

**Week 1 – Esther 1:1-2:22****Facts about Esther**

- At least two significantly different versions exist; one Greek (c. 150 BC), one Hebrew (c. 350 BC)
- Only Book not found among the scrolls at Qumran
- Not included in Jewish Canon until mid 2<sup>nd</sup> Cen CE, and not universally accepted even then
- Western Christian tradition considers Esther canonical, Eastern church considers it non-canonical
- First Christian commentary on Esther written around 836 CE
- 16<sup>th</sup> Cen. Debate over the Greek additions to the Hebrew versions: Jerome separates the Greek portions and places them in the apocrypha section, Luther considered the Greek additions apocryphal
- 1611 KJV – includes the Greek version (Hebrew original + 107 Greek verses)
- God is not mentioned in the Hebrew version

**Texts of OT**

300 BC to 100 AD	150 AD	300 to 450 AD	400 AD	1010 AD	1382 AD	1530 AD	1611 AD	1881 AD
LXX Qumran Scrolls	Old Latin	Most Significant Greek Manuscripts	Latin Vulgate (Jerome)	Masoretic Text (oldest Heb OT)	Wycliffe Bible	Tyndale Bible	Authorized Version	Westcott- Hort Text
	OT based on LXX Includes Apocrypha	Sinaitic (1853) Alexandria n (1627) Vatican (1209)	OT based on Hebrew Excludes Apocrypha	Oldest surviving Hebrew texts Aleppo Leningrad	Based on Old Latin	Based on Greek	Based on Medieval Textus Receptus Masoretic Texts And LXX apocrypha	NT Based on Sinaitic, Alexandria n, Vatican codices
350 BC Hebrew Esther	150 BC Greek Esther		Hebrew Esther Greek “additions placed in apocrypha”	Hebrew Esther		1546 council of trent reinstates “additions”	Greek version of Esther	

**Historical Connections**

The book of Esther follows the tradition of ancient writing which often uses historical references to color the story rather than report historical facts. The general setting of Esther best fits the reign of Xerxes I (486-465 BC) the king of Persia. Many of the details such as 127 provinces, the permanence of Persian law, the names of the Queens, etc. do not match other records of the Persian Empire. These discrepancies remind us that the ancient view of history was much different than our modern view. Story >> Facts

**Features / Themes**

- **Contrast** – the story exploits contrasting characters to highlight the goodness of Esther compared with the superficiality of Persians
- **Biblical Allusions** – numerous subtle allusions to other biblical stories hover within the story. Esther’s story is similar to Joseph, Ruth, Daniel, and even Saul.
- **Lack of Ritual Concern** – There is a notable absence of concern for the traditional Jewish holiness code. Situations such as marrying a Gentile, non-Kosher food, etc. receive no mention.
- **Role of God** – Traditional Esther readings show that God is always working, but not always visible.

### ***Esther 1:1-2 – Setting***

The story of Esther takes place during the Persian empire when the tribes of Judah and Benjamin were still in the exile imposed by God in 586 BC when the Babylonians captured Jerusalem. After the Persians defeated the Babylonians, the Persian ruler Cyrus (576-530 BC) allowed some of the Israelites to return to Jerusalem and encouraged them to rebuild the temple there (See Ezra-Nehemiah). Based upon the connection to Xerxes, Esther takes place 60-100 years later.

### ***Esther 1:3 – 22 – “All the kings horses and all the kings men...”***

#### **Notes:**

- 3 Banquets mentioned in the section (vv. 3, 5, 9)
- King served by 7 eunuchs and 7 nobles

#### **Questions:**

- What do we learn about King Xerxes values and character from this section?
- What are the main concerns of Xerxes and his nobles?
- What features of the story seem exaggerated?
- What ironies are employed within this section?

### ***Esther 2:1-2:20 – Esther becomes Queen***

#### **Notes:**

- King is angry for a long time
- The word “remembered” (2:2) is not the opposite of “forgot” but rather involves more compassion. (Gen 8:1; 40:14)
- Phrase in v.2 should be rendered in the passive, “...what had been decreed against her” and shifts blame and responsibility from the King to the nobles
- (v. 5) the use of the names Kish, Shimei, Benjamin color the story with the parallels in Saul. (1 Sam 9:1; 2 Sam 16:5f)
- The word “Jew” reflects the evolution of the term post Exile since Judah was the largest tribe exiled.
- Mordecai’s connection to Jehoiachin (2 K 24:8) would make him over 110 years old
- Esther has 2 names, similar to Daniel and his friends in Dan 1:6f

#### **Questions:**

- What are the main concerns of Xerxes and his nobles? How do they get things done?
- Based on the story, what are the key qualifications to be Queen?
- What do we learn about Mordecai’s and Esther’s character from this section?
- What biblical stories seem connected to Esther in this section?
- What features of the story seem exaggerated?
- What ironies are employed within this section?
- Compare and contrast Vashti / Esther, Mordecai / Xerxes

### ***Esther 2:21-23 – Mordecai and Esther save the king***

#### **Questions:**

- How does the focus of the King/Nobles compare with focus of Mordecai?
- Based upon the story so far, how is Esther “better” (1:19) than Vashti?
- What biblical stories seem connected to Esther in this section?
- What features of the story seem exaggerated?
- What ironies appear within this section?