

Esther

MEANING: Esther means “Star.”

1. Esther’s Hebrew name was Hadassha, meaning “Myrtle” (2:7).
2. Her Persian name was Esther, derived from the Persian word for “Star.”

AUTHOR: Unknown, but someone who lived in Persia during the time of the events of the book Perhaps a younger contemporary of Mordecai wrote the book.

TIME WRITTEN: The probable time of authorship took place between 464 B.C. and 435 B.C.

1. 464 B.C. — The end of Xerxes’ reign.
2. 435 B.C. — When the palace of Susa was destroyed by fire).

POSITION IN THE BIBLE:

- 17th Book in the Bible
- 17th book in the Old Testament
- 12th and last of 12 books of History
- 16 have preceded it. 49 to follow it.

CHAPTERS: 10

VERSES: 167

WORDS: 5,637

KEY WORD: Providence

TWO KEY PASSAGES:

1. **Esther 4:14** –if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. **Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"**
2. **Esther 8:17** –And in every province and city, wherever the king's command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. Then many of the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them.

KEY CHAPTER: Esther 8

1. According to the Book of Esther, the salvation of the Jews is accomplished through the second decree of King Ahasuerus, allowing the Jews to defend themselves against their enemies.
2. Chapter 8 records this pivotal even with the accompanying result that “many of the people of the land became Jews” (**8:17**).

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT ESTHER:

1. The name of God does not appear once in the Book of Esther. Nonetheless, his hand of providence and protection of His people is evident through the book.

2. Haman's plot brings grave danger to the Jews and is countered by the courage of the beautiful Esther and the counsel of her wise cousin Mordecai, resulting in a great deliverance.
3. The Feast of Purim becomes an annual reminder of God's faithfulness on behalf of His people.
4. Ahasuerus is the Hebrew name and Xerxes the Greek name of Khshavarsh, king of Persia from 486-464 B.C.
5. The great feast or banquet.
 - a. According to Esther 1:3, the feast of Xerxes took place in the third year of his reign. Therefore, since he began to reign in 486 B.C., his third year would be 483 B.C.
 - b. The historian Herodotus refers to this banquet as the occasion of Xerxes' planning for a military campaign against Greece.
 - c. But in 479 B.C. he was defeated by the Greeks at Salamis, and Herodotus tells us that he sought consolation in his haem.
 - d. This corresponds to the time when he had a "contest" and crowned Esther queen of Persia (2:16-17).
6. Since the rest of the book took place in 473 B.C. (3:7-12), the chronological span for the Book of Esther is 10 years.
7. Xerxes was a boisterous man of emotional extremes, whose actions were strange and contradictory.
 - a. This fact sheds light on his ability to sign a decree for the annihilation of the Jews, and two months later to sign a second decree allowing them to overthrow their enemies.
8. Esther was addressed to the many Jews who did not return to their homeland.
 - a. Not all the godly people left.
 - b. Some did not return for legitimate reasons.
 - c. However, most were disobedient in staying in Persia.
 - d. Nevertheless, God continued to care for His people in voluntary exile.
9. The Book of Esther reveals another satanic threat to destroy the Jewish people and with them the Messianic line.
10. The Book of Esther was written to show how the Jewish people were protected and preserved by the gracious hand of God from the threat of annihilation. Although God disciplines His covenant people, He never abandons them.
12. The God of Israel is the sovereign controller of history, and His providential care can be seen the world.
 - b. He ensures that Mordecai's loyal deed is recorded in the palace records.
 - c. He guides Esther's admission to the king's court.
 - d. He superintends the timing of Esther's two feasts.
 - e. He is involved in Ahasuerus's insomnia and the cure He uses for it.

- f. He sees that Haman's gallows will be used in an unexpected way.
- g. He gives Esther great favor in the sight of the king.
- g. He brings about the new decree and the eventual victory of the Jews.

SUMMARY OF ESTHER

INTRODUCTION:

A. The story of Esther fits:

1. Between chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra.
 - a. **Ezra 6:22** - "And they kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven days with joy; for the LORD made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria toward them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel."

