

# The Book of ESTHER

## Charts, Maps and Doctrines

### Where is God's Name?

Esther is one of the most unusual books in the Bible because God's name is never mentioned except, perhaps, in acrostic form. For this reason, it has often had trouble in being accepted as a part of the Old Testament canon. Esther deals with the Jews during the Persian exile. One theory is that God's name was omitted intentionally so that the book would not become plagiarized later with the heathen god's name substituted into it. W.G. Scroggie agrees with this contention and claims that the name of God (YHWH) can be found 4 times in acrostic form. It is his claims that it is found in such a way and in such places that would be beyond the realm of mere probability. Furthermore, no New Testament writer makes reference to Esther nor does anyone in the NT allude to it in speech. However, it is a book which deals with, more than any other, God's provisional care of the Jews.

Esther was Jewish woman who became the wife of a Persian king, and, in this position, was able to prevent the wholesale massacre of the Jewish people who were within the boundaries of the Persian empire. The king, Ahasuerus, had deposed his first wife (or his present wife) because she would not attend a banquet with him, and, Esther is taken to wife instead. 2

The book is written sometime after the death of Ahasuerus, which would be after 465 BC, making this one of the last books of the Bible to be written, and therefore, one of the last books to be added to the canon of Scripture. It was the last historical book to be added to the canon.

It has been alleged that the author of this book was Mordecai, Esther's cousin, who was a low ranking official in the castle of Ahasuerus; and, it is likely that Ezra, edited this book when adding it into the canon himself.

The style of this book is very readable and rarely does one have to spend time examining the various translations or the Hebrew text in order to understand what is going on. We should be able to compare the style of Ezra to this book to see if the similarities exist. That would lead credence to his having edited Esther.

We do not have a way of easily fitting this into the annals of Persian history, as there are no events or names which match. Various peoples have said that Ahasuerus was Xerxes (486-465 BC) or Artaxerxes II (404-359 BC). If he were Xerxes, we have a strange gap between the third year in Esther 1:3 and the seventh year of 2:16, since he was, at that time (483-480 BC) planning and carrying out the invasion of Greece. Like the book of Haggai, this book is dated with reference to the reign of Ahasuerus.

Esther is filled with dates and historical references, unlike a work of fiction or a romance. Archeology has confirmed that the writer of Esther had a reasonable knowledge of the peoples and culture of Persia.

The translations used in this treatise is primarily dependent upon the New American Standard Bible, but various changes were made, having used the other Bibles in the bibliography. Since this is primarily a narrative, the changes in translation were not to provide greater word-for-word accuracy or to give an exact rendering according to Hebrew syntax and word order; but changes were made primarily for readability, consulting the other translations available, along with Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies, to make certain that any change in rendering would not violate the intent of the original text. For instance, in Esther 1:14b, the very literal English translation is "...who used to behold the face of the king, who sat first in the kingdom." What is important here is their prominence and the Hebrew language often gives a very physical, literal slant on things, whereas the meaning and intent are actually different. For instance, in Hebrew (as in many

languages) the literal, physical heart in literature is a reference to the thinking portion of a person's soul. In other languages, the "heart" may be the emotional arena of the soul, and, in still others, "heart" may refer to the emotional part of the soul in reference to love. Hence, I have translated Esther 1:14b as follows: "...who had access to the king's presence and were prominent in the kingdom."

Now, it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus, the [same] Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia, over 127 provinces. In those days, as King Ahasuerus sat upon his royal throne, in Susa, the capital, in the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his princes and attendants, the army [officers] of Persian and Media, the nobles and princes of his provinces, [who were all] in attendance, when he displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty for many days, 180 days in all. And, when these days were completed, the king gave a banquet lasting seven days for all the people who were present in Susa, the capital, from the greatest to the least, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. [Esther 1:1-5]

Notice that the facts are very specific; the king is named, the time is precise (the third year of his reign) and the event named would have been one remembered for years by those in attendance and those who had heard about it. With these specifics, we know that this is not a parable or a story to teach us right from wrong. It is strictly an historical event concerning God's grace upon the Jews during their dispersion.

It sounds as though it were a sort of open house where these various groups came and went from the palace, entertained, fed and the riches of the kingdom were prominently displayed. The first open house was done for the upper class and ruling class of Persia; then, the king has an open house for the people of his capital city; an open house which doesn't last quite as long, but long enough. Certainly the events were the talk of the town and there was possibly even some serious jealousy and insurrection in the air, which Ahasuerus was able to quell with a similar, but shorter, open house for those of his immediate kingdom.

White hangings, and linen and blue, held fast with cords of fine linen and purple, upon silver rods [and rings]; and white marble columns; couches of gold and silver [set] upon a pavement of malachite and alabaster, of mother-of-pearl and turquoise. Drinks were served in vessels of gold, vessels of all kinds, and the royal wine was plentiful according to the king's bounty. And the drinking was done according to the law: there was no compulsion, for the king had given directives to each official of his household that he should do according to the desires of each person. [Esther1:6-8]

Very possibly, this was all politics, or the king could have had a real fondness for his subjects. We do not know enough about Ahasuerus yet. He did not bring the people into his palace, but held an open house in the courtyard which was in the midst of his garden. In some ancient cities, this was upon the rooftops of the palace so that one could have a splendid view of the surrounding city and country. This allowed him and his wife privacy when they wanted it, yet allowed the people for a first hand look at the wealth of their reigning lord. This sort of thing was not done to "show off", exactly, or to cause his subjects to be jealous, because they were a part of this wealth. Realistically, they could not expect to achieve this sort of splendor, but they shared in it vicariously as being a part of his kingdom. The courtyard and surrounding garden was decorated with

incredible color and beauty and the subjects drank from golden vessels belonging to the king; probably a one-time experience for them. Wine superior to anything which they had ever drunk was served, yet this was done in such a way that his subjects were not compelled to drink, to over indulge, or to under-indulge. This indicates that the king had a respect for freedom and human volition and did not view his subjects as pawns.

Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the palace [lit. royal house] which belonged to King Ahasuerus. On the seventh day, when the king's heart was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, to bring Queen Vashti before the king with [her] royal crown in order to display her beauty to the people and princes, for she was exceptionally beautiful. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered [to her] by the eunuchs. Then the king became greatly incensed, and his anger burned within him. [Esther 1:9-12]

The queen had been involved in a lot of entertaining; she herself has a banquet strictly for the women. The various translations seem to indicate that this entertaining was not for the women from the palace, but that the banquet took place in the king's palace. Very likely that after all this open house took place, she was quite exhausted. However, when the king wanted to show her off, as some men are wont to do, she refused. On the face of it, this would not seem like much of an indiscretion; however, the king gave a royal command, he sent his trusted servants, his eunuchs, in a group of 7, to deliver the command, and, if he was unable to command his own wife, what kind of a king was he? This caused him to lose face and his Queen was well aware of this. She was possibly too tired; however, royal protocol would have insisted that she at least make a royal appearance.

The next few verses are interesting; the king does not immediately react with an action for which he could be sorry; he consults his lawyers, so to speak, as to how this poor judgement by the Queen should be handled.

Then the king spoke to the wise men, who understood the times (for it was the custom of the king [to speak] before all who knew the law and justice and [who] were close to him: Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media who had access to the king's presence and were prominent in the kingdom): "According to law, what is to be done with Queen Vashti, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus [delivered] by the eunuchs?" [Esther 1:13-15]

King Ahasuerus was a very thoughtful king, even in anger. He had several options as king: he could have flown off the handle and did whatever vindictive thing his soul desired; he could have sat and stewed about this situation and then made a decision; he could have cooled off and made a decision; or he could consult with his chief of staff, and render a decision after cooler heads prevail. Some leaders do not require a staff in order to render good decisions and some do. What is important to a good head of state is to be cognizant of his own weaknesses and to operate within that framework. So far, we have no reason to fault King Ahasuerus for his actions as a king.

One more note should be inserted here: because of the position of a king being what it is, the king himself will refer to himself in the third person (as do often those around him speaking directly to him, but making comments which pertain more to his office than to his person). This has been a common practice of many centuries and many cultures. In our own culture, it is often heard of our president referring to himself or to his office in the third person. This lends a dignity and a loftiness to the esteemed office; and is properly used when referring to the office rather than to the person.

And, during this meeting [literally, in the presence of the king and the princes], Memucan said, "Queen Vashti, has wronged not only the king but [also] all the princes, and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. For the Queen's conduct will become known to all the women causing them to look with disrespect upon their husbands by saying, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in to his presence, but she did not come.' And this day the ladies of Persia and Media who have heard of the Queen's conduct will speak in [the same way] to all the king's princes, and there will be plenty of disrespect and insolence. If it pleases the king, let a royal edict be issued by him and let it be written in the laws of the Persian and Media so that it cannot be repealed, that Vashti should come no more into the presence of King Ahasuerus, and let the King give her royal position to another who is more worthy than she. And when the king's edict which he shall make is heard through out all his kingdom, great as it is, then all the women will give honor to their husbands, great and small." [Esther 1:16-20]

Since the fall and the garden, women have occupied a particular place in this world, a place which some like to attribute to evolution. However, since evolution is a myth, there is no evolution involved. God created man first, put him in authority, and when the woman was designed, the fall was a result of the man obeying the authority of the woman. There is no inferiority or superiority issues here. When I am in a courtroom and a judge is presiding, I am under the authority of that judge, not because he is richer, more intelligent, stronger or physically more appealing. I am under his authority because that is a part of God's established laws. Women are under the authority of men and, when a culture rejects that, the culture becomes unstable and weak. When we operate outside of God's plan, even as unbelievers, things do not proceed as we think they should. The overthrow of male authority is not necessarily the cause of a society's downfall; it can also be one of the many results. We could simply follow the history of the United States for periods of time when women got up in arms and demanded "their fair share" or their rights or equality, and soon thereafter, there would be a depression or war or disaster among the family unit, the most basic unit of society, the one which gives the woman the most protection and provision. It is a simply law of cause and effect; of disobeying God's plan and paying the piper. These men of Persia and Media recognized this. If the Queen can disobey her husband, whose word is law throughout 127 provinces, then the results would snowball and affect the family structure throughout the entire kingdom. It would not matter if the king forgave her, if he was no longer angry, if she had a headache or if she were tired. A precedent had been set and it had to be met with equal or greater force. The King was too wrapped upon this, possibly, to see the issues clearly, and he probably thought that he had the good sense to speak with those who were emotionally detached and was willing to listen to reason. In this case, the Queen no longer behaved as a wife so her position as a wife was no longer applicable.

However, the king is not listening to good sense here, but is simply being manipulated. This tells us about the king and that he was easily influenced by his staff. We will find this more and more as we progress through this book. Any person with influence could speak to the king and essentially get what he wanted out of the king—in terms of legislation. Ahasuerus is a lobbyist's dream. As long as a lobbyist can secure an audience with the king and present a cogent argument, the king would go for it. This aspect of Ahasuerus' character will play a great impact on the events which unfold. In fact, we are going to find that Ahasuerus likes to throw parties, he likes to drink, but he really is not that interested in running his kingdom. We will find that he has become bored with his job, but will allow others who influence him to do whatever they think should be done.

Now, about this legislation: can you imagine some milquetoast becoming frustrated and then hanging a set of rules on the kitchen wall proclaiming that he is now the boss. Unless he has a gun and is willing to use it, the proclamation will be laughable. The difference here is, the king has the gun and is willing to use it. The result will be that his wife will be removed as queen.

