

Old Testament Survey

Esther

General Outline of Esther

- I. The Banquet of Ahasheurus (Xerxes) and the Divorce of Vashti - Esther 1
- II. The Elevation of Esther to the Throne - Esther 2
- III. Haman's Elevation and His Plot Against the Jews - Esther 3
- IV. Mordecai's Mourning for Israel and His Admonition to Esther - Esther 4
- V. Esther Approaches the King, Haman's Rage Against Mordecai - Esther 5
- VI. Elevation of Mordecai and the Disgrace of Haman - Eshter 6
- VII. Haman's Downfall and Ruin - Esther 7
- VIII. Mordecai Promoted, Counter-Edict for the Jews - Esther 8
- IX. The Jews Revenge, the Feast of Purim - Esther 9
- X. The Power and Greatness of Mordecai - Esther 10

Authorship and Date

1. The authorship of the book is completely uncertain. Suggestions have been Mordecai, Ezra, or Nehemiah. However, no linguistic or other clues are given so the author remains a mystery.
2. Esther 10:2 seems to imply that the reign of Xerxes is over (464 B.C.). The absolute latest date is prior to 330 B.C. since no Greek terms appear. Additionally, the author shows an intimate knowledge of Persian customs hence the writer apparently was an eyewitness to many of the events. The best date is somewhere in the fifth century B.C.

Critical Objections to the Historicity of Esther

1. No secular accounts mention Queen Esther.
 - a. Herodotus says that Xerxes' queen during the period from the seventh year of his reign was Amestris, a daughter of a Persian named Otanes. This queen apparently murdered the mother of a rival of Xerxes' affections, and later buried fourteen noble Persian youths alive as an offering to a Persian God. Evidently this woman could not be Esther.
 - b. Some details between Esther and Herodotus do appear. Namely:
 - 1). During Xerxes third year (483 B.C.) he raised an expedition to Greece, and event which corresponds to the banquet mentioned in Esther 1:3.
 - 2). It was in Xerxes seventh year (479 B.C.) that he returned from Salamis, after having been soundly defeated. According to Herodotus, he sought consolation in his harem. This was the time that Esther was promoted to queen (Esther 2:16).
 - b. The fact that Herodotus does not mention Vashti is of little concern since he does not mention a lot of other prominent historical figures, such as Belshazzar.
2. Some use Esther 2:5-6 to show that the author regarded Xerxes as a near successor to Nebuchadnezzar since it appears that Mordecai was carried off with Jehoiachin in 597 B.C.

However, the Hebrew text says that it is Kish, Mordecai's great-grandfather, that is carried into Babylon and not Mordecai himself.

3. It is asserted that 127 was too high a number for the number of provinces (*medinah*) under Xerxes' rule since Herodotus says that the empire was divided into 20 *satrapies*.

However, it is unlikely that the Persian word satrap and the Hebrew word province (medinah) mean the same thing. Additionally, the number of satraps kept changing according to the Behistun stone.

4. It is asserted that armed Jews could not have killed 75,000 of their enemies in a single day nor would the Persian government have allowed such a slaughter.

The Jews had ample time to arm and prepare for their enemies. Additionally, the Persians did not regard human life very high and where a member of the royal family was concerned they spared no pity.

5. Many say that Mordecai was a fictitious character and the book of Esther was meant to bring hope to an oppressed nation.

An inscription was found mentioning a certain Marduk-ai-a as an official in Susa during the reign of Xerxes.

6. Haman the Agagite is considered to be fictional.

Sargon mentions Agag as a district in the Persian Empire. Thus Haman was a native of this province rather than a descendent of the Amalekite King Agag.

The Historicity of Esther

1. Artaxerxes II mentions that the palace of Xerxes was destroyed by fire in the reign of Artaxerxes I. It would be a stretch of the imagination to assume anyone living two hundred years after the destruction of the palace would have knowledge of the palace and its floor plans.
2. The Feast of Purim, as established in the Book of Esther, has no other historical basis. Additionally, Assyrian inscriptions use the term *puru*, "lot", which makes the word Purim itself authentic.