

## Dickson Old Testament Commentary

# ESTHER

### WRITER

This book is named after the principal character, Esther. Her Jewish name was Hadassah (“myrtle”). Some believe that she was Queen Amestris whom the historian Herodotus mentioned as the queen during the reign of Xerxes (Ahasuerus), the king of Persia. The name Esther means “a star,” which was possibly given to her because of her unique beauty.

There is no indication within the text as to who wrote this book. Even among Jewish scholars there is no agreement concerning the writer. Some have suggested that Mordecai, Esther’s uncle, wrote the book. Augustine thought Ezra was the writer. There are even some who have thought that the source of the material was copied from records of the Persian Empire, and then transcribed as the book by a scribe who lived sometime in the latter part of the 4th century B.C. Regardless of the authorship, the Jews accepted the book as inspired, and thus it became a part of the Old Testament canon of Scriptures.

### DATE

Some have suggested that the book was written before Ezra led the second group of exiles back to Palestine in 457 B.C. Some have also suggested a later date of around 350 B.C., just before the Greeks conquered the Medo-Persian Empire. If the events of the book took place after Ezra’s return with exiles, but before the work of Nehemiah, then the events of the book took place between chapters 6 & 7 of the book of Ezra. The exact date of writing, however, is difficult to determine.

King Ahasuerus in the book was the Persian King Xerxes of the Persian Empire. Ahasuerus was his Hebrew name. The wedding banquet of Esther’s inauguration to be queen took place in the seventh year of Ahasuerus, which would be about 479 B.C. This was four years after the banquet in chapter 1 where Vashti refused to parade herself before the friends of the king, and subsequently was banished.

Ahasuerus (Xerxes) was defeated by the Greeks at Salamis in 480 B.C. The events of the book, therefore, could have taken place upon his return to his palace a defeated king somewhere between 483 to 474 B.C. This would explain his paranoia concerning the slanderous report of Haman that a “certain people” in his realm were planning a rebellion.

### BOOK

Esther was a Jewish orphan girl who eventually became the queen of Persia.

She was brought up in Shushan by her uncle, Mordecai. The book that is named after her is a history of Israel while the Jews were in the lands of their captivity. It is a historical chronicle that centers around the life of two people, and particularly around the fate of all Jews who lived throughout the Persian Empire.

Some have presented various reasons that would question the canonicity of this book. These reasons have been based on the nature of the book. Those who have doubted the authenticity of the canonicity of the book have noted the fact that God is not mentioned in the book. However, there is probably no other book in the entire Bible that portrays the providential work of God in the lives of His people more than the book of Esther. It is also objected that none of the inspired writers of the New Testament refer to the book. But quotations by other inspired writers are not a final verification of inspiration. This is true simply because the writers of the Bible were not required to refer to one another in order to prove their inspiration. Except for the term “fasting,” there are no other religious terms used in the book. But when considering the plan of God to bring the Messiah into the world, the book of Esther gives us a vital historical view of how God providentially preserved the returned exiles in order that they be the foundation upon which He fulfilled His promises to the seed of Abraham. But more important, the book gives us a history of this preservation from the inner court of the Persian Empire, the greatest empire of the world at that time in history.

What the book does offer to the Bible student is a history of the life of two people, Esther and Mordecai, who eventually lived in the inner court of the Persian Empire. The historical facts of the book give us a picture of the social predicament of the Jews who were living as former captives throughout the territory of the Persian Empire. It reveals how they were discriminated against by other cultures who also lived under the domain of the Persian Empire. And for the Jews, it gives the historical background of the feast of Purim, a holiday that was established by the Jews in order to celebrate the providence of God.

One of the things that makes the book of Esther so exciting is the fact that it deals with many themes in reference to the people of God. These themes focus our attention both on the work of God in history and God’s work through those who have committed their lives to Him. Consider these themes: (1) *Godly living*: Though there is no mention of the name “God” in the book, the lives of both Mordecai and Esther exemplify the lives of people who are committed to God and His purposes. What the skeptic would consider coincidences in the lives of these two characters of the book, the believer stands in wonder at how God worked all things together for the good for His people. Their godly desires kept them focused on the purpose of their citizenship in the eternal kingdom of God. (2) *The God of history*: The book clearly fits into the historical survival of the people of God until the coming of the Messiah. Understood in its historical context, the book of Esther is a clear revela-

