

I. Esther

- a. Purpose: We will look at the authorship, purpose and other aspects of the book of Esther so we would be more familiar with this part of the Bible and yearn to study it for ourselves.
- b. Authorship
 - i. According to John Walton: “The book gives no indication as its author, and though some have speculated that Mordecai may be a candidate, there is little evidence available to promote any theories.”¹
 - ii. Gleaming from Jewish oral tradition as written down in the Jewish Talmud **Esther** was written by “members of the Great Assembly”: “The members of the Great Assembly wrote the following, and a mnemonic to remember these books is kuf, nun, dalet, gimme: Ezekiel [Yehezkel], and the Twelve Prophets [Sheneim Asar], Daniel [Daniel], and the Scroll of Esther [Megillat Ester]” (Baba Bathra 14b– 15a).²→ But who are the members of the Great Assembly is unknown.
 - iii. So what else can we know about this anonymous author?
 1. In considering the authorship we also must consider the date of when it was written. According to Eugene Merrill “Josephus suggested its composition occurred in the days of King Artaxerxes (464– 424 BC) at the latest, a time in which, he says, canonical books were still being written.”³
 2. Also whoever it was that wrote the book knew a lot about Persian culture and history during the time when it was an empire.⁴
 3. The author also must have access to information that only Mordecai and Esther would had known in the beginning.⁵
- c. Canonicity
 - i. Some have questioned whether Esther should be in the Bible because God is not mentioned in this book.
 - ii. We will consider the question of why God is not mentioned in the book later but to say Esther should not be in the Bible is unlikely since Esther was widely accepted as canonical.⁶
 1. Esther appears in nearly all the Hebrew manuscript witnesses.
 2. Esther is included in the Greek Septuagint.
 3. Esther appears in the Vulgate.
 4. Esther is mentioned by Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Hilary of Poitiers, Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius, Rufinus, and Augustine.

¹ John Walton, “Esther” in *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 348.

² Source: https://www.sefaria.org/Bava_Batra.15a.2?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en.

³ Eugene Merrill, “The Book of Esther” in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, B&H Publishing), Kindle Locations 12603-12605.

⁴ John A. Martin, “Esther” in *Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Victor), 700.

⁵ John Walton, “Esther” in *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 349.

⁶ What follows below is from Eugene Merrill, “The Book of Esther” in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, B&H Publishing), Kindle Locations 12614-12617.

- iii. The listing of books in the Scripture where Esther is missing (most notably Melito) happen to be incomplete in some cases or were minor listings.⁷
- d. Background
 - i. The book of Esther takes place during the early fifth century BC when the Achaemenid rulers expanded the Persian Empire as far out as the Mediterranean Sea where they were fighting with the Greeks.⁸
 - ii. During this time the book of Esther mentioned the Persian emperor ruling was Ahasueras and he is identified with Xerxes I who is the son of Darius the Great.⁹
 - iii. Other than Daniel the book of Esther is unique among books in the Old Testament in that its settings are largely outside Israel and their principal characters are primarily foreign rulers and governments.”¹⁰
 - iv. The Jews mentioned in the book are those that were scattered in Persia because of the exile of their Jewish fathers and forefathers and did not return to the promise land.
- e. Purpose
 - i. According to Richard Mayhue the theme of the book is “Preservation through Providence.”¹¹
 - ii. According to John Walton: “The purpose of the book of Esther is to show that God can accomplish his purposes just as easily through ‘coincidences’ as he can through grand miracles of deliverances. Though he works behind the curtain, he is just as much in control.”¹²
 - iii. According to Eugene Merrill: “The major purpose of Esther is to explain the origin of the Feast of Purim, the occasion for celebrating God's intervention on behalf of His beleaguered people (**Esther 9:20–32**).”¹³
 - iv. In my own words: The book of Esther is about God being a promise keeping God who will faithfully protect His people in exile from being destroyed as a people, during the reign of the Persian Empire.
- f. Structure
 - i. There are different ways people have outlined the book.
 - ii. The most easiest to remember is Richard Mayhue’s outline¹⁴
 - 1. The RISING THREAT to the Jews (**Esther 1-4**)
 - a. Esther becomes queen (**Esther 1-2**)
 - b. Haman's plot against the Jews (**Esther 3-4**)
 - 2. The REVERSED TRIUMPH of the Jews (**Esther 5-10**)

⁷ What follows below is from Eugene Merrill, “The Book of Esther” in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, B&H Publishing), Kindle Locations 12616-12617.

