Project: Esther Overview

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1. INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

We know that the book of Esther is rarely preached and rarely taught. Yet of all the books in the Bible, Esther is the only one to get the title, in Judaism, of “The Scroll” (see section 12.1 below). This gives it special emphasis, similar to the title, in Hebrew, of the Song of Solomon, which is “The Song of Songs” (taken from the first verse, and meaning the “best” song).

Jobes comments on how Christians throughout church history have struggled with this book:

Because of the absence of religious values and the presence of sensuality and brutality, the book of Esther has posed a problem for interpreters throughout its history. For the first seven centuries of the Christian church, not one commentary was produced on this book. As far as we know, John Calvin never preached from Esther nor did he include it among his commentaries. Martin Luther denounced this book together with the apocryphal 2 Maccabees, saying of them, “I am so great an enemy to the second book of Maccabees, and to Esther, that I wish they had not come to us at all, for they have too many heathen unnaturalities.”

And here’s a great quote from Robert Gordis (his commentary on Esther):

Anti-Semites have always hated the book, 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 the Bergen-Belsen wrote the Book of Esther from memory and read it in secret on Purim. Both they and their brutal foes understood its message. This unforgettable book teaches that Jewish resistance to annihilation, then as now, represents the service of God and devotion to His cause.

2. KEY QUESTIONS

This section is not about the key questions that we ask of Esther (what is the theme, date, etc.) but what are the questions asked and answered by the book of Esther.

For instance, the key question of the book of Romans might be “What is the gospel?” or “What is the mission of the church?” One of the questions of the book of Matthew is, “What is the church and how is it supposed to function?” (a question answered by chapter 18). Or the key question of the book of Job might be, “How should I respond when I am in the dark as to the reason or cause of my suffering?”

Michael Fox suggests these as some key questions asked and answered by the book of Esther:

How can Jews best survive and thrive in the diaspora?

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What is the nature of the Gentile state?
What must Jews do in times of crisis?
What is the nature of the Jewish community and exile and how does (and should) it work?
How do men and women treat each other?
Where do we see God?

3. BIBLIOGRAPHY

3.1 COMMENTARIES

Berlin, Adele.  

The real worth of Berlin’s commentary is in the Introduction (pp. i-lxi), most of which is spent on literary analysis. Aside from some detailed comments on general issues in literary analysis like plot and characterization, she focuses on aspects in Esther like comedy, satire, and hyperbole. Though there are some aspects of this commentary that are not conservative (she sees the book of Esther as fictional), again the literary analysis makes this one of the top commentaries that authors (other commentators and authors of journal articles) interact with.


Bush, Frederic.  
1996  Ruth/Esther. WBC. Dallas: Word. (xiv + 514 pages)

Bush’s commentary has all the typically parts associated with a Word Commentary. That is, for each passage: (1) a bibliography section before the translation section, with textual notes following the translation section; (2) a “Form/Structure/Setting” section that is usually one page; (3) a “Comment” section that proceeds verse-by-verse through the passage and is several pages; and (4) an “Explanation” section that is usually several pages. The strength of this commentary, again as with most WBC’s, is in the bibliography and notes on the text itself (textual criticism, syntactical notes on Hebrew phrases, etc.). This is definitely a technical/scholarly commentary and not one that spends time on devotional or applicational aspects. As an example, in the Introduction there is a fair amount of discussion on the process in which the book (the text) took shape, that is, early versions and later editing and redaction.

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Day, Linda.  

Day is not an evangelical interpreter. As two examples, (1) she sees the story as fiction; and (2) she sees the book as concerned with “minority survival,” and thus sees application to gay rights movement. However, she engages in helpful literary analysis throughout the commentary. Though this may not be a technical commentary, due to not working in Hebrew and Aramaic very much, this is still a scholarly commentary and certainly not a devotional one. Each passage examined has three sections: (1) Literary Analysis; (3) Exegetical Analysis (this is more cultural, historical, and thematic and not syntactical); and (3) Theological and Ethical Analysis.


Jobes, Karen H.  

[NOTE: In all four sermons by Tim Keller, see below, this is the only commentator he mentions by name, and he doesn’t just mention Jobes in passing, he has high praise for her commentary.]

Many of the volumes in this series (The NIV Application Commentary) are a kind of middle ground between technical and devotional commentary, and Jobes is a good example. They are not technical in the sense of dealing with biblical languages much (just here and there). However, most of them do very much deal with historical and cultural background, and have a surprisingly good interaction with other bibliography. And they do, occasionally, mention biblical languages (especially in doing word studies). Again, Jobes is a stellar example of this middle ground. She interacts with other commentators, and does a lot with historical/cultural background. But this is not a technical commentary. As the word “application” in the series title indicates, there is a real devotional aspect to the series, a look at current events and our world and how the biblical book speaks to our situations. In fact after the commentary portion of each section, each section ends with a “Bridging Contexts” portion and a “Contemporary Significance” portion.

Levenson, Jon D.  

Though Levenson does not deal much with Hebrew, like Day’s commentary this is still a scholarly commentary in terms of dealing with history, literary analysis, and interacting
with bibliography. Unlike Day Levenson does not make application to minority groups or gay rights. In the Introduction section the commentary covers all the basic issues around Esther, without focusing on an particular one (as, for instance, Berlin or Fox do with literary analysis). The commentary section (after the introduction to the book of Esther) is less than 100 pages, so this commentary is not that detailed.

Reid, Debra.  

The TOTC series is by its own admission not a critical or technical commentary. Its goal seems to be to provide an adequate explanation for Bible studies, or even preachers, without getting bogged down in scholarly debate or detailed word or thematic studies. Yet this commentary is a middle ground commentary (it is not devotional), since it does include some historical and cultural background, albeit fairly brief. There doesn’t seem to be much literary analysis in TOTC as a series, and Reid does this a little bit. Larger blocks of text are covered (i.e., not verse-by-verse by any means). Reid definitely sees the book of Esther as calling its readers to be theological, to see God’s unseen role in history. In sum, simply by its shorter length (not just in pages but the size of the book is a smaller paperback) this commentary does not go in-depth in any areas.


3.2 OTHER BOOKS

Day, Linda.   

By “books” of Esther in the subtitle, Day means the Hebrew (Massoretic) text (that most English translations are based on), the Greek “A” text, and the Greek “B” text (see section 10, “Text,” below). This work is definitely scholarly, interacts with much of the scholarly literature on Esther, and as the subtitle indicates, does a lot with literary analysis (characterization, plot, literary techniques, etc.). Most of this work is basically a commentary, as Day divides the text up into 9 episodes and offers comments on each section. The text of the three versions (she prints the full text of the two Greek versions and the Hebrew text, along with an English translation) is too small and hard to read.

Fox, Michael V.  
Fox is mainly a literary study, as the title indicates, yet still has a little over 100 pages devoted to a commentary. After the commentary are chapters on historicity and date, genres, structures, in-depth character studies (each main characters gets a chapter devoted to him or herself: Vashti, Xerxes, Haman, Mordecai, and Esther), God’s absence in the book, and a final section on the Greek versions of Esther.

4. OUTLINES OF THE BOOK

4.1 Chronology in Esther

The events of Esther unfold over a period of 10 years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Year of Reign</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:3</td>
<td>Ahasuerus holds his banquets</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>483</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:16</td>
<td>Esther goes to Ahasuerus</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>479</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:7</td>
<td>Haman casts his lots</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>474</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:12</td>
<td>Haman issues his decree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:13</td>
<td>Date planned for annihilation of the Jews</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:9</td>
<td>Mordecai issues his decree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:12; 9:1</td>
<td>Day upon which Jews could defend themselves from attack</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:6–10, 20–22</td>
<td>Ten sons of Haman executed; Feast of Purim celebrated</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14, 15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>473</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(above taken from ESV Study Bible notes)

4.2 SEEING THINGS IN TWO’S

Perhaps the simplest way of seeing a structure to the book of Esther is to see things in two’s, or pairs.

Nearly every event in Esther happens twice, the second time being a variation of the first. In the first chapter, there is a long banquet and a short banquet. In the second chapter, there is a “virgin pageant” that leads to the queening of Esther, followed by a second “virgin pageant.” Esther holds two banquets that lead to the downfall of Haman, which is paired with the two banquets that led to the fall of Vashti. There is a decree that zips through the empire calling for the destruction
of the Jews, and then later there is a decree sent calling for the destruction of their enemies. Esther comes twice unannounced to King Ahasuerus. Haman goes home with his head covered after giving honor to Mordecai, and his head is covered before he is hung. The Jewish defense in Susa lasts for an extra day. Paired events are one of the motifs in this book. This will become an important point later on, when I examine the Name of the Lord in Esther.4

Here’s one way of structuring the book, topically, using pairs:

1:1-2:20 Two queens and two banquets.
2:21-4:3 Two men and two plots.
4:4-9:19 The two strategies of Haman and God.
9:20-32; 10 Two battles.5

4.3 OUTLINE ORGANIZED AROUND BANQUETS

Most commentators see banquets as the basis for the structure, or outline, of the book, and in fact even other ways of structuring the book (see various structures below) incorporate them.

As Linda Day has noted, “Shifts in power (empowerment and disempowerment) tend to occur at parties.”6 Or Berlin puts it even more strongly:

More than just a structural 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. That most emblematic Persian institution, the banquet, or Table of the King (see the Commentary to chapter 1), is the occasion on which Jewish well-being is secured. How appropriate that the holiday commemorating Jewish deliverance in Persia features feasting and merrymaking, as if it were a re-enactment of the many banquets of the Esther story.7

The word “banquet” (Hebrew mishteh) occurs frequently in the book (see section 13, “Key Words,” below). However, commentators see a different number of banquets in the book. Usually this is either 8 or 10. Here is a chart of 10 possible banquets:

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5 http://www.inerrancy.org/esth.htm
10 BANQUETS IN ESTHER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NO.</th>
<th>REF.</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1:3-4</td>
<td>Given by Xerxes, for his court. Purpose: to display his riches and glory (1:4). Duration: 180 days.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2.  | 1:5-8 | Given by Xerxes, for the common people in Susa, taking place outdoors, in a royal garden. However, people here means males, since the ladies are invited by Vashti in banquet #3. Duration: 7 days. “The whole population of the city would not fit in the garden at once; hence we may think of the feast as a public reception.”
| 3.  | 1:9   | Given by queen Vashti for the women of the court.                                                                                                                                                      |
| 4.  | 2:18  | Given by king Xerxes for Esther, called “Esther’s banquet.”                                                                                                                                           |
| 5.  | 3:15  | Xerxes and Haman sit down to drink (have a private banquet).                                                                                                                                          |
| 6.  | 5:4-5 | First banquet by Esther for the Xerxes and Haman.                                                                                                                                                     |
| 7.  | 5:8, 12, 14; 7:1-2 | Second banquet given by Esther for Xerxes and Haman.                                                                                                                                                  |
| 8.  | 8:17  | Feasting in celebration of Mordecai’s promotion and counter-decree.                                                                                                                                    |
| 9.  | 9:17, 19 | First day of Purim feasting throughout empire.                                                                                                                                                    |
| 10. | 9:18  | Second day of Purim feasting in Susa.                                                                                                                                                                 |

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Commentators see these banquets groups in three’s or two’s

Here is Pierce’s outline, which he calls “Feasts and Fasts”:

A

| A | Ahasuerus’ Feast (1:1-4) |
|   | Ahasuerus’ Feast (1:5-8) |

B

| B | Vashti’s Feast (1:9) |
|   | Esther’s Feast (2:8-23) |

C

| C | Jew’s Fast (4:1-3) |
|   | Jew’s Fast (4:4-17) |

B₁

| B₁ | Esther’s Feast (5:1-8) |
|    | Esther’s Feast (7:1-10) |

A₁

| A₁ | Mordecai’s Feast (8:15-17) |
|    | Mordecai’s & Esther’s Feast of Purim (9:1 – 10:3) |

We can take such a chiasm and put it in a “V” shape instead.

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4.4 “V”-SHAPED OUTLINE

There are more simple versus more complex “V” shapes to Esther, as well as chiasms. Here’s a more simple one:

Up to chapter 4 Esther is passive; after chapter 5 she is active. Chapter 6 is the turning point.


