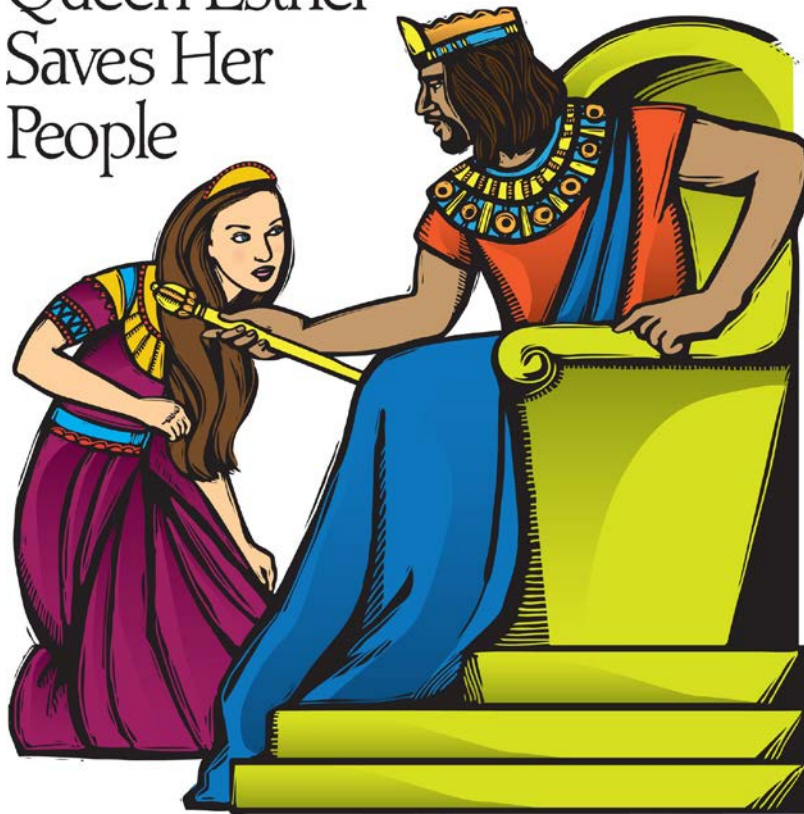


THE BOOK OF

ESTHER

Queen Esther
Saves Her
People



Charles R. Williams

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THE FOUR CAPITALS OF MEDO-PERSIAN EMPIRE =



The Book of Esther

Her Influence Saved Israel from Destruction in Persia

Introduction:

1. The book of Esther clearly demonstrates the providential loving care that God has for His people, especially during their trials and persecutions.
2. It also furnishes an explanation of the origin of the important Feast of Purim, a celebration of God's care, first mentioned in 2 Maccabees 15:36.
3. We are introduced to several main characters; Ahasuerus (Xerxes 1), the Persian Ruler, Vashti the modest Queen, Mordecai the faithful Jew, Haman the wicked counselor, and courageous Esther to whom is addressed these key words, "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14).
4. Esther and her fellow Jews, whom she eventually saved from destruction, were a part of those who remained dispersed after the first return from Babylonian captivity.

Time:

5. The time was somewhere between 450 and 440 B.C., some 75 years after the end of the Babylonian Captivity.
 - a. The events in the book cover a period of ten years, somewhere between chapters six and seven of the book of Ezra, which was between the first return led by Zerubbabel and the second return, led by Ezra.
 - b. The record begins in the third year of the Persian king in and around his fortified palace in the city of Shushan (Susa), which was the capital of the ancient country of Elam, north of the Persian Gulf and east of Old Babylonia (Genesis 14:1-9).
 - c. The four capitals were Shushan (Susa), Babylon, Ecbatana, and Pasargadae .

Setting:

6. God's purpose and will were served by His two faithful servants, Esther and her cousin, Mordecai, who adopted her as his daughter, and who were examples for all of God's people down through the ages. [NOTE: Esther was a daughter of Mordecai's uncle, **2:7**]
7. In this sacred record, Esther demonstrated in her life to be an example of courage, patience, decorum, and to have a demeanor that listened to the wisdom of those her senior.

- a. Her Hebrew name was *Hadasseh*, which meant “myrtle” from the myrtle wood trees and expressed the idea of beauty.
- b. Her Persian name ‘*Ester* (Heb.) was derived from the Persian word for “Star” (*Stara*).
- c. The Greek title for this book is *Esther*, evidently a person of physical beauty and definitely of character as well.

