

Esther

Authorship: Unknown. The author’s familiarity with minor details of the story and with Persian customs, in addition to his obvious sympathy with the Jewish exiles, suggests that he was probably a Jew living in Persia at the time the events of the book took place. Mordecai’s journal (9:20) may have been one of his sources.

External evidence points to the following three possibilities:

1. The Talmud (*Baba Bathra* 15a) attributes the book to the work of the men of the Great Synagogue;
2. Clement of Alexandria named Mordecai as the author. Josephus also names Mordecai as the author (*Antiquities of the Jews* 11.6.1);
3. Augustine suggested that Ezra was the author of Esther.

Date and Location: The familiarity with details suggests Esther was written soon after the events it records, probably c. 450 B.C., and probably in Persia.

Overview and Background: In 486 B.C., 52 years after Cyrus had permitted Zerubbabel to lead the first group of Jewish exiles from Babylon back to Judea (Ezra 1-2), Xerxes (also called Ahasuerus) became king of the Persian Empire. In about 478, Xerxes married a Jewish exile named Esther. The book bearing her name tells the story of how Esther, because of her marriage to Xerxes, was able to defeat a plan to exterminate all Jews in the Persian Empire (which would have included those who had returned to Judea). More Jews would return to Judea during the reign of Xerxes’s son Artaxerxes (Ezra 6-7; Nehemiah 2). Many, however, would choose to remain in Babylon and other parts of the Persian Empire.

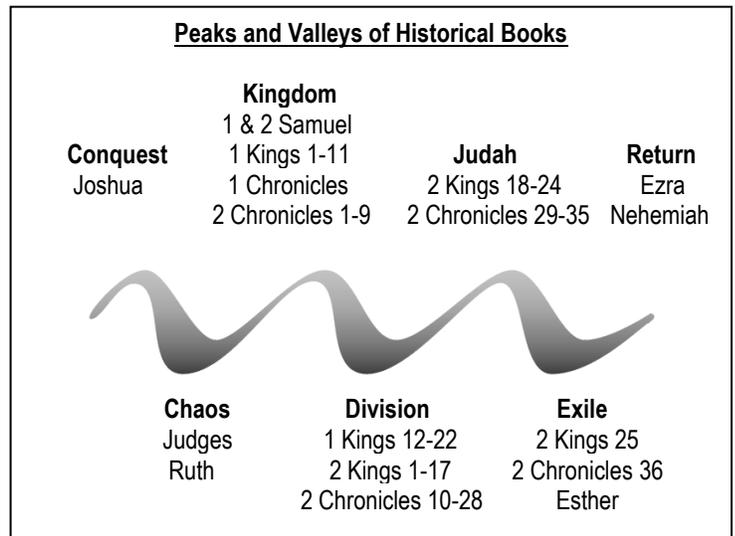
Purpose: (1) To encourage the Jews remaining in Babylon and the rest of Persia to remain firm in their faith; (2) To show those Jews who had returned to Judah that God was at work among his people outside of Judah as well; (3) To demonstrate, to all believers, God’s providential care for His people.

Unique Feature:

- Esther and Song of Songs are the only two biblical books that do not mention the name of God.
- Esther records the origin of the Festival of Purim (9:16-19) and is the only biblical book to mention this festival.

Outline:

- I. Prologue (1)
- II. Xerxes’ first pair of decrees (2-3)
 - A. Decree to replace Vashti (2:1-18)
 - B. Mordecai’s exposure of assassination conspiracy (2:19-23)
 - C. Decree to destroy the Jews (3)
- III. Haman’s clashes with Mordecai (4-5)
- IV. Turning point: The king’s sleepless night (6:1-3)
- V. Mordecai’s triumph over Haman (6:4-7:10)
- VI. Xerxes’ second pair of decrees (8:1-9:17)
 - A. Decree elevating Mordecai (8:1-2)
 - B. Decree protecting the Jews (8:3-17)
 - C. Jews’ vengeance on enemies (9:1-17)
- VII. Epilogue (9:18-10:3)
 - A. Establishment of Purim celebration (9:18-32)
 - B. Greatness of Mordecai (10:1-3)



Key Verse

“For 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?” (Esther 4:14 ESV).

Sources:

Journeying with God: A Survey of the Old Testament, Purposeful Design Publications. Wilmington, Harold L. *Wilmington’s Bible Handbook*, Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale, 1997.