

Esther 1

Introduction to the book of *Esther*

Esther = Greek and Akkadian word for "star"

Hadassah = Hebrew word for "myrtle"

The book of *Esther* is at the end of the 12 books of history in the Old Testament

Basic dates to keep in mind:

539 BC – Medo-Persian Empire overthrew the Babylonian Empire

536 BC – The first group of Jews returned under Zerubbabel

458 BC – The second group of Jews returned under Ezra

444 BC – The third group of Jews returned under Nehemiah

-The book of *Esther* takes place c.480 BC

-Between the *chapters 6-7* of *Ezra*

-It was during the reign of Xerxes I of Persia

Author - the Bible doesn't say

-Candidates: Ezra, Nehemiah, possibly Mordecai – maybe Nehemiah is the best candidate

When Zerubbabel led the Jews back to Jerusalem, not all Jews went (or even wanted to go)

-They had been in Persia about 70 years and were established there (maybe a little shoe shop down on the square)

-The same with Israel today – the country was established in 1947, but many Jews around the world stayed in their own countries – they were not interested in returning to Israel

King Ahasuerus (Hebrew name) or Xerxes I (Persian name)

-His reign: 486-465 BC – a great general, but a rough person

Book of *Esther* is one of the most exciting books in the Bible – more exciting than most programs on TV and movies today: intrigue, love, hatred, revenge, courage, and honor

Very interesting point: The name of God is not mentioned anywhere in the book – there is no reference to God (the only book in the Bible to omit his name or even his existence) (*3 John* talks about "the Name" – *3 John 7*)

-Some say that this was intentional – more on that later [Later: Notice *Esther 5.4* – it is an acrostic for God]

Esther 1.1-9

V1 – King: A-haz-u-e'-rus (accent on 4th syllable) – other name: Xerxes I

-Check any good Bible dictionary or encyclopedias, and you will find many historical references to this king

-After Xerxes' defeat at Salamis, Herodotus said that Xerxes consoled himself with women (a reference to the time of *Esther*)

V2 – Capital of Persia? Susa

V3 – Who was to be present for this feast? Representatives from all the 127 provinces of

Persia

V 4 – What did Ahasuerus do at this feast? Displayed all the glory of his kingdom

-How long was the feast to last? 180 days (about 6 months)

V 5 – What happened after 6 months of feasting? – a giant drinking bash for 7 days straight

V 6 – The Persians were wealthy and lavish

-Herodotus (IX, 82) speaks of gold and silver couches they captured from the Babylonians

-Archaeologists have uncovered marble pillars and the mosaic pavement in Susa [*Beacon Bible Commentary*, II, 676]

V 7 – Describe the drinking? In golden glasses, and the wine was plentiful

V 8 – "According to the law" – the women were separated from the men

-What else happened concerning their drinking? Each one could drink as much as he wanted

V 9 – What was Queen Vashti doing? Hosting the women

Esther 1.10-17

V 10 – What was the condition of the men by the 7th day? "merry with wine"

-How do you describe the behavior of men who are drunk? – terrible

-The king gave orders to his servants

V 11 – What was the order the king gave? – to bring Queen Vashti before the men and let her show her beauty to them

-Is there any indication that the king wanted her to disrobe? No, but it is implied

-If not disrobe, then he wanted her to show her beauty, as at a beauty pageant today

-Any scriptures on this subject? Read 1 Timothy 2.9-10, 1 Peter 3.1-5

World's view? If you have it, flaunt it. (not the Christian view)

-Could Vashti have justified obeying the king? Yes – he was king (obey the government); her husband; "Go along to get along."

-Was Vashti a Jew? No – a pagan living under the Patriarchal Age – yet she showed great courage here [in some ways she was more noble than Esther]

V 12 – Vashti's decision? She would not appear before the men

-Reaction of Ahasuerus? Extremely mad

-Why mad? She had embarrassed him in front of his drinking buddies

V 13 – The king spoke to his advisors (probably astrologers)

-Remember that the king was very drunk (along with everyone else)

V 14 – List of his advisors

V 15 – What was to be done with Vashti?

