

Keys for understanding Esther begin with Esther 1 and the reason for Esther's advancement to highposition; 3:5-6 sets the stage for the plot; even without the mention of God, 4:13-17 implies worship and a realization of his involvement in their lives; 9:20-32 describes the official establishment of Purim as a religious holiday for the Jews. Mastering the ideas of these is a first step in grippingthe whole book.

Study tips: Before reading Esther read II Chronicles 36 to establish the background of this book. Read through Esther at one sitting, noting how the characters develop and interact. Note the careful chronological data given throughout the book (1:3,4,10; 2:12, 16; 3:1; etc.). Talk with a Jewish friend about Purim to gain some other insights into the book. Find a copy of the Apocrypha and read its version of Esther. How does it differ from the biblical version? Can you explain the differences?

Esther in the classics is well represented. Sandro Botticelli (about 1445-1510) painted "Mordecai Lamenting Before the Gates of the Palace" as a masterful study in perspective with the solitary figure of Mordecai sitting on the palace steps. "The Wrath of Ahasuerur" by Jan Steen (1629-1679) portrays the moment of Esther's disclosure of the plot to the king. The popularity of the story of Esther has always been a favorite of the Jews as the third-century fresco of Esther before Ahasuerus shows. Alexander Pope wrote the libretto for George Frederick Handel's oratorio "Haman and Mordecai", which Handel later revised to the not unfamiliar "Esther".

For further reading: ESTHER: TRIUMPH OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY (Moody) by John C. Whitcomb..a brief andhelpful look at Esther from the Everyman's Bible Commentary. THE NEW BIBLE COMMENTARY has an exceptionally fine introduction to Esther along with its normally helpful commentary.

b. Items for more detailed study...as time allows:

- the character of theleading persons: Ahasuerus, Haman, Mordecai, Esther...
- the justice in the ultimate decree
- Esther's counter-plot to Haman
- the moral implications of Esther's queenship

If you wish to read the Apocrypha version I recommend the Oxford Annotated Edition of the Apocrypha. And when you have finished the study you will see how the plot shows the favor that God holds for His people and how this favor enables them to emerge the victor in many situations where otherwise they would have been overwhelmed. The plot grows from thehatred of the Jews which has an ethnic and universalistic cast to the triumph of the Jews over the sworn enemies.

D. A Survey Study of the Histories

This is the last section of the Hagiographa and near the last section of this course...but do not get too excited, we have some other things to consider as well..and a couple of tests to give, etc. But these books complete the Old testament canon and they are, in order: Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and the Chronicles. Their great function is to show the covenant of God being ratified after the period of captivity and punishment: God has and keeps His people.