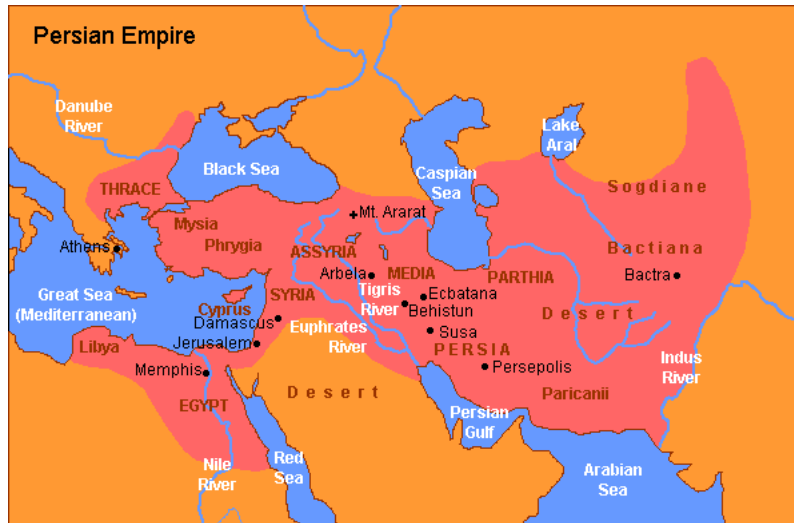


Book of Esther

The author of the book must have been a Jew who lived in Persia at the time of the events narrated. He must have also had access to the official chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia. Many believe it was Mordecai; the time of the writing was c. 475 B.C.



Let me give you several helpful chronologies:

721 B.C. Assyria conquers the Northern Kingdom.

625 B.C. Babylon established as a power by Nebuchadnezzar's father Nabopolassar, an Assyrian noble.

612 B.C. Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar defeats Egypt and Assyria at Carchemish.

606 B.C. Judah is defeated by Babylon and the first of three major deportations. Two will later take place in 597 and 586.

539 B.C. Cyrus, King of Persia conquers Babylon (the end of the Babylonian Empire).

538 B.C. Cyrus the Great permits Jewish repatriation to the land to rebuild the Temple.

516 B.C. Temple is completed.

480 B.C. Xerxes I lost the battle of Salamis being defeated by the Greek city states.

475 B.C. the events described in the Book of Esther take place

We are now ready to analyzed the book of Esther. Esther and her family had apparently never availed themselves of prior repatriations.

Xerxes I (486-465 B.C.) had just lost the battle of Salamis. He turned his attention toward home. On the last night of a particularly debaucherous seven-day festival the King calls for his queen, a lady named Vashti.

Vashti had heard tales of the boy's rogue like conduct and refused to come. The King was infuriated so he divorced his "Queen." What else could he do, he had to save face for he had called for her in the presence of all his Satraps. Est 1:1-22

Est 1:1 This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush:

Est 1:2 At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa,

Est 1:3 and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present.

Est 1:4 For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty.

Est 1:5 When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace ...

Est 1:7 Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king's liberality ...

Est 1:10 On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded.

Est 1:11 to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at.

Est 1:12 But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger ...

Est 1:19 *Memucam replied:* "Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she.

A contest is held and a Miss Persia selected. Women in Persia, unless royalty, were treated a little better than animals, so maidens were herded to the Palace for the great contest.

Esther, a closet Jewish maiden, had lived with her cousin Mordecai, also a closet Jew, ever since her parent's death. Esther was selected, making Mordecai very proud, he urged her to hide her true ethnicity.

Soon a couple of eunuchs named Bigthana and Teresh plotted to kill Xerxes but Mordecai found out about the plot and told Esther. The Queen told Xerxes, giving credit to Mordecai, and the plot was foiled. The two conspirators were hung on a tree; the custom was to impale them first and then hang them for show.