-Wouldn't you hate to have your fate in the hands of men like that?

V 16-18 – Their assessment of the situation? Vashti had done wrong – she set a bad example for all the women of Persia; it would encourage them to disobey their husbands also

Esther 1.19-21

V 19 – Decision of advisors? Depose Vashti (a Persian law could not be broken or repealed)

V 20 – Result of this action (supposedly)? To make all wives obey their husbands

V 21 – Decision of Xerxes? He followed the advice of his advisors

This shows how women were treated where God's religion had not gone

-Today, pagan nations have a very low esteem for women (in other words, Moslem countries)

Esther 1 – the story of great courage and modesty, especially from a non-Jewish woman

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Esther 2

Esther 2.1-4

- V1** - Note *v 16* = the 7th year of his reign; compare with *1.3* = the 3rd year of his reign – so 3-4 years between *Esther 1* and *Esther 2*
-Historians believe in this time, Ahasuerus fought the Greeks at Salamis (480BC) – the Persians were defeated
-**What does the Bible record about the thinking of Ahasuerus?** He remembered what he had done to Queen Vashti
-There seems to be a note of regret in his thinking – his conscience hurt him
- V2** – **The king's new plan?** To get a new queen
-some kind of beauty contest was to be held
- V3** – A eunuch was put in charge of training the women and giving them cosmetics
- V4** – The one who pleased the king the most would be the new queen
-Notice the double standard – the King wanted only a virgin, but of course he was not pure himself

Esther 2.5-7

- V5-6** – A new character in the book: Mordecai (mor-de-ki)
-**Whom was he the great-grandson of?** Kish
-**Who was Kish?** – A Jew taken captive in 596 BC during the reign of Jehoiachin (the 2nd group to be captured by the Babylonians) [*Beacon Bible Comm.*, II, 678]
-This would have established Mordecai's age at about 50
- V7** – **Relationship of Mordecai and Esther?** Cousins
-**the family background of Esther?** An orphan who was being raised by Mordecai

Esther 2.8-11

- V8** – **What happened to Esther?** Mordecai entered her into the contest for a new queen
-We begin to see that the Jews in Persia were not as faithful as they should have been
- V9** – **What kind of impression did Esther make on the eunuch?** A big hit – she was given a choice place
-Notice the emphasis on cosmetics again
- V10** – **Why did Esther not tell anyone that she was Jewish?** The Jews were not well liked in Persia; the Persians had some measure of anti-Semitism
- V11** – **Mordecai's attitude?** Very worried and anxious

Esther 2.12-16

V 12 – The contestants took baths in perfume, etc., for year

V 13 – Each young lady could take anything she wanted

V 14 – Each lady spent the night in the castle, and we assume that she met the king in the morning

-Some have thought that this meant that each lady had a sexual relationship with the king as a test in the contest

However, notice *Esther 2.17* – "*all the virgins*" – they remained virgins in this contest

-So there was no sex between Esther and King Ahasuerus before they were married

V 15 – **What impression did Esther make?** A good impression on everyone

V 16 – Esther was taken to the king's palace

Esther 2.17-20

V 17 – **Result for Esther?** The king loved her; she was made queen

-God was arranging things through his providence to deliver his people from the enemy

V 18 – A big celebration in honor of Esther

V 19 – Mordecai was made some king of judge (sitting at the gate)

V 20 – **Why had Esther not revealed her Jewish race?** Mordecai told her not to

Esther 2.21-23

V 21 – A very interesting development – **What happened?**

-Two men tried to overthrow King Ahasuerus

V 22 – Mordecai heard about it – **What did he do?**

-He told Esther to tell the king (in the name of Mordecai)

V 23 – **What happened?** The two men were hanged, and the event was recorded in the king's records – a seemingly insignificant event (but nothing is insignificant if God is behind it)

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Esther 3

Esther 3.1-6

V 1 – What new character is introduced at this point? Haman

-What family is he a descendant of? Agagites

-Do you remember anything about them?

