

## The Book of Esther from an educational perspective

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The Book of Esther is probably the best known book of the Bible. Dramatically read twice in synagogues, it is a central part of the Purim festivities celebrated in family and community. The heroes of the Book of Esther serve as role models for Jewish children, embody basic educational values, and are distinctly present at innumerable Purim parties in an imaginative variety of costumes.

Yet the Book of Esther also raises certain serious educational and perhaps even ethical problems that demand our attention. Primary among them is Esther's mixed marriage. Secondly, Mordechai's refusal to bow down to Haman, an act that endangered the entire Jewish people – despite the reality that in biblical times Jews did bow down before foreign rulers. A third issue concerns the violent end of the story: after the great victory of 13 Adar, Esther calls for an additional day of war and the public hanging of Haman's sons (who were already dead). This paper seeks to shed light on these subjects. Its basic premise is that the author of the Book of Esther was aware of such problems and relates to them, directly and indirectly, in the biblical text itself. Through an attentive and careful reading of the plain meaning of the Book of Esther, deeper levels of meaning become evident, and shed light on the educational dilemmas that the story seems to present. The discussion makes relatively minor use of traditional commentary and academic studies, and focuses on readings that reveal the plain meaning of the text itself.