

# Esther

## I. Introduction

### A. History

#### 1. Timeline

490 The Persians were defeated by the Athenians at Marathon.

486 DARIUS I died and XERXES I (AHASUERUS) ruled Persia. He was the king who married ESTHER. A Latin league was formed with the Hernici.

485 The Prophet DANIEL wrote "Daniel" in Babylon, covering 605-485 B.C. XERXES crushed the Egyptian and Babylonians revolts and deposed his Queen VASHTI.

483 BUDDHA died. Rome was at war with Veii for 9 years. ARISTEIDES was banished.

481 XERXES invaded Asia.

479 ESTHER became Queen of Persia. Persia lost Sestos and the Hellespont.

478 CONFUCIUS died. Persia lost Byzantium, Bosphorus and Cyprus. The League of Delos was formed.

474 HAMAN plotted to kill the Jews. The Crumaeans defeated the Etruscans.

473 ESTHER established the Purim Feasts. Tribune GNAEUS GENUCIUS was murdered in Rome for impeaching two consuls. DUNWALL ruled Britain and codified the British laws.

471 SOCRATES was born. Tribune VOLERO PUBLILIUS established "comitia tributa", a plebeian assembly of tribes.

465 XERXES was assassinated and ARTAXERXES I LONGIMANUS ruled Persia. He was the king who issued the

decree of March 5th, 445 B.C. granting the Jews permission to rebuild Jerusalem.

461 The Age of PERICLES, to 428 B.C.

458 The Holy Scriptures assumed a settled form. "Psalms", a collection of spiritual songs and poems used in worship and devotion, written by different authors from 1500-450 B.C., were compiled. Athens sent 200 ships to help INARUS of Egypt against Persia. Athens defeated Corinth and commenced construction on the "Long Walls" of Athens.

447 The building of the Parthenon began.

445 NEHEMIAH returned to Jerusalem under the decree of ARTAXERXES. Canuleian Law legalized the validity of marriage between patrician and plebeian in Rome. ACRAGAS was defeated by Syracuse.

444 The Jews began to rebuild Jerusalem under the decree of ARTAXERXES. ANTISTHENES founded Cynics, a school of Greek ethics.

438 The Parthenon was completed at Athens.

437 NEHEMIAH completed the walls of the city of Jerusalem.

436 NEHEMIAH organized the "Great Synagogue" in Jerusalem.

432 Priest MANASSEH was expelled from Jerusalem by NEHEMIAH for his refusal to put away his wife, SANBALLAT'S daughter. MANASSEH built a Temple on Mt. Gerazim in Samaria and used the Pentateuch. The Athenians and Corinthians

met at Apella.

427 PLATO was born.

425 The Prophet MALACHI, the last of the Old Testament prophets, wrote “Malachi”, covering 431-425 B.C.

424 The Priest EZRA wrote “Ezra”, covering 538-424 B.C. “Nehemiah” was written by NEHEMIAH covering

485-425 B.C. “Esther” was probably written by EZRA and covers 479-424 B.C. EZRA is credited with also writing “I and II Kings”, originally one book, and “I and II Chronicles”, also originally one book. I Kings covers events from 985-868 B.C.; II Kings covers 868-561 B.C. I Chronicles covers 3975-985 B.C.; II Chronicles covers 985-539 B.C.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Consistency**

### a. Accurate

Accurate depiction of Xerxes’ Empire

Banquet in Xerxes’ third year

4-year gap corresponding to Xerxes off fighting the Greeks (481–479 BC)

Accurate description of castle

Persian terminology

### b. Inaccurate?

127 satrapies vs. Herodotus’ 20 (1:1, 8:9)

Mordecai over 122 when prime minister, thus Esther older (2:5-6)

Esther not member of noble family

Size of Haman’s gallows (5:14, 7:9)

Unalterable laws in 1:19 & 8:8

One wife of Xerxes: Amestris (Possibly Vashti)

Existence of Mordecai

## **B. Author**

Talmud: men of Great Synagogue (In Ezra’s day)

Josephus: Mordecai

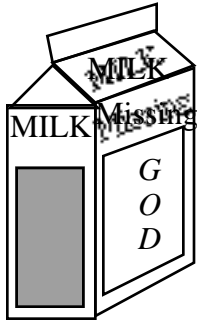
## **C. Theme/Purpose**

Jews flourishing in a foreign land

God’s providence & hiddenness

## **D. What the critics say**

“I am so great an enemy to the second book of the Maccabees, and to Esther, that I wish they had not come to us at all, for they have too many heathen unnaturalities. The Jews much more esteemed the book of Esther than any of the prophets; though they were forbidden to read it before they had attained the age of thirty, by reason of the mystic matters it contains.” —Martin Luther, Table Talk



“Esther also, being perfect in faith, exposed herself to no less danger, in order to deliver the twelve tribes of Israel from impending destruction. For with fasting and humiliation she entreated the everlasting God, who seeth all things; and He, perceiving the humility of her spirit, delivered the people for whose sake she had encountered peril” —First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians [A.D. 30-100.]