Mordecai was rewarded by being listed in the Chronicles of the King of Persia. His heroic act was recorded for posterity. Est 2:1-23

Est 2:5 Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish,

Est 2:6 who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah.

Est 2:7 Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

Est 2:8 When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many girls were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem.

Est 2:9 The girl pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven maids selected from the king's palace and moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem.

Est 2:10 Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so.

Est 2:11 Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her ...

Est 2:15 When the turn came for Esther (the girl Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail) to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her.

Est 2:16 She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

Est 2:17 Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti ...

Est 2:20 But Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do, for she continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up.

Est 2:21 During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes.

Est 2:22 But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai.

Est 2:23 And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were hanged on a gallows. All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.

A Satrap named Haman, an Agagite, was promoted to the number two man in the Kingdom; the power of the new position went to his head. Haman made a rule that all must bow before him when he arrived for work at the Palace Gate. This to Mordecai was unthinkable given the fact that such behavior was an acknowledgement, at least in the eyes of the Persians, that Haman was a god. Mordecai refused to bow and gave as his reason his Jewish heritage.

Haman informed the King of his confrontation. Keep in mind no one knew Esther was kin to Mordecai. Haman got permission from the King to have the man who refused to bow killed. The King further gave his approval to have those of Mordecai's ethnos killed. An irrevocable proclamation was issued authorizing the killing of the troublemaker and all his fellow Jews. Est 3:1-15

Est 3:1 After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles.

Est 3:2 All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor.

Est 3:3 Then the royal officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?"

Est 3:4 Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai's behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew ...

Est 3:8 Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom whose customs are different from those of all other people and who do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them.

Est 3:9 If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will put ten thousand talents of silver into the royal treasury for the men who carry out this business."

Est 3:10 So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.

Est 3:11 "Keep the money," the king said to Haman, "and do with the people as you please" ...

Est 3:13 Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews -- young and old, women and little children -- on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods.

Est 3:14 A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so they would be ready for that day.

Est 3:15 Spurred on by the king's command, the couriers went out, and the edict was issued ...

Mordecai, in response to the proclamation mourned outside the gate, in sack cloth and ashes. Esther heard of his actions so she sent a messenger named Hatach to comfort Mordecai and to inquire what was wrong. Mordecai gave Hatach details concerning Haman and his conversation with Xerxes. Mordecai sent a message to Esther urging her to go see the King and to plead the case of her people.

Esther is not too thrilled with Mordecai's plan and sends Hatach back with the message that only people who are summoned can go into the presence of the King. When unannounced people did arrive the King either would be pleased and permit an audience or the unannounced person would be executed.

When she protested that Mordecai's plan might prove fatal, Mordecai insists that this is her responsibility to God. Mordecai urges Esther to think clearly about two facts; first, her nationality will be found out ultimately and second, that both she and what is left of her family will be executed when it is known they are Jewish.

He further tells her that God is going to save Israel and she can either participate or not participate. She is also reminded that her being in the harem with opportunity to save Israel may have been the sole reason why she was born into the Kingdom of God. Esther agrees to go if Mordecai and his friends will pray and fast for her. The only possibility left open to Esther was to appear at the entrance of the throne room and hope for a gracious response from the king.

This was for Esther a very dangerous plan even under the best of circumstances.

Est 4:1-17

Est 4:1 When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly ...

Est 4:4 When Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them.

Est 4:5 Then Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why.

Est 4:6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate.

Est 4:7 Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews.

Est 4:8 He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to urge her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

Est 4:9 Hathach went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said.

Est 4:10 Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai,

Est 4:11 "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."

Est 4:12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai,

Est 4:13 he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape.

Est 4:14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

Est 4:15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai:

Est 4:16 "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."

Est 4:17 So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions.

Fortunately, the king graciously received Esther, even offering her half the Kingdom if she so desired. She very coyly asks for nothing except to host a banquet for both Xerxes and Haman. At the banquet, rather than asking for deliverance of her people, she for whatever reason, asked instead that the two of them come to another banquet the next day.

