

INTERACTIVE TRAVEL GUIDE

DESTINATION: *Esther 1-10*

The Book of Esther is the last of the Historical Books of the Old Testament. Chronologically, the events of this story fall between Ezra chapters 6 and 7, after the return of Zerubbabel and before the return of Ezra to Jerusalem. In this short book we see clearly God's providence and faithfulness in dealing with His people Israel, though the name of God is not mentioned once.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS:

538 B.C.

The return of the Jews from captivity begins under Cyrus

521-486 B.C.

Darius 1 reigns in Persia

486-465 B.C.

Ahasuerus reigns in Persia during the time of Esther

464-424 B.C.

Artaxerxes Longimanus reigns in Persia

458 B.C.

Ezra leads a group of returnees back from captivity

TRIP PLANNER:

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.

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.

The book of Esther reads much like a fairy tale. The Maiden is the fairest of them all and becomes the queen of the kingdom of Persia. The Villain Haman launches his attack to destroy the Jews, but his plot is thwarted by the Hero Mordecai and his beautiful and brave cousin-daughter, Esther who risks her life to save her people.

The Book of Esther can be divided into two parts:

The threat to the Jews (Chapter 1- 4)

The Triumph of the Jews (Chapter 5-10)

PLACES OF INTEREST:

Citadel of Shushan - The kings of Persia had more than one royal palace and more than one royal city. The events in Esther take place in Shushan (Susa), which is located in present-day southwestern Iran.

Susa (Šušim) - Ancient capital of Elam, favorite residence of the Persian king Darius I the Great. Alternate name for Shushan.

The King's Gate - The gate of a city was the main area of commerce, and the entrance was available for anyone to sit and dialogue. Other gates led to the entrance of the royal courtyard. The palace area had several outer courts with various levels of access. The King's gate was likely the closest a citizen could get to the king.

127 Provinces of the Kingdom of Persia - A description of the size and complexity of the Persian kingdom - including multiple languages and scripts (3:12). Each province acted on its own to control and service the needs of the people.

PEOPLE OF INTEREST:

Ahasuerus - Persian king, identical with Xerxes (486-465 B.C.) and husband of Esther. He signed the decree written by Haman allowing him to destroy all the Jews within the Empire.

Bigthana & Teresh - Two eunuchs who were doorkeepers for the King. They were angry with King Ahasuerus, and Mordecai overheard their plot to overthrow him. Through Esther, the message was brought to the king and both men were executed. Mordecai is later rewarded for his heroic deed.

Esther - The main character in the book named for her. She was a Jewish orphan adopted by Mordecai, her cousin. Also known as Hadassah, which means "myrtle." Her Persian name, Esther, means "star." She may have been named after the goddess Ishtar, or she could have been named for her glowing beauty.

Haddassah - Esther's Hebrew name.

Haman - He was the son of Hammedatha and was the chief minister of King Ahasuerus. He was known as Haman the Agagite, a descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites. On account of his attempt to exterminate the Jews in the kingdom of Ahasuerus, he is frequently called "the persecutor of the Jews." His crimes against the Jews and his downfall are remembered during the Jewish Feast of Purim.

Hathach - One of the king's eunuchs who was assigned to attend to Esther. He was used as a messenger between Esther inside the palace and Mordecai on the outside (chapter 4).

Mordecai - Son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjamite. When his uncle and aunt died, he raised Esther, his cousin, as his own daughter. They were Jewish exiles who continued to live in Persia. Mordecai was probably some type of lower official in the king's royal palace.

Queen Vashti - First queen of King Ahasuerus. When she refused to appear before the king and his court, she was deposed from her royal office.

Seven Chamberlains - They were ordered to present Queen Vashti with her crown and royal garments to all the people. They were:

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| 1. Mehuman | 5. Abagtha |
| 2. Biztha | 6. Zethar |
| 3. Harbona | 7. Carcas |
| 4. Bigtha | |

Seven wise men - The King's closest advisors. They advised the king on what to do with the disobedient Queen Vashti:

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| 1. Carshena | 5. Meres |
| 2. Shethar | 6. Marsena |
| 3. Admatha | 7. Memucan |
| 4. Tarshish | |

FUN FACTS:

Seven-Day Banquet - This was a feast for everyone in the Persian capital held in the court of the king's palace. It celebrated the completion of a 180-day display of the Kingdom's riches and royal splendor, showing all the dignitaries of his kingdom and surrounding areas the wealth of the Persians.

Twelve Month Beauty Treatment - Each of the women being considered as a replacement for Queen Vashti was put into a 12-month program. The first six months were for treatments with oils of myrrh, followed by six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying the women. The text indicates that all of these women were virgins (2:19).

Gallows - Haman ordered gallows to be built upon which he intended to hang Mordecai. He ordered them to be built 75 feet high (50 cubits). The gallows themselves may have been built on a structure already in place to add to their height and to make it very visible as a public display.

Pur - The word is Persian for the casting of lots. They could have been sticks of various lengths, flat stones like coins, or some kind of dice; but their exact nature is unknown. The closest modern practice to casting lots is likely flipping a coin. The Pur determine a "lucky" day for Haman to exterminate the Jews.

Feast of Purim - The festival of Purim derives its name from the lots cast by Haman. This new holiday was instituted on the day Haman had designated for the Jews' destruction - which instead became their day of liberation. It is the most joyous of all Jewish holidays and involves the mutual giving of gifts of food and drink, giving charity to the poor, and a celebratory meal (9:22); other modern-day customs include drinking alcohol, wearing of masks and costumes, and public celebration.