

Esther

An introduction

The book has the Jewish remnant in the Persian Empire in two moods: grieving over the threat of their genocide and celebrating the destruction of enemies and their own survival. And this in the space of four chapters!

For a good, conservative introduction to and commentary on the book of Esther go to the following link <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/esther.pdf> Notice particularly the *possible* time line that has Esther's story bisecting the book of Ezra and preceding the book of Nehemiah. So you cannot understand Esther's significance for the Bible's story line, unless you also read the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. If you want to use these studies for your group, then you will have to do more than just read Ezra and Nehemiah.

For background on the Persian Empire you can go to the following link <http://www.crystalinks.com/persia.html> . Notice the extent of the Empire at its height of control. Look at all the live links on this site to the archaeological material that helps illuminate some of the story in Esther. You might also be stimulated by the results of the excavation of Persepolis http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/MUS/PA/IRAN/PAAI/PAAI_Persepolis.html , which along with Susa, was one of the cities built and inhabited by the Persian kings.

Any good commentary on, or introduction to Esther will tell you the features of the book. Significantly, it's unique for a book of the Bible in that the name of God is not mentioned. Neither is prayer, sacrifice or the past history of the Jews. The only religious activity that gains a mention is fasting.

There are some credible explanations for this. But this doesn't mean God is absent. As you will discover, there are an incredible number of coincidences in the book. It transforms your understanding and increases the delight in reading, if these coincidences are thought of the providential care of God. If you want some help understanding what is meant by God's providence, the following site will help <http://www.studylight.org/dic/hbd/view.cgi?number=T5128>

If you and your group are to enjoy this book, you will have to be content with some unanswered questions. For instance, how could a faithful Jew allow someone in his care to become part of a harem? Or, is it right to seek revenge on your enemies? In the end, the point of the story is not to answer our questions but to open a window on the God who, as always, works as it were behind the scenes and brings good out of evil intentions. Always remember the best example of this is the cross of Jesus (Acts 4:27,28).