B: Elevation of Haman (3:1)  B’: Elevation of Mordecai (8:15)

C: Anti-Jewish Edict (3:12-15)  C’: Pro-Jewish Edict (8:8-14)

D: First Banquet of the Threesome (5:6-8)  D’: Second Banquet of the Threesome (7:1-6)

Royal Procession (ch. 6)
4.5 CHIASM

Chiasm is a word that come up often in the commentaries, though the fulcrum, or turning point, is sometimes debated:

Yehudah T. Radday, Michael V. Fox, and Sandra Beth Berg have all demonstrated a chiastic dimension to the narrative of Esther, though they find its center respectively in 6:1 (“During that night the king’s sleep fled from him”), 6:9 (“Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor”) and 4:13-14 (“who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?”).10

4.6 PROBLEM-BASED PLOT

Yet one more way of looking at Esther is that the book is a series of a problem, an incident, complications of the incident, or stimulus. One of more of these things leads to an outcome or a response. And this outcome in turn leads to other problems or stimuli. Bush does the best job of explaining and even mapping out, in a chart of four pages, this approach.11

5. WAYS OTHERS HAVE TAUGHT/PREACHED ESTHER

5.1 DEVER, MARK.

Dever has done one sermon on Esther, titled “Surprise: The Message of Esther,” on 21/1/02. Abstract and link to audio:

http://www.chbcaudio.org/docs/summaries/2002/021201.HTM

This is a pretty basic introduction to, and overview of, the book of Esther. Dever covers plot, characters, and lessons. Dever gives the main lesson as one in God’s sovereignty/providence, that Esther is an illustration of Romans 8:28.

Dever:

“It has been said that large doors swing on small hinges. Esther is filled with small but crucial happenings. Do you believe this is a book of chance? If so, you believe that:

Esther just happens to be beautiful
Esther just happens to be favored by the King
Esther just happens to be Jewish
Mordecai just happens to save the King’s life
Haman just happens to mention his troubles with Mordecai to his friends

Haman’s friends just happen to encourage him to build a gallows
Xerxes just happens to have trouble sleeping
Xerxes just happens to have a book read to him
The book just happens to contain the record of Mordecai’s deed
It just happened that Mordecai was never rewarded
Haman just happens to come in just as the King is wondering how to honor Mordecai
Haman just happens to be pleading with Esther just as the King comes in.”

Other lessons that Dever draws are: (1) God always punishes His enemies; and (2) God will certainly deliver His people.

5.2 PIPER, JOHN.

Piper has not taught any series through Esther. But he did do two messages in December 1987, each of which is a long poem that tells the story of Esther (the webpages have the full text of the poems):

http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/poems/esther-part-1

These two poems are offered in book form, published by Crossway (due to be released in Sept 2012), and available on amazon:


Here’s the description:

Having proven himself as a poet, John Piper has written another masterpiece, retelling the story of Esther. This two-part poem begins with Mordecai talking with his teenage cousin Hadassah (Esther), whom he is raising. He explains how her grandfather had a prophetic dream about freedom in the land of Susa, and how his aunt and uncle (Esther’s parents) began the journey. Esther’s mother, he explains, died in childbirth, and her father died only two years later. Part two fast-forwards to Esther looking back and explaining how she became queen to her son, and what God’s providential purposes were in saving the Jews. This moving story is complete with illustrations by artist Glenn Harrington, and will inspire faith in God through fictional poetry about the nonfictional story of Esther.

5.3 KELLER, TIM.

Tim Keller did a series in April-May 2007 called “Esther and the Hiddenness of God,” a four-part series (four weeks) on Esther (available on Redeemer.com website). Two of these are free on Redeemer Presbyterian Church’s Free Sermon Resources page:
Listed below are the links to these two sermons. (The other two are for purchase).

**Tim Keller Sermon #1** (“The Silent Sovereignty of God” Esther 2:5-10, 16-23):

http://sermons2.redeemer.com/sermons/silent-sovereignty-god

Ways in which story interesting and practical and relevant to us: (1) The Jews were living in dispersion in Persia. They were a religious minority living in a society which was dominated by spiritual and moral values at great variance to theirs. When you’re a religious minority, how do you relate to that dominant culture? Do you try to withdraw so you’re completely pure? but you can’t really. Do you try to fit in and just keep your views secret? That doesn’t seem right. Do you protest and try to criticize everything? That doesn’t seem practical or charitable. (2) Another interesting thing: Here you have a male dominated society in which a woman becomes a major vehicle for social justice. (3) Last for anyone, male or female, “How do you follow God in morally and spiritually and culturally ambiguous situations? Can and does God work with you in situations like that?

From chs. 1-2, Three points of the sermon: (1) God is always at work in spite of appearances; (2) the world is obsessed with appearances, nothing but appearances; and (3) How God’s work can free us from the world’s ways, enslavement to the world’s ways. Here are the points fleshed out:

Point #1: This book avoids any mention of God. In some places it seems that the author goes out of his way to do this – deliberate. Such as when people fasted. Why? Jews are in great danger at this time. People sought to destroy them and take their possessions. Whenever God sees His people in danger, He responds spectacularly (e.g., 10 plagues in Exodus). But here, no miracle, no vision, not even a dream. No mention of God. But here, whole string of coincidences that happen. And if they did not, or if one had not, the Jews would have been destroyed (at least a great many). We can say, “What if this did not happen?” many times. Just little things, ordinary things. When you see one of 10 plagues you know “That’s God!” But when Xerxes gets drunk we don’t say, “Wow that’s God at work!” In Esther God is at work in ordinary ways. Karen Jobes in her commentary says, “When God works in extraordinary ways, we know. When God works in ordinary ways, we think He’s not there. But He is. His silence is not absence, his hiddenness is not abandonment.”

Point #2: God doesn’t care about appearances. The book of Esther says, “it is always inappropriate to be made at God because He’s not working in your life.” How would you know (that God is not working)? God doesn’t care about appearances but the world does. Look at the first banquet. It took 180 days to how his wealth. Then shortly later a beauty show, a form of “Persian Idol” instead of American Idol. If we were reading Esther to a girl she might say, “Wow in those days the worth of a man was determined by the size of his wallet and the worth of a woman by the size of her dress.” But now it’s the same! So in some ways we’re different than the days of Xerxes, in many ways we’re the same. What you have matters more than what you
are. The worlds says, unless you get his kind of credentials, beauty, money resume, unless you get these things, you’re worthless. Commentators pretty much agree that in chs. 1-2 Esther has compromised. Feminists don’t like her (she listened to Hegai more than the other women, meaning she was completely compliant, she was the “Barbie doll,” she completely sold out to the system). Rabbis and evangelicals don’t like her either in these chs. They compare her with Daniel and his friends, because Daniel and his friends make it clear they were Jews and would follow Torah (with things like dietary laws). Then of course she sleeps with a man she’s not married to, and then after that marries an unbeliever. Thus, liberal or conservative, she’s sold out. This is true, Esther got off to terrible start. But God stays with her, God grows her, and turns her into something great. By the end she’s a Braveheart. Here’s why that’s so important. So matter how you’ve made mistakes early in life, God can redeem your life. When you think God can’t use you, you’re not getting the message of the Bible, instead you’re imposing your own message on the Bible. Here’s what your thinking. You’re assuming the message of the Bible is: “God blesses and saves those who live morally exemplary lives.” That’s not the message of the Bible. The message of the Bible is that God persistently and continuously gives His grace to people that don’t ask for it, don’t deserve it, and don’t even fully appreciate it after they get it. Though to a great degree we are in the beauty treatments of the world, to a great degree we are concubines in the world system, but God hasn’t given up on us.

Point #3: Keller makes several devotional points here. One good one is that Jesus gave up His beauty for us. Real beauty is not selfconsummation but self-sacrifice. Also, we read several places in Scriptures about gold being refined through fire or trials. We need to know this makes us more internally beautiful. There are spiritual beauty treatments that Jesus uses, and these are often sufferings or trials.

Tim Keller Sermon #2 (“If I Perish, I Perish” Esther 4:5-17):

Started with brief review of last week (the first sermon in the series). Esther is very different fro Daniel. She doesn’t let people know she’s Jewish, and she breaks Mosaic laws. And thus, through compromise, achieves great status in Persia. In such orally , culturally , and spiritually ambiguous, does God will work with us? The answer of the book is yes.

Three points of the sermon: (1) Importance of being in the palace (2) high danger of being in the palace. (3) How to live in the palace with greatness.

Point #1. Mordecai is in gate of palace (not gate of city). In Susa, on hill, 120 feet above everything else, was palace and palace complex. A kind of city onto itself. To be there was the pinnacle of culture. Form there the laws and ideas that shaped all of life came from. Mordecai is saying “You’re there (Esther).” Mordecai says “You’ve got to use what you’ve got.” First thing we learn (not just Esther but Daniel and with Joseph as well) God uses for his work in the world not just missionaries and ministers, but people out in secular space, He uses for His work both lay and clergy, He sues them all. At end of book of Revelation, you don’t see people leaving earth and going to heaven. Goal of God is that His life comes into this world and cleanses and perfects this world. So that all of what is wrong with this world is healed. Three things are
broken: our relationship with Him, our relationship with each other, our relationship with the world (earth). And by end of revelation all three are healed.

Illustration – pastor from England on Joseph: , if went to a book table and say title, “The man God uses” you’d think a missionary or pastor. But with Joseph, this was not the case. God greatly uses people in law, medicine, arts. At this spot in the Bible we have perfect example of that. Jews are in exile, but at this point on their way back. They’re trying to rebuild their lives, rebuild nation, rebuild city of Jerusalem. Ray Bock: God shows diversity of people He uses by giving us but not one, or two, but three books on how He did that. (1) Ezra – about a minister, a teacher of the Word (2) Nehemiah – a lay person, an urban planner and develop, he used management skills to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, so economic life and civic life could flourish. (3) last Esther, up in the royal court working for justice. Male and female, clergy and lay, everybody – God’s using them all!!

Application: do you see how important it is for people to be everywhere! You are not supposed to be using your position for yourselves, but instead use our connections to serve the city. Don’t “use” the city, serve it. You are here for a “time such as this.” You might say, “You don’t know, I used some shady methods to get where I am, I don’t know if I have a great testimony.” Couldn’t Esther have said the same thing?

Point #2: High danger of being in the palace. Esther says 30 days have passed. Capital punishable offense to go to the king unbidden. Esther night also have thought “I got here because the last queen was too bold.” also Esther might have thought “I’ve fallen out of favor (king hasn’t slept with her in 30 days.” Mordecai says “of course I know what I’m asking of you.” His response is a little brutal (he says you’ll lose either way, get sniffed out either way), But then he gets more compassionate, “such as time as this.”

Unless you use the clout, credentials, connections you’ve got, instead of seeing that as a way of furthering your career, feathering your nest, healing the world, then you’re dead already, it’s devoured you already. So it’s possible to root your identity in your position in the palace, money, wear these kinds of clothes. Your net worth is your self worth. When that happens, it’s eaten you, there’s no “you” left. To live in the palace is to get identity from performance. If you’re unwilling to risk your place in the palace, money, wear these kinds of clothes. Your net worth is your self worth. When that happens, it’s eaten you. You’re the tail and it’s the dog. Mordecai: If you can’t risk throwing away the palace for others, your people, it’s devoured you.

Even here grace is hinted at. The word “come” in Hebrew is passive, “Who knows if you were not brought to a royal position for a time like this?” He’s saying this was not really you (your beauty, etc.) that got you where you are. Esther began to respond to it. The Esther from chs. 1-2 begins to go away, the one that never rocks the boat or ruffles any feathers. Here’s the danger. Some of you might try to do what Esther did. I won’t look at my position the same way, I’ll see it as a way of serving others. I’m going to get more involved, take risks. I’ve been too quiet about my beliefs, so I’m going to start speaking up. Here’s the danger. First, it won’t last. If you get inspired by an example, like Esther, hear a sermon “Be like Esther,” but the basic motivation is guilt. It will wear off. Or other thing, you get inspired, and then overreact. People are secret about faith, and then realize they need to be more overt, and they get obnoxious. Do you know that that is? They haven’t really left the palace, They’re still identity
rooted in palace, performance. Just a Pharisee. Thus this feeling will either wear off, or you’ll become Pharisaical, if only look at Esther as example. An example, even great example, can only crush you.

