

**ESTHER**  
**The God Who Is There**  
*Lesson 59*

This week, I was in Orange County, California, taking a deposition of an engineer for Toyota Motor Corporation. The engineer was from Japan, and this was his second time to be in the U.S. Unlike most depositions, where there is a witness, a court reporter, and a gaggle of lawyers, this deposition had an extra person present. Sitting between the witness and the court reporter was a slight woman and her notepad. She was the interpreter/translator for the deposition.

The witness spoke no English, and I speak even less Japanese! The interpreter translated every word I uttered into Japanese. Every word the witness spoke was rendered into English. This went on all day long. Some of the deposition involved the corporate structure of Toyota. Interestingly, the structure was not the same as we typically see in American companies. At least, many of the terms for the divisions and working groups seem to be different. I struggled to write the names of the different Japanese people involved, putting them in a phonetic form onto my legal pad so I could ask about them without butchering their names too badly. I suspect I still butchered their names.

Dealing with documents in the deposition was also different than normal. The documents were in Japanese and had a translation. Normally when I see a foreign language document, I can at least pronounce the words, even if I do not know what they mean. Not so with these documents. The Japanese writing is not even remotely familiar to me. As I would show the documents to the witness, I would give him the Japanese version, I would use the translated English version, and I would give the interpreter a copy of both. At least once, the witness told me that what I was looking at or reading in the English version was not in the Japanese version. We had to struggle to figure out what we were both talking about.

In the midst of the deposition and my preparation for it, I was working on the lesson this week on Esther. Esther has issues that closely track those I was experiencing. Esther was written in Hebrew for a Jewish audience concerning a Persian king, his Persian court and customs, and other Persians as well. Even the principal Hebrew characters in the story had Persian names. The official alphabet was every bit as different from the Hebrew alphabet as Japanese from English. Then to make it even more bizarre, we have the whole story, names included, translated into 21<sup>st</sup> century English!

	Hebrew	Aryan Persian	English
Script	מֶלֶךְ	𐎧𐎠𐎫	King
Pronunciation	<i>Melek</i>	<i>Xšâyathiya</i>	<i>king</i>

The Aryan Persian script was a special alphabet made at order of Persian king Darius I (522-486 BC). It had 36 signs indicating syllables and eight ideograms including the one to the left for "king." Should "king" be spelled out it would be: 𐎧𐎠𐎫 𐎠𐎫 𐎠𐎫 𐎠𐎫 𐎠𐎫 𐎠𐎫 𐎠𐎫 𐎠𐎫

Recognizing ahead of time the joys of triple translation, we now can begin our study of Esther!

## BACKGROUND

Esther is a marvelous tale that can thrill old and young alike. It has multiple plot lines that weave storylines of intrigue in the Persian palace, heroic intervention into planned genocide of God’s people, the rise of a foreign orphan to the world’s most powerful woman, immigrant Jews reaching high posts in foreign government, and the humorous fall of a pompous fool who does himself in. The book has subtle word play in the Hebrew, a great awareness of Persian court procedures, some interesting plot lines that reinforce stereotypes of historical figures, and many other noteworthy features. The best way to explore these and other related issues (*e.g.*, is this a historical story or is it a historical novel/short story?) is to dig right into the story itself, pausing where appropriate to examine things in a bit more detail.

## NARRATIVE STORY

The book begins,

Now in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa, the citadel, in the third year of his reign he gave a feast for all his officials and servants (Est. 1:1-3).

This places the storyline beginning in year three of the reign of Ahasuerus, known to most people by the Greek-derived version of his name, Xerxes I. Xerxes reigned from 486-465 BC. Xerxes was a king historically famous for his

extravagant parties. History notes him both arrogant and fickle. Most of the historical information we have on Xerxes comes from the Greek historian Herodotus (c.484-c.430BC) in his books on the Persian Wars. Herodotus recorded Xerxes as overly confident in his abilities and that of his armies. He also noted Xerxes rapidly changed his mind in military matters, listening to one counselor then another.<sup>1</sup> His interest in court luxuries, building programs and failed military campaigns caused notable increases in taxes, and many scholars attribute his reign as the beginning of decay of the Persian Empire.<sup>2</sup>



Xerxes, depicted in this coin from his reign, was named in Persian *Khshayarsha*. Typical of the problems moving names from one language into another, especially with differing alphabets and available sounds, the word is hardly recognizable in Greek or Hebrew. The Greeks transliterated the word into their language as *Xerxes*. In Hebrew the name became *Ahashwerosh*, which is a transliteration with an added alef (the initial "A") to indicate a foreign loan word. In our ESV, the Hebrew is rendered into the English *Ahasuerus*.

