

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF ESTHER

* * * **GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL PRESERVATION OF THE JEWS** * * *

S.L.H.
Soli Deo Gloria!

"For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed. And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" **Esther 4:14**

AUTHOR: Anonymous (c. 470 BC)

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE. Though anonymous, Jewish tradition attributes authorship of the book of Esther to Mordecai (Cp., Esth9:20-21). However, Mordecai's authorship is by no means certain, and seems unlikely for several reasons. First, as will be discussed subsequently, Mordecai was likely an unbeliever (at least at time of events in the Book of Esther). Second, throughout the Book of Esther Mordecai is consistently spoken of in the 3rd person; while not definitive, contrast that with Daniel who authored the Book of Daniel (e.g., Dan7:15; 8:1; 9:2; 10:2; 12:5).

The events of the Book of Esther take place from the 3rd year to the 13th year of the reign of the Persian King Ahasuerus (cf. Esth1:3; 3:7); assuming the identification of Esther's Ahasuerus¹ with Xerxes I (the Great), this would date the events recorded in the Book of Esther as 483-473 BC.

As with many of the books of the O.T., liberal critics have attempted to late date the Book of Esther, often to the period of the Maccabees (2nd century BC). However, the facts do not support such attempts. 1) The Hebrew style and vocabulary of Esther are similar to the Chronicler, not 2nd century Hebrew. 2) The accurate details provided of the Persian court (cf. Esth1:6) are consistent with an eyewitness author. 3) No Greek words are found in Esther, but it includes many Persian words. 4) The favorable attitude toward a Gentile king is sensible for the Persian period, but unthinkable during the Greek empire (especially the Maccabean period).

QUESTION CONCERNING CANONICITY. The name of God (neither "God" nor "LORD") does not occur in the Book of Esther. Nothing is mentioned of the religious aspects of Jewish life (not even prayer). Furthermore, no N.T. author quotes from the Book of Esther². For these reasons, both Jewish and Christian scholars have questioned the canonicity of the book of Esther. However, the Book of Esther certainly deserves its place in the canon of Scripture, especially when the theme of the book is properly understood (see THEME OF ESTHER below).

¹ Ahasuerus was not a personal name, but a title (meaning *Exalted Father*) used by several individuals in the Achaemenid dynasty of Persian kings.

² However, the O.T. books of Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Zephaniah, Nahum, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Obadiah are also not quoted by N.T. authors.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT. Esther is the last of three post-exilic historical books: Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. Whereas Ezra and Nehemiah record the history of the Jews who returned to the land of Israel from Babylon, Esther records the history of the Jews that remained scattered throughout the Persian empire after the Persians conquered the Babylonians.

As will be discussed in the exposition of the text of the Book of Esther, the Persian King "Ahasuerus" (Esth1:1) is most reliably identified as **Xerxes** I (the Great). If that is the case, the events of the Book of Esther occur between the 1st and 2nd returns of Jews from the Babylonian captivity (see CHART: JEWISH RETURNS FROM BABYLON), which means historically they fit into the gap of more than 70 years that occurs between chapters 6 and 7 of the Book of Ezra (see CHART: CHRONOLOGY OF EZRA-NEHEMIAH). The chronology of the Persian kings is complicated by considerable uncertainties. That chronology, as it intersects with the Books of Daniel, Ezra, Esther, and Nehemiah, is shown in the CHART: CHRONOLOGY OF THE MEDO-PERSIAN KINGS, in which their names as they appear in the Biblical text are shown in the blue boxes (indicating the duration of their reigns) and are correlated with their Persian names in the notes attached to each box. This chronology of Persian kings is consistent with the broad order given in Ezra 4:5-7 (i.e., Cyrus, Darius, Ahasuerus=Xerxes, and Artaxerxes). Furthermore, Xerxes is prophesied as the 4th king of Persia (i.e., Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius, Ahasuerus=Xerxes) who is richer than all and will attempt to conquer Greece (cf. Dan11:2).

The events of the Book of Esther precede those of the Book of Nehemiah by ~30 years. Esther's marriage to Xerxes, the King of Persia, may explain why his son Artaxerxes would be predisposed to allow the Jews to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. Though not supported by secular interpretations of history, there is a case to be made that Artaxerxes was the son of Xerxes by Esther, which would make Esther (the Jew) the mother of Artaxerxes³.

Finally, though not specifically ordained by God in Scripture, the Book of Esther provides the historical basis for the festival of **Purim**, which is celebrated by Jews to the present day (cf. Esth9:21,26-28).

BACKGROUND FROM THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT. The Abrahamic covenant includes a profoundly important provision, namely "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee" (Gen12:3). Though the Gentiles are not a party to the covenants God made with Israel (cf. Eph2:11-12), God regulates His relationship with the Gentile peoples and nations by means of this provision in the Abrahamic covenant (cf. Matt25:32-46). This principle is prominent in the Book of Esther. Haman's diabolical intent to eradicate the Jewish people worldwide resulted in his own execution, the execution of all of his sons, and will ultimately result in the eradication of his entire race which will be excluded from the Kingdom (cf. Obad18).

THEME OF ESTHER. The theme of the Book of Esther is the providence of God in the preservation of the Jewish people, where providence is the unseen hand of God guiding history to its appointed end (Cp., Isa46:9-11). This work of preservation occurs even during periods of apostasy (e.g., Esther's generation of Jews in Persia, Diaspora Jews during the present Church Age) when most Jews are unbelievers, since the preservation of the

³ The original records preserved from this period are from the Greek historian Herodotus, who records the wife of Xerxes and mother of Artaxerxes as Amestris, which might be a Hellenized form of the Persian name Esther (i.e., Am**ESTR**is).

Jewish people **as a race** is necessary for the ultimate fulfillment of God's covenants with Israel (i.e., a regenerate Israel functioning as the head of the nations in the Millennial Kingdom; cf. Deut26:19; 28:13); consistent with this understanding, **Mordecai and Esther were likely unbelieving Jews**. This has an application to the modern state of Israel today, which is largely unbelieving; God providentially protects the nation of Israel today, even in its unbelieving status.

OUTLINE OF ESTHER.

I. GENOCIDAL CRISIS FOR JEWS IN PERSIAN DIASPORA	Esther 1-5
A. Queen Vashti Deposed	Esther 1
B. Esther Becomes Queen	Esther 2
C. Haman's Genocidal Plot	Esther 3
D. Intercession of Mordecai	Esther 4
E. Esther Granted Favor by the King	Esther 5
II. GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL PRESERVATION OF THE JEWS	Esther 6-10
A. Mordecai Unexpectedly Honored by the King	Esther 6
B. Haman Exposed and Executed	Esther 7
C. The Jews Are Avenged	Esther 8
D. Feast of Purim Instituted	Esther 9
E. Mordecai Exalted to Prime Minister of Persia	Esther 10

DISPENSATIONAL NOTES. See the CHART: TYPOLOGY IN THE BOOK OF ESTHER. The typology in the Book of Esther is complex, with considerable differences of opinion as to its details even among Dispensational commentators. Suffice it to say, however, that Esther is a type of the nation of Israel in the Diaspora, which will be providentially preserved to the time of the end, at which time she will be restored to her proper place as the people of God (Hos1:6-10) and the wife of JEHOVAH (Jer3:8-20).

Note that a significant feature of the Persian Empire was that the Law of the Medes and Persians could not be altered, which contributes to plot elements in both the Books of Esther and Daniel (cf. Esth1:19; Dan6:8). This is a type of the one true God, His righteousness, and His laws, which "change not" (Mal3:6; cf. Deut4:2; 12:32; Prov30:6; Rev22:18-19).

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN MOSES AND ESTHER. Some have noted certain similarities between Moses and Esther, in that both were Jews born in foreign lands, both were adopted, both concealed their Jewish identity for a period of time, both were initially reluctant to act as a deliverer for the Jewish people under persecution outside the land of Israel, and both fought against the Amalekites and saw victory over them.

COMPARISONS OF RUTH AND ESTHER (adapted from Fruchtenbaum). The Books of Ruth and Esther are the only two books in the Bible named for women, and they share some interesting similarities and contrasts: 1) Ruth was a Gentile with a Hebrew name, whereas Esther was a Jew with a Gentile name; 2) Ruth was a Gentile who lived among Jews, whereas Esther was a Jew who lived among Gentiles; 3) Ruth married a Jew who was in the line leading to the kings of Israel, whereas Esther married the Gentile ruler of Persia; 4) both illustrate blessing that results from faithfulness to the God of Israel, both for the Gentile (Ruth) and the Jew (Esther); and 5) the Book of Ruth illustrates the **sovereignty** of God (such that the name of the LORD appears prominently throughout the book), whereas the Book of Esther illustrates the **providence** of God (such that the name of the LORD never appears in the book).

