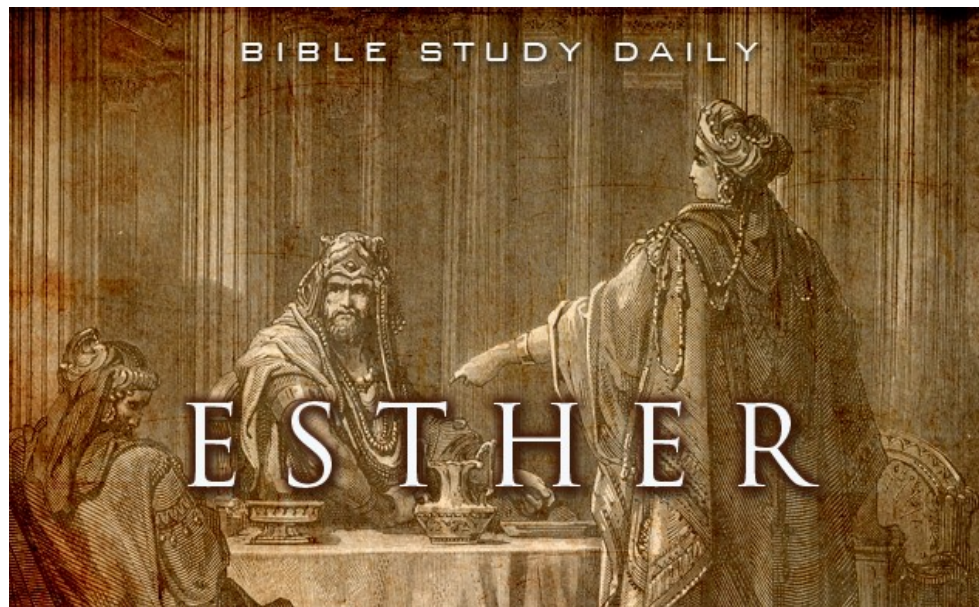




BIBLE STUDY DAILY



This document contains the introduction to the book of Esther as well as my study notes for the book.

Name

The title “Esther” is based on Esther, the central character of the book. Esther and Ruth are the only books of the Bible named for women. Ruth was a Gentile who married a Jew and saved the nation. Esther was a Jewess who married a Gentile and saved the nation. Oddly, the book of Esther is the only book of the Bible that never mentions God, though the hand of God is clearly revealed throughout the book.

Author

The authorship of Esther is unknown. The book itself makes no mention of authorship. Many early Jewish as well as Christian scholars suggested Mordacai as the author because the narrative includes information from someone very familiar with the royal court.

Genre

History

Literary Form

Historical Narrative

Time Frame

The book of Esther covers a period of about 10 years, between the third and twelfth year of King Xerxes who ruled Persia from 486-465 B.C.

Emphasis

The book of Esther emphasizes God’s sovereignty, and His desire to protect His people. Specifically,

- To record the rise of Esther to power in the Persian kingdom.
- To document the reign of the Persian king Xerxes.
- To record Haman’s attempt to exterminate the Jews.
- To record the deliverance of the Jews by God.
- To document the institution of the feast of Purim.
- To record Mordecai’s rise to prominence.

Outline

- The replacement of Queen Vashti 1:1-2:20
- The threat of extermination of the Jews 2:21-3:15
- Queen Esther’s intervention on behalf of her people 4:1-5:14
- A reversal of fortune: Mordecai is lifted up and Haman is executed 6:1-10:3

What I Noticed Today (Esther 1-3)

Note: Esther and Ruth are the only two books in the Bible named for women. Ruth was a Gentile who married a Jew and helped save the nation Israel. And Esther was a Jewess who married a Gentile and saved the nation from extermination.

Note: Esther is the only book of the Bible that never mentions God, yet it is clear that the hand of God is on the Jewish people throughout Esther's story.

Note: The events of Esther take place in the time period between Ezra chapters 6-7.

Esther 1

In verse 1 the king of Persia, Xerxes, (most translations use 'Ahasuerus' which is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek 'Xerxes'), was in Suza, one of the three capitals of Persia.

Note: Xerxes, king of the Persian empire ruled 21 years from 486-465 B.C.

In verses 3-4 in the third year of his reign (483 B.C.), Xerxes threw a party for the citizens of Suza that lasted 180 days.

In verses 5-12 at the end of this time, Xerxes held a week-long banquet.

- At the same time, Queen Vashti threw a party for the women.
- Xerxes commanded Vashti to come to him but she refused.

In verses 10-22 Queen Vashti was deposed:


- After consulting experts in the law and justice, Xerxes decided to banish Vashti from the royal household and replace her with a new queen.
- Following the advice of Memucan, Xerxes sent letters to all the provinces stating that every man should be master of his own house.

Esther 2

In verses 1-4 searching for a new queen, Xerxes issued a command to bring beautiful young virgins into the capital and placed in his harem to undergo a year of beauty treatments.

