

Reading Esther

The Big Picture

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| 1-2 Esther made Queen > Mordecai saves the king | 6-7 Mordecai honored > Haman executed |
| 3 Haman's plot to destroy the Jews | 8-9 The king's edict > Jews slaughter their enemies |
| 4-5 Mordecai and Esther work to save their people | 9-10 Purim holiday instituted > Mordecai exalted |

Key Issues in reading Esther

– Yahweh is never mentioned: Although God seems absent, he is guiding events according to his purpose. *When we scrutinize the text of Esther for traces of God's activity, we are doing what the author has made us do. The author would have us probe the events we witness in our own lives in the same way. He is teaching a theology of possibility. The willingness to face history with an openness to the possibility of divine providence, even when history seems to weigh against its likelihood, as it did in the dark days after Haman's decree. In this way, the book offers a stance of profound faith.* – Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther*.

– The main characters are presented in an ambiguous light:

- Shouldn't the Jews have returned to the land?* [i.e. like Ruth and Naomi]
- Should Esther have married a foreign king?* [against Exodus 34:11-16]
- Should Mordecai have publicly disrespected an authority figure?* [against Exodus 22:28]
- Shouldn't they have prayed to Yahweh in their distress?* [i.e. like the Psalms, or Daniel]
- Should they have prolonged the slaughter one extra day?* [see 9:13]
- Should they have established their own [secular?] festival?* [Purim 9:17, 20-22]

– The book reads very much like a narrative illustration of key figures in the book of Proverbs

The Foolish Immature King

- 31:2-4 My son... do not spend your strength on women—on those who ruin kings.
It is not for kings, O Lemuel—not for kings to drink wine nor for rulers to crave beer...
- 20:2 A king's wrath is like the roar of a lion; he who angers him forfeits his life.

The rash, proud, arrogant, wicked villain vs. The righteous, wise, humble hero

- 18:2 Before his downfall a man's heart is proud, but humility comes before honor
- 11:2 When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.
- 14:29 A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly
- 13:22 A sinner's wealth is stored up for the righteous.

The wicked get what's coming to them vs. The wise are rewarded

- 16:27 If a man digs a pit, he will fall into it; if a man rolls a stone, it will roll back on him.
- 28:10 He who leads the upright along an evil path will fall into his own trap, but the blameless will receive a good inheritance.

Key Themes in Esther:

1. The story is filled with irony: Life with God is filled with reversals of fortune
 - The king commands that “every man should be ruler over his household” (1²²cf²⁰) though the king ends up “obeying” Esther all through the story
 - Haman unwittingly blesses Mordecai | Haman is hanged on the gallows he built
 - The Jews end up “winning” a battle without an army, king, etc.
2. Mordecai refuses to compromise his loyalty by bowing to a foreign ruler.
3. God not only preserves but blesses his people, when they are persecuted in a foreign land:
4. Main Point of Esther (to put it simply!): Ironically, without a king, without an army, without a land, without a prophet, Yahweh's people are not only surviving but flourishing while in exile.