⁸ John Walton, “Esther” in *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 349.

⁹ John Walton, “Esther” in *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 349.

¹⁰ Eugene Merrill, “The Book of Esther” in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, B&H Publishing), Kindle Locations 12620-12621.

¹¹ Richard Mayhue, *Ordination Practicum Syllabus* (Sun Valley, California: Self-Published for The Master’s Seminary), 69.

¹² John Walton, “Esther” in *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 347.

¹³ Eugene Merrill, “The Book of Esther” in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, B&H Publishing), Kindle Locations 12624-12625.

¹⁴ What follows below is modified from Richard Mayhue, *Ordination Practicum Syllabus* (Sun Valley, California: Self-Published for The Master’s Seminary), 69.

- a. Mordecai's triumph over Haman (**Esther 5-7**)
 - b. Israel's triumph over enemies (**Esther 8-10**)
- g. Key characters in **Esther**¹⁵
 - i. Esther: Jewish maiden of great beauty who became the queen of Persia. Her courage paved the way for the preservation of the Jews within the Persian Empire.
 - ii. Mordecai: Esther's older cousin and palace official. He was used by God to deliver the Jews.
 - iii. Haman: An Amalekite, captain of the princes, who plotted destruction of the Jews.
 - iv. Ahasuerus: The Persian king Xerxes I, reigning 486-465 B.C.
- h. Closer look at **Esther**
 - i. Esther's rise began in **Esther 1** and culminates in **Esther 2:17-20**.
 - ii. In **Esther 2:21-23** we see Mordecai prevented a coup against Ahasuerus.
 - 1. In terms of what we know with history when Esther became queen in 479 BC Ahasuerus experienced a humiliating defeat by the Greek and probably as a result of this some conspirators set about to assassinate the king.¹⁶
 - 2. According to **Esther 2:23** the account of what Mordecai did was recorded in the book of Chronicles a fact that is later important to the story.
 - iii. The book plots two overlapping storyline with that of the struggle between Mordecai and Haman's attempt to harm him which is a microcosm of the larger story of Esther and Haman's plot to hurt the Jews.
 - iv. The story in the book of Esther is filled with irony.¹⁷
 - 1. A specific kind of irony: Actions and plan of actions appears to be headed in one direction with certainly unexpectedly gets overturned and reversed by a series of unforeseen scenarios.
 - 2. Esther is an undistinguished and unrecognized Jewish woman who becomes a queen.
 - 3. Esther who originally was powerless before she was a queen becomes the means God used to powerfully save the Jews from their powerful Persian enemies.
 - 4. Haman dies on the gallows he had erected for Mordecai.
 - 5. Mordecai who is despised by Haman prevail over wicked Haman and ironically takes his place of being under the King.
 - 6. God's name nowhere occurs in the book, but God's sovereignty, presence and power is seen throughout the book.
- i. Place of this book in the Canon

¹⁵ What follows below is quoted verbatim from Richard Mayhue, *Ordination Practicum Syllabus* (Sun Valley, California: Self-Published for The Master's Seminary), 69.

¹⁶ Eugene Merrill, "The Book of Esther" in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, B&H Publishing), Kindle Locations 12630-12632.

¹⁷ What follows below is from Eugene Merrill, "The Book of Esther" in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, B&H Publishing), Kindle Locations 12653-12657.

- i. The book of Esther in our English Bible is grouped next to Ezra and Nehemiah since these three are post-Exilic historical narrative books in the Old Testament.
- ii. The book of Esther shows us God is faithful even with those exile that didn't return. Furthermore it shows God keeps His promise to bless those who bless Abraham's descendants and curse those who curse them (**Genesis 12:3**).