

Esther

The book of Esther in that it is named after a woman

- Only one other OT book is named after a woman
- That is the book of Ruth

We don't know the author of this book¹³

- He or she had a very detailed knowledge of Persian culture, etiquette, and history
- He or she also had very detailed knowledge about Jewish customs and calendar

As we mentioned earlier, Esther fits in a period of time between the first and second returns of Zerubbabel and Ezra

- This would be just before the content of Ezra 7

Esther is similar to the book of Exodus in that the Jewish race as a whole is threatened

- But God is faithful in both books to preserve His people

Like the Song of Solomon, Esther is unique in that the name of God is not mentioned anywhere in its ten chapters¹⁴

- But this doesn't mean that God is not present

The doctrine of providence teaches us that God is at work in both known and unknown ways throughout history

- In the book of Esther, God is certainly at work behind the scenes

Ezra and Nehemiah both deal with people who returned to the Promised Land

- Esther, however, details what happened to some of the people who remained in Babylon during the Persian Empire

Those who returned in Persia were far more numerous than those who initially returned to Jerusalem

Let me introduce you to some of the leading characters in this book

- Hopefully, this will give you a little more insight and context as the plot unfolds

1. King Ahasuerus

Also known by his Greek name, Xerxes, he was the ruler over the Persian Empire from 485 to 465 BC

- He ruled over a large area, 127 provinces (1:1; 8:9; 9:30)

¹³ Ibid., 553.

¹⁴ Ibid., 555.

He seems to be a fickle man, with very few personal convictions

- He seemed to listen too much to what others said instead of making his own decisions

2. Vashti

She is the queen in the opening two chapters

- But she is not mentioned starting in chapter 3

The king commanded her to show off her beauty in front of a group of drunken men at a feast (1:10-11)

- She refused (1:12), even though we don't know why

There was concern that other ladies may refuse to listen to the king because of Vashti's influence (1:17)

- So she lost her position as queen

3. Esther

She is a young Jewish woman who was very beautiful (2:7)

- She was an orphan, adopted by her older cousin, Mordecai

She won a beauty contest and was given the title of queen (2:17)

Note the comparisons and contrasts between Ruth and Esther

- Ruth was a Gentile woman who married a Jew
- Esther was a Jewish woman who married a Gentile

4. Mordecai

He was a Jew (2:5) who served in the king's court (3:2)

- He was Esther's cousin, adopting her since she was an orphan

He became aware of an assassination plot against the king

- So he alerted Esther of this (2:21-23)

Throughout the book, he is portrayed as a wise and generous individual

5. Haman

He was a leader among the king's officials

- He was second in command

He was a sinful, prideful individual

- He abused his power for selfish purposes

He is an Agagite

- As such, he hated the Jews
- He put together a plot to kill all of the Jews and brought this before the king for his approval

The outline for Esther will follow the main thematic events

- The threat to the Jews (1-4)
- The triumph of the Jews (5-10)

I. **The threat to the Jews (1-4)**

Chapter 1 sets the opening scene for this book

- King Ahasuerus is enjoying a time of great prosperity and peace

The king throws a lavish banquet

- He invites everyone who was at the capital, "from the greatest to the least"
- The queen also throws a banquet for the women (1:9)

But when the king demands that the queen appear in order to show off her beauty (1:11), she refuses (1:12)

- We aren't told why she refused

The king is enraged that the queen would defy his order (1:12b)

- His counselors recommend that she be removed as queen
- The king agrees and a royal edict makes it official (1:22)

Chapter 2 describes the process for finding a new queen for the king

- In essence, it became a beauty contest
- *The Miss Persia pageant!*

All across the land of Persia, young virgins were gathered (2:3)

- They were given cosmetics (2:3b)

We are introduced to Mordecai in verse 5

- He is from the tribe of Benjamin
- He had adopted Esther since she had no father or mother (2:7)

Verse 6 specifically mentions the Babylonian captivity

- It is a fitting reminder of why the Jews are in Persia!