Haman was overjoyed at the special invitation. He had to pass by the gate on his way home where Mordecai was lamenting and was angered once more when Mordecai did not bow.

Haman tells his family and friends what a great day he had; he was excited about the banquet with the King and Queen and the second invite. He also reveals his anger over the "jerk Mordecai" who just would not bow. Haman's wife and friends suggest that he obtain permission from the king to hang Mordecai on gallows built right there in his own courtyard. It would seem Esther's purpose in inviting the king and Haman to a 2nd private banquet, was to accuse Haman of plotting to destroy her people. Although given her situation this was not a bad plan but with God involved He will make it a superb plan. Est 6:1-14

Est 6:1 That night the king could not sleep; so, he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him.

Est 6:2 It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes.

Est 6:3 "What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?" the king asked. "Nothing has been done for him," his attendants answered.

Est 6:4 The king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the palace to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows he had erected for him.

Est 6:5 His attendants answered, "Haman is standing in the court." "Bring him in," the king ordered.

Est 6:6 When Haman entered, the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" Now Haman thought to himself, "Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?"

Est 6:7 So he answered the king, "For the man the king delights to honor,

Est 6:8 have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head.

Est 6:9 Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king's most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!"

Est 6:10 "Go at once," the king commanded Haman. "Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended."

Est 6:11 So Haman got the robe and the horse. He robed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city streets, proclaiming before him, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!"

Est 6:12 Afterward Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief,

Est 6:13 and told Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, "Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him -- you will surely come to ruin!"

Est 6:14 While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman away to the banquet Esther had prepared.

Why she didn't accuse Haman at the first banquet can only be conjectured. Maybe she was afraid but in hindsight we know it was God in action! Unable to sleep that night, the king had the official chronicles read to him.

One such chronicle told of Mordecai's unrewarded loyalty in exposing a plot against the king. It was no accident he could not sleep and it was no accident he read of Mordecai's exploits. God is in this thing, knee deep. Haman arrived at the court to ask the King if he could hang Mordecai. He was preempted by Xerxes who asked Haman "what honors should be bestowed upon a favorite of the king?" Thinking himself to be the King's favorite, and supposing Xerxes was going to give him special honor, he suggested a very elaborate celebration, only to be told later these honors were for a man named Mordecai, a Jew.

"Bring him ... through the street ... and give him a ticker tape parade" recommended Haman. And then those strange words from the mouth of the King: "Do even so to Mordecai" said the King to the surprised Haman.

Keep in mind a proclamation had been signed by Xerxes authorizing the death of Mordecai and all Jews. What was going on in the King's mind is unknown, what and if he knew and or remembered about his earlier proclamation is unknown. I would conjecture he may have forgotten his earlier command to annihilate a complete race.

Being a fickle and forgetful monarch, he for whatever reason had failed to connect this latest desire with his earlier fiat or maybe he didn't recall the specifics of his earlier command to exterminate the Jews! Who knows - God may even have clouded his thinking.

Later, at the second banquet hosted by Esther, the King indicates he doesn't remember any edict to kill Mordecai and his "ethnos." Esther reminds the King of the edict and further reminds it was Haman who had written the edict the King had signed. Esther also reveals to the King that she is a Jew saying, "if we were to be sold as slaves then I could understand that business is business"-- but to have us killed for the gold in our teeth and the paltry trinkets we may have acquired as your wives, concubines, wine stewards, cooks etc., this doesn't make sense and I therefore feel compelled to speak."

Est 7:5 King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he? Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?"

Est 7:6 Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman." Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen.

4.25 Notice Esther distances the King from the deed and so also does the King himself by asking "who did this?" He asked much like David when speaking with Nathan concerning the Bathsheba deal "who is he" - where is the man who did this?"

4.26 Esther does not answer "you did it at the request of Haman," but rather she says, "it's the vile Haman." Est 7:7-10

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