

The Book of ESTHER

AUTHOR: Unknown

Although the author is unknown, the book bears the marks of an author very close to the events recorded, with access to written records (2:23; 6:1; 9:20; 10:2). He was also very familiar with the palace at Susa (Shushan) and with the character of the Persian king. The accuracy of the author's knowledge of Persian customs (cf. 1:19–22; 3:13–15; 8:5–14; 9:20, 29) is confirmed not only by Herodotus (a fifth century b.c. Greek historian), but also by materials discovered in Persian archives. The book is sprinkled with Persian names and loanwords. The fact that the author of the Book of Esther is not actually named does not make this book any less authoritative or canonical than those books which identify the author.

DATE: Fifth Century b.c.

The events described in the book occurred in 483–473 b.c. The fact that the author speaks of King Ahasuerus in the past tense (1:1) suggests that the book may have been written during the reign of Artaxerxes I (464–424 b.c.), the successor of Ahasuerus. Linguistically the book may be dated to the latter half of the fifth or the early fourth century b.c.

THEME: God's Providence for Israel

Historically, the Book of Esther unveils a segment of Jewish history occurring during the Jewish captivity in Persia. This historical account is not found elsewhere in the Bible. The institution of the Feast of Purim is recorded in this last of the Old Testament historical books. Theologically, the Book of Esther displays the infinite wisdom, continuing providence, and overwhelming power of God in the preservation of His people. Even the most insignificant events and ordinary happenings of the world, with its rulers and subjects, are appointed and directed by God to effect His purposes. There is the perfect union of two apparently irreconcilable truths—the free will of man and the sovereignty of God. Man's actions are undoubtedly his own even though God knows them and appoints them to be used for His purposes (cf. Ahasuerus's ridiculous command to Vashti, Vashti's unwise disobedience to her husband and monarch, Esther's tragic entry into the king's harem, Mordecai's propitious saving of the king's life, etc.). The Book of Esther reveals God's providence in sustaining Israel and redeeming the elect.^A

UNIQUE FEATURE:

God's power is everywhere seen and His presence felt, though neither His name nor the word for "God" appears anywhere in the Book of Esther. This is one reason for late objections to its canonicity and for the additions to the Greek version (Septuagint). Nevertheless, one sees His hand not only in the great events of monarchs and their kingdoms but also in every transaction of man (cf. 4:14, **note**).

OUTLINE

- I. The Setting for Redemption (1:1–2:23).
 - A. Vashti Deposed and Esther Appointed Queen (1:1–2:20).
 - 1. The Feast of Ahasuerus (1:1–9).
 - 2. The Disobedience and Divorce of Vashti (1:10–22).
 - 3. The Plan to Choose a Queen (2:1–11).
 - 4. The Naming of Esther as Queen (2:12–20).
 - B. Mordecai's Performance of His Civic Duty (2:21–23).
- II. The Plot Against the Jews (3:1–4:17).

¹ <https://sites.google.com/a/indubiblia.org/inductive-bible-study/esther-1>

- A. Haman's Pride and His Treachery (3:1–6).
 - B. The Securing of a Decree for the Destruction of the Jews by Haman (3:7–15).
 - C. The Jews' Search for an Intercessor to the King (4:1–11).
 - D. Esther's Acceptance of and Preparation for the Challenge (4:12–17).
- III. The Plan for Deliverance (5:1–7:10).
- A. Esther's Approach to the King (5:1–14).
 - B. Mordecai's Elevation to Honor by the Adversary Haman (6:1–13).
 - C. Haman's Wicked Plan Unveiled by Esther (6:14–7:10).
- IV. The Reward of Deliverance (8:1–9:32).
- A. The Jews Granted Freedom to Defend Themselves from Massacre (8:1–14).
 - B. Mordecai and Esther Honored (8:15–9:19).
 - C. The Institution of the Feast of Purim (9:20–32).
- V. An Epilogue on Mordecai (10:1–3).¹

¹W.A. Criswell, *Believer's study Bible [computer file], electronic ed.*, Logos Library System, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1991 by the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies.