



**Esther...**  
**such a time as this**

by Bernard Gabbott

**Memory verse:**

"If you keep silent at this time,  
liberation and deliverance will come to the Jewish people  
from another place,  
but you and your father's house will be destroyed.  
Who knows, perhaps you have come to the kingdom for such  
a time as this."

***Esther 4:14***

## Introduction

Esther is a strange book, an outlier if you like in the books of the Bible. The only book not to mention God, a book about God's people in 'exile with no mention of the land of Israel, and even its propensity to call God's people 'the Jews' (when the rest of the Old Testament calls them 'the Israelites'), not to mention the slippery nature of its genre, its seeming ambivalence about God's people living in 'exile but in the culture—Esther is a strange book!

And, yet, it speaks to our time. It comments on the buffoonery and corruption of power. It offers observations on living as aliens as God's mob, in an antagonistic (or, at best, ambivalent culture). It displays the hand of God, in the flow of history. It describes the goodness of celebration. And it reminds God's mob that they have a mighty God who will defeat even their greatest and most powerful enemies.

Set during the reign of Xerxes (485-465BC) (the 'Ahasureus' of 1:1), Esther recounts the situation faced by a group of Jews who remained in Persia after most of the Jews returned to rebuild the Temple (under Cyrus, 539BC). It recounts their endangerment, their survival, and their perseverance, all because of the God who isn't even mentioned in the book.

The book itself is a mixture of history, satire, and comedy. But its form never undermines the serious truth it conveys—God always provides for his people.

## Study 4: Esther 9-10

### Comprehend

1. Read Esther 9-10.
2. What happened across the empire? (9:1-19)
3. What attitude was expressed towards ‘the Jews’? (cf.9:4, 11-12)
4. What does Mordecai institute, with Esther... and why? (9:20-32)
5. How does Esther finish? (10:1-3)

### Consider

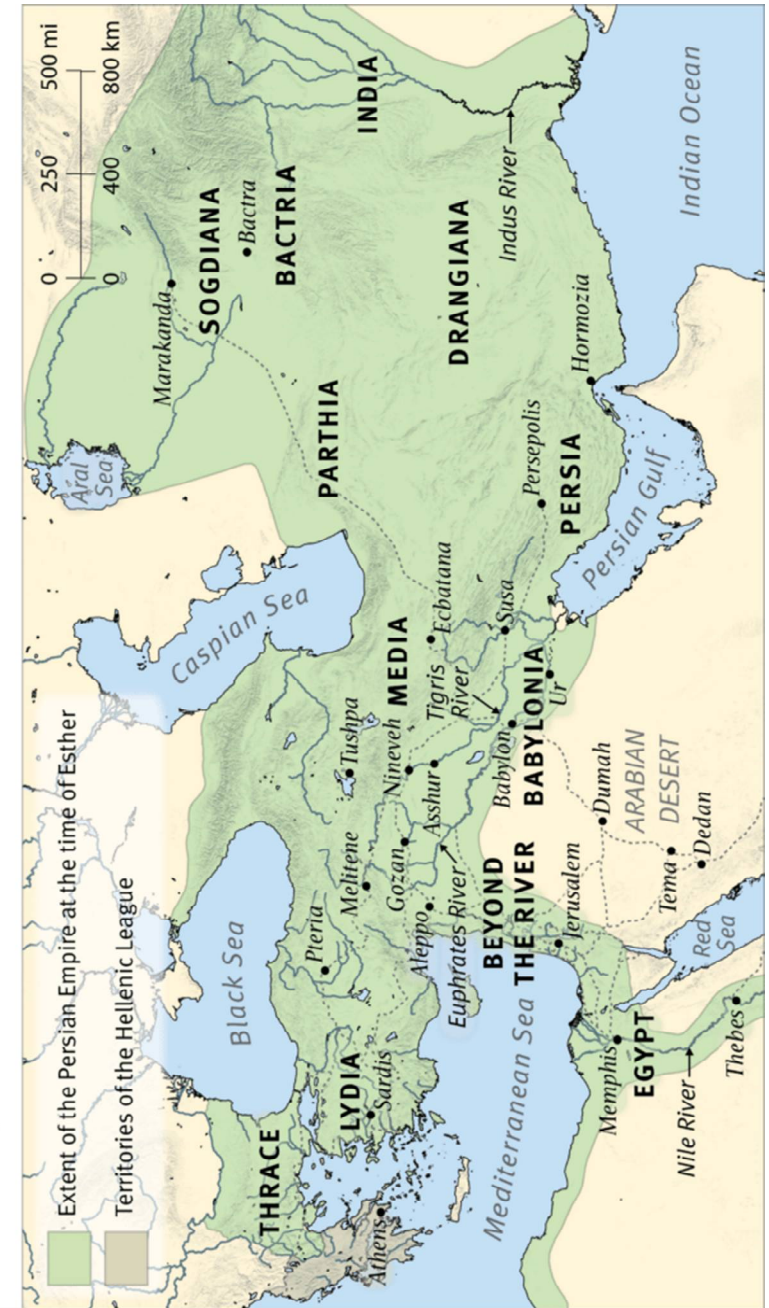
1. Consider how the book began—with the feasting of Ahasuerus. Consider how the book finishes—with the commemoration of the Purim feast. What do you make of this?
2. What does this finish tell us about remembering, celebrating, and passing on?

