

## ESTHER.<sup>1</sup>

Our subject is the story of Esther and the scripture reading comes from the latter section of chapter four of the book which carries her name:

### SCRIPTURE

Then Esther spoke to Hatach, and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say: "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death, except any to whom the king holds out the golden sceptre, so that he may live. Yet I have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days".

And they told Mordecai what Esther had said.

Then Mordecai told them to answer Esther: "Do not think to yourself that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews".

"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for just such a time as this?"<sup>2</sup>

Then Esther told them to answer Mordecai: "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast likewise. And so I will go in to the king, even though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!"

So Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.<sup>3</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

We begin by noting some of the fascinating points of comparison and contrast between the recorded stories of *Ruth* and of *Esther*—the only women whose names have been given to books in the Bible.<sup>4</sup>

#### Points of comparison.

(i) First, we might compare the opening words of the books which carry their names: (a) 'it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus' (*Esther* 1. 1) and (b) 'it came to pass in the days when the judges judged' (*Ruth* 1. 1). These are the only occasions where such an expression commences a book of scripture.

(ii) Second, both of the stories display clear cases of God's working providentially behind the scenes, bringing His will and purpose to pass through seemingly 'coincidental' happenings.

By way of example only, in the one story, of *Ruth's choosing* for herself the right section of a certain field in which to glean<sup>5</sup> and, in the other story, of *Esther's being chosen* as the successful candidate in an empire-wide royal beauty contest.<sup>6</sup>

(iii) Third, early in the two accounts, both *Ruth* and *Esther* are located in countries in which they were complete strangers.<sup>7</sup>

(iv) Fourth, when in those foreign lands, both *Ruth* and *Esther* find 'favour' in 'the eyes' ('the sight') of men of high standing,<sup>8</sup> following which they are both urged by a shrewd older relative<sup>9</sup> to make a vitally important request to these influential men.<sup>10</sup>

(v) Fifth, both *Ruth* and *Esther* comply with the directions which they have been given<sup>11</sup> and, in the event, both of their requests are granted.<sup>12</sup>

(vi) Sixth, in both instances, the granting of these requests has the most profound and far-reaching implications,<sup>13</sup> for both play a crucial part in preserving what is known as the 'Messianic line' (a line which can be traced back to the Garden of Eden itself and which would terminate in the coming of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus<sup>14</sup>) from extinction.

The one granted request (in the book of *Ruth*) results in the continuation of that line when it seems that it has come to a dead-end and the other granted request (in the book of *Esther*) results in the thwarting of the attempt by Israel's enemies (and, no doubt, through and behind them, the sinister design of the great overlord of evil himself<sup>15</sup>) to wipe out that line completely.

(vii) Seventh, both stories very much hinge around events which take place during a critical night—in the case of *Ruth*, when the man of high standing wakes up suddenly from his sleep at midnight<sup>16</sup> and, in the case of *Esther*, when the man of high standing fails to get any sleep at all!<sup>17</sup>

(viii) Eighth, each story focuses largely on a case of intermarriage between an Israelite and a Gentile—in the one instance, between Boaz and *Ruth*,<sup>18</sup> a ‘young Moabite woman’ as she is described<sup>19</sup> and, in the other, between *Esther* and Ahasuerus,<sup>20</sup> a famous Persian king.<sup>21</sup>

(ix) Ninth, to this day, these particular Old Testament stories are read publicly by the Jews during two of their annual Feasts—the book of *Ruth* during their Feast of Pentecost and the book of *Esther* during their Feast of Purim.<sup>22</sup>

### Points of contrast.

And yet, for all they have in common, the two stories differ significantly in that:

(i) First, the story of *Ruth* is set sometime *before* Israel's *first king* (Saul) is anointed,<sup>23</sup> whereas the story of *Esther* is set sometime long *after* Israel's *last king* (Zedekiah) is carried away, blinded and bound, to Babylon.<sup>24</sup>

(ii) Second, *Ruth* was a Gentile who married a Jew, whereas *Esther* was a Jewess who married a Gentile.

(iii) Third, *Ruth* chooses to enter into her marriage,<sup>25</sup> whereas *Esther* is given no choice about entering into hers.<sup>26</sup>

(iv) Fourth, *Ruth* is a foreign widow, who, on her marriage to a Jew, becomes an important person in the land of Israel, whereas *Esther* is an Israelite orphan, who, on her marriage to a Gentile, becomes an important person in the land of Persia.

(v) Fifth, the faith of *Ruth* enables her to overcome a personal calamity,<sup>27</sup> whereas the faith of *Esther* enables her to overcome a national crisis.<sup>28</sup>

## THE STORY

### (1)

#### The historical context.

First, one or two comments on the historical context.

Cyrus (so-called ‘the Great’) was the founder of the Persian empire, which included that of conquered Babylon.

As something of an aside, according to the book which bears his name, Daniel the prophet<sup>29</sup> lived until at least the third year of the reign of Cyrus in 536 B.C.<sup>30</sup> But, at the time of Esther chapter 4, it was some 62 years later<sup>31</sup> and the king mentioned in our reading (‘Ahasuerus’, or ‘Xerxes’ as he was known to the Greeks<sup>32</sup>) was the fifth king of Persia.

### (2)

#### The crisis.

It is now the year 474 B.C. and the Jewish people face one of the more serious crises of their entire history.<sup>33</sup>

As a nation, they are under sentence of death and that by decree of the mighty king of Persia,<sup>34</sup> which is by far the most powerful kingdom in the world at the time.<sup>35</sup> This decree has been inspired by the king's most senior government official, one Haman the Agagite.<sup>36</sup>

Haman's scheme to destroy the Jews has been made possible by his recent promotion to favour and power.<sup>37</sup> This must have been particularly galling to Mordecai the Jew,<sup>38</sup> because, only a short time before, he had exposed a conspiracy to assassinate Ahasuerus.<sup>39</sup> After Mordecai saved the king's life, we would expect him to be rewarded but it is the dastardly villain Haman who is advanced to the top job.<sup>40</sup> I guess that Mordecai could be excused for wishing that he hadn't bothered!

Haman's plot has been occasioned directly by Mordecai's persistent refusal to bow to him,<sup>41</sup> even though that is the king's express command.<sup>42</sup>

### (3)

#### Israel and Amalek.

Mordecai's refusal stems not from any rudeness or lack of courtesy on his part. It is due rather to who Haman is.

Haman is an Agagite;<sup>43</sup> that is, in all likelihood, he is of the royal line of the ancient nation of Amalek.<sup>44</sup>

Amalek is that nation against which God, on oath, had declared warfare from generation to generation.<sup>45</sup> Of old, Israel had been commanded:

(i) to 'remember' and 'not forget' what Amalek did when Israel had first come out of Egypt, seizing (as Amalek did) the opportunity to attack those of Israel who were faint and weary, and

(ii) to 'blot out the very memory of Amalek from under heaven' when they entered the land.<sup>46</sup> But this Israel had conspicuously failed to do.

But 'how then', Mordecai must have asked himself, 'can I show honour and respect to one with whom my God has sworn only perpetual warfare?'

We are told that, as a result of Mordecai's refusal, Haman 'scorns' ('disdains', 'thinks light'<sup>47</sup>) to kill him alone but determines rather to bring about the destruction of the whole Jewish nation.<sup>48</sup> For Mordecai has openly declared that he is a Jew.<sup>49</sup>

The thoroughness of the planned assault is emphasised by the words of the decree/letter, 'to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate'.<sup>50</sup> Although Mordecai's steadfast refusal to bow is the immediate cause of Haman's malicious design, nevertheless, it is highly likely that, over time, something of the sort would have happened anyway; as is suggested by the repeated description of Haman as 'the Jews' enemy'.<sup>51</sup>

The roots of the mutual hostility between the Jews and the Amalekites go back as far as Exodus 17, where Amalek is the *first enemy* to attack Israel following the Exodus.<sup>52</sup> Now an Amalekite is the *last enemy* to attempt to attack them at the close of Old Testament history.

#### (4) Sentence of death.

But, whether or not this attack would have come at some time without Mordecai's refusal to pay homage to Haman, it is now scheduled. And, at the end of chapter 3 and the opening of chapter 4, the prospects for God's people look bleak in the extreme. *They* are in a state of great alarm,<sup>53</sup> *Shushan*<sup>54</sup> is in turmoil, consternation, confusion,<sup>55</sup> *Haman* is jubilant, *Ahasuerus* is more concerned about his wine than about his decree and *Esther* is totally oblivious to the great danger in which she and her people then stood.<sup>56</sup> It seems that, as queen, Esther was sheltered from all matters of state business and was, therefore, ignorant of the existence of the decree which so troubled her people.

Nothing, it seemed, could possibly save the people. The mighty king of Persia has given his authority for the writing of the edict which could be neither changed nor revoked.<sup>57</sup> That edict has been sealed with the king's personal signet ring<sup>58</sup> and sent by royal couriers throughout the whole length and breadth of the empire.<sup>59</sup> The precise date is fixed; the people are named.<sup>60</sup>

Surely nothing—and nobody—could now save the nation of Israel from certain destruction. Or, so it 'seemed'.

#### (5) God's preparations.

But recent developments have certainly not taken the God of Israel by surprise! *He* has not been caught off guard. Far from it.

For both Haman's plot and Ahasuerus's decree has been foreseen and prepared for.<sup>61</sup> In our scripture reading, Mordecai makes it clear that he is confident that, even if Esther refused to help and remained silent, 'relief and deliverance' would 'arise for the Jews from another place'—from another quarter.<sup>62</sup> I have no doubt that he was right.

For God is not baffled by the recent turn of events. Unlike the city of Shushan,<sup>63</sup> the Lord isn't 'thrown into confusion'! He stands ready to meet the challenge.

Mordecai surmises (correctly) that Esther might well have come to the kingdom for just such a time; that is, that the Lord has raised her to her position of royal dignity to deal with this very crisis. But what Mordecai doesn't realize when he said this was that his own contribution would also prove crucial to saving the day for Israel.<sup>64</sup>

We know that the Lord had prepared for Israel's present predicament well in advance by locating both Mordecai and Esther in the right place at the right time and placing them in positions from which they could both later exert a powerful influence for good over the king.

#### (6) Mordecai and Esther located.

Specific preparations had begun over 120 years before, back when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had taken into captivity 'all the leaders ... all the mighty men of valour ... and all the craftsmen' of Judah<sup>65</sup> in the days of Jehoiachin,<sup>66</sup> Judah's last-but-one king.

Included at that time had been the prophet Ezekiel,<sup>67</sup> who had so much to say about Israel's future glories. But, humanly speaking, if it had not been for another captive, Ezekiel's prophecies would have remained forever unfulfilled. That other captive's name was 'Kish'; the great grandfather of Mordecai.<sup>68</sup> But then, you and I know that Nebuchadnezzar was, not only 'king of Babylon', but also God's 'servant'.<sup>69</sup>

When Esther's parents had died (in circumstances not recorded), Mordecai, her older cousin, had adopted her.<sup>70</sup>

And all of this is to prove absolutely essential, for both are needed in the time of crisis—and that with close personal ties. So that, for example, Mordecai is able, through Esther's attendant, to notify Esther of the danger, and to counsel her to jeopardize her life on behalf of her people.<sup>71</sup> How wonderful that, out of the vast empire of 127 provinces,<sup>72</sup> in God's providence, both Mordecai and Esther are duly situated in the citadel ('palace', KJV) of Shushan.<sup>73</sup>

### (7) The chain of ten links.

With both Mordecai and Esther located in the right place, we now need to trace a chain of ten links within the book of Esther itself, each link of which would prove equally necessary to checkmate Haman's malicious designs and to save the day for Israel.

#### The Ten Links:

1. Queen Vashti refuses to attend the king's feast.
2. The king accepts the advice of Memucan to remove Vashti.
3. The king accepts the advice of his officials to replace Vashti.
4. Esther is chosen as the new queen.
5. Mordecai hears of, and reports, a plot against the king's life but the king fails to reward Mordecai at the time.
6. The king's decree authorising the execution of the Jews takes the form of a permission only and specifies a date 11 months later.
7. Esther is extended the golden sceptre by the king.
8. The king agrees to attend two banquets.
9. During a sleepless night, the king has read to him details of Mordecai's part in frustrating an earlier assassination attempt—and, following the pleading of Esther, he later executes Haman and replaces him with Mordecai as his First Minister.
10. When the day comes for the king's two decrees to be put into operation, Mordecai's recent appointment swings the balance in favour of the Jews, who prevail over their enemies.

