

LITERARY OVERVIEW

Title: Esther, the name of the central female character and hero of the book.

Author: Unknown. The many details of court records, eunuchs' names, and others indicate someone with access to "inside" information.

Period Covered: The Jewish exile under Persia, the 3rd kingdom under which Israel was captive (Assyria, Babylon, then Assyria).

Main Characters: Esther, Mordecai, King Ahasuerus (reigning 485–464 B.C), Haman, the Providence of God.

Minor Characters: Queen Vashti, Hegai, Haman's wife/family/friends.

Form/Genre: Historical narrative/hero story in supreme storytelling style (including heightened examples of irony and satire).

The book of Esther is a story par excellence. It has virtually all of the ingredients that people through the ages have most loved in a story—a beautiful and courageous heroine, a romantic love thread, a dire threat to the good characters, an ideally villainous villain, suspense, dramatic irony, evocative descriptions of exotic places, sudden reversal of action, poetic justice, and a happy ending. (Ryken)

Challenges: To read with freshness a story well known to many of us. To enter into the world through our imaginations to fill out the details of a real world and feel the tensions and fear the Jews would have faced. To enter sympathetically with the characters of Esther and Mordecai, and understand what was at stake for them.

Storyline: The Jews, through the enflamed hatred of Haman, are in danger of extinction. The Invisible God, who though unnamed is ever-present, sets the stage through His guiding hand of Providence to deliver His people by the hand of a hero-team. In the end, the enemy is humiliated through laughable irony, and a day of celebration is established to glory in the preservation of the Jewish people.

The book is absent of the Name or explicit mention of God. Nevertheless, His presence is assumed and, when looked for, obvious.

**OUTLINE¹****I. Introduction (1:1–2:23)**

- A. Queen Vashti's downfall (1:1–22)
- B. Esther's rise to the throne (2:1–18)
- C. Mordecai's success in foiling a plot against the king (2:19–23)

II. Main Action (3:1–9:19)

- A. Haman plots to kill the Jews (3:1–15)
- B. Mordecai and Esther plan to save their people (4:1–17)
- C. Esther is favorably received by the king and prepares to expose Haman (5:1–8)
- D. Haman prepares to hang Mordecai (5:9–14)
- E. Mordecai is honored and Haman is humiliated (6:1–13)
- F. Esther brings about Haman's destruction (6:14–7:10)
- G. Esther wins the right of the Jews to defend themselves (8:1–17)
- H. The Jews completely destroy their enemies (9:1–19)

III. Conclusion (9:20–10:3)

- A. The establishment of the Feast of Purim (9:20–32)
- B. Mordecai's high rank and beneficent rule (10:1–3)

LESSONS**The place of Divine Providence**

- the preservation of His people for the purpose of bringing Christ into the world

The place of human action**Hero stories and their reflections on the Lord Jesus Christ**

¹ Map and Outline from the ESV Study Bible, Crossway Publishers.