

PRECEPT
UPON
PRECEPT

Esther

A MAN AND
A WOMAN FOR
SUCH A TIME
AS THIS

ESTHER
A MAN AND A WOMAN FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS
PRECEPT UPON PRECEPT

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HELPFUL STUDY TOOLS

ARTHUR, KAY; ARTHUR, DAVID; DE LACY, PETE

The New How to Study Your Bible

Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2010

Hebrew Word Study Tools

(The following is a list of helpful Hebrew Word Study Tools:)

HARRIS, R. LAIRD; ARCHER, GLEASON L. JR.; WALTKE, BRUCE K.

Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament

Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1980

RICHARDS, LAWRENCE O.

Expository Dictionary of Bible Words

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985

RECOMMENDED COMMENTARIES

GAEBELEIN, FRANK E.

The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 4, 1, 2 Kings, 1, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Esther, Esther, Job

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishers, 1992

WALVOORD, JOHN F., ZUCK, ROY B., AND DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures

Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983-c1985

CARSON, D. A.

The New Bible Commentary

Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994

KEIL, C. F., DELITZSCH, F.

Commentary on the Old Testament

Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2002

RECOMMENDED SOFTWARE

Logos Bible Software

Powerful search engines and up to 4,000 electronic Bible study resources (commentaries, lexicons, Bible dictionaries etc.) make it fast and easy to do simple and complex searches of multiple sources, then pull materials together for orderly presentation—excellent for word and topical studies based on English or original Hebrew and Greek. Available at www.logos.com.

LESSON ONE

Chapters One and Two

THIS LESSON INCORPORATES The following located in the Appendix:
Observation Worksheets of Esther 1–2
“The Main Characters in the Book of Esther”
“Banquets in the Book of Esther”
“Esther at a Glance”
“The Times of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther”
Cross-references

If you want a good story, you’ll find it in the book of Esther.

It’s a book you don’t want to put down—especially if you are reading it for the first time. Because it is short and fast-moving, you’re eager to see how it all turns out. You are eager to know:

What will happen to the hero and heroine?

The people?

The villain?

Will the king be deceived—a pawn of those who serve him?

Who will live? Who will die?

While Esther has all the ingredients for a good story, what makes it even more fascinating is that it is a book of the Bible, which means it is a book “breathed” by God—inspired, recorded, and preserved for eternity. A divine work ordained by the One and Only True God.

And because of that, Esther has a purpose beyond being simply a fascinating story in a quick read. God has a reason for including this book among the sixty-six that comprise the Bible. According to the book of Romans, the book of Esther, like the other portions of the Old Testament, was written for your instruction—so that you might have encouragement and hope for your life (Romans 15:4).

It is for this reason that we are going to ask you to restrain yourself and move with us through this book chapter by chapter, letting its story unfold over these

next four weeks. We are going to ask you not to read ahead or read commentaries until we tell you to; Esther didn't happen in a day—so let's read and study it a segment at a time.

We long to have you discover the truths of Esther for yourself, to have a divine encounter with God Himself, to give Him the opportunity to be your primary and principal teacher. If you'll do this, you'll never forget His message and His purpose for including Esther in His book.

We're confident God will use the message and story of the book of Esther to prepare you for the days ahead—days that are leading us rapidly to the end of the ages.

DAY ONE

1. When you study God's words, you want divine insight, nothing veiled. So begin with prayer, talking with the Author and seeking His purpose for including Esther in the Bible. As you pray, you might want to remind God of His promise to lead you and guide you into all truth. You might also ask Him to keep you on track so that you see and understand what He wants you to know. Be careful that you don't bring any presuppositions into your study that would keep you from handling God's Word accurately. Remember, we are not to add to His words; He tells us everything we need to know, and if He doesn't tell us, we don't need to know it!
2. When you study a book of the Bible, it is important to identify the type of literature you are reading as it helps you determine how to interpret it correctly. In the Appendix of this workbook, you will find a printout of the whole book of Esther. Read the first chapter of Esther. When you finish, think about the type of literature you just read. Does it sound like history, poetry, wisdom literature, or prophecy?
3. As you read a historical narrative—an account of what happens in time and place to people, you want to begin by getting the facts. Like any good journalist, you need to ask the **5 Ws** and **H**: **who, what, when, where, why**, and **how**. Of the 5—the two easiest to see in a historical account are the **who** and the **what**: people and events.

So let's begin there. Read chapter 1 again and list your observations on the chart that follows.

- a. **Who** are the main characters of Esther chapter 1?
- b. **What** is happening? In other words, what is the main event—or main events?