-*1 Samuel 15* – Samuel told Saul to kill all the Amalekites (also called Agagites/named after King Agag)

-But Saul did not destroy all of them

-God was right in what he told Saul – if Saul had obeyed, God's people would not have faced this evil man Haman

V 2 – What were people supposed to do to Haman? Bow down to him

-What did Mordecai do? Refused to bow down to him

-Why? Because of the first and second of the 10 Commandments

-So Mordecai remembered the Law of Moses

-What did the New Testament teach about bowing down to people? Remember when Cornelius bowed to Peter – Peter told him to stand up (see *Acts 10.25-26*)

V 3-4 – When questioned about this, what did Mordecai say? He was a Jew

V 5 – What was Haman's reaction to Mordecai? He was enraged (the king was not the only one with a temper problem)

V 6 – Why didn't Haman just have Mordecai killed? He was a little afraid of the Jews

-Remember it still was not common knowledge that the queen was a Jew

-Mordecai is beginning to emerge as a man of God

Esther 3.7-15

V 7 – Time lapse? 12th year of the reign of the king (*Esther 1* was the 3rd year)

-Why was Haman casting lots? To determine the best time to have the Jews killed

-The lot fell to the 12th month (12 months later)

V 8 – Reason Haman gave for the destruction of the Jews? – different laws; they do not observe the king's laws, etc.

V 9 – How badly did Haman want to have the Jews killed? He was willing to pay 10,000 talents of silver

V 10-11 – The king agreed to Haman's plan (the king was still not aware that Queen Esther was a Jew)

V 12 – The order was given – sealed with the king's signet ring

V 13 – **What did the order include?** To kill all Jews and seize their property – all on one day
-Notice the little regard for human life

V 14 – A copy was to be sent to all the provinces

V 15 – **What did the king and Haman do?** Drank together (satisfied with themselves)

End of *Esther* 3: Old question: "What happens when an irresistible force hits an immovable object?" - Something has to give

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Esther 4

Esther 4.1-3

V 1 – Mordecai's reaction to the decree of King Ahasuerus? Sackcloth and ashes/tore his clothing

-These were traditional Jewish signs of great sorrow (as with David before the death of his baby boy)

V 2 – Mordecai went to the king's gate

V 3 – Reaction of the Jews in general? Same as with Mordecai

Esther 4.4-8

V 4 – Did Esther know about the king's edict? No

-She must have thought that something strange was taking place – maybe Mordecai was sick or in pain or in poverty

V 5 – What did Esther do next? Sent Hathach to see Mordecai and find out what the problem was

V 6-7 – Hathach went to see Mordecai – Mordecai told him what the problem was

V 8 – Mordecai's plan? To get Esther to change the king's mind and rescind the edict

Esther 4.9-14

V 9-12 - What was Esther's reply? No-one can approach the king unless he extends the scepter (otherwise death) – and the king had not sent for Esther for 30 days (in other words, the king was in a very bad mood)

V 13-14 – This is the key passage for the entire book

Points Mordecai made:

1. You will not escape destruction against the Jews

-**Note:** There are congregations that refuse to take a stand against certain false doctrines and false teachers, but they will not escape destruction

-Satan is constantly trying to destroy the people of God – we cannot remain neutral!