There’s another way. How can you change? Esther is not an example, but a signpost, a pointer. All religions of world: there’s a gap of chasm between us and god. So we need mediation: transformations of conscience, etc. here’s what the Bible says: Esther saved her people by identification and mediation. She identified with her people, didn’t take the safe way. She risked coming under same condemnation of her people. But because she identified, she could mediate. And she received favor and that favor was imputed to her people Does that remind you of anyone? Jesus reigned in the ultimate palace. And he left it, and with Jesus no one had to prompt hi or cajole him to do it. And He identified with us, and took on condemnation. Not at risk of his life, at cost of his life. If see Esther as example, crushes you, but if see Jesus as savior, that changes you, there’s your security, real worth. Now you can truly give up on all the “stuff” around you.

Application: (1) if you now see Jesus as savior, then and only then do we have freedom to say, “if I perish, I perish,” and we can truly serve the poor of the world. If you wish to be like Christ, give much, give often, give feely to the poor, the thankless, the undeserving. “If I perish I perish is the language of identifying with poor. (2) “If I perish I perish is the language of exciting mission. Wherever you are, you’re in a position with certain abilities, even experience of hard times, that you and only you can minister in certain situations. There are certain people that only you can help. (3) this is the language of unconditional obedience. Don’t just “try” God out, or make Him your personal assistant, take your hands off your life, put your life in His hands. You’ll become a person of greatness not by trying to become a person of greatness but by serving the One who said, “Father Your will be done.”

Tim Keller Sermon #3 (“The Man the King Delights to Honor” Esther 3:1-6; 6:1-10):

Keller looks at not the protagonist but the antagonist: Haman. And pride. Here are his three points about pride: (1) character of it; (2) deadliness of it (3) cure for it. Haman had highest position. But he must have been particularly obnoxious. Why? The king had to command people to bow to him. In this society bowing was very instinctive (therefore the command is odd). In spite of this great power and position, he (Haman) didn’t get the respect he thought should go with it. Haman says all this (what he had) gave him no satisfaction as long as Mordecai doesn’t bow.

Pride is concentration on self, absorption with self. C.S. Lewis says pride is ruthless, sleepless, unsmiling concentration on the self. Thus you don’t get into relationship, jobs, etc. unless it makes you feel good about yourself. Pride turns everything into a means to an end – getting more respect and approval for oneself. Pride is endless ego calculation: Am I getting the thanks I deserve? How am I looking? Two forms of pride (1) superiority form of pride, which is the usual
way pride is thought of; (2) inferiority form of pride, where you’re down on yourself, you’re very self conscious, just as self-absorbed. Doing just as much comparison. We don’t think of this second form as pride, but it is. Again, pride is self-absorption. Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it’s thinking of yourself less. Not caring about approval or respect. A humble person is un-needy. What you would think is that they are happy, and they are incredibly interested in you. They’re relaxed. Screwtape letters: “our enemy want to turn the man’s attention away from himself.”

Point #2: So what? How bad is that? Very bad. vv. 5-6 (“Haman when he heard about this was enraged … looked for a way to destroy all Jewish people”). So Haman tells Xerxes about a group of people, and how lots of money will come into the king’s treasury. King doesn’t even find out who this people is. He just gives his signet ring to Haman. Everywhere in Bible: Pride is deadly, goes before a fall, leads to destruction. Pride makes you fool, since Pride, in general, keeps you from learning from mistakes. Say your relationship breaks up -- it’s circumstances, or her, or him, … never you. Humble people are not always standing on their own dignity, and as a result they learn fast. Proud people don’t just not learn from their mistakes. But the superiority doesn’t listen to others, inferiority is so devastated others say “forget it.” Superiority makes you overestimate you gifts. Inferiority makes you underestimate. Pride doesn’t just make you a fool, makes you evil. Since Augustine, pride not one sin among many, more of a root sin, the source of many sins. For instance, you can’t be terribly bitter without being proud. Pride makes you too abrasive (that’s the superiority) pride makes you too shy (that’s the inferiority form). Racism, national pride, genocide all come from pride. As bad as this is, pride is the one sin that hides itself. By definition, the more proud you are the less proud you think you are. Adultery, embezzlement, etc. – you know when these happen. Virtually no one says “I’m too proud, help me with this.” One more thing: worst thing about pride of all – if get someone real religious, religiosity will kill off lust, materialism, but just makes pride worse. There is no pride like religious pride. Can’t just say God is great and you need to obey him, this is solution to pride. It often is very much not a solution at all. Religion can make it worse – more superior, or more inferior. Religiosity is like pouring oil on the fire.

Point #3: At start of chapter 6, Haman comes to see the king. Haman built gallows to make public spectacle or Mordecai. But God has different idea. Haman didn’t just want love, he wanted the love of someone who was worthy (the king putting his robes on me). Someone once said, “we don’t just want praise, we want the praise of the praiseworthy.” When the king says Mordecai will ride the hose and wear the kings’ robes, and Haman will lead the horse. Total reversal, and Haman knows it’s because he tried to put himself up high on a pedestal. Biblical truth” if you humble yourself, you’ll be exalted, if you exalt yourself, you’ll be humbled.” Lose yourself, and you will find yourself. Look for Christ and you will find everything else thrown in. Why? It’s the nature of God, and how He made the universe. What Haman asked for was not the wrong thing: someone of ultimate worth loving us. He asked the wrong king, he went to the wrong king. Our king was stripped of his clothes, even stripped of His Father’s love. Jesus does this voluntarily – there’s the ultimate king. At infinite cost to Himself He reversed placed with us. Jesus takes what we deserved so that he can give what he deserves. When you realize that Jesus did all this for you, that’s the 1-2 punch that the ego needs. To know that Jesus had to die for you humbles you; to know that Jesus as glad to die for you affirms you infinitely. That’s the
1-2 punch the ego needs. If you can see Jesus this way, you don’t be up on yourself, and you won’t be down on yourself.

Tim Keller Sermon #4 (“Rest from Our Enemies” Esther 7:1-10; 9:20-23):

The upshot of everything (last verse) is that Esther procured rest from their enemies. This was the great desire of their hearts. In Deuteronomy this was promised for God’s people. God promised rest to Israel, and this was the upshot of his salvation.

Three points in the sermon: (1) How Esther got rest from her enemies (2) How Jesus gets us rest from our enemies (3) how we can get rest from our enemies.

Point #1. Esther throws banquet for king Xerxes and Haman. Esther was reestablishing a relationship with the king (she had not been called for 30 days). She’s very strategic in her rhetoric. First premise “if I have your favor” (she reminds him he chose her as the king), (2) here’s my petition, “Save my life, please save my life!” – there’s a shocker, in light of the premise (an attack on the queen is an attack on the kind). Then (3) the king asks who has done this? And she responds, “Haman.” Thus the king, perhaps like modern monarchs, is not made at himself, but someone else: Haman. No male was allowed to be with a queen of the king, even concubine, alone. So what Haman did was illegal. clearly he’s melting down. He should have left the room immediately when the king left. So Haman throws himself on the couch begging for mercy. So now a big part of the king’s problem is solved. The servants know and suggest that the king use the very gallows that Haman made. The word for “gallows” is literally “tree.” Can hang or impale, but the point is that it was the most cursed, ignominious death. So the king says, “Sounds fitting, take him!”

Then Esther proposes a counter decree since the first one can’t be repealed. Some did try to attack the Jews and take their possessions. So the Jews did end up killing, in their defense. But the text is clear that the Jews did not take plunder from their enemies, to let us know this is not materially motivated (Esther’s counter decree).

But … this never lasts. Moses gave it (rest) to them for a while, David the same, and others. But the later propjets began to prophecy that the Messiah would come and give final rest and peace.

Point 2. Jesus says he’s the Son of Man. Thus the disciples thought, “Any minute now and he’ll lead an attack on Rome.” But Jesus came to die, on a “tree.” So that He could offer ultimate rest. Jesus did not say “Oh I don’t believe in the judgment of God.” Jesus talked about hell more than anyone. But Jesus reveals that God is not so concerned with destroying this or that enemy, but destroying enmity. He wants to destroy the evil that is destroying the world that He loves. If Jesus had taken up the sword and destroyed the Romans he would have given a kind of rest, temporarily, to one group of people. The natural response of the human heart is to respond to evil force with hurtful force. Whack your enemy, ad if you whack them hard enough you get rest, don’t you? But you didn’t whack the enmity, you only whacked the enemy. And then you only make the enemy worse. When you fight evil with evil, you become harder. When someone does evil to you, you become self-righteous (“I would never do that”). Second, when you whack an
enemy back you make them more of an enemy (their children become your enemy, or they re-group and hate you more, etc.). Jesus: the best way to fight evil is with good. We don’t respond to evil force with hurtful force but with the violence of grace. The violence of grace: in Les Miz, by Victor Hugo, in early stages, Jean Valjean is hurt by people. He becomes a hard man, he hurts people and wrongs people. He’s become a “bad man.” He takes refuge with a bishop. One night steals candlesticks. Police catch him. Bishop says, “Glad you took candlesticks I have you, but forgot other items.” When Jean Valjean speak of this, he calls this, “the hardest assault he had sustained on his heart.” Grace is violent, powerful, traumatic. He says, “He knew his hardness of heart would be complete” if he turned his back on grace. There is nothing more formidable, more violent in best possible way, than grace.

Only way to destroy an enemy is to make him a friend.

Point #3. If you understand gospel get rest from your enemies in two ways. First: very humbling. Humbles you out of self-righteousness. When someone assaults you, it’s tempting to get on your high horse. But the gospel says you are no better, so evil has no place to get a foothold. First way in which your enemies can no longer destroy you – you no longer hate your enemies. Second thing: gospel values you, affirms you. The Son of God thought you were worth dying for, worth infinite agony and suffering. Now you have a new heavens, new earth guarantee. How does this help? You now have a new identity. If your self worth is wrapped up in net worth, then enemies can touch you. Because they can touch your money, your status. But to the degree your real treasure is in heaven, your enemy can’t touch you. It can’t touch your real treasure. For some of us, our reputation with other people is our real treasure. This people can hurt us. But what if it was only God’s eyes that matter to us? Then others can’t destroy us. You can’t touch my real treasure my real reputation, my real life. Rest from enemies means that enemies can’t harm you, thus can’t control you, and thus can’t make you evil. Grace is traumatic, we’re not talking about law or love.

5.4 MACDONALD, JAMES.

MacDonald preached a sermon in 2008 titled, “At All Times in Every Situation.” This is a 47-minute sermon in which he works through the whole book of Esther. He summarizes each chapter in Esther, with brief applicational/devotional thoughts on each chapter after the summary. One thing he does a good job with is noting that whenever anyone makes a suggestion to king Xerxes, he (Xerxes) says “whatever,” or “great,” etc.

Chapter 1: Prideful ruler (God still works through them). From chapter 1 (Xerxes demanding his wife come so he can show her off): male leadership run through kindness and servant-leadership, not demanded or legislated. Chapter 2 talked about Mordecai. Mentions significance of Mordecai descendant of Kish (related to Saul). He thinks Esther would have run if she could have (that she was forced to go to the king, she would have been killed otherwise). He says women who have gone through abuse can relate to Esther – they question, “Where is God?” Esther did so as well. Chapter 3: God at work even through wicked prejudice. Haman enters the story. Haman is an Agagite, a descendant of Agag (whom Saul should have killed). Haman wants to destroy all the Jews. He (MacDonald) comments on how church needs to be one people, we don’t discriminate.
Chapter 4: God is at work even in tough choices we have to make. Ch 4 begins with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. Mordecai says his famous “how knows if you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this.” Mordecai says if she doesn’t, God will find someone else. Don’t think God is worried, stymied if you don’t do what you should. God’s purposes will never be thwarted. “You’ll never turn out wrong doing right.” God always blesses obedience. She reveals what kind of woman she is: her spirituality, loyalty, and courage. Chapter 5: Fear, fasting, Favor. She’s afraid, no doubt as she approaches the king, not knowing if this would be the last moment of her life. He (king) has not seen her in 30 days, but shows great favor to her. God must have given her favor. Haman thinks he’s being favored by Esther since she requests just the king and him to a banquet. Chapter 6: God is at work, the timing will be perfect. Xerxes can’t sleep, and reads about Mordecai saving his life. And here we have the story of the king asking Haman what should be done for the man the king honors, and Haman answers, and the king says do that for Mordecai. Application: when you oppose God’s people you are going to lose. Maybe not right now, but you will lose. Chapter 8: God is at work, the reversal will be awesome! The moment it looks the darkest, the great reversal is coming. Next week, next month. Don’t you think God knows, and can balance the books of justice?

