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## Article 17: Esther at a Glance

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# ESTHER AT A GLANCE

This book records the thrilling story of how a brave and beautiful Jewish girl named Esther became queen in Persia and later (by the providence of God) saves her people from a devilish plan by their foes to exterminate them.

## **BOTTOM LINE INTRODUCTION**

THE ULTIMATE IN SUSPENSE. HOW HISTORY'S FIRST ATTEMPTED HOLOCAUST WAS NARROWLY AVERTED.

In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah we have the story of what happened to the minority of those Jews (perhaps as few as 20 percent) who returned to Jerusalem after the decree of Cyrus. The book of Esther describes what happened to the majority (80 percent) that decided to remain.

## **FACTS REGARDING THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK**

1. Who? **Mordecai**. Queen Esther's relative (Esth. 2:7) who helped save the Jews from extinction (Esth. 8:1) and later became Prime Minister under King Ahasuerus (Esth. 10:3).
2. What? The **book of Esther**
3. When and where? 470 B.C., from Shushan in Persia
4. Why? How God saved the Jews from an attempted holocaust
5. To whom? The Jews in Persia

## **KEY EVENTS**

1. Esther chosen to become queen
2. Plot of Haman to exterminate the Jews
3. The midnight visit of Haman to the king and subsequent outcome
4. Esther reveals her identity and Haman is hanged
5. Institution of the Feast of Purim to commemorate the deliverance of the Jews

## **KEY INDIVIDUALS**

1. **Ahasuerus (also known as Xerxes)**: Persian king who made Esther as queen
2. **Vashti**: Ahasuerus' former queen who was divorced by the king for insubordination
3. **Esther (also called Hadassah)**: beautiful Jewish girl who became queen and subsequently saved her people from history's first attempted holocaust
4. **Mordecai**: cousin or uncle of Esther who gave wise advice to her during the attempted plot to destroy the Jews
5. **Haman**: godless prime minister under Ahasuerus who instigated the plot against the Jews but who was later hanged on the same gallows he had built for Mordecai
6. **Zeresh**: Haman's wife who gave him some fatal advice

## KEY PLACES

1. **Shushan palace:** headquarters for Persian King Ahasuerus in the capital city of Shushan

## UNIQUE FEATURES

1. Esther is the second of two biblical books named after a woman. The other is the book of Ruth. Note the contrasts between Ruth and Esther.
  - Ruth was a Gentile who lived among Jews. Esther was a Jewess who lived among Gentiles.
  - Ruth married a Jew. Esther married a Gentile.
  - In obedience to Naomi (her mother-in-law), Ruth's faith is rewarded (Ruth 3:1-6). In obedience to Mordecai (her uncle), Esther and all the Jews are saved.
2. The eventual outcome in both stories is determined through a midnight conversation:
  - See Ruth's talk with Boaz (Ruth 3:8-13), and Haman's talk with the king (6:1-10).
3. The events in Esther transpire during the 60-year period between chapters 6 and 7 in the book of Ezra.
4. Esther is the only biblical book in which all the events take place in Persia.
5. Esther records the most horrible example of anti-Semitic hatred in the entire Bible, as seen in the actions of Haman the Agagite. This vicious henchman was the Adolf Hitler of the Old Testament. The subsequent hanging of wicked Haman also offers the most vivid object lesson fulfillment of the prophecy in Gen. 12:3: *"And I will ... curse him that curseth thee."*
6. Esther is one of two biblical books in which the name of God is not mentioned (the other is Song of Solomon). Why is this? One reason may be to illustrate the hidden but providential care of God in spite of outward appearances. There is no other book in all the Bible in which God is more evident, working behind the scenes, than in this book. Providence may be defined as follows: "It is that continuous agency of God by which He makes original design with which He created it" (A. Strong). It can also be thought of as the hand of God in the glove of history. Providence is the last of three great facts which make up the sovereignty of God as witnessed by man. These are:
  - Creation: which accounts for the existence of this universe (Gen. 1:1).
  - Preservation: which accounts for the progress and development of this universe (Psa. 135:6-10; Dan. 4:35).
7. One may with full justification write the words of three tremendous verses across the book of Esther.
  - Gen. 50:20: *"But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."*
  - Psa. 76:10: *"Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee ..."*
  - Rom. 8:28: *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."*

8. The name of God, however, may be secretly included in Esther. His great title YHWH does appear in acrostic form four times in the Hebrew text of the book (Esth. 1:20; 5:4, 13; 7:7).
9. Esther records the only mention of the Feast of Purim (4:14), an observance to celebrate the deliverance of the Jews from Haman.
10. The longest verse in the Bible is found in Esther (8:9), and contains 90 words.
11. Esther records the only nationwide beauty pageant in scripture (2:1-4).
12. It describes the most famous and far reaching divorce in the Bible (1:19).
13. Perhaps no other verse in all of God's Word explains for us more clearly in regards to the reason for the why and when of our birth than does the one in 4:14: *"And who knoweth whether thou are come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"*
14. It illustrates most vividly that eternal truth which says you reap what you sow. This is seen:
  - In the case of Jacob, who deceived his father by the skin of a young goat (Gen. 27:16), only to be himself deceived by his sons by the blood of a young goat (Gen. 37:31).
  - In the case of Daniel's enemies who plotted to have the prophet killed by lions, only to be themselves killed in this manner (Dan. 6).
  - In the case of Haman who built a gallows to hang Mordecai, only to be himself hanged upon that same gallows (Esth. 5:14; 6:10).
15. Finally, it provides the third of three instances where a wife gave her husband some fatal advice!
  - As seen in the case of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:6)
  - As seen in the case of Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 21:5-7)
  - As seen in the case of Haman and Zeresh (Esth. 5:14)

## COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

### **Exodus:**

- Both books record two divinely instituted feasts to be observed as a reminder of how He saved His people from destruction.
- The Passover Feast, signifying their deliverance from Egypt (Exod. 12-14).
- The Feast of Purim, signifying their deliverance from Haman.

## TITLES FOR AND TYPES OF JESUS

### **The God of Providence:**

1. In the Salvation of Esther (2:17)
2. In the Insomnia of the King (6:1)