Occasion:

- 8. When Esther’s mother and father died, her older cousin, Mordecai, took her in and raised her as his own daughter.
- 9. Because of her great beauty and demeanor, she “obtained grace and favor” in the sight of the king, and he crowned her as queen (2:15-18).
- 10. It is evident that her cousin, Mordecai, was very familiar with Persian life and held a high position (2:19-23; 3:1-6; 4:1-2; 5:9, 13; 6:12); however, Haman, an immature and arrogant man, was second in command in the kingdom and assumed a self-imposed divine position.
 - a. He boasted of his own greatness and demanded that Mordecai bow down to him and give homage (3:2).
 - b. A Jew, however, could worship only the true and living God, and therefore refused to bow down to Haman.

Turning Point:

- 11. Because of Mordecai’s refusal to give him homage, Haman received permission from the king to declare that all of the Jews should be killed.
- 12. Mordecai was mortified and petitioned Esther for help, reminding her that she would be included in this death notice.
 - a. To do so, however, meant that Esther would endanger her own life; for, no one was to see the king unless he first gave permission (4:11).
 - b. Esther did all that Mordecai had commanded her, and she found favor in the king’s sight.
- 13. The king granted her whatever she wanted up to half of his kingdom.

- a. Her interest, however, was not in money and land, but in the saving of her people from harm.
- b. She invited the king and Haman to come to a banquet she had prepared that day.
- c. Meanwhile, Haman built a gallows upon which to hang Mordecai (5:1-14).
- d. That evening, after Esther's first banquet, the king could not sleep; so, he requested that the chronicles of his reign be read to him, upon which occasion he discovered that he had not rewarded Mordecai when he had previously revealed a plot to harm the king (6:1-4)

Consequences:

- 14. The king called in proud Haman and asked him what he thought he should do for a man "for whom the king delights to honor?" (6:6).
 - a. Haman thought it was he the king had in mind.
 - b. When he announced that it was Mordecai and that he should honor him as he suggested, Haman followed the king's orders but went home afterwards, mourning (6:6-14).
 - c. The king and Haman were invited by Esther to come to another banquet she prepared, and as they dined together, Esther revealed the plot of Haman.
- 15. The king had Haman hung on the same gallows he had made for Mordecai.
- 16. The king also appointed Mordecai to Haman's position and wrote degrees to allow the Jews to protect themselves, which resulted in their being delivered (Chapters 7-10).

Application: Influence

- 1. Esther's courage enabled her to be a blessing to her people.
 - a. We need courage to stand up for the Kingdom of Christ, and increase its borders by sowing the seed, His word.
 - b. We need to stand steadfast on the foundation, the Christ and His word.
- 2. Esther's willingness to place her trust in Mordecai's advice saved her and her people.
 - a. We need to listen to God's wisdom by reading, studying and following His written word.

- b. We need to seek the wisdom of God through His written word.
- 3. Esther placed her faith in the providential care of God; however, she also recognized that she had to act and thus be a part of His plan.
 - a. God will carry out His plan, but we must have a loving and submissive heart.
 - b. We must be a part of the plan for whose success we pray.
- 4. Esther could not know God's time schedule, but she believed that God would in His own time provide for His people.
- 5. We should have no doubts about the survival of Christ's kingdom (Matthew 16:18).



MAJOR OUTLINE OF ESTHER

I. ESTHER BECOMES QUEEN OF PERSIA. (1:1-2:23)

A. King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I 485-464 B.C.) Holds a Council and Gives a Feast. (1:1-9)

1. He showed the riches of his glorious kingdom.
2. Royal wine was poured in abundance.
3. Queen Vashti made a feast for the women.
4. The king ordered Queen Vashti to come before the men and show her beauty.
5. She refused and the king was made furious and his anger burned deeply within.

B. The Queen Was Degraded. (1:10-22)

1. She could no longer come before the king.
2. Her position would be given to another who is better than she.

C. A Plan Is Made for Procuring Another Queen. (2:1-4)

1. The king's servants suggested that beautiful young virgins be gathered from the kingdom, brought before the king, and given beauty preparations.
2. Whomever the king chooses will replace Vashti.