Not that I will have time to say much about any these links.

#### Link 1.

First, there is the refusal of Queen Vashti to come when summoned by Ahasuerus to the large banquet he was giving.<sup>74</sup> We are left to guess why Vashti disobeys the king's command.<sup>75</sup> But, for us, the important point is that she refuses to come, not why she did.

#### Link 2

The second link is the counsel of Memucan, one of the king's seven chief rulers and special advisers.<sup>76</sup>

In the eyes of Memucan, it would hardly do for it to be said that Ahasuerus could rule over kingdoms from India to Ethiopia but not rule over his own wife!<sup>77</sup>

As Memucan sees it, for the king to turn a blind eye to Vashti's disobedience would create a very dangerous and far-reaching precedent—encouraging other ladies throughout the empire to rebel against their husbands<sup>78</sup> ... and, of far greater importance to Memucan and his colleagues, encouraging the wives of the king's officials to do so<sup>79</sup> ... and, I guess, of even greater importance to Memucan personally, the wife of one of those officials in particular!<sup>80</sup>

Why, it doesn't bear thinking about! So, Memucan presses for the removal of Vashti from her position as queen<sup>81</sup>—and Memucan has his way. And so, exit Vashti.<sup>82</sup>

You have to laugh. Here is a king who proclaims a decree and issues letters, which, so it was hoped, would result in all the menfolk of his empire's being able to do the very thing which he had just proved himself incapable of doing!

And I note that, since this feast lasts only seven days,<sup>83</sup> it is on the last day that Ahasuerus calls for Vashti.<sup>84</sup> That is, it is at the very last minute, so to speak, that she is removed to make way for Esther.

Which brings us neatly to ...

### Link 3.

That of the later advice given to Ahasuerus by the king's court officials that he then seeks a replacement wife.<sup>85</sup>

Previously, Memucan had advised Ahasuerus to replace deposed Vashti with 'another who is better than she'<sup>86</sup> and yet this is not actioned for three years.<sup>87</sup> And we might wonder why it was so long before the king 'remembered' Vashti and all that had happened.<sup>88</sup> It does seem a long time for a king to be without a queen.

But scholars generally identify Ahasuerus with Xerxes, the son of Darius I. And they tell us that this three-year gap coincides exactly with the time when Xerxes was engaged in his ill-fated campaign against Greece,<sup>89</sup> alluded to by the prophet Daniel.<sup>90</sup>

### Link 4.

The fourth link consists of Esther's success in the royal beauty contest.<sup>91</sup> Clearly, Esther enjoys a huge God-given advantage, namely, her natural good looks. She is beautiful both in form and in face—she has, that is, a shapely figure and is lovely to look at.<sup>92</sup>

It is made clear that Esther is selected as a contestant by government officials—that neither she nor Mordecai has any choice in the matter.<sup>93</sup> Nor is it her doing that she wins 'grace and favour' in the sight of Ahasuerus and that he chooses to make her his queen in the place of Vashti.<sup>94</sup> Of course, Mordecai could later see that all this may well have happened for the very purpose of thwarting Haman's nefarious scheme.<sup>95</sup>

We have no way of knowing the number of the selected contestants but, given that these have been sought in all 127 provinces of the kingdom,<sup>96</sup> it is not unlikely—as one Jewish writer speculates—that there are several hundred.<sup>97</sup> But, in spite of all the stiff competition, it is Esther who found favour in the sight of the most powerful and wealthy man of the day.<sup>98</sup>

But, separate to this, it is necessary for Mordecai also to be fitted to exert influence for good over Ahasuerus at the appropriate time.

### Link 5.

And this, which forms our fifth link, is largely achieved by his timely discovery and exposure of a plot hatched by two eunuchs<sup>99</sup> whose job it is to guard the entrance to the king's personal apartment.<sup>100</sup> News of this planned assassination 'just happened' to leak out to Mordecai, of all people in the world!

That the plot represents a real danger is evident from the fact that Ahasuerus is murdered less than ten years later<sup>101</sup> by the captain of his bodyguard and one of his eunuchs.<sup>102</sup>

Careful investigations soon establishes the guilt of the two men.<sup>103</sup> Ergo, exit two eunuchs!<sup>104</sup>

How important at that time proves the line of communication which exists between Mordecai and Esther. For neither of the cousins would have been of any use without the other.

And, without revealing anything of her close relationship to Mordecai, Esther is careful to see that Mordecai was given full credit for saving the king's life.<sup>105</sup>

And yet, by some inexcusable oversight, Mordecai receives absolutely no reward<sup>106</sup> and it must have been sickening to him to see Haman promoted to the highest office in the kingdom by the very man whose life he had recently saved. But, if the King of Persia lets Mordecai down badly, the King of kings knows exactly what He was doing. And, as always, His timing is perfect.<sup>107</sup>

And the same line of communication between Mordecai and Esther becomes desperately important again later, when Hatach, Esther's servant, is dispatched to relay details of another plot.<sup>108</sup> But, on that occasion, it is not the king's life which is in danger, but the queen's—together with the lives of all her people.

And so, to ...

### Link 6.

It is fascinating to observe how the Lord overrules both the nature and the timing of Haman's chosen method of wiping out the Jewish people.

First, Haman seeks a decree which authorises all who wish to do so to 'attack' the Jews,<sup>109</sup> with the incentive that the attackers would be free to pocket a considerable portion of the spoil for themselves.<sup>110</sup> This is a most cunning move, because many of the Jews in Persia had done extremely well for themselves there—which is why so many had chosen to stay there and had declined the offer of Cyrus for them to return to their homeland.<sup>111</sup>

And now their very material prosperity is to be the bait to ensure their destruction.<sup>112</sup> Clever!

But, as the apostle Paul assures the Corinthians, "He catches the wise in their craftiness",<sup>113</sup> and later events are to show that Haman has been too clever by half for his own good. For the very method he chooses left open one all-important way of escape.

We are told more than once that the laws of the Medes and Persians could not be repealed, even by the king himself.<sup>114</sup>

And so, had Haman sought and secured a decree which commanded the Persian military to attack and destroy the Jews, it is hard to imagine any way for the Jews to be delivered. For Ahasuerus could hardly have later authorised the Jews to fight against his own forces!<sup>115</sup>

But, because the decree takes the form only of a royal permission granted to the Jews' foes and not a command to the king's forces, it leaves the door wide open for the king to follow up later with a second decree, granting equal sanction for the Jews to defend themselves—and, thereby, to neutralise the first decree. Indeed, since the first edict doesn't require anybody to carry out the genocide,<sup>116</sup> nobody could be blamed for later failing to obey it.

A second important factor about the planned attack is its timing. Haman's edict is written on the thirteenth of the month Nisan.<sup>117</sup> I suspect that Haman chooses this particular date deliberately, so that the news will break on the Jewish people the next day—the first day of the feast of Passover.<sup>118</sup> To Haman, a holiday commemorating Israel's past deliverance would be an ideal occasion to publish plans for the nation's destruction.<sup>119</sup>

But Haman is clearly a superstitious man and he wouldn't dream of embarking on such an important venture without first ensuring that the day selected for the actual slaughter<sup>120</sup> would be an auspicious day. Consequently, Haman, resorting to the art of astrology, cast 'Pur'<sup>121</sup> (an ancient Akkadian word for 'lots'<sup>122</sup>) to determine the precise day on which the slaughter should take place.<sup>123</sup>

And this 'favourable' day falls on the 13<sup>th</sup> of the month Adar.<sup>124</sup> True, this is a full eleven months distant, in the last possible month of the year<sup>125</sup> but Haman could afford to wait. Indeed, I suspect he may have relished the prospect of seeing Mordecai squirm with self-recrimination for all of those eleven months on account of the grim fate which he had brought upon his people.

And yet you and I can hardly miss seeing God's overruling hand in all of this. For the interval between (i) the passing and proclamation of the decree and (ii) its timed execution provides Esther and Mordecai with ample time for all the necessary steps to be taken to save their nation.

Although the royal messenger service was extremely fast,<sup>126</sup> there were 127 provinces to be reached, stretching from India to North Africa.<sup>127</sup> As it turned out, two months and ten days elapses between the first and the second decrees<sup>128</sup> and, had Haman fixed on an earlier date for the execution of the Jews, there might well have been insufficient time for the second set of messengers to reach the farthest points of the empire to avert the massacre there.

But the God of Israel knows all about that. And the claim made in Proverbs 16 clearly held as true in Persia as it did in Israel; 'The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord'.<sup>129</sup> Truly, so too did the words which the Lord had once put into the mouth of Balaam, 'there is no enchantment ('augury') against Jacob, no divination against Israel'.<sup>130</sup>

### Link 7.

Link number seven is forged when the king extends his golden sceptre to Esther.<sup>131</sup>

Through her attendant, Esther has pointed out to Mordecai, not only that it was common knowledge that it was a most unhealthy thing for any man or woman to enter the king's inner court without an invitation, but also that it is highly unlikely that she is going to be summoned soon—for she hadn't been called for a whole month.<sup>132</sup> This in itself was cause for serious misgivings. Ancient secular writers portray Ahasuerus as a vain and sensual monarch<sup>133</sup> and his passions and affections may well have been transferred elsewhere. There are certainly no guarantees in this particular business, as ex-queen Vashti can tell you!

On top of which, the Jewish writer Josephus claims that men stood around the royal throne armed with axes to deal with any intruders.<sup>134</sup> The message was unmistakable; if you didn't get the sceptre, you got the axe! And *that* would really spoil your day!<sup>135</sup>

When I read Mordecai's words to Esther, 'Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for just such a time as this?'<sup>136</sup> I am reminded of words of Winston Churchill, which my wife, Linda, and I came across at his birthplace (Blenheim Palace) many years ago.<sup>137</sup> Referring to the time when King George VI made him Prime Minister in May 1940, at what Mr Churchill described as 'the outset of this mighty battle', he wrote: 'I felt as if I were walking with destiny, and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial'.<sup>138</sup>

I guess that, if Queen Esther accepted Mordecai's assessment of the situation, she might have said those very words to herself—'that all my past life (has) been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial'.

But, as things developed, there was one obvious difference between Winston Churchill and Queen Esther, because, for all his best efforts, Mr Churchill could do nothing to save some six million Jews from Hitler and the horrors of the Holocaust, whereas, Esther was the instrument that God chiefly used to save the whole Jewish nation of her day from Haman and the decree he had so carefully drafted.<sup>139</sup>

But we mustn't underestimate the courage which inspired Esther to say, 'I will go in to the king ... and if I perish, I perish'.<sup>140</sup>

For, whereas Queen Vashti had suffered the loss of her *crow*n for *not coming* to the king when she *had been called*, Queen Esther was willing to risk the loss of her *head* for *coming* to the king when she *had not been called*!<sup>141</sup>

But first, she instructed Mordecai<sup>142</sup> to organise a three-day fast<sup>143</sup> by the Jews in Shushan'.<sup>144</sup> And, given that fasting was very often associated with prayer to God in times of great distress,<sup>145</sup> Esther's three-day 'fast'<sup>146</sup> was doubtless accompanied by earnest prayer and a sense of utter dependence upon God.<sup>147</sup>

Interestingly, Esther herself would have been fasting at the very time when the Passover lamb was to be slaughtered, roasted and eaten.<sup>148</sup> In many ways, it is ironic, therefore, that she should be *fasting* when her nation's calendar called for *feasting*.

Just possibly, Esther has in mind the means of victory employed by Moses and Joshua over Amalek many centuries before—when those out of sight<sup>149</sup> supported the one who performed the public part and, in prevailing with God, secured the success of the one in the front line of the battle.<sup>150</sup> If so, then, in effect, Esther is asking the Jews in Shushan to hold up her hands while she does battle with the Amalekite of her day.<sup>151</sup>

No doubt Esther is greatly relieved to find that, just as she had at their first meeting,<sup>152</sup> so again she obtains favour in the sight of the king.<sup>153</sup> For Ahasuerus extends to her the all-important golden sceptre,<sup>154</sup> which guarantees her safety.<sup>155</sup>

## Link 8.

Our eighth link comprises the agreement of the king to attend two banquets prepared by Esther.

