The Bible and Bread

Context, Themes, and Word Study

Esther

2026 Week 12

Esther 4:9-17 ~ New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

9 Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. 10 Then Esther spoke to Hathach and
gave him a message for Mordecai: 11 “All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s
provinces know that, if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without
being called, there is but one law: to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden
scepter to someone may that person live. I myself have not been called to come in to the king
for thirty days.” 12 When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, 13 Mordecai told them to
reply to Esther, “Do not think that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the
other Jews. 14 For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews
from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you
have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.” 15 Then Esther said in reply to
Mordecai, 16 “Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and
neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After
that I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.” 17 Mordecai then
went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Esther ~ Introduction by Eugene Peterson

It seems odd that the awareness of God, or even of the People of God, brings out the worst in some people. God, the source of all goodness and blessing and joy, at times becomes the occasion for nearly unimaginable acts of cruelty, atrocity, and evil. There is a long history of killing men and women simply because they are perceived as reminders or representatives of the living God, as if killing people who worship God gets rid of God himself. We've seen an extraordinary frenzy of such "god" killings in the modern era. To no one's surprise, God is still alive and present.

The book of Esther opens a window on this world of violence directed, whether openly or covertly, against God and God's people. The perspective it provides transcends the occasion that provoked it, a nasty scheme to massacre all the exiled Jews who lived in the vast expanse of fifth-century-B.C. Persia. Three characters shape the plot. Mordecai, often identified simply as "the Jew," anchors the story. He is solid, faithful, sane, godly. His goodness is more than matched by the evil and arrogant vanity of Haman, who masterminds the planned massacre. Mordecai's young, orphaned, and ravishing cousin, Esther, whom he has raised, emerges from the shadows of the royal harem to take on the title role. It turns out that no God-representing men and women get killed in this story—in a dramatic turnaround, the plot fails. But millions before and after Esther have been and no doubt will continue to be killed. There is hardly a culture or century that doesn't eventually produce a Haman determined to rid the world of evidence and reminders of God. Meanwhile, Esther continues to speak the final and definitive word: You can't eliminate God's people. No matter how many of them you kill, you can't get rid of the communities of God-honoring, God-serving, God-worshiping people scattered all over the earth.

Esther ~ Wesley Study Bible Introduction

More than an intriguing court story that explains the feast of Purim, the story of Esther encourages readers to live faithfully and responsibly. It implicitly asked its original Jewish audience to place themselves in the Persian Empire, a setting of struggle. The book pictures an audience that lived under foreign rule, away from the promised land, away from the temple, probably before Torah regulations became customary, and in the midst of "pagan" Gentiles. Such Jews probably saw themselves as harmless, trying to live as the people of God while adjusting to the foreign conditions. Yet their unique ethnic and religious identity and their worship of God as the one and only God led to problems. In cultures that worshiped various gods, the Jews' behavior was viewed as criminally negligent, a cause for elimination.

The heroes of the story, Esther and Mordecai, rise to honor and a privileged status in a foreign court as Jews. Little did Mordecai know that, through God's providence, his good deed for a Gentile king would protect his own life. Neither did Esther know that her position would present her with the "opportunity" to risk her life to save her people. The original audience was likely to hear parallels to the story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50.

Although God is never mentioned, as Wesley notes, the "finger of God" directs events (*Notes*, Esther, Par.1). Behind the events, with their dramatic plot reversals, stands not just a divine order but also a divine ordering. The audience is meant to see that such divine ordering of life calls not for a fatalistic submission to some pre-orchestrated plan, but for personal willingness to act faithfully in response to divine opportunities.

NIB Introduction

The Hebrew Book of Esther is an exciting, fast paced story that has captured the imagination of Jews over the centuries, although it has been less well received by the Christian church. It contains all the elements of a popular romance novel: a young and beautiful heroine; a wicked, scheming villain; a wise older father figure; and an inept and laughable ruler. In the story good triumphs, evil is destroyed, and all ends happily. It is no surprise, then, that the book of Esther was so popular that, despite certain objections, including its failure to mention God even once, it made its way into the Jewish canon by popular acclaim. Beneath its lighthearted surface, however, the Book of Esther explores darker themes: racial hatred, the threat of genocide, and the evil of overweening pride and vanity. These layers of meaning make this book a worthwhile object of study.

The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in 12 Volumes, Volume III, p. 855

The Bible for Normal People, Episode 295: Pete Enns – Pete Ruins Esther

"...Esther is routinely considered by academics to be a story. A novella, a little novel, not a historical account. One big reason is that the notion of a Persian king holding an empire-wide beauty contest to find a replacement for his queen seems unrealistic. In addition to historical difficulties, like Esther does not appear in any Persian records.

Esther is fictional, but also a powerful and encouraging story of the triumph of the Jews against seemingly insurmountable odds through the actions of a woman—and an orphan woman at that—named Esther.

That's her Persian name, and it means star. Her Hebrew name is also given Hadassah, which means myrtle. This book is still read each year at the Feast of Purim, which commemorates this victory and which is mentioned in the closing chapters of the book.

...as with the books of the Hebrew Bible as a whole, the author of Esther is unknown, nor is it known exactly when in the Persian period it was written.

...no copies of Esther were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Every other book of the Hebrew Bible is there, plus many others that eventually did not make it in, not Esther.

https://thebiblefornormalpeople.com/episodes/bible-episode-295-pete-enns-pete-ruins-esther?rq=esther

In a recent video, Tucker Carlson called the Book of Esther "the most controversial book in the Bible for a long time." He pointed out that Martin Luther once questioned whether it should be included in Scripture, and argued that the story centers on what he described as the "genocide of 75k Persians."