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION. A hotly debated issue today is whether or not Christians are obligated to support the Jewish people and/or the modern nation of Israel. Many suggest that we are under no obligation to do so because they are a nation of unbelievers, they still reject Jesus as their Messiah (cf. Matt23:37-39), and they oppose Christian evangelism in many ways (cf. Rom11:28); some go so far as to suggest that to do so is sinful and inconsistent with the will of God. **The message of the Book of Esther speaks to this issue.** It is clear that even unbelieving Jews outside the land of Israel and under the discipline/chastisement of God remain, nonetheless, objects of His election and providential preservation (Rom11:26-27,29). Note that God's promise to Abraham to bless those who bless him and his descendants, and to curse those who curse him and his descendants (Gen12:3), does not make the divine promise of blessing/cursing contingent upon the spiritual condition of the Jews, either individually or corporately.

See CHART: OBJECTS OF GOD'S LOVE IN THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

CHAPTER 1

QUEEN VASHTI DEPOSED

The Book of Esther opens during the time of the Persian empire. King Cyrus had decreed in 536 BC that all Jews exiled by Babylon could return to their native land of Israel, even encouraging them to rebuild the Temple of the LORD (cf. Ezr1:1-4), but only a small group of ~50,000 had done so under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-6). Over 50 years after the decree of Cyrus, most of the Jews remained scattered throughout Persian lands and subject to the king of Persia.

- [1] As discussed in the Introduction, "Ahasuerus" was not a personal name, but a title (i.e., Exalted Father) used by numerous Persian monarchs; that the writer thought it necessary to give additional details to delineate "this ... Ahasuerus" is consistent with that understanding. This Ahasuerus was Xerxes I (the Great) who reigned from 486-465 BC. The empire of Persia reached its greatest expanse under Xerxes, "from India even unto Ethiopia".

Typological Note. Ahasuerus is a type of JEHOVAH God, portrayed as king over the whole world (Cp., Dan2:44; Zech14:9). Note "Ahasuerus" is a title that means *Exalted Father*; "Xerxes" means *king of all men*.

- [2] "Shushan" was the Hebrew name of the Persian capital, which is what appears in the text of Esther, whereas Susa is its form in Greek (many modern Bible versions use Susa, presumably to more explicitly make the connection with secular sources which use the Greek form).
- [3] The "third year of his reign" would be 483 BC. The purpose of this extended banquet was probably to assemble all his "nobles" and "princes" to plan for an invasion of Europe; Xerxes wished to avenge his father Darius' defeat by the Greeks at Marathon in 490 BC. Planning would have taken place during the day, followed by "feast[ing]" and revelry in the evening.

Historical Note. The Medo-Persian empire began as an alliance between Media and Persia⁴, with the dominant partner initially being Media; as time went on, Persia rose to dominate the alliance, as prophesied by Daniel (cf. Dan7:5; 8:3). That "Persia" is mentioned before "Media" in this verse suggests the setting of the Book of Esther is during the later phase of the empire in which Persia dominated, which is consistent with the identification of Ahasuerus as Xerxes I.

- [4] The assembly of princes and nobles in Shushan went on for "an hundred and fourscore days" (i.e., half a year), suggesting both the detailed nature of the military planning, as well as the extravagance of the feasting—presumably to engender support for the upcoming military campaign, for which the "nobles and princes" (v3) would be expected to supply troops.
- [5] At the end of the 180 day exercise, the king held a "feast" of "seven days" for all the ordinary citizens of "Shushan" (presumably to

⁴ The Medo-Persian empire began with Cyrus II (the Great), who conquered the Babylonians, and whose father was king over the Persian province of Anshan and whose mother was the daughter of the king of Media.

announce his intention to attack Greece and muster the support of his local subjects).

- [6] Subsequent archeological excavations have confirmed that the minute details of the king's palace in Shushan are extraordinarily accurate, virtually necessitating that the author of the Book of Esther be a contemporary eyewitness of the events recorded in the book.
 - [7] The king supplied "royal wine in abundance" (i.e., the best vintage) served in unique "vessels of gold". This extravagance was undoubtedly an attempt to curry favor and support from the subjects of Persia for the upcoming campaign against Greece.
 - [8] In later years, the Persian court became corrupt, and parties like these included compelled drinking and debauchery; but such was not the case under Xerxes. "And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel."
 - [9] Xerxes' "queen" was "Vashti", whose name in Persian means *beautiful*. Xerxes would have had many wives and concubines, but according to Persian custom one wife of the king would have been preeminent over the other wives as "queen". The Greek historian Herodotus records the name of Xerxes' "queen" as Amestris, which has been difficult for scholars to reconcile linguistically with Vashti; however, the name Amestris is linguistically close to Esther (see comments in the Introduction).
- The king's party would have been attended only by men, so Vashti held a separate party for "the women in the royal house" (i.e., the women who lived/served in the Persian palace).
- [10] After "seven days" of feasting, the king was "merry with wine" (i.e., drunk). These seven "chamberlains" (Lit., eunuchs) had charge over the royal harem.
 - [11] True to the meaning of her name, Vashti possessed great "beauty" and was "fair to look on". Presumably the king wished to boast in her "beauty" before all the men who were in attendance at the feast.
 - [12] The reason for Vashti's refusal is not given and has been the subject of much speculation. Since it was stated that she be brought "with the crown royal" (v11), some have taken that to suggest she appear only with the crown (i.e., naked). Others base her unwillingness on merely the indignity of being paraded before drunken men at a party. However, the reason is not known and unimportant. The king was enraged by Vashti's refusal to come, likely only exasperated by his inebriated condition.
 - [13] These "wise men, who knew the times" were the same caste of magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers (i.e., Magi; Cp., Dan2:2) over which Daniel was set in Babylon (cf. Dan3:48), which were retained as advisors to the Persian court after Persia subjugated Babylon, and which continued to exist as an order even into the first century AD (cf. Matt2:1).
 - [14] Distinct from the caste of "wise men" (v13) were the "seven princes of Persia and Media". All seven names given are Persian in origin,

suggesting these were the leaders of the noble families of Persia proper (not the subjugated lands that comprised the empire).

- [15] Unlike the kings of Babylon, who were absolute depots (cf. Dan5:18-19), the kings of Persia were subject to their "law", and whatever consequences were to be leveled against Vashti for her refusal to obey the "commandment of the king" had to be "according to law".
- [16] Vashti's refusal to obey Ahasuerus was regarded as an offense to "all the princes, and to all the people who are in all the provinces of the king". The setting was an assembly of all the princes of Persian and Media to plan for a massive invasion of Europe (Greece), for which the princes of all the vassal provinces would be expected to supply troops. Vashti's public display of insubordination before Ahasuerus in this context, left unchecked, might engender insubordination among the vassal princes and provinces.
- [17] Further, rumor of Vashti's insubordination before Ahasuerus might engender insubordination among the wives of the princes. This stated concern of Memucan (v16), however, might have been subterfuge designed to resonate with the emotions of the princes, but intended to mask the real concern (i.e., a defection of support among the princes for the upcoming military campaign).
- [19] The nobles' desire to make the removal of Vashti a "royal commandment ... written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it may not be altered" was likely a precaution to ensure that Vashti could never return to power as Queen and exact revenge on those responsible for her banishment.

Dispensational Note. The prominent attribute of the law of the Medes and the Persians was that it could never be altered (Cp., Dan6:8). This is a type of the immutability of Jehovah GOD and His eternal and unchanging law (cf. Ps19:7-9; 119:89; Isa40:8; Mal3:6). Note that it is only in the Bible that the immutability of the law of the Medes/Persians is recorded (i.e., undocumented in secular sources), but it is a major plot element in the books of Daniel and Esther.
- [20] The concern that wives submit to their husbands was superficial; the real concern was that the vassal princes and their subjects submit to the great Persian king Ahasuerus.
- [21] Dispensational Note. The removal of Vashti, the Gentile Bride (Cp., Act15:14) of the great King Ahasuerus, from her place of service as Queen for disobedience, after which Ahasuerus obtains a Jewish Bride, is a type of **the Rapture of the Church**. The Church Age will end with the Church, the Bride of Christ, in apostasy (cf. 1Tim4:1; 2Tim3:1-5). The rapture will remove the apostate Church from the earth, after which God will restore Israel to her former place as the Wife of Jehovah (cf. Isa54:1-8). All of this was prophesied in Romans 11:16-26.
- [22] Here it is clear that the Medo-Persian empire was a confederation of many distant "provinces" of distinctly different "peoples" and "languages". Such an alliance is always in danger of disintegration, especially in times of war.