THE BOOK OF ESTHER OCCURS HERE

- b. **Ezra 7:7** - "Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah
 2. Between the 1st return led by Zerubbabel in 536 B.C. and the 2nd return led by Ezra in 456 B.C. A 10 year period somewhere in this 80 year period between the 1st and 2nd returns.
- B. Esther provides the only Biblical portrait of the vast majority of Jews who choose to remain in Persia rather than return to Palestine.
- C. The clearly emerging message is the God uses ordinary men and women to overcome impossible circumstances to accomplish His gracious purposes.
- D. There are two divisions to Esther.
1. The threat to the Jews. (1-4)
 2. The triumph of the Jews. (5-10)

THE THREAT TO THE JEWS. (1-4)

A. The story begins in Ahasuerus's palace at Susa.

1. The king provides a lavish banquet and display of royal glory for the people of Susa, and proudly seeks to make Queen Vashti's beauty a part of the program.
 - a. She refuses to appear.
 - b. Fearing that the other women will become insolent if Vashti goes unpunished, the king is counseled to dispose her and seek another queen.
2. Esther later finds favor in the eyes of Ahasuerus and wins the royal "beauty pageant."
3. At her cousin Mordecai's instruction, she does not reveal that she is Jewish.

4. With her help, Mordecai is able to warn the king of an assassination plot, and his deed is recorded in the palace records.
- B. Meanwhile, Haman becomes captain of the princes, but Mordecai refuses to bow to him.
1. When Haman learns that Mordecai is Jewish, Haman plots for a year to eliminate all Jews, as his rage and hatred grow.
 2. He casts lots (Purim) daily during this period until he determines the best day to have them massacred.
 3. Through bribery and lies he convinces Ahasuerus to issue an edict that all Jews in the empire will be slain eleven months hence is a single day.
 4. Haman conceives his plot in envy and a vengeful spirit, and executes it with malicious craft.
 5. The decree creates a state of confusion and Mordecai asks Esther to appeal to the king to spare the Jews.
 6. At the peril of her life, Esther decides to see the king and reveal her nationality in a desperate attempt to dissuade Ahasuerus.
 7. Mordecai convinces her that she has been called to her high position for this purpose. That great statement: “Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this” (4:14).

THE TRIUMPH OF THE JEWS. (5-10)

- A. After fasting, Esther appears before the king and wisely invites him to a banquet along with Haman.
1. At the banquet she requests that they attend a second banquet as she seeks the right moment to divulge her request.
 2. Haman is flattered but later enraged when he sees Mordecai.
 3. He takes his wife’s suggestion to build a large gallows for Mordecai. He cannot wait the eleven months for Mordecai to be slain.
 4. That night Ahasuerus decides to treat his insomnia by reading the palace records.
 - a. Reading about Mordecai’s deed, he wants him to be honored.
 - b. Haman, mistakenly thinking the king wants to honor him, tells the king how the honor should be bestowed, only to find out that the reward is for Mordecai.
 5. Haman is humbled and infuriated by being forced to honor the man he loathes.
- B. At Esther’s second banquet Ahasuerus offers her as much as half of his kingdom for the third time.
1. She then makes her plea for her people and accuses Haman of his treachery.

2. The infuriated king has Haman hanged on the gallows that Haman intended for Mordecai. His sins found him out . . . He reaped what he had sown.
 - a. The gallows, 75 feet high, was designed to make Mordecai's downfall a city-wide spectacle.
 - b. It ironically provides Haman with unexpected public attention—posthumously.
 - c. Not the kind of attention one would want.
- C. Persian law (3:12) sealed with the king's ring cannot be revoked, but at Esther's request the king issues a new decree to all the provinces that the Jews may assemble and defend themselves on the day when they are attacked by their enemies.
 1. The decree changes the outcome intended by the first order and produces great joy.
 2. Mordecai is also elevated and set over the house of Haman.
 3. When the fateful day of the two decrees arrives, the Jews defeat their enemies in their cities throughout the Persian provinces, but do not take the plunder.
 4. The next day becomes a day of celebration and an annual Jewish holiday called the Feast of Purim.
 5. The word is derived from the Assyrian "puru," meaning "lot," referring to the lots cast by Haman to determine the day decreed for the Jewish annihilation.
 6. The narrative closes with the advancement of Mordecai to a position second only to the king.