Some scholars consider the reference to “over 127 provinces” as inaccurate since Xerxes inherited the Empire’s 20 provinces (or “Satraps”) as his father Darius organized. Those twenty provinces, however, were subdivided into smaller sections for tax and governing purposes. The tax divisions did exceed 127, and did spread “from India to Ethiopia” as noted in Esther.<sup>3</sup>

The book then begins to detail its plot by placing the first set of events at a series of banquets. Banquets play a major role in the book, with ten banquets mentioned over the book’s ten chapters. From his capital of Susa, Xerxes gave two banquets and Vashti, his queen, gave the third banquet mentioned. The queen’s banquet was a feast for the women in the palace, and was apparently running concurrently with the King’s second banquet. On the seventh day of the King’s banquet, he ordered his seven eunuchs to bring Vashti in her regal splendor so he could show her off. The queen refused to leave her own bash and come. Xerxes’ anger “burned within him” over the flagrant disregard of his imperial edict. The King consulted his seven counselors over the legal ramifications of the queen’s disobedience, and the discussion evolved around the effect the queen’s disrespect

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Herodotus, VII.1-14. It should be noted that as a Greek, Herodotus has a bias against Xerxes, which likely shows itself in his appraisals of character and events.

<sup>2</sup> T. Cuyler Young, Jr., “The Consolidation of the Empire and its Limits of Growth Under Darius and Xerxes,” *Cambridge Ancient History* (Cambridge 1988), v. IV, at 71 notes that Xerxes,

never lived up to his early promise and was certainly never the king, or perhaps the man, that his father Darius had been.

<sup>3</sup> See the taxation districts noted by Herodotus at III.89-97.

would have over all women in the Empire. The concern was that all noble women would henceforth refuse the direction and instructions of their husbands (“there will be contempt and wrath in plenty” Est. 1:18). The best solution suggested was that a royal decree and law be issued and published throughout the kingdom that:

Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus. And let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she (Est. 1:19).

Historians cannot conclusively determine Vashti’s identity. Herodotus (VII.61) recorded a wife of Xerxes to be *Amestris*. Of course taking a Persian name into Greek and into Hebrew is not a simple task, as noted earlier with *Xerxes/Ahashwerosh/Khshayarsha*. Among others, William Shea has articulated how the name Vashti could be a Hebrew version of a Persian name that might go into Greek as *Amestris*. See, “Esther and History,” Andrews University Seminary Studies 14 (1976) at 236ff.

Sometime later, the king decides he needs a formal queen in addition to his large harem. His younger counselors suggested a national beauty pageant! Officers in all the provinces were to gather their prettiest virgins and send them to the head harem eunuch in Susa. Among the population at Susa was a Jew named Mordecai whose family had been carted off from Jerusalem during the Babylonian exile a century earlier.

Mordecai, who seemingly traced his lineage back to King Saul, was rearing his niece, an orphaned Jew named Hadassah in Hebrew, Esther in Persian. Knowing Esther’s obvious beauty, Mordecai took her to the chief harem eunuch and entered her in the beauty contest. Before releasing Esther into the eunuch’s care, Mordecai told her to tell no one of her Jewish heritage.

For a year, Esther learned the ways of court and prepared for her beauty audition with the king. Mordecai would wonder into the frontcourt of the harem to check in on her each day. On the evening Esther had her regal audition, she dressed and carried herself exactly as the eunuch recommended. Esther’s charms had already won over the eunuch, as well as others involved in the affairs.

Esther’s efforts paid off:

The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti (Est. 2:17).