We are told that Esther was “beautiful or form and face” (2:7)

- We also know that she was a Jew

God begins to work behind the scenes, even though He isn't mentioned

- Esther found favor in the sight of the eunuch (2:9)
- She found favor “in the eyes of all who saw her” (2:15)
- The king “loved Esther more than all the women” and he made her queen (2:17)

We learn that Mordecai had told Esther not to make known the fact that she was a Jew (2:10)

- We aren't told why he gave her this counsel
- But it certainly adds to the plot of the story!

Late in chapter 2, Mordecai becomes aware of a plot to kill the king (2:21)

- Mordecai tells Esther, who then tells the king (2:22)
- The two men are hanged for their crimes (2:23)

Chapter 3 records how the king promoted Haman over all the princes (3:1)

- *There is no mention of honoring Mordecai for sparing the king's life!*

Mordecai refuses to bow down or pay homage to Haman (3:2)

- As a result, Haman is filled with rage (3:5)

Somehow, Haman discovers that Mordecai is a Jew (3:4)

- Being an Agagite, Haman would have hated the Jews
- There was a long history between the people of Agag and the Jews

Outside of God's control, this chapter is filled with sinister, satanic plans to wipe out the Jews

- 3:6, “Haman sought to destroy all the Jews...who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus”
- 3:11, the king tells Haman, “the silver is yours, and people also, to do with them as you please” (emphasis mine)
- 3:13, “letters were sent by couriers...to destroy, to kill and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, women and children”

Haman tells the king that the Jews had a history of being rebellious to the king's laws (3:8)

- He spins the story for his own purposes
- The king agrees to put the Jews to death (2:10)

A date is set for all the Jews to be killed (3:13)

- Historians have computed this date to be March 7, 473¹⁵

The Jews begin to hear the news of the date for them to be killed

- Like Mordecai, they mourn, fast, weep, wait, and put on sackcloth (4:1; 3)

Esther and Mordecai communicate with one another through Hathach

- He had been assigned to attend to Esther as queen (4:5)

Mordecai, an older and wiser Jew, tried to influence Esther in her position as queen

- But Esther reminded Mordecai that anyone who entered into the king's presence uninvited would be killed (4:11)
- That applied to the queen as well

Esther herself would be impacted by this edict (4:13)

- Mordecai hints that her being in the position as queen could be to save the Jews (4:14b)

The Jews are to fast for three days

- Esther agrees to enter the king's presence, whether she dies or not (4:16)

II. The triumph of the Jews (4-10)

Chapter 5 opens with the words, "Now it came about on the third day"

- What would happen to the Jews?
- Would Esther go into the presence of the king?

With tremendous faith, Esther puts on her royal robes and stands outside for the king to notice her (5:1)

- The king does notice her and invites her to come into his presence (5:2)
- This is an amazing act of God's grace!

The king notices that Esther is troubled

- She asks if the king and Haman would attend a banquet (5:5)

Once they are at the first banquet, she asks if they will attend another banquet (5:8)

- It could be that Esther was biding some time to plan out the details of how to tell the king about the plot to kill the Jews

Haman leaves the first banquet "glad and pleased of heart"

- He sees Mordecai, who does not honor him, and he is again filled with anger

¹⁵ Ibid., 558.

Haman goes home and consults with some friends and his wife

- The plan is to kill Mordecai the next morning
- So gallows are constructed to hang him (5:14)

Things aren't looking so good for Mordecai, are they?

- But we need to keep reading

Chapter 6 informs us that the king couldn't sleep well that night

- So he had the records of the king read to him

As he listened, the king was reminded about Mordecai's report about the two men who threatened to kill the king

- The king asks, "What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" (6:3)
- They answer, "Nothing has been done for him" (6:3)

Haman had just come into the king's court to tell him about his plan to kill Mordecai

- The king asks Haman what should be done for the person who the king wanted to honor
- Of course, Haman assumed that the king was speaking of himself!