I don't know if *Esther* was taken aback by the generosity of the king's offer (couched in a well-known Oriental idiom of exaggeration, not to be understood literally<sup>156</sup>). But *we* may well be taken aback by her reply, simply inviting him and Haman to a banquet which she had already prepared for them.<sup>157</sup> And that detail means, of course, that, Esther must have been preparing this particular banquet while she and her maids had been fasting!<sup>158</sup>

And then, no doubt, to our even greater surprise, at this first banquet, she goes no further than to invite her two distinguished guests to a second.<sup>159</sup>

Many possible explanations have been suggested as to why Esther postponed presenting her petition.<sup>160</sup>

Personally, I favour the view that she patiently, wisely and deliberately did as she did—(i) partly to excite and then to maintain the king's interest and (ii) partly to convey to him that her petition concerned a matter of the utmost importance—that she wasn't presenting it out of some rash, emotional impulse.<sup>161</sup>

And, although she wasn't to know it, a tremendous amount was to hang on the deferring of her request, in that it was the night before she eventually made it, that the king was to suffer an all-important sleepless night. But that is part of link number nine.

And, before we reach that, we need to note that, whereas Esther pleases Ahasuerus, Mordecai *dis*pleases Haman.

Because, although Haman has left the first banquet merry in heart,<sup>162</sup> intoxicated with pride, there is one big fly in his ointment—Mordecai. For Mordecai sours Haman's joy of the moment by refusing even to acknowledge him when he passes through the king's gate,<sup>163</sup> let alone bowing down to him and paying him homage as he had refused to do previously.<sup>164</sup>

Yet, although full of indignation, 'Haman restrained himself'.<sup>165</sup> It is just as well for Mordecai that Haman did, for, otherwise, he might have killed Mordecai on the spot—who would not, then, have lived to see the deliverance of his people. Truly, as Asaph once expresses it, 'Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain'.<sup>166</sup>

And Haman is easily persuaded by his wife and friends not to wait eleven months to see Mordecai perish but to erect a 'high-rise' gallows (possibly, 'stake') immediately and to seek authority from Ahasuerus first thing the next morning to have Mordecai impaled on it.<sup>167</sup>

Which does bring us to ...

### Link 9.

To wit, Ahasuerus's sleepless night.<sup>168</sup>

Everything hinges around this crucial night, when the Lord (who Himself neither slumbers nor sleeps<sup>169</sup>) begins to 'turn the tables' and to bring all of Haman's pernicious schemes and intentions crashing to the ground.

And this He did by depriving the mighty king of Persia of a night's slumber.<sup>170</sup>

And, surprise, surprise, just like King Darius before him,<sup>171</sup> Ahasuerus didn't call for his musicians to play for him. In his case, he called for a book to be read to him!<sup>172</sup>

Talk about coincidence! Surely, it is more than a million-to-one chance that the monarch of Persia should be listening at the dead of night to the one item in all the chronicles of his vast kingdom which concerned the very man whose execution was planned for the next morning.<sup>173</sup>

And it is hard not to laugh at the self-seeking vanity of Haman as he talks at cross purposes with the king—and ends up bestowing the greatest honour he can imagine on the very man he was planning to dishonour and to kill?<sup>174</sup>

As a result, within a few hours the tide has turned, and Mordecai is highly 'honoured'<sup>175</sup> while Haman is 'mourning'<sup>176</sup>—compelled now to bow down to the man who had persistently refused to bow down to him!

We are not told whether Esther knows of these events when she summons Ahasuerus and Haman to the second banquet. But, at that banquet, she calmly recounts her people's horrifying predicament to Ahasuerus—who, having previously lost one wife,<sup>177</sup> probably had no ambition to lose another!<sup>178</sup>

This is followed quickly by (i) the identification of Haman as 'the adversary and enemy',<sup>179</sup> (ii) the brief record of Ahasuerus's wrath<sup>180</sup> and (iii) Haman's unexpected and sudden fate.<sup>181</sup>

And so, whereas in chapter 6, Mordecai is *exalted* in the very way that Haman had planned for himself,<sup>182</sup> in chapter 7 Haman is *executed* in the very way he had planned for Mordecai.<sup>183</sup> Applying one of Shakespeare's graphic phrases, Haman was 'hoist with his own petard'.<sup>184</sup>



Yet, although Haman is now dead and it is most unlikely that anybody will dare touch Esther personally, the sentence of death still hangs over her people.<sup>185</sup>

But, following his appointment of Mordecai in Haman's place,<sup>186</sup> Ahasuerus leaves Mordecai and Esther to sort out with his civil servants a legal way of rendering the first decree harmless<sup>187</sup>—which they successfully do.<sup>188</sup> For the king's second decree not only effectively neutralized the first but also, because it was the more recent of the two, it served to unnerve the Jews' foes.

Which brings us to the final link in our chain.

### Link 10.

Mordecai's exalted position (now installed in the highest office in the kingdom, second in authority only to Ahasuerus) tips the scales very much in favour of the Jews, for, out of 'fear' of him, all the provincial rulers throughout the empire 'helped the Jews'.<sup>189</sup>

In summary, 'on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them', the expectation of their enemies was 'turned to the contrary' and 'the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them'.<sup>190</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Surely, it isn't difficult for us to detect the hand of a more formidable foe than Haman—that of the great 'enemy'<sup>191</sup>—at work behind many of the scenes. For, although Haman was labelled 'the adversary' by Esther,<sup>192</sup> in reality he was but the unwitting tool of the mighty monarch of evil—of the great 'adversary' of God's people—himself.<sup>193</sup>

I suspect you are familiar with some at least of the devil's previous attempts either to cut off or to corrupt the line of 'the seed of woman', the Messiah.<sup>194</sup> And the book of Esther records Satan's last known attempt in Old Testament days to frustrate God's purpose of salvation for the world.<sup>195</sup>

But, if Satan was at work behind the scenes, so, too, was the Lord. Indeed, as has been well said, 'God not only moves behind the scenes; He moves the scenes He is behind'.<sup>196</sup>

It is well known that the name of God does not occur in the book of Esther,<sup>197</sup> any more than it does in the Song of Songs. Yet, although His name is not there, He most certainly is.

For, whereas at all times He stays out of His people's sight, they are never out of His! And, without violating human free will in any way, the 'unmentioned God' remains ever and always in control.<sup>198</sup>

And so, in a nutshell, the story of Esther demonstrates that your God and mine is not only *invisible*<sup>199</sup>—He is also *invincible*!

**And we can trust Him.**

This is a link to an article on ten discoveries which provide background to the Book of Esther ...  
<https://biblearchaeologyreport.com/2025/03/11/top-ten-discoveries-related-to-the-book-of-esther/>.  
Highly recommended.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> A suggested chiasmic outline of the book of Esther (from A. Tomasino, 'Esther: Evangelical Exegetical Commentary'):

- A) Introduction: The glory of Xerxes (1:1–2)
- B) The two feasts of the king (1:3–22)
- C) Esther's triumph over her rivals (2:1–18)
- D) Mordecai foils the plot against the king (2:19–23)
- E) Conflict between Haman and Mordecai is initiated (3:1–6)
- F) Haman appears to request the death of the Jews (3:7–15)
- G) Mordecai and Esther conspire against the plot (4:1–17)
- H) Esther appears before the king unbidden (5:1–8)
- G') Haman and Zeresh conspire against Mordecai (5:9–14)
- F') Haman appears to request the death of Mordecai (6:1–14)
- E') Conflict between Haman and Mordecai is concluded (7:1–10)
- D') Mordecai foils the plot against the Jews (8:1–17)
- C') The Jews triumph over their rivals (9:1–17)
- B') The two feasts of the Jews (9:18–32)
- A') Conclusion: The glory of Xerxes and Mordecai (10:1–3)

*'In this proposed structure, the "hinge" is identified as the episode where Esther sets in motion her plot to overturn Haman's plot. It is precisely at this point that the Jews' deliverance begins. Perhaps coincidentally, this scene also contains the verse identified by the Masoretes [Jewish scholars of the 6th to 10th centuries AD] as the central verse of the book (Esther 5. 7).*

*'Additionally, scene D begins with the note that Esther had not revealed her kinship with Mordecai to the king (Esther 2. 20); but at the beginning of D', their relationship is revealed (Esther 8. 1). Also, in both scenes, the villains are impaled (Esther 2. 23; 8. 7). Scenes G and G' both begin with Mordecai at the king's gate (Esther 4. 2; 5. 9). It appears that scene H marks the true crisis of the story. Esther is about to appear before the king without an invitation. If he decides to kill her, the story is finished. If he allows her to live, there is hope for the Jews. It is here that the reversal will truly begin'.*

<sup>2</sup> Mordecai's answer contains a reference to Esther's previous objection: 'All of the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know ...'. In response, Mordechai says, in effect, that even if 'all of the king's servants ... know' of this law, nevertheless 'who knows' if your path to the royal throne was not meant for the sole purpose of your intervention today'.

<sup>3</sup> Esther 4. 10-17.

<sup>4</sup> Neither book is directly quoted in the New Testament. 'The Book of Esther 'is the only Old Testament book not found among the Qumran scrolls', D. M. Howard Jr, 'New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis', Volume 4, page 584.

<sup>5</sup> Ruth 2. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Esther 2. 16-17.

<sup>7</sup> Ruth 1. 19; 2. 10; Esther 2. 5-7.

<sup>8</sup> Ruth 2. 10 with Ruth 2. 1, and Esther 2. 17 with Esther 1. 1.

<sup>9</sup> A mother-in-law, Ruth 1. 22, and an older cousin, Esther 2. 7, respectively. (The word 'daughter' is used to describe both; Ruth 2. 2, 22; 3. 1, 16, 18 {cf. 1. 11, 12, 13}, and Esther 2. 7, 15.)

<sup>10</sup> Ruth 3. 2-4, 9, and Esther 4. 8-16; 7. 2-4.

<sup>11</sup> 'Ruth answered Naomi, "All that you say I will do"', Ruth 3. 5; 'Esther said to return to Mordecai this answer, "... I will go"', Esther 4. 15-16.

<sup>12</sup> Ruth 3. 11, 13; Esther 8. 3-8.

<sup>13</sup> Ruth 4. 10, 13, 17 with Matt. 1. 5, 16; Esther 9. 1.

<sup>14</sup> And, through that coming, would give effect to God's great plan of salvation for fallen man.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Rev. 12. 1-5.

<sup>16</sup> Ruth 3. 8.

<sup>17</sup> Esther 6. 1. 'That same night the king could not get to sleep', Good News Bible. Literally, 'the king's sleep fled!'

<sup>18</sup> 'Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife', Ruth 4. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Ruth 2. 6 ESV.

<sup>20</sup> 'Ahasuerus set the royal crown on Esther's head and made her queen', Esther 2. 17. The word 'wife' is not used of Esther, but, 'it was usual with the eastern kings to put a crown or diadem on the heads of their wives at the time of marriage, and declare them queens', John Gill, *'Exposition of the Bible'*, comment on Esther 2. 17.

<sup>21</sup> A name better known in its ordinary Greek form of 'Xerxes', who reigned over Persia from 485 to 465 B.C.

<sup>22</sup> In the synagogue, on the Sabbath preceding Purim (*'Shabbat Zakhor'*), Deut. 25:17–19 and 1 Samuel 15 are read. On the morning of Purim, the reading is Exod. 17. 8–16.

The name 'Purim' was given to the annual feast (the details of which occupy no less than half a chapter of the book, Esther 9. 17-33) by which Israel has commemorated their victory over their enemies right up to the present day. And so, whereas their first victory over Amalek had been commemorated by the building of an altar, Exod. 17. 15 (the altar was named 'Jehovah Nissi'—'the Lord my Banner'), their last victory over Amalek was commemorated by the instituting of a feast.

Another point which they have in common is that, although neither young woman is mentioned in Heb. 11, both were marked by great faith and courage.

'Anti-Semites have always hated the book (of Esther), and the Nazis forbade its reading in the crematoria and the concentration camps. In the dark days before their deaths, Jewish inmates of Auschwitz, Dachau, Treblinka, and Bergen-Belsen wrote the Book of Esther from memory and read it in secret on Purim', *'Megillat Esther'*, Rabbinical Assembly, 1974, page 14. Its esteem in the Jewish community is often estimated by quoting the saying of Maimonides that, 'when the Prophets and the Writings pass away when the Messiah comes, only Esther and the Torah will remain', *'Mishneh Torah, Megillah'*.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Sam. 10. 1.

<sup>24</sup> 2 Kings 25. 7. Technically, Zedekiah was the king of *Judah*, and has been aptly described as 'the monarch with a wishbone but no backbone!' The earthly sovereignty of the house of David was not restored again after the captivity; 'thus says the Lord God, "Remove the turban and take off the crown"', Ezek. 21. 26.

<sup>25</sup> Ruth 3. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Esther 2. 8 ('was taken').

<sup>27</sup> Ruth 1. 3-5.