D. Mordecai and Esther Are Introduced. (2:5-11)

1. They lived in the city of Shushan where the palace stood.
2. Mordecai's great-grandfather, Kish, was taken into exile in the first carrying away into Babylon during the reign of Jeconiah (Jehoiachin, Coniah) king of Judah, when Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon.
3. Mordecai reared Esther his cousin for she had neither a father nor a mother.
4. Esther was lovely and beautiful, and her cousin treated her as his own daughter.

5. During the rounding up of the beautiful women, Esther was included, and she was taken with the others to the palace.
6. Because of her beauty, she obtained the favor of Hegai, the king's eunuch; therefore, he gave her special beauty preparations besides an allowance, seven choice maid servants, and the best place in the palace.
7. Mordecai instructed her not to reveal her heritage; her people, or her family.

E. Esther Is Chosen to be Queen. (2:12-20)

1. The women were given six months for beauty preparations.
2. Each went before the king but would not come again unless called by the king.
3. Esther obtained favor from all those who saw her.
4. The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and he set the royal crown upon her head and made her Queen of Persia.
5. The king proclaimed a holiday, made a great feast, and gave generous gifts to the officials and his servants.

F. Mordecai Discovers a Plot Against the King and Saves the King's Life. (2:21-23)

1. Mordecai was sitting within the king's gate when two of the king's eunuchs became furious and sought to lay hands on the king
2. The matter became known to Mordecai; therefore, he told Queen Esther, who in turn informed the king in Mordecai's name.
3. The matter was confirmed which resulted in the two eunuchs being hung, and all was recorded in the chronicles and in the presence of the king.

II. HAMAN MAKES A PLOT TO EXTERMINATE THE JEWS. (3:1-5:14)

- A. Haman Was Promoted by the King, and He Set Him Above All the Princes. (3:1)
- B. All the King's Servants Paid Homage to Haman as the King Gave Orders but Mordecai Refused to Bow or Pay Homage. (3:2-4)
- C. Haman Was Filled With Wrath, and When He Learned Mordecai Was a Jew, He Plotted to Destroy All the Jews Throughout the Kingdom. (3:5-6)

D. The Day Was Selected and the Decree Issued. **(3:7-15)**

1. Haman went to the king and accused the Jews of not obeying the king's commandments and laws.
2. He asked the king to give the orders to kill all the Jews and the king agreed.
3. The decree was published and proclaimed throughout the kingdom.

E. Mordecai Hears About the Decree: He Mourns and Then Informs Esther Through Hathach, One of the King's Eunuchs, Who Was Appointed to Her. **(4:1-9)**

1. When the decree was heard, all the Jews cried out with a bitter cry and put on sackcloth and ashes.
2. When Esther was told about the decree, it made her greatly distressed.
3. Mordecai gave Esther the details and a copy of the document regarding the decree and Haman's part in having this done through Hathach, the queen's assistant.
4. Hathach returned to Esther and told her all that Mordecai had told him.

F. Esther Is Persuaded to Petition the King. **(4:10-17)**

1. Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a command to Mordecai.
2. Esther points out to Mordecai that she cannot go see the king without his permission; otherwise, it would mean her death.
3. Mordecai reminded Esther that the king's decree included her since she was also a Jew, and "who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"
4. Esther told Mordecai to gather all the Jews in Shushan and fast for three days and then she said, "I will go to the king, which is against the law. If I perish, I perish."

G. Esther Is Accepted and Invites the King and Haman to a Feast. **(5:1-8)**

1. The king invited Esther to come in his presence and touch the top of his scepter.
2. Because she found favor in his sight he offered to grant her anything she wished, up to half the kingdom.
3. She invited the king and Haman to come to the banquet she has prepared for him.

4. The king accepted the invitation along with Haman.

H. A Plot Is Made Against Mordecai. (5:9-14)

1. Haman is pleased and goes home to brag about his promotion and his having been invited to Esther's feast along with the queen.
2. Haman was displeased, however, because Mordecai would not bow down to him as he passed by the gate.
3. His friends and his wife Zeresh suggested he build a gallows and hang Mordecai on it.
4. Their suggestion pleased Haman so he built the gallows.

