

Outline of Esther

The book of Esther gives an account of an attempted extermination of the Jews during the exile. The setting is the Persian empire under king Xerxes I, also known as *Ahasuerus* (Hebrew) and *Khshayarsha* (Persian). He reigned from 486-465 B.C. and the book of Esther itself covers the period 483-473 B.C. It is written as if it were a past event (1:2) after the time of Xerxes I, so it must have been written after 465 B.C. but before the close of the canon with Malachi around 425 B.C. It fits chronologically between the sixth and seventh chapters of Ezra (see the table below).

Three Phases of Exile	Three Phases of Return
605 B.C. (Daniel)	538 B.C. (Zerubbabel)
	483-473 B.C. Book of Esther
597 B.C. (Jehoiachin)	458 B.C. (Ezra)
586 B.C. (Zedekiah)	444 B.C. (Nehemiah)

Expositors often note that the name of God (יהוה, YHWH, LORD) or the word for God (אלהים Elohim). The author is unknown.

- I. The Activities in Ahasuerus' Court.....1:1-2:23
 - A. The debauched feast of king Ahasuerus..... 1:1-22
 - B. Esther replaces Vashti as Queen2:1-18
 - C. Mordecai exposes an assassination attempt on Ahasuerus ...2:19-23

- II. Haman's Plot to Kill the Jews3:1-4:17
 - A. The plot hatched because of Haman's hatred of Mordecai3:1-15
 - B. The Jews mourn and fast.....4:1-17

- III. Mordecai and Esther Work to Save Their People5:1-7:10
 - A. Esther's initial banquet for the king5:1-8
 - B. Haman's mistaken notion about his status5:9-14
 - C. The ironic honoring of Mordecai by Haman.....6:1-14
 - D. Esther's second banquet, request, and hanging of Haman.....7:1-10

- IV. The Jews Delivered8:1-10:3
 - A. Resistance allowed and the Jews' joy8:1-17
 - B. Complete Jewish victory and Feast of Purim instituted.....9:1-23
 - C. Review of the events that led to Purim9:24-32
 - D. Mordecai honored 10:1-3

Notes

- ❑ To see why the feast called Purim is called that, see 3:7, 9:24, 26, 28-29, 31-32.
- ❑ Note the king's immorality (ch 1, 2) and lack of care for what happened in his kingdom (3:10).

- ❑ The plot to kill the Jews was hatched in Nisan (about April) of the king's 12th year (474 B.C.). By casting lots, Haman determined his plan would be executed in the month Adar, which was the twelfth month of that year (the following February-March). The delay may seem strange to us, but it did give Haman time to prepare the empire for his wicked plot, and also gave the Jews time to try to figure out what to do.
- ❑ Consider the timing of 6:1-4. There is no coincidence there!
- ❑ At 6:13, Haman's friends, wife, and wise men somehow knew something about the Jews and that Haman was in trouble. It seemed to these folks that the God of the Jews had been against Haman the night that he was ordered to honor his enemy.
- ❑ Perhaps these friends knew of the Jewish history and prophecy. Notice that Haman is an Agagite. See Exodus 17:14 and 1 Samuel 15, particularly verses 8 and 33. Ultimately Haman was destroyed. The same thing came of Adolf Hitler.
- ❑ If you are interested in literature, consider Esther with respect to the literary devices and qualities it displays. For example, irony (6:10, 7:10) and foreshadowing (6:13). What are some other techniques the writer employs? Can you describe the literary contour of the book?

Have you ever thought about how many times in history there has been an attempt to wipe out the Jewish people? What about talk of such? See Esther 3:6 for example. Consider Pharaoh's treatment of the Jews during the Egyptian captivity and at the Exodus. Consider the Holocaust during World War II in Germany.

Further, have you ever further thought about how many times that the line of the Messiah or the Messiah himself was threatened with death? Consider 2 Chron 22:10-12, Matt 2:13, 16-18. Are there others?