<sup>28</sup> Esther 3. 13.

<sup>29</sup> Matt. 24. 15; Mark 13. 14.

<sup>30</sup> Dan. 10. 1. 'The third year of Cyrus's rule as king over Babylon was 536 B.C. Cyrus had begun ruling over Persia in 559 B.C., but Daniel's and the other biblical writers' interest in Cyrus was as ruler over Babylon, which he conquered in 539 B.C.', Thomas Constable, *'Expository Notes'*, comment on Dan 10. 1.

<sup>31</sup> Esther 3. 7 specifies 'the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus', who began to reign in 486 B.C; that is, the events of Esther 3-4 took place in 474 B.C. The book of Esther begins in his third year, Esther 1. 3; i.e., in 483 B.C.

<sup>32</sup> R. D. Wilson, 'A Scientific Investigation of the Old Testament', page 9, 'has shown conclusively that "Ahasuerus" is the Hebrew rendering of the Greek "Xerxes"', Eugene Merrill, 'Kingdom of Priests', page 498, footnote 2. For Persian names in the book, see A. R. Millard, 'The Persian Names in Esther and the Reliability of the Hebrew Text', accessible at ... [http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jbl/1977\\_millard.pdf](http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/jbl/1977_millard.pdf).

The character of Ahasuerus/Xerxes:

(i) 'The *silly monarch* who would decorate a tree with the jewellery of a prince in reward for its fruitfulness, and flog and chain the Hellespont as a punishment for its tempestuousness, is not fit to be let out of the nursery. His consent to the diabolical proposal of his grand vizier for a massacre, without an atom of proof that the victims are guilty, exhibits a hopeless state of mental feebleness', W. F. Adeney, 'Esther: The Expositor's Bible', comments on Esther 1, accessed at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/adeney/expositoreznehes.xxxiii.html>.

(ii) 'A *tyrant* who could behead the builders of the bridge over the Hellespont, because a storm had destroyed the bridge, and command the sea to be scourged, and to be chained by sinking a few fetters (Herod. vii. 35); a debauchee who, after his return from Greece, sought to drive away his vexation at the shameful defeat he had undergone, by revelling in sensual pleasures (Herod. ix. 108f.); so frantic a tyrant was capable of all that is told us in the book of Esther of Ahasuerus', Keil and Delitzsch, 'Historical Character of the Book of Esther'.

(iii) Herodotus, admittedly, no great fan of a ruler who had invaded his country, reported that Xerxes had *a very bad temper*: 'As he marched out the army, Pythias the Lydian, dreading the heavenly omen and encouraged by the gifts given to him by Xerxes, came up to Xerxes and said, "Master, I wish to ask a favour of you, which would be a small favour for you to render, but would be a great favour for me to receive". Xerxes, thinking that he knew everything Pythias could ask for, answered that he would grant the favour and asked him to proclaim what it was he wished. "Master, it happens that I have five sons, and they are all bound to soldier for you against the Greeks. I pray you, king, that you have pity on one who has reached my age and that you set free one of my sons, even the oldest, from your army, so that he may provide for me and my possessions. Take the other four with you, and may you return having accomplished all you intended". Xerxes flew into a terrible rage and replied, "You villainous man, you have the effrontery, seeing me marching with my army against the Greeks, with my sons and brothers and relatives and friends, to remind me of your son ... You may now be certain of this ... now that you have turned most shameless, you shall receive less than what you deserve. You and four of your sons are saved because of your hospitality; but one of your sons, the one you most desire to hold your arms around, will lose his life!" Having answered thus, he commanded those charged to accomplish this to find the eldest of Pythias's sons and cut him in half, and having cut him in two to set one half of his corpse on the right side of the road and the other on the left side, and between these the army moved forth', Richard Hooker, 'Herodotus: The Histories: Xerxes at the Hellespont', accessed at ... <https://brians.wsu.edu/2016/11/10/herodotus-the-histories-xerxes-at-the-hellespont-mid-5th-century-bce/>.

Compare the references to his wrath and anger in Esther 1. 12; 2. 1; 7. 7, 10.

Interestingly, in 1967 an important new text was discovered near Persepolis when a tractor struck a stone. The self-laudatory description of Xerxes found in the recently discovered inscription translated by Gharib reads :

'(14-17) *I am not hot-tempered...I hold firmly under control by my will. I am ruling over myself*'. (Source: E. M. Yamauchi, 'The Archaeological Background of Esther', Bibliotheca Sacra, April-June 1980, page 104, accessed at [http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bsac/1980\\_099\\_yamauchi.pdf](http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/bsac/1980_099_yamauchi.pdf). 'Surely, you must be joking, your Majesty!')

(iv) When Xerxes returned, after being defeated by the Greeks, he was 'completely discredited and thus turned to *a life of licentious indulgence*. He dallied with the most beautiful women of the court, including the wives of some of his chief officials', Eugene H. Merrill, *ibid.*, page 499. See Herodotus, 'Histories', Book 9, Chapters 108-109 (accessible at [perseus.tufts.edu](http://perseus.tufts.edu)).

<sup>33</sup> Israel had been caught totally unawares, having lived in peace and prosperity under the Persians. There is a gap of more than fifty years between Ezra chapter 6 (which ends with events in the year 515 B.C.) and chapter 7 (which takes place in the year 458). The intervening period is skipped in Ezra's narrative, since no significant events occurred vis-à-vis the renewal of Israel's national life in the land, while the book of Esther gives a detailed record of all-important events outside of the land. Three key dates given in the book of Esther allow scholars to fill in the historical events recorded in extra-biblical history as background to the events of this book: (i) the third year of Xerxes (Esther 1. 3), (ii) the seventh year of Xerxes (Esther 2. 16) and (iii) the twelfth year of Xerxes (Esther 3. 7). The first indicates that the banquet at which Queen Vashti was deposed occurred in 483/482, after Xerxes had consolidated his power and was preparing to launch his invasion of Greece. The second indicates that Esther was made queen in 479/478, a year after Xerxes's return from Greece. The third dates the initiation of Haman's plot against the Jews to 474, a little more than halfway through Xerxes reign.

<sup>34</sup> 'Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with instruction to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day', Esther 3. 13..

<sup>35</sup> Archaeologists have excavated the gate where Mordecai sat (Esther 2. 19 etc.), the square before the gate (Esther 4. 6) and the royal palace at Susa (Shushan). The excavated structures correspond perfectly to the descriptions given in the book of Esther—as even the secular French excavators acknowledged. (Source: E. M. Yamauchi, *Persia and the Bible*, page 300.)

<sup>36</sup> In putting his proposal to the king, Haman commences with the truth (that the Jews are ‘scattered abroad and dispersed’), continues with a half-truth (that the Jews have ‘different laws’) and ends with a lie (that the Jews do not ‘keep the king’s laws’), Esther 3. 8.

With his coffers recently drained by the Greek war, Xerxes might have been uneasy about the request that he should approve such a wholesale massacre. So, Haman at once supports his petition by the offer of enormous monetary gains if he is given authority to plunder the Jews: ‘I will pay ten thousand talents of silver’, he offered, ‘into the hands of those who carry on the king’s business, to put into the king’s treasuries’, Esther 3. 9; cf. Esther 4. 7. In the circumstances, such an attractive offer must have seemed virtually irresistible.

‘This is a stupendous amount of money. We know from history that it equals two-thirds of the annual budget of the Persian empire (see Herodotus, *Histories* 3. 95). Obviously, the king was interested in this kind of arrangement since his coffers had been drained by the Greek war. The amount of money shows the intensity of the hatred of Haman ...

“And the king said to Haman, ‘the silver is yours’”—literally, “the silver is given to you”, Esther 3. 11. It seems from the context that this is the beginning of an Oriental bargaining section (similar to Gen. 23). ‘The king was allowing him to pay those who would destroy the Jews and turn in their property to the crown’, Bob Utley, *Free Bible Commentary*, comments on Esther 3. 9 and 11.

‘Haman having held out the prospect of a large sum as the result of exterminating the Jews, and the king having bestowed this upon Haman, the plundering of the Jews, thus permitted to all the inhabitants of the kingdom who should assist in exterminating them, Esther 3. 13, must be understood as implying, that they would have to deliver a portion of the booty thus obtained to Haman’, Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Volume 3, page 347.

Five years elapsed between Esther’s becoming queen and the plot of Haman, Esther 2. 16; 3. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Haman is introduced at the moment when he has been exalted to the highest position under the king of Persia; he has just been made grand vizier, Esther 3. 1.

<sup>38</sup> ‘External proof of the career of Mordecai has been found in an undated cuneiform text that mentions a certain Mordecai (‘Marduka’) who was a high official at the Persian court of Shushan during the reign of Xerxes and even before that under Darius I. This text came from Borsippa and is the first reference to Mordecai outside the Bible’. (Source: <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/book-esther>.)

Concerning Mordecai: ‘The name appears in Aramaic letters, but most significant is the occurrence of the name Marduka, in a tablet from Borsippa in Mesopotamia ... Marduka, is listed as a *šipîr* (“an accountant”) who makes an inspection tour of Susa during the last years of Darius or early years of Xerxes. It is Ungnad’s conviction that “it is improbable that there were two Mardukas serving as high officials in Susa”. He therefore concludes that this individual is none other than Esther’s uncle’, E. M. Yamauchi, *The Archaeological Background of Esther*, *Bibliotheca Sacra*, April-June 1980, page 107. A note of caution is sounded, however, by D. J. A. Clines, *In Quest of the Historical Mordecai*, in *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays 1967-1998*, Volume 1, pages 436-443.

<sup>39</sup> Esther 2. 21-23.

<sup>40</sup> There is a certain irony in the contrast between Mordecai’s informing on Bigthan and Teresh in chapter 2 and Haman’s informing on the Jews in chapter 3.

<sup>41</sup> Esther 3. 2c. ‘According to Herodotus [Hist. 1. 134], the Persians were very conscious of social class, observing strict protocols. They would greet equals with a kiss, but would always bow and make obeisance before those of higher standing’, J. Walton, *The NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, page 806.

<sup>42</sup> Esther 3. 2b, 3. Both Vashti and Mordecai act in defiance of a command of the king, inciting great ‘wrath’ against them, Esther 1. 12; 3. 2-5.

<sup>43</sup> Esther 3. 1.

<sup>44</sup> See, 'Agag the king of the Amalekites', 1 Sam. 15. 8. 'The 'Agag' was a title rather than a personal name. It is the dynastic name of the kings of Amalek, just as Pharaoh was used as a dynastic name for the ancient Egyptians. It is, I suppose, possible that Haman's promotion had been influenced by his royal blood.

In Num. 24. 7 ('his king shall be higher than Agag'), there is a possible allusion to the literal meaning of the word 'Agag' ('high'), thereby conveying the message that the king of Israel would be 'higher than high' (a characteristic use of puns in biblical poetry).

Flavius Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XI, Chapter 6, Paragraph 5) and the Targum understand the statement literally to mean that Haman was descended from (the) Agag, king of Amalek.

<sup>45</sup> Exod. 17. 16.

<sup>46</sup> Deut. 25. 17-19. This background explains Esther's later request for Haman's ten sons to be hanged in disgrace and humiliation on the scaffold, Esther 9. 13-14. It was not spite or vindictiveness on her part.

<sup>47</sup> The word rendered 'despise' in Esther 1. 17.

<sup>48</sup> Esther 3. 6. Haman, not satisfied with removing Mordecai from his official position, or even having him put to death, extends his decree of annihilation to all Jews. This recalls the first transgressor of a royal command in the story (Vashti) as the decree promulgated in the wake of her refusal to obey likewise applies to all women and not only to her personally.

<sup>49</sup> 'He (Mordecai) had told them that he was a Jew', Esther 3. 4; cf. 'they had made known to him (Haman) the people of Mordecai', Esther 3. 6. Contrast, 'Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mordecai had commanded her not to make it known, Esther 2. 10, and 'Esther had not made known her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had commanded her', Esther 3. 20. It proved as well that Esther did obey Mordecai in this respect, for this provided Haman with no advance warning of (i) her relationship to the hated Mordecai, or (ii) that he would inadvertently include the Queen of the kingdom in the death decree.

<sup>50</sup> Esther 3. 13; 7. 4; cf. Esther 8. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Haman is portrayed as the enemy of the Jews *par excellence*; hence, his epithet, 'the enemy of the Jews', repeated at crucial junctures in the text (Esther 3. 10; 8. 1; 9. 10, 24; cf. Esther 7. 4, 6—the second word in Esther 7. 6 indicating 'one who oppresses, afflicts, causes anguish').