tion of how God worked in the events surrounding His people in order that they survive to bring about His purpose for their existence. If we stand as spectators in watching the events transpire throughout the lives of Esther and Mordecai, we can come to no other conclusion than God working at this point in history to guarantee the continuation of the seedline of David until the Messiah was born. (3) *Humble service*: God has an eternal purpose (see 4:14). In the submission of the two characters of the book, we see that when one understands God's eternal purposes, he submits his life to His plan. In their submission to His purposes, Mordecai and Esther trusted in God's providential care as they humbly submitted to His work in carrying out His plans. (4) *Obedience in times of conflict*: The book is a story of conflict between good and evil, right and wrong. In this conflict, it is comforting to see the obedience of those who do that which is right, and consequently, see the reward of their choice to do the right thing. Esther chose to do that which was right in obeying Mordecai (2:10,20; 4:8-16), though her choice set her against the law of the land (4:11,18; 5:1,2). Mordecai chose to do right by not obeying a senseless law (3:2-8). These two chose to obey God rather than man, and as a result, they survived in the conflicts and the unrighteous perished (At 4:19,20; 5:29). (5) *The demise of the arrogant*: Haman was a character of great pride and arrogance. The book is a classic description of those who would conduct themselves in such a manner, revealing the end of such arrogant behavior (See 3:5; 5:0-14; 7:8-10). One of the great contrasts of the book is in the difference between the humble nature of Mordecai and the arrogant pride of Haman. In the end, humility won, and pride brought death (See 6:1-3; 8:9-15).

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The events and proclamations of the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi took place during the zenith of the Medo-Persian Empire. Persia, or modern-day Iran, came into world dominance when Cyrus ascended to the throne, and subsequently absorbed the Babylonian Empire.

Little is known of the early development of the Persian people. They possibly migrated into the Mesopotamia region around 1000 B.C. By the 7th century B.C. the Medes were a united power who dominated the Persians. In 612 B.C., the Medes had allied themselves with the Babylonians, and then conquered Nineveh, bringing to an end the Assyrian Empire. The Persians eventually became the dominant power of the region, which power eventually led to the rise of what was called the Medo-Persian Empire. Cyrus the Great was the first recognized king of this empire. Under the leadership of Cyrus, the Babylonian Empire came to an end when Cyrus defeated the Babylonian army of King Nabonidus at Opis. After Cyrus came King Cambyses who conquered territory for the Persian Empire that extended into Egypt. After Cambyses came Darius I Hystaspes (Er 4:24; Hb 1:1; Zc 1:1). He extended

the borders of the Empire westward as far as the Aegean Sea and eastward to the Indus River. Under his reign he organized the Empire into twenty districts, or satrapies. He gave the people in each district some autonomy to govern themselves. Judah was part of the satrapy that was called “Beyond the River” (Er 4:10; Ne 2:7). During his reign he sought to subject the Greeks to Persian control. In 490 B.C. he invaded Greece with a massive army, but was routed by the Greeks at the battle of Marathon. After his death, Xerxes (Ahasuerus), came to the throne of Persia. It was during the reign of Xerxes that another massive Persian army was formed in order to conquer the Greeks. But this campaign turned into a military disaster for the Persians when a small fleet of Greek ships defeated the Persians in the bay of Salamis, near Athens. It was during the reign of Xerxes that the story of Esther took place. There was a great deal of national drama that was affecting the nation, and in many ways this drama is reflected in the events that took place in the capital of Persia, even to the palace into which Esther was called.

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### The Ascension Of Esther

(1:1 – 2:23)

**Outline:** (1) Rejection of Vashti (1:1-22), (2) Selection of Esther (2:1-23)

### Chapter 1

#### REJECTION OF VASHTI

**1:1-9** The history of Esther begins with the setting of how she became queen of the greatest world empire of that time. Ahasuerus (Xerxes) reigned from 486 to 465 B.C. **Shushan:** Or, Susa. **The powers of Persia and Media:** This six-month feast was probably a regrouping of the leaders of the Persian Empire in order to reassess their military position in reference to threats against the Empire that existed at this time in reign of Xerxes. **Couches were of gold and silver:** The historian Herodotus mentioned these eloquent furnishings in the palaces of Persia. Many archaeological discoveries have been made of this area of the world that reflect the grandeur of the Persian

Empire. **Drinking was not compulsory:**

It seems that some of the leaders refrained from drinking alcohol in order to maintain their composure. Every feast as this was political, and thus some of those who were invited wanted to use the occasion for politics. **The queen also made a feast:** It was not the custom that the woman participate in the feast that was conducted by the king and his men. Therefore, the queen conducted a parallel feast for the wives of the leaders.

