

The Historical Accuracy of Esther

The human author of **Esther** opens the book with the same Hebrew formula: **this is what happened**, that opens the historical books of **Joshua**, **Judges** and **Samuel**, as well as the book of **Ezekiel**. He apparently intends his readers to think the story he is about to tell relates to actual historical events.

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 486 BC | Ahasuerus becomes king |
| 483 BC | Ahasuerus holds a banquet (Esther 1:3) |
| 482-479 BC | Persia fights Greece and is defeated |
| December 479 to January 478 BC | Esther becomes queen (Esther 2:16-17) |
| April to May 474 BC | Haman plots against the Jews (Esther 3:7) |
| April 17, 474 BC | Ahasuerus' edict against the Jews (Esther 3:12) |
| June 25, 474 BC | Ahasuerus' edict to protect the Jews (Esther 8:8) |
| March 7, 473 BC | The day of destruction (Esther 8:12) |
| March 8-9, 473 BC | The first Purim celebration (Esther 9:17-19) |

Nothing in this book has been shown to be historically untrue; however, a number of questions have been raised concerning the historical accuracy of **Esther**. There are **twelve problems** usually raised against the accuracy of the book. None of these problems are beyond explanation and some may result from the legitimate use of poetic license. But even if they are taken altogether, they do not compel the conclusion that the story is entirely fiction.

1. The division of the Persian Empire into 127 provinces seems to contradict the twenty provinces that Herodotus mentioned (see **Ak - The King Gave a Grand Banquet in Susa, and Displayed the Vast Wealth of His Kingdom** for the explanation)

2. Feasting for 180 days seems so absurd to some that they challenge the historical accuracy of the book of Esther (see **Ak - The King Gave a Grand Banquet in Susa, and Displayed the Vast Wealth of His Kingdom** for the explanation)

3. The name **Vashi** does not agree with Herodotus, who refers to the wife of **Ahasuerus** by the name of **Amestris** (see **Ak - The King Gave a Grand Banquet in Susa, and Displayed the Vast Wealth of His Kingdom** for the explanation).

4. Some have doubted the historicity of **Esther**, saying that if **Mordecai** was really taken into captivity with **Jehoiachin**, he would have been about 120 years old during the reign of **Ahasuerus** (see **An - Esther Was Taken to the King's Palace and Entrusted to Hegai, Who Had Charge of the Harem** for the explanation).

5. The name **Esther** does not agree with Herodotus, who refers to the wife of **Ahasuerus** by the name of **Amestris** (see **An - Esther Was Taken to the King's Palace and Entrusted to Hegai, Who Had Charge of the Harem** for the explanation).

6. Some question the historical accuracy of **Esther** in that a year of beauty treatments seems far-fetched (see **Ao - Now the King was Attracted to Esther More Than Any of the Other Women** for the explanation).

7. Persian kings collected their harem indiscriminately, but they usually took wives from only noble families; therefore, **Esther's** marriage to **Ahasuerus** seems highly unlikely (see **Ao - Now the King was Attracted to Esther More Than Any of the Other Women** for the explanation).

8. Another detail that has been considered improbable by some is that **Haman** cast lots to determine the date for the execution of the Jews eleven months in advance (see **Av - The Lot Fell on the Twelfth Month, the Month of Adar, in the Presence of Haman** for the explanation).

9. The height of **Haman's seventy-five foot pole** constructed to impale **Mordecai** has been seen by some as fanciful, and lacking authenticity (see **Bd - Haman's Rage Against Mordecai** for the explanation).

10. The practice of making decrees of the king irrevocable is unknown in any of the extrabiblical texts during the reign of **Ahasuerus**; therefore, some say it was not plausible (see **Bi - Now Write Another Decree in the King's Name in Behalf of the Jews** for the explanation).

11. Another detail that has been considered improbable is that the Jews killed **seventy-five thousand** of their enemies after the king's second edict (see **Bm - The Jews Struck Down All Their Enemies with the Sword, Killing and Destroying Them** for the explanation).

12. Some think it unlikely that a Jew such as **Mordecai** could have held such a high position in the Persian Empire (see **Cf - The Greatness of Mordecai** for the explanation).

If it were possible or necessary to prove the historical accuracy of an ancient document in every detail, the document, then, would be only a collection of facts we could obtain elsewhere. The arguments against **Esther's** historical accuracy are primarily based not on evidence, but on the absence of confirming evidence, in some cases, and on improbabilities judged from our limited knowledge of the ancient world. On the contrary, **four basic points lead us to the conclusion that the book is a trustworthy witness to history.**

First, research has demonstrated that the author's credibility as to what we know of Ahasuerus and his reign: the greatness of his empire (1:1 and 20), his quick and sometimes irrational temper (1:12, 7:7-8), his almost unlimited promises and generous gifts (5:3, 6:6-7), his drinking feasts and his seven princely advisers (1:14), an efficient postal system (3:13, 8:10), and Persian words.

Secondly, the viewpoint of Yeshua and the apostles is that the history written in the TaNaKh, as a whole, is an unquestionably reliable guide to the events of the past. One good indication of Christ's high regard for the Scriptures is found in His complete trust in the literal truth of *biblical history*. He always treats the historical narratives as factually truthful accounts. In the course of His teachings He makes reference to: **Abel (Luke 11:51), Noah (Mt 24:37), Abraham (John 8:56), Sodom and Gomorrah (Luke 10:12), Lot (Luke 17:28), Isaac and Jacob (Matthew 8:11), David** when he and his companions ate the bread of the Presence (Mark 2:25), and many other persons and incidents. It is not too much to say that Messiah accepted without reservation the entire historical accuracy of the TaNaKh.

Thirdly, there is no indication that Esther is intended to be taken other than as a straightforward narrative of events as they occurred. The human author went to great lengths to include places, names, and events, so much so that the text seems to be making a point about its own historical value.

Fourthly, if we believe in the inspiration of Scripture, then we must believe that the book of Esther is historically accurate. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (Second Timothy 3:16-17).