

Old Testament Survey

Esther

Introduction

- Esther is one of two books in the Bible named after women (Esther/Ruth).
 - The story is set in the time frame of the Persian Empire (539-331 BC). Specifically, King Xerxes (Ahasuerus) is on the throne and the events described occur over a period of ten years.
 - Chronologically the story of Esther occurs between chapter 6 and 7 of the book of Ezra. The Temple has been rebuilt under the leadership of Zerubbabel (chap 1-6) but Ezra has not yet arrived in Jerusalem to initiate religious reforms (chap 7-13).
Many of the Jews in captivity chose to remain on the banks of the Euphrates rather than return to their home land. Esther and Mordecai are among those who did not return to Israel.
 - The Persian King during the days of Ezra and Nehemiah is the son of Xerxes (Artaxerxes).
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Perhaps more than any other Old Testament book, Esther remains the most controversial inclusion in the canon of Scripture.

Martin Luther was hostile to the book and expressed that he wished it did not exist.
(The New American Commentary Vol 10; Mervin Breneman; page 294)

The major difficulty swirls around the classification of genre.

The book of Esther is **historical narrative** – It is an accurate account of actual events

The book of Esther is a **historical novel** – The story is set in an actual historical context but the story line is fictitious with the intent of teaching a broader truth.

- The name of God in any form is not mentioned once. The King of Persia is mentioned 190 times in 167 verses.
- The New Testament does not quote from this book

- There were no copies or fragments found among the Dead Sea Scrolls
- No reference to the Mosaic Law, the Temple, or to sacrifices
- No mention of prayer (although there is a reference to fasting)
- No external record of the events or of Esther outside of the Bible

It is important to note that the argument against Esther being real history is not based upon evidence but upon the absence of evidence.

The Purpose of the Book of Esther

1. The book of Esther provides the background information for the Festival of Purim (Esther 9). An annual feast commemorating the deliverance of the Jews from the hand of Haman.

Celebrated in February/March each year with the story being read in the synagogues with much noise and fanfare. Booing and hissing sounds are made every time the name Haman is mentioned! Gifts are exchanged, costumes are worn, and pasties called “the ears of Haman” are made and eaten.

2. To demonstrate the sovereignty of God – Although the name of God is not mentioned, His fingerprints are on every page.

The remnant of Jews that returned to Jerusalem would have been very encouraged to keep pressing on in the work, knowing that God had not forgotten them and that He remained faithful to the covenant promises.