5.5 MISCELLANEOUS.

Nationally-known names for which no sermons or teaching on Esther found on their website (or other searches on the web):

Rick Warren
Andy Stanley
T.D. Jakes
John MacArthur
Matt Chandler (though all sermons prior to 2006 were removed from the church’s website)
Thabiti Anyabwile
Crawford Loritts
Ligon Duncan
David Platt
C.J. Mahaney
Josh Harris

6. THEMES OF THE BOOK

6.1 Power (and temptation) as Proximity to Those in Power

Linda Day notes:

Power is often materially conveyed through physical items—clothing, scepter, throne, ring, palace furnishings, and the like. Generally speaking, the narrative tends to be physically descriptive; great care is taken to indicate the locations of
events and the movements of the characters from one venue to another. Space does not function neutrally, but instead is key to the power structure in the Persian kingdom. In this environment, the king resides at the center, representing total political power. Power decreases proportionally as one moves away from this center, to the palace complex (including the women’s quarters), to the king’s gate, to the citadel, and finally out to all the provinces. Physically coming closer to the center increases one’s power, and everyone in this story comes into the king. One can note the frequency that the Hebrew term *lipney*, “to the presence of,” appears with Ahasuerus as its object.12

6.2 The Futility of Human-Made Law

Fox comments:

Potentate and nobles affirm the rule of law, though the laws they come up with are less than dignified and just.13

As Linda Day note:

Signifying a radically different sense from the biblical *torah*, or “instruction,” *dat* indicates an official decree issued by the government for its citizens. Decrees are given to be obeyed, and obedience (along with its corollary, disobedience) functions as a theme in the story. How an individual chooses to respond to the royal law or to commands from other people drives the progression of events and their outcomes.14

6.3 Living in a pagan environment (can mean affirming distinctives)

Any religious people struggles with this, whether Amish, orthodox Jews, Muslims, or Mormons. Where do we land on the spectrum of, at the one extreme, being distinctively separate (in acts of worship, customs, dress, etc.), and on the other hand, assimilating (while maintaining more of a minimum of religious distinctives).

As Jobes states,

Most American Christians are indistinguishable from their unbelieving neighbors in dress, housing, professional vocations, entertainment choices, and so forth. Does this mean we are compromising our faith? Possibly, but not necessarily.15

13 Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther*, p. 25.
Often in the Bible, faithfulness to the people of God equals faithfulness to God (this is a key theme in Matthew, see much of chapter 10, for instance, and most scholars think the “little ones” or “least” in the parable of Mt 25 refers to disciples, not humanity in general). Esther risked her life by declaring her identity with God’s covenant people.

Perhaps Daniel and Esther counterbalance each other. The first teaches about make a bold stand for one’s faith (in some contexts, continuously), and the second teaches of a more subtle affirmation which at times must be bold. This might be similar to things we hold “in tension” elsewhere in Scripture, such as we are called to “judge,” but also called to “not judge.” Or we are told to rebuke a fool, but in the next verse told to not talk to a fool. Which can only mean there are contexts for each. John Goldingay has written on such apparent contradictions in his work on biblical theology.

6.4 Living in a pagan environment (can mean compromise)

Ronald Pierce notes:

… the reader notices that many Jewish people, including Esther and Mordecai, are continuing to live in Susa (thought without compulsion) more than fifty years after Cyrus had opened the door for exiles to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their broken homeland. This is especially noteworthy since Esther’s and Mordecai’s were taken from the city of Jerusalem itself (2:6).16

One area of contemporary controversy in evangelical missions where biblical books like Esther and Daniel can be used is what is called the “insider movement” in Muslim missions. By “insider” authors mean a local Muslim population. For instance, a Muslim that practices Islam, but becomes a Christian, and stay in his community.

Missiologists rate Christ-centered Christian communities, in the Muslim world, on a spectrum of C1 to C6. C1 is a church foreign to the Muslim community, in culture and language. Think of transporting one of our American churches to, say, Morocco. C2 would ne like C1, but using Arabic, though the vocabulary would be “Christian.” C3 starts incorporating non-Islamic cultural elements such as music, dress, or art. Then C4-6 is where the gathering much less like a “church” (and maybe is not really a church) but more of Muslims who focus on, or worship, “Isa” (Jesus).

Much of this debate centers on whether it is acceptable for an Arabic believer in Jesus to still worship “Allah,” using that name, and to engage in things like Muslim prayers, in short following as man of the five pillars of Islam as one’s conscience allows. The thought is to show Muslims that one can become a believer in Jesus without becoming a cultural “traitor,” that there are parts of Muslim culture that are neutral and not against Christ.

Some things are more clearly neutral, such as food or dress. But what about using the Koran in witnessing? Or using the term “Allah”? Or honoring and keeping Ramadan? Or praying at a mosque in line with Muslims?

Here is John Piper, 6-minute talk on the “Insider Movement” (this also has links to articles):

http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/05/16/piper-responds-to-the-insider-movement/

Piper thinks the motivation for the “insider movement” is great, that too many Muslims become Christians, then just “disappear,” they leave the country and go to the west. But Piper disagrees with staying in the mosque, staying with some veneration of Muhammad. So Piper draws the line at C4.

7. CHARACTERS IN THE BOOK

7.1 ESTHER

7.11 Esther in general

Most commentators agree that Esther is the only character that is rounded or developed or progressive, i.e., that has some measure of complexity and that has a character that grows through the story. She is more than one-dimensional. Many say that she is at first passive, then in the last half of the story very active.

Jobes comments:

Esther was a powerful woman. She rose to the top of her profession. She faced and helped avert the potential genocide of her people. She played “office politics” with the best of them. And she became rich beyond her wildest dreams. Although her beauty was the reason she became part of the king’s harem, she achieved all this without any of the advantage of aristocratic birth, well-placed friends, inherited wealth, or social prestige. In fact, she did it in spite of being born a member of an outcast people whose future rested on the whims of rulers more interested in personal aggrandizement than serving their people well.17

Fishman notes:

The exiled Jews are symbolized and championed by one quadrupally disadvantaged individual—a women, an orphan, a Jew, and a captive in the king’s court. Esther triumphs over the sheer evil of a genocidal enemy, Haman, by outwitting the facilitating evil of her own husband and monarch, Ahasueros.18

7.12 Is Esther the Main Character?

This is a fair question since Mordecai’s name appears 52 times, and Esther’s name appears 55 times.

Commentators have noted two points that would make Esther the main character, and not Mordecai. First, Esther’s character is complex. She develops through the book of Esther. Mordecai’s character, on the other hand, is fairly flat and one-dimensional. The greater interest (that the author seeks to draw from the reader) is on Esther. Second, it is Esther who is directly responsible for Haman’s downfall; it was her plan and her execution.

7.13 Esther as an Example

Commentators make note that it is tempting to use Esther as an example, called by some the “exemplary” approach to Esther. And this has been done by rabbis, Jewish modern commentators, conservative Christian commentators, and feminists. Even Vashti, the queen mentioned briefly compared to the amount of text devoted to Esther in the book, can be a good example (being assertive and bold and not wanting to be the attention of lewd, drunken men) or a bad example (not obeying her husband). The question is rather, has the author of the book of Esther presented Esther, in any particular scene or act, as a good example to follow (or bad example, one to avoid)?

Fishman on medieval rabbis:

Medieval exegetes valorized Esther not as a “proper Jewish woman,” but as a model for all Jews, including Jewish men. The rabbis of medieval Europe often saw the book of Esther as a how-to book or self-help manual for Jewish survival among the elite classes in Diaspora communities. Esther was interpreted as the epitome of the clever courtier who understands how a subject should approach a ruler in order to accomplish difficult goals. Skill in this regard was especially critical for aristocratic Diaspora Jews, who were always in a potentially vulnerable position as they navigated their way as outsiders through the courts.

A starting place here is Jobes’ comments on the exemplary approach. She gives 8 pages of her commentary to this topic. Jobes does not see the husband-wife relationship as one that the author of Esther focuses on:

The author views Vashti specifically as the queen, not the wife, who refuses. The political ramifications of her decision foreshadow that of her successor, Esther. Both Vashti and Esther are portrayed in the story in their role as queen, not as wives. To color Vashti as the bad wife and Esther as the good one it so lose sight, as feminist interpreters do, of the major sociological division of the book between
Jew and Gentile. Judging strictly from the letter of the law, we would have to condemn Esther as well, for she should not have accepted marriage to a Gentile according to the Torah … 19

But other commentators would say that Jobes is too extreme. That there are things in Esther’s life that are example for us to follow, and that the author has structured the narrative in way to show us these things. If Esther, as noted above, grows and develops through the story, we should exercise case, say many commentators, in treat her as if she were the same person her whole life. Think of how we would feel if someone said, “Oh that person is very impatient” and they based this on working with us for one year, but that one year was ten years ago and we’ve not interacted with them since.

Another thing that makes Esther as an example hard is that the authors has not given us access to very much of her thought life at all (see literary analysis, section 9 below).

Perhaps Esther hated her circumstance with all her heart. Perhaps she felt that life in the harem violated every conviction and moral principle Mordecai had instilled in her. Maybe she wondered how God could have let such a horrible thing happen to her. On the other hand, perhaps Esther loved life in the harem. Perhaps the sensuality of harem life appealed to a part of her nature. Perhaps she was swept off her feet by the attention of the most powerful man in the empire. Maybe she knew that her lifestyle violated the Torah, but didn’t really care. Maybe she thought this was the best thing that ever happened to her. Would such an attitude have pleased God? Was Esther in God’s will or out of it? Interpreters who insist on taking an exemplary approach to this story must guess the answer to such questions. If we want to make Esther a role model of some sort, then we must be able to pass judgment on both the situation and her behavior in that situation. 20

7.14 Miscellaneous Notes on Esther

Four possibilities for the meaning of Esther’s name:

- From Ishtar, the Akkadian goddess of love. If this is true, then Mordecai’s name was likely derived from Marduk, the Akkadian god of war. If this is the case, then Mordecai was also working to keep his national identity secret. It is strange and troubling to have two characters hiding behind the names of pagan gods.
- From Satar, the Hebrew word meaning hidden. The Hebrew for this word, STR, is very close to Esther. Thus, Esther hides her Jewish identity with a name that means “hidden.” This plays into the author’s propensity to hide information needed to fully understand the spiritual dynamics of the story. Perhaps the name’s meaning drove the author to compose the book as he did. Even if Esther’s name was derived from one of

19 Jobes, Esther, p. 74.
20 Jobes, Esther, p. 112.
the other four in this list, its association with STR should be considered.

- From *Stara*, the Persian word for star. This name makes good sense from a historical perspective, since the story takes place in Persia.
- From *Astra*, the Median word meaning “myrtle.” Since Hadassah, in Hebrew, means myrtle, Esther chose a name that means the same as her given name.\(^{21}\)

### 7.2 MORDECAI

#### 7.21 Mordecai in general

In 2:21 Mordecai is said to be “sitting at the king’s gate.” Our modern ears hear this and think of perhaps two things. Either he is a poor man, even a beggar, choosing to hang out and sit at a public place (like a homeless person might do at a busy stoplight intersection), or he is a servant, who must sit or stand in the hot sun all day to help with opening or closing the gate, or providing service to visitors or merchants. Rather the opposite is the case. This expression biblically, “sitting at the gate,” was reserved for some form of official. The “gate,” especially the cool shade just inside the gate, was seen as one of the most important, if not the most important, part of a city, similar to what city squares were in the 1800s, or what malls were a few decades ago.