**1:10-12** The intoxicated king made an irrational demand on the queen, whom, he supposed, would on his command parade herself immodestly before the men of the king’s feast. **Queen Vashti refused:** She certainly knew the consequences of her refusal. At least she knew that there would be some consequences to pay for refusing to obey the king. We would thus accredit Vashti with the moral stature of all those women who would refuse to allow themselves to be objects

of immoral thought by parading themselves before others.

**1:13-22 Chamberlains:** These were eunuchs of the king's court who served the royal family. ***Men who knew the times:*** These would be the astrologers of the king's court who gave advice to the king. They possibly took advantage of the situation in order to maintain the submission of the women throughout the Empire. Memucan's answer was based on the belief that the example of the queen would encourage women throughout the Empire to show contempt for their husbands. However, there may have been some personal drama playing itself out in the inner court of the royal palace. There may have been some personal contention between the king and the queen, with the astrologers taking advantage of the situation in order to advance their beliefs. It would appear that they had a falling out with the queen before this event, and thus they took advantage of the opportunity to have her removed from the court. For some reason more than what was stated resulted in the advisors giving advice that the queen be banished from the presence of the king.

## Chapter 2

### SELECTION OF ESTHER

**2:1-4 He remembered Vashti:** It seems that there may be some remorse expressed here on the part of the king. But in his drunken stupor he had signed the decree to have her banished, and thus could not have her recalled to her former position. It is possible that after this feast of military personnel, Ahasuerus (Xe-

rxes) took the Persian army on a military campaign against the Greeks for three to four years. The Persians were defeated at Salamis in 480 B.C. and again at Plataea in 479 B.C. Upon his return to Shushan, the events recorded in verse 16 are the beginning of the drama that took place in the royal court concerning Esther.

**2:5-11 Mordecai ... Kish:** Kish was the great grandfather of Mordecai. He had been taken with the original captives who went into the Babylonian exile in 597 B.C. This was the conquest of Jerusalem during which Jeconiah, the king of Judah, was also taken into captivity. The events of Esther, therefore, took place almost 100 years after the initial captivities of Jews from Judah. Both Mordecai and Esther, as well as their parents, were born in captivity. ***Fair and beautiful:*** She must have had a unique beauty in the sense that she drew the attention of people. She was of such a demeanor that Hegai, the chief chamberlain, or eunuch, preferred her above all the other young maidens who were brought from throughout the territories of the Empire. Considering the fact that she was a Jew who had been brought up with the morals of Mordecai, we would conclude also that her spiritual demeanor was greater than the Gentile maidens of the Persian Empire. ***House of women:*** Or, the harem. ***Not revealed her people:*** The Jews were not culturally favored by the Persians. Though some of the Jews had been in the territory of their original captors for about 100 years, they still suffered from the prejudice of the people of

the regions in which they were living. Knowing that this prejudice existed, and that most of the Jews would remain in the land of their former captors until the coming of the Messiah, God was here working behind the scenes in order to bring some relief to His people in exile. The book of Esther is a history of how the Jews were able to deliver themselves from the conspiracy of Haman, and thus become more prominent in the Persian Empire. By the time of Nehemiah, Nehemiah was in the king's court, and eventually was appointed a governor of Judah. We would assume that this took place because Esther became the queen of the Persian Empire in order that the Jews gain more respect throughout the Empire.

**2:12-18** Before the young maidens went before the king, who was probably away from the royal palace at this time, they were under the care of the royal court for one year. They were given the clothes and cosmetics they desired by which they prepared themselves to be presented before the king. Esther wisely submitted to the directions of Hegai, the king's chamberlain. She allowed him to make the choices as to how she would present herself before the king. The result was that Esther was immediately favored by the king. In order to gain the acceptance of the people, the king had a great banquet. He also reduced the taxes of the people.

