

ESTHER
A BEAUTIFUL CHAMPION FOR ISRAEL

Writing:

Authorship – It is impossible to identify the author from the book, but many have concluded that Mordecai is the likely candidate. The author is obviously a skilled narrator who had access to court records (10:2). Furthermore, he had information likely known to only Mordecai and Esther, and a good working knowledge of the Persian court.

Historical context – In 480 B.C. Xerxes I was engaged in a conquest to conquer the Greek city states. He encountered the mighty Spartans at the Thermopylae in late August or early September of that year. Before he left on his campaign, he threw a lavish and extended party, recorded in Esther 1. While he was gone, he ordered the search for his next queen. When he returned, he went through an extensive elimination process to settle on Esther.

Interpretive dilemma – Some scholars are unsure how to categorize this book, believing that the accuracy of the historical accounts is questionable. Is the book historical? Historical novel? A parable? Allegory? Belief in inspiration doesn't discredit these honest questions. This has caused many to simply allot Esther its own genre. It is historically accurate, narrative, and theologically instructive.

Content:

Plot and morals – The basic plot is the rise of Esther to become the queen of the Medo-Persian empire in a time when she is in a unique position to save her people from annihilation. Her cousin Mordecai is influential in working to establish and keep her in that place of influence, but the Persian Haman is the conniving villain who uses the order of Xerxes to destroy the Jews. The moral to the story: God works through people, in perfect timing, to accomplish His will.

Structure – In recent history, scholars have grown in consensus to recognize this book by its use of *reversal*. This happens when a story line goes opposite of anticipated ends (IE, Haman dies and Mordecai rises to power, the Jews destroy their enemies rather than being destroyed).

Major themes – 1) The preservation of God's people through His own sovereign work. It seems obvious from God's intervention that Haman's plot to destroy the Jews was a genuine threat against God's people. What Haman underestimated was his weakness even in a position of great authority. God is in absolute control, and His plans will prevail. 2) The establishment of an annual feast to commemorate this great coup. *Purim* is the celebration of God delivering His people through the boldness of Mordecai and Esther. (Contemporary Jews read the Megillah twice, give money to two poor families, give at least two food items to at least one person, and feast with an intoxicating drink of some kind.)