



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

## **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

---

**Volume 21 Issue 37**

**September 4, 2022**

### **The Book of Esther: An Introduction**

Esther 1:1-3a

A large portion of prophecy was written to encourage later generations. Isaiah 1-39 was written for Isaiah's generation living in Judah at the time of Isaiah. Yet such was not the case for the rest of the book. Isaiah 40-55 is pure prophecy, written for the generation of God's people living during the time of the exiles of 605, 597, and 586 BC — roughly 100 years after Isaiah.

Isaiah 56-66 was written for the people of God living in Palestine during the returns of 538, 458, and 444 BC — roughly 200 years after Isaiah.

Knowing this gives us keen insight into the content of each section of Isaiah. For example, what a difference it makes knowing that Isaiah 40 was written to God's conquered people going into exile.

Isaiah 40:1-2a: "'Comfort, O comfort My people,' says your God. 'Speak kindly to Jerusalem; and call out to her, that her warfare has ended, that her iniquity has been removed...'"

"Her warfare has ended"? What are you talking about? Its just begun! They're going into exile!

Yet in the midst of this national tragedy, God shifts the focus to the REAL battle confronting every individual, that which involves enslavement to sin and the Devil! It is this warfare that has ended because in the Messiah our "iniquity has been removed."

Truly, understanding the audience to whom God's word is given is massively important to an accurate understanding of the text. And so it is when it comes to the Book of Esther. The account recorded in this book occurred in the early part of the reign of the Persian ruler, Xerxes.

- Esther 1:3 took place in the 3rd year of Xerxes, 483 BC.
- Esther 2:16 occurred in the 7th year of Xerxes reign, 479 BC.
- Esther 3-10 occurred in the 12th and 13th years of Xerxes' reign, 474-473 BC.

If you know your Bible history, you know that at the time of the events of Esther God's people had returned to the Promised Land in order to rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem (they first returned in 539 BC under Xerxes' father, Darius). And as you know, it couldn't have been worse going for them. First off, very few returned. Out of the millions upon millions of Jews living in Persia, only 42,360 people returned (cf. Ezra 2:64). Why so few? Because God's people had been paganized<sup>1</sup> and so were quite comfortable in exile! They couldn't be bothered by their *grandparent's* land or city! Yet that was NOT the attitude of the 42,360 who returned. They were the faithful, the committed, the ones who longed for the restoration of God's glory and redemptive purpose. Speaking of these people by application we read:

Zephaniah 3:18, "I will gather those who grieve about the appointed feasts- they came from you, O Zion; *the reproach of exile* is a burden on them."

Now being so committed as they were, you'd think God would have "blessed" this remnant and so make their path easy and straight. Yet that is NOT what happened! Rather than being "blessed", these people felt cursed as their lives in Jerusalem was fraught with difficulty, persecution, internal conflict, trials, famine, hardship, and more!

As a result, the next generation and the one beyond that fell into severe compromise. They gave up on worshipping God genuinely and so lived for themselves, intermarrying with their Gentile neighbors, compromising their faithfulness, and much more.

So, what did God do? That is where Esther comes in. When this book was written (NOT when the history occurred), Judaism was in bad shape — both in Palestine and in the diaspora. I wonder if there could have been found 4,000 people hadn't "bowed the knee to Baal" at the time! Accordingly, THE questions of the hour were what about God's people? Did God still love them? Or had they truly been abandoned? Were they just too wicked? Too compromised? Too sinful?

This brings us to the glorious entrance of the redeeming work of God recorded in Esther — a message that was written and given to a compromised people! That no doubt is why God's name is NOT mentioned one time in this book. See, those who first received this book believed that God no longer was with them on account of their moral compromise. So, was He? The book of Esther does NOT answer this directly; RATHER it shows it!

And thus, by way of application, the book of Esther speaks to any and all of God's people who have fallen into despair on account of their sin and compromise — believing God could never love them, receive them, or restore them.<sup>2</sup> With that, let me introduce you to this book this morning and next week. We begin with the historical background of Esther.