**2:19-20** *Esther followed the command of Mordecai:* The great character of Esther was revealed by the respect she had for Mordecai. Even while designated as the queen of the greatest world em-

pire at the time, she still respected and obeyed the one who took care of her in her youth. The maturity of youth is manifested in their respect for their elders.

**2:21-23** The plot to assassinate the king laid the foundation for what later became of Mordecai. The discovery of the plot by Mordecai was almost coincidental. However, when considered with the theme of what eventually happened in the life of Esther and Mordecai, we understand that God was working in the lives of these two people in order to bring about a deliverance of the Jews in their land of captivity. Since the deliverance from the proposed genocide of Haman in the near future came during the time when Esther was the queen, we would assume that God was seeking to relieve the Jews in captivity of some of those who were greatly prejudiced against them. Since the deliverance was throughout the Empire, we would assume that God was focusing on the preservation of the returned remnant in the land of Judah.

**Hanged:** From the archives of the Persian Empire, people were actually impaled, and then their corpses were hanged on a tree for public exhibition. In the events of this history, the ten sons of Haman were first killed with the sword, but afterward their bodies were hanged on the gallows of their father (9:10-14; compare Dt 21:22,23; Ja 8:29; 10:26; 1 Sm 31:8-10; 2 Sm 4:12; 21:9,10).

### **The Deliverance Of The Jews**

**(3:1 – 10:3)**

**Outline:** (1) Conspiracy of Haman (3:1-15), (2) Mordecai persuades Esther (4:1-

17), (3) Esther exposes Haman (5:1 – 8:17), (4) Deliverance of the Jews (9:1-17), (5) The feast of Purim (9:18-32), (6) Advancement of Mordecai (10:1-3)

### Chapter 3

#### CONSPIRACY OF HAMAN

**3:1-6 Haman ... the Agagite:** We can assume why Haman despised the Jews since he was a descendant of the Amalekite King Agag (See 1 Sm 15:8,33). Since Israel had the mandate from God to destroy all the Amalekites because of their mistreatment of Israel immediately after the nation came out of Egyptian captivity, Haman devised a plan to do the same to them. His was a plan of revenge for his forefathers. **Mordecai did not bow:** Because he knew God's desire that the Amalekites should have been annihilated from history because of their grievous sin in reference to His chosen nation, Mordecai would not manifest any submission to Haman. In his mind, God's mandate that the Amalekites be obliterated from history still stood, regardless of the high ranking of Haman. **Whether Mordecai's words would stand:** They spoke to Haman to see if he would endure the conduct of Mordecai. **Laying hands on Mordecai alone:** Haman's grudge was not simply against Mordecai, but against all the Jews. It would seem that not only did Mordecai refuse to pay homage to Haman, but all the Jews likewise did not submit. As the second most powerful person in the Persian Empire, Haman thus sought how he might alleviate from the Empire a race of people he despised. But not only did his scheme

fail, similar schemes of every government that would seek to do the same to the Jews throughout history have also failed.

**3:7-9 A certain people:** Haman planned his genocide of the Jews by deceiving the king with slanderous words about the Jews. We must understand the king's willingness to believe Haman in the context of the recent defeat that Ahasuerus (Xerxes) had experience by the Greeks. Ahasuerus was probably still feeling the humiliating defeat of his army by the small forces of the Greeks at Salamis. If there were any threat of rebellion in the Empire, he wanted to squash it immediately. **Among the people in all the provinces:** This statement is significant in view of the fact that at this time in history the Persian Empire included all the former territories of the Assyrians and Babylonians, the territories to which the Jews were taken into captivity. The "certain people" (the Jews) who were scattered throughout the Persian Empire included all twelve tribes of Israel. Concerning all the returns of the Israelites from captivity, therefore, the Bible student must clearly understand that a remnant of this "certain people" (all twelve tribes of Israel) returned to the land of promise. God did not fail in His promise that if they repented, a remnant of all twelve tribes would be allowed to return to the land of promise. **They cast Pur:** Haman knew that he could talk the king into following his murderous scheme against the Jews. Before he went to the king, therefore, he cast lots in order to determine the date for the genocide. The casting of the lots determined