Esther 1:5-7 is a flashback in the story to introduce Mordecai, a Benjaminite, who was Esther's uncle. Esther's parents had died. Mordecai adopted Esther and raised her as his own daughter.

In verses 8-14 along with other young women, Esther was brought to the



king's harem and placed under the care of Hegai (a eunuch who was in charge of the king's harem).

- Hegai assigned seven servants to care for Esther and moved her to the best quarters in the harem.
- Esther hid her ethnic background while in the harem.
- Mordecai walked by the harem courtyard every day to learn how Esther was doing.
- After six-months of beauty treatments, a young woman would be brought to the king and the next day returned to a different harem. She would not see the king again unless he called for her by name.

In verses 15-20 Esther was called to be with Xerxes

- Esther was taken to Xerxes in the tenth month of the seventh year of his reign (4-years after the party when Vashti refused to come to Xerxes).
- Esther pleased Xerxes so he made her queen in place of Vashti.
- Xerxes threw a banquet in her honor.
- Esther had still not revealed her ethnic background, just as Mordecai had instructed her.

In verses 21-23 one day when Mordecai was by the King's gate, he overheard a plot by two of the king's eunuchs to kill the king.

- He reported it to Queen Esther and she told Xerxes.
- The men were investigated, the report verified and they were hanged.

Note: The men were probably not hanged the way we think of hanging today. In the Persian empire, the usual form of "hanging" was to be impaled on a stake.


Esther 3

In verses 1-4 Xerxes promoted Haman to second in command to the king.

- The king had commanded that the people bow down to Haman to pay homage to his position, but day after day Mordecai refused to bow down.
- When questioned by the royal guards, Mordecai only told them that he was a Jew.

Note: We don't know for sure why Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman since there was no Jewish law prohibiting him from doing so. One possibility is that Haman was an Amalekite. The Amalekites had been at war with the Jewish people since the Exodus. God had promised war with the Amalekites from generation to generation (Exodus 17:16).

In verses 5-6 when Haman learned about Mordecai's refusal to bow down to him and that he was a Jew, he decided to kill not just Mordecai but to



exterminate all Jews from Persian empire; men, women, and children.

In verses 7-15 in the first month of the twelfth year of Xerxes (474 B.C.) Haman convinced Xerxes to allow him to exterminate all the Jews:

- Haman went to the king saying that the Jews followed their own laws, and did not obey the king's laws.
- Therefore, he said, it was in the king's best interest to kill them all.
- Haman even offered to pay 10,000 talents of silver (750,000 pounds) for the extermination of the Jews himself.
- The amount he offered was the equivalent of 2/3 of the entire kingdom's annual income.
- The king agreed and issued the decree that all the Jews were to be killed on the thirteenth of Adar, 11 months later.

Note: The population of the ancient Persian empire was slightly over 49 million people, of which the Jews represented approximately 20%. So Haman's plan was to annihilate some 10 million men, women, and children.

Some thoughts for additional consideration:

- *God's hand is clearly at work in the lives of Mordecai and Esther. Out of all the women in the kingdom, Xerxes selected Esther to be the new queen. Mordecai is at the city gate at just the right time to foil an attempt to assassinate the king. Both events were part of God's plan to save His people.*

What I Noticed Today (Esther 4-7)

Esther 4

Haman plans to annihilate all the Jews in the Persian empire.

In verses 1-3 when Mordecai learned about the king's decree, he mourned in sackcloth and ashes, as did many of the Jews throughout the Persian empire.

In verses 4-9 news of Mordecai's mourning reached Esther who sent her servant Hathach, to Mordecai to find out why he was mourning.

- Returning from Mordecai, Hathach told Esther about the king's decree to annihilate all the Jews in the empire.
- Mordecai asked Esther to beg the king to spare the people's lives

In verses 10-17 Esther explained to Mordecai that she had not been summoned to the king for 30 days.

- Mordecai warned her that even she would not be safe.
- Esther agreed to try to see the king, but asked that the people pray and fast with her for three days, and then she would attempt to see the king.

Esther 5-7

Haman's plot to annihilate the Jews is exposed by Esther.

Esther 5

In verses 1-8 on the third day, Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the outer court.

- The king allowed her in, asking what she wanted.
- Esther invited the king and Haman to a banquet.
- At the banquet, the king asked her what she wanted and she asked for the king and Haman to return the next day for a second banquet when she would make her request known.

In verses 9-14 on the way home, Haman went by Mordecai who refused to bow down to him and this infuriated Haman.

- When he got home Haman consulted friends and his wife who advised him to build a gallows 75-feet high and ask the king for permission to hang Mordecai.
- So Haman issued an order for the construction of the gallows.

Esther 6

In verses 1-3 that very night the king could not sleep so he ordered a reading of the daily court activities and found that Mordecai had never been honored for foiling the attempt on the king's life.