CHAPTER 2

ESTHER BECOMES QUEEN

The removal of Vashti from her position as Queen necessitated the search for a replacement. The elaborate and lengthy process to assemble a pool of candidates for Ahasuerus was conducted while he was away from Shushan on Persia's unsuccessful campaign against Greece. Against incredible odds, Esther was selected. The foreknowledge and providence of God is seen in that Esther was selected to be Queen and put into a position to help the Jews during an existential crisis even before that crisis had developed.

- [1] Ahasuerus "remembered Vashti" in the sense of feeling the loss of her absence.
- [2] The idea of assembling a pool of "young virgins", from which Ahasuerus could select a replacement Queen, came from the "king's servants". In Scripture, the unnamed "servant" can be a type of the Holy Spirit (Cp., Gen15:2; 24:2).
- [3] The pool of "young virgins" were to be gathered "from all the provinces" of the Persian empire; Esther was a virgin (Heb., *betulah*; Cp., v14). Here, "chamberlain" is the Hebrew word for *eunuch*, and "Hegai" is a name derived from the Persian word for eunuch. As "keeper of the women", Hegai was undoubtedly a literal eunuch. The "young virgins" were given "things for purification" (or beautifying ointments), which were cosmetic treatments to enhance their attractiveness; it is likely that many of these treatments included things the Law of Moses would deem unclean.
- [4] The process proposed to find a replacement queen "pleased the king".
- [5] The genealogical sketch given for "Mordecai" is undoubtedly abbreviated, but names his ancestors who are of particular note. He was a "Benjamite" descended from "Kish", who was also the forefather of King Saul (1Sam9:1), whose line of descent included "**Shimei**" (2Sam16:5).

Shimei and the Providence of God. Approximately five hundred years, and many generations, before the time of Mordecai and Esther, Shimei was a Benjamite Jew who had cursed King David on his flight from Jerusalem during the rebellion of Absalom (cf. 2Sam16:5). Abishai petitioned David to allow him to slay Shimei for his heinous act of disrespect toward the king (v9), but David chose to show him mercy (vv11-12). David said, "It may be that the LORD ... will requite me good for his cursing this day" (2Sam16:12). Had David allowed Shimei to be slain, Mordecai would have never been born.

Meaning of Mordecai's Name. "Mordecai" is a Hebrew transliteration of the name of the chief Babylonian god *Marduk*. This was presumably his Persian name; his Hebrew name, if he had one, is not given.

Historical Note. This verse includes the first use of "Jew" in the Bible; derived from "Judah", it became a term used of all Israelites. The notion that the ten tribes that followed Jeroboam, seceding from Judah during the reign of King Rehoboam and being exiled from the

land of Israel when conquered by Assyria in 722 BC with no subsequent mention of a return, are 'lost' is without merit⁵. After Jeroboam's secession and subsequent apostasy (1Kgs12:25-33), the believing remnant from all ten northern tribes permanently immigrated to the southern nation of Judah (2Chron11:13-17). Thus, following the division of the kingdom, the nation of Judah became populated with Israelites from all twelve tribes, and for this reason all became known as "Jews".

- [6] Nebuchadnezzar's deportation of Jews at the time of "Jeconiah, king of Judah" was his second deportation in 597 BC (see CHART: NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S THREE DEPORTATIONS FROM JUDAH). The proper interpretation of this verse has caused considerable debate relative to the historical placement of the Book of Esther. Some have interpreted it to mean Mordecai himself was taken from Jerusalem to Babylon in 597 BC. However, such an interpretation would require either that the events of the Book of Esther had to have occurred almost immediately following Cyrus' decree allowing the Jews to return from Babylon, which is inconsistent with the circumstances of the fledgling Persian empire at that time, or that Mordecai be ~140 years old during the events of the Book of Esther. Others have taken "Kish" as the ancestor of Mordecai's who was deported with Jeconiah, interpreting v5 as a tight genealogy without any gaps; however, this interpretation disconnects the "Kish" and "Shimei" of Mordecai's genealogy from their more prominent namesakes, making the correlation of the names purely incidental. A better understanding is that the ancestor of Mordecai's who was deported in 597 BC is unnamed, and the genealogy given in v6 rightly correlates with the prominent figures from the early history of Israel, and is so given for the purpose of highlighting the providence of God in the placement of Mordecai (and Esther) during the reign of Ahasuerus (i.e., Xerxes the Great).
- [7] Hadassah/Esther was Mordecai's "uncle's daughter", so they were technically cousins. However, Mordecai was considerably older than Esther, making him more of an uncle figure in her life. Esther's parents died when she was young, and Mordecai had raised her as "his own daughter".

Meaning of Esther's Names. "Hadassah" is a Hebrew name meaning *myrtle* [tree]. "Esther" is a Persian name that is a form of *Ishtar*, the Babylonian goddess of love and war; however, "Esther" transliterated into Hebrew is related to a word that means *hidden* or *concealed* (Cp., Ps83:3; Matt13:44).

- [8] Because Esther was exceptionally "fair and beautiful" (v7), she was added to the pool of virgins assembled at "Shushan" under "Hegai" to be considered in replacing Vashti.
- [9] Esther is called a "maiden", a Hebrew word often translated *damsel* and generally meaning a young virgin of marriageable age (Cp., Gen24:14). Much as Joseph and Daniel obtained favor from their pagan handlers, so Esther found favor with Hegai, who gave her priority in

⁵ British Israelism contends that the so-called ten lost tribes immigrated to Europe, then to Great Britain, and are represented today by English-speaking Anglo-Saxon peoples. Mormonism contends that the tribe of Ephraim immigrated to North America and became the ancestors of the Native American peoples.

undergoing the beautification process as well as assigning her and her maidens to "the best place of the house of the women".

- [10] However, in contrast to Joseph and Daniel, who lived boldly as Jews in pagan lands, strictly adhering to the requirements of the Law of Moses (cf. Gen39:7-12; Dan1:8-16; 6:10), Esther hid her Jewish identity, as directed by Mordecai, and conformed to Persian culture (which almost certainly required her to break the Law of Moses).
- [11] Mordecai made daily observations of Esther. However, it is not stated whether he was distressed by her situation, or whether he hoped for her selection as queen; the latter would seem to be the case based on the counsel Mordecai gave to Esther.
- [12] To "**go in** to king Ahasuerus" is a euphemism for sexual relations (Cp., Gen16:2; 29:21; 38:8; Deut21:13; 25:5). The beautification process took "twelve months".
- [13] Each "maiden" was given every possible advantage to please the king.
- [14] Each maiden spent an evening with the king (which included sexual relations; cf. v12), after which she was assigned to be a concubine (i.e., no longer a virgin) in the king's harem and lodged in the "second house of the women" under a different "chamberlain" (Lit., eunuch), "Shaashgaz". Mordecai and Esther had to have known that this would be her fate if not chosen to become queen.
- [15] Though Mordecai is said to be Esther's "uncle", that Hebrew word has a broad range of meaning; Mordecai and Esther were cousins (v7). Esther "required nothing" to enhance her attractiveness when she finally got her turn to "go in unto the king". Whether this was personal confidence, or an implicit trust in the LORD's will for her, is not stated.
- [16] Esther became queen "in the seventh year" of the reign of Ahasuerus (i.e., Xerxes; 479 BC), four years after the removal of Vashti (Cp., Esth1:3). This four year gap includes Xerxes' failed attempt to conquer Greece, during which he was absent from Shushan for two years.
- [17] The king "loved" (Heb., *ahab*, a genuine love rooted in emotion) Esther. Esther was given "the royal crown", the same with which Vashti had refused to appear before the king (Esth1:11), confirming her replacement of Vashti as "queen". Thus, against all odds, Esther was made queen according to the providence of God (Cp., Gen45:5,7).
- [18] Part of Ahasuerus' wedding celebration included a "release", probably a brief deferment of "taxes", but also likely included a release from military service, throughout all his "provinces". This generous "gift" to the subjects of the Persian empire may have been as much about distracting them from Xerxes' disastrous failure in attempting to conquer Greece as it was about celebrating his new queen.
- [19] Mordecai "sat in the king's gate" after "the virgins were gathered together the second time", suggesting that Mordecai was elevated to a position of authority after the selection of Esther as queen, perhaps by her influence.