Who What is happening Where When

4. Now does the narrative tell you *where* chapter 1 is happening? If so, double underline the place on your Observation Worksheet in green. Then write it under the heading **Where** as you did with the **who** and the **what**. This will help you put the book in its geographical context. There is a map in the Appendix. Locate the place on the map. Also, note the extent of King Ahasuerus’s kingdom.
5. Now, one last thing for today. Is there any reference that tells us when the event(s) is taking place? Any reference to time? If so, put a green circle around all time references and then note the time on the chart above under **When**.

That’s a good start! The story has begun . . . and lest you think, “And what does an event that happened millenniums ago mean to me, besides maybe being a little entertaining?” why don’t you ask God to show you?

We guarantee He will—in His time! Be patient.

DAY TWO

Have you ever read the Bible and then within the same day forgotten what you read? If so, that can change. Yesterday you began to learn the technique of asking 5 W and H questions in order to discover truth for yourself. The second technique is marking certain words in the text. These two techniques work together to slow you down as you read and help you see clearly what the author is saying.

If you are new to Precept but have met others who are not, undoubtedly you’ll hear or have heard the difference marking the text makes as you study; so please jump into the water of God’s Word in good old cannonball style.

And for those of you who are Precept veterans, take the opportunity to help new students in your class see how these techniques work and how they unlock the meaning of the text. It will sharpen your discipleship skills.

1. Read Esther 1 again and color-code the main characters:
 - a. Ahasuerus
 - b. Vashti

By color-coding, we simply mean choose a color for each one and then mark every reference to that person in the color of your choice. As you do, also color all related pronouns and synonyms.

Remember a **synonym** is a word that means the same as another, such as *king* for Ahasuerus and *queen* for Vashti. **Pronouns** are words like *I, me, my, he, she, you*, etc. You remember, don't you? Pronouns are stand-ins for the person.

2. Now what is the purpose of identifying and marking people? It's to help you see where they are mentioned and what God wants you to know about them. Therefore, after you mark you make a list! On "The Main Characters in the Book of Esther," in the Appendix, list in brief what you learn about Ahasuerus and Vashti. Leave space to add to your lists as you study each chapter.

There are lessons to be learned from observing the lives of others—things to imitate and sometimes things to avoid, so look for these and think about them. These are real people, not fictional characters created by man's imaginations.

3. Usually when you reread the text and make your lists about people, you discover words or phrases that are repeated. They are repeated because they are important. Remember, in biblical times people didn't have their own copies of the Word of God; therefore, the Word was read to them. When they heard something over and over, it helped them get the point—and remember it.

Did you notice the word *banquet* being repeated several times?

- a. Read through Esther chapter 1, and in your own distinctive way or color, mark all the references to *banquet*.
 - b. When you finish, list the various banquets on the page in the Appendix titled, "Banquets in the Book of Esther." As you do, note who gives the banquet, who attends, how long it lasts, and basically what happens at each. Be brief in what you record. Just the facts. You don't need to rewrite the text.
4. Now let's pause and think about what you have seen *for yourself* these past two days. You have discovered the **who** (the king and the queen) and the details about them including **how** the king reacts to the queen's refusal, the **what** (banquets), the **when** these things are taking place and the **where**. And you have marked each one. This is a great beginning.

On your Observation Worksheet you probably noticed that some of the verse numbers are bolded. This indicates where a new paragraph begins.

A **paragraph** consists usually of one or more sentences that are connected by a common thought or subject. When studying a book of the Bible, it is very helpful to summarize the main thought, event, or teaching of each paragraph. This is called the *theme* of the paragraph. So let's do that now.

Read through your Observation Worksheet again. As you do, write in the left margin the main theme of each paragraph. You may, of course, also write it below.

- a. 1:1-4
 - b. 1:5-9
 - c. 1:10-12
 - d. 1:13-20
 - e. 1:21-22
5. Now you have the themes of the paragraphs, so what is the theme, the main subject or event, covered in Esther chapter 1? If you wanted to remember what this chapter is all about, how would you title it?
- a. Write it out in as few words as possible. If you can, it is always best to use words from the text as it will help you better remember the content of the chapter. For example: you could title it “A King and Queen Throw 3 Celebrations” or “Ahasuerus Gives a Banquet, Queen Vashti Refuses to Come.” While the first title is true, the latter uses terms from the text (*banquet* rather than *celebration*) and is more specific, noting the names of the key people and the problem at the second banquet.
 - b. You will find an “Esther at a Glance” chart in the Appendix of this book. Record a theme for Esther 1 on the chart.

Summarizing each chapter of a book as you study is great tool for helping you remember what the chapter is about. If you have a New Inductive Study Bible (NISB) you'll find an At a Glance chart at the end of each book of the Bible. You might want to record the themes of Esther there. We suggest you use a pencil to begin with in case you want to change or refine a theme.