Recall, the Southern Kingdom of Judah fell in 586 BC at the hand of the Babylonians — at which time massive amounts of God's people were transported to Babylon where they lived as strangers and aliens in a foreign land. Now prior to the fall of Jerusalem, God sent the prophet Jeremiah who prophesied that the exile would last only 70 years (cf. Jeremiah 25:11). And that 70-year time frame came to an end in 539 BC when Persia rose up and conquered the Babylonians.

In order to unite the conquered people of Babylon, the Persian leader Cyrus issued a decree allowing all peoples to live wherever they wanted. BUT when it came to the Jews, he went one step further. Cyrus NOT only made the decree that they could go home, BUT he also financed the return!

After the deaths of Cyrus in 530 BC and his son Cambyses in 522 BC, leadership passed to Darius I — a very important figure biblically. It was this king who ordered that the Jewish Temple at Jerusalem be rebuilt after work on it had been discontinued for 16 years (Ezra 4:24; 6:1). It was under this king that Haggai and Zechariah engaged in their ministry in 520 BC.

One political note, during his reign Darius sought to expand Persia to include Greece. This resulted in the First Persian War with Greece (492-490 BC) which ended miserably for the Persians at the Battle of Marathon. As great a leader as Darius may have been,

he failed miserably when it came to Greece!

Darius died in 486 BC at which time his son, Xerxes, became the next Persian ruler (486-465 BC). This is the king referenced in the book of Esther whom the Jews called Ahasuerus. After solidifying his power, one of the first things Xerxes did was to take up his father's cause and so attack Greece. Xerxes wanted to prove that he was a greater king than his father.<sup>3</sup> And so, Xerxes raised up a massive army and the largest naval fleet recorded in ancient history!<sup>4</sup> They couldn't lose! This led to the Second Persian War which occurred from 481-479 BC. Here Xerxes most certainly out did his father NOT by conquering the Greeks, BUT by losing so massively! I won't go into any detail, BUT it was this military endeavor which included the following:

- The loss of 674 ships in a storm as Xerxes endeavored to cross the Hellespont.
- The Battle of Thermopylae which on paper seemed like a Persian victory, yet in reality was a massive defeat. To the 6,000 Greeks who died, the Persians lost 20,000 men including two of Xerxes brothers.
- Then came the Naval Battle of Salamis in which- under Xerxes orders- the Persian fleet sailed into a trap which resulted in 1/3 of the Persian Navy being lost (including another one of Xerxes' brothers).<sup>5</sup> It is recorded that Xerxes groaned as he watched the battle from an outlook which oversaw the gulf.<sup>6</sup> With this massive loss, Xerxes fled to Sardis (where he stayed one year) leaving the invasion in the hands of his generals.
- Next came the Battle of Plataea where the Persian army was routed. And then the Battle of Mycale where the Persian naval fleet was beached, and the remaining Persian army routed and scattered.



Because of this, Xerxes returned to Persia in shame, a failed king!

## The Key Figures of this Book

### Xerxes/Ahasuerus

Following his massive and embarrassing defeat to the Greeks, Xerxes turned his focus primarily to self-indulgence and pleasure.<sup>7</sup> Much of what we know about his character is reflected quite accurately in Esther.<sup>8</sup> Consider, he was incredibly proud and so enjoyed flaunting his wealth and power.

Esther 1:4, "And he displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty for many days, 180 days." (Cf. also 1:7)

And even though he encountered a massive defeat at the hands of the Greeks,

nevertheless his passion to demonstrate his greatness never waned. He was a showman, deriving satisfaction from “wowing” other people (cf. Esther 1:10-11; 2:18). G. Ricciotti said this:

[Xerxes inherited none of the good qualities of his predecessors] but only a love of opulent display which progressively sapped his moral fiber. (Ricciotti, 1955, pp. 16, Vol. 2 )

He was hotheaded and known for his bad temper (cf. Esther 1:12; 7:7, 10)<sup>9,10</sup>. The following inscription, found on a wall at Persepolis, reflects the bad temper of Xerxes, “I am not hot-tempered. Whatever befalls me in battle, I hold firmly. I am ruling firmly my own will.”