In verses 4-9 Haman arrived early in the morning to ask the king for permission to hang Mordecai but instead the king asked Haman what should be done for a man the king wished to honor.

- Proudful, thinking the king was referring to him, Haman answered to give the person royal robes and the king's horse, and have the man led through the city by a high-ranking advisor.

In verses 10-14 much to his chagrin, the king ordered Haman to do exactly that to honor Mordecai.

- Haman did as the king ordered. He took new clothes to Mordecai and paraded him around the city shouting, "This is what is done for the man the king wants to honor."
- Haman returned home and told his wife and friends what had happened.
- Haman's wife and friends all told him he would not prevail against Mordecai; his downfall was certain.

Esther 7

In verses 1-4 the king and Haman came to Esther's banquet:

- The king asked Esther once again what was her request.
- This time, Esther answered that she wished to save her life and the life of her people who had been sold to be destroyed, killed, and annihilated.

In verses 5-6 when the king asked who would do such a thing Esther pointed to Haman.

In verses 7-8 the king went to the palace garden while Haman begged the queen to spare his life.


- When the king returned he saw Haman on the couch where the queen was, and accused him of trying to assault the queen.

In verses 9-10 Harbona, one of the king's servants told the king about Haman's gallows.

- With that, the king ordered Haman hanged on the gallows he had built to hang Mordecai.
- Haman was taken out and hanged on the gallows he had built for Mordecai and the king's anger subsided.

Some thoughts for additional consideration:

- *The providential hand of God is apparent throughout these chapters.*



Mordecai learns of the king's decree and is able to inform Esther and secure her help. Esther is allowed to come into the king's presence. The king is gracious to her granting her request for two banquets. The delay between the two banquets gives Haman time to build the gallows. The king is unable to sleep and orders honor to be bestowed upon Mordecai by the very man who was trying to kill him. The gallows Haman built for Mordecai end up being the gallows upon which he was hanged.

- *God often works through others, sometimes without us even realizing how He is bringing events to pass that will ultimately serve His purposes.*

What I Noticed Today (Esther 8-10)

The reversal of fortune continues in Esther 8-10.

Esther 8

In verses 1-2 the king gave Haman's estate to Queen Esther and she put Mordecai in charge of the estate. Esther revealed her relationship to Mordecai to the king. The king elevated Mordecai to the position that Haman had occupied and gave him his signet ring that had been retrieved from Haman.

In verses 3-6 the issue of the king's edict allowing the annihilation of the Jews had not been dealt with.

- Esther made a plea to the king to reverse his edict, but an edict by the king sealed with his ring could not be reversed.

In verses 7-14 however, the king allowed Mordecai to write a new edict (474 B.C.).

- Mordecai's edict allowed the Jews to prepare weapons and take vengeance on those who hate them throughout the kingdom on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month.

In verses 15-17 Mordecai left the king's presence dressed in royal robes wearing a crown.

- The people of Suza rejoiced and celebrated throughout the land as the king's edict was announced.
- Many ethnic groups throughout the land professed to be Jews because of their fear of retribution from the Jews.

Esther 9

In verses 1-2 the king's edicts went into effect on the thirteenth of Adar.

- The Jews overpowered their enemies throughout all of the king's provinces but they took no plunder.

In verses 3-4 Mordecai continued to gain power throughout the kingdom, second only to King Xerxes because he continued to seek the good of the people (Esther 10:3).

In verses 5-15 the Jews put to death all those who hated them which included the 500 men in the capital of Suza and the ten sons of Haman.

- The next day the Jews assembled again the next day and killed 300 additional men in Suza.



In verses 16-17 the Jews killed 75,000 men who hated them throughout the Persian empire., but they did not take any plunder.

Note: The number of enemies killed (75,000 Esther 9:16) represents a very small percentage of the total population of the ancient Persian empire, which is estimated to have been 49.4 million people (44% of the world's population at that time).

In verses 18-19 the Jews in Suza had assembled to take vengeance on their enemies on the 13th and 14th day of the twelfth month and rested on the 15th. The people in rural areas took vengeance only on the 13th day and rested on the 14th.

In verses 20-32 the day following became a day of feasting and rejoicing, which was formalized by an edict of Mordecai.

- The two-day holiday was known as Purim (for 'Pur' which refers to the casting of 'lots').
- Letters were sent throughout the kingdom telling the Jews to celebrated the Feast of Purim every year as a remembrance.

Esther 10

In verse 1 King Xerxes imposed a new tax on the entire Persian empire.

In verses 2-3 Mordecai's promotion to second in command was written in the records of the King.

- Mordecai's popularity among the people continued to grow because he sought their good.

Some thoughts for additional consideration:

- *God's promises to the people of Israel were maintained by the complete reversal of fortune of the people of Israel that occurred because of Esther and Mordecai. God used them and their situation to bring about the salvation of the people.*