

# ESTHER

## Key Context and Themes

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### King Xerxes (Ahasuerus)

- He reigned from 486-465 BC. The events of Esther occurred between 483 and 473 BC. The Persian empire stretches from Pakistan in the east to Turkey in the west, from the Balkans in the north to Sudan in the south, representing an empire whose power and wealth was as vast as any that has ever existed. Whether back in Jerusalem or still in exile, the fate of the Jews hangs in the balance of the events of this book.

### Purim

- One of only two festivals celebrated by the Jews not established by Moses, the other being Hannukah. It falls one month before Passover in the last month of the year. You need to pay close attention to the time references (days, months, dates) throughout the book, because they are crucial to conveying the larger significance of the book.

### Absence of God

- Esther grapples with the question of God's apparent absence. Would God be faithful to his people far from the temple that is being rebuilt, far from the promise land? What does it mean for God to be in control and for his people in a context where he is seemingly neither known nor acknowledged?

### Ambiguity of Main Characters and Events

- The author almost never provides a moral evaluation of characters' actions and often fails to reveal their motivations. Therefore, we are often left in the dark as to why key characters made the decisions they did. As a result, the characters are not easily categorized as heroes or antiheroes. We will see true truths articulated for less savory reasons. And yet, through it all, in the midst of ambiguity, we see God's faithfulness and good purposes.