-To remain neutral is to be destroyed

-**How would Esther be brought into the destruction?** Someone would find out that she was a Jew

2. If you do not help at this time, God will bring help from someone else

-In other words, God will protect his people, one way or another

3. You may have been made queen for just this moment –

-We can never be certain about the providence of God

-*Philemon 15 – Perhaps....*

-**Mordecai:** God made you queen for this exact moment in world history

-God arranges things for us – to put us in key positions for certain moments in history

Esther 4.15-17

-**What indicates here that Esther had grown at lot as a child of God?**

1. Fasting – that showed some leadership in getting others to fast with her

2. She had the courage to approach the king

-*"Going for broke"* – putting all her eggs in one basket

Esther: *"If I perish, I perish."* – What a great statement

-**Other similar occasions in the Bible?** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace (*Daniel 3*)

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Esther 5

Esther 5.1-8

V 1-2 – **What did the king do when Esther approached the throne?** Extended the scepter
-the first crisis had been reached and overcome

V 3-4 – The king wanted to know what he could do for Esther
-In the Hebrew language, *Esther 5.4* contains an acrostic for the name of God – Elohim
-**Esther's reply?** For the king and Haman to have dinner with her that day

V 5 – The king and Haman ate with Esther

V 6-7 – The king wanted to know what Esther wanted

V 8 – **Her reply?** To eat with me tomorrow, and I'll make my request
-**Why did she delay?** -Maybe scared, but probably to increase the interest (like having to wait until Christmas to open presents)
-**What were the risks of the delay?** Maybe she would be discovered to be Jewish, or maybe the king's good mood would change

Esther 5.9-14

V 9 – **Haman's attitude?** Filled with hatred toward Mordecai; full of pride for himself

V 10-12 – **What did Haman do?** Went over all his accomplishments (including getting to eat in the queen's house) - He was totally full of pride
-But that was not enough – Mordecai was still an irritant

V 14 – **What did Haman's wife recommend?** For him to build a gallows and hang Mordecai on it (simple, wasn't it?)
-Haman had the gallows built
-The gallows = about 75 feet high (maybe on some high building or hill – for all people to see)
-So Haman was going to take care of that irritating Jew

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Esther 6

Esther 6.1-9

V 1 – That night, why couldn't the king sleep? The Bible does not say

-From the theme of the book, we would say that it was the providence of God

-Do you remember another night when a king of Persia could not sleep? *Daniel 6* –
When Daniel was in the lion's den

-How did the king deal with his sleeplessness? He had the official court records read to him - that would surely put him to sleep

-Have you ever tried reading the Congressional Record? Totally boring

V 2-3 – What just "happened" to be read to him? How Mordecai saved the king's life

-Question of the king? Was Mordecai rewarded? **Answer?** No

V 4-5 – Early the next morning

-Who was in the courtyard? Haman - making final arrangements for Mordecai's hanging

V 6 – What did the king say? What should I do for a man I want to reward?

V 7 – Who was the man, according to Haman? Haman

V 8-9 – How should the man be rewarded, according to Haman? A royal robe, a royal horse,
to be led through the city with a proclamation of this man's greatness

Esther 6.10-14

V 10 – Instruction of the king to Haman? Do this to Mordecai

V 11 – The command was carried out

V 12-13 – Conclusion of Haman's friends? If Mordecai is a Jew, you've had it!

V 14 – Haman goes to the banquet that Esther was having

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Esther 7

Esther 7.1-6

V1 – The banquet begins.

V2 – The king wanted to know what Esther wanted.

V3-4 – **Message of Esther?** "My people" (!) have been sold for destruction

-Notice: she did not mention the "Jews" – brilliant on her part

-If just sold into slavery, that would not have been serious enough to disturb the king (what good psychology!)

V5 – The king wanted to know who would want to destroy Esther's people

V6 – Notice the increased courage of Esther

-Haman was terrified – **Why?** Because he could see that things were going very badly for him

Esther 7.7-10

V7 – **Where have we seen the king's anger before?** *Esther 1* – with Vashti

V7b – An understatement!

-The king must have broken into a rage

V8 – **What was Haman doing stretched out on the couch before Esther?** Begging for his life

-Oh, how the tables had turned!

