

Studying the Book of Esther

Why study the Book of Esther? The Book of Esther reveals God's faithfulness to His covenant people in preserving them through dangerous situations. God raises up people He has prepared to rescue His people and secure His promises to them. Believers in God should have complete confidence that He will never abandon them nor forsake them.

The story of the Esther and Mordecai and their role in the preservation of the Jewish race occurs between the years 483 to 473 BC during the reign of the Persian king Ahasuerus, 486 to 465 BC who was the son of king Darius. Esther was the final book to be accepted into the canon of the Hebrew Bible having undergone much critical attack over its authenticity. Esther is now a much beloved book for devout Jews who joyfully participate in the annual feast of Purim, Esther 9:19-32, commemorating their rescue from destruction. Also, this rescue of the Jewish people was an incentive for many Gentiles to convert to Judaism, Esther 8:17. Although, the word "God" does not occur in the Book of Esther, His faithfulness, providence and guidance is evident throughout all the events recorded in the Book.

Basic Outline of Esther

Preparation of God's People: 1:1-2:23

Peril of God's People: 3:1-5:14

Preservation of God's People: 6:1-10:3

Themes of Esther: (1) God is faithful to His Covenant Promises; (2) God providentially preserves His Covenant People; (3) Obedience of God's prepared people.

Brief Summary of Book of Esther.

The first two chapters of the Book of Esther describe the early reign of king Ahasuerus and his command to hold a feast for officials and servants in the palace in Susa, capital of the realm of the Persians. The king desired to have his wife, Queen Vashti, appear before the people, who were drinking heavily, to display her great beauty. Vashti refused and was subsequently removed as Queen. A search was then undertaken to select a new Queen and Esther, (Hebrew: Hadassah) was chosen from all others considered for this role. During this time, Esther's uncle Mordecai, who had raised and looked after Esther, had discovered a plot by two of the king's eunuchs to kill the king. The plotters were then found guilty and hanged and this was recorded in the king's chronicles.

Chapters 3 to 5 describe the plot of Haman, the highest official in the court of king Ahasuerus, to destroy all the Jews in the kingdom. Haman had been enraged because Mordecai would not bow down to him, and he convinced the king to issue a decree that all Jews in the kingdom were to be killed. Mordecai then pleaded with his niece Esther to entreat the king to remedy this evil situation. Esther planned a feast for both the king and Haman designed to gain favor for herself with the king. Haman pleased with this honor, plotted to have Mordecai put to death.

Chapters 6-10 describe how the evil plot of Haman was overturned. Before the feast Esther was preparing took place, the king was moved to have his book of memorable deeds read to him and he discovered the role of Mordecai in saving his life. The king desired to honor Mordecai and by a twist of divine irony, Haman was commanded to lead Mordecai, who was seated on a horse, through the square of the city so all the people could give praise to Mordecai. During the feast Esther had prepared for the king and Haman, she revealed to the king, the plot of Haman to kill all the Jews. In another twist of divine irony, the king who was enraged with Haman, promptly directed that he be hung on the very gallows that Haman had erected to hang Mordecai. Esther and Mordecai then implored the king that another decree be issued that allowed the Jews to defend themselves against any who sought to kill them. The Jews were successful over their enemies and fear of the Jews was on all of the people of the kingdom. After this, Mordecai sent notices to the Jews of the kingdom to celebrate their rescue by a feast that was called Purim which was to be held on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar. This

feast was to be celebrated every year thereafter. The last chapter of Esther describes the role of Mordecai who was appointed second in rank to king Ahasuerus.

Verses to memorize from the Book of Esther, (ESV).

4:14 For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

9:27-28 The Jews firmly obligated themselves and their offspring and all who joined them, that without fail they would keep these two days according to what was written and at the time appointed every year, 28 that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, in every clan, province, and city, and that these days of Purim should never fall into disuse among the Jews, nor should the commemoration of these days cease among their descendants.

10:3 For Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers, for he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people.

Resources for studying the book of Esther.

See the article on how to study the Bible for suggestions on the method of Bible study and recommended resources to obtain. Suggested commentaries and studies are listed below for a more extensive study. Some are available on-line in a pdf format.

One Hour – One Book

Scroll down to video on Esther.

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSrCJNW5eUWQMyVw_2VqW_w

Commentaries

Breneman, Mervin. *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*. New American Commentary, Broadman & Holman, 1993.

Constable, Thomas. *Notes on Esther*, latest edition. Online at Plano Bible Chapel.

Huey, F. B. Jr. *Esther*. The Expositor's Bible Commentary. Vol 4. Zondervan, 1988.

Martin, John A. *Esther* The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Victor, Cook Communications, 2004.

Tomasino, Anthony J. *Esther: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary*, Lexham Press. 2016.

Whitcomb, John C. *Esther: Triumph of God's Sovereignty*. Everyman's Bible Commentary series. Moody Press, 1979.

Studies

Chisholm, Robert B., Jr. *Interpreting the Historical Books: An Exegetical Handbook*. Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis series. Kregel Publications, 2006.

Dyer, Charles H., and Eugene H. Merrill. *Nelson's Old Testament Survey*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001.

Hanna, Kenneth G. *From Moses to Malachi: Exploring the Old Testament*. 2nd ed. CrossBooks, 2014.

Harrison, Roland K. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969.

Howard, David M., Jr. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books*. Moody Press, 1993.

Merrill, Eugene. H. *A Theology of Ezra-Nehemiah and Esther*. In *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*. Moody Press, 1991.

Swindoll, Charles R. *Esther: A Woman of Strength and Dignity*. Word Publishing, 1997.

Yamauchi, Edwin M. *Persia and the Bible*. Baker, 1990.