

Esther

Esther, meaning star, was an orphaned Jewish child raised in Persia by Mordecai, her cousin. Esther was the daughter of a Benjamite, Abihail. When Cyrus gave permission for the exiles to return unto Jerusalem she stayed with Mordecai her cousin. Esther was a person of faith, goodness, devotion and courage. She built upon these characteristics combining with them a sense of watchfulness. She was devoted to her cousin, Mordecai, and obedient to his teachings. Her grace and her beauty gave her favor amongst all that she came in contact with.

These qualities brought her to attention of King Ahasuerus, who chose her to replace the vacillating and adamant queen Vashti. Esther originally named Hadassah, meaning the myrtle, received her name of Esther (a form of an Arabian/Persian name, Satarah, which means star) when she entered the royal harem.

King Ahasuerus gave authority to Haman to kill all Jews in the Persian Empire. Haman was King Ahasuerus' prime minister. Haman called for this ruling to be given because Mordecai refused to bow to Haman. Haman felt ridiculed and stripped of his authority by Mordecai's refusal to bow down to him and so he went to the king to claim that all Jews were the same and should be killed.

In this day and age it was not wise for anyone to go before the king without permission, not even the Queen, but Esther having heard of what was being planned risked her life and position as Queen to go before Ahasuerus on behalf of her self and her people. Esther went before the King and asked him if he knew that his order to kill all the Jews would also extend to her since she was a Jew! Upon King Ahasuerus hearing this he over turned the order and Haman and his sons were hanged on the very same gallows that he had planned on using for Mordecai and the rest of the Jews.

Author: The Book of Esther does not specifically name its author. The most popular traditions are Mordecai (a major character in the Book of Esther) and Nehemiah (who would have been familiar with Persian customs).

Date of Writing: The Book of Esther was likely written between 460 and 350 B.C.

Purpose of Writing: The purpose of the Book of Esther is the recording of the institution of the Feast of Purim and the obligation of its perpetual observation. The Book of Esther was read at the Feast of Purim to commemorate the great deliverance of the Jewish nation brought about by God through Esther. The noble Esther risked her own death as she realized what was at stake. She willingly did what could have been a deadly maneuver and took on the second in command of her husband's kingdom, Haman. She proved a wise and most worthy opponent, all the while remaining humble and respectful of the position of her husband-king.

Much like the story of Joseph in Genesis 41:34-37, both stories involve foreign monarchs who control the destiny of the Jews. Both accounts show the heroism of Israelite individuals who provide the means for the salvation of their people and nation. The hand of God is evident, in that what appears to be a bad situation is indeed very much under

the control of the Almighty God who ultimately has the good of the people at heart. At the center of this story is the ongoing divergence between the Jews and the Amalakites, which was recorded to have begun in the Book of Exodus. Haman's goal is the final effort recorded in the Old Testament period of the complete eradication of the Jews. His plans eventually end up with his own demise, and the elevation of his enemy Mordecai to his own position, as well as the salvation of the Jews.

Key Verses: Esther 2:15 - Now when the time came for Esther to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested.

Esther 4:14 - For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to the royal position for such a time as this.

Esther 6:12 - Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has begun, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him - you will surely come to ruin!

Esther 7:3 - If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life-this is my petition, and the life of my people-this is my request.

Brief Summary: Feasting is a major theme of this book, there are ten recorded banquets, and many of the events were planned, plotted or exposed at these banquets. Although the name of God is never mentioned in this book, it is apparent that the Jews of Susa sought His intervention when they fasted and prayed for three days. In spite of the fact that the law allowing their destruction was written according to the laws of the Medes and Persians, rendering it unchangeable, the way was cleared for their prayers to be answered. Esther risked her life by going not once uninvited before the king but twice. She was not content with the destruction of Haman; she was intent on saving her people. The institution of the Feast of Purim is written and preserved for all to see and is still observed today. God's chosen people, without any direct mention of His name, were granted a stay of execution through the wisdom and humility of Esther.

Practical Application: The Book of Esther shows the choice we make between seeing God's hand in our circumstances in life and seeing things as merely coincidence. Esther proved to have a godly and teachable character that also showed great strength and willing obedience. In short, Esther was very different and this caused her to be elevated into the position of Queen. She shows us that remaining respectful and humble even in difficult if not humanly impossible circumstances often sets us up to be the vessel of untold blessing for both ourselves and others.