

# Esther

## Original Historical Setting

**Author:** A Jew, possibly Mordecai

**Written:** Perhaps around 465 B.C

**Audience:** Jews in Persia.

**Occasion:** The general occasion is the desire to preserve the origin of the Feast of Purim. The specific occasion is unclear.

## **Timeline:**

486 BC – Xerxes begins 21-year reign as Persian king

479 BC – Esther becomes queen in Persia

473 BC – Slaughter of Jews is scheduled to take place

472 BC – The establishment of the Feast of Purim

## World Events that occur simultaneously

484 BC – Founder of Buddhism, Siddhartha Gautama dies

480 BC – Greeks defeat Persian fleet

## What to look for

- Even though God is not mentioned in the book of Esther, notice how His hand is evident in guiding the details such as ensuring Mordecai's deeds are recorded; Ahasuerus's insomnia and the cure he uses; unexpected use of the gallows; Esther finding great favor with the king; etc.
- Notice the author's use of the stylistic element of pairs: twin banquets of Ahasuerus, twin banquets of Esther, twin festivals of Purim, two lists of royal servants, two references to Esther's hiding her ethnic identity, two fasts, two royal decrees and two letters establishing Purim.
- Notice how the chamberlains (eunuchs) always seem to come on the scene at just the right time to move the story along (1:10,15; 2:3,14,15; 4:4,5; 6:14; 7:9)

## Genre/Literary style

Historical narrative written in excellent Hebrew

## Key text(s)

4:14 – For such a time as this

## Features and Structure

- The book of Esther can be outlined as follows:
  - 1:1-2:20 – God's preparations
  - 2:21-4:3 – Haman's plot
  - 4:4-9:32 – Esther's intervention
  - 10:1-10:3 – Mordecai's Advancement

## Interesting facts

- Each spring, usually about a month before Passover, Jews celebrate Esther saving the Jews from a massacre. The celebration is called Purim. Many dress in costumes (especially children), put on plays, share large meals together with family and friends and give gifts to friends and the poor.
- Purim is an ancient word for the lots that Haman used to select which day he would have the Jews killed.
- The Jews read aloud the story of Esther during Purim. And much like the old melodramas, they boo the villain Haman and stomp, jeer and rattle noisemakers to drown out the sound of his name.
- Neither the name LORD nor God are found in the book of Esther although His fingerprints are all over the story. This bothered some Jewish scribes so when they made copies of Esther they made the name of God stand out in four places by making the letters "YHVH" (the letters for Yahveh) larger so they stood out on that line (1:20; 5:4; 5:13; 7:7). They did this also with the name Elyeh (the letters for the name meaning "I am that I am")
- The longest verse in the English Bible is Esther 9:7.

## Memory Verse: Esther 4:14