Now we do not follow out the evolution of this law, but perhaps the intent was to allow Memucan, or those who put him up to this, to get rid of their wives as well. If the king gets rid of his wife for her disobedience, and proclaims that all wives in his realm should obey their husbands, then cannot a husband act just as the king acted and get rid of his own wife? Laws and edicts can have all kinds of effects, both intended and unintended, obvious and subtle. For instance, there are laws against hate speech, and the intent of these laws seems noble. However, they have been used in various countries to allow homosexuals to sue pastor teachers for teaching that homosexuality is a sin. When a pastor teaches this, it can be considered hate speech, and pastors have been sued and they have lost in court, based upon this law. Now, which of the framers of this law saw this as an eventual result? We have passed hate crime legislation here. My guess is legislation like this is passed for political reasons, and people support it because they are so horrified as to man's inhumanity. Here in Texas, a man was dragged behind a pickup (if I recall) until dead. This vicious action, as heinous as it is, requires vigorous prosecution of the law and a penalty which, although it can never equal the cruelty involved, is enough to make the perpetrator sorry every day of his life for committing this act of incredible inhumanity. What is not called for is legislation. We do not need some new law passed. But, legislators gain political favor in the eyes of the people when they pass legislation against hate; and, if a legislator opposes such a bill, then automatically, he is branded a supporter of hate. So, we now have this feel-good legislation; the voters and the legislators who are truly for this legislation can feel as though they have given a kick to the driver of the vehicle.

And [this] word pleased the King and the princes, and the King did as Memucan proposed. So he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province according to its [particular] script and to every people according to their language, that every man should be the master of his own house and this [should be published] according to the language of his own people. [Esther 1:21-22]

Unlike the United States, where it is thought by many to have problems because there are languages other than English spoken here, King Ahasuerus was not concerned with the differing languages, and when an edict was issued, it was issued in the dialect of the people who received it. This was not so much a law or an edict, but a resolution or a statement of policy which was followed in the house of the king down to the hut of the slave.

After these things when the anger of King Ahasuerus had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her. Then, the king's attendants who served him, said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the King. And let the King appoint overseers in all the provinces of his kingdom that they may gather every beautiful young virgin to Susa the capital, to the house of the women [i.e., the harem], into the custody of Hegai, the King's eunuch, who was in charge of the women; and let their cosmetics be given [them]. Then let the young lady who pleases the king be queen in place of Vashti." And the matter pleased the king and he did accordingly. [Esther 2:1-4]

There is a time frame involved here. This story begins in the third year of King Ahasuerus (which could be any part of this third year); then there was a party which lasted half of a year; the queen's transgression; there was the meeting with his top officials; and, here, Ahasuerus has healed and ready for another marriage. Possibly 2 years have gone by during this time. The search for a new queen is not a week long process. This would be something which must be noised abroad, then the search must occur, the candidates brought, and the entrance into the harem. That possibly took between 6 months to a year.

Now there was a Jew in Susa the capital whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite, who had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the captives who had been exiled with Jeconiah, king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had exiled. And he was bringing up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. Now the young lady was beautiful of figure and face and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter. [Esther 2:5-7]

Here, Esther is introduced. This is her first appearance in the book which bears her name. The precise lineage of Mordecai, as the first paragraph, indicates that this is not a story or a fable or a parable, but an event which really occurred. It also establishes her Jewishness.

Some question has arisen concerning the age of Mordecai, that he was really too old for this story; but, the construction of the Hebrew allows for his lineage to be traced through his grandfather and it is possible that his father was skipped. There is no indication as to why, but his father could have been killed in the dispersion and his father could have run out on him. We can only speculate here. It was not important enough for God the Holy Spirit to note the history or whereabouts of his father.

Esther is obviously an extremely attractive woman. Mordecai must have had a great deal of respect for this king because he is going to offer his own daughter to him (Esther was just like a daughter to him). Mordecai was not seeking something for himself here, but for her.

So it came about when the command and decree of the king were heard and many young ladies were gathered to Susa the capital into the custody of Hegai, that Esther was taken to the king's palace into the custody of Hegai, who was in charge of the women. Now the young lady pleased him [Hegai] and found favor with him, so he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and food, gave her seven choice maids from the king's palace, and transferred her and her maids to the best place

in the harem. Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make [this] known. [Esther 2:8-10]

There is no indication as to the number of women involved here; perhaps tens, perhaps hundreds; but it is obvious that Esther stood out from among the rest. It is unclear as to what sort of treatment the other women received, but Esther was treated like royalty from the beginning. I suspect the other women were treated similarly.

Some history and geography would be important at this point. The Jews, prior to the dispersion, were sandwiched between the Great Sea (the Mediterranean Sea) to the West, the Jordan River and the Salt Sea to the East with Israel in the North and Judah to the South during the days of the divided kingdom. The Babylonian empire took in Israel and Judah and moved Eastward in a 250-300 mile sweep about the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers to what is now the Persian Gulf. Today, this would have been Israel, Jordan, the southern portions of Syria and Turkey, most of Iraq and a portion of Iran. In other words, it was a huge empire. The Babylonian empire is also called the Chaldean empire because during the 7th and 8th centuries BC, a Chaldean king ruled.

In the early 8th century BC, Israel was taken into the Assyrian empire and, when the last king of Israel, Hoshea, refused to pay tribute to Assyria, he was imprisoned and his capital city, after a 3 year siege (724-721 BC), was taken over. Prior to this attack and soon thereafter, Jews were transported from Israel and foreigners were brought into Israel, now called the province of Samaria (which accounts for a lot of the racial hatred which existed between the Jews in the South and the inhabitants of Samaria).

Judah, to the south of Israel, was not threatened by the Assyrian takeover in the north. There was a spiritual revival in Judah over the next 100 years and a simultaneous weakening of the Assyrian empire. In fact, under Josiah, in circa 621 BC, Judah took back a portion of Samaria and Eastern Galilee from the Assyrians (II Chron 34:6).

Judah went to war with Egypt in 609 BC, at which time Josiah died in battle. Egypt put its own ruler on the throne of Judah, but was distracted by battles with the Babylonian empire. The two empires seemed to be at a standstill, but Babylon took over Judah, and Jehoiachin, at 18 years of age, the ruler of Judah, surrendered Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC. His uncle, Zedekiah, took over the throne as the last king of Judah, rebelled in 589 BC, and, in 587 BC, the city was burned down and the walls were razed. The cream of Judah's population had already been transported throughout the Babylonian empire beginning in 597 BC. Many were royal guests of Nebuchadnezzar and many enjoyed rights and privileges similar to native Babylonians, except for the right to return to Judah. At least three other major deportations have been noted in the Bible (II Kings 25:11; Jer 52:29 II Kings 25:25-26 Jer 41-43; 52:30), which occurred between 587 and 582 BC.

In 539 BC, the Babylonian empire fell to Cyrus, the king of Persia. The Persian empire, at its peak, took in an incredible amount of real estate. The entire Chaldean/Babylonian empire was within its influence and it also controlled Libya and Egypt (to the far Southwest) and Armenia to the North, and Median and Persia to the Northeast. God had blessed this empire because they did not have all the prejudices of the Babylonians and Assyrians toward the Jews. In fact, Cyrus was the king who encouraged the rebuilding and repopulating of Judah by the Jews in a series of decrees beginning in 539 BC.

Cyrus, in his conquest of Babylon (550-539 BC), made Susa the capital of the Persian empire, and it is sometime after this when the incidents in Esther took place. We do not know which king of Persia that the book of Esther refers to; many scholars lean toward Xerxes, who reigned from 485-465 BC, and others identify King Ahasuerus with Artaxerxes II (404-359 BC).

Who King Ahasuerus is not important. What is important is that the Jews were a conquered people, many of whom still lived within the areas to where they had been deported. Others in those areas had ancestors who had been at war with the Jews a century earlier and there would have been some prejudice on their part. In some cases, there remained a vicious hatred and prejudice (as an aside, having lived in Texas for several decades, there are many Southerners who are still "fighting" the civil war and who view those from the North with disdain). We have a similar situation here. Furthermore, the Jewish worship of the one true God, to the exclusion of the idolatry held to by the Chaldeans, Egyptians, and Persians, would have been viewed as suspect. So, whereas the Persian empire had a generally open and favorable view toward the Jews, in a precedent set by Cyrus, they were not seen as equals to those in the Persian empire; and certainly not with Persian royalty. This is why Mordecai admonished Esther not to disclose her race.

It is also important to note that, human nature will keep some Jews where they are—they have been in Persia for over a century; they were born there, they have established businesses and families and neighborhoods, and antisemitism is not overt and out of control (antisemitism will always exist, no matter where Jews live). So there are a large contingent of Jews who are not going anywhere—they aren't going to return to their land because, quite frankly, they don't see it as their land. Mordecai and Esther are a part of this group.

Mordecai was, for all intents and purposed, Esther's father, and he was concerned over what would transpire as Esther spent 12 months in the purification rites of these women. When a woman was brought into the harem of a Persian king, she underwent course of purification for a period of 12 months. During this time, she would be anointed with perfumes and cosmetics. It is not clear what else occurred, but very likely they would be taught in the proper protocol for royalty. This possibly removed ties to the outside world, family, former boyfriends, etc. No doubt, this would have been great fodder for a reality show series.

And every day, Mordecai walked back and forth in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and how she fared. Now when the turn of each young lady came to go in to King Ahasuerus, after the end of her twelve months under the regulations for the women (for the days of their beautification were completed as follows: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and the cosmetics for women) then, the young lady would go in to the king in this way: anything that she desired was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. In the evening she would go in and in the morning she would return to the second harem, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not again go in to the king unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name. [Esther 2:11-14]

Throughout this book, the word "cosmetics" are "ointments for purification." We do not know exactly what they are or what sort of ritual was involved. Certainly, grooming was a part of the process, as was training, but certainly there were some pagan rituals which took place. What took place during the evening was not what one would view as a Christian courtship; however, what actually transpired is not made known to us, as this is a matter of privacy. Certainly, what did take place in most cases was pre-marital sex and the woman in question would then be transferred to the second harem, which is where the young ladies went who had met the king. They would have remained there possibly for the duration of their lives, as a part of his harem. The women in the second harem might never hear from the king again; they were to come to him only when summoned.

The items which the women could request would have been, very likely, clothes, jewelry, cosmetics and whatever other items might enhance their appearance.

Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail, the uncle of Mordecai who had taken her as his daughter, came to go in to the king, she did not request anything except what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the women, advised. And Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her. So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus to his royal palace in the tenth month which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. [Esther 2:15-16]

Esther was a wise young woman. Whereas, the other women had their own ideas about what would impress the king in terms of accessories, Esther did not know the king and relied upon the wisdom of Hegai, who did. This is obvious if you look around you. There are women who know how to wear clothing and makeup and what suits them and what doesn't; and there are women who do not have a clue. Some women can have exceptional natural beauty and, by poor taste and lack of discernment, hide that beauty with the improper use of cosmetics, clothing and accessories. Hegai, for all intents and purposes, was a professional in this regard and Esther trusted his judgment. Those in her periphery respected Esther, her demeanor and the choices which she made. Part of becoming a queen was to behave as one, circumspectly, and this is what Esther did. Her training as a child by Mordecai was obvious. Again, let me mention the timing here. This narrative began during the third year of King Ahasuerus' reign, possibly near the end of that third year. During the first half of the fourth year, he had an open house for the princes in his realm and then an open house for those in the immediate vicinity. The queen refused to attend one function, causing the King to become quite angry. He meets with his court and discusses a plan of action. A resolution is passed and this is disseminated throughout the land. This would take us to the end of his fourth year. The king stewed about this situation for some time and one may ask what is the big deal. Very likely, the king was in love with this wife yet, he could not allow this transgression. Queen Vashti had put him in a very difficult position. He went with the dictates of his counsel, which was reasonable for a king to do. He still will have several months to a year to deal with the proclamation, the banishment of the Queen, and his feelings for her. This would take us to the end of his fifth year. Noticing the king's mood and being quite perceptive as to his thoughts and inner emotions, his aides suggested another marriage. Prior to this point in time, this would have been unthinkable. For those who have spent time healing from a relationship, this is fully understandable. For a year, the search for a new queen occurs, until all of the prospects are brought to the first harem and another year of purification rites ensues. Then we have the interviewing process, which, depending upon the number of women involved, could take a month to 4 months. This would put us in the 10th month of the seventh year of King Ahasuerus.

