

Esther

“For Such a Time as This”

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“*Esther*”

- The Targum connects the name with the Persian word for "star," explaining that Esther was so named for being as beautiful as the Morning Star
- Esther was originally named Hadassah (2:7), which means "myrtle" in Hebrew
 - the name Esther may come from a reconstructed Median word *astra* meaning “myrtle”

The Book of Esther

Under Attack

- Perhaps no book in the Bible is attacked more than the Book of Esther
 - God's Inspiration
 - Since the name of God does not occur within its pages
 - No reference to divine worship
 - Historical Accuracy

Historical Accuracy Challenged

- Esther presents some historical issues that have led scholars to debate the historical nature of the book
- Current scholarship tends to view the Book of Esther as an inaccurate historical account, though with some historical background

Historical Accuracy Challenged

- Some argue that Esther is historically inaccurate
 - None of the characters in Esther, except the king, are recorded in any of our sources for Persian history (Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, 507)

Historical Accuracy Affirmed

- Esther ends the same way as Kings and Chronicles by appealing to a source the reader may consult to verify the facts (10:2)
- Regardless of with what Persian king Ahasuerus may be identified (usually identified with Xerxes I), other sources (e.g. Herodotus and Ctesias) indicate the historicity of Ahasuerus

Historical Evidence

- The four years between Vashti's deposition and Esther's coronation (1:3; 2:16) has been identified as the period when Xerxes was occupied with the Greek campaign
 - the gathering of the nobles in "the third year of his reign" (1:3) = the assembly to discuss the Grecian campaign
 - "the seventh year" (2:16) when Esther was made queen = Xerxes' return from Greece

Proof for Mordecai

- Mordecai is an authentic name that appears as *mrdk* in a fifth century Aramaic document and in various forms in treasury tablets found at Persepolis
- The name *Mardukā* occurs in a tablet from Borsippa in Mesopotamia
 - *Mardukā* served as an accountant during either the last years of Darius or the early years of Xerxes

Proof for Mordecai

- Mordecai was likely one of the king's officials before he received Haman's job (Moore, "Archaeology and the Book of Esther," *Biblical Archaeologist*, 73-74)
 - Mordecai is described as "sitting within the king's gate" (2:19; 5:13; 6:10)
 - According to Xenophon and Herodotus, Persian officials had to stay at the gate of the palace

“Shushan (Susa) the Citadel”

Esther 1:2, 5

- Descriptions of the palace indicate familiarity with the conditions at Susa
 - “the house of the women” (2:9)
 - “the second house of the women” (2:14)
 - “the king’s gate” (2:19)
 - “the inner court” (4:11)
 - “the outer court” (6:4)

“Shushan (Susa) the Citadel”

Esther 1:2, 5

- Archaeological excavations have revealed the remains of this palace and “show that it agrees perfectly in ground plan with the structure presupposed in the book of Esther” (Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 467)

Purim

- Purim comes from “lot” which was how Haman chose the day to destroy the Jews
- Purim is the celebration remembering God’s deliverance of the Jews from Haman’s intended massacre
- Scholars generally agree that the major purpose of Esther is to provide historical grounds for the celebration of Purim

Purim

- The argument for the observance of Purim has force only if the events recorded in Esther actually occurred
- The Jews began the festival of Purim during the time of Artaxerxes' reign, and the Jews were still keeping it during Josephus' time (Josephus, 11.6.13)
- 3:7; 9:18-32

Key Words

- **Decree** (~18 times)
 - 2:1, 8; 3:9, 15; 4:3; 8:8, 13-14, 17
- **Jew/Jews** (~55 times)
 - 2:5; 3:13; 4:16; 8:13; 9:25; 10:3

Verses to Remember

- 4:14, 16
- 8:16-17
- 10:3

Chapters to Remember

Chapters 8 & 9

- Decree for the Jews to defend themselves (ch. 8)
- The Jews defeat their enemies; Purim
 - “On the day that the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, the opposite occurred, in that the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them” (9:1)

Overview Outline

Chs. 1-2: Xerxes replaces Vashti with Esther

Chs. 3-4: Haman plots against the Jews because of pride and hatred

Chs. 5-7: Esther bravely intercedes for her people

Chs. 8-10: The Jews defend themselves

Outline by Chapter

- Ch. 1: The king removes Vashti as queen
- Ch. 2: Esther chosen; Mordecai reveals plot
- Ch. 3: Decree: kill the Jews
- Ch. 4: Mordecai asks Esther to help
- Ch. 5: Esther invites the king and Haman
- Ch. 6: The king honors Mordecai, not Haman
- Ch. 7: Esther's banquet; Haman hanged

Outline by Chapter

Ch. 8: Counter decree: Jews can defend themselves

Ch. 9: Jews kill enemies; Purim

Ch. 10: Greatness of Mordecai

Applications

- Am I prepared, ready and willing to risk my life and reputation to do what is right?
- Do I know when to keep silent and when to speak; when to wait patiently and when to act; and how to act when the opportunity arises?
- Can I handle unjust criticism, personal attacks and at the same time trust God, rely on God's Word and serve him?

Trivia

Name the two eunuchs who served as doorkeepers who plotted to kill the king.
Who revealed their plot?

2:21-22

Bigthan and Teresh; Mordecai

Memory Verse Review (2 Kings—Nehemiah)

- 2 Kings 7:9—“We are not...”
- 1 Chron. 29:5b—“Who then...?”
- 2 Chron. 7:14—“If My people...”
- Ezra 7:10—“For Ezra...”
- Neh. 8:8—“So they read distinctly...”

Memory Verse for Esther

4:14b

“Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”