<sup>52</sup> Exod. 17. 8. This point is noted in the parable of Balaam: 'Amalek is the first of the nations', Num. 24. 20. Note that 'Amalek is called the beginning of the nations, not "as belonging to the most distinguished and foremost of the nations in age, power, and celebrity" ... for in all these respects this Bedouin tribe, which descended from a grandson of Esau, was surpassed by many other nations, but as the first heathen nation which opened the conflict of the heathen nations against Israel as the people of God', Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Volume 1, page 195.

<sup>53</sup> (i) In keeping with Jewish custom, Mordecai lamented publicly: 'Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry', Esther 4. 1. (The 'loud and bitter' combination is found in only one other place in the Bible, when Esau discovers that he has lost the blessings that he desired from his father, Gen. 27. 34.)

(ii) 'There was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing (compare, in context, the same combination in Joel 2. 12): many lay in sackcloth and ashes', Esther 4. 3.

<sup>54</sup> Susa, that is.

'By 521, Darius had removed the capital to Susa in old Elam, three hundred miles northwest of Pasargadae, and there erected a magnificent palace. Both Esther and Nehemiah refer to this structure as the "citadel of Susa" ("Shushan the palace," KJV) ... he designed and commenced the construction of the magnificent city of Persepolis, to this day regarded as one of the wonders of the ancient world ... Xerxes' first interest lay in the completion of the royal palace at Susa and the further aggrandizement of Persepolis, the latter project occupying him on and off for the twenty-one years of his reign (486–465)', Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, pages 489, 491, 498.

'Susa is the only reported destination of Greek embassies to the Great King and was probably the goal of all Greek embassies to him. The city was one of the four main imperial centres where the King spent lengths of time', M. C. Miller, 'Athens and Persia in the fifth century B.C.', page 114.

'Susa shared with Persepolis, Ecbatana and Ctesiphon the honours of being a royal city', the article 'Susa' in *The Biblical World*, edited by C. F. Pfeiffer, page 555.

<sup>55</sup> Esther 3. 15.

<sup>56</sup> Esther 4. 5.

<sup>57</sup> Esther 1. 19; 8. 8. We remember how King Darius was very displeased with himself and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him. He laboured to the going down of the sun and doubtless sought to devise means of maintaining the law and yet evading its import. But, into the den of lions, Daniel, the king's favourite, was cast, Dan 6. 8, 12, 14-16.

<sup>58</sup> Esther 3. 12.

<sup>59</sup> Esther 3. 13. The posts started off with all speed, 'being hastened by the king's commandment' and the two men who had just planned a nation's extermination (as if they had done a good day's work and deserved some refreshment) 'sat down to drink', Esther 3. 15.

<sup>60</sup> We should note:

(i) 'The extent of the contemplated massacre. The Jews were scattered throughout all the provinces of the empire; and to all the provinces the letters commanding to slay them were transmitted by the posts, hastened by the king's commandment.

(ii) 'The universality of the contemplated massacre. "Both young and old, little children and women", were to be slain.

(iii) 'The simultaneousness of the contemplated massacre. The bloody work was to be done in one day—the thirteenth day of the twelfth month', G. Rawlinson, '*The Book of Esther*', The Pulpit Commentary, Volume 7, page 75.

<sup>61</sup> 'The Babylonian Talmud refers to "Preceding the affliction with its cure". "After these things", Rabba taught: [This means,] after the Holy One, blessed be He, had created the cure for the affliction. As Reish Lakish taught: The Holy One does not strike at Israel without first creating their healing" (*Megilla* 13b)', Yonatan Grossman, '*Megillat Esther: Timeframe and Chronology (Chapter 1)*', accessed at <https://etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/ketuvim/megillat-esther/timeframe-and-chronology-chapter-1>.

<sup>62</sup> Esther 4. 14.

<sup>63</sup> Esther 3. 15.

<sup>64</sup> See Esther 6. 1-2.

<sup>65</sup> 2 Kings 24. 10-16.

<sup>66</sup> Also called 'Jeconiah', 1 Chron. 3. 16; Esther 2. 6..

<sup>67</sup> 'This is evident from Ezek. 33. 21 where the prophet speaks of his captivity as occurring in the twelfth year before the time when the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, which came in 586 B.C. Again in Ezek. 40. 1, he speaks of an event that occurred in the twenty-fifth year of his captivity, which he says was in the "fourteenth year after that city was smitten". The captivity of 597 B.C. was the time when King Jehoiachin was taken, along with ten thousand captives (2 Kings 24. 11-16). Ezekiel indicates that his call to the prophetic ministry came in "the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity" (Ezek. 1. 2)', Leon J. Wood, '*The Prophets of Israel*', page 355.

<sup>68</sup> Esther 2. 5-6. 'Mordecai and Haman are brought before the reader in the guise of hereditary enemies, the one the descendant of *Kish*, and thus connected with the first king of Israel, the other the descendant of *Agag*, Saul's conquered foe', A. W. Streane, '*The Book of Esther: The Cambridge Bible*', page 19.

<sup>69</sup> Jer. 25. 9; 27. 6; 43. 10.

<sup>70</sup> Esther 2. 7. 'The Hebrew term can have several familial references. Josephus and Jewish tradition assert that Mordecai was her uncle ... The word has a wide semantic range'. Bob Utley, *ibid.*, comment on Esther 2. 7. The Bible text refers explicitly to 'Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai', Esther 2. 15, making Esther his cousin.

<sup>71</sup> Esther 4. 7-14.

<sup>72</sup> Esther 1. 1; 8. 9. 'The same mode and purpose of describing the extent of the empire is found in Xenophon, '*Cyropaedia*' 8. 8. 1: "That Cyrus's empire was the greatest and most glorious of all the kingdoms in Asia—of that it may be its own witness. For it was bounded on the east by the Indian Ocean, on the north by the Black Sea, on the west by Cyprus and Egypt, and on the south by Ethiopia"', A. Berlin, '*JPS Bible Commentary: Esther*'.

<sup>73</sup> Esther 2. 5, 8.



<sup>74</sup> Esther 1. 12.

The king held two banquets. The first lasted 180 days and involved the regional rulers, Esther 1. 3-4. The second lasted for seven days and included everyone, Esther 1. 5.

Consider the following two lengthy quotations:

(1) 'It cannot escape the reader that there are a lot of parties in the story—ten altogether. The parties, first of all, provide the setting and the tone of the book, which is one of feasting and revelry. The parties also help to structure the scenes of the book.

'The book opens and closes with a series of banquets.

'At the beginning, Ahasuerus gives a banquet for the nobility from throughout the empire and then for the residents of Susa. This has its counterpart in the feasting of Purim at the end of the book, which is celebrated by the Jews throughout the empire on 14 Adar and by the Jews of Shushan on 15 Adar.

'In Esther 1. 9, Vashti gives a banquet for the women; in Esther 2. 18, Ahasuerus gives a banquet for Esther. Ahasuerus and Haman party to mark the occasion of Haman's decree (Esther 3. 15) while the Jews party when Mordecai's counter-decree is published (Esther 8. 17).

'At the centre of the plot are Esther's two banquets, the second being the climax of the story. Between these two banquets comes another climactic point—the reversal in which Haman must honour Mordecai.

'More than just a structuring device, the banquet is the setting at which all the major events occur: Vashti loses her queenship at a banquet, Esther is made queen at a banquet, and, most important of all, Esther saves her people at a banquet', A. Berlin, *ibid.*.

(2) 'The banquet (or literally, "drinking occasion") is an appropriate image for a story set in the Persian Empire. The Persians were well known for their love of wine and strong drink. According to both Herodotus (Hist. 1. 133) and Strabo (Geog. 15. 3. 20), the Persians decided the most important matters of state when they were drunk. (Herodotus adds that the decisions would be confirmed when they had sobered up.)

'Any decisions made when one was fully sober were considered suspect, and had to be reconsidered when inebriated. These charges have the tone of slander, but the fact that they were promulgated says much about the reputation of the Persians in this era ...

'The banquets of the opening and closing chapters are both issued by royal decrees: in chapter 1 by Xerxes, but in chapter 9 by Queen Esther and Mordecai. Also, the first banquet of chapter 1 is for the residents of all the provinces, while the second is for the residents of Susa; the first Purim banquet of chapter 9 is for the Jews spread throughout the empire, while the second Purim banquet was for the Jews of Susa', A. Tomasino, *ibid.*.

<sup>75</sup> I have read somewhere that Persian queens were not to appear unveiled in public. If this is true, it is interesting that, on this occasion, the king wished 'to *show* the people and princes *her beauty*', Esther 1. 11.

It is possible that she objected to being paraded before a company of drunken princes, for we are told that 'the royal wine' was 'in abundance', Esther 1. 7, and that, at the time 'the heart of the king was merry with wine', Esther 1. 10—see note 74 (2) above.

Vashti may have tried to preserve her dignity in the face of a group of drunken men who had lost theirs or she may simply have been enjoying a good time in the separate banquet which she had organised for the women, Esther 1. 9. Alternatively, she may have assumed that such a command could only be issued by the king in a drunken state and that, after he sobered up, he would either (i) recognise the unreasonableness of his command or (ii), possibly, forget that he had ever issued it.

Vashti's good judgment in so acting may be hinted at in the analogy between (i) her refusal to come before the king and (ii) Joseph's refusal to the proposition of Potiphar's wife:

(i) For her part, Vashti 'was of handsome appearance' and the king, therefore, desires to bring her. 'But Queen Vashti refused' and is, therefore, banished from the palace.

(ii) For his part, Joseph 'was of handsome form and beautiful appearance' and Potiphar's wife, therefore, desires to seduce him. 'But he refused' and is, therefore, banished from Potiphar's house.

<sup>76</sup> Esther 1. 14-20.

<sup>77</sup> The king clearly felt totally humiliated. He had spent six months displaying the glory and sovereignty of his dominion and now even his own wife refuses to submit to his rule!

<sup>78</sup> Esther 1. 17. Memucan diverts the issue from that of royal authority in a couple of ways:

(i) He presents the issue, not as a matter of a subject who disobeys an order from the king but of a wife disobeying her husband.

(ii) He presents the issue, not as that of a personal insult to the king but that of the general good of the empire.

It is fair to assume that the Persian officials would suffer first, because, in all likelihood, their wives were dining with the queen when the order was given and they would, therefore, witness Vashti's insubordination at first hand. But, Memucan argues, the matter would not stop there, because reports of Vashti's action would quickly spread throughout the entire empire.

That is, Memucan levers the king's marital problem into a national crisis. The truth is that the officials are not worried that Vashti's example will provoke other Persian subjects to disobey the king; they are worried that all the Persian women (and, not least, their own wives) will disparage their husbands.

<sup>79</sup> Esther 1. 18.

<sup>80</sup> Clearly, Memucan was not a eunuch! Contrast the 'seven eunuchs', Esther 1. 10 with the 'seven princes', Esther 1. 14. If truth be told, the seven princes are more concerned about themselves than they are about the king! Memucan hopes that the womenfolk throughout Persia will be so horror-struck when they hear of Vashti's fate that they will not dare disobey their husbands.

<sup>81</sup> Esther 1. 19. I note that, from this point on, Vashti's title of 'Queen' is removed. Previously, she was 'Queen Vashti' (Esther 1. 9, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17); now, in Esther 1. 19 and Esther 2. 1, she is just plain 'Vashti'.

'Let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be repealed', Esther 1. 19. Perhaps Memucan and his colleagues were concerned that the king might later change his mind about Vashti and reinstate her—leaving them to 'carry the can' and to face her anger.

<sup>82</sup> Esther 1. 21. Ironically, Vashti's punishment had the effect of preventing her from ever appearing before the king in the future ('that Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus', Esther 1. 19)—the very thing she had refused to do on this one occasion. ('Queen Vashti refused to come', Esther 1. 12).

<sup>83</sup> Esther 1. 5.

<sup>84</sup> Esther 1. 10-11.

<sup>85</sup> Esther 2. 2-4.

There is a fascinating verbal connection with the story of Joseph:

(i) *Proposal of Joseph* (Genesis 41. 34-37):

'Let Pharaoh act to *appoint officers over* the land

And let them *gather* all the food of the good years that are imminent

... under *the hand of* Pharaoh, and let them *keep* food in the cities

And *the thing was good in* Pharaoh's eyes'.

(ii) *Proposal of Ahasuerus's attendants* (Esther 2. 2-4):

'Let the king *appoint officers over* all the provinces of his kingdom

And let them *gather* every virginal maiden of good appearance

To *the hand of* Hegai, the king's chamberlain, *keeper* of the women

And *the thing was good in* the king's eyes'.

