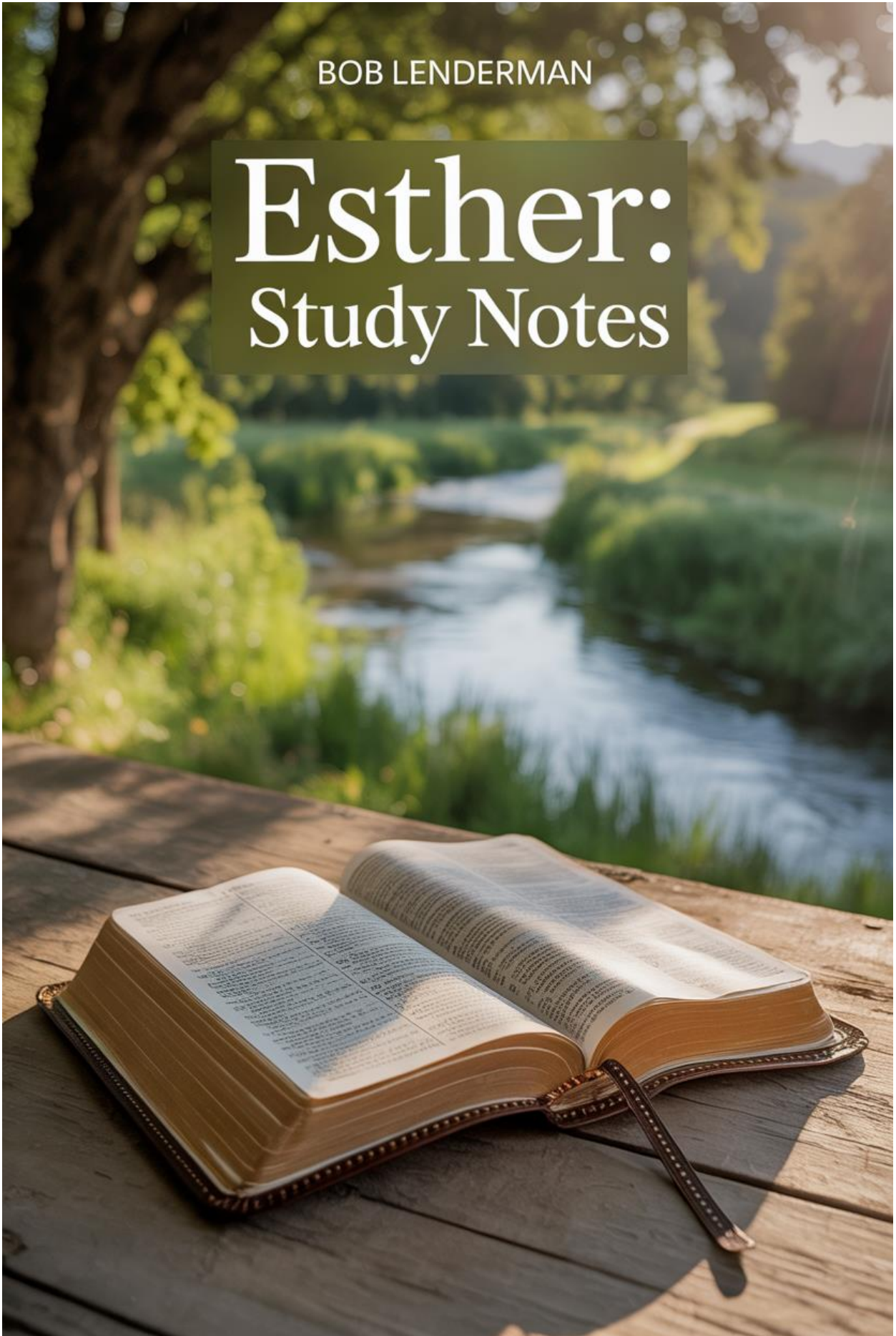


BOB LENDERMANN

# Esther: Study Notes



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*Bob Lenderman*

## **ESTHER: STUDY NOTES**

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# BOOK OF ESTHER: STUDY NOTES

## Section 1: Introduction & Setting

- **Q: What is the Book of Esther about?**

- **A:** The Book of Esther tells the true story of a young Jewish woman named Esther who becomes queen of Persia and courageously saves her people from a plot to destroy them. It's a powerful story of courage, divine providence (God's unseen guidance), and deliverance.
- *(Reference: Book of Esther, general overview)*

- **Q: When and where does the story take place?**

- **A:** The events occur during the reign of King Ahasuerus (also known as Xerxes I), around 483-473 BC. This was after the Jewish exile to Babylon and before some Jews returned to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.
- The story primarily takes place in **Susa**, the capital city of the Persian Empire.
- *(Reference: Esther 1:1-2)*

- **Q: Who are the main characters in the story?**

- **A:**
  - **King Ahasuerus (Xerxes):** The powerful, sometimes impulsive, king of the Persian Empire.