He also was easily flattered (cf. Esther 1:21; 2:4). This is not a good thing. Because of this, Xerxes was surrounded by “yes-men” whose focus was the pleasure of the king not the good of his kingdom. That no doubt is what led to his assassination in 465 BC by the captain of his bodyguard, Artabanus.

Finally, he was incredibly materialistic,

Esther 3:9, (Haman speaking) “If it is pleasing to the king, let it be decreed that [the Jews] 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.”

Haman knew how to manipulate Xerxes, all it took was the promise of a large donation to the king’s treasury. So great did Xerxes value money.

### **Vashti (Xerxes’ Wife)**

We are introduced to this lady in the opening chapter of Esther (vv. 10-12) where she was unwilling to be a public spectacle and so disobeyed Xerxes’ command. Beyond this, we know very little of her from Esther. However, history reveals that she was a strong and dangerous woman you did not want to cross. Following Xerxes massive naval defeat at Salamis, as I said the king fled to Sardis. Here he fell in love with his brother’s wife. When his brother’s wife repulsed him, he then fell in love with her daughter. It was a sordid affair carried out in front of Vashti.

Well, Vashti bided her time and on Xerxes’ birthday back in Susa, her present was the mutilated body of the mother of this woman.<sup>11</sup> No doubt this in part is what prompted Xerxes to remember the decree about Vashti in Esther 2:1!

### **Haman**

Haman was an Amalekite who descended from King Agag who was hacked to death by the prophet Samuel in 1 Samuel 15. That being said, Esther reveals some notable things about his person and character. He most certainly was intelligent and quite capable, Esther 3:1. You don't become second in command in the Persian capital of Susa without skill.<sup>12</sup>

As a descendant of King Agag, Haman hated the Jews, Esther 3:6. Accordingly, a description of Haman throughout this book is that he was "an enemy of the Jews." (cf. Esther 3:10; 9:10, 24)

He was one who lived in extremes and so was incredibly intense, cf. Esther 3:6b; 5:13, 14; 6:4! Think of the 75-foot pole he erected on which Mordecai was to be hung. Then, when he sought approval for the execution of Mordecai, he didn't come to the judgment hall at the start of the next business day, like most would. No, he got there in the middle of the night!<sup>13</sup>

His god and "Achilles heal" was the praise of man.

Esther 3:5, "When Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage to him, Haman was filled with rage." (cf. also Esther 5:9, 11, 12; 6:12; & 5:14 & 6:13b)

This seems rather extreme. Why would one man failing to bow down cause Haman so much grief? It is because public honor was most important to him.

Esther 6:6, 8-9, "So Haman came in and the king said to him, 'What is to be done for the man whom the king desires to honor?' And Haman said to himself, 'Whom would the king desire to honor more than me?' [now at this point Haman could have stated anything he wanted- like wealth, power, pleasure, provinces, battle commissions, and more. Instead, notice what he suggests...] Let them bring a royal robe which the king has worn, and the horse on 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.'"

Clearly, one of the most important things to Haman was public recognition... the respect and reverence of those beneath him.

### **Mordecai**

According to Esther, He was the son of Jair and a descendant of Benjamin (in fact, he was related to the first king of Israel, Saul). He lived in the Persian capital city of Susa.

And being Esther's cousin, Mordecai raised her when she was orphaned. It is interesting to note that his name was derived from the Babylonian god, Marduk, who was the chief god in their pantheon. As we'll see, this reflects the compromised state in which he lived as a Jew in exile.

In terms of the character traits discernable from Esther, we note the following:

- He most certainly was an intelligent and capable man, Esther 2:19. You don't become a judge in the Persian court without some skill.<sup>14</sup>
- Not surprisingly, he had a very strong sense of justice, and so doing what was right, Esther 2:22.<sup>15</sup>
- He was stubborn — which would fit the profile of a magistrate, Esther 3:4.<sup>16</sup>
- Furthermore, he hated Amalekites, Esther 3:2, 4.<sup>17</sup>
- Initially, he is portrayed as being earthbound, Esther 4:8.