that the twelfth month would be the time of the genocide. This was eleven months from the time they cast the lots. ***Their laws are different:*** Though living in the land of their former captors for almost 100 years by the time this statement was made, the Israelites maintained their obedience to the commandments of God. They had been taken into captivity because they had rejected the commandments of God (Hs 4:6). But in captivity, they repented and were restored by their obedience to the word of God. ***I will pay 10,000 talents:*** This was almost two-thirds the annual income of the Empire from taxes and tribute. We must not think that Haman himself would come up with this amount of money from his own resources. His plan was to confiscate the property of the Jews after the genocide. Whether the king realized this, we are not told. It was a law of the land that the state could confiscate the possessions of traitors. If he knew the plan for payment, then this might help us understand why Ahasuerus agreed to such a murderous scheme in the first place. This also helps us to understand that while in the land of their former captors, the Israelites were not idle and impoverished. By this time in their history they were functioning well within the economy of the Persian Empire. They were financially blessed in order that they might continue to support the return of the exiles to the land of Palestine. The first exiles had returned almost 100 years before, and Ezra's group returned somewhere around the time of the events of the book of Esther. Those Jews who stayed in the land of the cap-

tors financially helped those who returned to Judah. It may have been this great financial strength of the Jews throughout the Persian Empire that caused Haman to be jealous of the Jews.

### **3:10-15 *The silver is given to you:***

We are not told if Haman suggested this in his discussions with the king, or if this was the king's idea. Whatever the case, the great amount of silver the Jews possessed was going to be confiscated by Haman. Of that which was to be confiscated, 10,000 talents was going to be given to the state. ***The king's ring:*** This was the signet ring that was designed in a way that a stamp could be made on decrees, which stamp made the decrees official. In giving the ring to Haman, the king was relinquishing the sovereignty of the Empire to Haman to carry out his scheme. ***Shushan was perplexed:*** Or, the people were in confusion.

## **Chapter 4**

### **MORDECAI**

#### **PERSUADES ESTHER**

**4:1-3** After the decree for the genocide of the Jews went throughout the Empire, Mordecai's actions portrayed the feelings of the Jews. They had done nothing to deserve what was coming from the state. In order to manifest his mourning, he did what was customary among the Jews, that is tear his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes. This action was a declaration to everyone of the great consternation and confusion that existed among the Jews.

**4:4-9 *Show it to Esther:*** The queen did not know of the decree that had gone

out. Since such legal matters did not pertain to the women of the kingdom, Haman and his men acted immediately in order to carry out the conspiracy against the Jews, though the day of genocide did not come for several months. Thus Mordecai had to inform Esther about the matter when he sent Hatach back to her with the news of what was going to happen.

**4:10-17 Who is not called:** The law was that no one could approach the king without the king's invitation. If one sought to approach the king without an invitation, he was to be killed. This was a defensive measure for the protection of the king. It was to prevent assassinations. The normal procedure was that the king, through his guards or another representative, often his cupbearer, would invite someone into his presence. In this way the royal scepter was extended to a visitor. **Do not think:** Because Esther also was a Jew, she would not escape the genocide. Of course, Haman did not know that Esther was a Jew. If he had known, he would certainly not have schemed against the Jews. **Relief and deliverance will arise:** Mordecai's faith was here expressed. He knew that God would deliver his people from this senseless scheme of Haman. If Esther did not take a stand, God would work out another means by which to deliver His people. We must keep in mind that by this time thousands of Jews had returned to Palestine to rebuild the temple and walls of the city of Jerusalem. Judea fell within the realm of the Persian Empire. Therefore, the genocide would affect Jews as

Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Nehemiah who were ministering somewhere in the Persian Empire at this time. Men as Sanballat and Tobiah in Judah would be given the authority to attack the Jews in Judah (See comments of Ne). Though Jews as Mordecai had not returned to Palestine with men as Ezra, Mordecai and all Jews knew that it was the desire of God that the nation of Israel exist for the coming of the Messiah. **Fast for me:** The fasting and prayer was the manifestation of their faith in the providence of God. Though God is not mentioned in the book, all things that pertain to the work of God in the lives of His people are clearly revealed. In times of distress, the peoples' fasting and prayer was a proclamation of their faith that God continue to work among His people. **If I perish, I perish:** As in all instructions that came from Mordecai, Esther was obedient to her uncle who had brought her up from childhood. She was willing to risk her life for the life of Mordecai, and the rest of the Jews.