- **Vashti:** The king's first queen, who is removed from her position.
  - **Esther (Hadassah):** A young Jewish orphan, raised by her cousin Mordecai, who becomes the new queen.
  - **Mordecai:** Esther's cousin and guardian, a loyal Jew who works in the king's gate.
  - **Haman:** A high-ranking official in the king's court, who becomes the Jews' mortal enemy.
  - *(Reference: Esther 1-3 for character introductions)*
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## Section 2: The Rise of Esther

- **Q: Why was Queen Vashti removed from her position?**
  - **A:** During a grand feast, King Ahasuerus, after drinking wine, commanded Queen Vashti to appear before him and his guests wearing her royal crown, to show off her beauty. Vashti refused to come. The king's advisors, fearing her disobedience would set a bad example for other wives in the kingdom, advised the king to remove her as queen.
  - *(Reference: Esther 1:10-22)*
- **Q: How did Esther become queen?**
  - **A:** After Vashti was removed, the king's servants suggested finding a new queen by gathering all the

beautiful young virgins in the empire. They would undergo a year-long beauty treatment before being presented to the king. Esther was among these young women, chosen by the king, who loved her more than all the others and made her his new queen.

- *(Reference: Esther 2:1-18)*

- **Q: What was Esther's secret?**

- **A:** Mordecai had instructed Esther not to reveal her Jewish heritage to anyone in the palace. She kept this secret, even after becoming queen.

- *(Reference: Esther 2:10, 20)*

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### **Section 3: The Threat (Haman's Plot)**

- **Q: Who was Haman and what was his evil plan?**

- **A:** Haman was an Agagite, a descendant of Israel's ancient enemies, and was promoted to a very high position by King Ahasuerus, second only to the king. His evil plan was to completely destroy and annihilate all the Jewish people throughout the entire Persian Empire on a single day.

- *(Reference: Esther 3:1, 6)*

- **Q: Why did Haman hate Mordecai and the Jews?**

- **A:** The king had commanded everyone to bow down and pay homage to Haman, but Mordecai

refused to do so because he was a Jew and likely felt it conflicted with his devotion to God. Haman was filled with rage and, upon learning Mordecai's ethnic identity, decided that killing only Mordecai was not enough. His anger extended to all of Mordecai's people – the Jews.

- *(Reference: Esther 3:2-6)*

- **Q: How was the decree to destroy the Jews issued?**

- **A:** Haman tricked King Ahasuerus into issuing a decree by telling him there was a certain people group whose laws were different and who did not obey the king's laws. He offered to pay a huge sum of money into the royal treasury if the king would allow him to destroy them. The king, unaware Haman was referring to the Jews, gave Haman his signet ring, authorizing him to write and send out the decree throughout the empire.

- *(Reference: Esther 3:8-13)*

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## **Section 4: Esther's Courage & Intervention**

- **Q: How did Mordecai challenge Esther to act?**

- **A:** When Mordecai heard about the decree, he mourned publicly and sent a message to Esther, urging her to go to the king and plead for her people. Esther initially hesitated, explaining that approaching the king without being summoned

could mean death. Mordecai then sent a powerful message: "Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, liberation and rescue will arise for the Jews from another place, and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?"

- *(Reference: Esther 4:1-14)*

- **Q: What brave decision did Esther make?**

- **A:** Esther decided to risk her life for her people. She sent a message back to Mordecai asking all the Jews in Susa to fast for three days and three nights with her. She then declared, "I will go to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish."

- *(Reference: Esther 4:15-17)*

- **Q: How did Esther approach the King?**

- **A:** After three days of fasting, Esther put on her royal robes and went into the inner court of the palace, standing opposite the king's throne. King Ahasuerus, seeing her, graciously extended his golden scepter towards her, signaling that her life was spared.

