



# ESTHER

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GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN AN EVIL DAY

# Introduction

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The Days are Evil



# Why Esther?

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- The book does not contain the divine Hebrew name for God, *Yahweh*, nor even the generic *elohim*.
- There is no mention of Jerusalem or the temple.
- No one prays in the book.
- No one receives a divine vision.
- No one is concerned about the Mosaic Law.
- No one performs a miracle.
- There is no prophet, priest or king.

# Why Esther?

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- For the first seven centuries of church history, no commentaries were written on Esther.
- John Calvin did not preach or write on Esther.
- Martin Luther: “I am so great an enemy to the second book of Maccabees and to Esther, that I wish that they had not come to us at all, for they have too many heathen unnaturalities.”

# Why Esther?

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- God in His providence has placed Esther in the canon of inspired Scripture. (There is no doubt of that fact.)
- Paul states: “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of Scriptures we might have hope (Rom 15:4).”

Why Esther? – So that we may have hope.

# Historical Background

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## 1. Esther is written during the Jewish Exile.

- Theological Significance

- Israel is dependent upon the covenants. They provide the promise of land, kingship, dominion, and a future.
- During the exile, they lose all covenant promises. They have nothing.

# Curses of Deuteronomy 28

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15. But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.

36. The LORD will bring you and your king whom you set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known. And there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone. And you shall become a horror, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples where the LORD will lead you away.

49. The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young.

64. And the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. And among these nations you shall find no respite, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot, but the LORD will give you there a trembling heart and failing eyes and a languishing soul.

# Historical Background

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## 2. Historical Timeline

- 586 B.C. – Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon sacks Jerusalem (Daniel taken).
- 539 B.C. – Cyrus II takes Babylon and establishes the Persian Empire (200 year empire).
- 539 B.C. – Cyrus II releases the Jews to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-4). Daniel serves his son-in-law, Darius the Great.
- The books of Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Haggai and Zechariah are written to encourage the Jews who are living in Palestine to renew covenant loyalty in the midst of changing political tides.



# Historical Background

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## 2. Historical Timeline - Newsmakers

1. Confucius is writing his philosophy of life in China.
2. Pericles is establishing a modern democracy in Athens.
3. Socrates is creating a school of thought that impacts millennia.
4. Sophocles is writing masterpieces like *Oedipus Rex* and *Electra*.
5. Pythagoras formulates foundational theorems in mathematics, philosophy and religion.
6. Spartans take a stand in Greece.
7. The Olympics are gaining in worldwide popularity.

# Historical Background

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## 2. Historical Timeline

- 486 B.C. – Xerxes I (Ahasuerus), the son of Darius, the grandson of Cyrus, comes to power.
  - Herodotus describes Xerxes as the tallest and most handsome of the Persian kings, as an ambitious and ruthless ruler, a brilliant warrior, and a jealous lover.
  - History validates that he was a capricious despot. He killed at will, ruled with power, and was assassinated by his own guards.



# Purpose in Writing Esther

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The author is writing to Jews who are living outside of Palestine. He desires to remind them God is in total control over the affairs of man, thus they can trust His day to day providence. The author will do this by:

1. Moving powerful people like pawns.
2. Giving imperfect people power.
3. Fulfilling His will by daily decisions.
4. Portraying God as the Master of reversals.

# Reminders for Reading

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1. Narratives record what happened—not necessarily what should have happened or what ought to happen every time. What people do in narratives is not necessarily a good example for us. Therefore, not every narrative has an individual identifiable moral of the story.
2. Most of the characters in Old Testament narratives are far from perfect in action and character.
3. We are not always told at the end of a narrative whether what happened was good or bad. We are expected to be able to judge that on the basis of what God has taught us directly and categorically elsewhere in the Scripture.
4. In the final analysis, God is the hero of all biblical narratives. Old Testament narratives are not just stories about people who lived in Old Testament times. They are first and foremost stories about what God did to and through those people.



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