

Esther

Week 1 Outline

Literary Genre

1. Not really a historical account
2. Could be a set of stories of royal court
3. Could be seen as apocryphal
4. Could be seen as “secular”

Persian History

- Started as small nomadic tribal people
- Cyrus, a tribal leader, decided to expand their boundaries and conquer areas
- Cyrus and the Persians overthrew the Medes and Babylonians
- In just around 30 years Cyrus’ empire would stretch from India in the east, to Greece on the Mediterranean, down to Egypt and Ethiopia, and north to what is now Russia.
- In 538 Cyrus issued an Edict that allowed Israelite captives to return home.
- Two capitals: Persepolis and Susa
- Persia was destroyed by Alexander the Great.
- Persian History is recorded by Greek historians, specifically, Herodotus
- Xerxes I or Artaxerxes II

Israelite History

- 70 years as Babylonian captives
- They would return to the Promise Land as subjects to the Persians and eventually the Greeks and then Romans. They would never be free again
- Few returned to the Promise Land and thus many were still living in the Persian capitals during the time of our story.

Purim

- Purim or Festival of Lots is a Jewish Holiday that commemorates the saving of the Jewish people by Esther and Mordecai

Questions:

1. In light of the time and space issues to you think it will change how you read this scripture?
2. How does the lack of historicity affect your sense of this book's being the Word of God?
3. What about the absence of God directly mentioned? How do we/you interpret that?
4. How do we determine what we learn about God and ourselves when it is not clear with words and directives from God in biblical text?