And the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found favor and kindness with him more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. Then the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his princes and his servants; he also made a holiday for the provinces and gave gifts according to the king's bounty. [Esther 2:17-18]

We do not know what transpired the night that Esther met the king. The Bible is not shy about copulation, and when it occurred and was germane to the narrative, it is mentioned. Here it was not

mentioned, nor was the lack of it. However, Esther received clear training from Mordecai, which, even after a year in preparation, therefore separation from Mordecai, she held to, as Esther 2:20 proclaims, it is certain that Mordecai trained her with regard to men, the most important thing a father can do for his female child. A father knows better than anyone else what a male is like and if he does not, on numerous occasions, sit down and explain and reiterate what the man is like, he does his daughter a great disservice. A young lady, from puberty on needs to know what is proper behavior to expect from a male and what is not. We are not talking about sexual harassment here because that is obviously a sign of weakness and lack of masculinity in the male involved. Any woman with half a brain can recognize that. It is the sensitive and caring and handsome men about which the young lady must be warned. A young lady must be aware that the men who come in a good package may not be what they seem and their motives may be far less than honorable. A young lady must be able to recognize honor, integrity and character, attributes which are not readily discernable, the lack of which are often hidden behind an attractive appearance.

We do not know what spiritual training that Esther had, if she had any. Nor do we know why God is not mentioned in this book. The fact that He is not, yet the book of Esther is still found in the canon, gives great credence to the canon of Scripture. We, at best, recognize the canon, but it is God who has determined what his complete message to man shall be. This was very likely written in Susa, and, in a time when writing was not the norm, although it certainly did exist (Esther 1:22 2:23), but would be viewed with some curiosity if someone just wrote something the length of Esther. My mind wonders if this could have been originally composed by an unbeliever—someone recording the facts of the marriage of King Ahasuerus and Esther—which Ezra later became privy to and recorded in Scripture for us. If recorded by an unbeliever, it is highly unlikely that JHWH's name would be found. However, since God controls human history, He is capable of such a feat. We do not know how the book of Esther came to be or the events which transpired to enter it into God's Word. This passage points out that whatever Mordecai taught Esther, she listened and obeyed. Even a year and a half after being in his care, does she recall what she was taught. Very likely, since she practiced obedience to Mordecai, even a year and a half after being taught, this would indicate that Mordecai brought her up correctly and trained her properly. This would give greater credence to her behavior as being honorable and exemplary during her first meeting to the King.

It is interesting to speculate whether she or Mordecai were believers. It is possible to be a member of the chosen race and not be a believer in Jesus Christ. It is possible to have training and wisdom in things of life and to behave accordingly, yet be spiritually dead. God has set up certain laws of establishment that, when followed by believer and unbeliever alike, they will prosper in all things (Deut. 4:4-9 6:6-12 11:18-22). God can execute His plan on earth by using believers and unbelievers alike. He does not require anything on our parts to fulfill His plan. Therefore, it is very possible that Mordecai, Esther and King Ahasuerus were all unbelievers that God used to preserve his people. All three of them could have been fully entrenched in the laws of divine establishment, yet unbelievers. This would cause them to be prosperous on earth, yet they would spend eternity in the lake of fire. When we die, these would be interesting people to look up in heaven, if they are there, and find out the extent of their spiritual training and to find out why God's name was not recorded in this book. The fact that God's name, JHWH, shows up in the book of Esther in acrostic form is not necessarily something which was intentionally put there by the human author but by God the Holy Spirit.

And when the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai was sitting at the king's ate. Esther had not yet made known her kindred or her people, even as Mordecai had commanded her, for Esther did what Mordecai told her as she had done when under his care. In those days, while Mordecai was sitting at the

king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's officials from those who guarded the door, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus, but the plot became known to Mordecai, and he told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name. Now when the plot was investigated and found to be so, they were both hanged on a tree; and it was written in the Book of the Chronicles in the king's presence. [Esther 2:19-23]

Mordecai had a position in King Ahasuerus' government, which is indicated by the phrase "sitting at the king's gate." This position was very likely guarding the king's palace (as v. 21 would suggest). V 19 establishes that he had this position during the period of time when the choice of Esther was made. It tells us that after all the prospects were interviewed, during that time, Mordecai had a post and that was "sitting at the king's gate."

During this time that Mordecai was on guard duty, he overheard two other guards, Bigtha and Teresh, plotting against the king. Notice that Mordecai follows a certain protocol and goes to the queen, with whom he has audience, because he did not have "the king's ear." Esther was able to convey this to the King and the King had the men hanged, as they should have been.

The Book of Chronicles which is mentioned here, is not the same Book of Chronicles which we are familiar with. Kings directed others to record the historical events in their realm for posterity. Usually, that history was biased (note that it was written "in the king's presence") and whatever information which we have received through writings of antiquity must be read with a discerning eye. No one views himself as being the person who is in the wrong; and no military hero and king wants to look bad; therefore, the writings which we have from the past, except for those found in God's Word, will be slanted in favor of the king who directed the writing. Flaws are not a thing which were recorded in a king's history. The one exception is the Bible, where every aspect of a person's character, good and bad, are recorded with unfailing accuracy. One only need examine the lives of the exemplary saints from the Bible, Moses or David, to discover that, despite their spiritual stature, they made many mistakes of the flesh, all recorded with unerring accuracy and candor.

Chapter 3 begins with a new set of events unrelated to those which have proceeded. The only connection here is a chronological one:

After these events King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedagtha, the Agagite, and advanced him and established his authority over all the princes who were with him. And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman; for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai neither bowed nor paid homage. Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why are you transgressing the king's command?" Now it was when they had spoken daily to him and he would not listen to them, that they told Haman to see whether Mordecai's reason would stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew. [Esther 3:1-4]

Now we are getting an inkling that perhaps Mordecai did know the one true God. As part of the Law given through Moses, where the Jew was not to worship any false image or idol. This is going beyond simple laws for divine establishment to a relationship with the one true God. It was normal for royalty to be paid homage to and it was quite unusual for anyone to refuse to bow down before him. This was quite surprising

for the other guards so they questioned Mordecai about it. It was not something like going out and getting drunk or fornicating; what Mordecai refused to do was thought of as being right, in the eyes of these Persians, and why someone would risk their life over something as trivial as not paying homage to a high ranking official was surprising. Particularly because they knew that Mordecai was a good and faithful servant to King Ahasuerus. The end of chapter 2 tells us that Mordecai had no disrespect for the throne, not was he confused about the rule of government. He was very conservative and establishment oriented in those areas. So, to see this person who is not a trouble-maker, who is not an insurrectionist, who has close ties to the throne, refuse to do a little bowing and scraping; that is highly unusual.. They first tried to talk him into doing obeisance and apparently there were several discussions which ensued. However, when it was clear that Mordecai was not going to listen to them and that he disagreed with them, they decided to pursue these matters further and force Haman to take a stand.

Now, to offer the other opinion—old habits die hard. Mordecai could be an unbeliever who refuses to bow down to some idol or to some person. He may not be sure who or what he believes in, but he knows who he does not believe in.

When Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage to him, Haman was filled with rage. But he disdained to lay hands upon Mordecai alone, for they had told him [who] the people of Mordecai were; [Esther 3:5-6a]

Here, we might want to examine a few words. "Disdained" is from a Hebrew word which means "to disdain." Some people were anti-Semitic and this revealed the anti-Semitism resident in Haman's soul. Haman was thoroughly disgusted by Mordecai and the lack of obeisance due to his being a Jew just opened an incredible can of worms, insofar as Haman was concerned. He despised the Jewish race as well.

Haman is so upset at Mordecai, that it would not have been enough for him to attack Mordecai alone. The entire Jewish race for their own peculiarities should pay for this transgression.

...therefore, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, who [were] throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus. In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, was the Pur (that is, the lot) cast before Haman from day to day and from month [to month] until the twelfth month, that is the month Adar. [Esther 3:6b-7]

Here we have the famous saying, "the die is cast" or "the lot is cast." This reminds me of a chess game. Having sat down with a chess set and an account of a recent championship match, I was amazed to find that twelve pairs of moves prior to the end, the die had been cast. The loser, twelve pairs of moves prior to the end, could not have done anything to escape his fate. This is how far in advance some of these players see the game. As Mordecai ruminated upon this for awhile, he had sealed his own fate and was setting into motion some events which could not be reversed. 11 months before the decree was established and send forth, Mordecai had determined his direction. This is an incredible amount of hardness of heart. His hatred and bitterness layered upon one another until he desired to destroy the entire Jewish race. This may seem extreme, but we have many recent historical examples of irrational hatred of the Jews. Anti-Semitism is inspired and nurtured by Satan and it is found in the conservative party of the United States, within the members of the Black race, in Russia over the past 80 years, and in Nazi Germany. Jews. whose physical appearance is not too dissimilar to ours, are treated differently at times and despised, because they are God's

chosen people and those who have fallen into the sphere of anti-Semitism have been influenced by Satan.

Again, as an aside: note the exactness of the time and the months. This is detail which would not have been used in a fable or a parable. This really occurred. It was not even a representative story of what could have happened. This is a real historical event.

What appears to be the case is, a time frame is set up for carrying out Haman's diabolical plan. Lots were cast in order to determine the best time for this, which ends up being 12 months into the future.

The Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from [those] of all [other] people, and they do not observe the king's laws, so it is not in the king's interest to let them remain. If it is pleasing to the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who carry on the king's business, to put into the king's treasuries." [Esther 3:8-9]

We have seen that one of the strengths of King Ahasuerus is to wait out his own impulses and speak to his advisors. It is possible that he really had little interest in involving himself with legislation and kingly affairs (apart from picking a queen or throwing a party). Often when his most trusted advisors came to him, he would heed recommendations. We saw this when it came to the disposition of the matter of Queen Vashti; when it came time for him to find a new wife; and when the plot was revealed against him. All three cases depended upon the judgement of those under him. There is nothing wrong with this method of rulership, although it is not the way David or Moses would have ruled (or Paul), but then they had the spiritual maturity and the wisdom to make their own decisions. Not everyone has this ability, particularly those in leadership positions and there is nothing wrong with recognizing one's own weaknesses as a leader and depending upon a good chief of staff. However, the ruler is no better than his weakest link in his cabinet and Haman is that weak link. Note how Haman presents his case. He does not come to the king claiming that he is upset because one Jew will not bow and scrape to him, therefore, he wants all Jews to be killed. He frames his point of view around the rebelliousness of the Jews—around them being so different from the Persians. Notice the absolute viciousness of his plan. Mordecai will know of the decree; know that he is going to die; and prior to his death, he will have the full realization that he caused the death of thousands of his fellow Jews.