Mordecai's response to the decree was NOT prayer, fasting, or worship. Rather, he appealed horizontally, to Esther to go to the king. What a contrast to Daniel and his three friends!

He also was worldly, Esther 2:10.

Esther 2:10, "Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make *them* known."

Think of it! To instruct Esther NOT to make her nationality known meant that Esther could NOT observe in any way the calling that rested upon her as a Jew- no holidays, no open prayers, no fasts, no worship, nothing! (cf. also 2:20) Yet this clearly did not bother Mordecai. Iain Duguid observed this:

Mordecai worked so hard to fit in as a good citizen of the empire that when we hear the Jewish exiles described as those whose laws are different from those of every other people and who do not obey the king (Esth. 3:8), we feel that Mordecai, at least, was being grossly misrepresented. [IOW, such a description could not be attached to Mordecai] Even though the charge should have been true of all of God's people, Mordecai was far from being an obstinate standout. He showed little enough concern over the ethical issues involved in his cousin Esther being taken into the harem of the Gentile king, with its defiling food and corrupting practices. In fact, he was the one who insisted that far from being in the least bit different from other peoples, Esther should entirely conceal her Jewishness. He was no Shadrach, Meshach, or Abednego; he had been a good servant of the empire, quietly obeying all of the other laws of the king, committed to fitting in. (Duguid, 2005, p. 35)

And yet, in spite of his compromised state, Mordecai was a genuine child of God whose

faith and trust in the end emerged, Esther 4:14a.

Esther 4:14a, “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...”

What a strong statement of trust and reliance upon the promises of God! Mordecai here is referencing the promise God made to Abraham!!! And so, as worldly and compromised as Mordecai was at the start of this book, nevertheless, he was a believer.

## **Esther**

As I just mentioned, Esther was an orphan from the tribe of Benjamin. Her Jewish name, Hadassah, was the word for a myrtle or dove. However, her Babylonian name was Esther which came from the Babylonian sex goddess, Ishtar. As such, much like with Mordecai, she initially is portrayed in this book as a compromised Jew.

With that, notice what this book tells us about her:

- First off, she most certainly was beautiful, Esther 2:7.<sup>18</sup>
- Furthermore, she was quite adept at manipulation; she was a people pleaser par excellence, Esther 2:9, 15b, 17; 4:8; 7:2-4; 8:2, 5-6.

Speaking Esther in relation to Hegai the eunuch charged with care of Xerxes’ harem:

Esther 2:9, “Now the young lady pleased him 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...”

The language indicates that Esther was able to secure the approval and so the devotion of this eunuch. And this will NOT be the only time we see this in Esther; her ability to manipulate occurs throughout this book. Iain Duguid wrote:

The writer uses an unusual idiom to tell us that Esther ‘won favor’ (*nasa’ hen*) in Hegai’s sight: she worked for her promotion in the house of women, by fitting into the agenda that the empire set for her. She was willing to let the empire define her reality. Resistance was not high on her program at this point; on the contrary, she seemed content, even eager, to be assimilated. (Duguid, 2005, pp. 22-23)

Like her uncle, she also lacked Biblical conviction, Esther 2:10, 15a, 20.

Esther 2:10, “Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make *them* known.”



Again, to hide her identity meant that she no longer would live or practice her faith! Show me a Christian who is never in the word of God, does not attend worship, never speaks of God, nor spends time with God's people, and I'll show you a compromised believer. That was Esther! Iain Duguid wrote this:

The similarity of Esther's position to that of Daniel and his three friends, exiled and incorporated into the imperial system, highlights also what is different about them. Daniel and his three friends stood up to the empire, quietly but firmly requesting permission to be faithful to their own beliefs by not eating the royal food (Dan. 1:8–16). They received permission to do so and God in turn blessed them, against all the odds. They remained unassimilated, and yet were nonetheless respected by the empire because of God's direct intervention. Unlike Daniel and his three friends, however, Esther had apparently no ethical qualms about eating the empire's food and being used as the emperor's plaything. And following Mordecai's advice, her Jewishness remained perfectly concealed. (Duguid, 2005, p. 23)

That being said, there is no question that she was a genuine child of God... as in the life of Mordecai, her circumstances likewise brought this out, Esther 4:16. Esther speaking when she accepted the call to put her life on the line and approach the king uninvited:

Esther 4:16a, "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..."

