

Book of Esther

1. Purpose Esther

- To show God's sovereignty
- Author unknown but possibly Mordecai, Ezra, or Nehemiah
- Key people: Esther, Mordecai, King Ahasuerus (note: Ahasuerus is his Persian name, Xerxes is his Greek name), Haman
- Key place: Shushan Persia

2. Major themes

- God's sovereignty - the circumstances of the Jews in this time was not chance, but was of God's grand design. God is sovereign over every area of life.
- Racial hatred - Jews in Persia had been a minority since their deportation from Judah about 100 years earlier. Haman was an enemy of the Jews.
- Deliverance - Jews celebrate on the Hebrew calendar on the 14th of Adar (equivalent of late February/early March) the feast or festival of Purim which is God's deliverance of His people in Persia from Haman's plot to kill all of the Jews.
- Action - faced with death, Esther and Mordecai risked their own lives to save the Jews.
- Wisdom - Jews were a minority in a world hostile with them. It took great wisdom for Mordecai to survive.
- This was one of the lowest points in the Jews history. The expectation for the Jews to return to political power remained dreams unrelated to reality. The Jews live scattered all over the known world.
- The Jews could have ignored all of the traditional practices and integrated themselves into the Persian culture. Or develop some kind of special Jewish religious practice unique in Persia. Or they could retreat into a sect of Judaism and avoided contact with Persian life as much as possible. They could turn religious practice into an act of self pity and wailing. They could center their life on the expected apocalyptic promises of the Lord. They could recognize God's continuing actions on their behalf even under their circumstances.
- The writer of Esther who we aren't sure of, skillfully formulated the story of Esther to provide Israelites in Persia a model for faith and life and way to celebrate God's work in their day.
- Describes God's way of delivering his people from extermination.
- Interesting point: Book of Esther was inspired by God even though the name of God or the word God is not in the Book. This shows that God can teach his people through entertaining historical literature as well as strongly worded theological writing. God uses many forms of writing to teach his people.

3. Outline of Esther

- God works in all history even when his actions are not obvious or when he does not raise up a prophet to interpret his actions.
- Positions of influence are opportunities to show loyalty to God and his purpose for his people.
- Social status at birth does not determine one's potential for ministry.
- No age gives sufficient reason to forget or forsake the faith of our fathers.
- We must always remember that history stands on God's control.
- Historical festivals of God's people remind us of God's control of his people.
- The triumphs of Esther and Mordecai shows God's faithfulness to his people when his people are faithful.
- Understanding can come through literature that concisely refers to God only in oblique language. God's people can understand this.
- Even pagan leaders can be used of God to fulfill his purpose.
- Birth does not set limits that a person cannot overcome.
- God does not work according to worldly values and expectations. He works through committed people willing to fulfill his will and that give him the praise and glory to his honor.
- Celebrations to God's victories are open to all people of all ages.
- Persia offered the perfect opportunity for Jews to ignore their traditional heritage and become part of Persians culture. Persian Jews were reminded of God's great victories even when ruled by a foreign leader in a harsh culture.

4. How the Books of Esther applies to us today.

- 1) Esther stands as a beacon to a people tempted to treat success in a secular society for the faith of the fathers.
- 2) Trust God even in the darkest moments of life.
- 3) Make worship and celebrations of God's victory include people outside of our faith.

5. Timeline of Esther

- 1) Haman's plot to destroy the Jews
- 2) Esther intercedes for her people.
- 3) King orders Haman to be hanged.
- 4) The feast of Purim instituted.

all took place in circa 480 B.C.

Extra: Book of Esther contains 10 chapters, 167 verses, 5,637 words. Most unusual feature of Esther is that never once throughout the whole book is God mentioned.