Following this decision, we have the fourth banquet, this one in Esther’s honor. It was called “Esther’s feast.”

Some time later, Mordecai was in the king’s gate when he overheard two men conspiring to kill the king. Mordecai got this information to Queen Esther and she in turn relayed it to the king. Esther still had not revealed her Jewish heritage, but

gave the information in the name of Mordecai. After sufficient investigation, the allegations were found true and the two conspirators were hanged. The event itself was recorded in the king's chronicles and time passed on.

Some time later, the king promoted a man named "Haman the Agagite" high among his court officials. A Jew who was well grounded in history would have been on high alert over the possible interplay between the Benjaminite Mordecai and the Agagite Haman. Agag was the Amalekite king who was defeated by Mordecai's relative King Saul. Saul was supposed to have killed Agag, but instead captured him. This was a straw that broke the camel's back in Saul's reign, precipitating his loss of the crown (see 1 Sam. 15). The story is almost setting up "Saul vs. Agag 2 – the Sequel!"

Mordecai's name is not Jewish. It means "man (or "worshiper") of Marduk, a pagan god. For a long time, critics and supporters of a historical Esther noted that the name Mordecai is nowhere to be found in Persian records. (See, Hoschander, J., *The Book of Esther in the Light of History* (Dropsie College 1923), at 297; Gaster, T. H., *Purim and Hanukkah in Custom and Tradition* (Henry Schuman 1950), at 4). Discovery and publication of Persian texts has changed that view considerably. We now have over thirty texts that date in a range of the Esther account and name up to four individuals as *Marduka* or *Marduku*, the Persian equivalent of Mordecai. Edwin Yamauchi notes that one of these four could even be the Biblical Mordecai. *Persia and the Bible*, (Baker 1990), at 235. With Mordecai frequently referred to as sitting at the King's gate (Est. 2:19, 21; 5:9, 13), it indicates that Esther's uncle was in some position of standing in the government.

Haman relished the fact that with his new rank, people were supposed to bow before him. Mordecai, however, was not going to bow to the Agagite! Haman found out about Mordecai's persistent refusal to bow, and decided to take out not only Mordecai, but to kill all the Jews. Haman and his compatriots decided to cast dice to determine the day for the Jewish annihilation. The casting of the die was, in Persian, a casting of "*pur*," *pur* being Persian for "lot" (the plural of "lots" is *purim*).

Haman went before King Xerxes and told him of a pernicious people in the land whose "laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws" (Est. 3:8). Haman suggested the king decree that the Jews should be destroyed. The king agreed, and the edict was issued throughout the empire that on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (the month of "Adar"), all peoples were free to kill any and every Jew, keeping the Jews possessions as plunder. Haman and the king then sat down for the story's fifth feast/banquet.

Mordecai, and Jews throughout the empire, received the news with great terror. There was weeping and lamenting, as the people reverently began fasting, and wearing sackcloth and ashes. The queen, still a closet Jew, heard and sent fresh clothes to Mordecai, but Mordecai refused to wear them. Unable to meet with Mordecai face to face, Esther sent a eunuch to find out what was the problem.

Mordecai informed the eunuch and sent him back with a copy of the decree and a request that Esther plead with the king for the life of the Jews. Esther sent the eunuch back explaining that no one can come before the king without first being invited. To do otherwise was to risk death, unless the king held out his golden scepter. Esther added that it had been a full thirty days since she had last been in the king's presence.

Mordecai sent word back through the messenger eunuchs that Esther would not escape the penalty. In fact, her refusal to help would just mean help would come from another, while her and her family's house would be destroyed. Mordecai then added the important encouragement,

Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this? (Est. 4:15).

Esther sent back word that she would indeed approach the king uninvited, but first, she wanted Mordecai and other Jews in Susa to join Esther and her servants in a three-day fast. As we noted earlier the persistent theme of banquets in the book, we should note also the "anti-banquet" here of Mordecai, the Jews, Esther, and her attendants fasting. Following the fast, Esther assured her uncle that she would then do the illegal deed of approaching the king and accepting the consequences: "If I perish, I perish" (Est. 4:16). Mordecai did exactly as Esther instructed.