Haman is a man whom the king trusts (a mistake in his own judgement), which was revealed because he advanced the status of Haman so quickly. Therefore, the king will assume that whatever counsel Haman has, it will be counsel which should be followed. From Haman's presentation, the king can see that he was the seeds of a insurrection on his hands and that this requires swift, decisive action. It was not abnormal for ruling bodies of people to (1) destroy the entire population of conquered peoples; (2) destroy their male population entirely; (3) deport an entire race or country; (4) enslave the entire race or country of a conquered people. Therefore, what is being suggested is not out of line with the mindset of those times. There is a race of people in the kingdom who disobey all of the king's laws and it is not in the king's interest to allow them to remain as citizens.

The only part of the verse which is confusing is the last two phrases. It appears as though Haman will pay the king 10,000 talents as a result of this; which money he will probably take from the Jews he kills.

Then the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedagtha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. And the king said to Haman,

"the silver is yours, and the people [also], to do with them as you please." Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and it was written just as Haman commanded to the king's satraps, to the governors who were over each province, and to the princes of each people, each province according to its script, each people according to its language, being written in the name of King Ahasuerus, and sealed with the king's signet ring. And letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to seize their possessions as plunder. A copy of the edict to be issued as law in every province was published to all the peoples so that they should be ready for this day. [Esther 3:10-14]

The king trusts his advisers so much that he does not write the law himself or even call a meeting of his top officials; he simply hands the signet ring to Haman and allows Haman to draft this law and put the final signature upon it himself. There is nothing wrong with delegating authority; however, here the king has someone under him who is filled with vindictiveness and mental attitude sins. No one with this impairment should be in a position of authority; their judgement is perpetually clouded. It is equivalent to scar tissue on the believer. Clearly, the silver to carry out this decree will come from the king and not from Haman, which means that it will come out from the king's treasuries. However, there is a double-bonus here given to those who kill Jews: money from the king and the possessions of the individuals and families that they kill.

There is a long date set upon this decree. This is apparently because of the casting of the lots. Their superstitions gave God a chance to act, setting up the consummation of this decree far in the future. purpose here is to give the decree time to be disbursed throughout the entire Persian empire. It may arrive in the various sectors within a month or two, due to the swiftness of the king's couriers (and this is after a month has been spent drafting the law in the various languages and dialects of the land); but then this information needs to be disseminated throughout each province. All this requires time. Furthermore, Haman would like to savor this act of evil. He will exact his revenge and enjoy it for a full year. Furthermore, this act of violence to be perpetuated upon the Jewish people would take time and planning on the part of the executioners; therefore, a year was given for the edict to go into effect.

The next verse gives the response in Susa (which would be a typical response from throughout the land). The Jews in this area, as in every area, have prospered, have become productive member of this society and have found a place within this land, while still remaining a separate people. This has been God's plan all along. In general, because of their past, Jews have always, as a whole, tended toward higher academic levels, greater productive levels, and they are less likely to be distracted by gross immorality or anti-establishment considerations. Therefore, the Jewish race had found a niche in that society. They did business with the general population every day, they were friends and neighbors of those in the Persian empire and this edict came completely out of the blue. There was no prior expectation that such a thing could occur. The Jew, with all his great wisdom and background, does not realize how he his right in the middle of the angelic conflict and that Satan will attack with incredible viciousness at various times, without warning, with a strategy so brutal as to be practically incomprehensible. In general, most Jews have no understanding as to why they are so persecuted in this life. There is an unseen conflict which they have no appreciation for. They are God's people, something which they do not fully understand. However, it can be no other way. The Jews occupy the tiniest fraction of the Arabic territories at this time. The amount of land that they occupy is less than 1/2

of one percent of the land controlled by Arabic groups. They could not be squeezed into a smaller space, relatively speaking. Furthermore, the land that they stand on has none of the great oil resources that we find in the surrounding Arabic countries. Yet, a significant number of Arabs are up in arms over this situation. To them, it is the worst disaster in history that the Jews live on this tiny plot of land. Their hatred is so irrational that a significant number of Arabs are willing to kill themselves if they know this will take out a handful of Jews. The Arab population in Israel has the same political rights as do the Jews. In fact, Israel gave Arabic women the right to vote before any Arabic nation did.

Now, certainly, Jerusalem is considered holy to the Arabic people, just as it is to the Jews and Christians. However, we do not find Christian suicide bombers taking out Jews; or Jewish suicide bombers taking out Arabs or Christians. The Arab hatred of the Jew seems completely irrational unless one understands the angelic conflict. Then it makes sense.

The couriers went out compelled by the king's command while the decree was issued in Susa, the capital; and when the king and Haman sat down to drink, the city of Susa was in confusion. [Esther 3:15]

"Confusions" is actually a participle of the Hebrew word  $\text{יָדָוּב}$ , which, like many Hebrew words, is derived from a very real event, but is used to describe something more ethereal. It is used of thick, entangled boughs, but means "confusion, not knowing what to do, perplexity." The King does not even have a clue as to what he has set into motion with allowing this decree to be sent forth, and while he and Haman (with whom he obviously has a good rapport) are sitting down having a drink together, the city around them is in turmoil and confusion, no one knowing what to do because of this edict. The Jews are confused because they have been transported to this area, against their will and were not allowed to leave (or, if this was after the decree of Cyrus, then they had chosen to stay). In any case, they thought that there was a favorable disposition toward the Jews and they had become decent, upstanding, establishment oriented citizens. They have never been known for fomenting revolt outside of the land. This edict was a complete surprise. Furthermore, most Jews do not realize how closely involved they are to the unseen struggle and rebellion of Satan. Most have no idea as to why they face the horrible tribulations that they do.

On the other hand, the citizens in general do not know what has occurred. While there certainly did exist some prejudice on the part of the local citizenry, not all were. Why the Jews had been singled out for massive extermination was confusing to them. Some of them had been certainly deported from elsewhere; when was it their turn? Others were strictly Persian who had no prior reason for hating the Jew and this directive was a shock to them. They viewed the Jews favorably (which was why Assyria had been prospered in the first place), and now they were suddenly faced with this.

Meanwhile, Haman and the King drink together, the King having no idea that he has been used by Haman, and Haman having no idea that he was used by Satan. At this point, we begin to see another reason for the book of Esther. There is an unseen conflict of which a small percentage of Christians are aware; the angelic conflict. There are things which occur in this world, events which come to pass which seem so horrible as to be surreal. Most people, if pressed, could not give an adequate explanation as to what happened in Nazi Germany. The forces behind such intense evil are unknown to them. There have been books and films wherein people keep asking why and all of their explanations seem totally inadequate. The book of Esther reveals that this type of attack has existed from the earliest times until now. While Esther does not reveal the unseen forces behind this edict, those who have a reasonable understanding of the Bible and of the true state

of the world also understand what is not said and what is not alluded to. Esther does not speak directly of God's overriding care and control of history; nor does it speak of the Jews unique position in history, nor does it allude to the angelic conflict. On the face of it, Esther is a simple recording of a series of events. However, behind those events we have a conflict which, we as Christians, are privy to.

When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly. And he went as far as the king's gate, for no one was to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. And in each and every province where the command and decrees of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay on sackcloth and ashes. [Esther 4:1-3]

This was a highly distressing chain of events to the Jews. They were about to be killed, their entire families, for some unknown reason as far as they were concerned (like the majority of Christians, they have access to information concerning the unseen conflict, but they have not made themselves aware of this information), so this edict comes as a complete surprise. They had viewed their relationship with the Assyrians as good. The option of returning to the land by the king's hand seemed to be a very favorable disposition, and they chose to remain in Persia because things were not so bad. What has occurred here, on the other hand, is a complete reversal of policy.

Esther, even as queen, was unaware of what has transpired. Living in the palace, attended by servants, separates her from the rest of the world. It is possible that the edict could have been passed and carried out without her knowing of these events. In our age, we are so used to seeing so many events, as they are happening, on videotape and hearing about them on the news. We often do not realize that there are a great many events that we do not ever see on the news because there was no videotape of the event or related persons. Those events transpire outside of our realm of knowledge as though they never occurred. We see, at the most, their rippling effects. Even less informed is the Queen. They live in a world which is unspoiled by many of the tragic events outside the palace. They have a position in life which demands a certain mode of behavior, a certain detachment, all of which is accompanied by a certain amount of ignorance.

Then Esther's maidens and her eunuchs came and told her, and the Queen writhed in great anguish. And she sent garments to clothe Mordecai that he might remove his sackcloth from him, but he did not accept [them]. [Esther 4:4]

Note that Esther has not been told about the edict; all she knows is that her surrogate father is outside the palace walls wailing, crying, wearing sackcloth and ashes. She loves Mordecai and owes to him everything that she has. It was the impeccable training she received from him which allowed her to achieve her position (and, certainly, God's grace and plan, which used Mordecai's abilities as a father). She had a tremendous love for her father, as would any daughter, and his pain was her pain. She is not aware of the events which have caused him to be in this pain; she just wants to do whatever she can to relieve it. Her first attempt to deal with these circumstances is to send Mordecai new clothes. This seems superficial, but recall that she does not know what has occurred, she does not know how to remove his distress, and this sudden bit of news that he is outside the palace in sackcloth has upset her greatly. She does not know why and does not know what to

do. With a new set of clothes, he can enter into the palace and she can speak with him. When Mordecai refuses the clothes, she tries something else:

Then Esther summoned Hathach from the king's eunuchs, whom the king had appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this [was] and why it [was]. So Hathach went out to Mordecai to the city square in front of the king's gate and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact amount of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict which had been issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show Esther and inform her, and to order her to go in to the King to implore his favor and to plead with him for her people. [Esther 4:5-8]

The money situation is a bit more clear in this passage. Haman was going to pay the king to allow this edict. He first brought to the king a set of reasons as to why the King should issue such an edict and, in order to sweeten the deal, he would pay the king a tremendous amount of money (which money would be taken from the Jews that he slaughters). This revenge was worth a great deal to Haman.

Mordecai realizes that the order came from the King (even though the King did not write it or apply the signet ring himself to the edict, but trusted Haman to take care of it) so Mordecai must go all the way to the king to deal with this problem.

An interesting sideline (and perhaps, only to myself) is the precision with which this author writes. Mordecai does not hand Hathach the edict; he may or may not be in possession of an original edict. He had a copy of this decree and that copy is handed to the eunuch. Mordecai did not go throughout the city tearing the decrees down. This, very likely, was punishable offense. He, at most, removed one to take home and copy; but, more likely, copied down a decree which had been posted and handed a copy of the text of this decree to Hathach. Note further that Mordecai knows that Esther does not know about this; not even the eunuch who is in her charge realizes what has occurred.

And Hathach came back and related Mordecai's words to Esther. Then Esther spoke to Hathach and ordered him to reply to Mordecai: "All the King's servants and the people of the King's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the King holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned to come to the King for these thirty days." And they related Esther's words to Mordecai. The Mordecai told [them] to reply to Esther, "Do not imagine that you in the King's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?" [Esther 4:9-14]

Even Mordecai follows a certain protocol here. He is dressed in sackcloth and ashes and is not to enter into the palace like that. However, he appeals to his daughter, the Queen to intercede. Esther has not faced quite this much responsibility before. As queen, she had certain functions and responsibilities, but never

before had she faced anything quite like this. It was overwhelming and she did not really know what to do. She had an easy answer—she could not go into the King unless summoned and those who went to him without being summoned were put to death. And, furthermore, he had not called for her for thirty days.