Finally, someone is turning to God in this book... and that someone is Esther! She truly believed God in spite of the moral corruption into which she had fallen!

Next time we are going to continue with this Introduction. However, let's not walk away this morning without making application. For whom was Esther written? Compromised servants of God who have come to believe that God no longer could be with them on account of their sin.

If you are a child of God, you remain precious to God regardless of your sin; He will never give up on you or abandoned you. This is what Satan/His demons wants you to believe. They are all about having us question God's ability and character/His character — His ability to protect us and His willingness to help us. Again, it is this issue that was front and center in the lives of God's people at the time. And it is this issue that continues to haunt God's people today:

- What encouragement is there for the compromised? Do they have a future?
- How much sin does it take for God to disown one of His children?
- When circumstances are difficult and it seems as though God has turned a deaf

ear toward you, is there hope?

- Don't Miss It! God loves His crooked sticks; He truly does! Accordingly, any perceived abandonment you might feel when it comes to God in light of your sin is just that... perceived! If God saved you, He will never let you go!

That is a fundamental message inherent in the gospel/the Covenant. In washing the disciples' feet, Jesus came to Peter knowing full well that soon this disciple would betray Him. Yet this is what Jesus said speaking of the cleansing nature of God's redeeming grace

John 13:10: "...He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet..."

Don't miss the implication of this verse. If you have been saved by the blood of Christ (been "bathed"), then all your sin — past, present, and future — has been cleansed. The only thing that can happen now is that you get your feet — not your person or your standing before God — dirtied by walking in this world. Accordingly, God could never reject you... even when you sin!

2 Timothy 2:13, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself."- and so, behold God's disposition toward His sinning children...

Luke 15:20b-23, "But while he [the prodigal] was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry.'"

If ever you feel that God has abandoned you, it is only a feeling; for again, He never could! That is the powerful message of Esther. It has been said that the Pilgrim's Progress is the Westminster Confession of Faith... with people in it. Well get this: Esther is the doctrine of God's unconditional and sovereign love and devotion... with people in it!

## References

- Baldwin, J. G. (1985). *Esther: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Duguid, I. M. (2005). *Esther & Ruth (Reformed Expository Commentary)*. Grand Rapids: P & R Publishing.
- Hill, A. E. (2012). *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Volume 28)*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic.

- Reid, D. (2008). *Esther: An Introduction and Commentary (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Volume 13)*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic.
- Ricciotti, G. (1955). *The History of Israel, 2 Volumes*. Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Company.
- Yamauchi, E. M. (1997). *Persia and the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