The book of Esther is built around a number of chiasms. That there are ten banquets is likely no accident. The first banquet mentioned (the 180 day feast) really does not add much to the story, but it does give a full five banquets before the fasting. There are then five banquets after the fasting. This centering of the fasts draws attention to the fasts, a matter considered again later in this lesson in the points for home.

After three days, Esther dressed in her regal best and went into the king's inner court. The king, seeing Esther, extended his golden scepter and welcomed her. Asking why she had come, the king offered to give Esther her heart's desire. Esther responded that she wanted the king and Haman to come to a feast she had prepared in honor of the king (banquet number six). This banquet stands in stark contrast to the one the king had held and commanded his queen to appear. Here, the king is asked by the queen to appear!

The king and Haman rush to get to the banquet while the food was still fresh! Knowing that the food was a road to a destination, at the banquet, the king again asked Esther what she wanted, offering to give her up to half of his kingdom! Esther responded that her only desire was that the king and Haman might come to a second banquet. Esther promised at the second banquet to pour out her heart to the king.

The evening after the first banquet, Haman skipped home, proud, happy, and excited about the future. Things, he thought, surely were coming up rosy! While going home, Haman came across Mordecai who still refused to bow. It filled Haman with wrath, but he restrained himself from immediate violence. Once home, Haman called in his wife and friends and told them all about his successes. He detailed how king and queen alike loved him. It is helpful to appreciate his attitude if we understand that the king of Persia was noted for *not* dining with others. It was rare for the king to do so (making the ten banquets in Esther even more important and attention-getting to the person knowledgeable about Persian court). Cuyler Young explains,

He remained in considerable seclusion a great deal of the time. Access to his person was tightly controlled, and when one was in his presence, the rules of decorum were complex and rigidly enforced.<sup>4</sup>

No wonder Haman was so proud! He told his audience,

Even Queen Esther let no one but me come with the king to the feast she prepared. And tomorrow also I am invited by her together with the king (Est. 5:12).

Yet in the midst of his excitement, he could not shake the anger over Mordecai. He complained that all the great events were “worth nothing” as long as Haman saw Mordecai alive. Haman’s wife and friends advised him to have a high gallows made and then at the next feast, tell the king to hang Mordecai and be done with him. Haman thought this plan splendid, and placed the orders for constructing the gallows.

With plans to hang Mordecai, Haman no doubt slept well that night. Not so King Xerxes. Plagued with insomnia, the king had his book of memorable deeds brought forth and read. One wonders whether the king was hoping the reading would help him sleep or would entertain him through the night. When the story was read of Mordecai’s report of the rebellion, the king asked what honor was given to Mordecai. The king’s attendants replied, “Nothing,” and the king determined to remedy that first thing. The king asked who was at court at such an early hour and the answer was “Haman.” Haman had come to work early to get about the business of hanging Mordecai on the specially prepared gallows.

Here the story gets absolutely funny, albeit on a morbid subject. The king called in Haman to ask about what honor should be given to Mordecai. Haman entered wondering how to posture his request about hanging Mordecai. Two ships were

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<sup>4</sup> Young at 81.

about to collide and Haman had no idea. The king asked Haman, “What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?” Haman, the pompous fool, thinks the king is talking about him! Haman said to himself, “Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?” So Haman answered that the one the king wishes to honor should be allowed to wear royal robes of the king, should be placed on a royal horse (one that wears a royal crown, which Persian horses of the king actually did!), and then one of the king’s most noble officials should have to lead the horse and rider around the busiest parts of town declaring the rider to be honored by the king. Next to hanging Mordecai, this must have been the highest dream of Haman.

One can only imagine the internal reaction of Haman as the words proceeded from the king,

Hurry; take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to MORDECAI THE JEW, who sits at the king’s gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned (Est. 6:10-11).<sup>5</sup>

Haman was forced to do this deed, the opposite of his plans for coming in early. Haman was the one who had to lead the horse and proclaim the praise on Mordecai. Afterwards, Mordecai returned to the king’s gate, and Haman went home in mourning, telling his wife and friends how upside-down the day went. His wife and friends, these same folks who 24 hours earlier had suggested the gallows for Mordecai, now sang a different tune:

If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him (Est. 6:13).

