

## *Chapter 18: Esther*

### **Key Terms**

- Deuteronomistic History: Martin Noth proposed that Deuteronomy–2 Kings is a unified work written primarily during the exilic period. This term describes Deuteronomy–2 Kings in Noth's theory, which remains a dominant theory today.
- Historical Books: Old Testament books Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther
- exilic: term describing the period during which both Israel and Judah were exiled from the Promised Land
- Purim: festival that celebrates God's deliverance of Israel as recorded in the book of Esther
- Persian Empire: major power in the ancient Near East ca. 539–332 BC
- Xerxes: King who ruled Persia during the time of Esther

### **Key Ideas**

- God is at work even when he is behind the scenes.
- The schemes of the wicked are doomed.
- God's plan for his people cannot be thwarted.

### **Chapter Summary**

Much controversy surrounds the book of Esther, including questions of canonicity, genre, historicity, and authorship. The book is set during the reign of Xerxes I (Ahasueras), reigning during the fifth century BC. Contemporary sources fail to identify most of the major actors within the book, leading many to question the work's historicity, though this is not ample evidence to outweigh the book's own insistence on its accuracy. The literary characteristics of the book indicate that the work is not intended as a historical chronicle; rather, it is intended to convey a theological message to the scattered Israelites of God's protection of his people and his judgment against their enemies.

The plot and message of Esther are structured around the technique of reversal, which is heightened by irony. The text is read annually at the celebration of Purim, which commemorates the deliverance of the Jews recorded in the book and also establishes its celebration. The events of the book imply that God's display of power is designed to confirm the people in their faith, rather than witness to the surrounding world, which has already observed God's revelation through Israel.