## End Note(s)

- <sup>1</sup> By this, I don't mean that they were bowing down to other gods. Rather, they were living horizontally, worldly, and so compromised lives.
- <sup>2</sup> Recall the description Joyce Baldwin gave when it came to the purpose of Malachi (written around 444 BC, about the same time as Esther was written), "Whereas most of the prophets lived and prophesied in days of change and political upheaval, Malachi and his contemporaries were living in an uneventful waiting period, when God seemed to have forgotten his people enduring poverty and foreign domination in the little province of Judah. Zerubbabel and Joshua, whom Haggai and Zechariah had indicated as God's chosen men for the new age, had died. True the temple had been completed, but nothing momentous had occurred to indicate that God's presence had returned to fill it with glory, as Ezekiel had indicated would happen (Ezekiel 43:4). The day of miracles had passed with Elijah and Elisha. The round of religious duties continued to be carried on, but without enthusiasm. Where was the God of their fathers? Did it really matter whether one served him or not?" (Hill, 2012, p. 225)
- <sup>3</sup> "A unique source, especially for the Battle of Salamis, is the play *Persai*, that is, *The Persians*, by Aeschylus, which was performed in 472—but eight years after the battle. Because Aeschylus himself was a participant in the battle, this is an eyewitness, if dramatized, account. ¶ According to the play, Xerxes led the expedition in order to surpass the achievements of his father Darius (11.753–58). The *Persai* reports the Battle of Salamis as it must have appeared to the Persians themselves. The queen grieves at the tragic defeat of her son. The ghost of Xerxes' father, Darius, arises to rebuke his son's youthful folly (11.782–83)." (Yamauchi, 1997, pp. 191-192)
- <sup>4</sup> "Xerxes was able to amass the largest army and navy ever mustered in antiquity... The Greeks believed that they were fighting millions." (Yamauchi, 1997, p. 195)
- <sup>5</sup> "The battle began soon after dawn. According to Plutarch (*Themistocles* 14), Themistocles 'chose the exact time at which a sea breeze would begin to blow and waves would throw the Persian ships into confusion.' The Greeks feigned retreat by backing water (Herodotus 8.84–85) to lure the Persians into the narrowest part of the bay. Here the channel is reduced to but 1,300 yards, where not more than 100 to 120 ships could operate in a line. As Peter Green describes the action: 'The Greek line, in fact, had become a noose; and the Persians were now energetically hanging themselves in it.' ¶ The Persians fought bravely under the eyes of their king, but the very crush of their numbers proved to be a handicap. The Greeks fought in better order and with less confusion (Herodotus 8.86). Although the Spartan ships were battered by the Ionians, the Athenians and Aeginetans were able to ram many of the Phoenician and Cypriote ships. They then attacked the Cilician, Pamphylian, and Lycian ships in the Persian right center." (Yamauchi, 1997, pp. 215-216)
- <sup>6</sup> "Xerxes had been seated on a golden diphros on the slopes of Mount Aegaleos, observing the battle with secretaries at hand to make a record (Herodotus 8.90). According to Aeschylus, (*Persai* 465–67): 'Xerxes groaned aloud when he beheld the depth of the disaster; for he occupied a seat commanding a clear view of all the armament—a lofty eminence hard by the open sea.'" (Yamauchi, 1997, pp. 217-218)
- <sup>7</sup> Joyce Baldwin wrote, "There is plenty of evidence for his exploits with women, and of his intention to have his own way, even with his brother's wife and daughter." (Baldwin, 1985, pp. 18-19)

<sup>8</sup> “Though there is not much attempt at portraiture, in one way and another it is possible to get to know this Persian monarch of the book of Esther. That all the information about him dovetails so well supports the general accuracy of the source material, including the biblical book.” (Baldwin, 1985, p. 19)

<sup>9</sup> “Rather than being a paragon of patience, Xerxes, according to both classical and biblical sources (Esther 1:12; 7:7), had a nasty and at times irrational temper, although he could on occasion be magnanimous (Herodotus 7.136).” (Yamauchi, 1997, p. 189)

<sup>10</sup> The following is an example of Xerxes’ anger, “Xerxes ordered two pontoon bridges built across the Hellespont from Abydos to a point near Sestos. These were constructed with two flax and four papyrus cables. The northern bridge was formed with 360 ships and was 4,220 yards long; the southern bridge was made with 314 ships and was 3,700 yards long. When a storm destroyed these bridges, Xerxes was furious and executed those who built them. He ordered the Hellespont to be scourged with 300 lashes and branded with hot irons (Herodotus 7.35).” (Yamauchi, 1997, p. 201)

<sup>11</sup> “Amestris [Vashti] was a very vengeful, powerful, and influential woman, as may be seen in her reaction to an affair that took place when Xerxes was in Sardis after the Greek expedition. He first fell in love with the wife of his brother Masistes, but when she repulsed him, he fell in love with her daughter Artaynta. The king gave this woman a robe, which Amestris herself had woven. When Amestris discovered this affair, she was furious but bided her time until the king’s birthday. Like Herod Antipas at his birthday (Mark 6:21–26), Xerxes reluctantly acceded to his wife’s request: ‘Nevertheless, Amestris being instant, and the law constraining him (for at this royal banquet in Persia every boon asked must of necessity be granted), he did very unwillingly consent’ (Herodotus 9.111). Amestris then took dreadful vengeance upon Artaynta’s mother and had her mutilated.” (Yamauchi, 1997, pp. 230-231)