It was during this conversation that the eunuchs arrived to take Haman to the feast, banquet number seven in the book. Haman just thought his day could get no worse.

After the food, during after-dinner drinks, the king re-asked his question of Esther. “What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted to you. And what is your request?” The story is written to show the king practically begging Esther to tell him what was behind the royal treatment! Esther plays it very carefully and simply: “If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request” (Est. 7:3).

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<sup>5</sup> One might wonder over this active involvement by the Persian king in such a trivial matter. Cuyler, at 81, explained that the Persian king “was all powerful: his words were law, and even small details of government were often referred to him for decisions.” This was not an oddity, but was typical.



The king's body language must have been responsive to her request, probably indicating an amazement that she should even have to ask such. She continued,

For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated (Est. 7:4).

Esther explained that she would not bother the king if she and her people were merely being sold into slavery out from under the king, but the death and annihilation prompted her request.

The king goes crazy with anger demanding, "Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?" (Est. 7:5). Then the other shoe drops and Esther answers, "A foe and an enemy! This wicked Haman!" Then, the story tells us, Haman was terrified before the king *and the queen!* The king is so angry that he storms out of the room into the garden. Haman began begging for his life from Esther. The king returned, just in time to see Haman falling on the couch where Esther was reclined. The king saw it as Haman attacking the queen, and declared, "Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?"<sup>6</sup> One of the eunuchs then spoke up and told the king that Haman had built a gallows for hanging Mordecai. The king put two and two together and ordered that Haman be hung on that very gallows. It was done immediately.

The king followed Haman's hanging by giving to the queen the house of Haman, which Esther placed under the care of Mordecai. Esther then told the king that Mordecai was her uncle, and the king elevated Mordecai to a position of honor in the court. Esther then told the king the fuller plan of Haman the Agagite (the emphasis there again reminding the studious Jew of the final foil of Saul's house over Agag's). Esther begged the king to revoke his order, but the king said instead the plan would need to avert slaughter by another decree, not by revoking the first one.

The story of Esther makes great use of the Hebrew word *napal*, meaning to "fall." The word is first used in Est. 3:7 where Haman let the "fall" of the Pur (or "lot") determine the date of the annihilation of the Jews. Then the rest of Esther turns the word back upon Haman. In Est. 6:10, Haman is told to decorate and honor Mordecai and to not "fall short" in any of the praise. Then three verses later as Haman recounted his horrible day, his wife noted that Haman had "begun to fall" before Mordecai and that he would "surely fall before him." The final indignity on Haman is found in Est. 7:8 and the word is used as Haman "was falling on the couch where Esther was." Haman's fate was sealed by his falling, even as he tried to seal the fate of the Jews with the falling lot.