- [20] Esther continued to hide her Jewish ethnicity "as Mordecai had charged her". "Esther", transliterated into Hebrew, means *something hidden* or *concealed*. Note, Esther could not have been practicing the Law of Moses, else her religious adherence would have surely given away her identity. This does not necessarily mean she was not a genuine believer, though it suggests that was likely the case.
- [21] As Mordecai's sat "in the king's gate", he was in a position to overhear discussions of rumors and plots, such as a plot to assassinate "the king, Ahasuerus", by two of his "chamberlains".
- [22] Esther communicated the information concerning the traitorous plot to "the king", giving Mordecai the credit for the intelligence.
- [23] A subsequent "inquisition" proved the intelligence to be correct, and "Bigthan and Teresh" (v21) were "hanged on a tree". The details of the incident, along with the fact that Mordecai had uncovered the plot, were "written in the book of the chronicles before the king", a fact that would prove to be providentially important in the future (cf. Esth6:1-2).

CHAPTER 3

HAMAN'S GENOCIDAL PLOT

Haman is introduced, inexplicably elevated to a position of power within the empire, and subsequently develops a hatred for Mordecai (and all Jews). Haman conceives a diabolical plan to kill all Jews, thereby eliminating the chosen people of God; in this, Haman is seen as a type of the Antichrist (Cp., Rev12:13,17). Thus, Satan (i.e., the influence and power behind Haman) attempted to cut off the Jewish people before they brought forth the Messiah (cf. Rom9:4-5; Rev12:1-4).

- [1] "Haman" is introduced and inexplicably elevated by King Ahasuerus to the position of prime minister, "above all the princes". In contrast, Mordecai's role in exposing the plot against the king (Esth2:21-23) seemingly went unnoticed and unrewarded. Haman's name means *magnificent* (Cp., Dan8:25; 11:36-37). A brief genealogy of Haman is given, noting that he is an "Agagite".

The Amalekites and the Providence of God. "Agag" was king of the Amalekites (cf. 1Sam15:8); thus, Haman was an Amalekite. The Amalekites were the perpetual enemies of the Israelites, having committed many sins against them, such that the LORD commanded King Saul to "smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling..." (1Sam15:1-3; i.e., conduct Holy War against the Amalekites in order to cut them off as a race of people; Cp., Deut7:1-5; 20:16-17). Saul failed to do as the LORD commanded, which was one of the reasons the kingdom was taken from him and given to David (1Sam15:26-28). Although Samuel killed Agag (1Sam15:32-33), the Amalekites were not cut off as a people. Had King Saul obeyed the LORD and cut off the Amalekites, Haman would never have been born.

Typological Note. "After these things" typologically connotes the Rapture of the Church (Cp., Rev1:19; 4:1) and the start of the

Tribulation. Vashti is never mentioned again, as the Church is not mentioned after Revelation 3. Haman, a type of the Antichrist, immediately appears (Cp., Rev6:1-2).

- [2] The reason for Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman was not initially given, but many take it as a requirement of the Law of Moses (cf. Exod20:5; Deut5:9); this is not necessarily a given, as Jews bowed to their human kings/rulers. The reason for his refusal could have been related to the fact that Haman was an Amalekite (see The Amalekites and the Providence of God). Nonetheless, Mordecai's refusal to bow in "reverence" to a government official is not morally equivalent to the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego's to worship Nebuchadnezzar's golden image (Cp., Dan3:12-18). Typologically, Haman is a type of the Antichrist, who will demand worship of himself during the Tribulation (Rev13:15), which the Jewish remnant will refuse to do.
- [3] Mordecai's refusal was in defiance of "the king's commandment", and if not a violation of the Law of Moses, would be incumbent upon him.
- [4] When the "king's servants" inquired of Mordecai concerning his refusal to bow in reverence to Haman, Mordecai "told them that he was a Jew". If not prohibited by the Law of Moses, Mordecai's refusal may have been related to the fact that Haman was an Amalekite, who were the eternal enemies of Jehovah and His people and under a divine curse (cf. Exod17:14,16; Deut25:19).
- [5] The refusal of a Jew to bow to Haman filled him with "wrath"; typologically, this picture's the refusal of the remnant Jews to worship the Antichrist during the Tribulation (Cp., Rev12:12,17).
- [6] Mordecai's hatred of Mordecai extended to his entire race, such that Haman "sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom". Such irrational hatred of God's chosen people can only be attributed to Satanic influence. Note, this verse may imply that all the "Jews" were refusing to bow to Haman.
- [7] The 12th year of King Ahasuerus was 474 BC. "Pur" was a Persian word meaning "lot", which explains why a translation is provided (albeit Pur becomes incorporated as a loan word into Hebrew after the events of the Book of Esther). To "cast ... the lot, before Haman" is to put Haman in the place of God alone (cf. Prov16:33). Typologically, Haman was setting himself forth as God, just as Antichrist will do (1Thess2:3-4). The "lot" was being cast to determine the day on which Haman would purpose to destroy the Jews. It was "the first month, the month Nisan", and the lot fell on "the twelfth month ... the month Adar"; in the providence of God, the lot gave the Jews the maximum amount of time before Haman's plotted destruction of them.
- [8] The Jews were indeed a peculiar people (Exod19:5). It was the LORD's intended purpose that the Law of Moses be a law code distinct from all other nations to serve as a witness to the righteousness of JEHOVAH (cf. Deut4:5-8). As with the enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Luk23:2), Haman falsely charged the Jews as being disloyal and unlawful subjects of their Gentile ruler. Haman's allegation that "it is not for the king's profit to suffer them" was decidedly untrue (cf. Gen12:3).

Historical Note. Though out of fellowship with their God and living in a foreign land in unbelief, the Jews of Esther's days remained distinct as a people; they did not assimilate with the Gentiles peoples in whose lands they lived. This is true today.

- [9] Haman had to petition "the king" to allow him to execute his plan; was this a type of the sovereignty of God, to which Satan himself is subject (Cp., Job1:10-12)? Note, "ten thousand talents of silver" was an enormous sum of money, equivalent to hundreds of millions of dollars today. It is inconceivable that Haman personally possessed that kind of wealth (Cp., Solomon; 2Chron9:13). Presumably he promised to pay it from the assets that would be seized from killing all the Jews throughout the kingdom; if that understanding it correct, it suggests that the Jews in the Persian diaspora had become exceedingly wealthy. Typologically, this is true of the Jews today in the current Diaspora. Note, the German Nazi's seized the immense wealth of the Jews during the Holocaust, as had the Roman Catholic Church's centuries-long inquisition.
- [10] The king permitted Haman to execute his plot against the Jews (Cp., Job1:10-12).
- [11] The king essentially declined Haman's offer of ten thousand talents of "silver" (v9), allowing him and the people who kill the Jews to keep whatever property was seized.
- [12] King Ahasuerus is portrayed as being sovereign over "every people", and that he can clearly communicate his laws in every "language" (Cp., Rom16:26). Note that the fatal decree was set in law on "the **thirteenth** day".
- [13] The date set for the extermination of "all Jews" was "the **thirteenth** day of the twelfth month". This prospect was foreseen by God in the ultimate "curse" of the Mosaic covenant (cf. Deut28:64-66).

Note that Haman attempted to do to the Jews (i.e., exterminate them as a race) exactly what the LORD had commanded King Saul to do to the Amalekites (1Sam15:3), only the LORD did not permit the Israelites to take a "spoil" of the Amalekites. Was Haman's hatred of the Jews as a people based on a knowledge of the decree of their God against his own people?

Textual Note. In the Hebrew text, all 22 "letters" of the Hebrew alphabet occur in verse 13.

- [14] The king's "commandment" gave the subjects of the Persian empire virtually an entire year to prepare to come against the Jews. Typologically, this is a picture of all nations coming against the Jews (cf. Zech12:2-3; 14:1-2).
- [15] The "king and Haman sat down to drink" (cf. Prov31:4-5). Note that the city of "Shushan" was "perplexed" by the "king's commandment".

CHAPTER 4

INTERCESSION OF MORDECAI

Mordecai appeals to Esther to intercede with King Ahasuerus on behalf of the Jews. Though neither Mordecai nor Esther display any obvious religious devotion to the God of Israel, both have the conviction that He will by some means intervene to save the Jews (Esth4:14).