## Chapter 5

### ESTHER EXPOSES HAMAN

**5:1-8** Esther was taking her life into her own hands when she entered the inner court of the palace. She entered in a way that was not threatening, and thus the guards did not take action against her. She stood in a conspicuous place where she could be seen by the king. When seen by the king, she was invited into the presence of the king. The king may have found Esther's beauty irresistible, and thus she was drawn to him by her pre-

sentation. But we would conclude that God answered the prayer and fasting for three days by the people that she be given a hearing before the king. **My petition and my request:** The wisdom and good judgment of Esther was manifested in how she answered the king concerning her desires. We would not expect her to rush in and present the pleas of the people who were to be killed in the scheme of Haman. Instead, she wanted Haman in the presence of the king when the truth was revealed. In order to accomplish this, a banquet had to be prepared, which preparations were already in progress when Esther stood before the king on this first occasion. She assumed that she would receive a positive answer to her request that the king attend a banquet.

**5:9-14** Haman certainly thought it special to be personally invited to a banquet that involved only himself and the king and queen. We can only imagine his overwhelming excitement about what was to come. However, on his way from the palace, he again encountered Mordecai who would not bow in his presence. His inflated ego was crushed every time he came into the presence of Mordecai. **Let a gallows be made:** Zerech, Haman's wife, was certainly caught up in the excitement of Haman, for she also would profit from any exaltation of Haman in the Empire. In order to soothe the consternation of her husband concerning Mordecai, she suggested the means by which Mordecai would be put to death (Compare 1 Kg 21:1-16). **Fifty cubits high:** This is about 75 feet (about 23 meters). The tremen-

dous height was to make Mordecai's hanging seen by everyone in Shushan. Haman wanted a public sign to everyone who would defy Haman.

## Chapter 6

**6:1-3** **The king could not sleep:** It could have been that God was now at work in reference to all parties concerning the conspiracy of Haman. In order to prepare the mind of the king to give an immediate command that his prime minister be hanged, we would assume that God disturbed the sleep of the king. The mention of the sleepless night in this context leads us to believe that God caused the sleeplessness. God wanted the king to read about Mordecai, whom the king would later discover was a Jew. The king's normal procedure to overcome sleeplessness was to have read before him the chronicles of the kingdom, which reading was certainly boring. Nevertheless, it would have its intended effect, and thus allow the king to fall asleep. But in this case, a valiant deed was recalled by the king. Mordecai had not been rewarded for his act of loyalty in reference to the king. He had saved the king's life by thwarting the assassination scheme of Bigthan and Teresh (2:21). When he later discovered that Mordecai was a Jew, then he would conclude that the Jews were actually loyal to the king.

**6:4-9** Haman had come early in the morning in order to get the king's permission to hang Mordecai. For this reason he was in the court. But before he could initiate his plan, he was summoned by the king, and thus one of the greatest

turns in events in the Bible started to be unveiled. From the time the king gave the order to Haman to honor Mordecai with the honor that was suggested by the presumptuous Haman himself, the deliverance of the Jews began. We can only imagine the shock that came to Haman once he heard that he was to bow down and pay homage to Mordecai. ***The royal apparel:*** Wearing the king's clothing manifested the king's favor of the one who was presented before the people (See 1 Sm 18:4; 2 Kg 2:13,14; Is 61:3,10; Zc 3; Mk 5:27).

**6:10-14 Haman quickly went to his house mourning:** The tables had been turned. Haman sought to oppress the downtrodden. But God seeks to raise them up (See 1 Sm 2:8; Rv 3:8,9). ***Mordecai came again to the king's gate:*** All the honor that was given to Mordecai did not change his humble character. Once all the parade was over, he went back to the king's gate. All the glory that was given to him did not change his life. ***You will not prevail against him:*** Zeresh and the wise men who stood with Haman, those with whom he assuredly schemed to murder the Jews, took what had happened as an omen. The omen was that Haman would surely fall before Mordecai. While they were still speaking, the judgment of God was being carried out against one who had thought to destroy the work of God by destroying His people.