Mordecai was fully aware that the Jews, in some way, would be delivered; possibly not all of them and possibly not even Esther, as he indicates; and this would end Esther's direct line from her father. Mordecai points out what should be clear to anyone with a little spiritual sense: that perhaps Esther was elevated to her position for this reason.

The Esther told [them] to reply to Mordecai, "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go into the King, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him. [Esther 4:15-17]

Mordecai told her just exactly what she needed to know in order to take action.. Esther has spent time thinking about this situation between messages and has the background and training from Mordecai to do what is right. A lot of time has passed since Esther's wedding to the King. It was the 12th or 13th year of the King in this passage, and they were married in the 7th or 8th year. So, at least 4 years have elapsed and, although it is likely that King Ahasuerus still loves his queen, they are no longer on their honeymoon. If he was less than honorable (and, obviously, his judgement has suffered over the years, having allowed that evil Haman to become his friend and to get a law passed that was totally unjust), Esther's arrival could be an excuse for the end of their marriage.

The fasting, we would expect, would be more than just a ritual. It would be interesting to see if the acronym JHWH shows up in this passage because this would indicate a petition to God for His guidance and blessing upon this course of action. However, that is not the case here. We do not find any mention of God's name here. It should be clear that God's name is not invoked here. There is no fasting and prayer—just fasting. I believe that Mordecai and Esther, at least during the time of this writing, are both unbelievers. There is nothing said to indicate that they are not. Recall, most of the believing Jews returned to Jerusalem when given the chance. The others Jews had blended into society well enough to be comfortable with life in Persia. Furthermore, God does not need to use believers in order to accomplish His plan. God is fully capable of moving forward with His plan without any person's help. What happens in this book could have occurred had there been no believers in all of Persia. God is able to do that. It would be foolish of us to think that God's plan would somehow be unable move forward without us.

Now it came about on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the King's palace in front of the King's rooms, and the King was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room, opposite the entrance in the palace. And it happened when the King saw Esther the Queen standing in the court, she obtained favor in his sight, and the King extended to Esther the golden scepter which was in his hand. So, Esther came near and touched to top of the scepter. [Esther 5:1-2]

The set up of the castle, the throne in the King's hand, the position of the throne, and the ritual for touching the top of the King's scepter are things which would be only known to someone who lived within the

palace of Susa. The King's feelings are still strong and favorable toward Esther and he is more than willing to see her. Had he not been willing to see her, or had he gotten tired of her, the king could have Esther executed for disturbing him. Recall, this is a man who did not really like enacting laws or running the country. He liked the perks, but was more than willing to let someone else handle his work for him (which is why he let Haman draft and distribute that evil law). Ahasuerus could not even be bothered to proof read Haman's law. So, Esther, coming to the king like this, was risking her life.

Then the King said to her, "What is troubling you, Queen Esther? And what is your request? Even half the kingdom it will be given you." And Esther said, If it please the King, may the King and Haman come this day to the banquet which Esther had prepared for him." Then the King said, Bring Haman quickly that we may do as Esther desires." So the King and Haman came this day to the banquet which Esther had prepared. And as they drank their wine at the banquet, the King said to Esther, "What is your petition, for it shall be granted to you. And what is your request? Even to half the kingdom it shall be done." [Esther 5:3-6]

A certain protocol is revealed here: Esther, even as Queen, does not come right out and make her request known to the King. He knows that there is more to her entrance than just to invite him to dinner. He can see it in her face and hear it in her voice. Her invitation of Haman is deliberate, but the King thinks that it is because this is the person that he spends the most time with and she was just being considerate. His offer of half of the kingdom could be an idiom reserved for his wife and it is possible, but unlikely, that really means this.

So Esther answered and said, "My petition and my request is [this]: If I have found grace in the sight of the King, and if it please the King to grant my petition and do what I request, may the King and Haman come to the banquet which I shall prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king says." [Esther 5:8]

What the king has said is that he is ready to hear what Esther's petition is. She is not quite ready to explain to him what it is that she wants. It is possible that she does not know how to phrase it or that she is waiting on God for guidance to speak to her King and husband. She may be working up the nerve; and she may just be setting things up in order to make her request known. King Ahasuerus realizes that this is an important request because it is taking her 2 days to work up the courage to ask for whatever it is that she wants. His words indicate that he is very willing to grant any request that she has. However, before we examine her request and the King's response, we will follow Haman. For this information to be known, the omniscience of God the Holy Spirit was required. This is not the sort of thing which Haman would have readily divulged to Esther or to the King; and certainly not to Mordecai.

Then Haman went out that day glad and pleased of heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, and that he did not stand up or tremble before him, Haman was filled with anger against Mordecai. Haman controlled himself, however, went to his house, and sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh. The Haman recounted to them the glory of his riches, and the number of his sons, and every [instance] where the king had magnified him, and how he had promoted him above

the princes and the servants of the king. Haman also said, "Even Esther the queen let no one but me come with the King to the banquet which she had prepared; and tomorrow also I am invited by her with the King. Yet all of this does not satisfy me every time I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." [Esther 5:9-13]

Haman is just like any other unbeliever. If circumstances are just exactly what he wants, then he is happy—to some extent; if they aren't; then he is not. He is ruled by his circumstances and by the most minute details of his circumstances. He has everything that a person could desire and these things he recounts to his wife and friends. He has riches and power and fame. The two most important people in the world have bestowed upon him friendship and invitations. Furthermore, and this is not stated directly, but implied; Haman is not even jealous of the King's greater riches, power and fame. He is one of the few unbelievers who is not eaten up with jealousy. What the King has is fine with him—as far as we know. We do not know whether he genuinely likes the King or whether he is using the king to attain what he wants. In either case, he is not concerned that there is a richer and more powerful person on this earth. Haman is quite pleased with his own station in life; rare for an unbeliever. However, there is always just this one thing which, Haman thinks, keeps him from enjoying true happiness. Almost all people believe that if there were just one, or perhaps even a dozen things in their life which could be changed, then they would be happy. Unregenerate man does not understand that this is the devil's world and that he possesses an old sin nature; the combination of these two things makes it impossible to be happy for a sustained amount of time in this life.

The believer also has a difficult time sustaining any happiness or peace in this life. In fact, even though we are commanded to be happy and content with what we have (1 Tim 6:8 Heb 13:5 1 Peter 3:14), many believers are unhappy. When out of fellowship, they can be unhappy for the exact same reasons that cause unbelievers to be unhappy. Since it has never occurred to some believers to confess their sins to God to regain their fellowship and the filling of the Holy Spirit, some spend the entirety of their lives out of fellowship, experiencing no true spiritual growth, blown in every way by every wind of doctrine and circumstance. These behave exactly like religious unbelievers (or like non-religious unbelievers). Their souls feel and respond as do the souls of unbelievers because they do not have the Holy Spirit controlling and guiding their life; the Holy Spirit has been stifled and grieved and all they have are their own personal resources.

One must always realize that wonderful circumstances are temporary in this life; that there are always reasons for us to point to to claim that these things are causing us unhappiness. Unbelievers and believers out of fellowship are slaves to their circumstances, to the whims of their own souls. Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes illustrates this as a believer; and Haman, as an unbeliever, illustrates this for us in this passage. He is so close himself to realizing that there is something drastically wrong with his life that he should have all these human benefits and he is still miserable. And it is such a trivial detail of life: some Jew wearing sackcloth and ashes will not bow and scrape to him. There is no indication that Mordecai has ever ridiculed Haman, made light of him or of his position or personage. He just will not do obeisance to Haman. And Haman is fully aware that in this life, he has blessings and human success almost beyond compare. Yet he is racked within his soul because of one lone Jew. This information should reveal to him that he needs something beyond what this world has to offer. Unfortunately, the only advice he receives is that of another unbeliever. The only solution that an unbeliever can come up with when one is unhappy is to change your circumstances:

Then Zeresh, his wife, and all his friends said to him, "Have a gallows fifty cubits high made and in the morning ask the King to have Mordecai hanged on it, then go

joyfully with the King to the banquet." And the advice pleased Haman, so he had the gallows built. [Esther 5:14]

The believer with doctrine can only look upon this with sadness. Unregenerate man is so blind and eaten up in his soul with hardness of heart, or scar tissue. Haman's only deliverance from this life of woe is this lone Jew sitting at the King's gate. God's representative with knowledge of the one and only true God and Haman desires to destroy this one link that he has with true happiness. It is a situation at once ironic and grievous. Furthermore, examine the solution offered and taken: Mordecai is a man who has really done no wrong and yet they have all agreed that he should be worthy of death because this just might help Haman to be happy. What an incredibly depraved solution to a relatively simple problem.

Chapter 6 begins where again one would expect to find God mentioned by name. I will just have to find out where these acronyms occur in Esther. Prior to the closing of the canon of scripture, God communicated to mankind via dreams and visions, as well as in other various and sundry manners. Here, God causes King Ahasuerus to become sleepless until he finally calls for the records of his administration.

During the night, the King could not sleep so he gave an order to bring the book of records, the chronicles, and they were read before the king.. [Esther 6:1]

The King apparently does not know why he could not sleep nor does he know why he is going through his own record books. Perhaps he thinks it will cause him to sleep if his past accomplishments are read to him. Perhaps he will feel better in his soul. Most likely, he is unable to sleep. What better way to get some sleep than to have the records read to you?

We know that it is God who has sent him a fitful sleep and Who has put the suggestion in his mind to look through his past records. The king had an incredible empire, the size of which and population would be hard to fathom; and the control of which was not aided by the communications system which we have today. He had to deal with many crises and an incredible number of people whom he saw or heard spoken of perhaps once or twice; so his memory of everyone's accomplishments was not perfect. He does not remember Mordecai; not right off the top of his head. However, God will cause this bit of past history to come to the forefront of his thinking just at the proper time.

And it was found written what Mordecai had reported concerning Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuch's who were doorkeepers, that they had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. And the King said, "What honor or dignity has been bestowed upon Mordecai for this?" Then the King's servants attending him said, "Nothing has been done for him." [Esther 6:2-3]

This was not some incredible coincidence that the King cannot sleep and just happens to stop the reading with Mordecai just at the time Haman is coming to him to ask to hang Mordecai. Perhaps the King could not sleep and was concerned about his past deeds and where he might have made a mistake. Some unbelievers will reexamine their lives, trying to find out at what point in their lives have they erred and is there a way to go back and repair the damage. Even believers will do this sort of thing, replaying conversations, series of actions and events over and over in their heads, trying to find the point at which things could have been righted. Such believers will do penance or commits acts of restitution, often failing to recall what David

said, after committing adultery and having the innocent husband killed: to God he said, "Against You, and You only have I sinned." It is like playing a chess game, and suddenly, ten pairs of moves before the end, you find that you have been trapped and there is no way out if your opponent realizes this also. You return mentally two or three moves to determine how could you have averted such disaster.

Unbelievers often view life as a series of random, unconnected purposeless events, with no purpose or design. The evolutionist sees his world as one which sprang from a random mixture of inorganic material which suddenly became, by a million to one chance or circumstance, organic matter; and by a series of perhaps another million million in one chances, develop into a living, walking human being. How can you conduct your life if there is no order; only chaos. Who is to say what is right and wrong if events occur without meaning and purpose, random occurrences without direction, plan or design.