DAY THREE

1. As we begin observing Esther chapter 2 today, once again you'll want to talk to the Author. Ask Him to help you handle His Word accurately as 2 Timothy 2:15 says—not adding to it or taking away from it, but simply hanging on His every word and treating it in accordance with Whose it is!
2. Read through your Observation Worksheet of Esther 2. As you do, note the main characters in this chapter. Jot down their names below.

3. Add pertinent information to “Banquets in the Book of Esther.”
4. Now that you have an overview of this chapter, let’s prepare to observe the text more closely so that we can see exactly what is happening.

On the back cover of this workbook there is a **Key Word Bookmark** that serves two purposes.

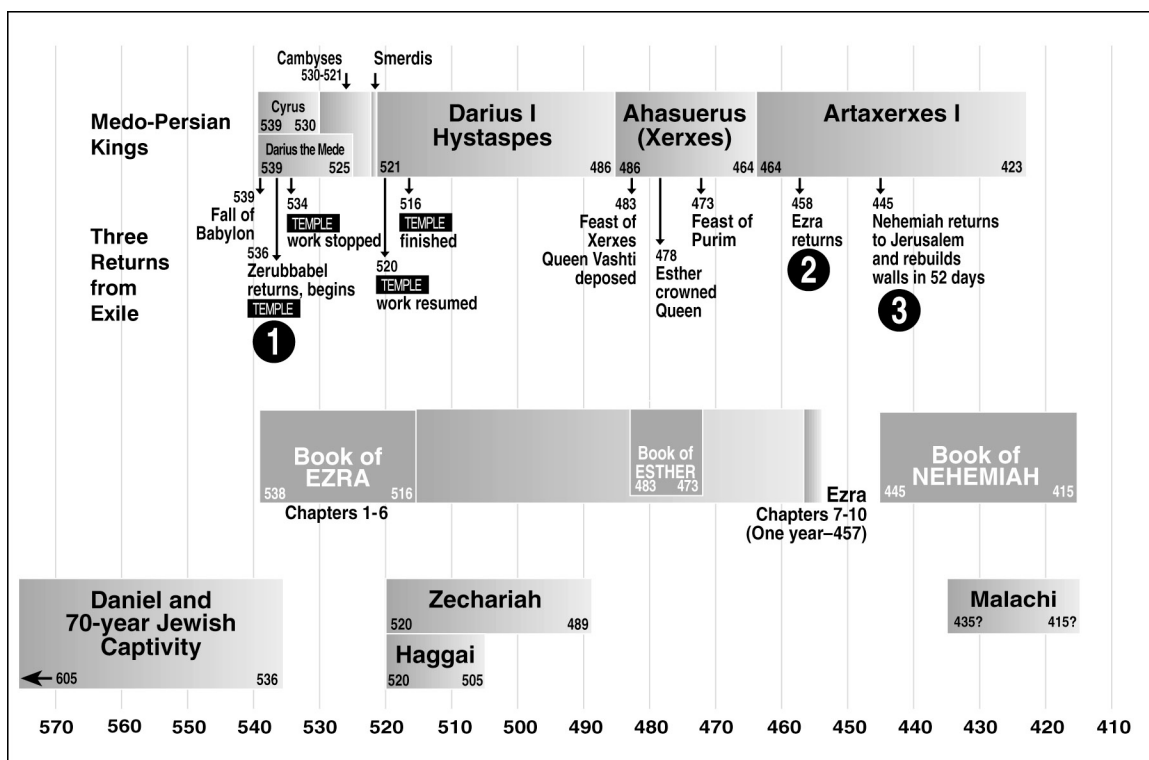
- a. *First*, it lists key words which appear throughout the Bible and gives you suggested ways of marking them so that you can be consistent throughout the Word of God. A **key word** is a repeated word that helps unlock the meaning of the text. Please note, the markings on the bookmark are merely suggestions—there is no right or wrong way to mark. Do what suits you.
 - 1) On that side of the card you will also find a suggested way to mark references to time—words that tell you *when* something happens or indicate *timing* such as *then*, *when*, *after*, etc. When you observed Esther 1, you put a green circle over the reference to “the third year of his reign”—marking the *when* of this chapter.
 - 2) It also suggests a way to mark geographical locations—*where* something occurs. Remember when you marked the where of Esther 1—the citadel of Susa? We suggested you double underline it in green.
- b. *Second*, on the other side of the bookmark you will find space to list key words used in Esther as you go. Mark or color them as you will do on your Observation Worksheet. Then you can use this as a reminder of the words you want to mark.
5. Do your observations of Esther chapter 2. Remember as you read to question the text with the 5 Ws and H: *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how*.
 - a. Mark any references to *when* and *where*.
 - b. Mark *King Ahasuerus* and *Vashti* as you did before. Put the king on your bookmark.
 - c. Add *Esther* and *Mordecai* to your Key Word Bookmark and mark each in a distinctive color or way.
 - d. Mark *banquet* as you marked it in chapter 1. Make sure it is on your Key Word Bookmark.
 - e. Add *favor* to your bookmark as it will be a repeated word throughout the book.
6. Read through Esther 2 again. This time look for the paragraph divisions (bolded verse numbers), and in the margin of your worksheet, record the main event of each paragraph. Then add a theme for Esther 2 to “Esther at a Glance” in the Appendix.
7. Now briefly list what you learn about Esther and Mordecai on “The Main Characters in the Book of Esther.”

