

## ESTHER (Teacher's Edition)

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### AUTHOR-

For centuries scholars have debated the question of who wrote the Book of Esther. The Jewish historian Josephus claimed **Mordecai** wrote it. But many modern scholars dispute this because **Mordecai** is mentioned in the **past tense** in the final chapter of the book. Until new evidence emerges, the author must remain unknown, but we do know it must have been a Jew who was very familiar with Persian **customs and words**.

## **WHEN THE BOOK WAS WRITTEN-**

The question of date can be answered with greater certainty. The Persian king Ahasuerus is generally believed to be Xerxes 1 (Xerxes is the **Greek version** of Ahasuerus) who succeeded Darius 1 in 485 B.C. and ruled for **20 years** over 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia. He lived in the Persian capital of Shushan. At this time there were still many Jews living in Babylon under Persian rule though they had been free to go back to Jerusalem for over fifty years. The story itself takes place over a period of **4 years** starting in the **third** year of Xerxes' reign. Since we know the reign of Xerxes lasted for about 20 years, beginning about 485 B.C., Esther must have been written some time shortly after **465 B.C.**

## **ABOUT THE BOOK-**

What an awesome book! A friend of mine said that this book could be a perfect screenplay without any adjustments. How true!

The Book of Esther is valuable historically because it gives us a view of the Jewish people who were scattered throughout the ancient world about 475 B.C. The events in the book occurred about **100 years** after the leading citizens of the Jewish nation were carried into exile by Babylon in 587 B.C. Shortly after the Persians overthrew the Babylonians, they allowed the Jewish exiles to return to their native land. Many did return to Jerusalem, but thousands of Jewish citizens chose to remain in Persia, probably because this had become home to them during their long separation from their native land. Thus, this book shows clearly that God **protects His Chosen People**, even when they are **scattered** among the nations of the world.

Esther is a major chapter in the **struggle** of the people of God to survive in the midst of a hostile world. Beginning with the Book of Genesis, God had made it clear that **he would bless** His Covenant People and bring a curse upon those who tried to do them harm (**Gen 12:1,3**). The Book of Esther shows how God has kept this promise at **every stage** of history. Just as Haman met his death on the gallows, we can trust God to **protect us** from the enemy, Satan, and to work out His ultimate purpose of redemption in our lives.

One unusual fact about this book is that it **never mentions the name of God**. For this reason some people believe Esther has no place in the Bible. They see it as nothing but a fiercely patriotic Jewish book that celebrates the victory of the Jews over their enemies.

This harsh criticism is unfair to Esther. A careful reading will reveal that the book does have a spiritual base. Queen Esther calls the people **to prayer** and **fasting** (4:16), and God's protection of His people speaks of **His providence**. The book also teaches a valuable lesson about the **sovereignty** of God: although the enemies of the Covenant People may triumph for a season, He holds the key to **ultimate victory**.

Something of note that is a great lesson for us today is that Mordecai and Esther **feared God and not man**. Regardless of the consequences, Mordecai refused to pay homage to Haman. Esther risked her life for the sake of her people by going to the king unsummoned. Their mission seemed always to be the saving of the life the enemy was trying to destroy.

In fact, in their working for God they demonstrate one of the great lessons of this book: **teamwork**.

Their successful partnering reflects the unity Jesus prayed for in John 17. The success of their individual roles, even their very survival, **depended on their unity**.

### **A BASIC ASSESSMENT OF ESTHER (BASIC THEMES)-**

The facts and significance of Esther's actions, at a time when the very life and existence of her nation and people were in doubt, speaks to the role each of us should play. God's Spirit is refining and shaping us, Jesus' bride, the church, to fulfill our role in this earth.

This book helps us grasp, I believe, our potential in **intercessory prayer**. It illustrates our privilege of affecting the rescue of individuals, circumstances, and even entire nations or people groups through **prayer**. The following is gleaned from this book as a preparation for each of us to become "Esther-like" intercessors:

- As Esther prepared herself for her appearance before the king, so we should lay aside old ways and **put on the new self** (Colossians 3:5-14) and be **clothed in righteousness**
- As Haman hatefully conspired to destroy the Jews, so the Bible reveals we have an enemy who opposes all we do (John 10:10; Revelation 12:12). We should therefore not be **unaware of Satan's schemes** and we should **stand against them** (2 Corinthians 2:11; Ephesians 6:11)
- As Mordecai caught Esther's attention, prompting her full sensitivity to both the seriousness of the situation and the possibilities of her role in accomplishing a major deliverance, so we must allow the Holy Spirit to **awaken us to our roles as intercessors**. (See Ephesians 6:10-20 and consider the **international** ramifications of the prayer potential being referred to)
- As Esther did not even care about her own life (compare Esther 4:16 with Revelation 12:11) but gave herself to fasting and bold intercessory entrance to the king, so we should boldly go to the throne of grace through fasting and prayer and **break the power of evil** (Mark 9:28,29; Hebrews 4:16; Acts 14:23- which contextually is related to pray that pole will be empowered to change their nations)
- As Esther was invited to "touch the scepter", a phrase related to **authority for ruling**, so we too are called to **reign with Christ** above every principality and power (Romans 5:17; Ephesians 1:18-23; 2:6)

You might say that all of the above can be summarized in the statement: **timely intercession by believers in their proper roles can neutralize evil plans.**

### **A POSSIBLE KEY WORD-**

I actually think there is one particularly great key word for this book, which I believe is: **PROVIDENCE**. The reason for this is that one reason the book was written was to demonstrate God's **providential care** of His people in their trials and persecutions.