We have here a race of God's people who are about to be delivered in a series of events which defy random movement. There was a purpose that Mordecai could not sleep and a reason why he asked for the record book. There are a number of other things which he could have done as the king. It didn't happen just at any night; in fact, his question indicates that this has never happened before—or if it had, they had never gotten to this point in the record book before or he had not heard this reading before. The circumstances here fit together too well to be without a pattern or planner. God delivers His own people when it is necessary and He disciplines them when it is necessary. Queen Esther came to the throne years prior to this in response to another series of events which perhaps to some, appeared random, but God controls history and He controls these events. It was Mordecai's excellent training of Esther which allowed her to become the queen.

Certain a male can relate to seeing a woman whose beauty is absolutely stunning; until she opens her mouth and what comes out obliterates this beauty. Esther was certainly a woman of great physical attractiveness; but consider how many women of King Ahasuerus' realm were beautiful and also answered the quest for a new queen. Yet Esther was chosen because besides her physical beauty, she had substance and training and character which can only be instilled by a loving parent and exploited by a positive child.

Certainly, a fair question at this point would be, where is God in this? What exactly is God doing? We don't know exactly. Charismatics like to think that every five minutes, God performs some kind of miracle in their lives, to straighten things out. One told me that their God is a *big God*, meaning that their God was able to perform miracles and the God I believed in was unable to. God is able to perform miracles and, one in awhile, He does. However, God's plan is so great and so perfect as to not require constant direct interference from Him. For God's plan to work in my life, He does not need to magically destroy all of my enemies all of a sudden; He does not need to give me a million dollars or more through some lottery so that I can pay off my debts, He does not have to turn a broken bone of mine whole in an instant. God has set forth a series of events which are perfectly suited to the day to day decisions which I make; and God has done that for billions of people. For God to have to perform a miracle every few minutes almost implies that He did not quite get the plan right. It is as though, God is saying, "Holy crap, I did not know they were going to do that. I'd better fix it with a miracle."

Haman, now having come to a point where he believes he can solve all of his problems and become a happy man again, is about to become quite surprised:

Then the King said, "Who is in the court?" (Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the King's palace in order to speak to the King about hanging Mordecai on the gallows which he had prepared for him). And the king's servants said, "Behold, Haman is standing in the court." And the King said, "Let him come in." So Haman

came in and the King said to him, "What is to be done for the man whom the King desires to honor?" [Esther 6:4-6a]

These occurrences are a joy to the reader of this book. We know what is in the King's mind and what Haman has planned and note how the conversation sets Haman up. He will give the King advice, part of his position as a member of the cabinet and as the King's friend, yet not realize whom this advice concerns. His life centers around himself and the first thing that Haman thinks about is himself. He is almost distracted and will not answer the King flippantly, but it will be almost without thought. He has something important to say to the king, and, as far as he is concerned, the king is concerned with some petty matter of the realm, which Haman can dispense with in a moment so that they can get on to the more important business of Haman's desires.

And Haman said to himself, "Whom would the king desire to honor more than me?" Then Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the King desires to honor, let them bring a royal robe which the King has worn, and the horse upon which the King has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown has been placed; and let the robe and the horse be handed over to one of the King's most noble princes and let them array the man whom the King desires to honor and lead him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him, 'Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor.'" [Esther 6:6b-9]

When he says to himself, "Whom would the king desire to honor more than me?" it is a rhetorical question. Haman is the king's friend, he hangs out with the king, he drinks with the king, so he knows what the king has going on; so he thinks to himself, "Obviously, there is no one better than me that the king knows." So Haman will give an answer with himself in mind.

One thing that Haman could do better than most was to think on his feet and give quick and satisfying answers. The King in question desires to do the right thing, yet has not the sense to decide what that should be. Therefore, he has surrounded himself with men upon whose advice he can rely. Throughout all of the book of Esther, this seems to be the case. This is not an observation of derision; after all, it is much preferable for a king to realize that he cannot make good decisions without help and guidance, and then to surround himself with those who can provide this than to have an arrogant king whose every whim and bad decision is law, placed into effect without thought, without counsel. As Clint Eastwood said: "A man's got to know his limitations." This king's limitation was, he did not really like the responsibility of being king, although he was rather fond of the perks.

Our God is a God of irony and humor. He has mapped out this series of events in which Haman will paint himself into a corner. Haman has built his own gallows and doesn't even see it coming. God managed to do all of this without a single miracle. He is able to bring about His will, even when dealing with unbelievers. And even though many esteemed exegetes argue that Esther and Mordecai just have to be believers, there is nothing in this book which forces us to that conclusion. In fact, the calling for a fast apart from prayer, the lack of God's name in this book—these two factors suggest that Esther and Mordecai were both unbelievers. And even if you point to Mordecai's refusal to bow down before Haman in worship, bear in mind, there are some agnostics and atheists in our society who would have also refused. A man does not have to be a believer in order to take a moral stand.

Then the king said to Haman, "Take quickly the robes and the horse as you have said, and do so for Mordecai the Jew, who is sitting at the king's gate; do not fall short of anything at all that you have said." [Esther 6:11]

We can only imagine the crestfallen look upon Mordecai's face at this instant. The King obviously has no idea as to what kind of an edict which he had sent forth by Haman's hand, and now, Haman has no idea what he had set himself up for. During his trip to the palace, Haman must have begun to feel better and better as he neared the King, and now this. There are few things which could have been worse news for Haman. Furthermore, it was his own idea.

So Haman took the robe and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city square, and proclaimed before him, "Thus it shall be done to the man whom the King desires to honor." Then Mordecai returned to the King's gate. But Haman returned home, mourning, with his head covered. [Esther 6:11-12]

Can you imagine Haman's incredible embarrassment? He wanted to kill Mordecai; Mordecai would not bow down to him in worship, and now he was leading Mordecai through the streets, as though he were Mordecai's servant. He is essentially giving Mordecai the deference and public respect he expected Mordecai to give him. The tables could not have been more turned—well, actually, they could!

Even Mordecai may not be fully aware of what is occurring. He may have been totally oblivious to Haman in the past, recognizing that, as a man of God's people,<sup>1</sup> he is not to worship another man, such as Haman; however, up until the edict, Mordecai may not have realized the hatred of Haman. Doubtless that Mordecai is nonplussed by this entire turn of events. Only Esther, as we shall see, is fully aware of the edict, who authored it. It is highly likely that Mordecai still might not be aware of who authored the edict to destroy his people. Only the king's signature stamp was upon the edict and obviously, since the King knows that Mordecai is a Jew and wanted to honor him, the King himself may not be aware of the exact content of the edict which he had authorized. Neither the King nor Haman realize just who exactly Esther is. If identified as we are accustomed to with a last name (or, "of" so and so), that would be her actual father, who is deceased, and not Mordecai. So neither one knows that they are honoring the "father" of the Queen. Only Esther, who has investigated this matter thoroughly with her resources as the Queen, knows just exactly who the principal players are in this drama. In fact, as I have gone through this book I have thought to myself that this would have made a wonderful drama on the stage. It has the clearly drawn characters; the series of events which lead to the ironies of all ironies; it has the humor and tragedy; and it has the villain with a tragic flaw. And on top of all this, it is not a story but a true event of history.

And Haman recounted to Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and Zeresh his wife said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish origin, you will not overcome him, but you will surely fall before him." [Esther 6:13]

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<sup>1</sup> Most Jews even today realize that they are God's people; even though they do not know what that means and they are not believers. I say that, as this statement would not prove that Mordecai is a believer.

Here would be the third apropos place for God's name to occur. Haman's friends and wife recognize, at this point in time, the Jews for who they are—God's people—and they recognize that because of Haman's attack upon the Jews, he is going to face his downfall. Recall the phrase from Esther 3:7: the die has been cast. Haman set into motion a series of events which would lead to the loss of everything he has gained. On earth, he was one of the richest and most powerful men. He had friends, a wife, possessions, power; and a tragic flaw—his hatred of Haman. Doubtless that Shakespear read this and recognized the tragic flaw syndrom and used that. Certainly this concept is a reality. We all have this tragic flaw, our old sin nature, and we become our own worst enemies with the choics that we make, with the mental attitude sins that we cling to.

While they were still talking with him, the King's eunuchs arrived and hastily brought Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared. Now the King and Haman came to drink wine with Esther the Queen. And the King said to Esther on the second day also as they drank their wine at the banquet, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom, it shall be done." Then Queen Esther answered and said, "If I have found grace in your sight, O King, and if it pleases the King, let my life be given me as my petition, and [the lives of] my people, as my request; for we have been sold I, and my people, to be destroyed, to be kiled and to be anihilated. Now if we had only been sold as slaves, men and women, I would havve remained silent, for the trouble would not be commensurate with the annoyance to the King." [Esther 6:14-7:4]

Although Haman's friends and wife recognize that this is the beginning of the end—Haman has attacked God's people and it appears as though this God will exact His revenge, Haman is certainly thinking that his day could not get any worse. However, the evil which will befall Haman has only begun.

At this banquet, only Esther seems to have a clear cut understanding of who everyone is and what part they have played. She realizes that her husband, the King, is sentimental, and with a little wine, he becomes quite attentive and pliable. Whatever he commands, no matter what state of mind he is in, that command is absolute law and it cannot be revoked. How foolish it would look for the King to send out various and sundry edicts, and then sen out a retraction later claiming that he was drunk, in a bad mood, or just didn't think this particular piece of legislation through. Remember, the king was like a deity to these people; so edicts from the king could not be wrong and therefore, could not be revoked. We know the king was as a deity to these people because even Haman demanded obeisance from all who walked by him. Esther is fully aware of this and will play her card exactly right. This is more of her excellent training as a young woman coming out.

The Jews were brought to Susa with full citizenship privileges; even to the point of allowing them to return to their land to rebuild Jerusalem. They had become, as Jews have become in every nation of the earth, a necessary, productive and integral part of the society, bringing God's blessing with them, as all nations who welcome the Jew and treat the Jew fairly and honorably receive God's grace and blessing. Had they been slaves, then they would be but property, as Esther is saying, and one can do with one's property as one wishes. However, this is not the case.

The King does not know exactly what she is talking about, although his anger toward whomever has caused Esther and her people pain has become kindled. Haman, on the other, is beginning to piece much of this puzzle together as she speaks. He knows what was in the edict; the king may or may not. Neither

Haman nor Ahasuerus realize that Esther was a Jewess, or that Mordecai was her adoptive father, and the entire direction of this conversation is making Haman feel considerably uneasy.

Then King Ahasuerus asked Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who would presume to do thus?" And Esther said, "A foe and an enemy, is this wicked Haman!" The Haman became terrified before the King and Queen. [Esther 7:5-6]

Haman's really bad day just became worse. Also, in this last verse, we realize that Esther has done her homework and she knows exactly who authored the edict to destroy the Jews. It is doubtful that the King even yet realizes what was in his own directive. He does not know that Esther is a Jew and no one knows who her adopted-father is. Ahasuerus has just had a little wine, his emotions are peaked because he loves his wife Esther and his anger toward anyone who would seek to harm her is at a height. His best friend has suddenly lost his "best friend" status. How can someone turn so quickly? Many men who have been married and in love have had their best friend commit adultery with their wives. Their love for their wife and best friend turns to rage. King Ahasuerus is facing a similar emotional situation. His so-called best friend has called for the death of his wife. It is clear to everyone at this point what Haman's fate is (except to the King, who will make the decision, yet still has to think this through). The King, as is his way, will wander off before making the decision, but Esther and Haman both already know what that decision will be.