-**How did the king choose to interpret this?** An assault on his wife Esther

-Possibly this was just an excuse to do what he wanted to do anyway

-They put a hood over Haman's head – a sign of being arrested

V9 – Harbonah – a really swell guy – **What did he tell the king?** About the gallows that Haman had built to hang the guy on who had saved the king's life

V10 – **Result?** Haman was hanged on the gallows he built for Mordecai

-Some people have said that Esther should have shown mercy to Haman and spared his life

-But: **Could she have saved his life?** Probably not – the king was in a rage, and he might have turned on her also

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Esther 8

Esther 8.1-8

V 1 – What happened to the possessions of Haman? Given to Esther (as compensation for her suffering)

V 1-2 – What about Mordecai? Replaced Haman

V 3-6 – Next action of Esther? To approach the king and ask him to reverse the law that Haman had written for the destruction of the Jews

- Esther was desperately interested in the safety of the entire Jewish race
- She was very careful not to put any blame on the king, but on Haman

V 7-8 – King's response? My law cannot be revoked (same with King Darius and Daniel in the lion's den)

Esther 8.9-14

V 9-10 – What was the purpose of the scribes? 127 provinces - probably at least that many languages to translate the edict into

V 11 – What was the new decree that was designed by Mordecai? The Jews could defend themselves and seize the property of their enemies

V 12-14 – The decree was carried to all parts of the Persian Empire

V 15 - Mordecai was dressed in royal robes

- Why was there rejoicing on the part of the Jews? They were happy over the new edict, and they knew that God was with them

V 17b – Why were the people in dread of the Jews? Because of what had happened to Haman, and they knew that God was with the Jews

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Esther 9

Esther 9.1-10

V 1-2 – Adar – our month of March

-What happened on the appointed day? The Jews made a good defense of themselves

V 3 – Even the government officials assisted the Jews (because the dread of Mordecai had fallen on them)

V 4 – Mordecai was very powerful

V 5 - Many people were killed by the Jews

V 6 – How many were killed at the citadel in Susa? 500

V 7-10 – Who else was killed (with the sword)? The 10 sons of Haman
-But the Jews did not plunder property

Esther 9.11-19

V 11 – The destruction was reported to the king

V 12 – The king asked Esther if there was anything else he could do for her

V 13 – **Requests of Esther?** For another day to kill the enemies of the Jews in Susa and to let the 10 sons of Haman be hanged
-The 10 sons were killed with the sword in v 6-10, but Esther had their dead bodies hung before the city (a lesson in the power of God against arrogant people)

V 15 – Another 300 people were killed

V 16 – 75,000 were killed elsewhere in the kingdom

V 17-19 – The day of death: 13th day of Adar (v 1) – the 14th day for the Jews in Susa
-Rural Jews rested on the 14th day

Esther 9.20-30

V 20-21 – **What did Mordecai set aside for celebration?** The 14th and 15th days of the month Adar

V 22 – **How would they celebrate?** By sending food and gifts to their fellow Jews

V 23-24 – **What did lots have to do with it?** Haman had cast lots to determine the best day on

which to kill the Jews (see *Esther* 3.7 – the casting of the lot ("Pur" in Hebrew)

V 25-26 – **Name for this feast?** "Lots" or in Hebrew "Purim" (the plural form)

V 27-28 – To be celebrated every year

V 29-30 – A feast for all generations of Jews

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Esther 10

Esther 10.1-3

V1 – Why praise Mordecai? To show that God rewards faithfulness

Great lessons from this book?

1. The providence of God – working things out to protect his people
 - Palestine was under the control of Persia at this time
 - The death of the Jews could have destroyed the lineage of the Messiah
 - See Romans 8.28**
2. It is our duty to obey God, and God will work out the details

Describe each main character:

Ahasuerus (Xerxes I)

Vashti

Mordecai

Esther

Haman

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The Lord Works In Mysterious Ways

We've all heard the expression, "The Lord works in mysterious ways" and though it is not in the Bible, it actually is based upon a Bible concept known as "providence." "Providence" is a form of the word "provision" and is used in reference to the concern, care and preservation which God exercises over His creation. In the past God has intervened in the affairs of men through miraculous means, but He also operates within the natural laws which He created. God takes care of the animals and plant life, but not miraculously (Matthew 6:26-29). He has also promised to do the same for us, but not miraculously (Matthew 6:30-34).

