

Bible Book of Whenever (B-BOW)

Esther

Hello, Friends, and Welcome!

Here's the reading plan for Esther

Since **Esther** has only 10 chapters, the entire story could be read at one sitting. Perhaps you might try to read the story several times, in different versions. Each time you read, note what stands out to you. We (the Oaks) have often noted that Esther's story is full of parties (or banquets). The story could be read as revolving around 10 parties: Here are the references to them:

1:3-4	1:5-8	1:9	2:18	3:15
5:1-8	7:1-10	8:17	9:17	9:18-32

If you want to get a sense of the whole story of the Jews near the end of their exile, it is good to read **Ezra**, **Nehemiah** and **Esther**. **Ezra** and **Nehemiah** tell us about what is happening in the homeland, while **Esther** is concerned with Jews who remained in Persia. You could read all three books in a month—easily!

Here's the Swedish Marking System:

- ? Something I don't understand, or would like to know more about, etc.
- ★ Something I think is really good, helpful, inspiring, etc.
- ➔ Something I need to think about, work on, etc.

Title

Esther is one of two books in the Bible named after women. The other one is the book of **Ruth**. Ruth was a Gentile (Moabite) woman who married a Jew, and Esther was a Jewish woman who married a Gentile (Persian). Esther's Hebrew name was Hadassah, "Myrtle," but her Persian name was Ester, taken from the Persian word for "star." Esther was placed in the "Writings" section of the Hebrew Bible as one of five rolls (Called "Megilloth"). The other four are **Song of Solomon**, **Ruth**, **Lamentations**, and **Ecclesiastes**. These books are read on Jewish holidays, and **Esther** is read on the Feast of Purim.

A Little Background

Remember there was a time when the Jews went into captivity under the Babylonians (see the end of **2 Kings** and **2 Chronicles**). For 70 years the Babylonians ruled over the Jews. They were overthrown by the Persians. When the Persians took over, they chose to be kind to the Jews, and the king of Persia (Cyrus) declared that they could go back to their homeland if they wanted to. (Note: This proclamation was a fulfillment of prophecy: **Jeremiah 29:10; 25:11-12; Isaiah 44:28**). **Ezra** and **Nehemiah** record the returns of the Jews, along with the rebuilding of the temple and reconstruction of Jerusalem's walls. Some of the Jews went back in the first trip with Zerubbabel, Others under Ezra, and a third group under Nehemiah. However, many of the Jews chose to stay in Persia. The events recorded in **Esther** tell us what took place among the Jews who stayed in Persia.

Esther covers a period of 10 years. It involves all the Jews, but revolves around 4 main characters:

- The King—Ahaserus, or Xerxes
- Esther, who becomes his queen
- Mordecai, Esther's cousin
- Haaman, the king's highest official

One unique note about Esther is that God's name is not mentioned in this book. There are no miracles recorded there, but **Esther** beautifully illustrates the unseen hand of God arranging circumstances and using people.

A Key Memory Verse

Esther 4:14: ...*Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*

A clear message of **Esther** is that God uses ordinary men and women to overcome impossible circumstances to accomplish His gracious purposes.

Some Extra Research

Use a good Bible dictionary, encyclopedia, or check online for more information about some of these subject:

- *The Providence of God.* **Esther** is a part of a much larger story that runs all the way from Abraham to Christ, and through Him, the church. If Haman had succeeded, the Jewish people as a whole would have been destroyed, and the story of God's saving work in and through Abraham's descendants would have been a different story. Actually, Christians should read the book of **Esther** as not just a story about the Jews, but also a part of their own heritage.

James Russell Lowell put it this way:

*Careless seems the great Avenger; history's pages but record
One death-grapple in the darkness 'twixt old systems and the Word.
Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne—
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own.*

- *The Jewish feast of Purim.* Most students believe that one purpose of **Esther** was to explain the origin of the Feast of Purim and ensure that it would be observed by future generations (**9:28**). This has happened, since Jews have continued to observe Purim to the present day. Reading the book of **Esther** is a part of that celebration. If you have Jewish friends, ask if you may share in their Purim celebration this year (usually held in the spring, around the month of March).
- *The history of Israel's relationship to the Amalekites.* This was a conflict that started back in the days of the Exodus from Egypt (**Exodus 17:8-16; Deuteronomy 25:17-19**), and continued through Israel's history (Note especially **1 Samuel 15**—King Agag, spared by Saul and executed by Samuel...and remember that the villain in Esther's story, Haaman, was an "Agagite"—**Esther 3:1**; a descendant...).



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