<sup>86</sup> Esther 1. 19. The wording is similar to that of 1 Samuel 15. 28 ('The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbour of yours, who is better than you'). In much the same way that David will be a better king than Saul, Esther will be a better queen than Vashti.

By means of this allusion, we might discern the paving of the way for the repair of Saul's sin. Saul lost his kingdom because he did not wage war in the proper manner against Amalek and Agag. Now, Esther is restored to royal status so as to make good this deficiency. Together with Mordecai (also descended from Saul), she will bring about the downfall of 'Haman, the Agagite'.

<sup>87</sup> Esther 1. 3; 2. 12-16.

<sup>88</sup> Esther 2. 1.

<sup>89</sup> In a vain attempt to avenge his father's earlier defeat at the battle of Marathon.

The four-year gap in the biblical text between the deposing of Vashti (Esther 1. 3) and the crowning of Esther (Esther 2.16) after a purification period of twelve months (Esther 2. 12) matches the period in which Xerxes was away from Persia on his expedition against Greece.

'The second chapter of the book of Esther begins with "After these things". The time frame includes the campaign to Greece, the battle of Thermopylae, the sack of Athens, and the Persian defeat at Salamis', Gordon Franz, *'Thermopylae and the Book of Esther'*.

<sup>90</sup> 'Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia; and the fourth [Xerxes] shall be far richer than they all: and when he is waxed strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the realm of Greece. Then a mighty king [Alexander the Great] shall arise, who shall rule with great dominion', Dan. 11. 2.

<sup>91</sup> Esther 2. 8-17.

<sup>92</sup> 'Fair of form and good to look at', Esther 2. 7 lit. The same had been true of Rachel, Gen. 29. 17, Abigail, 1 Sam. 15. 3, and Bathsheba, 2 Sam. 11. 2.

<sup>93</sup> Mordecai has been criticised for allowing (perhaps even encouraging) his adopted daughter to seek marriage with a Gentile, but there is no evidence that he did so. It is made clear that she was selected as a contestant by government officials, Esther 2. 8 ('gathered ...taken'). The expression 'she was taken into the king's house' is that used of Sarah, Gen. 12. 15 (cf. 'David sent messengers and took her (Bathsheba)', 2 Sam. 11. 4). If anything, Mordecai lamented the fact that she was taken; note his concern about 'what would become of her', Esther 2. 11.

<sup>94</sup> Esther 2. 17.

<sup>95</sup> Esther 4. 14.

<sup>96</sup> 'Appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in Shusan', Esther 2. 3.

<sup>97</sup> Josephus claims that there were four hundred virgins, Flavius Josephus, *ibid.*, Book XI, Chapter 6, Paragraph 2. This is not unlikely since Plutarch ('*Life of Artaxerxes*', 27. 5) reports that Artaxerxes had three hundred and sixty concubines.

<sup>98</sup> 'She obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins, and he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen', Esther 2. 17.

<sup>99</sup> Esther 2. 21. The 'threshold' which these eunuchs guarded was presumably the entrance to the King's private apartments. They were the most trusted watchmen; their treason was, therefore, doubly dangerous.

<sup>100</sup> Esther 2. 21-23. 'When amongst the many intrigues of that Eastern court a plot was set afoot to assassinate the king, news of it leaked out to *Mordecai, of all people in the world*, and thus he was able to establish a claim upon the king's favour', F. B. Hole, '*Coincidence or the Hand of God?*', accessed at ...

[https://www.stempublishing.com/authors/hole/Art/Hand\\_of\\_God.html](https://www.stempublishing.com/authors/hole/Art/Hand_of_God.html).

Just as Mordecai and Esther together were used to foil a plot against the life of their king in chapter 2, so, in later chapters, they are used to foil a plot against the life of their nation.

<sup>101</sup> In 465 B.C.

<sup>102</sup> 'Xerxes actually lost his life through a conspiracy formed by Artabanus, the captain of his guard, and Aspamitras, a eunuch and a chamberlain', G. Rawlinson, *ibid.*, page 55—sources: *Diodorus Siculus*, XI, 69 and *Ctesias, Persica*, 29.

<sup>103</sup> 'The affair was investigated and found to be so', Esther 2. 23a.

<sup>104</sup> Being crucified or impaled, Esther 2. 23b. This was the form of capital punishment inflicted upon political offenders in Persia. 'This was not an unusual method of execution in the Persian Empire; Darius, Xerxes' father, was known to have once impaled 3,000 men', J. A. Martin, '*Esther: The Bible Knowledge Commentary*', page 705.

<sup>105</sup> Esther 2. 22.

<sup>106</sup> Esther 2. 23. 'That Mordecai had gone unrewarded for saving the king's life was a reflection on the Persian king, for whom it was a point of honour to reward his benefactors (*Herodotus* III. 138, 140; V. 11; VIII. 85; IX. 207; Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, I. 138)', C. A. Moore, '*Esther: The Anchor Bible*', vol. 7B, page 64. We have no way of knowing whether, at the time, Mordecai felt in any way aggrieved at the inexcusable omission.

<sup>107</sup> For another benefactor strangely forgotten till the right moment, compare Joseph and the failing memory of the chief butler, Gen. 40. 23; 41. 9.

<sup>108</sup> Esther 4. 8-9.

<sup>109</sup> Esther 8. 11.

<sup>110</sup> See the penultimate comment in note 36 above.

<sup>111</sup> Contrast, 'The whole assembly together was 42,360', Ezra 2. 64, with 'Thus says Cyrus king of Persia ... *whoever is among you of all his people*, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem', Ezra 1. 2-3.

<sup>112</sup> And we can take it that their natural enemies, (the Amalekites, for example) would take advantage of the decree to annihilate them—'young and old, women and children', Esther 3. 13.

<sup>113</sup> 1 Cor. 3. 19; Job 5. 13. 'In 1 Cor. 1. 18-25, Paul had said that the wisdom of God, namely, Christ crucified, is foolishness to the world. Here he made the same point in reverse: the wisdom of the world is foolishness in God's sight', Thomas Constable, *ibid.*, comment on 1 Cor. 3. 19-20.

<sup>114</sup> Esther 1. 19; 8. 8; cf. Dan 6. 8, 12, 15. It seems that Esther herself was unaware of this, Esther 8. 5.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. John 18. 35.

<sup>116</sup> 'Genocide' is the murder of a whole group of people, especially a whole nation, race, or religious group.

<sup>117</sup> Esther 3. 12.

<sup>118</sup> 'In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, they cast lots) before Haman', Esther 3. 7. Haman's decree went out 'on the thirteenth day of the first month', Esther 3. 12—on the eve of the slaughter of the Passover lambs: 'In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at twilight, is the Lord's Passover', Lev. 23. 5.

'Passover, the greatest celebration of deliverance of the Israelites, was celebrated on the fourteenth of Nisan. The edict was written on the thirteenth of Nisan, so it began to be distributed on the fourteenth. Thus, just as the Jews were celebrating deliverance from their great enemy of the past, the Egyptians, they were learning of a new plot from a new enemy', *The IVP Bible Background Commentary, Old Testament*, page 488.

<sup>119</sup> It is also possible that the timing of the casting of lots was chosen for another reason; 'according to the Babylonian religion, the gods met at the beginning of the year to decide men's fate', John Bendor-Samuel, *Esther: New International Biblical Commentary*, page 515.

<sup>120</sup> 'Pogrom' would have been a good word. A 'pogrom' is an organized massacre of a particular ethnic group.

<sup>121</sup> Esther 3. 7. The use of the lot among the Persians is mentioned by Herodotus (iii. 128) and by Xenophon (*Cyropaedia*, i. 6. 44, iv. 5. 55). It was done by means of a small stone die. The term *pur* is not found in the Bible outside of Esther.

<sup>122</sup> 'The contemporary term for this prism was "pur"; derived from an Assyrian word "puru" meaning die or lot;', R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to Old Testament*, page 1095.

Interestingly, archaeologists have discovered at Shushan of all places a quadrangular dice, engraved with the numerals 1, 2, 5, 6: 'Marcel-Auguste Dieulafoy, who excavated at Susa, discovered a quadrangular prism which has the numbers 1, 2, 5 and 6 engraved on its sides', Leon Wood, *Survey of Israel's History*, page 409, note 98.

<sup>123</sup> The casting of Pur was thought to have great power, and, for this reason, the Jews' later deliverance was viewed as a notable victory over it; 'Haman ... had cast Pur (that is, cast lots), to crush and to destroy them', Esther 9. 24.

<sup>124</sup> Esther 3. 7. The month's name itself was ominous—it was the month of 'the threshing floor'!

<sup>125</sup> Esther 3. 7, 12-13.

<sup>126</sup> 'Darius is perhaps best remembered for instituting an advanced highway system throughout the empire, a route traditionally called the "Persian Royal Road." According to Herodotus, the "father of history," this roadway stretched from Susa (in Elam) to Sardis (in Lydia) and was comprised of a total of 111 intermediate resting-stages, passing through some six Persian provinces, and requiring a total of 90 days to travel the entire course of approximately 1,685 miles. Herodotus adds that another three days were required to journey from Sardis to the coast at Ephesus, from which some scholars have deduced that the "Royal Road" may have extended as far as the Aegean coast. At its other end, a road continued from Susa that ran to Persepolis and beyond', B. J. Beitzel, *The New Moody Atlas of the Bible*, page 206.

The historian Herodotus (Book VIII, Paragraph 98) said of the Persian royal messengers, 'Now there is nothing mortal that accomplishes a course more swiftly than do these messengers, by the Persians' skilful contrivance. It is said that as many days as there are in the whole journey, so many are the men and horses that stand along the road, each horse and man at the interval of a day's journey. These are stopped neither by snow nor rain nor heat nor darkness from accomplishing their appointed course with all speed', *Herodotus*, English translation by A. D. Godley, page 97. Herodotus estimated that it would take three months and three days for a message to reach all parts of the empire (Book V, Paragraphs 52-53).

'The Persian system of posts is thus described by Xenophon, who attributes its introduction to Cyrus: "Stables for horses are erected along the various lines of route, at such a distance one from another as a horse can accomplish in a day. All the stables are provided with a number of horses and grooms. There is a post-master to preside over each, who receives the despatches along with the tired men and horses, and sends them on by fresh horses and fresh riders. Sometimes there is no stoppage in the conveyance even at night; since a night courier takes up the work of the day courier, and continues it. It has been said that these posts outstrip the flight of birds, which is not altogether true; but beyond a doubt it is the most rapid of all methods of conveyance by land" (*Cyropaedia*, 8. 6, § 17)', G. Rawlinson, *ibid.*, page 73.

Not quite the speed of an email, but ... !

<sup>127</sup> Esther 1. 1.

<sup>128</sup> Esther 3. 12; 8. 9, both references with a similar Hebrew construction. (*Trivia*: Esther 8. 9 is the longest verse in the Old Testament.)

<sup>129</sup> Prov. 16. 33.

<sup>130</sup> Num. 23. 16 (cf. v. 5), 23. The verse continues, 'now it shall be said of Jacob and Israel, "What has God wrought!"'

<sup>131</sup> Esther 5. 1-3. No doubt Ahasuerus realised that Esther must have been greatly troubled if she risked coming uninvited to the king. He extended the sceptre a second time, Esther 8. 4, but that was to be expected then.

<sup>132</sup> Esther 4. 11; cf. 2. 14. Any infringement of this law carried only one penalty – execution.

<sup>133</sup> See note 32 (iv) above.

<sup>134</sup> Flavius Josephus, *ibid.*, Book XI, Chapter 6, Paragraph 3: 'Now the king had made a law, that none of his own people should approach him unless he were called, when he sat upon his throne and *men, with axes in their hands, stood round about his throne, in order to punish such as approached to him without being called*. However, the king sat with a golden sceptre in his hand, which he held out when he had a mind to save any one of those that approached to him without being called, and he who touched it was free from danger'.

<sup>135</sup> We can understand therefore why Esther wasn't ready to rush in. Although, even after she had been made queen, it remained Esther's practice to obey 'Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him', Esther 2. 10, 20, on this occasion, without actually saying 'no', she registered her firm objection. So, when she did venture in, she did so with her eyes wide open.

Mordecai's answer 'contains a veiled response to Esther's previous chiding: "All of the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces *know*". In response, Mordecai intimates that even if "all the king's servants" know of this law, nevertheless, "who *knows*" if your entire path to the royal throne was not meant for the sole purpose of your activity at this time', Yonatan Grossman, *The Mystery of the Disappearing Servant*, accessed at ...