5. When you marked Esther, Mordecai, and the king, you learned that the king married a Jew but didn't know it. You also saw references to *her people*—which obviously would be Jews. Devise a way to mark the references to Jews and put it on your bookmark. Some use a blue star of David like this: . When you finish, list what you learn from chapter 2 about the Jews below, or if you want, you can put this on “The Main Characters in the Book of Esther.”

6. When you study historical books, it's always important to pay attention to anything that tells you *when* because this puts you into the historical context or setting of the book. Note all the references to time that you marked. As you do, list your insights below, what happens and when.

7. Finally, following this you will find a time chart.
 - a. Look at the center line. When does the book of Esther take place?

 - b. What empire is ruling at this time? (Look at the top line) _____
 - c. What is another name of Ahasuerus? _____
 - d. According to this timeline, what had already happened in Jewish history prior to the events in Esther? (Don't miss looking at the bottom line where it mentions Daniel.) List the events in the order in which they occur. “Temple” is a reference to the Jews' temple in Jerusalem.



e. The main theme of Ezra is the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, while the main theme of Nehemiah is rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Where does Esther fit chronologically into the events of these two books?

8. Read Ezra 4:1-6. Why might Mordecai have told Esther not to reveal her people?

Good work. It is really going to pay off tomorrow, and we think you will be excited at the truths you have discovered for yourself simply through the skills of observation.

DAY
FIVE

Now that you've observed the first two chapters, have the timing of these events, and have seen the references to Jews, let's get an even broader understanding of the historical context of the book of Esther. This will be our objective for today as we finish this week's study.

Hangeth thou in there, faithful one. It's going to be enlightening and exciting, especially if you've never seen it before.

1. Look at your list on Mordecai. Did you note why his great-grandfather left Judah? If not, see 2:5-6.

2. Let's explore the exile of the Jews by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon under the reign of Jeconiah, king of Judah.
 - a. Read 2 Kings 24:8-16 which describes the exile. Jeconiah was also called Jehoiachin.
 - b. From "The Times of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther" found in the Appendix
 - 1) The date of the exile with Jehoiachin was _____ B.C.
 - 2) Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem about nine years later, and in _____ B.C. destroyed the city and its temple. This is described in 2 Kings 25 and in the last chapter of 2 Chronicles.
 - c. Read 2 Chronicles 36:9-23.
 - 1) What items were exiled along with the people?

 - 2) Who brought about the captivity and the destruction and why?

ABOUT PRECEPT MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Precept Ministries International was raised up by God for the sole purpose of establishing people in God's Word to produce reverence for Him. It serves as an arm of the church without respect to denomination. God has enabled Precept to reach across denominational lines without compromising the truths of His inerrant Word. Believing the Word was verbally inspired and given to man as all that is necessary for him to become mature and thoroughly equipped for every good work of life, this ministry does not seek to impose its personal doctrines on others, but rather to direct people to the Master Himself, who leads and guides by His Spirit into all truth through a systematic study of His Word.

Precept Ministries International produces a variety of Bible studies and holds conferences and intensive Training Workshops designed to ground attendees in Inductive Bible Study. Conferences and weekly Bible studies are held at Precept Ministries International's headquarters and conference center, conveniently located on a beautiful 32-acre multi-building complex in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Jack Arthur and his wife, Kay, founded Precept Ministries in 1970. Kay Arthur is the creator and coauthor of the Precept Upon Precept and In & Out Bible studies, the New Inductive Study Series, 40-Minute Bible Studies, and Discover 4 Yourself Inductive Bible Studies for Kids. From years of diligent study and teaching experience, Kay and the staff have developed these unique, inductive courses.

If you want more information about Precept's teaching ministries or workshops, please contact **Precept Ministries International, 877-234-2030, www.preceptministries.ca**. A doctrinal statement is available upon request.