As Linda Day says, Mordecai is a little bit of an enigma, even though still flat and one-dimensional:

> Mordecai’s exterior is inscrutable. He is an enigma, both loyal and disloyal to the crown, a man who does not shy away from battle but who also displays concern for his young foster daughter.\(^{22}\)

Bush notes:

Apart from the epithet “the Jew” and the portrayal of his final status of power and authority, Mordecai is characterized by his actions, and in every one of these he is distinguished by this absolute loyalty and constancy. He is loyal to Esther, his ward (2:7, 10-11), and to the king (2:21-23). Above all he is loyal to the Jewish people. Every action he takes is directed toward their deliverance (e.g., his lamentation in 4:1-3 is specifically directed to bringing Haman’s edict to Esther’s attention …). … The capstone is placed upon this characterization of Mordecai in the encomium upon him in 10:3b. He is held in esteem by all because “he was constantly seeking the good of his people and promoting the welfare of all their descendants.”

Further, it is striking that the narrator does not even once describe with direct statements Mordecai’s feelings, emotions, thoughts, or deliberations, in sharp and striking contrast with the way he so frequently characterizes Haman …


Mordecai’s character, then, is built around a single quality or trait, his utter loyalty to the Jewish people. He is what Berlin (Poetics, 23-32) calls a flat character or “type”; that is, he stereotypically represents what the ideal diaspora Jew should be.23

7.22 Mordecai’s ancestry

As Jobes states, “In Hebrew narrative the characteristic described when a character is introduced is key to understanding his or her role in the story.”24 In 2:5-6 Mordecai is called “the son of Jair, the son of Kish, a Benjamite, who had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the captives who had been exiled with Jeconiah king of Judah.”

If the phrase, “who had been exiled with Jeconiah king of Judah” refers back to Mordecai, this would mean Mordecai was living at 597 BC, the date of the exile, and would now be more than 100 years old.

One way of resolving this is to read the phrase, “who had been exiled with Jeconiah king of Judah,” as referring to Kish, and not Mordecai.

A second thing to realize is that, in Hebrew, the phrase “the son of,” even when used of families (not figurative in phrases like “the sons of disobedience”), does not have to mean one generation. When we see the formula “A is the son of B who is the son of C” we think this is three generations. However, Hebrew does not have a term for “grandfather.” So in the example above, “A” would call both “B” and “C” his “father.”

A verse in 2 Sam 9:7 can illustrate this. David is talking to Mephiboshet. David says that he will show kindness to Mephiboshet for the sake of Jonathan “your father” (JKV) and for the sake for Saul “your father” (KJV). The Hebrew word for “father,” ’av, is used in both these phrases. Of course this doesn’t make much sense in English, since a person does not have two fathers. The resolution of this is that, again, Hebrew does not have a term for grandfather, and uses the same term for both (“father” and “grandfather”). Accordingly, some modern translations change the second English word from “father” (KJV) to “grandfather” (NAS and NIV, for instance).

The key here for the reader is that Mordecai is a descendant of a man name “Kish,” who was of the tribe of Benjamin. Any Israelite would immediately make the connection with the well-known Kish of the tribe of Benjamin, who was King Saul’s father (1 Sam 9:1-2). Now if Kish was the one taken into exile, this could not have been the same “Kish” that was the father of Saul. However, it was not uncommon for a descendant to be given the name of a grandfather, great-grandfather, etc. Again the point here is association: Mordecai is an ancestor of Kish and father of Saul; the point is not to present a strict genealogy. For the significance of the ancestry of Mordecai, see section 7.32 below under “Haman.”

This is probably the best explanation as to why Mordecai does not “bow” before Haman.

24 Jobes, Esther, p. 119.
7.3 HAMAN

7.31 Haman in general

Although we see very little of the inner thoughts and attitudes, and motivations of all the characters in the book of Esther (see section 9, Literary Analysis, “below), as Linda Day notes, we see more of this in Haman than either Esther or Mordecai:

Haman is the quintessential villain whose sole role in the story is opposition to others. The narrative reveals his inner thoughts more frequently than any of the other characters, but those thoughts always display a single trait—his egocentrism.25

Berlin:

… Haman is the archetypal comic villain—a knave, but, in keeping with farce, not darkly evil. We are not meant to feel threatened by the comic villain—not even children are afraid of Haman—nor are we meant to sympathize with him when he meets his deserved end. He is doomed from the start and we enjoy watching his downfall.26

7.32 Haman’s ancestry

See the note above, from Jobes, on how characters are introduced (section 7.22 on “Mordecai”). In 3:1 Haman is called, “the son of Hammedatha the Agagite.” Agag was the king of the Amalekites at the time of Saul. The Lord had clearly commanded Saul to completely destroy the Amalekites 1 Sam 15:2-3). In 1 Sam 15 Saul defeats Agag, but Saul sins greatly by taking plunder. Even in the book of Exodus we come across the Amalekites, who are the first people to oppose Israel. God’s wrath was kindled against the Amalekites (see Exod 17:8-16; Deut 25:17-19).

So Haman is either a literal descendent of Aga (and thus an Amalekite). Or Haman is figuratively called can “Agagite.” Apparently “Agagite” could be a figurative term, meaning an eternal enemy of the people of Israel.

The whole point of mentioning Mordecai, as being of the lineage of king Saul of Israel, and Haman, being of the lineage of king Agag of the Amalekites, is twofold. First, we are set up by the author to expect tension, conflict, and even violence between these two men. And perhaps more importantly, we are shown one of the themes of the book, the forces of this world are out to destroy God’s people. And as decades, centuries, and millennia pass, this remains unchanged. As there was Moses and the Amalekites, and the prophet Samuel who reminded Saul of his

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responsibility to kill Agag and the Amalekites, there is not Mordecai and a remnant of the Amalekites. As Jobes states, “The story is not about conflict between any two hostile peoples, it is about the hostility of the world against God’s people … While God may be good to all his creatures in general, he is in a special relationship of protection and preservation with his covenant people.”

7.33 Haman’s name

Esther 3:5 says Haman was full of “wrath,” which is hemah (the first “h” is a guttural sound) in Hebrew. Some say this was symbolic of Haman, that either (1) he lived up to his name, or (2) though there was a historical “Haman” who tried to destroy the Jews, and was executed by Xerxes under Esther’s plan, his real name was not “Haman” but he was given this “nickname,” so to speak, to make for a better story.

7.4 XERXES

Levenson on satire:

Some of this satire is specific to the literary figure of Ahasuerus and resists generalization into a message about the Persian regime, Gentile rule, the nature of monarchy, or the like. This particular king is, after all, a weakling whose actions are always willed by his subordinates, Memucan (1:21), Haman (3:10-11), Harbona (7:9), and Esther and Mordecai (8:8). As Fox puts it, Ahasuerus “never says no” and “surrenders effective power to those who know who to press the right buttons—namely, his love of ‘honor,’ his anxiety for his authority, and his desire to appear generous.”

Fishman notes:

The action described by the text reveals a drunken, power-hungry, grotesque ruling class that treats women and wives (even queens) as disposable objects. The monarch is presented to the reader either as a buffoon or something worse—an opportunistic ruler who is all too eager to go along with Haman’s plan to kill the Jews, and then sits down with Haman for a few drinks once the papers are signed.

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8. AUTHOR, DATE, HISTORICAL DIFFICULTIES

8.1 AUTHOR

As with much of Hebrew narrative, the author is not stated in the text. Tradition gives a few guesses and claims, such as Mordecai, but again, there is no evidence for any one person as the author.

8.2 DATE

The book of Esther spans about 10 years. It starts in the third year of King Xerxes (483 B.C.). Xerxes’ father Darius had been defeated by the Greeks, to the west, and conflict between the two empires continued in Xerxes’ reign.

We’re not sure how long after this period the book of Esther was written. But certainly after the period of Xerxes (485-65 BC), but not soon after his death, since parts of Esther imply a looking back at the past (such as 10:2), and other parts imply a tradition that has grown (as in Purim and how it is celebrated, in 9:19). In parts it seems the authors feels the need to educate his audience as to the customs of Xerxes and the court. This is one use of the mode of narration called “description” (see section 9 below, “Literary Analysis”), that is, to educate an audience since they no longer live close to (in chronology or geography) that social context (see the descriptive comments from the author of Esther in, e.g., 4:11

Jobes (see 9.5 below) thinks that because of element of humor, written at least a generation or two after the events occurred.\(^{30}\) This would make the date around 400 BC., possibly a little before, and anytime during the 4\(^{th}\) century BC.

8.3 HISTORICAL DIFFICULTIES

Jobes wording is concise here: “Nothing in this book has been shown to be historically untrue, though a number of questions have been raised concerning its historical accuracy.”\(^{31}\)

Here are the problems, with responses from evangelical commentators under each:

(1) PROBLEM: If Mordecai was taken into captivity with Jehoiachin (Ester 2:6), he would be over 100 years old during the historical context of the book.

RESPONSE: See section 7.2 above.


(2) PROBLEM: The number of satrapies (regions of Persia) is listed in Esther 1:1 as 127 (Daniel 6:1 gives the number at 120), but the historian Herodotus (and other ancient sources) give the number as between 20 and 30.

RESPONSE: The word in Esther 1:1 is not “Satrap,” and just means some form of province or region. So it could easily be a region smaller than a satrapy.

(3) PROBLEM: The concept, clearly evident in Esther, of Persian laws (made by the kind) being irrevocable is not known from any of the historical texts.

RESPONSE: Berlin (Fox also) claims “To govern a country in which a law could never be changed would make governing impossible.”

But this could be a generalization, not meant (literally) that the laws could never, even in 100 years, be changed, but that they were meant to be long-standing and should not be subject to change shortly after their issuance. So worded as an absolute, but understood not to technically and absolutely be immune to any change.

Jobes sees this expression as more of a literary tool:

In the two biblical contexts in which reference to this legal policy occurs, however, it not only heightens the dramatic tension of the story, it also reveals the pretentious arrogance of the Persian king and his counsel, who are thereby portrayed as thinking that they can control circumstance by merely decreeing their wishes to be irrevocably so. In both Daniel and Esther the ultimate impotence of such human reasoning is revealed. The statement that the laws of Persia and Media cannot be repealed satirizes the way the authority of the Persian monarchy was perceived, not necessarily the way Persian law formally operated.

(4) PROBLEM: The names of Vashti and Esther, as queen, are unknown to non-biblical historical texts. Herodotus gives the name of Xerxes’ wife as Amestris.

RESPONSE: Jobes lists one possibility for the book of Esther:

… the names of the characters in Esther have been questioned as historically problematic because they seem inconsistent with the names that would be expected, given the extrabiblical sources. Such problems have led some to conclude that the story is fiction. However, this may be one example of poetic license employed in the naming of characters, names that possible have been assigned by the author to characterize the role each plays in the story.

For instance, Vashti’s name is said to sound similar to the Old Persian expression for beautiful woman or beloved. The Hebrew form of Xerxes’ name (pronounced Ahashwerosh) sounds comical when pronounced in Hebrew and

33 Jobes, Esther, p. 79.
“would correspond to something like King Headache in English.” The name “Esther” sounds similar to  *Ishtar*, the Babylonian goddess of love and war … Haman’s name pronounced in Hebrew sounds similar to the Hebrew word meaning “wrath.” Of course these phonetic wordplays do not come across in English translation. Instead of being the actual name of the historical person, these names may have been chosen or created by the author to characterize the people who nonetheless did actually exist in history with other names.34

For a second meaning of Esther’s name see the section “Characters in the Book” (section 7) above.

One other option mentioned, for Vashti, is that the name Herodotus uses, Amestris, was her Greek name, and Vashti is some form of her Persian name that we simply don’t have in any extant extrabiblical sources. Another option, again for Vashti, is that Herodotus only mentions the one wife (Amestris) that bore the son who was the successor to the throne (in this case, Xerxes’ and Amestris’ on Atraxerxes).

It should be noted that other historical aspects of the book of Esther have been confirmed by extra-biblical sources. As one example, Herodotus confirms that there was indeed a custom of the Persian kings, started by Darius, that no one could approach the king without a summons (including the queen).

9. LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK

9.1 MODES OF NARRATION

We’re familiar, in biblical narrative, with what are often called different modes of narrative.35 I only include this as a preface to discuss how unique Esther is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODE</th>
<th>DEFINITION</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DIRECT</td>
<td>A simple reporting of events, thus fast-paced, at first glance “just the facts.”</td>
<td>… And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. 9 And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.   Gen 12:8-9 ESV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| DRAMATIC   | An author quotes speech, as if a                                          | [Judah spoke to him, saying] “I will                                       | 34 Jobes, *Esther*, pp. 36-37.
35 Though he borrows some of these from other authors, these four in the chart are the list Leland Ryken uses in his *Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), p. 43.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>COMMENTARY</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>scene from a play/drama. Thus we’ll see double quote marks, i.e., quoted speech. This slows the pace down.</td>
<td>be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever.” Gen 43:9 ESV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An author elaborates on some details of the setting or character. Think of a parentheses: that is, parenthetical remarks to fill in some missing information.</td>
<td>Any explanations of location (where something is), manner and customs, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The author inserts his own opinion or gives an explanation.</td>
<td>Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord. Gen 13:13 ESV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The author of Esther makes much of direct (and sometimes descriptive) narrative.

For descriptive, regarding the opening banquets of Xerxes (chapter 1) Fox states:

> The opening scene is unusually expansive for biblical narrative. Instead of reporting actions and words, the author scans the venue like a cinematographer, moving at a leisurely pace and describing in lavish detail what one present in the palace would have witnessed. This scene and some others in the book of Esther stand in contrast to the Bible’s usually scanty use of description …

Along with the author making much of dramatic and descriptive modes of narration, we find surprising little that is given of Esther’s thoughts, attitudes, or emotions, perhaps even less so than usual for biblical narrative:

> The text is strangely silent about the motives and thoughts of Esther and Mordecai. We don’t know what Esther thought about being taken into the king’s harem or why Mordecai refused to bow to Haman. The author neither exonerates nor condemns Esther and Mordecai, and never evaluates their behavior as good or bad in the eyes of the Lord. The authors’ reticence to reveal their thoughts, motives, attitudes, and intentions may be frustrating to readers accustomed to modern techniques of characterization, where inner thoughts are usually described in detail. However, biblical authors stand in the literary tradition of Mesopotamia and Syro-Palestine, which was typically laconic in its description of characters. In Hebrew narrative, character is often revealed only through action and speech, leaving the reader to draw inferences about motives and intentions.  

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Oren puts it this way:

The story is not told; it is performed: intoxicated bodies at King Ahashverosh’s banquets; feasting and fasting; immersion of young and beautiful virgins in oils and spices; bowing and now bowing down; sitting and standing in the inner royal court; a royal ring moves from one finger to another.\(^{38}\)

Berlin:

In literary terminology, the story of Esther is conveyed by “telling” rather than by “showing.” In “showing,” the characters talk and act, and the reader, seeing the characters in action, infers their motives and dispositions. In “telling,” the author or narrator (in the Bible it is impossible to distinguish the two) describes and evaluates the qualities of the characters. This helps to keep the characters flat (as befits the comic genre). We hear only the narrator for most of the story; we do not hear the characters themselves. This does not mean that we get no picture of their inner lives; on the contrary, the narrator tells us, for instance, that the king was angry, that the king loved Esther, that Haman was filled with rage at Mordecai. But this is from the mouth of the narrator; we do not see Ahasuerus stomping or hear Haman cursing. In Esther’s “telling” mode, the presence of the narrator looms large, so we have the sense that a story is being told. …

The “telling” mode is congruent with the relatively lower incidence of dialogue and direct discourse that we find in Esther. The sparseness of dialogue means that we are more likely to have indirect speech, speech reported by the narrator, which we have on numerous occasions. For example, we do not have Mordecai’s words to Esther telling her not to reveal her Jewishness; we only have the report that he told her this (2:10, 20).\(^{39}\)

Jobes:

The ambiguity of Vashti’s action and motives must be allowed to stand as the deliberate intention of the author, for he could have easily supplied an evaluation. Either a moral appraisal of Vashti’s refusal is irrelevant to the author’s point or the ambiguity is itself a part of what he is saying.\(^{40}\)

Levenson:

Full of action, with few and perhaps no scenes that could be omitted without damage, the book relies more on narration and less on quoted speech than most

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comparable biblical material. Indeed, the direct address of one of its heroes, Mordecai, is limited to two verses (4:13-14).\textsuperscript{41}

9.2 IRONY

Another tool the authors make good use of is irony.

Fox (on chapter 1):

The king and his nobility are the butt of some rather broad irony. The world-ruler banishes a wife he cannot control, only to take on later a new one who controls him completely. The king is so unsure of his authority that he has a fit when it is defied, and then to prove his strength he allows himself to be manipulated into banishing his beautiful wife. The limtness of the king’s masculine authority sends his noblemen into a tizzy, for they believe that his failure will undermine their own status. These paper patriarchs need a royal decree to back them up in their quarrels with their wives. They, like the king, are desperate for honor, and they think they can achieve it by decree. What the decree actually achieves is to broadcast to the entire empire the very news they thought so threatening.\textsuperscript{42}

There are a number of instances of irony in the book of Esther. A few examples:

(1) In ch. 1 Xerxes displays his opulent wealth. This is meant to show his power (and possibly to gain support from his nobles in his continued war with Greece). Xerxes could command any soldier (or noble) to obey, and they would not delay. Yet the one person it is assumed he can command and control more than any other (both in a patriarchal society and in an ancient royal court), his wife, will not obey his command.

(2) Because Vashti refused to come into the king’s presence, she will be demoted to the status of someone who is not allowed into the king’s presence (in 1:19 this is stated, specifically, and also she is referred to as just “Vashti,” and not by the title “queen”).

(3) Edict of death sent out on 13\textsuperscript{th} day of the first month, which is eve of Passover, i.e., the first day of Passover (Exod 12:18; Lev 23:5; Num 28:16). So the joy of Passover is an event for sorrow in Persia.

(4) Mordecai the Jew refuses to bow or fall before Haman. But later, Haman intentionally falls before Esther the Jew. Also, Hama ends up lower (literally, as in height) than Mordecai as Haman leads the horse upon which Mordecai sits. Finally, Haman’s own wife predicts that he, Haman, will “fall” before Mordecai (see Section 13, “Key Words,” below).

\textsuperscript{42} Fox, \textit{Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther}, p. 24.
Haman’s building the gallows to kill Mordecai leads to Mordecai acquiring Haman’s position and property.

9.3 PERIPETY

Levenson, "… the theme of the entire book is summed up in two Hebrew words—nahapok hu’, “the reverse occurred.” The very structure of Esther suggests the transformation “from a time of grief to one of joy, and from an occasion of mourning to a holiday” (v. 22), which it its great theme.43

There is much in Esther of the reversal of destiny, circumstances, or expectation. An author can use several literary tools to present reversal. One of these is peripety. Interestingly, in modern Greek the word peripeteia means “adventure.” The analogy would seem to be that an “adventure” has things that are unexpected, or that it is the reversal (opposite) of what could be perceived as the boring routine of everyday life. Aristotle (in his Poetics) defines peripety as a change by which the action veers round to its opposite. An example of this in modern movies would be Bruce Willis in “Sixth Sense,” where he tried to help dead people, but at the end it is he who is dead.

9.4 HUMOR

Berlin:

The threat of the destruction of the Jews is no laughing matter, but the Book of Esther is hilariously funny. … The frivolity of the book’s style—with its hyperbole, mockery, and comic misunderstandings and reversals—undercuts the gravity of its theme.44

Fox comments:

The book’s incongruous humor is one of its strange hallmarks. It mixes laughter with fear in telling about a near-tragedy that is tellingly reminiscent of actual tragedies. We laugh at the confused sexual politicians, the quirky emperor, and, above, all, the ludicrous, self-glorifying, self-destructive villain …

Humor, especially the humor of ridicule, is a device for defusing fear. The author teaches us to make fun of the very forces that once threatened—and will again threaten—our existence, and thereby makes us recognize their triviality as well as their power. “If I laugh at a mortal thing,” said Byron, “tis that I may not

week.” Jews have learned that kind of laughter. The book of Esther begins a tradition of Jewish humor.45

10. TEXT OF THE BOOK

10.1 GREEK TEXTS

An introductory article will be sent with this titled “Additions to Esther.”

And a brief article from Adele Berlin (see abstract of her commentary above) here:

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/holidays/Jewish_Holidays/Purim/History/Book_of_Esther/Greek_Versions.shtml

English translation of the additions can be found here:

http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/r/rsv/rsv-idx?type=DIV1&byte=3888691

And another English translation here, which includes the letters A-F for the 6 additions (see below):


Two Greek versions of Esther exist. One is the Septuagint (LXX), sometimes known as the “B” text (to distinguish it from the “A” text), and the second is called the (Greek) Alpha (“A”) text of Esther.

The LXX has a number of additions, as in added whole passages.

There are 6 of these additions in LXX Esther, labeled A, B, C, D, E, and F. Addition A, as an example, appears before Esther 1:1 of the Hebrew text (and this our English translations), and Addition F appears after the last verse of the Hebrew text, and thus ends the book. These additions appear to be inserted (not based on a variant Hebrew text) for the following reasons:

(1) It inserts God, prayers, and worship into the text, since this is entirely lacking in the Hebrew. Thus instead of reading God’s providence “between the lines,” so to speak, the LXX makes it clear: God delivered the Jews, even though he used human agency and historical circumstances. In doing so, the LXX is trying to make Esther more “biblical,” that is, more like books such as Daniel or Ezra.

45 Fox, Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther, p. 253.
(2) It shows the reader more of the emotions, attitudes, and motivations of the characters (see section 4 above, “ Literary Analysis,” for a mention of how this is lacking in Hebrew narrative in general, and in Esther even more so).

(3) Two of the additions (additions B and E) give the text of two edicts in Esther, whereas in the Hebrew the edicts are just mentioned.

(4) Some additions show Esther to be a pious Jewess. For instance, one additions remove any doubt the reader has as to whether Esther followed (as Daniel did) Jewish dietary laws (kashrut) while eating in the Persian royal court.

(5) The LXX has the king (Hebrew Ahashwerus) specifically as Artaxerxes, not Xerxes.

Aside from these 6 additions there are also less significant variants from the Hebrew text.

When Jerome in the 4th century was translating the Latin Vulgate from Greek manuscripts, he noticed the additions in LXX Esther (that there was no Hebrew counterpart). Probably due to a doubt as to the authenticity of the additions, but not wanting to delete them entirely, he collected them as placed them all at the end of his translation. These additions stayed in the history of churches that used Latin (Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox) and remain part of their canon to this day. Since the additions don’t make much sense collected and placed at the end of the whole story, some Bibles have placed them back where they are in the LXX. For Protestants they are not canonical, and often appear in copies of the Apocrypha as “Additions to Esther.”

The Alpha text of Esther is the other Greek text, which has less significant variants from the Hebrew.

10.2 ONE NOTE ON HEBREW MANUSCRIPTS

In the Hebrew manuscripts from the middle ages (reflected in the standard Hebrew Bible that seminary students use, called BHS), the names of Haman’s sons in Esther 9:7-9 are written in the margins, clearly offset from the rest of the text (BHS puts this in the text, but still offset from the rest of the text). We’re unsure as to the reason for this. One proposal is that this “setting apart” shows that these people were set apart for destruction. Another proposal is that the appearance—the names are in a vertical list and thus appear somewhat like a “post” or “pole”—reminds the reader of the impaling, on a post, that Haman and his sons experienced for opposing the people of God. (Note: when translations have “hanging,” this is not hanging as in western American movies, but impaling).
Part of a scroll of Esther, from the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale U. (not ancient, dated to early 19th century, but scrolls in the middle ages show the same separation of the names of Haman’s sons. Note in this manuscript that a picture is drawn as the “gallows” in which one tall gallows has 11 men hung (the 10 sons plus Haman himself; the 11th is not technically Haman but represented with the Hebrew word “man,” which is the last word in 9:6 in Hebrew and appears at the very top of the list above)

11. THEOLOGY

11.1 THE APPARENT LACK OF THEOLOGY IN GENERAL

It has been said that theology is harder to find theology in the book of Esther than any other biblical book. This is true whether one searches for what it contributes to systematic theology, or how it fits into biblical theology.