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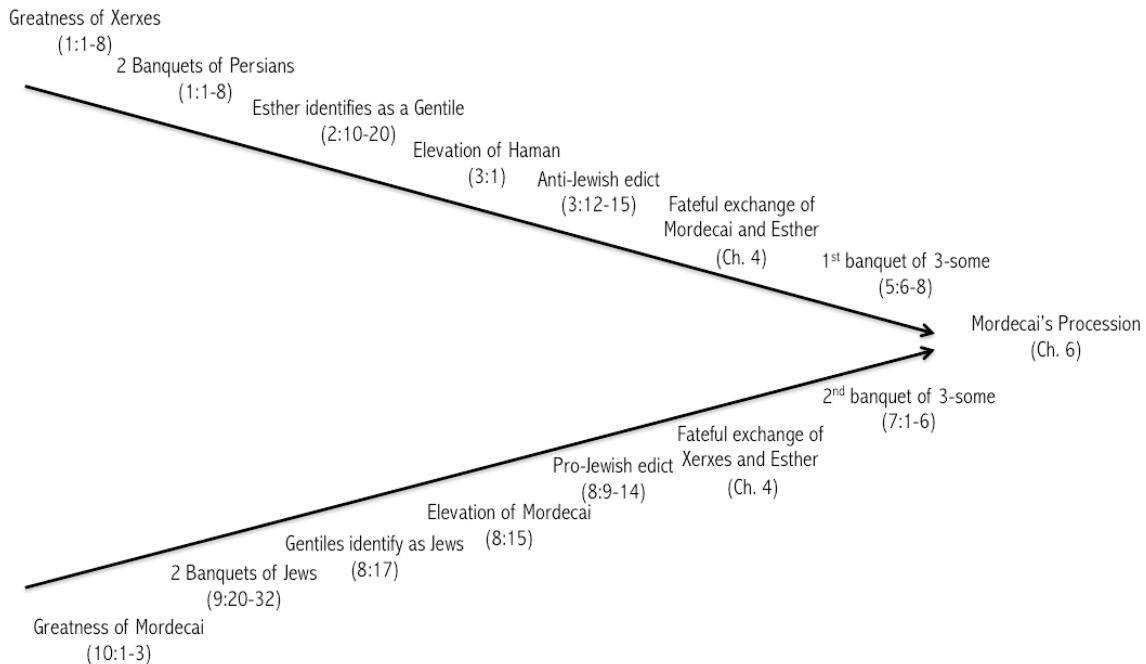
<sup>6</sup> Old Testament scholar Jon Levenson considers this "the funniest line of the whole book." He credits the scene of Haman called before Xerxes to honor Mordecai the funniest scene of the book. *Esther* (Westminster John Knox 1997), at 3-4.

Mordecai then dictated an edict that allowed the Jews to defend themselves on the day that was set for their slaughter. The Jews were allowed to kill and plunder any who sought them ill will, throughout the empire. The news was received with great joy among the Jews in the empire, and it was celebrated with a feasting holiday (banquet number eight - Est. 8:17). Many Gentiles are so concerned that they identify themselves as Jews at this point! When the day came, the Jews were able to strike down their enemies that hated them, and the thirteenth and fourteenth days of Adar were days of Jewish victory. On the fourteenth, the Jews throughout the kingdom celebrated the victory with feasting (banquet number nine). The Jews in Susa had some cleanup killing to do on the fourteenth, so they held their feasting (banquet number ten) on the fifteenth of Adar.

The book closes with the explanation that in the future, Jews were to celebrate annually, the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar as future days of feasting and gift giving (gifts of food, of course. It is, after all, a banqueting celebration!) The holiday was called “Purim” after the plot devised with casting “Pur” or “lots.” Mordecai recorded the information that the book was based upon, as he continued to rise high in the ranks of serving King Xerxes.

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Jon Levinson points out the strong chiasmic elements in portions of the Esther story that focus attention on chapter six Where Haman has to honor Mordecai rather than hang him. It was at this point that the story begins its reversal of fortune for the Jews. (below modified from Levenson, *Esther*, at 8).



## CONCLUSION

Purim is still celebrated by Jews today. It is a holiday marked by reading the Esther story, often with the listeners squawking and making noise (with “graggers”) whenever Haman’s name is mentioned, while cheering at the mention of Mordecai. People use the day still to give gifts of food, especially to the poor. Of course, a banquet feast marks the festival as well. For dessert, many eat a cookie called “Haman’s ears” or “Haman’s pockets.” It is a wonderful reminder of a foiled attempt to blot out the Jewish race, something God has said will *never* happen.

Of course, Haman was not the last to try and thwart God’s promise and eliminate the Jews. Hitler and the Third Reich tried the same thing. Hitler banned the Jewish celebration of Purim and one of Hitler’s staunch followers, Julius Streicher (1885-1946) gave a speech on November 10, 1938 accusing the Jews of “butchering” 75,000 Persians “in one night.” His reference was to the Purim events set out in Esther. In some perverted manner, Striecher tried to persuade the German populace that the Jewish Purim was a threat to Germany. Striecher said the Jews would institute a Purim in Germany, killing mass Germans, if Germany did not get to the Jews first. Streicher fails to inform anyone that the Jewish killings in Esther were in self-defense because the Persians were trying to eliminate the Jews. Streicher did not have the defense of misreading the Persian, into Greek, English or German. He had the same clear Scriptures, but was contorting them for his own purposes.