Christian author Eric Metaxas strongly pushed back, saying, "The Bible is the Word of God. PERIOD." He criticized Carlson's approach, warning that picking and choosing what to accept in Scripture is "mindbendingly arrogant" and "deeply wrong," calling his interpretation "a satanic inversion."
https://www.facebook.com/FollowJesus153/posts/in-a-recent-video-tucker-carlson-called-the-book-of-esther-the-most-controversia/1379125124253168/

Although the book of Esther is entertaining and thought provoking in many respects, its most salient theme for a modern theological understanding of the book is the fact that it is the story of an attempt by a Gentile to exterminate the Jewish people. It's importance to both Christians and Jews resides in the survival of the Jews in the face of the threats posed by the Gentile characters' active anti-semitism or, at best, indifference. The relevance of this theme to a modern audience lies in a fact of history that responsible readers are compelled to acknowledge: The sorry history of Western Christianity's anti-Semitism, culminating in the murder of six million Jews in the Holocaust. In the light of that history, arguments concerning Esther's "anti-Gentile" bias seem self-serving, to say the least. The book of Esther is about Jewish survival in the face of Gentile threat, and an enlightened interpretation in the post-Holocaust period must acknowledge the reality of that threat. **NIB Volume III, p. 873**

The Feast of Purim, or Festival of Lots

AI Overview

https://www.google.com/search?q=feast+of+purim&oq=feast+of+purim&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyCQgAEEUYORiABDIHCAEQABiABDIHCAIQABiABDIHCAMQABiABDIHCAQQABiABDIHCAUQABiABDIHCAYQABiABDIHCAcQABiABDIHCAgQABiABDIHCAkQABiABNIBCDQ4NDVqMGooqAIDsAIB8QUFED7wVH2gyw&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

The Feast of Purim, or Festival of Lots, is a joyful Jewish holiday celebrated annually on the 14th of Adar (usually March) to commemorate the salvation of the Jewish people in ancient Persia from Haman's plot to annihilate them, as told in the Book of Esther. It is marked by reading the Megillah (scroll of Esther), sending food gifts, charity, festive meals, costumes, and making noise at Haman's name.

The Story of Purim

Based on the Book of Esther, the holiday commemorates the 4th-century BCE, when Haman, Prime Minister to King Achashverosh of Persia, planned to destroy the Jews. His plan was thwarted by Queen Esther, who was Jewish, and her cousin Mordechai. Esther risked her life to reveal Haman's plot to the King, which led to Haman being hanged on the very gallows he prepared for Mordechai.

The name "Purim" comes from the word *pur*, meaning "lot," because Haman cast lots to determine the date for the destruction of the Jews.

Significance of Purim

- **Deliverance & Survival:** It honors a dramatic reversal of fortune where a scheduled genocide turned into a celebration of survival.
- **Divine Intervention:** The story is seen as evidence of God's hand, even though God is not explicitly mentioned in the Book of Esther.
- **Courage:** It celebrates the courage of Queen Esther.
- **Identity & Resilience:** It serves as a reminder to combat anti-Semitism and maintain Jewish identity.

Traditions and Customs of Purim

- **Reading the Megillah (Scroll of Esther):** Attendees make noise, stamp their feet, or use graggers (noisemakers) to drown out Haman's name during the reading.
- **Mishloach Manot (Sending Gifts):** It is traditional to send at least two types of food or drink to friends and family.
- **Matanot La'evyonim (Charity):** Generosity to the poor is emphasized, often by giving to at least two needy people.
- **Seudah (Festive Meal):** A luxurious feast is held, often involving drinking wine or other spirits.
- **Costumes and Masking:** People dress up in costumes to celebrate the "hidden" nature of the miracle.
- **Hamantaschen:** Triangular pastries, known as "Haman's ears" or pockets, are eaten, usually filled with poppy seeds, fruit, or chocolate.

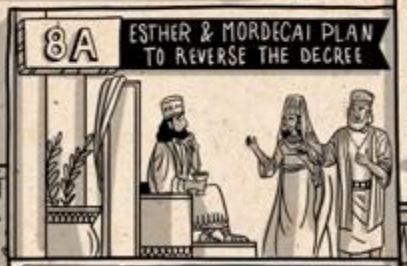
When is Purim?
Purim is celebrated on the 14th day of the Hebrew month of Adar. In cities surrounded by a wall since the time of Joshua (like Jerusalem),

It is observed on the 15th of Adar (called Shushan Purim).

- **2026:** March 2 – March 3.

Themes and Cultural Impact
Purim is known as a time of great merriment, often including parades (Adloyada), theatrical "shpiels" (parodies), and sometimes drinking to the point of not distinguishing between "cursed is Haman" and "blessed is Mordecai".

ESTHER I



CURIOUS FACT:

- GOD IS NEVER MENTIONED
- INVITATION TO LOOK FOR GOD'S ACTIVITY
- "COINCIDENCE" & IRONIC REVERSAL

MORAL AMBIGUITY:

- A LOT OF DRINKING, SEX AND MURDER
- VIOLATION OF TORAH COMMANDS

THE POINT:

DESPITE EXILE, "GOD'S ABSENCE," AND ISRAEL'S MORAL COMPROMISE, GOD HAS NOT ABANDONED HIS PROMISES.

https://bibleproject.com/videos/esther/