## Chapter 7

**7:1-6 Banquet of wine:** These were special banquets. The king again asked

for what the queen requested. It was the first time that she revealed that she was a Jew. Not only was the revelation of her heritage revealed to the king, but also to Haman. The banquet, therefore, became an occasion of astonishment, anger and horror. The king was astonished that his beautiful queen was one of the people who would be destroyed in the genocide planned by Haman. He was astonished that it was a Jew, Mordecai, who saved his life from an attempted assassination. It was an occasion for his anger at Haman for developing such a scheme. And it was an occasion when Haman was stricken with terror by his immediate sentence of death. ***We are sold ... to be destroyed:*** Esther said that it would be fine to be sold into captivity. They were experiencing the social position as a lower class of bondage people in the Persian Empire. But in this case, they were sold into destruction by the promise of payment by Haman of 10,000 talents silver. Esther's reply to the king made it clear that the king had been deceived into carrying out a plot that would lead to the destruction of his beautiful queen.

**7:7-10** The anger of the king was against Haman. He realized that he had been treacherously led into a scheme that would include the death of his beloved queen. And when Haman learned that Esther was a Jew, he immediately realized that he was in serious trouble, especially seeing the king storm out of their presence in anger. The fact that the king arose from the table and departed in anger meant that someone was going to die. ***Will he force the queen:*** It was custom-

ary that no one would be left in a room alone with the queen. But knowing that his death was imminent, Haman fell before the queen's couch in order to plead through her for mercy from the king. But when the king saw the posture of Haman in reference to the queen, he thought Haman was making an immoral attack against the queen. ***Covered Haman's face:*** This was the sign of an official arrest and sentence of death. ***They hanged Haman:*** The irony in the story was that all the evil that Haman had planned for another came back on him. He reaped what he had sown.

### Chapter 8

**8:1-6 *The house of Haman:*** As was the custom of the time, the possessions of a traitor were confiscated by the state. In this case, the possessions of Haman were given to the one he had wronged. Esther then gave the house of Haman to Mordecai, signalling to the king that she desired that Mordecai be exalted to the position that Haman had formerly enjoyed. Mordecai was subsequently given second in command in the Persian Empire.

**8:7-17 *Seal ... may not be reversed:*** The death sentence to the Jews could not be changed because it was sealed with the king's signet ring. The only way to spare the Jews was to issue another decree that would allow the Jews to fight back. This decree also had to be sealed with the king's signet ring. **127 *Provinces:*** The genocide decree was not simply a local event. It went throughout all the Persian Empire, which included

Judah where the original returnees had gone in order to rebuild the temple and restore the altar sacrifices. Thus a second decree had to cover the same regions, that is the entire Persian Empire. ***Sivan:*** This was eight months before the first decree was to be carried out. This decree was immediately drafted, sealed and sent throughout the Empire. The result was a victory for the Jews. ***People ... became Jews:*** The deliverance of the Jews was so spectacular that many were evidently persuaded that the God of the Jews was working for their survival. At least they understood that the Jews were now in favor with the king of the Empire, for they all learned that the queen was a Jew. The result was that a great many people became proselytes.

### Chapter 9

#### DELIVERANCE OF THE JEWS

**9:1-17 *Helped the Jews:*** Only those who were most prejudiced against the Jews dared to counter the decree of Mordecai that allowed the Jews to defend themselves. The officials of the Empire actually aided the Jews in defending themselves against their cultural enemies. With this help from the civic officials and army leaders, it is easy to understand how the Jews were able to overcome those who hated them. We must not assume that the hate of Haman for the Jews was the attitude of all the citizens of the Empire. The fact that others helped the Jews to survive indicates that Haman had a personal vendetta against the Jews. His hate was not copied by others who possibly understood the true

reason why he was trying to genocide the Jews from among the people. In the capital of Shushan, 800 of the enemies of the Jews died. This included the ten sons of Haman. Their bodies were displayed on the gallows that were previously prepared by their father for the hanging of Mordecai. We must understand that the Jews had been placed in a situation where they had to fight for their lives. Fathers had to take up arms in order to defend their homes. ***They did not lay their hand on the spoil:*** The fact that it is mentioned in the text that the Jews did not plunder those they overcame, is evidence of the fact that this was not a battle that would prosper them materially. It was a self defense struggle for their own survival. Who received the spoil is not revealed. We only assume that the spoil went to the Empire. We must always keep in mind that it was in the providence of God that the Jews survive until the coming of the Messiah. In this particular incident in history, the interest of God would have been on the Jews who were living in Judah at the time the decree of genocide went out to all the Persian Empire. Judah was included as one of the 127 provinces, and thus the existence of the returned remnant of Jews in the region was at stake. God's purpose was that the nation of Israel exist at the time of the coming of the Messiah in order that the world know that He had fulfilled all His promises to the seed of Abraham. We would conclude, therefore, that the book of Esther was included in the canon of Old Testament Scriptures in order to reveal to us how God continued to work with

Israel in captivity in order to protect His chosen people until the arrival of the Messiah. He preserved them for a remnant that would return to the land of promise.

