

#13. THE BOOK OF ESTHER

- 1. Esther is one of the post-exilic history books.** By use of the term *post-exilic*, we mean the story of Esther occurs after the 70 year captivity in Babylon has ended. By Esther's day, many of the Jews had already returned to The Land, while many (like Esther and Mordecai) remained in the land of captivity. In her day, the kingdom of Babylon had been conquered by Persia.
- 2. The author is unknown, though the writing style is similar to Ezra's.** The text of 9:29 may suggest Mordecai was the author.
- 3. The Date:** Although Esther follows Nehemiah in our Bible, the events of Esther occurred about 30 years earlier. The date of writing was about 470BC. Esther became queen in 479BC.

Timeline of Ezra - Nehemiah - Esther

- 586-585BC - Jerusalem destroyed and the captivity of Judah in Babylon (The Northern Kingdom had been exiled in 722BC by the Assyrians).
- 539BC - Babylon is overthrown by Cyrus of Persia.
- 538BC - Cyrus issues the decree for The Return of the Jews from Persia (Babylon).
- 536BC - Work begins on The Temple by Zerubbabel.
- 530BC - The Temple project is halted.
- 520BC - The Temple project resumes under the ministry of Haggai, Zechariah, and Zerubbabel.
- 486BC - Xerxes becomes King of Persia.
- 479BC - Esther becomes queen.

- 474BC - Haman issues the decree to destroy the Jews
- 473BC - The establishing of the Festival of Purim
- 465BC - Artaxerxes I becomes King of Persia.
- 458BC - Ezra comes to Jerusalem with the second group of Exiles.
- 445BC - Nehemiah comes to Jerusalem. The walls of the city are rebuilt.
- 433BC - Nehemiah returns to Babylon.
- 432BC - Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem.
- 430BC - Possibly a date for the ministry of Malachi.

4. Key Chapters

- **Chapters 1 and 2** - The Rise of Esther
- **Chapters 3 and 4** - The Plot against the Jews
- **Chapters 5-8** - Esther's Intervention on behalf of the Jews
- **Chapters 9 and 10** - The Deliverance of the Jews

5. Key Verses

- **Esther 4:14 NASB** "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?"
- **Esther 2:8-10 NASB** So it came about when the command and decree of the king were heard and many young ladies were gathered to the citadel of Susa into the custody of Hegai, that Esther was taken to the king's palace into the custody of Hegai, who was in

charge of the women. ⁹Now the young lady pleased him and found favor with him. So he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and food, gave her seven choice maids from the king's palace and transferred her and her maids to the best place in the harem. ¹⁰Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make *them* known.

- **Esther 3:5, 6 NASB** When Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage to him, Haman was filled with rage. ⁶But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him *who* the people of Mordecai *were*; therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, who *were* throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.
- **Esther 7:9, 10 NASB** “Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs who *were* before the king said, “Behold indeed, the gallows standing at Haman’s house fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai who spoke good on behalf of the king!” And the king said, “Hang him on it.” ¹⁰So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king’s anger subsided.
- **Esther 9:20-22 NASB** Then Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, ²¹obliging them to celebrate the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same month, annually, ²²because on those days the Jews rid themselves of their enemies, and *it was a month* which was turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and rejoicing and sending portions *of food* to one another and gifts to the poor.

6. Key People

- **Esther** - the Jewish young woman who became the Queen of Xerxes in Persia.
- **Mordecai** - cousin or close relative to Esther who became her adoptive father. Although he was willing to serve Xerxes, he was unwilling to bow down to his administrator, Haman. Eventually he became second-in-command to Xerxes.
- **King Xerxes I (Ahasuerus)** - fourth King of Persia. He reigned from 486BC until his death in 465BC when he was murdered by the chief of his bodyguard.
- **Haman** - the arrogant second-in-command during the reign of Xerxes. He recognized the king as his superior, but would not accept anyone as his equal. His hatred for Mordecai's unwillingness to bow to him fueled a plot to exterminate all the Jews in Persia.

7. Key Places

- **Susa** - the capital of Persia (modern Iran)

8. Key Themes

- **God's Protection** - There is no mention of God in Esther's story, but the fruits of His protection and intervention are evident.
- **Racism** - Haman was a descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites and an enemy of the Jews. Racial/nationalistic hatred drove Haman develop a plan to obliterate the Jews.
- **Responsibility** - Esther and Mordecai understood that although their mission to save the Jews might fail, they could not escape their responsibility to try.

9. The Contents of Esther

- Esther Becomes Queen (1:1-2:18)
 - o Queen Vashti displeases the King (1:1-22)
 - o Esther replaces Queen Vashti (2:1-18)
- The Conflict Between Mordecai and Haman (2:19-7:10)
 - o Mordecai's loyalty to the King (2:19-23)
 - o Haman's Decree (3:1-15)
 - o Esther's Intervention (4:1-5:14)
 - o Mordecai is honored (6:1-13)
 - o Haman's Fall (6:14-7:10)

- Haman's Plan Fails (8:1-10:3)
 - o Esther and Mordecai appeal to Xerxes for protection (8:1-17)
 - o The Jews defend themselves successfully (9:1-19)
 - o The establishing Purim (9:20-32)
 - o Mordecai's Promotion (10:1-3)

Worth noting

- With the exception of Malachi, Nehemiah, and Ezra 7-10, the story of Esther is the last event in the Old Testament era.
- The Feast of Purim was added in the days of Esther and was not a part of the original order of feasts. Jesus probably honored the Feast of Purim by observing it in John 5.
- The providential care of God for His people is the center-piece of Esther.

When reading Esther

- Remember that timely intercession, bold intervention, and confident trust in God's providence can neutralize every plan of evil.
- Remember that some deliverances are solely due to the intervention of God. Esther teaches that other deliverances occur when we fight the battles ourselves, energized and assisted by The Lord.