<sup>12</sup> This is incredible! At this point, Haman was second in command of Persia. You don’t give this office to a fool. (cf. also Esther 5:10)

<sup>13</sup> Esther 3:6b: it wasn’t enough to kill Mordecai. No, all the Jews must die!! In Esther 5:13, though Haman had everything anyone in the ancient world could want, notice his comment, “Yet all of this does not satisfy me every time I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.” Clearly this man was intense. He had to have the public praise of Mordecai. If he didn’t, life was bitter despite everything he had! Consider Esther 5:14. Knowing his personality, his wife gave this solution to the problem of Mordecai, “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...’” It wasn’t enough to kill Mordecai... it wasn’t enough simply to impale him. Mordecai had to have him hung on a pole 50 cubits high which is 75 ft!!! Finally, consider Esther 6:4. When it came time to getting the king’s approval on his plan to kill Mordecai, Haman didn’t just arrive early... he arrived in the middle of the night (cf. 6:1)! “So the king [who couldn’t sleep and so was being read to in the wee hours of the morning] said, ‘Who is in the court?’ Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king’s palace...”

<sup>14</sup> The implication of this verse is the Mordecai had become a Persian magistrate/judge. Joyce Baldwin wrote, “...throughout the ancient Near East, ‘the gate’ was the area where justice was dispensed, and that, while the litigant stood, the king or his appointed official ‘sat’ (cf. Pr. 31:23, rsv). The turn of phrase in 19b thus takes on concrete significance, and Gordis makes the feasible suggestion that Esther, when she became queen, had Mordecai appointed a magistrate or judge, ‘a lesser position in the elaborate hierarchy of Persian officials’, and that she accomplished this without delay, ‘before the final ceremonial parade that concluded the coronation festivities’.” (Baldwin, 1985, p. 70) This office wasn’t just given to anybody. The fact that Mordecai attained this position tells us much about his intelligence and capabilities.

<sup>15</sup> At one point in Xerxes’ life, two of his officials conspired to assassinate the king. Mordecai overheard their plot. Now he could have used that information to advance himself. Yet he did not. Rather, he reported it to Esther clearly with the intent that this information be related to the king.

<sup>16</sup> As we’ll discuss when we get to this verse, there is nothing in the Bible that would

have prevented Mordecai from kneeling before Haman. Many of his fellow Jews bowed down without compromise (cf. Esther 3:8). That he refused to kneel even after much cajoling- even after it put the entire people of the Jews at risk- tells us something of his stubbornness. Edwin M. Yamauchi commented, "The Jews regularly bowed down to kings (1 Samuel 24:8-9) and to other superiors (Gen. 23:7; 27:29). Mordecai's refusal to bow down before Haman has, therefore, puzzled commentators." (Yamauchi, 1997, p. 236)

<sup>17</sup> Yes, according to God's just decree, Saul was to wipe the Amalekites out. Yet he failed. As a result, the Amalekites continued to live along side the Jews. Now God's decree did NOT give any Jew warrant to hate the Amalekites (any more than it gives us warrant to hate an evil man). Yet clearly, Mordecai did. We read in Esther 3:2, "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 down nor paid homage." Why? He falsely chalked it up to his heritage, "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 3:4) The fact that this last statement is referenced indicates that this was the reason Mordecai did not stand. Yet what about all the other Jews who bowed? Clearly Mordecai had the problem.

<sup>18</sup> The Hebrew indicates she had a great figure and a strikingly pretty face. Just as Saul most likely was a genetic freak at the time, sporting an appearance that would have been striking, Esther more so. As we'll see, the appeal made to Xerxes regarding the replacement of Vashti was that he could get a beautiful, sexy new wife (with the emphasis on her looks). That Esther was chosen by Xerxes tells us that she must have been that and more.