- [1] Mordecai mourned publicly over the decree of Ahasuerus to allow the killing of all Jews (Esth3:13); unlike Esther, Mordecai openly identified with his people. Typologically, this seems to prefigure the mourning of Jews during the Tribulation, when they as a race will again be in peril of extinction (cf. Joel2:12; Zech12:10).
- [2] It was unwise, if not unlawful, to appear before the "king" in a condition of mourning (Cp., Neh2:1-2).
- [3] "Jews" throughout the Persian empire mourned as they became aware of the "king's decree" against them. Note that although "fasting" was undertaken by the Jews, there is no mention of prayer.
- [4] Was Esther embarrassed by Mordecai's public display, or concerned for his life? But as yet, she was unaware of the reason for his public display of mourning. Apparently, Esther's sheltered life as part of Ahasuerus' harem meant she had not heard of the king's decree.
- [5] "Hathach, one of the king's chamberlains" (i.e., eunuchs) was apparently Esther's only means of communications outside of the harem.
- [8] Through Hathach, Mordecai charges Esther to appeal to the "king" concerning the decree which would allow the killing of all Jews. Though Esther had not publicly identified with the Jews of Persia, they are referred to as "her people".
- [10] Esther communicates a message to Mordecai through Hathach.
- [11] According to this verse, Persian "law" forbade anyone approaching the "king" without a personal invitation, subject to "death", except the king extend mercy by holding out his "golden scepter". Apparently this included even the queen. Perhaps since the king had not called for Esther (his queen) in "thirty days", Esther already feared he was displeased with her for some reason, making the prospect of her approaching him without an invitation even more intimidating. Typologically, this could foreshadow Israel's entrance into the Tribulation period, initially out of fellowship with the LORD because of unbelief.
- [13] Mordecai warns Esther that, as a Jew, she should not expect to escape the destruction planned for all her race, simply because she resides in the "king's house". The implication is she will not be able to keep her identity hidden indefinitely, it will surely be exposed. Furthermore, once exposed, the immutability of "the laws of the Persians and the Medes" (Esth1:19) will prevent the king from making an exception for her, even if he were so inclined.

- [14] Note that by confidently asserting that "then shall ... deliverance arise to the Jews from another place", Mordecai seemingly alludes to the implicit promise of the LORD to preserve the Jewish people contained in the Abrahamic and subsequent covenants made with Israel (Gen12:3; 13:15-16); God could not keep His unconditional promises to the descendants of Abraham if the Jewish people as a race were eradicated (cf. Jer31:35-36). It should not be presumed that such an allusion to the covenantal relationship between the LORD and Israel necessarily testified to genuine faith in Mordecai, as the unbelieving Pharisees and Sadducees in Jesus' day also made such allusions (Cp., Matt3:7-9; Jn8:39). Furthermore, Mordecai does not specifically name JEHOVAH as the Deliverer of the Jews.

Mordecai rightly observed that God does not need any particular individual to execute His will on earth, but He chooses to use those who are available, willing, and providentially prepared (cf. 2Tim2:20-21). Mordecai subtly suggested the possibility that Esther had been providentially placed in her extraordinary position for the purpose of helping "her people" (v8) in their time of greatest need. Finally, Mordecai points out that Esther faces death regardless of her decision to act or not. If she approached the king uninvited to seek his help, he could have her executed; but if she did not seek the king's help, she would fall under the king's decree allowing the destruction of all Jews, such that "[she] and [her] father's house shall be destroyed".

The Believer's Response to the Providence of God. A believer should recognize that the personal and providential blessings of God, whether they be riches, positions of worldly influence (e.g., Joseph, Daniel, Esther), or (in the context of the Body of Christ) spiritual gifts (1Cor12:1-11), are given by God with the intent that they be used in His service and for His glory (cf. Gen45:5-8; Rom8:28; 1Cor6:19-20; 2Cor9:6-15; 1Pet4:10-11).

- [16] Esther commits to "go in unto the king" without an invitation, which is "not according to the law", and risk her own death. She precedes her approach of the king by a hard fast (i.e., "neither eat nor drink") of "three days, night⁶ or day". Note that Esther and Mordecai fasted, but no mention is made of prayer (Cp., Dan9:3; Neh1:4; Matt17:21; Luk2:37; 5:33; Act10:30; 14:23; 1Cor7:5); so likewise the unbelieving Pharisees also fasted (Cp., Matt6:16).

Much like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (cf. Dan3:17-18), Esther undertakes a righteous action on behalf of the LORD without presuming His intervention or deliverance; "And if I perish, I perish" (Cp., Heb11:24-26).

- [17] According to Merrill Unger, "Mordecai's faith and Esther's noble decisions foreshadow the trust and confidence of that godly remnant of the Jewish people who will pass through 'the time of Jacob's trouble', but will be 'saved out of it' (Jer30:7)". Note that Mordecai and Esther, like the Jewish remnant that will enter the Tribulation, entered their existential crisis without faith.

⁶ The Jews reckon the "day" to begin at "night" according to the Biblical pattern established at creation (cf. Gen1:5,8,13,19,23,31).

CHAPTER 5

ESTHER GRANTED FAVOR BY THE KING

Esther 5-7 are the climax of the book. The table is turned on Haman and his diabolical plot to destroy the Jews, and they are delivered through a most unlikely series of circumstances (i.e., the providence of God; Rom8:28).

- [1] Esther approached the "king", on "his royal throne", and "in the royal house". She was clothed in her "royal apparel", which would have been supplied by the king. Typologically, compare this to Jesus' parable concerning the wedding garment of Matthew 22:8-13.

Note that "three days, night or day" (Esth4:16) is equivalent to "on the third day", which should reconcile similar expressions in the Gospels regarding the time Jesus Christ spend in the sepulcher (Cp., Matt12:40; 27:63; Mk8:31; 9:31; 10:34; Luk9:22; 24:7). Typologically, compare to Hosea 5:15-6:3.

- [2] Esther "obtained favor" from the king. Here, "favor" is the Hebrew word most often translated as *grace*.
- [3] The "king" recognized Esther was approaching him with a request, and (while somewhat hyperbolic in typical Oriental fashion) he was predisposed to graciously (cf. v2) grant her request with lavishness (Cp., Matt25:34; Mk6:23). If the king was so obviously predisposed to grant her request, why did Esther not immediately present it? Perhaps she wanted to petition the king and confront Haman at the same time, which required some elaborate pre-planning.
- [4] Esther's public request before all present in the court was apparently small, perhaps to ensure it would be granted.
- [5] Esther's revelation of her racial identity to the king, and her accusation against Haman, needed to be done in a private setting.
- [6] The "king" came to Esther's "banquet of wine" with the understanding that she would make a greater request in that private setting.
- [8] Esther conditioned her "request" on the king's "favor" (i.e., *grace*). She requested that the "king" and "Haman" attend an even grander "banquet" she would prepare for the next day.
- [9] That "Haman" was honored to be included in a private banquet with the king and queen was undoubtedly intended by Esther to feed his ego, which it did. But from this emotional high, he was immediately brought low when he subsequently encountered Mordecai—the Jew who refused to show him honor.
- [10] Haman constrained his focus to the great honor he was seemingly receiving from the queen, rather than the dishonor he received from Mordecai. He was anxious to share the news of his great honor with his friends and family. Haman's wife, "Zeresh", is a Persian name that means *gold*.

- [11] Haman recounted to his friends and family his multitude of blessings and honor, especially the personal exaltation that had been bestowed on him by the king.
- [12] Haman's exclusive invitation to Esther's private banquets for the king were the source of his greatest pride (cf. Prov16:18). Typologically, Lucifer/Satan (and the Antichrist) was/is/will be motivated by lust and pride (Cp., Isa14:12-14).
- [13] However, all the honor and exaltation that had been bestowed upon Haman could not be enjoyed by him because of the indignation caused by the solitary rebellion of one "Jew" (i.e., Mordecai).
- [14] At the encouragement of his "wife" and "friends", Haman constructs a "gallows" on which to "hang" Mordecai, with the intention of requesting permission to do so from the king at Esther's banquet of the next day. Here, "gallows" is the same Hebrew word translated as "tree" in Deuteronomy 21:22-23. Note, "fifty cubits high" is approximately 75 feet, ostentatiously high in order for all to see.

Historical Note. Our contemporary understanding of "hanging" from a rope by the neck should not be anachronistically imposed upon the text. History records that the Persians typically performed executions by impaling the condemned (Cp., Ezr6:11), which may be the means of execution in the Book of Esther. The Hebrew word translated "hang" means to *strike*. Note, the crucifixion of Christ is referred to as being "hanged on a tree" (Gal3:13).

CHAPTER 6

MORDECAI UNEXPECTEDLY HONORED BY THE KING

Esther 6 opens with an event that is beyond coincidence. The entire course of Jewish history was altered, and millions of Jewish people were providentially preserved, simply because the pagan king of Persia had insomnia. In this the providence of God is demonstrated and is consistent with His covenant promise to Abraham (Gen12:3).