And the king arose in his anger from drinking wine [and went] into the palace garden; but Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that harm had been determined against him by the King. Now when the King returned from the palace garden into the place where they were drinking wine, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. Then the King said, "Will he even assault the Queen with me in the house?" As the word went out of the King's mouth, they covered Haman's face. [Esther 7:7-8]

The King, in one of his rare moments, makes a quick decision and a good decision concerning Haman. What he says upon re-entering the banquet room is quite humorous; whether he meant it that way or not. Haman is begging for his life from the Queen on the couch, but, when the King returns, it appears to him as though he is assaulting his wife. We certainly do not get the entire set of conversations recorded in the Bible, but clearly the King has pieced together that Esther is a Jew and the edict to destroy the Jewish race, which he authorized and probably only recently read or found out its contents (either during his walk or from the unrecorded conversation); so what he said was only probably not a joke to him. I do not know right now why Haman's face was covered. This is done in our culture prior to a hanging, but that has not been ordered yet. However, it is not necessary for each and everything to fall in chronological order. We may first have the calling for Haman's hanging, which we find in the next two verses, and then the covering of his face.

Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs, who [were] before the King said, "Behold indeed, the gallows standing at Haman's house fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai, who spoke good on behalf of the King." And the King said, "Hang him on it!" So they hung Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai and the King's anger subsided. [Esther 7:9-10]

When Haman decided to take his revenge upon Mordecai and to do this by destroying the Jewish race in the city of Susa and throughout the Assyrian empire, Haman sealed his own fate. Although it is never mentioned in this book, no one but Satan could have inspired such evil. When Haman decided to hang Mordecai on the gallows which he constructed himself, he was choosing the time and manner of his own death. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap."

Our God is not just a God of judgement; He is also a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. God blesses us with blessings which are far beyond our imagination and protects us in ways we do not see.

On that day King Ahasuerus gave the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther; and Mordecai came before the King, for Esther had disclosed what he was to her. And the King took off his signet ring, which he had taken away from Haman and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.  
[Esther 8:1-2]

This signet ring had given Haman carte blanc. Whatever Haman chose to do, he could do, and if it required a decree with the King's approval; he merely had to put the King's seal upon it. A privilege which brought with it a tremendous amount of responsibility. Like all other things in life, privilege and prosperity goes hand in hand with responsibility. At the time that this is being written, the lottery is recent and a big deal in Texas (as it is in many states). Millions of people in this state play this game in hopes of entering prosperity beyond their wildest dreams. They hope to solve their every problem with money. Some can hardly wait to win so that they can quit their jobs and begin to enjoy life. If you cannot enjoy your life with everything which God has already given you, how on earth do you think a change of financial status could make things better? And how many people out of the millions who enter the lottery in hopes of winning realize the awesome responsibility which would accompany such a win? Probably not one in a hundred thousand. Haman, the second most powerful and second richest man in the Persian kingdom was unhappy and sought the destruction of thousands of Jews in order to attain happiness. His power and wealth cried out for good judgement and responsibility; but Haman had neither. He could be charming, funny and interesting; but character was what he lacked. Without character, his wealth and power were only things to abuse. How many men have have, despite their own shortcomings, married a wonderful woman, and then abused her verbally, mentally and physically. How many women when married to an honorable and kind man have abused him verbally? God provides us with blessings beyond our imagination, but these blessings require appreciation and responsibility.

We have another problem to deal with here. An edict from the King has gone throughout the Persian empire calling for the destruction of the entire Jewish race within the empire. The King cannot very well send out another edict saying, "Ohmigosh, I've changed my mind. Forget that 'destruction of the Jew' edict. I just don't know what I was thinking. Must have been a typo or something. Besides, my wife and her adopted Father, who turns out to be a pretty good guy, are both Jewish. Let's just act as though this never happened." The King in many cultures was the closest thing to God on earth. Some Kings expected worship and obeisance deserved only by God the Father. Therefore, all edicts and directives from the King carry with them a tremendous authority beyond simply being laws which can later be changed or repealed. These edicts have a divine quality to them, and, as such, cannot be changed or reversed. It makes the King look as though he does not know what he is doing when he reverses a royal decision (which, in this case, was true).

Then Esther spoke again to the King, fell at his feet, wept, and implored him to avert the evil scheme of Haman the Agagite and his plot which he had devised against the Jews. And the King extended the golden scepter to Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the King. Then she said, "If it please the King and if I have found grace before him and the matter seems proper to the King and I am pleasing in his sight, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammadatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews, who are in the king's provinces. For how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?" [Esther 8:3-6]

Note that Esther clearly understands her position of authority and has assumed the responsibility which goes with it. She does not leave it to the King to think this through and deliver the Jews; she guides him in this direction. The handing over of the golden scepter means that this has occurred later and she has gone into the King's throne room without being called and the King has admitted her into his presence.

So King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "Behold, I have given the house of Haman to Esther, and him they have hanged on the gallows because he had stretched out his hands against the Jews. Now write to the Jews as you see fit, in the King's name, and seal [it] with the king's signet ring, for a decree which is written in the name of the King and sealed with the King's signet ring may not be revoked." [Esther 8:7-8]

When Haman built the gallows, he had no idea that it would be used on him. You cannot attack the Jewish race without dire consequences. Even his wife and friends realized that his poor judgement would bring him down (Esther 6:13). God protects and provides for His own. This should give us, as Christians, great comfort. God is taking care of us and providing for our every need. How dare we become impatient with God's timing or question His provision. How dare we worry and be confused about our lives. Jesus Christ controls history.

The king, again, delegates responsibility. He knows that they know better than he what has to be said. He is finally giving the signet ring to someone who can be trusted; who has some character.

So the King's scribes were called at that time in the third month (that is the month Sivan), on the twenty-third day; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded to the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the princes of the provinces which extended from India to Ethiopia, 127 provinces, to every province according to its script, and to every people according to their language, as well as to the Jews according to their language, as well as to the Jews according to their script and their language. [Esther 8:9]

Note again that this goes to everyone throughout the entire Assyrian kingdom, in every language and script of every people. The King had no difficulty being a king over many races and languages. There was not a national drive to speak one language.

Note that the directive which follows will not contradict the previous directive. The previous edict will not be removed and disparaged. It will be amended.

And he wrote in the name of King Ahasueres, and sealed it with the King's signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horses, riding on steeds sired by the royal stud. In them the King granted the Jews who were in each and every city the right to assemble and to defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate the entire army of any people or province which might attack them, including children and women, and to plunder their spoil, on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasueres, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar).

[Esther 8:10-12]

Note again all of the details. This is how things were done in the realm of King Ahasueres. He had an almost hands off policy. When something needed to be done, he assigned that job to another to do in its entirety. Note also the detail about the delivery of these notices. The Persians prided themselves for their mail system. When information needed to be disseminated, they were fully capable of getting the word out to the entire realm of the Syrian-Media empire. Note that they bred their horses for the best; and the king had the stud horse. This is accurate and shows an attention to detail that only an insider would know. This makes it likely that the first draft of the book of Esther was written by Mordecai. Knowing Esther, having control over Haman's family, having a place near the King's palace and access to same, Mordecai would be the most likely author of this book.

In the edict, the Jews are given the right to defend themselves to the point of taking the lives of their attackers and plundering them, having killed their entire families, women and children included. This would give anyone who read and planned to execute the first edict pause for thought.

A copy of the edict to be issued as law in each and every province, was published to all the peoples, so that the Jews should be ready for this day to avenge themselves on their enemies. The couriers, hastened and impelled by the King's command, went out, riding on the royal steeds; and the decree was given out in Susa the capital. The Mordecai went out from the presence of the King in royal robes of blue and white, with a large crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. For the Jews there was light and gladness and joy and honor. [Esther 8:14-16]

The directive was clear enough so that everyone, Jew and non-Jew alike, understood its significance and its meaning. They were no longer open to wide scale attack; and, if such a thing occurred, they could not only defend themselves, but go one step further and destroy their attackers and take their possessions. Mordecai, wearing royal apparel, has obviously been elevated to a place of stature similar to that of Haman's. Mordecai has been faithful to his king and was loyal even during the issuing of the first edict. He made his position known and he took every legal step that he could to remove or nullify that edict. Nowhere did he suggest sedition or rebellion. He was not a revolutionist. Mordecai is our example as a citizen of a country. His citizenship was within the Persia-Media empire, and he behaved as a royal subject would. Paul, in Romans, reiterates this sentiment. We are to obey our rulers and show respect toward those who govern over

us. Nowhere in the Bible are we told to be lawless and rebellious. The Bible does not teach anti-establishment activity.

And in each and every province, and in each and every city, wherever the King's commandment and his decree arrived, there was gladness and joy for the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many among the peoples of the land became Jews, for the fear/respect of the Jews had fallen on them. [Esther 8:17]

The evil plotted by Haman against the Jews turned out much differently than he could have ever expected. Not only was his entire plan overthrown, but his evil resulted in the evangelism of the land. Many became Jews, because they recognized the power and strength of this people; the fact that they had the one true God upon Whom they depended. Becoming a Jew was similar to our becoming a Christian. They enter into another realm or kingdom, yet remain loyal to the earthly kingdom in which they reside. The adoption of the Jewish rituals and laws were merely overt signs that they had believed in Jesus Christ, the King and God of the Jews. The word for "dread" (from the NASB) and for "fear" (KJV) is the exact same word used in the OT for fear of the Lord. This word conveys an abject fear, but it also connotes reverence and respect. The surrounding peoples understood that for all intents and purposes, the first decree sent out by King Ahasuerus was overturned by the second. This is something which had never occurred before. Having a healthy respect for the King, the people knew that such a reversal was supernatural. No other person or group of people had ever caused an edict to be overturned. Furthermore, many people knew that Haman was the true enemy of the Jews and they knew his end. All of Haman's household, including all of his servants, knew what had occurred. Several of those who guarded the castle knew pretty much what happened. Through these two groups of people, rumors spread concerning the originator of the first edict, his motivation, and suddenly, a few months later, this person is hanged and the Jew whom he despised is now over his household. This is quite an unusual turn of events and it gives the unbeliever of the land pause for reflection. If this series of events occurs on behalf of the Jews in this human drama that we have seen played out, then there must be something to this "peculiar" people.

Now in the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar), on the thirteenth day when the king's command and edict were about to be exercised, on the day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain mastery over them, it was turned to the contrary that the Jews themselves gained mastery over those who hated them. The Jews assembled in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm; and no one could stand before them, for the fear of them had fallen upon all the peoples. Even the princes of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and those who were doing the king's business assisted the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai had fallen upon them. Indeed, Mordecai was great in the King's house, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces; for the man Mordecai became greater and greater. Thus the Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying; and they did what they pleased to those who hated them. [Esther 9:1-5]

Now we find out the result of the two edicts. The entire land was not converted, of course, and there were those who despised the Jews and their differences and they followed the first edict. They attempted

to kill and destroy and plunder the Jews in their periphery. However, the Jews were allowed to fight back, and they did; with God at their side.

This might seem brutal to some; but the ones who hated the Jews, like Haman, were a cancer to their society. Even though this was not Judea or Israel, the principle of the salt of the nation, as delineated in Matthew, is the same. The Jews acted as salt for the empires throughout which they had been spread. Salt is a preservative and flavor enhancer; and the existence of Jews in any nation brings upon that nation blessing (flavor) and preservation. God will bless the Jew no matter where he is to be found; and He will bless the nation which welcomes the Jew. Therefore, this series of events accomplished several things. (1) Those who despised the Jews, and therefore, despised their God, Jesus Christ, were a weight upon the land. Their hatred was symptomatic of their negative volition. One who despises the Jew also despises God, and is therefore a cancer in his own nation. This removes the cancer. (2) This established the Jews as a force to be reckoned with; a people with a strength outside of themselves. A people who have a protector who watches over them. (3) Many people recognized the power of this quiet, "peculiar" people, and became Jews by believing in Jesus Christ (now, certainly, some just went through the rituals and never apprehended our Lord, even after seeing ritual after ritual portray Him; but there are church members of even evangelical churches, who never believe in Jesus Christ.).