### Contact

1. Consider the book as a whole... what lessons have you learned about:
  - God?
  - God’s people?
  - the world we live in?
  - remembering and celebrating?

#### The Persian Empire at the Time of Esther c. 479 B.C.

Long before Esther’s time, the people of Israel and Judah (later called Jews) had been dispersed throughout the Near East by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Eventually the Persians absorbed nearly all of these lands into their empire, which reached its greatest extent during the time of Esther. Thus Haman’s plot to exterminate all Jews throughout the Persian Empire would have annihilated virtually all of the Jewish people, and Esther’s daring actions saved them from complete destruction.



## Study 1: Esther 1-2

### Comprehend

1. Read Esther 1-2.
2. Where are we? (1:1-2)
3. What is happening? (1:3-9)  
At the height of this feats, what happens? (1:10-12)  
What is the 'fallout'? (1:13-22)
4. What is the answer to 'no queen'? (2:1-4)
5. Who do we meet in 2:5? (cf. 1 Samuel 9:1-2)  
What else do we learn, and who else do we meet? (2:6-7)
6. What happens to Esther? (2:8-9)  
What is Mordecai's advice, what does Esther do, and how does Mordecai care for her? (2:10-11)
7. How does the king choose his queen? (2:12-14)  
How fares Esther? (2:15-18)  
What remains hidden? (2:19-20)
8. What else do we learn about Mordecai? (2:21-23)

### Consider

1. What kind of picture is painted of the nature of Ahasureus, the empire, and life in the court?
2. What is the contrast between the emperor and his wife, and Mordecai and his cousin?

'prescriptive' (this is how God's mob must act), or are they 'descriptive' (here is how God's mob have navigated life at a particular moment under God)?

2. What conclusions do you draw about the work of God in these events, and the actions of God's mob where they are?
3. How might you apply these conclusions today?

### Study 3: Esther 6-8

#### Comprehend

1. Read Esther 6-8.
2. Just as the second part of Esther began with an honouring (that of Haman in Esther 3), so too the third part of the book—how does this emerge? (6:1-11)  
  
But what is twist?
3. How does this affect Haman? (6:12)  
  
What is the conclusion? (6:13-14)
4. Against this backdrop, the feasting continues. And here, everything is revealed— what happens? (7:1-10)
5. What is the change in circumstances? (8:1-2)
6. Esther remains insistent—what does she request? (8:3-4)  
  
What is the solution? (8:5-8)
7. What edict is sent out, and what is the response? (8:9-17)

#### Consider

1. What is your response to such masterful ‘story-telling’?
2. How has Esther understood, and used, her position?
3. What has been the reversal, and how is this emphasized? (cf.8:3)
4. What is the contrast with Esther 3?

#### Contact

1. How do you understand these events—are they

3. What strikes you about the situation of ‘the Jews’?
4. What other things have struck you from this opening to Esther?

#### Contact

1. Is there any way you identify with the situation painted in Esther 1-2? If so, how or in what way?
2. At this point, what do you think the author of Esther (and we don’t know who they are) is trying to get us to think, feel and ponder as the readers?

## Study 2: Esther 3-5

### Consider

1. Read Esther 3-5.
2. Who do we meet in 3:1? (cf. Ex.17:8-16; 1 Samuel 15:20)
3. What is the tension between Haman and Mordecai? (3::2-5)

What climax does this reach? (3:6-15)

4. What is the reaction amongst the Jews? (4:1-3)
5. How does Esther found out the 'news'? (4:4-7)

Mordecai goes further—what does he do? (4:8-9)

There is some back-and-forth between Mordecai and his cousin. What is said, and what is decided? (4:10-17)

6. What does Esther do, and request? (5:1-4)
7. Haman leaves, and meets Mordecai—what happens? (5:9-14)

What happens? (5:5-8)

### Comprehend

1. Whilst God is not mentioned, what statements place (and have placed) this narrative in the context of the wider Biblical narrative?

What tension does this set-up?

2. There are so many repeated motifs here—we have another male/female pairing (Haman and his wife), we have another feast/banquet, we have another portrayal of the

power and machinations of the Persian Empire. What do you make of all this?

3. How does Mordecai portray Esther's 'rise to power'? What do you make of this?
4. What is the tension established by the end of Esther 5?

### Contact

1. God is not mentioned, but what conflict is established so cleverly here?
2. How does Esther's position, and Mordecai's exhortation, help us ponder the world we live in, and where we are?
3. What is the danger posed to 'the Jews' (God's people) here... and does it resonate with you? Why/why not?