Commentators note that there are several things missing in Esther:

(1) The name “Yahweh” or even the Hebrew term of “God” (*elohim*);
(2) Anyone praying to God (as we find in the book of Daniel, also set in a land outside of Israel);
(3) Any mention of Jerusalem or the temple (as we find on Nehemiah’s heart and lips, even before his return);
(4) No direct interaction with other parts of Scripture (like the Torah). See below (section 12) for what might be a few allusions to other parts of Scripture.

Jobes comments:

This book has noting to recommend it as a religious text, much less the inspired Word of God for the Christian church. The only textual link it has to the rest of the Old Testament is that the story it tells involved the Jewish people. If one went through the text and replaced every occurrence of the word “Jews” with the name of some other ethnic group, there would be no reason to think the story had anything at all to do with the Bible.\(^\text{46}\)

11.2 THE ABSENCE OF “GOD” AND PROVIDENCE

Most Christian commentators would say that God is not absent in the book of Esther, He is hidden, or He operates behind the scenes. Non-Christian commentators will often take the position that the book teaches nothing, or very little, about God, and rather that it elevates human

decision, effort, and companionship; human hope is in human action, not in a supernatural being (hence Day, Fox; see abstracts above in section 1).

The biggest area of theology that commentators see the book of Esther teaching is providence.

Jobes comments (for her comment on the Amalekites see section 7, “Characters in the Book,” on Mordecai and Haman):

The Esther story is another episode of that ancient war between Israel and the Amalekites, and by every indication it looks as if God’s people will be destroyed. They have no king, no army, no prophet, no land, no temple, no priesthood, and no sacrifices.\(^{47}\)

11.3 MORALITY/ETHICS

Esther, the person, would not fit well into many of our churches. Jobes comments:

Unlike Daniel and his friends, Esther shows no concern for the dietary laws when she is taken into the court of a pagan king. Instead of protesting, she conceals her Jewish identity and plays to win the new-queen beauty contest. Esther loses her virginity in the bed of an uncircumcised Gentile to whom she is not married, and she pleases him in that one night better than all the other virgins of the harem. When Esther risks her life by going to the king, she does so only after Mordecai points out that she herself will not escape harm even if she refuses to act. Furthermore, Esther displays a surprising attitude of brutality. When she hears that the Jews have killed five hundred people in Susa, she asks that the massacre be permitted for yet another day and that the bodies of Haman’s ten sons be impaled on the city gate.\(^{48}\)

11.4 VIOLENCE AND DISOBEDIENCE

Karol Jackowski, in an online article here:

http://theologytoday.ptsem.edu/jan1989/v45-4-article2.htm

makes a case for what she calls “holy disobedience” in Esther. That is, that some of the questions the book of Esther is aimed at answering are ones like, “Why disobey (the governmental authorities put in place)?” “When should we disobey?” Part of her answer is that when the situation is unbearable, the contemplated act will relieve the unbearable oppression, and disobedience can be set in a broader context of God’s plan, disobedience should be considered. Then after this, especially if God is still and silent (as He is in Esther), then one can and should act and such an act is a proper act of worship.

\(^{47}\) Jobes, Esther, p. 42.

\(^{48}\) Jobes, Esther, p. 20.
Jackowski comments:

The inexplicable absence of God from the original text of Esther provides possibly the most profound motivation to risk a dangerous act of disobedience. Esther demonstrates an irresistible willingness to trust in the unseen workings of God while tortured by anxiety and the fear that her sacrifice in the end may come to nothing.\(^49\)

12. PLACE IN CANON AND INNERTEXTUALITY

12.1 PLACE IN CANON

In the Jewish canon, the books are the same as the Protestant canon, but in a different order. Esther is one of five books, or in ancient times, “scrolls”—Hebrew *megillot*—that were grouped together and were part of the “Writings” (of the three-fold “Law, Prophets, and Writings”). These give are Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. These are read at five major festivals in the Jewish calendar, Esther being read at Purim.

As notes in section 1 above, Esther is the only one that is simply called *megillah* (the Hebrew singular for “the scroll”—*megillot* above is the plural, the singular—*ah* ending being replaced by the plural—*ot* ending).

Tim Keller has an interesting quote from a pastor on the three books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther (see Section 5.3 above), Sermon #2. This pastor says that God shows us a diversity of people He uses by giving us but not one, not two, but three books on how He helped His people in exile. (1) Ezra – about a minister, a teacher of the Word; (2) Nehemiah – a lay person, an urban planner and developer, he used management skills to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, so economic life and civic life could flourish and (3) Esther, up in the royal working for justice. Male and female, clergy and lay, everybody – God’s using them all!!

Jobes says, “The book of Esther subtly answers the question of the covenant from the perspective of those who did not, for whatever reasons, return to Jerusalem.”\(^50\)

The book of Esther starts with Hebrew *vayehiy*, “And it happened” (the KJV “and it came to pass” that we read so often in the narrative books of the OT). This opening does two things. First, it links this to history (not fiction). And second, it links Esther to the books of history that came after the Pentateuch. Josh 1:1 starts with the same word, as does Judges, Ruth, 1 Sam, and 2 Sam (originally it is thought that 1-2 Kgs were part of 1-2 Samuel, that is, what we know as four books were one scroll).


12.2 INNERTEXTUALITY

By “inner” textuality we mean how an author or book interacts with other parts of Scripture ("inter" would infer how the Bible interacts with literary texts outside of itself).

Edict of death was sent out on 13th day of first month, which is eve of Passover, i.e., the first day of Passover (Exod 12:18; Lev 23:5; Num 28:16). So as readers we are meant to think back to Passover, obviously another event in which God had to deliver His people from the oppression of a dominant people group.

The expression, “with fasting, weeping, and wailing” (Esther 4:3) echoes Joel 2:12 (as well as the question, “Who knows?” found in Joel 2:14 as well as Esther 4).

There is a link with very end of the book of Kings. Berlin:

Esther, no less than Ezra and Nehemiah but of course in a different fashion, picks up the story of Israel where the Book of Kings left off, with the exile of Jehoiachin to Babylonia, signaling the end of Judean independence and the beginning of the exile (2:6).

And also many commentators see links with the account of Joseph in Genesis.

Linda Day:

Though the book of Esther is not religious, it is exceptionally biblical. Other parts of the biblical canon are echoed in it, and the story is patterned after these earlier stories to greater and lesser degrees. The biblical work with which the book exhibits the closest connection is the Joseph story in Genesis 37-50 … the situational context of both is similar: set in a foreign court, the characters rise from humble origins to attain high political positions, which provide them the means to help their people in a crisis. There are also structural similarities between the two works, and the book of Esther repeats certain linguistic expressions from the earlier story. Though mentioned a few times, God is likewise not very present or active in Joseph’s situation.

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52 Day, Esther, p. 18.
13. KEY WORDS

13.1 “BANQUET”

The Hebrew word for “banquet,” *mishteh*, occurs 20x in the book of Esther. It occurs more in Esther than any other OT book. In fact second place goes to Genesis, which though much longer than the book of Esther only has 5 occurrences of *mishteh*. In fact the whole OT only has 46 occurrences. So 20x in Esther, and 26x in the whole rest of the OT.

See section 4.1 above (see list of banquets there in a chart).

13.2 “DECREE”

Hebrew term *dat*, “edict,” is rare in the rest of the Hebrew Bible.

As Linda Day notes:

Signifying a radically different sense from the biblical *torah*, or “instruction,” *dat* indicates an official decree issued by the government for its citizens. Decrees are given to be obeyed, and obedience (along with its corollary, disobedience) functions as a theme in the story. How an individual chooses to respond to the royal law or to commands from other people drives the progression of events and their outcomes.53

13.3 “FALL”

The Hebrew verb *naphal*, “to fall,” does not occur often, but it is key in this book. It occurs four times. In 3:7 when Haman casts (“causes to fall”) the lot, or *pur*, to determine when the Jews will be destroyed. The second and third occurrences are in 6:13, when Haman’s wife e says that he (Haman) has begun to fall (be humiliated) before Mordecai. Then in 7:8, when Haman falls into Esther’s couch begging for his life. Along with this are other verbs or expression of height (that do not use Hebrew *naphal*), such as Mordecai’s refusal to bow down (3:2), or Haman being lower than Mordecai when leading Mordecai on the horse.

General introduction:

If we did not have Purim, with the reading *Megillat Esther* as its centerpiece, Esther would languish in obscurity. In fact, it seems likely that Esther was included in the Bible because of the celebration of Purim. The converse is also probable: if we did not have the book of Esther we would not have Purim, for Esther gives us the account of the origin or Purim and the reason for its annual celebration. Without the book, there would be little reason to perpetuate the observance of Purim. Whether the book preceded the festival or the festival preceded the book, the two are now inextricably bound together.\(^{54}\)

The theme of hiddenness in Purim (note the link with the second interpretation of Esther’s name above, section 7.14):

Poor Purim. It has become the Jewish mardi gras, a day of revelry, drinking, and masquerades. But it is much more than this.

Purim is the holiday in hiding. One has to probe beneath the surface to find the spiritual dimension that lies underneath. In fact, the disguises and the masks are all designed to underscore the essential hiddenness of this day. This theme of concealment is found in the very name of the heroine of Purim. "Esther" derives from the root *str*, which in Hebrew means "hidden." In the Torah (Dt. 31:18), God says to Israel: "I will surely hide (*hastir astir*) My face from you..." The sages see this Hebrew phrase as a subtle suggestion of the hiddenness of God during the time of Esther.

Take Esther herself. No one except Mordecai knows who she really is. Even King Ahashveros is kept in the dark. "*Ein Esther magedet moledetah,*" says the Megillah in 2:20. "Esther did not reveal her origins..." This is the theme of the day: nothing is revealed.

Even God himself is hidden in the Purim story. Search the Megillah from beginning to end, but you find no mention of His name. Is this not strange for a biblical book? The closest we come to a reference to God is when Mordecai says to Esther that redemption for the Jews will come from *makom aher*, "another place."

To underscore the hiddenness of God, the entire story seems to be one of chance, happenstance, and coincidence -- the very things that the Bible tells us the world is not! In the Megillah, the role of God is unseen, His hand invisible. Queen Vashti just happens to refuse to appear at the royal feast; the king just happens to rid himself of her and to search for a new queen; Mordecai just happens to be in the right place at the right moment to foil a plot against the kings life; the king just happens to have a sleepless night and his courtiers remind him that Mordecai saved his life; Haman just happens to be in the Queen's chambers when the King

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walks in. Even the date on which the Jews are to be exterminated is determined by the casting of lots: *hipil pur hu hagoral,* "he cast a pur, that is the lot..." (Esther 3:7) and it is this "pur" that gives us the name of the holiday. All these echoes of randomness and chance suggest anything but the guiding hand of God.

Even the miracle of Purim is a hidden one. Contrast this with the miracle of Hanukah. There, the oil that is enough for one day burns instead for eight days, which is a *nes niglah,* an open miracle that everyone can see. But the Purim miracle -- whereby the entire Jewish community is saved from destruction -- is a hidden miracle, a *nes nistar.* The interceding hand of God is invisible. It could easily be ascribed to happenstance, the way everything else in the story seems to be happenstance.

Gradually we begin to understand the role of masks in the Purim story. *The entire deliverance of the Jewish people is masked.* It is a story wrapped in a disguise, hidden behind a costume, concealed behind a mask. Even that strange dictum in the Talmud *(Megillah 7b)* that ordains us to become intoxicated on Purim *ad delo yada,* "until we know not the difference between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordecai" -- even this is part of the theme of hiddenness. For how strange is the Talmudic advice. Ours is, after all, a tradition that abhors drunkenness. We are a people of the mind, discernment, analysis -- all those things that fall under the rubric of *data,* knowledge. But on Purim we are bidden to become intoxicated and conceal our vaunted *data* -- to the point of *ad delo yada* -- "until there is no *data*" -- and to enter a universe where reality has no meaning and we begin to realize that it is not our intellects that guide the world but the One Intellect above that guides the world.

There is another strange hiddenness about Purim. This is the most physical of all our holidays. The festive Purim meal, the sending of food gifts, the encouragement to drink to excess -- these are matters that deal with the body. What by contrast, is the most spiritual of our holy days? Obviously it is Yom Kippur. Our observance of these two days are in diametric opposition to one another. ...