If the name of God is not there in Esther, His finger is.” —Matthew Henry (Early 1700's)

## **II. Setting**

### **A. Susa in Persia**

### **B. Between Chapters 6 & 7 of Ezra**

## **III. Main Characters**

### **A. God**

### **B. Esther**

1. Hebrew name:

2. Persian name:

### **C. Mordecai**

1. Hebrew name:

2. Persian name?:

### **D. Ahasuerus**

**(Xerxes/Khshayarsh)**

“...A boisterous man of emotional extremes, whose actions were often strange and contradictory.”

### **E. Haman**

1. Captain of the princes

### **F. The Jews**

1. People of Judah

2. Expatriates who chose to stay



#### **IV. Literary Characteristics to watch for**

**A. Parallels**

**B. Sharp contrast**

**C. Details: names, places, etc.**

**D. Repeated refrains**

**E. Sevens**

**F. Poetic Justice**

#### **V. The text**

##### **A. Introduction: Esther and Mordecai In Persia (Esther 1–2)**

###### **1. Introduction to the Court (1:1-22)**

###### **a. The Splendor of the Court (1:1-9)**

What kind of imagery is used in this section? What does it remind you of?

Note the parallel feasts.

###### **b. Queen Vashti's Defiance (1:10-12)**

What was Xerxes' motivation for calling on Vashti?

How might you have felt if you were Vashti?

Why was Ahasuerus so upset?

What would be the proper way for both to respond?

Can you think of any modern examples of this kind of situation?

###### **c. The Consequences of Queen Vashti's Refusal (1:13-22)**

What might you do if you were in Xerxes' place?

Who did the king talk to about this?

What did the king do in response?

Was he right to do so?

What happened to Vashti?

Note poetic justice.

###### **2. The Rise of Esther and Mordecai (2:1-23)**

###### **a. The Search for a New Queen (2:1-4)**

What happened between Chapters 1 & 2? How does that explain the beginning of 2:1?

Compare 2:3–4 with Genesis 41:34–37

b. Esther and Mordecai Introduced (2:5-11)

Why did Esther hide her nationality? Was this acceptable?

Have you ever been tempted to hide something about yourself?

c. Esther's Rise (2:12-18)

What allowed Esther to rise to power?

d. Mordecai's Rise (2:19-23)

How did Mordecai learn of the assassination plot?

**B. A Threat to the Jews (Esther 3–5)**

**1. Haman's Rise and Mordecai's Affront (3:1-6)**

Why wouldn't Mordecai bow to Haman?

Why was Haman afraid to attack Mordecai?

Why were the Jews in Persia?

**2. Haman's Plot Against the Jews (3:7-15)**

Why did Haman want to kill the Jews?

How did Haman decide when to exterminate the Jews?

**3. Mordecai's Counter-Measures (4:1-17)**

a. Mourning (4:1-3)

Why did Mordecai wear sackcloth & ashes?

What is the modern equivalent?

Why did they fast?

b. Mordecai's Appeal to Esther (4:4-17)

**i. Esther Sends Garments (4:4)**

Why did Esther send clothes to Mordecai?

**ii. Esther Asks for Information (4:5-9)**

Why didn't Esther talk to Mordecai herself?

**iii. An Action Plan Is Formulated (4:10-17)**

What did Mordecai mean in v. 14?

How is Esther's action like that of Jesus?

**4. Esther's Intervention (5:1-8)**

What was Esther's request?

What is she doing here?

**5. The Zenith of Haman's Fortunes (5:9-14)**

How did Haman deal with his frustrations?

Did it comfort him?

What solution did his wife and friends offer?

What gives you comfort?

**C. Reversals of Fortune (Esther 6:1-9:19)**

**1. Mordecai's Reward (6:1-13)**

Why did the king ask for the chronicles?

Why was Mordecai rewarded?

Why was Haman in the court?

What is the irony here?

Can you think of any other reversals like this in the Bible?

What is done to the one whom God chooses to honor?

**2. Haman's Downfall (6:14-7:10)**

Why did Esther reveal her nationality?

How did the king deal with his anger?

How is this just?

Did the king have the right to do this?

Is it right for us to enjoy it?

**3. Further Reversals (8:1-17)**

**a. Mordecai Replaces Haman (8:1-2)**

What had Mordecai done to deserve his honor?

Did he deserve all he got?

b. Haman's Decree Reversed (8:3-17)

In v. 5, why is Esther so verbose?

How is v. 8 like the Law of God?

How is Haman like Christ?

How would a law like this be viewed today?

What was the end result?

c. The Jews Avenged (9:1-16)

How many total did the Jews kill?

Is this moral?

d. The Celebrations (9:17-19)

**D. Conclusion: A Jewish Festival and a Jewish "King" (Esther 9:20-10:3)**

**1. Purim: The Law of the Celebrations (9:20-32)**

a. Mordecai's Letter (9:20-28)

What does "Purim" mean?

When is it celebrated?

What is the purpose of the celebration?

b. Esther's Letter (9:29-32)

**2. Mordecai's Exaltation (10:1-3)**

What is the point of this last section?

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<sup>1</sup>Wetzel, *A Chronology Of Biblical Christianity*