### THE FEAST OF PURIM

**18-32:** *A day of feasting and rejoicing:* In the other provinces the Jews assembled and won their victories in one day, the thirteenth day. But in Shushan they assembled and fought for two days for deliverance. In both locations the quick victory was a sign that God was truly fighting for the Jews for their survival. We must not forget that the survival of a remnant of the Jews was necessary in order that the promises made to the fathers be fulfilled in the coming Messiah and Savior of the world. The book of Esther is not simply a book for modern Jews to read and rejoice over on the day of Purim. It is a book that plays a very important role in the Christian's understanding that God was providentially preserving the seedline of David in order that the Messiah and Savior of the world be born into the world in fulfillment of the promises that were made to the fathers (See Gn 12:1-4).

If the promises were not fulfilled, then God would be found a liar to the fathers. Mordecai wrote another decree and sent it throughout the land that the fourteenth and fifteenth of the month Adar would be a time of celebration. This time would correspond to February/March according to our calendar. It would be a time of celebrating the deliverance of the Jews from their enemies.

Purim thus became a holiday of the Jews throughout their generations, though the day was not a date set forth in the law. The feast of Purim was a day of rejoicing and manifestation of thanksgiving by the giving of presents to the poor and friends. The feast defines the theme of the book of Esther (See 3:7; 9:24ff). Though not a part of the Old Testament law, the feast became a very significant celebration for the Jews. It is mentioned in the apocryphal books (*Additions to Esther* 10:10-13; 2 *Maccebees* 15:36). There is no reference to the feast in the New Testament. Some have supposed that the feast mentioned by John in reference to Jesus' journey to Jerusalem in John 5:1 was Jesus' observance of the feast of Purim. But this view should be rejected since there is no emphasis on the feast in the New Testament, neither is there any mention that the feast was an occasion for the Jews to journey to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the feast of Purim has been a precious feast of celebration that has been enjoyed by the Jews throughout their history. Because of various persecutions the Jews have gone through throughout the centuries, the book of Esther has been the symbol of encourage and survival for the Jews. For the Christian, the events of the book of Esther remind us that God was working in history in order to bring about His purpose for the existence of the nation of Israel. That purpose was to bring the Savior into the world through the seedline of Abraham.

## Chapter 10

### THE GREATNESS OF MORDECAI

**1-3:** The greatness of Esther is found in the greatness of Mordecai. In her time of trial when she was to take a stand for that which was true, it was Mordecai who gave her courage to go before the king. Though there is no mention of God in the book, the lives of these two heroes of faith certainly portray the life-style of the godly. It is as if the writer of the book wants us to sit back and deduct from their behavior that God was certainly working in the scheme of things. If this was indeed the purpose of the writer in making no mention of the faith of both Mordecai and Esther, then we would conclude that he has accomplished his purpose. The writer assumes that we have the rest of the history books of national Israel, and thus, he wants us to fit Esther and Mordecai into the grand plan of God to preserve His people, the seedline of Abraham, in order that we conclude that He is faithful to His promises. The book closes by giving credit to Mordecai for the origin of Esther's strength. We would conclude that Mordecai's strength originated from His faith in the God who works in the lives of His people. Because Mordecai remained true to this principles, he, as Daniel and his friends, was exalted in the kingdom in order to continue his influence of the king and the destiny of the people of God. Even in these closing verses of the book Mordecai does not let his greatness in the King's court change his character. He remained

true to his principles. Great men are identified by their willingness to maintain their principles regardless of the social status in which they find themselves. Great men of God do not let society form or change their principles. They seek to change society through their principles. Their strength is found in God, and thus,

when society goes wrong, they stay close to God. They remain a beacon of hope in times of despair, as Mordecai became such at a crucial time in the history of Israel. Throughout the history of the people of God, there will always be the need for people as Esther and Mordecai to lead our way.