

## Esther

Set after the Exile, but while a large number of Jews had not yet returned to Judah, the book of Esther tells the story of Ahasuerus, the Persian king, who banished his wife Vashti for refusing to come into his presence when he summoned her. He subsequently chose a new wife – Esther – who used her position as Queen to save her people (the Jews) from slaughter at the hands of Haman, the King's right-hand man.

Esther is the only book in the Bible which never mentions God but which focuses on saving God's people from destruction.



### How long will it take?

- 30 mins
- Just read 1.1–2.18; 5.1-14; 6.14–7.10



### Inspiring quotes

For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, 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. *(Esther 4.14)*



## About the Author

We know nothing at all about the author of Esther – neither tradition nor scholarship suggests anyone as the author.

## About the times

Whether it was written near the time it was set, or later, the purpose of Esther is twofold:

To inspire the celebration of the feast of Purim (which celebrates the events told in the story)

To hold up an example to Jews living in foreign lands of how to live in the face of persecution.

Most people think that the king Ahasuerus referred to in the book was either King Xerxes (486-465 bc) or Artaxerxes (465-358 bc). Either way the book is set well after Cyrus allowed the exiles to return home in 538 bc and reflects, therefore, a difference scenario. Jews who



## How is it structured?

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 1.1-22    | The King banished Vashti  |
| 2.1-18    | Esther was chosen as queen  |
| 2.19-23   | Mordecai, Esther cousin, saved the King's life                                  |
| 3.1-15    | Haman, the King's right-hand man, plotted to slaughter all Jews                 |
| 4.1-17    | Esther decided to try and save her people                                       |
| 5.1-8     | Esther invited the King and Haman to a banquet                                  |
| 5.9-14    | Haman built gallows for Mordecai  |
| 6.1-13    | Mordecai was honoured by the King   |
| 6.14-7.10 | Esther appealed to the King and Haman was hung                                  |
| 8.1-17    | The edict to annihilate the Jews was reversed                                   |
| 9.1-10.13 | The Jews took vengeance on their enemies and the feast of Purim was established |



## Look out for...

One of the biggest discussions about the book is the question of what it is really about, see what you think as you read.

The characters in the story are all fairly stereotypical (with great heroes and villains). Notice this as you read and see if you think there is anyone who does not fit into the stereotype.

A key theme in the book is poetic justice (Haman is hung on his own gallows) – reflect on this theme as you read.



## What could this mean for me?

Esther's decision to save her people, in the end, was a clear choice. Who might we be called to step in to save today and how would we make that choice?



## Discussion group questions

Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?

Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?

What did *you* think the book was about?

Esther is famous for never mentioning the word 'God' in the book. Did you find any glimmers of God even though he was never mentioned?

Why do you think Esther was included in the canon of Scripture? Do you think it should have been?

The story of Esther is a story of people finding the courage to