As is found in the book of Esther, the author will quote a few statistics to give us an accurate rundown of what occurred. After all, if it was left at this, we do not know if two or three families fought throughout the land, or just exactly what transpired in terms of numbers.

And in Susa the capital the Jews killed and destroyed 500 men, and Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, and Vaizatha, the ten sons of Haman, the son of Hammedatha, the Jews' enemy; but they did not lay their hands on the plunder. [Esther 9:5-10]

These verses mention the ten sons of Haman by name. After this turn of events where Mordecai was placed over their household, they were less than enthusiastic about this idea. In their arrogance, which they learned from their father but developed by their own volition, they believed that they could do what their father could not and destroy the Jews around them; specifically Mordecai.

Notice at the end of this passage the character of the Jews. By law, they had the right to plunder the households of those whom they had killed, yet they did not. This was quite unusual and was a testimony to their character as a people. Some people are quite confused when someone has the right to wealth and yet refuses it. It makes them wonder what does that person have that he can bypass wealth. What could be more important than money and possessions? This kind of thing would cause many people to become Jews. If their heritage and their character are more important than money, then perhaps they are onto something.

On that day, the number of those who were killed in Susa the capital was reported to the King. And the King said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have killed and destroyed 500 men and the ten sons of Haman in Susa the capital. What, then, have they done in the rest of the king's provinces! Now what is your petition? It shall even be granted you. And what is your further request? It shall also be

done." Then said Esther, "If it pleases the King, let tomorrow also be granted to the Jews who are in Susa to do according to the edict of today; and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows." So the King commanded that it should be done so; and an edict was issued in Susa, and Haman's ten sons were hanged. [Esther 9:11-14]

Haman's ten sons were already dead. The purpose of hanging them is for public edification. The public is to see them out there, their rotting bodies hanging from the platform, as a sign to all what would be the eventual result of anti-Semitism. You sense in the king a feeling of defeat. He had no clue as to what he had set into motion with his drinking buddy, Haman. To have some of his subjects killing many of his other subjects was unacceptable to him, but he knows better than to object. Even he believes in the strength of the Jews and is acquiescing to the Queen, knowing that he doesn't really have a choice. He doesn't want to end up like Haman. The conversation between the King and Queen has its fine points of protocol, but the King has less control of the situation than he would like.

Esther realizes that there are a host of enemies still in Susa who are anti-Semitic, and they might as well be removed. Their antisemitism is a cancer and their removal is for the best of the kingdom. The King certainly does not see that, his powers of perception being not as sharp as hers (which is why he would continually delegate his power), but he did recognize the inevitability of it all.

Since this edict is not going throughout the entire land, there is not a time factor involved to bring in the various scribes and to have the various translations done. Nor does it have to be taken throughout the kingdom. Within the confines of the city, this could all be done within a few hours. We know this because King Ahasuerus has the report for the day of what has transpired, so it is at present, the evening. Esther wants the decree issued to continue the same activity tomorrow. Therefore, it must be done in a couple hours for it to be posted and obeyed.

So the King commanded that it should be done so; and an edict was issued in Susa, and Haman's ten sons were hanged. And the Jews who were in Susa assembled also on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and killed 300 men in Susa, but they did not lay their hands on the plunder. [Esther 9:14-16]

There is another reason why these people were not plundered. This would have confused the issue. The Jews did not kill so that they could steal. They did not find a home where there was wealth and attack and kill those inside in order to obtain their wealth. What they did was to deal with anti-Semitism. Those who were their enemies (which there would be many; many whose ancestors had fought against the Jews in battle and many just motivated by Satan). How many people would have rationalized their actions and decided if the family is dead, someone might as well take their possessions; and "if I did all of the work to kill them then some of the reward at least should fall upon me." However, they did not do that, leading me to believe that many of them were regenerate Jews, having been born again through faith in the God of Israel, Jesus Christ, the unique and true God of the universe. This was a testimony to their purity of motivation.

It took a bit longer for the statistics to come in from the entire realm of the kingdom, but they did come in:

Now the rest of the Jews who were in the King's provinces assembled to defend their lives and rid themselves of their enemies, and [they] kill[ed] 75,000 of those who hated them, but they did not lay their hands on their plunder. [Esther 9:16]

Note that in the original edict, that the Jews were allowed to plunder those whom they killed. However, throughout the kingdom, the same thing happened—those who were anti-Semitic were killed, yet their possessions were left untouched. This shows marvelous self-control and spiritual maturity on the part of the Jewish population as a whole. They understood their function in that land. This is a testimony to Bible doctrine in their souls. They had freedom of worship, and that would have included principles of God's Word inculcated in their souls. Having had their land removed from them, they became positive toward the teaching of the Word and responded to doctrine when it was taught. It is important to recognize that. It was, as I have said, not the result of the edict, because the edict allowed them to plunder.

Therefore, the Jews of the rural areas, who live in the rural towns, make the fourteenth day of the month of Adar a holiday for rejoicing and feasting and sending portions [of food] to one another. Then Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, obliging them to celebrate the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and the fifteen day of the same month, annually, because on these days the Jews rid themselves of their enemies and it was a month which was turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and rejoicing and sending portions [of food] to one another and gifts to the poor. Thus the Jews undertook what they had started to do, as what Mordecai had written to them. [Esther 9:19-22]

I find it totally amazing that the commentaries and introductions which I have read claim that they are not very sure who the author is and why God's name is missing (along with specific religious references). This portion makes it abundantly clear. First of all, Mordecai recorded these events—it says so in v. 20. The emphasized Bible reads: *And Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all the Jews...* The Septuagint reads: *And Mordecai wrote these things in a book and sent them to the Jews...* The word "write" means "to cut or to engrave" and means "to write a book." "Letters", as found in several versions, can mean "writings or book." Recall that this is a wealthy kingdom blessed by God. They had the resources to write these things and to distribute them. However, this was being distributed from the King's palace and the King was the God of the land. Recall how much of this began when Mordecai refused to do obeisance to Haman. Therefore, when using the official scribes of the kings and the writing materials of the king, then a certain amount of respect had to be given to the King and their incorrect system of worship. This was done by leaving God's name out of the book; however, it was inserted in acrostic form 4 times. The Jews knew the name of our Lord and would recognize it in writing. Many of the Persians did not and this would escape them. Many of the Persians who would read this, if on positive volition, would pursue the matter and speak with a Jew, God's representative to them.

## Where is God's Name?

This represented my opinion when I first wrote this, in 1995. I have since then changed my opinion. We are never told whether or not Mordecai or Esther are believers. This is never revealed to us. This book works, whether they are believers or not. It still holds up.

The idea is, this represents the Jews in our present age. The book of Esther is better known to Jews than any other book in the Bible (conversely, this is one of the least known and understood books by Christians). These are the Jews today, scattered throughout this earth, into many gentile nations. These are the Jews which face terrible and egregious persecution, yet God preserves them, time after time. At some point in time, they are going to see themselves as the Jews in this book of Esther—preserved by God, even though God is not named or recognized. The Jews today are lost—God is with them and God preserves them, but they do not recognize Him. They do not know who God is.

Furthermore, unlike every other feast instituted in the Old Testament, this feast is instituted by man and it is a bloodless feast. There are no animal sacrifices. It is a bloodless memorial which does not recognize God. At some point in our history, perhaps at the outset of the Tribulation, Jews will realize that has been their life: celebrating bloodless feasts, God's people yet not recognizing their True God, scattered amongst the Gentiles.

I personally wonder if any of this was edited much later. If a believer edited this later to be added as a part of the worship of God, why did they not insert God's name in a more prominent place? Very likely this book became a part of the official history of the reign of King Ahasuerus, not necessarily written in the Chronicles of the Kings, which he would read in order to help himself fall asleep, but in one of the other books which was kept in the castle as a reference book, a history of what has occurred. One reading with the divine slant on history recognizes what is occurring; that God's protection and will is manifest; and that the Jews in the land at this time were spiritually mature believers.

Thus the Jews undertook what they had started to do, and what Mordecai had written to them. For Haman, the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the adversary of all the Jews, had schemed against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur [i.e., his die was cast], that is the lot, to disturb them and destroy them. But when it came to the King's attention, he commanded by letter that his wicked scheme which he had devised against the Jews, should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. Therefore, they called their days Purim, after the name of Pur. And because of the instructions in this letter, both what they had seen in this regard and what had happened to them, the Jews established and made a custom for themselves and for their descendents, and for all those who allied themselves with them, so that they should not fail to celebrate these two days according to their regulations and according to their appointed time annually. So these days were to be remembered and celebrated throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and these days of Purim were not to fail from among the Jews, or their memory fade from their descendents.

[Esther 9:23-28]

Vv 23-28 are a summary and a post script. Haman's die was cast when he turned against the Jews. Because of this hatred of God's people, he and his ten sons were hanged and all that he had was given to Mordecai. The ceremony and celebration all stood for something to the Jews. This was done so that no one would forget what transpired here in Persia. Ritual is worthless without some reality and that is what this was all about. This book was read during this feast so that everyone would remember: God preserves and protects His own. He controls history and it does not matter how bad things appear—God is in control and we should have no reason to fear.

Then Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, with Mordecai, the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter about Purim. And he sent letters to all the Jews, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Ahasueres, namely, the words of peace and truth, to establish these days of Purim at their appointed times, just as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had established for them, and just as they had established for themselves and for their descendants with instructions for their lamentations. And the command of Esther established these customs for Purim, and it was written in the book. Now King Ahasuerus laid a tribute on the land and on the coastlands of the sea and all the accomplishments of his authority and strength, and the full account of the greatness of Mordecai, in which the King advanced him, are not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia? For Mordecai the Jew was second only to King Ahasuerus and great among the Jews, and in favor with the multitude of his kinsmen, one who sought the good of his people and one who spoke for the welfare of his whole nation. [Esther 9:29-10:3]

It is possible for history to stand as a witness to our Lord Jesus Christ without his name being said. This book is a tribute to Him and His control of history. However, one need look only to the Old Testament and nowhere do you find the name "Jesus Christ", even though the entirety of the Old Testament is about Him.

I once saw an evangelist speak at our High School several years ago to the entire student body. He spoke for 50 minutes and you could hear a pin drop. Students who would normally rush off to the lunch room when lunch began sat in complete silence under the control of the Holy Spirit. During this talk, because he was unsure as to how the school would react, he did not use our Lord's name not even one time in a message which was very evangelistic. However, everyone in the room knew Who he was talking about. Undoubtedly, this book was recorded by Mordecai and it became a part of the history of the Persians. Because they were not under the Lord Jesus Christ, yet were sympathetic to the Jews, Mordecai left our Lord's name, JHWH out of this book. As discussed previously, Mordecai himself may not have known Jehovah Elohim. However, anyone who knows our Lord and His power and His control of history knows that this is Jesus Christ protecting His people and prospering them under adverse conditions. We have the same Lord and He watches over us and protects us as He did the Jews. We have no reason in the world to worry.