<https://www.etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/ketuvim/megillat-esther/mystery-disappearing-servant-pivotal-dialogue-between-mordekhai-and>.

<sup>136</sup> Esther 4. 14.

<sup>137</sup> In September 2009.

<sup>138</sup> 'It was nearly three o'clock in the early hours of May 11 1940 before Churchill went to bed. At that moment, he later recalled: "I was conscious of a profound sense of relief. At last, I had the authority to give directions over the whole scene. I felt as if I were walking with destiny, and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial"', Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Finest Hour, 1939–1941*, Volume VI, Part 1, Chapter 16, 'The Tenth of May 1940'.

<sup>139</sup> Esther 3. 12; 8. 9-11. 'On the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, the reverse occurred: the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them', Esther 9. 1.

<sup>140</sup> Esther 4. 16; cf. 'If I be bereaved, I am bereaved', Gen. 43. 14.

'Esther has no prophetic vision or biblical promise to claim for her safety. Without knowing the end of the story, she must decide whether or not [Moses-like, Heb. 11. 25] to identify with God's people. Yet Mordecai's point is clear—Esther's life may potentially be lost if she goes to the king, but it will certainly be lost if she doesn't', B. Jenkins, *For Such a Time as This*, accessed at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/for-such-a-time-as-this/>.

<sup>141</sup> Queen Vashti refuses to come when bidden to the king's banquet; Queen Esther comes unbidden to invite the king to her own banquet.

<sup>142</sup> The tables are turned—it is now Mordecai who carries out Esther's commands; contrast Esther 2. 10, 20.

<sup>143</sup> I guess that we should probably have counselled Esther against fasting herself, reasoning that she would need to appear her best and most attractive. (Compare, 'When you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, of a sad face. For they disfigure (lit. 'corrupt') their faces so that they may appear to men to fast', Matt. 6. 16.)

'Not a word about the perfumes now. Not a word about the sweet odours to prepare herself for the presence of the king. To that she had submitted; it was the king's order; but now, although she does not mention God, it is evident where her heart is. She goes with this most singular preparation, but an admirable one at such a time—fasting—a great sign of humiliation before God', W. Kelly, *Lecture on Esther*, 18 March 1873.

Yet, she 'put on her royal robes' Esther 5. 1. She dressed in her best for this important occasion, and, more to the point, she dressed in her official apparel as queen.

<sup>144</sup> Esther 4. 16. Compare Esther 4. 3, where the Jews fast at the news of Haman's edict.

<sup>145</sup> 'Though prayer is not mentioned, it was always the accompaniment of fasting in the Old Testament, and the whole point of fasting was to render the prayer experience more effective. The reference to the Jews' fasting implies an effort to move God to act on their behalf. Indeed, what would be the point of fasting, if not to demonstrate sincerity before God? In the biblical canon, fasting is almost always accompanied by prayer', A. Tomasino, *ibid.*. See Ezra 8. 23; Neh. 1. 4; Dan. 9. 3; Luke 2. 37; Acts 13. 3; 14. 23, and compare how King Darius fasted while Daniel was in the den of lions, Dan. 6. 18.

<sup>146</sup> 'The "three days, night and day", Esther 4. 16, are not to be reckoned as three times twenty-four hours, but to be understood of a fast which lasts till the third day after that on which it begins; for, according to Esther 5. 1, Esther goes to the king on the third day. Compare the similar definition of time, Jonah 2. 1', Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Volume 3, page 354.

<sup>147</sup> Esther's faith rested entirely in God Himself and not in the beauty which He had given her. Compare Esther's 'for me' with the apostle Paul's prayer requests, Rom. 15. 30; Eph. 6. 19.

<sup>148</sup> Esther 3.12; 4. 16, with Exod. 12. 6-8.

<sup>149</sup> Moses, Aaron and Hur.

<sup>150</sup> 'Moses said to Joshua, "Choose for us men, and go out and fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand". So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed, and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed ... and Aaron and Hur held up his hands', Exod. 17. 9-11.

<sup>151</sup> And, even if God's name does not appear, none the less God's ears were open and He heard.

<sup>152</sup> Esther 2. 17.

<sup>153</sup> Esther 5. 2.

<sup>154</sup> 'This was the sign of acceptance at the Persian court (cf. Herodotus, 1. 99). This sceptre is depicted in several Persian wall paintings and carvings', Bob Utley, *ibid.*, comment on Esther 5. 2.

<sup>155</sup> Esther 5. 1-3. 'Instantly the king held out to her the golden sceptre, which showed that her breach of etiquette was forgiven; and, assuming that nothing but some urgent need would have induced her to imperil her life, he followed up his act of acceptance with an inquiry and a promise', G. Rawlinson, *ibid.*, page 102.

Esther proved true the words of Proverbs 21, 'The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He will', Prov. 21. 1.

The formal title of 'Queen' is used when the king's perspective is in view, Esther 5. 2, and when he addresses her, Esther 5. 3. Otherwise, the narrative refers to her simply as 'Esther'.

<sup>156</sup> 'An Oriental idiom of exaggeration (cf. Esther 5. 6; 7. 2; and Herodotus 9. 109-11, as well as Herod's use of the same idiom in Mark 6. 23), Bob Utley, *ibid.*, comment on Esther 5. 3.

The king didn't mean this literally, any more than Herod Antipas did many years later. There too, as with Ahasuerus's second and third offers, it had been offered at a banquet as a result of the ruler being 'pleased' with a young woman, Mark 6. 22. In the case of Herod, the offer was seized to secure the death of God's prophet; in the case of Ahasuerus, the offer was seized to secure the life of God's people.

<sup>157</sup> Esther 5. 4. 'That I *have prepared*'—how could he refuse? Contrast Esther's later invitation, 'which I *will prepare*', Esther 5. 8.

<sup>158</sup> Esther 4. 15-16.

<sup>159</sup> Esther 5. 7-8.

<sup>160</sup> The following are some of the suggested reasons:

1. She may have hoped that an enjoyable banquet would dispose Ahasuerus to grant her request. But this doesn't explain her second invitation.

2. Herodotus claims that at a Persian banquet, 'it is impossible to refuse any person's request'. In other words, all other things being equal, it was reasonable to assume that (for etiquette's sake alone) Ahasuerus would then accede to her request. But, again, this doesn't explain her second invitation.

3. She may have preferred a more private place to make her request, But, yet again, this doesn't explain her second invitation.

4 That, when the moment came for her to speak her carefully prepared lines, she was too nervous or fearful. But this doesn't explain why, on the first occasion, she had already prepared the banquet to which she then issues her invitation.

5. That she was prompted by some vague and intuitive (God inspired?) feeling that the time was not yet right.

My personal view, as set out in the main text, is that Esther 'patiently, wisely and deliberately did as she did—(i) partly to excite and then to maintain the king's interest and (ii) partly to convey to him that her petition concerned a matter of the utmost importance—that she wasn't presenting it out of some rash, emotional impulse'.

<sup>161</sup> Note also Esther 5. 8: 'let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do tomorrow *as the king hath said*'. That is, Esther is then able to present her request as nothing other than her doing what the king himself had required.

<sup>162</sup> Esther 5. 9.

<sup>163</sup> Esther 5. 9.

<sup>164</sup> Mordecai earlier refused to bow to Haman, Esther 3. 2; now he makes no motion at all to even acknowledge him, Esther 5. 9.

<sup>165</sup> 'He was filled with wrath against Mordecai. Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home', Esther 5. 9-10.

<sup>166</sup> Psa. 76. 10 KJV.

<sup>167</sup> Esther 5. 14.

Haman's wife and friends urged him to make an example of Mordecai by having a gallows 'fifty cubits high' (seventy-five feet high) erected in Susa and impaling him on it in the sight of the entire city, Esther 5. 14.

Today, most building engineers, inspectors, architects and similar professions define a high-rise as a building that is at least 75 feet (23 metres) tall; see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tower\\_block](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tower_block). Haman's 'gallows' was certainly both high-reaching and eye-catching!

<sup>168</sup> Esther 6. 1-3.

<sup>169</sup> Psa. 121. 4.

<sup>170</sup> Literally, 'sleep fled from the king'. No matter how many sheep (or camels!) he counted, he just could not go off. And so there he lies—the master of 127 provinces and yet not the master of half an hour's sleep.

And why was this, we wonder? Is King Ahasuerus worried about something, as King Darius once was? Dan 6. 8. Is his head buzzing with a thousand state problems? Has he eaten something which does not agree with him? We have no idea. What we do know is that 'that night', Esther 6. 1, was the all-important night for Mordecai. And God is never late!

<sup>171</sup> Dan 6. 18 KJV.

<sup>172</sup> Compare (i) the later comment of Ahasuerus's successor, King Artaxerxes: 'the letter that you sent to us has been plainly read before me', Ezra 4. 18, and (ii) the Behustran inscription of Darius I which records that 'it was inscribed and read before me'.

The original implies 'that the reading lasted for a considerable time. The object doubtless was that the continuous sound of another's voice might induce slumber. There is no suggestion in the passage that the king could not himself read', A. W. Streane, *ibid.*, page 19.

But which book? 'The book of records of the chronicles' of the kingdom, Esther 6. 1; Herodotus often referred to the Persian chronicles. Personally, I can imagine more inspiring reading!

But which volume? After all, the king rules 127 provinces. But the volume chosen concerned Shushan itself.

But of what period and which entry? 'It was found written that Mordecai', Esther 6. 2. Yes, the king was read the account of how Mordecai had discovered the assassination plot.

<sup>173</sup> That night, not only did it 'happen' to be the account of Mordecai's action which saved the king's life that is read but it 'happens' also that Haman is available in the outer court of the palace early. The haste of Haman to have Mordecai executed matched perfectly the haste of the king to have him rewarded.

<sup>174</sup> Esther 6. 6-11. I note that Ahasuerus waited patiently to hear Esther's petition, Esther 5. 3-8, but he forestalled Haman who came to present his petition, Esther 5. 14; 6. 6.

It was natural that Haman, after the favour shown him on the preceding day, should assume that he himself must be the person in the king's mind, so he quickly volunteered what to him would be the greatest possible honour imaginable, Esther 6. 7-9. In seeking permission to have Mordecai impaled (a sign and symbol of maximum dishonour), he ends up honouring Mordecai with the highest honour.

The descriptive words that Ahasuerus uses to identify Mordecai ('do even so to Mordecai the Jew', Esther 6. 10) draws attention to exactly that characteristic of Mordecai which antagonized Haman. The king, unknowingly, is pouring salt on Haman's wounds. Haman must have been mortified!

What a reversal! 'The royal robes which the king has worn', Esther 6. 8, 11; the last time Mordecai was in the city square he had been dressed in sackcloth and ashes, Esther 4. 1, 6.

<sup>175</sup> 'Mordecai came again to the king's gate', Esther 6. 12—he returned, that is, to his former position and employment. The high honour now done him was regarded as sufficient reward by the king. But I suspect that, to Mordecai, given that the sentence of death still hung over him and his people, the splendid parade through the city must have seemed an empty pageant.

<sup>176</sup> Esther 6. 11-12. 'His friends evidently realized that unseen forces were maintaining the blessing that they had observed following the Jews ... They saw in Haman's humiliation before Mordecai, the powerful honoured Jew, an omen of even worse defeat to come. The tide had turned', Thomas Constable, *ibid.*, comments on Esther 6. 11-14.

<sup>177</sup> Esther 1. 19, 21; 2. 1.

<sup>178</sup> As Esther viewed matters, if she and her people had been sold as slaves, the situation could have been remedied later. But execution was going too far!

<sup>179</sup> Esther 7. 6.

<sup>180</sup> Esther 7. 7.

<sup>181</sup> Esther 7. 8-10. Clearly, Ahasuerus was mainly influenced in this decision by Esther's impassioned pleas for her people, but also, no doubt, by the fact that he owed his very life to a man from that nation. And now we can understand why it was so important: (i) that Mordecai had not been rewarded at the time that he uncovered the plot to assassinate the king and (ii) that Esther did not make her request before the king's sleepless night.

<sup>182</sup> Esther 6. 8-11. There was 'a series of three things: (1) a royal robe which had been worn by the king; (2) a royal horse which had been ridden by the king and on whose head was the symbol of the Persian crown; and (3) a royal procession, led by the most notable princes, through the streets on this horse with its bedecked rider and a great proclamation', Bob Utley, *ibid.*, comment on Esther 6. 8-9.