... Purim and Yom Hakippurim are mirror images of one another. On Yom Kippur we are forbidden to eat or drink; on Purim we are bidden to eat and drink. Yom Kippur is overwhelmingly spiritual; Purim is overwhelmingly physical. But on each day we are required to serve God fully, with our bodies and with our souls.

The lesson is clear: God can be served not only in the solemnity of a Yom Kippur, but also in the revelry of a Purim. God is present not only in the open ark of Yom Kippur when spirituality seems so close, but also in the open food and drink of Purim when spirituality seems so remote. It is much more of a challenge to remember God amidst the revelry than to remember Him in the midst of the solemnity. To imbibe and to feast and to remember the Author of all; this is the great challenge of Purim -- perhaps a greater challenge than any other holy day. Purim is the holiday in hiding. But its message need not be concealed from us.55

Another author contrasts Purim with Passover instead of Yom Kippur:

55 [http://www.aish.com/sp/k/48951351.html](http://www.aish.com/sp/k/48951351.html)
There are two very different kinds of festivals. Purim is noisy, merry and secular in flavor. Passover is calm, meditative and deeply religious. Yet they are linked by a common theme. The Passover celebrates the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, Purim their deliverance from annihilation in Persia. Between them they frame almost the entire sweep of Old Testament history, and mark it as a story of deliverance from beginning to end.\textsuperscript{56}

15. FEMINIST INTERPRETATION

Though Berlin is interested in literary analysis in her commentary and not feminist issues, she does hold that Esther is unique, with Ruth, in the book’s featuring of a woman, and this is not uncommon in late biblical literature:

There are certainly a number of important, even heroic, women in the Bible: Eve, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Tamar, Miriam, Deborah, and Abigail, to name the more famous ones. But, as it as been noted some year ago, while women like these may stand in the spotlight for a scene or two, the stories in which women appear are usually about men. It is the male heroes, and few of them at that, who are the focal point of the great narrative block from Genesis through Kings: the patriarchs, Joseph, Moses, the kings. But when it come to later biblical and apocryphal books, especially those that resemble fiction, the situation changes. Instead of one long continuous narrative we have shorter, self-contained narratives, and in a number of them women are the central characters. Most obvious is the Book of Ruth, now dated by most scholars to the Persian period, in which Ruth and Naomi completely eclipse the male characters. The Story of Susanna, part of the Additions to Daniel in the Apocrypha, also features a woman in a central role, standing against the men of the establishment, although her ultimate vindication comes from Daniel. Most heroic is Judith, in the apocryphal book by that name. Judith, using her brains, her feminine wiles, and her physical strength, single-handedly kills the enemy of Israel and saves her people. Esther is like Judith in that she, too, is responsible for saving her people from the enemy, but Esther does so in concert with Mordecai. The tendency to feature women in sustained roles continues in the pseudepigraphal book Joseph and Asenath and in the Greek romances. The point is that in terms of the prominence and potency of women characters, the Book of Esther is part of the late biblical and postbiblical trend to feature women characters in important roles, whether alone or together with male heroes.\textsuperscript{57}

Jobes:


For the author of Esther the issue of the dignity and position of women in Persian court paled in contrast to the pressing threat of death for an entire race of people, who were God’s covenant people at that. The threat against the Jews of Persia was a threat against God’s plan of redemption. This distinguishes it from other instance of genocide against other peoples, evils that are no less morally reprehensible. The major sociological distinction within the book is an adversarial relationship between Jew and Gentile, not between men and women. Feminist interpretations fail to note that although both Vashti and Esther are women, Vashti was Gentile and Esther a Few. That difference is of far greater significant to the story than their common gender.\textsuperscript{58}

However, Jobes elsewhere does see Esther as representing women:

At that time and place, worldly power was held by Persian men. The author chooses to include and highlight an incident involving the interaction between men and women because in this story powerful Persian men rare outwitted by a Jewish woman. Esther has to overcome two levels of conflict, both as a woman and as a Jew, to come into her own as Queen of Persia. We modern readers probably cannot fully appreciate how truly remarkable a feat that was.

... That she actually succeeds in outwitting Haman and reversing his decree is almost a miracle. Other women in the Bible are renown because they were the mothers of sons who became great in Israel (e.g., Sarah, Rebecca, Hannah). The only other book of the Bible named for a woman is Ruth, A Gentile, whose role in history was to give birth to an ancestor of King David. In contrast, Esther is renown because her political acumen saved her people and on her authority a religious holiday was proclaimed, which has been celebrated for more than two thousand years.\textsuperscript{59}

Fishman:

Because of the privileged situation in which we live, few would wish to view Esther as a role model. Unlike the Jews who struggled to stay afloat in dangerous European courts or fled form one country to the next, it is difficult for many of us to identify with a woman trapped in a political situation in which the only hope for personal and communal survival depends on long silence and patience—punctuated by a disciplined burst of carefully targeted action and advocacy.\textsuperscript{60}

Fishman (at time of writing of this article) was co-director of Hadassah International Research Institute on Jewish Women, at Brandeis University (as well as an Associate Professor of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies at Brandeis).

\textsuperscript{58} Jobes, \textit{Esther}, p. 72.
\textsuperscript{60} Sylvia Barak Fishman, “Reading Esther: Cultural Impact on Responses to Biblical Heroines” (2002), p. 17, at \url{www.brandeis.edu/hbi/pubs/wp9.pdf}
Fishman again:

… contemporary readers of the Bible are likely to have little experience with and even less patience for hierarchies of power. Citizens of democratic countries often assume that straightforward, direct communication of political positions is possible. When individuals are free to speak out, silence is a mark of cowardice. Thus, contemporary feminist readers define female heroism as behavior devoid of compliance of submissiveness. When feminist reader condemn what they see as Esther’s initial passiveness and later deceptiveness, they are evaluating her character based on modern cultural assumptions in applicable during the time period represented in the text.61

16. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

16.1 INTRODUCTION

The Old Persian, or Achaemenid Empire (550-330 B.C.) started with Cyrus, and at its pinnacle (5th century B.C.) stretched from India to the east, then toward the west to the northeast border of Greece, and Egypt to the southwest. It was known for three things, which we see reflected biblical books from this period:

(1) Unlike the Babylonians, the Persians in general were more syncretistic, allowing foreign peoples that they had conquered to have freedom of religion (note Cyrus’s allowance for some Jews to move back to Jerusalem).

(2) A network of roads and their own version of the “pony express.” This helped a king unify a vast empire (and in the book of Esther allowed for royal decrees to get communicated to all the provinces). More on this below.

(3) Persia has been called by some historians the first “true” empire. By this they mean not (1) a rough collection of “city states,” that does not have a clear, centralized government; and not (2) a system that is so dominated by one ruler and one army that it seeks to simply assimilate others into one culture. Rather by “true” empire they mean a rule and system that has the ability to bring together subservient countries, peoples, and even factions of their own country, so that there is a balance of dependence on the central government, and a measure of independence that the central government allows that does not hurt but help the whole system.

There are three Persian kings that are mentioned by name in the Bible (see chart below). The first (Cyrus) issues the decree to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem, the second (Darius) allows for

the rebuilding of the temple, and the third (Xerxes) is presented as someone who doesn’t seem to care one way of the other for the return (it has already taken place, and the Jews are likely one of dozens of people groups in his kingdom), but who ends up marrying a Jewess (Esther).

### 16.2 THREE PERSIAN KINGS IN THE BIBLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KING</th>
<th>Ruled</th>
<th>Context</th>
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<tr>
<td>CYRUS</td>
<td>546-530 BC</td>
<td>This is the “Cyrus” of the Bible (mentioned in 2 Chron, Ezra, Daniel, and Isaiah). He conquered the Medes, Lydians, and Babylonians to essentially found this new world empire called Persia, which stretched over three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe. Cyrus thought of himself as a “savior” to the nations he conquered (note he is called a “messiah” or “anointed” in Isa 45:1), putting in place policies of religious freedom and often allowing (or funding) temples to be rebuilt (belonging to peoples he conquered). The Cyrus Cylinder is one of the best-known artifacts in biblical archaeology. It talks about this aspect of Cyrus’s reign (his openness and help to the religions of other people groups). And it is Cyrus that allows the Jews to return to Jerusalem. Thus in the book of Esther either Xerxes has a different policy, or Haman has tricked the king into doing what is not normal Persian policy (trying to destroy a people group). Cyrus’s son, Cambyses II, only ruled for a few years, but added Egypt to the Persian empire by conquering it in 525 B.C. (Cambyses died in 522 B.C.).</td>
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<tr>
<td>DARIUS</td>
<td>522-485 BC</td>
<td>Darius was, like Cyrus before him, very adept as a leader at consolidating the empire. Many historians think Persia reached its climax under Darius. Darius had extensive building projects for cities and temples, he built canals (both as infrastructure within Persia and in other parts of the empire to link lakes or oceans), roads, and established a mint and coinage system. However, his attempt to invade the Greek mainland was repelled when he lost to the Greeks at the famous battle of Marathon. At the beginning of the reign of Darius the rebuilding of</td>
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The temple in Jerusalem began (see Hag 2:1-10; Zech 7:1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>XERXES (or Xerxes I)</th>
<th>485-465 BC</th>
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<td></td>
<td>The king of the book of Esther. Son of Darius (above). As did his father, Xerxes organized an invasion of Greece. And again as happened to this father, but on a much slower timetable Xerxes eventually lost. Xerxes did make it to Athens (and took that city), but the army he left in Greece was eventually defeated. Ahasueros (the Hebrew form of Xerxes) is mentioned two times outside of the book of Esther: in Ezra 4:6 (which, similar to Haman’s view in the book of Esther, talks about complaints against the Jews) and in Dan 9:1 (where Darius is mentioned as the “son of Ahasueros,” the Darius is note Darius “the Great” [see above, the father of Ahasueros] but Darius “the Mede”). Xerxes was followed by his son Artaxerxes I (465-424 BC). After a few other kings Artaxerxes II ruled for a long time (404-358 BC), and would be considered a fourth major ruler of Persia along with the three above. Artaxerxes II was known for a period of peace, stability, and building (cities and monuments). After a few other kings, Alexander the Great of Greece successfully invaded Persia.</td>
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| 334 B.C. | Alexander the Great (Greece) successfully invades Persia. |

16.3 OBSERVATIONS

History Channel 8-minute summary of Persia that includes some of their architectural and engineering feats:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtRekH1pAo0

Some good notes on the road system that was built by Darius:
One of the most significant achievements of the Achaemenid administration was the establishment of the Royal Road that connected Susa to Sardis. This road, at the beginning used exclusively by the royal messengers (Barid; see below), eventually developed into the main communication nerve of the empire. Major trade routes were connected to the Royal Road and it might have extended eastwards from Susa as well, although no Greek accounts confirm such suspicion. The Achaemenid Royal Road was clearly a sign of the administration’s awareness of the need for quick communication routes and the importance of road-making, a trait continued by most subsequent rulers. It can also be credited as the first clear forerunner of the famous Via Apia of the Roman Empire that formed the major road system of that empire.

An immediate use of the Royal Road was made by the members of the Barid system. Barid was the name of the Achaemenid postal system established by Darius I in order to facilitate the communication between the central and the satrapal governments. All satrapies and local governments had the duty of providing fresh horses and amenities for the Barid messengers. Satraps and King’s Eyes sent regular reports of the state of their satrapies to the Imperial Court in Persepolis and Susa, where detailed records of the empire were kept. Sadly, with Alexander’s burning of the Persepolis Treasury and pillage of the Susa Treasury, none of these records survived to our time and we can only speak of their existence based on various archaeological findings and the records of Greek historians.\textsuperscript{62}

In fact what we (Americans) know as the Pony Express came from the Persian idea. It was actually Herodotus, the Greek historian, commenting on the old Persian empire, that is the source of the quote, “Neither snow, nor rain, nor gloom of night, stays these valiant couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.” What Herodotus said of the Persian riders was used by the Pony Express (started in 1860), and later became the unofficial motto of the U.S. Postal Service.

\textsuperscript{62} “History of Iran,” \url{http://www.iranologie.com/history/Achaemenid/chapter%20VII.html}. 