- [1] Insomnia is a common occurrence, but this instance was according to the providence of God. The king called for the reading of "the book of records of the chronicles", not as a means of entertainment, but hoping to fall sleep from boredom.
- [2] The place chosen for reading just happened to be the record of Mordecai foiling the plot against "Ahasuerus" (cf. Esth2:21-23).
- [3] It was at this point that Ahasuerus recognized his own delinquency in properly honoring Mordecai for his loyalty to the king. In contrast, God never forgets the acts of those who have faithfully served Him (cf. Matt25:34-40; 1Cor3:12-14; Heb6:10; Rev22:12).
- [4] Although it was apparently late at night, Haman happened to be in the "court". Ironically, he had come hoping "to speak unto the king" for permission "to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him".

- [6] The king spoke in the abstract (Cp., 2Sam12:1-7), asking Haman for his counsel on how to honor a person. Pride always clouds one's perceptions (Prov16:18), so naturally Haman believed it was he that should be honored by the king.
- [8] Haman's advice, which was really his own desire, was to put the one to be honored in the place of the king (Cp., Gen41:42-43). Typologically, Lucifer's desire was to "be like the Most High [God]" (Isa14:14).
- [9] The horse of the honored man was to be led by "one of the king's most noble princes".
- [10] That the king selected Haman to lead the horse, and so honor "Mordecai, the Jew", seems to suggest that Haman was one of the king's "most noble princes".
- [11] Typologically, "Mordecai, the Jew" is here a type of Jesus Christ, who will be exalted by God the Father, and to whom all of creation will bow—including His enemies (cf. Philip2:9-11).
- [12] For Haman, an Amalekite, having had to publicly honor "Mordecai, the Jew" was the ultimate humiliation.
- [13] The "wise men" (i.e., caste of scholars over which Daniel was made chief; cf. Dan2:48; 6:28; Esth1:13) as well as his "wife" take this humiliating turn of events to be an omen that he "shalt not prevail against [Mordecai], but shall surely fall before him"; they were seemingly aware of the Abrahamic curse contained in the Hebrew scriptures (cf. Gen12:3; 22:17) as well as the prophecy that Israel would be "higher than Agag" (Num24:5,7-9).
- [14] To add insult to injury, the time had come for Haman to attend Esther's second "banquet" (cf. Esth5:8).

CHAPTER 7

HAMAN EXPOSED AND EXECUTED

Haman's diabolical plot to destroy the Jews is finally exposed to king Ahasuerus, and Haman is executed on the very gallows his hatred for "Mordecai, the Jew" had led him to construct.

- [1] The "king" and "Haman" attend the second banquet of "Esther, the queen" (cf. Esth5:8).
- [2] King Ahasuerus still wishes to graciously and generously grant Esther's "petition", which at this point was still unrevealed.
- [3] Esther's "petition" is revealed; it is for her "life" and the life of "[her] people" and is conditioned on the king's "favor" (a Hebrew word most often translated *grace*).
- [4] Finally, Esther chose to identify with her people rather than with Persia (analogous to Moses; Cp., Heb11:24-26). Esther noted that had Haman's plot been merely to enslave herself and her people, she would have made no petition of the king; scripturally, this would have been

a fate permissible as discipline for disobedient Jews under the Mosaic covenant (cf. Deut28:68). However, Haman's intention was for all Jews "to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish", which was a fate that was excluded as a possibility by the Abrahamic and all other unconditional covenants God had made with Israel (cf. Ps89:34-37; Isa54:10; Jer31:35-37). For "we are sold" indicates that Haman's motivation, in addition to a diabolical hatred of the Jews, was financial (cf. Esth3:13). Typologically, this is an appeal to God by the Jewish remnant to keep His covenant commitments made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants. Also, the Antichrist is characterized as spoiling all peoples by means of taxation (cf. Dan11:20).

- [5] Ahasuerus seeks to know the identity of the "adversary and enemy" (v6) of the Jews. Ahasuerus still had not connected this great calamity with his own decree obtained by Haman (cf. Esth3:13).
- [6] Esther reveals that the "adversary and enemy" of the Jews is "this wicked Haman"; the phrase "this wicked Haman" in Hebrew gematria sums to 666, which is the number of the Beast (Rev13:18). Typologically, Haman is a type of "your adversary, the devil" (1Pet5:8).
- [7] Realizing the king will favor Esther over him, Haman appeals to Esther for mercy. Typologically, the Jews are in a place of favor with God above the Gentile nations (cf. Exod19:5; Deut26:19; 28:1; 32:8-9).
- [8] The king (providentially) happened to return to the room to find Haman "fallen upon" Queen Esther appearing to "force" himself upon her. That the king's servants "covered Haman's face" is a euphemism for humbling the pride of the wicked (Cp., Job40:12-13) and indicated he would never see the face of the king again (i.e., he will be executed).
- [9] "Harbonah" notes the irony of the situation, calling the king's attention to the ostentatious "gallows" Haman had constructed for "Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king". In a just turn of events, the king gives a command to "Hang [Haman] on it" (cf. Job5:13; 1Cor3:19).
- [10] The execution of Haman was "the king's wrath". To be "hanged" on a tree is a sign of one who is "accursed by God" (cf. Deut21:22-23). Typologically, this is the "wrath of Almighty God" (Rev19:15) that will be poured out on "the beast" (Rev19:20) at the second coming of Christ, fulfilling God's commitment of Genesis 12:3.

CHAPTER 8

THE JEWS ARE AVENGED

God had sovereignly worked through a myriad of providential circumstances to bring the Jews to the point where their deliverance was possible. Yet, the Jews themselves had to participate in the fight for their survival. Typologically, that will be true of the Jewish remnant during the Tribulation (cf. Zech10:4-5; 5:6; 14:13-14).

- [1] Ironically, whereas Haman had sought to take a spoil from all the Jewish people (Esth3:13), all "the house of Haman" was given to Esther.
- [2] The king's ring was taken from Haman and given to Mordecai, authorizing him to act on the king's behalf. As Daniel had become prime minister under Darius (cf. Dan6:1-3), so Mordecai became prime minister under Ahasuerus (cf. Esth10:3). Typologically, this pattern is seen even for disobedient and faithless Jews in the Diaspora, who nevertheless consistently amass wealth (often at the expense of the Gentiles), and who regularly rise to positions of highest influence and power (cf. Gen12:2).
- [3] Although Haman was dead, the king's decree permitting the slaughter of the Jews to occur on "the thirteenth day of the twelfth month" (Esth3:13) remained in effect, about which Esther "besought" the king. The characterization of the plot as "the mischief of Haman, the Agagite" sounds as if to downplay its severity, but the Hebrew word translated "mischief" is elsewhere translated as *wicked* (Esth7:6; 9:25) and *evil* (Esth7:7; 8:6).
- [4] Esther approached the king without being called, thus again risking personal death, but again the king "held out the golden scepter" extending grace to her (Cp., Esth5:2).
- [5] Esther again makes her petition of the king contingent upon his "favor" (i.e., grace; Cp., 7:3). Esther's petition was that the king would "reverse the letters devised by Haman ... to destroy the Jews".
- [6] Esther now publicly identified with "[her] people" and "[her] kindred" the Jews (Cp., Heb11:24-26). Haman's intention to "destroy the Jews" (v5) is characterized by God as "evil"; how hesitant our contemporary world is to label antisemitism and its adherents as "evil".
- [7] The king had already acted in "favor" (v5) of Esther by hanging Haman and giving all his house to her as spoil.
- [8] The remaining problem is that "the laws of the Persians and the Medes", once issued, "may not be altered" (cf. Esth1:19). Thus, the king's decree permitting the slaughter of the Jews could not be rescinded. However, the king permitted Queen Esther to issue in the name of the king any decree she wished, which "may no man reverse".
- [9] Mordecai was responsible for constructing the decree, which was delivered to every province of the Persian empire "according to its writing, and unto every people after their language, and to **the Jews** according to **their writing**, and according to **their language**". Note that after 70 years of exile under the Babylonians, and more than fifty years into the Persian empire, these scattered "Jews" still had their own distinct "writing" and "language" (i.e., Hebrew); this refutes the modern scholastic contention that after the Babylonian captivity the Jews primarily spoke Aramaic (Cp., Act21:40; 22:2; 26:14).

Esther 8:9 is the longest verse in the Bible (43 words in Hebrew, 90 words in English).

