

ESTHER: INTRODUCTION

While the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah deal with the Jews who returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and the walls of the city, the Book of Esther reveals an event in the lives of the Jews who remained dispersed under Persian rule.

While the Book of Esther follows the Book of Nehemiah in our Bibles, it falls chronologically between the two Books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Book of Esther reveals an engaging account of at least nine years in the life of the dispersed Jews in which Esther, the principle character of the Book, saves her race from extinction (cf. 1:3, 2:16, 3:7).

I. TITLE AND AUTHOR OF THE BOOK

A. Title: *Esther*

1. The main character of the book who was a Jew, and due to circumstances of Queen Vashti being divorced, was selected as Queen due to her beauty and winsomeness (2:7, 9, 5:2).
2. “Esther” means “star”
3. Her Hebrew name was “Hadassah” which means “myrtle” (cf. 2:7).

B. Author: No author is mentioned specifically in the Book – author is unknown

1. Some have said it was Mordecai – yet the Book never indicates he is the author – no “first person” of “I” or “me” used in the Book, as if he were writing it when he is involved in the specific events.
2. Ezra – but some authorities see a style that is different from the Book that bears his name.
3. High Priest Joiakim – would probably have no such intimate knowledge of the machinery of the Persian court and its customs (cf. 4:11).
4. “Men of the great synagogue” – yet the Book shows the sign of a single writer not a group of writers.
5. Writer is probably a Jew, maybe a younger contemporary with Mordecai, and familiar with the inner workings of the Persian court. Having first-hand knowledge of intimate matters that became very important to the Jewish race, wrote honoring Mordecai and his cousin Queen Esther.

II. DATE OF THE BOOK

- ### A.
- The events of the Book occur during the reign of the Persian king, Ahasuerus (Xerxes) who reigned during the years of 485-465 B.C.

THE BOOK OF ESTHER
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RULER	EVENTS	SCRIPTURE
1. Cyrus (536-529 B.C.)	Jews return to Palestine- build temple	Ezra 1:1-4, 2 Chronicles 36:22-33
2. Cambyses (Ahasuerus) (529- 522 B.C.)	Letters of opposition; Death by suicide	Ezra 4:6
3. Smerdis (Artaxerxes) (522 B.C.)	Letters of opposition	Ezra 4:7
4. Darius (522- 485 B.C.)	Shushan becomes main capital; temple in Jerusalem completed – 520-516 B.C.	Esther 1:2; Zech. 1:1; Haggai 1:14-15; Ezra 6:15
5. Ahasuerus (Xerxes) (485-465 B.C.)	Esther’s husband; a 58-year gap (516- 458 B.C.) exists between Ezra 6 and 7	Esther 1:1; 2:17
6. Artaxerxes (Longimanus) (465-424 B.C.)	Ezra leads group to Jerusalem (458 B.C.); Nehemiah leads group to rebuild walls (445- 444 B.C.)	Ezra 7:1-7; Neh. 2:1, 5:14
7. Xerxes II (424 B.C.)		
8. Darius II (Nothus) (423– 404 B.C.)		Neh. 12:22; 13:23-27; Malachi 2:13-16
9. Artaxerxes II (404-358 B.C.)		
10. Artaxerxes III (358-338 B.C.)		
11. Arses (338 -336 B.C.)		
	Persian Empire conquered by Alexander the Great	

- B. The Book was probably written sometime after the events, but by one with first-hand knowledge to the events that occur (cf. 1:1).
- C. Possibly middle of the fifth century: 440-450 B.C.

III. PRINCIPLE CHARACTERS OF THE BOOK

- A. King Ahasuerus (Xerxes)
 - 1. Name is the Greek “Xerxes” which is the Persian “Khasayarsha” vocalized in the Hebrew “Ahashwerosh” – “Ahasuerus”
 - 2. Harmonizing this king in Esther with Xerxes of history:

- a. “in the third year of Xerxes’ reign was held an assembly at Susa to arrange the Grecian War (Herod.; vii; 7) – “in the third year of Ahasuerus was held a great feast and assembly at Shushan the palace (Esther 1:3).
 - b. “In the seventh year of his reign Xerxes returned defeated from Greece and consoled himself by the pleasures of the harem (Herod.; ix; 108) – “Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus... in the seventh year of his reign” (Esther 2:16, cf. 2-15).
3. A ruler full of wrath and cruelty in history:
- a. Bridge at Hellespont (480 B.C.) destroyed by a storm – had builders of the bridge beheaded.
 - b. Drowned his defeat in Greece with sensuality – offered a prize for the invention of some new indulgence (J. Sidlow Baxter; EXPLORE THE BOOK, p. 262-263).
- B. Mordecai – A Jew serving in the palace of King Ahasuerus (2:5-7, 21-23)
1. A Benjamite carried away into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar.
 2. The cousin to Esther
 3. Took Esther as his own daughter when her parents died.
 4. Faithful to the King – warns of plot against King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) to Queen Esther
- C. Haman
1. Promoted by King Ahasuerus to be above all the princes – Full of pride (cf. 3:1, 6:6)
 2. Due to Mordecai’s refusal to bow down to him, Haman plotted to kill him and his people, the Jews (3:1-6, 7-11).
- D. Esther
1. Brave (4:16) – “and if I perish, I perish.”
 2. Intervened to save her people from total destruction.

IV. PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

- A. To show the PROVIDENCE of God working among his people who are dispersed throughout the Persian Empire.
- B. Though dispersed and doomed to destruction by a royal decree, the Jews were saved by God.
- C. The name of God is not mentioned, but He is working behind the scenes of human events to preserve His people.

V. THE FEAST OF PURIM

- A. Pur – “the lot”
- B. Celebrated by the Jews on the 14th and 15th days of the month Adar
- C. Name comes from the lots being cast according to the plan of Haman to determine the time to destroy the Jews (Esther 3:7, 12).
- D. God, through human events, overturned the plan and saved the Jews from destruction – therefore the celebration (9:20-22).

VI. OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

- I. CRISIS ANTICIPATED (Chapters 1-5)
 - A. Queen Vashti deposed (Chapter 1)
 - B. Esther selected as Queen (Chapter 2)
 - C. Haman plots to destroy all Jews (Chapter 3)
 - D. Mordecai pleads for help and intervention (Chapter 4)
 - E. Esther contrives aid (Chapter 5)
- II. CRISIS OVERRULED (Chapters 6-10)
 - A. Mordecai is honored (Chapter 6)
 - B. Haman is executed (Chapter 7)
 - C. The Jews are avenged (Chapter 8)
 - D. Purim is instituted (Chapter 9)
 - E. Mordecai is exalted (Chapter 10)