<sup>183</sup> As in chapter 6, the high point in chapter 7 is structured around a misperception. This time it is Ahasuerus who misunderstands, mistaking Haman's gesture of pleading for his life before Esther for an attempt to seduce the queen. Haman must have been doubly shocked: first by Esther's true accusation and then by Ahasuerus's false accusation.

It is an appropriate touch, that the villain be punished for something he did not do. The king's misunderstanding is intentional. It gives the king a pretext to punish Haman, because Haman's real wrong, plotting to kill the Jews, had received the king's full endorsement at the time, so how could the king now fault Haman for something he had earlier approved? Persian kings never make mistakes!

'Ravish the queen', Esther 7. 8; literally, 'conquer/subdue the queen'. The king knew full well that Haman had not fallen upon the divan with the intention of assaulting the queen but it suited his purposes to present the situation in this way.

The punishment of impalement for a sexual offense is mentioned by Herodotus: a certain Sataspes had raped a virgin and for this offence King Xerxes ordered that he be impaled', W. T. Wheeler, '*The Geography of Herodotus*', page 557. Not that impalement was a rare occurrence. According to Herodotus Darius I impaled three thousand Babylonians when he took the city of Babylon, an act which Darius himself recorded on his Behistun Inscription', E. M. Yamauchi, '*The Archaeological Background of Esther*'.

The information provided to the king by Harbonah, one of the eunuchs, concerning the gallows which Haman had erected for Mordecai could only have added fuel to the fire. This disclosure could only intensify the king's anger as Harbonah was careful to refer to Mordecai as the one who spoken good on the king's behalf: 'the gallows that Haman has prepared for *Mordecai*, whose word saved the king, is standing at Haman's house', Esther 7. 9. A nice touch! Not only was Haman plotting to kill the very man whom the king delighted to honour but he was also planning to take the life of the man who had saved the king's life!

<sup>184</sup> Esther 7. 10. A petard is a small bomb used for blowing up gates and walls when breaching fortifications.

Shakespeare's phrase, 'hoist with his own petard' ('For tis the sport to have the engineer hoist with his own petard', Hamlet, Act III, Scene IV), is an idiom that means "to be harmed by one's own plan to harm someone else" or "to fall into one's own trap", implying that one could be lifted (blown) upward by one's own bomb, or in other words, be foiled by one's own plan. In biblical terms, 'he who digs a pit, in it he will fall, and he who rolls a stone, on him it will come back', Prov. 26. 27.

<sup>185</sup> Esther 8. 8-12. The personal triumph of Mordecai and Esther over Haman was partially resolved by Haman's execution, but could only be fully resolved by the triumph of all the Jews over all of their enemies. Although the king had set Mordecai and Esther over the house of Haman (Esther 8. 1-2), he had yet to reverse Haman's decree against the Jews, which remained in effect and could not legally be repealed.

Esther therefore boldly ventured into the king's presence a second time, Esther 8. 3-6. This second occasion was accompanied by tears, Esther 8. 3; cf. Esther 7. 3-4.

Ahasuerus was now aware that the people in question were the Jews, Esther 8. 7. It seems clear that, when the scheme had been put to him by Haman, he had not realised this. He had been told only of 'a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king's laws', Esther 3. 8.

Ahasuerus himself specifically referred to Mordecai as 'the Jew', Esther 6. 10 (possibly Mordecai's nationality was recorded in the chronicles which had been read to Ahasuerus the night before) giving no indication that he felt it in any way inconsistent to honour publicly a man who was under sentence of death! We may assume that Haman had been careful to suppress their identity.

<sup>186</sup> Esther 8. 2; cf. Esther 9. 4, 10. 2-3. At the beginning of the story, the king's fury led to the dismissal of his queen and, when his fury abated, he needed a new queen. Now, his fury leads to the impalement of his highest official and, when his fury abates, he needs a replacement for this official. Two Gentile characters, Vashti and Haman, are removed from their positions of power; two Jewish characters, Esther and Mordecai, are exalted to fill these positions. I think it true to say that, of the major characters, only the king's position and status remain unchanged throughout.

<sup>187</sup> Esther does not seem to have appreciated that it was not possible even for the king to reverse his own laws, Esther 8. 5, 8.

<sup>188</sup> Esther 8. 9-17. The second decree which they wrote gave royal sanction, not only for the Jews to defend themselves on the set day but also for them to plunder the goods of their attackers, thereby levelling the playing field, Esther 8. 11; cf. 3. 13.

But we can hardly miss one point of detail. Although the second decree gave the Jews the legal right to spoil their foes, we read on three occasions that at no time did they do so, Esther 9. 10, 15, 16.

And why not? we may ask. For their decision not to enrich themselves at the expense of their enemies could hardly have passed unnoticed in a culture where victors were expected to take the spoil.

No doubt, we find the answer back in 1 Samuel 15. There we read that Saul had been commanded by the Lord to smite the Amalekites and to 'utterly destroy' all that they had, 1 Sam. 15. 3. (To 'utterly destroy' was a technical expression used to describe that which was utterly devoted and consecrated to God, as in the case of Jericho, Josh. 6. 17, 21; 7. 1; 8. 26.) Israel, that is, was to take no spoil from the Amalekites.

But Saul 'disobeyed' and 'rejected' God's word to him, 1 Sam. 15. 19-23, sparing both Agag and the best of the Amalekites' livestock, 1 Sam. 15. 9.

Mordecai and Esther were both descended from the same tribe as Saul, that of Benjamin, Esther 2. 5-7, and, on this day of victory over the Amalekite, they were most careful to see that nobody made the same mistake as the earlier man from Benjamin had done. What a great testimony. Saul had taken spoil from the Amalekites even though he had been forbidden to do so; but the Jews of Persia refused to take any spoil from their enemies even though they were entitled to do so.

<sup>189</sup> Esther 8. 1, 2, 9; 9. 3. The Jews had a great advantage in that Mordecai was installed in the highest office in the kingdom and all the provincial rulers stood in fear of him.

'Xerxes immediately put Haman to death and issued a countermanding decree authorizing the Jews throughout the empire to protect themselves against Haman's evil purge. When the local officials everywhere understood that Xerxes was now in support of the Jews, they joined in the effort to put down the anti-Jewish campaign. And so once more the God of Israel, though never mentioned by name in the book of Esther, bared His mighty arm on behalf of His people', Eugene H. Merrill, *ibid.*, page 502.

Esther made one further, last request—that all these remarkable events should be commemorated each year by the establishment of a special feast, called Purim, Esther 9. 18-32. (The text nowhere claims that God commanded the observance of Purim.)

I enjoy the following anecdote: 'A Soviet Jew was recently asked by a Westerner what he thought would be the outcome if the USSR stepped up its anti-Semitic policies. "Oh, probably a feast!" Asked for an explanation, the Jewish man said, "Pharaoh tried to wipe out the Hebrews and the result was Passover; *Haman tried to exterminate our people and the result was Purim*; Antiochus Epiphanes tried to do us in, and the result was Hannukah!'", William MacDonald, '*Esther: Unique Place in the Canon*', 'Believer's Bible Commentary', page 495.

In the synagogue, on the Sabbath preceding Purim (Shabbat Zakhor), Deut. 25:17-19, and 1 Samuel 15 are read. On the morning of Purim, the reading is Exod. 17. 8-16.

Previously, Susa had been 'thrown into confusion', Esther 3. 15; now, Susa 'shouted and rejoiced', Esther 8. 15b.

<sup>190</sup> Esther 9. 1.

<sup>191</sup> Luke 10. 19.

<sup>192</sup> Esther 7. 6.

<sup>193</sup> 'Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion', 1 Pet. 5. 8; cf. 'the spirit now at work in the sons of disobedience', Eph. 2. 2. There can be no doubt that to no small extent Satan was pulling the strings from behind the curtain.

<sup>194</sup> Some of Satan's more obvious attempts to remove the threat posed by the promised 'Seed of the woman':

(i) Cain's murder of Abel, Gen. 4. 8. 'Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother', 1 John 3. 12.

(ii) The corruption which led to the world-wide flood and to the near extinction of the human race, Gen. 6. 5-7.

(iii) The planned slaughter of all the Jewish male children in Egypt, Exod. 1. 13-16.

(iv) The attempt by Queen Athaliah of Judah to slay all the seed of David, 2 Chron. 22. 10.

The devil was well aware that the Messiah (destined to crush his—the serpent's—head one day, Gen. 3. 15) would come of the seed of David. But, because, in Esther's day, there was no king in Israel, he had lost all trace of that royal line. He had no choice, therefore, but to adopt a 'blunderbuss' approach, and to target the whole of the nation.

<sup>195</sup> Herod the Great will be the devil's tool for his first attempt in the New Testament, Matt. 2. 3-16. Rev. 12. 4 draws aside the curtains to reveal 'the great red dragon' as the real instigator of that attempt.

<sup>196</sup> 'God's ways are behind the scenes; but He moves all the scenes which He is behind', J. N. Darby, 'Synopsis of the Books of the Bible', Volume V (Colossians-the Revelation), page 499.

<sup>197</sup> This is all the more remarkable because the heathen monarch is referred to as 'the king' almost two hundred times in the Hebrew text.

As something of an aside—a note on Acrostics.

It is sometimes claimed that—in two places—the first letters of four words in the text spell out the name of God (YHWH) and that—in two other places—the last letters of four words spell out the same. It is said also that the last letters of four words spell out the generic name of God, 'I am'. (The first acrostic is found in Esther 1. 20, the second in Esther 5. 4, the third in Esther 5. 13, the fourth in Esther 7. 7, and the fifth (the 'I am' acrostic) is in Esther 7. 5.

These five acrostics can be found listed—in Hebrew and English—in E. W. Bullinger's, 'Companion Bible, Appendix 60'; accessible at <https://levendwater.org/companion/append60.html>. The practical application of this is said to be that God is always nearby even though we may not see Him in any obvious sense. (This particular hypothesis is referred to—without any attribution—by W. Graham Scroggie, 'Know Your Bible', page 95, and is quoted by many others. As far as I can find, the earliest exponent of the hypothesis is Bachya ben Asher in the thirteenth century—who identified the first four examples above.)

I am most definitely not convinced!

As has been pointed out, 'there are several difficulties with these proposed acrostics. First is the fact that only two of these occurrences are even spelled correctly, since the others depend on reading in reverse. Furthermore, the phrases in which the Name supposedly appears are not in any way significant, and in fact do not even form complete thoughts. Indeed, they even break up grammatical units. Also, the sequence of the letters Y-H-W-H at the beginning of words is not at all surprising, since these letters are the most common in the Hebrew Bible'.

Note also the following: 'Each of the acrostic configurations of the divine name alleged for Esther occurs frequently throughout the Hebrew Bible ... For example, in applying the same principles to the main exhibit of the divine name, one finds approximately 116 instances beyond Esther, or on average one example every seven to eight chapters of the Hebrew Bible ... Joel, for example, has two instances in its three chapters ... What is more, the divine name is explicitly present in some verses in which such acrostics occur ... the occurrence of the acrostic appears to have no bearing whatsoever on revealing the hidden God of the text, since in many cases God is already explicitly present, and if absent there would be no acrostic. Such acrostics in Esther, therefore, can hardly be taken to reveal the hidden God when they clearly do not do so elsewhere', L. A. Turner, 'Desperately Seeking YHWH: Finding God in Esther's "Acrostics"', accessed at ...

[https://www.academia.edu/6370833/Desperately\\_Seeking\\_YHWH\\_Finding\\_God\\_in\\_Esther's\\_Acrostics](https://www.academia.edu/6370833/Desperately_Seeking_YHWH_Finding_God_in_Esther's_Acrostics).

And, again, 'Limiting ourselves to acrostics on the name YHWH found in the first letters of four consecutive words, we find the following:

A) There are 24 verses in the Hebrew Old Testament which contain the acrostic spelled forwards (i.e. spelled YHWH) and

B) There are also 34 verses in the Hebrew Old Testament which contain the acrostic spelled backwards (i.e. spelled HWHY)'.  
(Source: F. W. Nelte, 'Acrostics on "THWH"', accessed at [https://www.franknelte.net/article.php?article\\_id=126](https://www.franknelte.net/article.php?article_id=126). For those interested, the article lists the 58 verse references.)

<sup>198</sup> Although in the future, the Lord will rule 'in Jerusalem', Isa. 24. 23, there and then, He over-ruled in Shushan—and that for the good of His people.

<sup>199</sup> Col. 1. 15; 1 Tim. 1. 17; Heb. 11. 27.