- [10] Historical Note. Ancient Persia was famous for its postal delivery system, which was even more efficient than that of western America's so-called pony express (1860's). It was purported that a letter could be delivered anywhere in the Persian empire in as little as 9 days. The motto of the US Postal Service was taken from Herodotus' description of the Persian system: "It is said that as many days as there are in the whole journey, so many are the men and horses that stand along the road, each horse and man at the interval of a day's journey; and these are **stayed neither by snow nor rain nor heat nor darkness** from accomplishing their appointed course with all speed."
- [11] Mordecai's decree, issued "in the name of king Ahasuerus" (v10), essentially permitted the Jews to do to those who attacked them exactly what the former decree allowed the subjects of Persia to do to them (Cp., Esth3:13). The Jews were allowed to defend themselves, and of those who attacked them they were permitted "to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish", including "to take the spoil of them for prey". Note that although the decree permitted the killing of women and children, as well as taking a spoil, the Jews did neither of these (cf. Esth9:6,10,15,16).
- [12] This second decree was issued "in the month Sivan" (v11), the third month of the year and nine months in advance of "the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar" (cf. Esth3:13).
- [13] Those who would attack the "Jews" were their "enemies", upon whom they might be justly "avenge[d]".
- [14] The delivery of the decree throughout the empire was "hastened", so as to give the Jews ample time to organize for their community defense.
- [15] "Mordecai" is again seen so honored as in the place of the king (Cp., Esth6:8). Upon learning of the decree, the capital city of "Shushan rejoiced and was glad" (Cp., Esth3:15), presumably over the fact that a potentially genocidal injustice had been thwarted (cf. Gen12:3).
- [16] Note, the "Jews had light" (Cp., Ps97:11).
- [17] Because of the very evident (but providential) divine blessing upon the Jews, "many of the people of the land became Jews" (i.e., proselyted into Judaism in order to worship of the God of Israel, which included circumcision; Cp., Exod12:48; Ruth1:16); they did so "for fear of the Jews", or more appropriately for fear of the God of the Jews (cf. Deut11:25; Josh2:9).

CHAPTER 9

FEAST OF PURIM INSTITUTED

When the day selected by the lot arrived, the Jews throughout the Persian empire gathered together to defend themselves against their enemies and were given a great victory over them. The Feast of Purim was instituted to commemorate this great victory.

- [1] On "the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar, on the **thirteenth**⁷ day of the same", the table was "turned" on those who "hated" the Jews and thought to "have power over them". The "decree" had been issued by the "king" (albeit unwittingly), but the date had been determined by Haman according casting the Pur (i.e., lot; cf. Esth3:7,13).
- [2] Throughout the Persian empire, "the Jews gathered themselves together" for mutual defense, which was permitted according to the king's second decree (cf. Esth8:11). Sensing the God of the Jews had given them victory over their enemies, the fear of the Jews "fell upon all people" (Cp., Deut11:25; Josh2:9). It is shameful when the enemies of God's people recognize and fear His providential protection of them more than God's people do (Cp., Rev6:15-17).
- [3] The government officials throughout the Persian empire who "helped the Jews" did so out of fear of "Mordecai" (i.e., a type of the Lord Jesus Christ). Typologically, this is a picture of Gentiles who help the Jews during the Tribulation and are granted entrance into the Kingdom at the Sheep and Goat Judgment (cf. Matt25:32-40), consistent with God's promise in Genesis 12:3.
- [4] Typologically, the exaltation of Mordecai by the king is a picture of God's exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ over all His enemies (cf. Ps110:1; Philip2:9-11).
- [5] The great victory was over "those that hated" the Jews (cf. Gen12:3). Note that all those who hate the Jews, even Jews living in unbelief in foreign lands, come under the curse of God in Genesis 12:3.
- Typological Note. Mordecai is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ at the 2nd Coming, a Jewish man who delivers the Jewish people from a diabolical attempt at worldwide eradication (Cp., Rev12:13-14), after which he is exalted over all the world (Esth10:2-3; Cp., Zech14:9) and second only to Ahasuerus (i.e., God the Father; cf. 1Cor15:24-27).
- [6] There were "five hundred men" in the "palace" at "Shushan" who hated the Jews, and especially Mordecai (a type of the Lord Jesus Christ). Thus, the hatred of the Jews rose to the highest levels of government (Cp., Ps2:-3; Zech12:3; 14:1-2).
- [7] In Hebrew scrolls of Esther 9:7-9, both ancient and modern, the ten names of Haman's sons are always written in a strange (but consistent) way; see below.
- [10] "Haman" (a type of the Antichrist) is specifically named "the enemy of the Jews" (Cp., Rev12:10,13,17). Haman's "ten"⁸ sons", given by name in verses 7-9, were killed by the Jews. Thus, the line of King Agag of the Amalekites was finally cut off according to the commandment of God (cf. 1Sam15:3,9); what King Saul had refused to do, Mordecai accomplished. Though permitted by the decree of Ahasuerus (Esth8:11), the Jews did not take a "spoil" of Haman and his sons. Practically, the house of Haman had already been given to

⁷ This will become yet another reason Gentile peoples consider 13 to be an unlucky number (Cp., Exod12:6,29); see CHART: ORIGIN OF TRISKAIDEKAPHOBIA.

⁸ When used in a symbolic sense, 10 is the number of the Gentiles (cf. Dan2:42; 7:24; Rev:13:1; 17:12). The 10 sons are types of the 10 kings (Rev17:12-13).

Esther by the decree of Ahasuerus (Esth8:1); however, theologically something profound may be in play. Since the Amalekites as a people were under the curse of God (cf. 1Sam15:1-3), this was a form of holy war (Heb., *harem*, the judgment of God) in which the taking of a "spoil" was not permitted (cf. Deut7:1-2; Josh6:17-19); the "spoil" was devoted to the LORD (Lev27:28-29).

המדינות כיהאיש קרדכי היקר וגדולי וכו' היהודים	איש:
בכל איביהם מכת-חרב והרג ואכדן ונעשו בשנאיהם	פרשנדתא
קרעוהם: וכשוטן הבירה הרגו היהודים ואכדן חמש מאות	דלפון
ואת:	אספתא:
ואת:	פורתא
ואת:	אדליא
ואת:	ארידתא:
ואת:	פרמשתא:
ואת:	אריס:
ואת:	ארידי:
ואת:	ויתא:
עשרת:	
כני הכן ביהמדתא עיר היהודים הרגו וכבוה לא שלחו	

Note: The words that form the left column are the Hebrew sign of the definite direct object along with the vav consecutive (i.e., "and"), untranslated in English; these three Hebrew letters sum to 707 in Gematria (see note at Esther 9:14). The words that form the right column are the names of Haman's ten sons.

- [12] After bringing the report of how many had been slain in "Shushan" (the number slain "in the rest of the king's provinces" is not given), the king asks Esther if she has any further "petition", promising that "it shall be granted thee". Typologically, this pictures the ability of the believing remnant of Jews to ask anything of the Father in Jesus' name (cf. Jn14:13-14; 1Jn5:14-15).
- [13] The Jews were not able to slay all their enemies in a single day, including "Haman's ten sons", so Esther petitioned the king to allow for a second day of slaughter, and it was granted. Note that "Haman's ten sons" had already been slain (v10), but for their bodies to be "hanged upon the gallows" was a sign of their being under the curse of the LORD (cf. Deut21:22-23; Gal3:13).

Prophetic Pattern. The inability of the Jews to slay all their enemies in a single day, thus being granted by God additional time to do so, is a prophetic pattern. It occurred previously during the long day of Joshua (cf. Josh10:12-14), and it will occur again at the 2nd coming (cf. Zech14:6-7). Whereas these two occurrences are supernatural works of God, the additional day granted to Esther was natural, consistent with God's working providentially to aid the Jews in the Book of Esther.

- [14] Historical Note. In 1946 (the year **5707** on the Hebrew calendar) following the German Holocaust of WWII, twenty-four of Hitler's Nazi generals were tried at Nuremberg for crimes against humanity relative to their participation in the attempted genocide of the Jews); 2 were acquitted, 8 were given prison sentences, and 12 were sentenced to death. Of the twelve sentenced to death, Martin Bormann had been tried in absentia and was already dead prior to the trial, and Herman Goering committed suicide hours before his execution. Though the condemned generals requested a military execution by firing squad, the court ordered them hanged. Thus, ten Nazi generals were hanged at Nuremberg. The last words of Julius Streicher, one of those

condemned to death, were "Purimfest 1946". In 1944, Hitler had outlawed the celebration of the Feast of Purim.