Perhaps no other book in the Bible illustrates this principle better than Esther. Through providence Esther becomes queen, Mordecai saves the king, Haaman's plot to exterminate the Jews backfires and Judaism becomes the national religion. The irony of this book is that although the providential hand of God is seen throughout this story, this is one of only two books in the Bible that does not contain the word "God."

Esther Wins The Miss Medo-Persia Pageant (Esther 2:5-20) ~ At a drunken feast, King Ahasuerus makes immoral demands of his wife, which resulted in her being deposed as queen, and a search is made for a new queen (Esther 1:10-12; 2:1-2, 4). The description of Esther in these verses is that of a beautiful, intelligent, meek and quiet girl (Esther 2:9, 15, 17). Certainly not just physical beauty, but inner beauty, a pleasure to be around. If she was a faithful Jew this would be a natural consequence. According to the Law she would love God and her neighbor as herself, she would not lie, steal, covet or commit adultery and she would live like the virtuous woman.

Christians should be the type of people that others love and desire to be around. A Christian will be humble, penitent, meek, seeking to do right, merciful and pure (Matthew 5:3-9). A Christian will be abundantly morally upright, patient, self controlled, reverent, kind and loving (2 Pet. 1:5-8).

Esther Had A Support Group (Est. 2:21-23; 3:1-6) ~ Esther was not a "self made woman", but had a godly support group and was raised in a godly home (Esther 2:5-7). No doubt she learned so much by example from Mordecai and his willingness to take her in and care for her when she was helpless. Mordecai was not only giving and caring, he was also a man of principle, who was committed to doing what was right (Esther 2:21-23). Mordecai had the courage to "stick to his guns" when he knew what he was doing was right (Esther 3:1-6).

If we have and provide our young people with godly homes and a godly support group (peers), we have gone a long way toward helping them remain faithful. If a child learns godly living and Christian principles in the home, the odds are good they will continue in them (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:1-4). If the child is surrounded by godly influences outside of the home as well, the odds are further increased that the child will remain faithful (Psalm 1:1; Proverbs 1:10, 15). Young or old, it is a proven fact that most all people will imitate and behave according to their peers; which is why it is essential that we surround ourselves with Christians.

Esther Was In A Position For God To Use Her (Esther 4:10-17) ~ Because she was a godly woman, Esther found herself in a position where God could use her and she could be an influence for good. Being the type of person God can use is only half the requirement, she then had to willingly submit to doing His will. Whether or not she rose to the challenge, God's will would still be done.

If you are living a godly Christian life you are in a position for God to use you.....now let Him use you. We are His hands to help (Js.1:27), His mouth to speak (Mt.28:19), His feet to go (Rom. 10:15).

Esther Was Blessed And A Blessing (Esther 8-9) ~ What was the end result of Esther's devotion, godliness, faithfulness and usefulness? She was blessed by God and was used by God to be a blessing to other people. Esther appointed Mordecai second in command (Est.8:1-2; 9:4), she interceded with the king to save her people (8:5-6), the Jews were exalted, respected and followed (8:16-17; 9:1b).

As Christians, not only are we saved, we are blessed (John 10:10; 1 Tim.4:8; Ps.23:5-6), and we get to be a blessing to others (Gal.6:10; 1Tim.6:17-18), which is a blessing to us (Acts 20:35).

Esther is just one more example of how God uses ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. The lesson for us is: be a godly person, surround yourself with godly people, be willing to do what God would have you do and you will both be blessed and be a blessing.