

ESTHER: A Woman of Character

Esther's story has all the ingredients of a great novel or movie: a "rags to riches" Cinderella type story line, a suspenseful plot, a villain, a hero, romance, plot twists, a climax where good triumphs over evil, and an ending where "everybody lives happily after ever". What more could you ask for! However there is *more* than just a good story -- we can all learn from Esther's example valuable traits and practices that can help us be successful in our lives today! We can also gain a better understanding of God can use ordinary people like us to accomplish great things.

Date & Setting:

The chronological span covered by the book is about 10 years (around 483-473 B.C.). The events occurred in Persia, in the royal city of Susa. Many years before Esther's story begins the Jews had a civil war and divided into a Northern Kingdom (Called Israel) and a Southern Kingdom (called Judah). Most of the kings did not walk with God and eventually both kingdoms came under God's judgement. The kingdoms were conquered by foreigners and the many Jewish people ended up in exile.

At the time of Esther's story some Jews has returned to their homeland, but many Jews were still living in exile in Persia. In the first part of the story things are looking dismal for the Jews -- but at the end they are triumphant over their enemies. And their triumph is still celebrated today in the annual Jewish feast of Purim.

Theme:

God's name is not mentioned once in the entire book! This is the **ONLY** book in the Bible where God's name is absent. *But God's working is evident throughout the story.* Perhaps the major message of the book is that God is sovereign, and uses ordinary men and women to overcome impossible circumstances to accomplish His purposes.

Author:

The author is unknown, but probably is a Jewish contemporary of Mordecai (some people feel that Mordecai himself was the author).

Cast of Characters:

- ☞ A King named **Ahasuerus** (that's his Hebrew name; his Greek version of his name was Xeres) -- he was a Persian king who sat over 127 provinces -- the most powerful man on earth at the time. He was a boisterous man of emotional extremes whose actions were often strange and contradictory.
- ☞ A Queen named **Vashiti** -- a strong minded Queen who was not afraid to go against the wishes of her husband.

- ☞ A Wicked Officer named **Haman** (boo!!) -- he was a wealthy and influential officer in the king' court; he was second in command in the entire kingdom. He was conceited, deceitful and anti-Semitic.
- ☞ A godly Jew named **Mordecai** (yeah!!) -- he was a wise, godly Jew living in Persia. He was an older cousin of Esther and raised her after her parents died.
- ☞ A Jewish women of great character -- the *star* of the book ... **ESTHER** (yeah!!!). (Her Hebrew name was Hadassah which means "myrtle" but her Persian name was Esther which means "star"). She was a women of great character and a positive role model in many respects. She start out in the story as an orphaned, lowly Jew living in exile in the land of Persia.

Broad Outline:

Part One: The Threat to the Jews (1:1 - 4:17)

- I. Esther selected as Queen (1:1-2:20)
- II. Formulation of the ploy by Haman (2:21- 4:17)

Part Two: The Triumph of the Jews (5:1 - 10: 3)

- I. The triumph of Mordecai over Haman (5:1 - 8:3)
- II. The triumph of Israel over her enemies (8:4 - 10:3)

NOTES:

ESTHER

Principles to help us be more successful in life

- 1) **Realize that God is sovereign and in control.**
- 2) **Be ready for your time to be used by God.**
- 3) **Realize that God can use lowly, ordinary people like us to accomplish great things; realize that one person (you) can make a big difference in the world with God's help.**
- 4) **Realize:**
 - a) **When all seems lost, it isn't (e.g. Mordecai, Jewish people). When things look hopeless, there is always hope!**
 - b) **When no one seems to notice, Someone is (e.g. Mordecai; Ps 30:5, 56:8).**
 - c) **When everything seems great, sometimes it isn't especially for those who pursue evil (e.g., Haman).**
 - d) **When God seems absent, He is present!**
- 5) **We should learn to forgive and not seek revenge (e.g., Haman).**
- 6) **God can change a secular leader's heart (e.g Xeres).**
- 7) **We need "monuments and memorials" to help us remember God's great works and to pass on to our children and others we influence (e.g. Purim).**
- 8) **There are many positive traits and practices that we can learn from the modeling of Esther:**
 - a) **Display grace, in spite of negative circumstances (2:9)**
 - b) **Have restraint and control (2:10)**
 - c) **Respect authority and have a teachable spirit (2:10,20)**
 - d) **Be modest and authentic (2:12-15)**
 - e) **Be winsome, by having internal beauty as well as outer beauty (2:15-17)**
 - f) **Have great courage, and be willing to take great risks to help others (4:15-16)**
 - g) **Rely on God; pray and fast before major events of life (4:16)**
 - h) **Be persistent and have courage to correct past wrongs (8:3)**