- *(Reference: Esther 5:1-3)*

- **Q: What was Esther's strategy to expose Haman?**



- **A:** Instead of immediately revealing Haman's plot, Esther invited the king and Haman to a private banquet. At this banquet, when the king asked for her request, she only invited them to a *second* banquet the following day. This delay built suspense and allowed God's timing to unfold.
  - (*Reference: Esther 5:4-8*)
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## **Section 5: Haman's Downfall & Jewish Deliverance**

### **• Q: How did the King discover Haman's wickedness?**

- **A:** On the night between the two banquets, King Ahasuerus couldn't sleep. He asked for the royal chronicles to be read to him. He heard about Mordecai's past service in uncovering a plot against the king, for which Mordecai had never been rewarded. Just then, Haman arrived to ask the king for permission to hang Mordecai.
- The king then asked Haman what should be done for a man the king wished to honor. Haman, thinking the king meant him, suggested a grand public honor (royal robes, horse, parade). The king then commanded Haman to do all these things for Mordecai!
- At the second banquet, Esther finally revealed her request: "If I have found favor in your sight, O King, and if it please the king, let my life be given me as

my petition, and my people as my request; for we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated." When the king asked who dared to do such a thing, Esther pointed directly at Haman: "A foe and an enemy is this wicked Haman!"

- *(Reference: Esther 6:1-12, Esther 7:1-6)*

• **Q: What was Haman's ultimate fate?**

- **A:** The king was furious. When he returned from his brief walk in the garden, he saw Haman pleading with Esther, having fallen across her couch. The king interpreted this as an assault and ordered Haman to be hanged on the very gallows Haman had built for Mordecai!

- *(Reference: Esther 7:7-10)*

• **Q: How were the Jews saved and what did they do?**

- **A:** Since the first decree (to destroy the Jews) could not be revoked according to Persian law, the king issued a *second* decree. This new decree, written by Mordecai and sealed with the king's ring, gave the Jews permission to gather, defend themselves, and destroy anyone who attacked them on the appointed day. On that day, the Jews successfully defended themselves against their enemies throughout the empire. Mordecai was greatly honored and promoted.

- *(Reference: Esther 8:1-17, Esther 9:1-16)*

- **Q: What celebration was established after these events?**
    - **A:** Mordecai and Esther instituted an annual celebration called **Purim** (meaning "lots," referring to the lot Haman cast to determine the day of destruction). This festival commemorates the deliverance of the Jewish people from Haman's plot. It includes feasting, joy, sending gifts to one another, and gifts to the poor.
    - *(Reference: Esther 9:17-32)*
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## Section 6: Key Themes & Lessons

- **Q: What are some important themes in the Book of Esther?**
  - **A:**
    - **Divine Providence:** Even though God is never directly mentioned, His hand is clearly at work behind the scenes, orchestrating events to save His people.
    - **Courage & Faith:** Esther's bravery and Mordecai's steadfastness in their faith, even in a foreign land.
    - **Identity:** The importance of holding onto one's heritage, especially in challenging environments.

- **Justice:** The wicked plot is overturned, and the oppressors receive the punishment they intended for others.
- **Anti-Semitism:** The ancient struggle against those who seek to destroy the Jewish people.
- **Celebration:** The institution of Purim as a lasting reminder of God's deliverance and joy.
- **Q: What can we learn from Esther's story?**
  - **A:**
    - God works in mysterious ways, often through ordinary people and circumstances, to achieve His purposes.
    - We should be courageous and use our positions and gifts to stand up for what is right, even when it's risky ("for such a time as this").
    - It's important to remember and celebrate God's faithfulness and deliverance.
    - One person's courage can make an enormous difference.
- **Q: Why is God's name not explicitly mentioned in the book?**
  - **A:** This is a unique feature of the Book of Esther and has led to much discussion. Possible reasons include:

- **Emphasizing God's hidden hand:** The story shows God working powerfully through "coincidences" and human actions, demonstrating His presence even when not explicitly named.
- **Appeal to a wider audience:** Perhaps to be more acceptable in a Persian court setting or for a secular audience.
- **Focus on human responsibility:** While God is at work, the story highlights the importance of human choice and action (Esther's courage, Mordecai's wisdom).