

# INTRODUCTION TO ESTHER

ESV TCL 2026/02/08

Q. What key words do you associate with the story of Esther?

ROMANCE	GOD	HUMOUR	HOLOCAUST	CHILD ABUSE
EPSTEIN	CHRISTMAS	WALLS	PURIM	GALLOWS
PROVIDENCE	FEMINISM	EMPIRE	JEWS	DIASPORA
EXILE	POGROM	LAW	MORDECAI	PERFUME
SEX	FOOTBALL RATTLES	MISS WORLD	HAMAN	AMALEKITES

## 1. AUTHOR

Mordecai (9:20) recorded the events >460 BC; someone else completed the book before 331.

## 2. CONTEXT

DATES BC	CHAPTER	TEXTUAL CHRONOLOGY OF EZRA-ESTHER
>68 years gap		The <b>Babylonian</b> exile
539-516	<b>Ezra 1-6</b>	<b>Cyrus II</b> ('the Great') rules the <b>Medo-Persian empire</b> . <b>Zerubbabel</b> et al rebuild the temple ( <i>house of <b>the LORD</b></i> ). 2 <sup>nd</sup> Temple completed in 516 BC.
58 year gap ( <b>Esther</b> )		Under <b>Xerxes I</b> ( <b>Ahasuerus</b> ), the book of <b>Esther</b> happens.
458-457	<b>7-10</b>	<b>Ezra</b> recruits Levites etc. (8:15ff) and arrives in Jerusalem. <b>Ezra</b> deals with the people's intermarriage with Gentiles.
12 year gap		<b>Artaxerxes I</b> (464-423 BC) (his reign starts)

The then vulnerable Jews in Jerusalem were preserved during Haman's attempted holocaust recorded in 483–473 BC when they had no walls.

## 3. STRUCTURE

The book of Esther itself is directed and facilitated by



three sets of feasts: (1) The feasts of Ahasuerus (Xerxes), (2-6) those of Esther, and (7-9) the climactic feasts of Purim.

#### 4. MULTIPLE RELATED THEMES – **‘THE INVISIBLE GOD’S DELIVERANCE’**

- God’s deliverance through a man (Mordecai, 10:3) and a woman (Esther, Cf. Genesis 3:15).
- God preserves his people despite opposition, e.g. Haman.
- Trouble is part of God’s plan too, even genocide.
- Mordecai models Jesus as saviour (10:3).
- Evangelism (8:17)
- The defeat of God’s enemies, including Haman and unfinished judgement on the Amalekites (Cf. 1 Samuel 15:3).
- The origin of the feast of Purim, when the Jews celebrate their salvation, not unlike Christmas.

#### 5. KEY VERSE?

When Queen Esther is afraid to speak up for her people, Mordecai says to her:

*Esther 4:14 “... if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” ESV*

Mordecai, however, never wavers in unbelief, so a better candidate is:

*10:3 For Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers, for he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people. ESV*

#### 6. KEY GROUPS OF PEOPLE

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. The LORD God – not mentioned explicitly! | 3. The Jews elsewhere in the empire. |
| 2. Mordecai, Esther & the Jews in Susa.     | 4. Haman and his family              |

#### 7. GREAT EVENTS

1. Queen Vashti’s rebellion
2. Esther becomes queen
3. Mordecai uncovers a plot against the king.
4. Banquets (eventually resulting in Purim)
5. Haman’s attempted genocide
6. Esther denounces Haman.
7. Haman hanged  
ESV/impaled NIV.
8. The Jews defend themselves.



*Esther denouncing Haman - Public domain – E. Normand (1857–1923)*

9. Mordecai promoted; Purim mandated.

## 8. ESTHER IN PRACTICE

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*Esther 1* Now in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, <sup>2</sup> in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa, the capital, <sup>3</sup> in the third year of his reign he gave a feast for all his officials and servants. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were before him, <sup>4</sup> while he showed the riches of his royal glory and the splendour and pomp of his greatness for many days, 180 days. ...

<sup>10</sup> On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, <sup>11</sup> to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at. <sup>12</sup> But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs.

<sup>17</sup> ... the queen's behaviour will be made known to all women, causing them to look at their husbands with contempt, since they will say, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come.' ...

<sup>19</sup> If it please the king, let a royal order go out from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be repealed, that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus. And let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. ...

<sup>22</sup> He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, that every man be master in his own household ... *ESV*

**Q1.** How and why does the Bible use such humour to laugh at the king?

*Esther 6:1-10* On that night the king could not sleep. And he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. <sup>2</sup> And it was found written how Mordecai had told about Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, and who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. <sup>3</sup> And the king said, "What honour or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" The king's young men who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him." <sup>4</sup> And the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for him. <sup>5</sup> And the king's young men told him, "Haman is there, standing in the court." And the king said, "Let him come in." <sup>6</sup> So Haman came in, and the king said to him, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honour?" And Haman said to himself, "Whom would the king delight to honour more than me?" <sup>7</sup> And Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king delights to honour, <sup>8</sup> let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown is set. <sup>9</sup> And let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials. Let

*them dress the man whom the king delights to honour, and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honour.'"*<sup>10</sup> *Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry; take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate ...*

**Q2.** How does the use of humour climax in chapter 6? **Discuss.**

Stephen Hawking: "God throws dice at every opportunity."  
Albert Einstein: "God does not throw dice."

**Q3.** Which scientist was right? (Esther 6:1-3)

**Q4.** How should we apply the attitudes of Mordecai and Esther (in chapter 4) to the salvation of God's people, ourselves, today?

See also 10:3.

**Q5.** Was Mordecai just a trouble-maker? 3:2; 10:3?

1 Samuel 15 (Saul's failure to eliminate the Amalekites)

## 9. HOMEWORK

Read and greatly enjoy Esther :).

King Xerxes' letter about killing all the Jews in the Septuagint

*'[I]The great king [Xerxes] [who always behaves with] equity and mildness,... Haman, who excelled in wisdom among us [told us about the Jews who are always causing trouble], differing in the strange ways of their laws and bringing about evil to our state, working all the mischief they can, so that our kingdom may not be firmly established. [So all the Jews shall,] with their wives and children, be utterly destroyed by the sword of their enemies, without all mercy and pity, by the 14th day of the 12th month Adar of this present year: Thus may they,...in one day with violence go into the grave, ...'*

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