary to their fulfilment; and He cares for

His people, whatever may be their condition or the power of their enemies. Happy people! (compare, as to Israel, Jer. 31:20).

God's government and sovereignty over the dispersed Jews

It is to be noticed that faith in the protection of God, and an acknowledgment of it, are to be found even when the dealings of God, with respect to His promises, are not owned. We are speaking of God's government, and not of salvation. Salvation is not the question here. The Gentile reigns and does according to his will, taking at his pleasure one of the daughters of Benjamin for his wife. Sad condition, indeed, for the people of God! a position contrary to all divine law, to all faithfulness under other circumstances, but here not leading even to expostulation. The people of Israel are lost here as to their own state. But God acts in His sovereignty, and makes use of this sorrowful evidence of their position to preserve them from the destruction with which they were threatened.

Nehemiah unfolds the last relationship of God with the people before the coming of the Messiah; a relationship of longsuffering, in which God does not own them as His people; a provisional and imperfect relationship. Esther teaches us that God watches in sovereignty over the dispersed Jews, and preserves them even without any outward relationship, and that, without revoking any part of the judgment passed upon them, God shelters them without displaying Himself, and consequently by hidden means.

It was this that, as a matter of history, had yet to be made known before the public interposition of God at the end, in the Person of Messiah, which prophecy alone could reveal.

God's interposition and His ways shown in connection with the earth

This interposition appears to me to be pointed out in the circumstances of this history; vaguely, indeed, yet clearly enough for one who has traced the ways of God, as revealed in the word. We see the Gentile wife set aside on account of her disobedience, and her having failed in displaying her beauty to the world; and she is succeeded by a Jewish wife, who possesses the king's affections. We see the audacious power of Haman, the Gentile, the oppressor of the Jews, destroyed; and the Jew, the protector of Esther, Mordecai, formerly despised and disgraced, raised to glory and honour in place of the Gentile. All this, be it remembered, is in connection with the earth.

The hidden hand of God

Finally, in the details of this book there is a very interesting point, namely, the providential means which God employed, the opportuneness of the moment at which everything happens — even to the king's wakefulness, shewing, in the most interesting manner, how the hidden hand of God prepares and directs everything, and how those who seek His will may rely upon Him at all times and under all circumstances, even when deliverance appears impossible, and in spite of all the machinations of the enemy and their apparent success.

Moredcai a type of the Lord

The close of the book presents, historically, the great characteristic facts of the dominion of the Gentiles; but one can hardly fail to see in it typically, in the position of Mordecai, the Lord Himself as head of the Jews, in closest connection with the throne that rules over all.

The appropriate circumstances of the Book

The very circumstances into which this book enters are appropriate. When an acknowledged relationship subsists, the dealings of God are according to the conduct of those who stand in this relationship; but here there is no such relationship subsisting. The scene is filled, and rightly filled, with heathen circumstances and heathen manners. Israel is as lost among them, their conduct does not come forward; but their preservation, where to the eye of man heathenism is everything, and their enemies seemingly all powerful. This is all in place. Any other picture would not have been the truth, nor given the true representation of the state of things, nor brought out into their true light the dealings of God.

It will be easily understood that this book concludes the deeply interesting series of the historical books, which, through the goodness of God, we have been considering, exhibiting — as far as there has been ability — their leading features. May the Spirit, who has enabled us to enjoy that which God has deigned to reveal in them, continue to instruct us while meditating on those books which we have still to examine!