### **KEY VERSE(S) AND CHAPTER(S)-**

I went back to being a good boy and have only one verse as a key verse. To me the key verse is: **Esther 4:14**. This great verse speaks to the theme that God uses people who will respond to **His call** in the position **He has put them** in to accomplish **His purpose**. In that same vein, I chose the key chapter as being: **Esther 8**. The reason for this is that this demonstrates the awesome results of a person's bold action in the name of their God, in this case the **deliverance of the Jews**.

### **JESUS REVEALED IN THE BOOK-**

- **Esther was a type of Jesus. She was an intercessor who saved a people, just like Jesus**
- **The hatred towards Mordecai and his stand for righteousness is reminiscent of the hatred toward Jesus.**
- **The role of King speaks to Jesus' role**
- **The vengeance and judgment against the enemies of God's people and commandments resembles the judgment that Jesus will bring to pass at the end**

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT REVEALED IN THE BOOK-**

- **Mordecai played the role of the Spirit as he spoke to Esther, her conscience and led her**
- **The favor of Esther before her king was the work of the Spirit**
- **The revealing of the conspiracy against the king as well as the turning around of Haman's plot was the work of the Spirit**
- **The king's insomnia was caused by the Spirit**
- **The love and loyalty between Esther and Mordecai was the work of the Spirit**
- **The Holy Spirit helped Esther to intercede in fasting and prayer for her people**

### **SOME TRUTHS AND APPLICATIONS-**

#### **Esther 1:17,18**

Never forget: people become what you are, not what you preach. Your behavior is important are there are standards we must keep. Live what you speak!

#### **Esther 3:1,2; 6:1-11**

**Be delivered from hero worship; it is a form of idolatry! The fawning and flattery in many Christian circles today is nothing more than idolatry and should be repented of. Do not personally curry favor- it is a trap! God will not forget your acts of righteousness, but will reward them openly in His time-so don't promote yourself!**

#### **Esther 4:1-3**

**In times of distress or attack, develop a habit of fasting and prayer. What**

prayer does not accomplish, fasting and pray always does! Your intercession can shape and save the nations.

### **Esther 4:12-14; 10:3**

A wise person discerns the seasons and knows what should be done. Use the favor God gives you as an occasion to serve His purpose. Always employ any advantaged position for the welfare of God's people.

### **Esther 8:17**

Understand that God gives you favor in seasons- use that season to extend the kingdom and not for personal benefit.

## **Persian Customs in the Book of Esther**

The Book of Esther records events during the reign of King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) in the fifth century B.C. at Shushan (Susa), administrative capital of the Persian Empire. After the death of Darius I (the Persian king who had allowed any Jews who desired to return to their homeland to do so), his son Ahasuerus became king. Ahasuerus was the king who became dissatisfied with his queen, Vashti, and banished her, marrying Esther.

Royal Persian feasts were noted for their splendor and opulence. Esther describes the Persian custom of eating while reclining on beds or couches. All eating utensils were made of gold, "the vessels being diverse one from another" (1:7).

Special laws protected the Persian king. Esther 1:14 refers to the seven princes who "saw the king's face." These were the chief nobles who were his advisors. Only a person summoned by the king could visit him, a custom which signified his royalty, as well as protected him from would-be assassins. Esther feared going to Ahasuerus without being called, because the punishment for such a visit was death (4:11).

The Persian Empire boasted a well-organized postal system (3:13). The king's ring (8:8) was the signet ring with which official documents were signed. In ancient Persia documents were sealed in two ways: with a signet ring if they were written on papyrus, or with a cylinder seal if written on clay tablets. Among the objects excavated at the royal city of Persepolis was a cylinder seal, which belonged to King Xerxes.

The book of Esther also refers to "the laws of the Persians and the Medes" (1:19). This phrase describes the ironclad nature of the laws that governed the Persian Empire. Once a law was issued, it could not be changed or revoked—not even by the king himself.

## **Jewish Feasts**

The Feast of Purim, which was established in the month of Adar—the last month of the sacred year—is a continual reminder of the heroism of Esther in risking her throne and life to save her people and to become God's channel for deliverance. The feast did not celebrate the destruction of the

enemies, but rather the “resting” of the Jews from the oppression of their enemies. The days of Purim are characterized by feasting and gladness for deliverance and redemption through the providential care of God.

### Jewish Feasts

<i>Feast of</i>	<i>Month on Jewish Calendar</i>	<i>Day</i>	<i>Corresponding Month</i>	<i>References</i>
Passover	Nisan	14	Mar.–Apr.	Ex. 12:1-14; Matt. 26:17–20
*Unleavened Bread Firstfruits	Nisan Nisan or Sivan	15–21 16 6	Mar.–Apr. Mar.–Apr. May–June	Ex. 12:15-20 Lev. 23:9–14; Num. 28:26
*Pentecost (Harvest or Weeks)	Sivan	6 (50 days after barley harvest)	May-June	Deut. 16:9–12; Acts 2:1
Trumpets, <i>Rosh Hashanah</i>	Tishri	1, 2	Sept.–Oct.	Num. 29:1–6
Day of Atonement, <i>Yom Kippur</i>	Tishri	10	Sept.–Oct.	Lev. 23:26-32; Heb. 9:7
*Tabernacles (Booths or Ingathering)	Tishri	15–22	Sept.–Oct.	Neh. 8:13-18; John 7:2
Dedication (Lights), Hanukkah	Chislev	25 (8 days)	Nov.–Dec.	John 10:22
Purim (Lots)	Adar	14, 15	Feb.-Mar.	Esth. 9:18–32
*The three major feasts for which all males of Israel were required to travel to the Temple in Jerusalem (Ex. 23:14–19).				