III. THE DOWNFALL OF HAMAN AND THE DELIVERANCE OF THE JEWS BECOME A REALITY. (6:1-9:32)

A. Mordecai Is Honored, and Haman Is Distressed. (6:1-14)

1. The king could not sleep and asked that the book of the records be brought to him so that he could read them.
2. The king read about how Mordecai saved the king's life by revealing a plot to kill the king.
3. The king asked what had been done to honor Mordecai, and the response was, "Nothing had been done for him."
4. Haman walked into the outer court of the king's palace to suggest to the king that Mordecai be hung on the gallows he had prepared.
 - a. Before Haman could say anything, the king asked him what he thought should be done for someone whom the king wished to honor.
 - b. Haman thought the king meant to honor him so he suggested that a royal robe which the king had worn be placed upon him, a horse the king had ridden be his ride, a royal crest worn by the king be placed on his head, and parade him through the city.
 - c. The king told Haman to do just that for Mordecai.
5. Afterwards, Mordecai returned to the gate, but Haman returned home humiliated.

6. The king sent messengers to Haman that he should hasten to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

B. Haman Is Exposed and Hanged. (7:1-10)

1. The king and Haman went to dine with Esther, and the king asked again what her petition and desire from him were.
2. She told the king about Haman's plot to kill her and her people, and Haman became terribly frightened before the king and queen.
3. Haman pleaded for his life before Esther as the king considered what to do.
4. It was decided to hang Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai, and it was done.

C. Mordecai Is Promoted and a Petition Is Granted. (8:1-8)

1. The king took the ring he had given to Haman and gave it to Mordecai.
2. Esther placed him over the house of Haman and another petition was granted.
3. Esther implored the king with tears to counteract the evil Haman had devised against the Jews.

D. A New Decree Is Issued. (8:9-17)

1. The king asked Esther and Mordecai to draw up a decree as it pleased them and seal it with the king's ring.
2. It was decreed that the Jews would be allowed to defend themselves against any assault.
3. The decree was copied and published throughout the provinces.
4. The people rejoiced and many became Jews because fear of the Jews fell upon them.

E. The Jews Destroyed Their Enemies. (9:1-17)

1. The Jews overpowered those that hated them.
2. Mordecai became prominent in the palace of the king and his fame spread throughout all the provinces.

3. The Jews defeated their enemies with slaughter and destruction but did not take any plunder.

F. The Feast of Purim Was Instituted. (9:18-32)

1. A holiday for feasting, rejoicing, and the giving of gifts was established.
2. It was to be a yearly celebration on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar because their sorrow was turned into joy
3. It was to be called the Feast of Purim because they cast Pur (that is, the lot) to consume their enemies.



PURIM

At the evening service in the synagogue; the Book of Esther is read. When the name “Haman” is read, the congregation says in unison, “Let the name be blotted out.” The young add their part with noisemakers and Purim rattles. The next morning the congregation assembles again and includes the formal religious exercises. The rest of the day is devoted to mirth and rejoicing. Hymns, dramas, recitations, and plays are a part of the festivities. They also prepare and send food and gifts to the poor. It has had even more meaning during times of persecution.



... they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor.

Esther 9:22, NRSV

CONCLUSION:

The Power of King Ahasuerus and the Glory of Mordecai Are Declared. (10:1-3)

1. All the acts and powers of king Ahasuerus were written in the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia.
2. Mordecai the Jew was second to the king and was great among the Jews.
3. Mordecai was well received by the multitude of his brethren for he sought the good of his people and spoke peace to all of his countrymen.

NOTES ON ESTHER

WHAT ARE THE PURPOSES OF THE BOOK?

1. It shows the importance of the Jewish people to the plan of God.
2. It demonstrates the province of God.
3. It reveals the necessity of reacting wisely to difficult challenges.
4. It highlights the Jewish and Gentile relationship.

WHAT LITERARY TECHNIQUES ARE USED IN THE WRITING OF THE BOOK OF ESTHER?

1. It has **fore-shadowing**: Several hints are given at the beginning of the book to reveal there are intrigues and mysteries ahead.
2. It has **well developed characters**: King Ahasuerus, Esther, Mordecai, Haman, etc.
3. It has a **“Cinderella” plot**: A from “rags to riches” storyline; from an orphan to Queen.
4. It has **humor through irony**: Mordecai received what Haman thought was going to be his, and Haman received what he had planned for Mordecai (hung on a gallows).
5. It has **well-defined heroes and villains**: Esther and Mordecai were heroes and Haman, his wife, and friends were villains.
6. It has **poetic justice**: They each received what they deserved.