So Haman lays out a proposal of honor

- The man would wear a royal robe
- The man would ride the king's horse
- The man would wear a royal crown
- The man would be led through the city while someone proclaimed, "Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor"

Then the king informs Haman, "...do so for Mordecai the Jew"

- Those words must have cut really deep for Haman
- Especially since Haman wanted to talk to the king about killing Mordecai!

So Haman had to lead Mordecai around the city

- This must have been humiliating
- He goes home with his head covered (6:12)

Notice the words of his friends and wife in 6:13, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish origin, you will not overcome him, but will surely fall before him"

- Those were sobering words for Haman!
- They were also prophetic

Chapter 7 is the second banquet that Esther had invited the king and Haman to attend

- On day 2 of the banquet, the king asks Esther what she wants from him

Esther informs the queen that her people would be destroyed, killed, and annihilated (7:4)

- She uses the same language from the king's edict (3:13)

Upon hearing this, the king asks who would do such a thing

- Esther tells the king that it was Haman who had come up with the idea (7:6)

The king commands that Haman be killed

- Providentially, he is killed on the same gallows that he had constructed for Mordecai
- God is at work, isn't He?

Chapter 8 has the king promoting Mordecai, giving him the house of Haman

- Now Mordecai is second in command, behind the king

Esther implores the king to reverse the previous edict to have the Jews killed

- The king tells Mordecai that he can write a letter with the king's full authority behind it

Mordecai even writes in the letter that the Jews have the king's permission to defend their lives (8:11)

- Just in case someone didn't get the second edict, the Jews would be able to protect themselves against any attempt to kill them

So copies of the edict were sent out to all of the provinces

- Of course, the Jews were pleased (8:16)

Chapter 9 recounts what happened on the day in which the Jews were supposed to be killed

- Instead of death, they protected themselves
- The Jews killed 500 men in the capital city of Susa (9:6)
- Outside of the capital, 75,000 were killed by the Jews
- Haman's 10 sons were hanged (9:14)

This chapter also mentions the Jewish holiday, Purim

- "pur" was the Hebrew word for "lot" that Haman had cast to see what day would be best to kill the Jews (3:7)

Chapter 10 records a summary statement about the king and Mordecai

- Notice how Mordecai is remembered, "great among the Jews and in favor with his many kinsmen, one who sought the good of his people and one who spoke for the welfare of his whole nation"

Earlier I mentioned that God's name is not mentioned anywhere in this book

- But we clearly see how God was actively working in the lives of these individuals
- Listen to these words from Matthew Henry, "though the name of God be not in it, the finger of God is, directing many minute events for the bringing about of his people's deliverance"¹⁶

¹⁶ Dever, 454.

Esther was a woman who was Divinely chosen for this exact time

- He had her as queen in order to influence the king

Mordecai was privy to knowledge about the king's assassination

- He wasn't recognized at the moment
- He was honored later, at the perfect time

Haman's plot to kill the Jews was almost a success

- It even had the king's full authority!

But God had made a covenant to bless the descendants of Abraham

- Also, to curse those who curse those descendants

Despite the Jews' disobedience to be exiled and stay in the land, God was still protecting His people

God is the Hero of this story

- Yet, He isn't even mentioned

There are many things that we could learn from this book

- Let me give you one to consider as you drive home today

There are going to be many times in your life when you don't know how God will act

- The cards may seem stacked against you
- Things may look very bleak
- You may not see any possible way out of your situation

In those moments, remember the story of Esther

- Recall how God was providentially working behind the scenes
- Remember God's faithful promises to bless and protect His people

Remind yourself of Romans 8:28, "**And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose**" (emphasis mine)

There is no such thing as luck, fortune, or happenstance

- God "**upholds all things by the word of His power**" (Heb 1:3)

Next time, we will start looking at the poetical books of the OT

- Beginning with the book of Job