- [15] An additional "three hundred men" (who hated the Jews) were slain in Shushan on the second day. Here, "prey" is the same Hebrew word translated "spoil" in v10 (also v16).
- [16] Throughout the Persian empire, an additional 75,000 "enemies" of the Jews were slain on the second day; the number slain on the first day is not given (Cp., v12).
- [17] Whereas "thirteen" becomes an unlucky number for the Gentiles, it represents great victory over their enemies for the Jews. See the CHART: ORIGIN OF TRISKAIDEKAPHOBIA.
- [18] The Jews battled their enemies, with their lives hanging in the balance (cf. Deut28:63-68), on Adar 13 & 14, and experienced "rest" (same Hebrew root from which the name Noah is derived) on Adar 15. Typologically, the unbelieving Jews will be scattered throughout the world at 70 AD for 2,000 years (i.e., 2 days), followed by 1,000 years of "rest" (i.e., on the 3rd day; cf. Hos5:15-6:2).
- [19] Thus, the "fourteenth day of the month of Adar", the day on which the destruction of the Jews' enemies was completed, became "a day of gladness and feasting" for the Jewish people; this commemoration seemingly arose organically among the Jews, but was later codified by Mordecai (cf. v23).
- [20] Jewish tradition takes the phrase, "and Mordecai wrote all these things", to indicate his authorship of the Book of Esther. However, in context, it might only apply to the decree concerning the Feast of Purim (vv21,26).
- [21] Mordecai's decree to formally "stablish" the Feast of Purim (v26) made it a two-day feast, Adar 14-15. Adar is the last (12th) month of the Jewish calendar, corresponding to February-March on the Gregorian calendar⁹.
- [22] The commemoration of God's gracious deliverance of the Jews from their enemies on the Feast of Purim (v26) includes "sending of portions one to another, and gifts to the poor" as gracious acts.
- [23] This verse suggests that the celebration on Adar 14 arose organically among the Jewish people, but that it was later codified as the Feast of Purim (Adar 14-15) by Mordecai (Cp., v19).
- [24] This summary statement makes clear that "Haman" was a type of the Antichrist, "the enemy of all the Jews" (Rev12:10), who plotted to "consume them" (cf. Rev) and "destroy them" (1Pet5:18). He sought to do so by means of the Pur, or "lot", but even the "lot" is subject to the sovereignty of the LORD (cf. Prov16:33; Rom8:28).
- [25] Typologically, the "wicked device[s]" of Satan will ultimately "return upon his own head" (cf. Ps2:1-5; 7:16; 141:10; 2Cor2:11).

⁹ To reconcile the Jewish lunar calendar with the solar year, a second month of Adar (i.e., a leap month) is added 7 times in a 19 year cycle. It is for this reason that Jewish holidays can swing between 2 months on our Gregorian calendar.

- [26] This festival came to be known as "Purim". "Pur" was the Persian word for lot, but it becomes incorporated into the Hebrew language, such that Purim means lots in Hebrew.
- [27] Although not a feast of the LORD ordained by the Law of Moses (cf. Lev23), the Feast of Purim (like Hanukkah) has become an annual festival celebrated by Jews throughout the world; both occur after the feasts of the LORD ordained to be celebrated in the first seven months of the year (thus, the chronological typology of these feasts is not disrupted). Thus, though Diaspora Jews are outside the land of Israel and living in unbelief, their celebration of the Feast of Purim is nonetheless an unwitting acknowledgement of the providence of God in their preservation. Here, "all such as joined themselves unto [the Jews]" refers to Gentile proselytes.
- [28] The annual keeping of the Feast of "Purim" is intended to serve as a "memorial" of God's providential preservation of the Jews in the Diaspora. Jews have consistently observed the Feast of Purim for the past 2,500 years.
- [29] The gravity of keeping "Purim" was "confirmed" by a "second letter" from both "Esther, the queen" and "Mordecai, the Jew"; thus, it was formally established (cf. Deut19:15; 2Cor13:1).
- [30] Their presence in the "hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus" indicates how thoroughly the Jews had been scattered into all the world (Cp., Is11:11-12; Matt24:31).
- [31] Note that again "fastings" occurs without mention of prayer, indicative of the fact that the Jews in the Diaspora are in a state of unbelief (Cp., Ezek37).
- [32] Here, "written in the book" would seem to be a reference to the Book of Esther. The Book of Esther ordains the Feast of "Purim", celebrated throughout the world by all Jews to the present day. Without the Book of Esther, there would be no historical basis for this ubiquitous celebration (much as the Books of the Maccabees establish the historical basis for the Feast of Hanukkah). While the Gospels record Jesus celebrating the Feast of Hanukkah (cf. Jn10:22), there is no mention of Him ever celebrating the Feast of Purim (which does not mean He did not; presumably He did).

Celebration of the Feast of Purim. Purim is also called "Mordecai's Day" (e.g., 2Macc15:36). Purim is celebrated by keeping five activities (Esth9:19,22): 1) "feasting" (including drinking wine to excess and eating turkey, believed to have originated in India; Esth1:1), 2) "gladness" (no mourning of any kind is permitted; no funerals), 3) a "good day" (working is permitted, although most Jews try to take off if they can), 4) "send portions to one another", and 5) give "gifts to the poor" (since "gifts" is plural, a minimum of two gifts must be given). The Book of Esther is read twice, once in the morning and once in the evening (in the synagogue it is usually led by the cantor and often set to music); the Jews are required to boo, hiss, or make loud noises every time the name of Haman is uttered (54x in the Hebrew text of Esther). Generally, children wear costumes (because the work of God was in disguise) and adults wear formal attire (commemorating Esther's banquet for the king).

CHAPTER 10

MORDECAI EXALTED TO PRIME MINISTER OF PERSIA

The deliverance of the Jews from all their enemies, followed by the exaltation of Mordecai and an unprecedented age of wealth and peace foreshadow the return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the inauguration of His Millennial Kingdom.

- [1] King Ahasuerus "laid a tribute upon the land" (i.e., increased taxes).
- [2] If the writing of the "book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia" began at the beginning of their kingdom, that would explain why its title mentions the Medes before the Persians.
- [3] "Mordecai, the Jew" was exalted to the position "next" to King Ahasuerus (i.e., prime minister), much as Joseph in Egypt (Gen41:39-44) and Daniel in both Babylon (Dan2:48) and Persia (Cp., Dan6:1-3) were. Typologically, that Mordecai was "accepted by the multitude of his brethren" pictures the reception of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Jewish people at His return. The kingdom of Christ will be a period a thousand years of "wealth" and "peace" for the Jews.

--- S.D.G. ---

APPENDIX

THE NAME OF GOD "HIDDEN" IN THE BOOK OF ESTHER

The Book of Esther has 167 verses in the English Bible, and there are 192 references to the Gentile king Ahasuerus or his kingdom; yet, there is not a single reference to God/LORD. Deuteronomy 31:16-18 says, "And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, to which they go to be among them ... and I will hide my face from them ... and I will surely hide my face in that day from all the evils which they have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods". In the Book of Esther, God has hidden His face; and yet, because He promised Abraham to preserve his seed forever (cf. Gen13:15; 17:19; 22:17; Ps89:34-37; Jer31:35-36), He cannot allow His people Israel to be destroyed.

The Masoretes, Jewish scribes entrusted with standardizing and preserving the text of the Hebrew Bible (i.e., the TNK, or O.T.) in the early centuries AD, included *masorah* in their standard text of the TNK; these *masorah* were facts and figures associated with the text of Scripture that were included as an aid to the perfect preservation of the text of the TNK¹⁰. The *masorah* associated with the Book of Esther note four times in which the name of the LORD (i.e., YHWH; Heb., יהוה) is embedded as an acrostic in the text of Esther; there is one additional place where "I AM" (Heb., אהיה) is embedded in the text. In each of these instances, the acrostic is embedded in four consecutive words in the Hebrew text.

Esther 1:20. In the Hebrew text, "all wives give honor" are four consecutive words that **begin** with the letters יהוה-י (YHWH, backwards in Hebrew). These words were spoken by the Persian nobles (i.e., Gentiles), and their decree **began** the king's new commandment.

Esther 5:4. In the Hebrew text, "come king Haman day" are four consecutive words that **begin** with the letters יהוה-י (HWHY, forward in Hebrew). These words were spoken by Esther (i.e., a Jew), and her statement **looks forward to** a coming banquet.

Esther 5:13. In the Hebrew text, "all this availeth nothing" are four consecutive words that **end** with the letters יהוה-י (YHWH, backwards in Hebrew). These words were spoken by Haman (i.e., a Gentile), and his statement was an conclusion (**end**) to his disposition.

Esther 7:7. In the Hebrew text, "there was evil determined" are four consecutive words that **end** with the letters יהוה-י (HWHY, forward in Hebrew). These words were spoken by the narrator of the book (i.e., a Jew), and the statement brings an **end** to the plot (and life) of Haman.

¹⁰ Would that the Greek text of the N.T. had been preserved with such painstaking precision (cf. Matt5:18).

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