

Notes on the Book of Esther

St. Jerome Adult Bible Study

The story of Esther is a melodrama. When it was read in the synagogue during the feast of Purim (a feast commemorating the Jews deliverance by Esther's doing), the men stomped their feet, banged the tables, hissed the villain, and cheered the hero. It was a riotous celebration with much drinking. It was a hero tale and its tradition should be respected. There is no mention of God, no pious lesson, and raises no disturbing questions – it's just plain fun.¹ The feast is still celebrated today one month before Passover, usually in March.



A Purim-gragger noise maker used whenever Haman was mentioned.

King Ahasuerus was a real king of Persia (aka, Xerxes I) who reigned about 486 to 465 BC. No documents have been found, however, to validate the existence of Esther, Vashti, or a vendetta against the Jews at the time. The book was likely written during Ahasuerus' reign but the author is unknown.

Esther's beauty and obvious influence over men inspired cosmetics, decorating styles, and even exotic dances. There are at least two novels, a half-dozen movies, dozens of story-books about Esther, and one strong Jewish women's aid group called Hadassah (Esther's Hebrew name).

1. What's Vashti's problem?
2. What was Ahasuerus' motivation in hosting a 6 month party followed by more party? Why an "open house?"
3. Make up your own story about where Vashti went and what became of her after leaving Susa.
4. Describe, using as many adjectives as you can, Haman and his motivations.
5. What kind of Jew is Mordecai? Would you trust him?
6. Do you recognize the familiar formula of fast and prayer in 4:16?
7. Wow! Haman's face must have been red in 6:10-13.
8. Is there a lesson in Haman's pride and ultimate fall?
9. Why did the Jews not take plunder when they killed their enemies?
10. Why is the Feast of Purim celebrated for two days?

¹ *Collegeville Bible Commentary*, p.822.