

# **ESTHER - A STUDY GUIDE**

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## **THE CENTRAL QUESTION:**

### **What does this book/story say to us about God?**

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
  - b. Why did He record it for our study?
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1. Would you think that God had anything to do with the events of Esther if all you knew was what you can read in the book itself? What is the purpose of having a book in the Bible that never mentions God or any religious activity except possibly fasting? Where, when, and by whom, do you think, was this book written? Should we accept the apocryphal additions to Esther where God and prayer are mentioned? Why do you think the Jews preserved this book? Do you find Esther inspiring in any way? Does it help in any way with your picture of God? What is the value of Esther? Would you feel a loss if it were not in the Bible?
2. The book of Esther has been called “the secular book of the Bible”. Why would that be? What does that imply? Does the book have a theme?
3. Few Biblical books have so much historical detail that can be checked and perhaps verified as the book of Esther. As we have already noted, only Xerxes and Mordecai seem to be documented from extra-biblical sources. This, of course, leads critical scholars to question the historical accuracy of the book. Do we just assume it is historically accurate because someone in the past said it is “inspired”? How would we decide this question for ourselves?
4. Where were most of the Jews in the days of Esther? Why do you think so many of the Jews stayed in Susa or Babylon rather than going back to Jerusalem or Canaan? Is this where God wanted them to be? Why did they get into this predicament? Was it ever God’s plan for them to be in Babylon or Susa? How many opportunities had they had to go back to Canaan? Do you have a harder time understanding and explaining how God treats the righteous or how He treats the wicked? Does Esther give us any help in understanding how God feels about His children even when they don’t care enough to come “home?” What do you think of a God who goes to such great lengths to preserve such a group? Where are Esther’s and Mordecai’s descendants today?
5. Shouldn’t God have solved the problems in the book of Esther by means of a prophet or prophetess instead of by a beautiful, young woman who ended up “committing adultery” as one of the many “wives” of a heathen king? (Esther 2:1-18) By our standards, shouldn’t Vashti have been the heroine of the book? (Esther 1:12) What do you think of the reason given by the counselors for deposing Vashti? (Esther 1:13-22) Couldn’t God have used some other person or method to solve this problem without breaking so many moral codes, even commandments, by our standards? Would you want your daughter to do what Esther did? Do you think Esther had any choice?
6. What was the reason Mordecai refused to bow to Haman? Was there a moral or Biblical reason involved or was this just a personal or national rivalry or stubbornness because Haman’s ancestors were old archenemies of the people of Israel? (See Genesis 14:7; Exodus 17:8-16; Numbers 14:45; 24:7; Deuteronomy 25:17-19; Judges 3:13; 6:3,33; 1 Samuel 15:1-3,9,20,32,33; 27:8; 30:1; 2 Samuel

1:1; 1 Chronicles 4:42,43)

7. How would you feel if you were Mordecai and you had just learned of the death decree against all of God's people because of your actions? (Esther 3:1-15) Why do you think Mordecai refused to bow down? Did he refuse to let others bow to him when he became prime minister?
8. How many other times in the Bible were death decrees issued? (Exodus 1:15-22; Matthew 2:16-18) What was the purpose of these decrees? Who do you think was behind them and why? Would the Jews, as a people, have disappeared if Esther had not done what she did? If you had been given the King's permission to counteract the first decree of Haman, what would you have written or done? Was Esther partly responsible for the kind treatment of Ezra and Nehemiah?
9. Why do you think Esther and her friends fasted? (Esther 4:15,16) Was it to get God's attention, or what?
10. Esther seemed to have been placed by God in a key place and position at the right time. Can you think of any others? How about Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah? How does God do this without violating people's freedom?
11. Did God keep King Ahasuerus from sleeping that night so that he would hear about Mordecai's saving his life? (Esther 6:1; 2:19-23)
12. How do you think Haman felt as he was leading Mordecai through the streets on the king's horse? (Esther 6:10,11)
13. What led Haman's wife to say that it would be ultimately fatal to oppose Mordecai? (Esther 6:12,13) Did she know something that we don't?
14. Why was Esther so vengeful, asking for another day of bloodshed, and then requesting the hanging of the ten sons of Haman? (Esther 9:5,6,13-15) Was Esther's request for a second day to kill the enemies of the Jews just self-preservation? Is this the first time the Israelites were granted extra time to kill? (see Joshua 10:12-14)
15. Did the universe love and worship God more or less after the events of the book of Esther? What do you think they learned from this book? Does the book have any usefulness for us in our day? How do you fit Esther in with Jesus' statement in John 5:39,40 which suggests that the Old Testament writings were to teach us about Him?
16. In the Apocrypha there is a book by the name of Judith that has a story and a theme, even an outcome, quite similar to that of the book of Esther. On what basis would you accept Esther as inspired and say Judith is not?
17. How does the book of Esther relate to other books of the Bible?
18. Considering all of the issues that have been mentioned so far, can we learn anything of significance about God from this book?

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