Needless to say, Hitler was not ultimately successful. Tragically, he oversaw and orchestrated the murder of millions of Jews, but in the end, God’s promise of a Jewish presence on earth was sustained, Hitler was defeated, and out of World War II arose a Jewish state for the first time in millennia. Purim is still celebrated.

### *Who wrote Esther?*

This is a question that no one can answer with any certainty. Certain Jewish tradition ascribes authorship to the “men of the Great Synagogue” (*Baba Bathra* 15a). Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, believed Esther’s author to have been Mordecai, one of the main characters of the story. While there is no proof to support this belief, the author of Esther clearly used the writings of Mordecai (Est. 9:20). Most every scholar agrees that the story has insightful references to life in Persia’s court. Carey Moore noted a number of such facts: the extensiveness of Xerxes’s empire (1:1, 20); Xerxes’s nasty and at times irrational temper (1:12; 7:7-8); Xerxes’s extravagant gifts (5:3; 6:6-7); the rousing drinking parties and ornamental goblets (1:4-7); the seven princely advisers (1:14), the efficient postal system (3:13; 8:10), and more. “Archaeology and the Book of Esther,” *The Biblical Archaeologist*, 38 (1975), at 69f.

## POINTS FOR HOME

1. “*Now in the days of Ahasuerus...peace to all his people.*” (Est. 1:1; 10:3).

With these words, the book of Esther begins and ends. Within ten chapters, 167 verses, neither the name of God nor the word “God” appears one time. There is no direct mention of God in the entire book, yet the book oozes God repeatedly. The pointed fasting of Mordecai, Esther, and her attendants forms a focus in the middle of the ten banquets. Prayer always accompanied fasting, whether it is mentioned or not. Passages repeatedly reference the understanding of a divine oversight and providence as Mordecai explained that Esther was placed in her position to do the very thing he called on her to do. Similarly, he explained that if she refused, help would arise from another place. Even Haman’s wife understood finally that no one would stand against the Jews, certainly not her husband.

This lesson is strong. The silence about God shouts loudly from every page.<sup>7</sup> God is in control – whether we acknowledge him, speak of him, or call his name.

2. “*...the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday*” (Est. 9:22).

There is a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance (Eccl. 3:4). Many know all too well the time for weeping and mourning, but I often wonder if those of us in America, raised on a Protestant work ethic, understand there is a time for gladness, laughing, and dancing? A time to celebrate! That is not to be equated with a time for gluttony, but it is a realization that God has given seasons of joy, and we should not live in them with guilt, but with thanksgiving to the giver! There is always a time for grief, and in those times let us seek God with tears and concerns. Let us also take the times he gives us with joy and close our eyes, inhale deeply reflecting on the moment, and with gratitude in our hearts, enjoy the blessings he has given. They are not earned; they are blessings of love in accord with his mercy and plans!

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<sup>7</sup> Scholars believe that the failure of the book to mention God, even as its theme is the salvation of God’s people, is the principal reason that this is the one Old Testament book of which not even a fragment is found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Even in the church, there is a bad reputation for the book. Luther wrote strongly of his hostility to the book, even as he recognized there was much good in it. For a full detail of views and citations see Gordis, Robert, “Wisdom and History in the Book of Esther,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 100 (Sep. 1981), at 360ff.

3. *“Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”* (Est. 4:14).

We see this repeatedly in Scripture, but how well do we internalize it in our lives? God has a plan for each and every child. He has prepared us to walk in his plans, long before we ever realized it (Eph. 2:10). He is at work in us in the midst of our shortcomings, our sins and failures, our missed opportunities, our self-inflicted limitations, our doubts and fears, our ignorance, our forgetfulness—in all these things, he is at work with a call on our lives. There is not one of his children alive today, who does not have a specific call on her/his life as God seeks to put each one to use in his kingdom. So wherever we are in life, whatever we think, let us pause and reflect that the Almighty God of history past, present, and future, has a purpose in our lives and in what we are doing today!