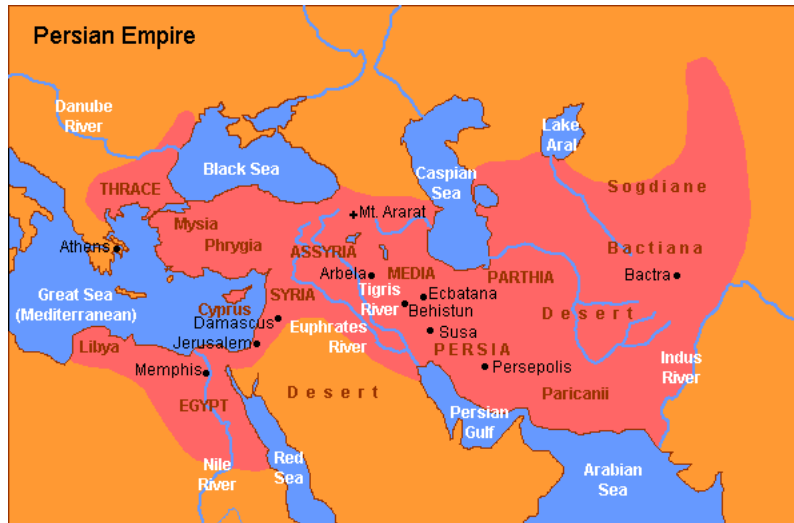


Book of Esther

9-19-2018

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 endures 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 continue our analysis of the book of Esther. Last week we studied Esther and her marriage to Xerxes I.

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

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

A Satrap named Haman, 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. 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

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

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

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."

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?" 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

Est 7:7 The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life.

Est 7:8 Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, "Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?" As soon as the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.

Est 7:9 Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, "A gallows seventy-five feet high stands by Haman's house. He had it made for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king." The king said, "Hang him on it!"

Est 7:10 So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided.

Esther asked the king for the preservation of her people from destruction and boldly accuses Haman of being the adversary. The absolute power of these Persian monarchs must be kept in mind. No one questioned such a monarch. The Persian King was thought to be god and gods do not make mistakes. The king leaves the room and goes out into the garden enraged at his "discovery," and when he returns he finds Haman pleading with Esther for his life.

She is reclining banquet style and Haman has laid beside her beseeching her to save him from the King's wrath. Accusing him of making prurient advances toward his queen, he ordered Haman to be hanged on the same gallows he had built for Mordecai; he poured his wrath upon Haman and attributed to him the worst of motives for thus approaching the queen.

I do not think the King really believed Haman was attempting to seduce Esther, he simply jumps to the nearest conclusion which suits his fancy and alleges Haman is trying in his absence to seduce his Queen. The king, learning for the first time that his queen was a Jewess, was overwhelmed by the thought that she and her people had been sold unto destruction by an unalterable decree.

This is the response for which Mordecai, Esther and many other Jews in the Kingdom of Persia had been praying, but deliverance is still a miracle away. To be sure, he had originally consented to Haman's plot without much deliberation; but more than one scholar has thought it difficult to imagine that he didn't know who had been responsible for initiating this pogrom only two months before. Esther carefully built up her case before finally naming Haman. By doing this she made it easy for the King to blame Haman. The destiny of man is never a product of what he thinks or does or plans.

Just a few days earlier Haman had received from the King a decree to kill Mordecai and all Jews, the day before, Haman had led a Jew in triumphal procession through the streets of the city, and then at the Queen's banquet he finds himself pleading with a Jewess for his very life! It reminds of our Lord's words about those who build new barns to house their new harvest but before their next harvest the owners die.

Luk 12:16 And he spake a parable unto them, saying, "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:"

Luk 12:17 "And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?"

Luk 12:18 "And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods."

Luk 12:19 "And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."

Luk 12:20 "But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?"

Luk 12:21 "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Luk 12:22 And he said unto his disciples, "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on."

Luk 12:23 "The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment."

The ethereal nature of life and its fleeting trends of events and sequences is emphasized by James chapter four.

Jam 4:13 Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain.

Jam 4:14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

Jam 4:15 For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

A similar reversal of events for Israel will take place at the inauguration of the Millennium. Isa 14:1-3 and Zec 14:1-8

Isa 14:1 The LORD will have compassion on Jacob; once again he will choose Israel and will settle them in their own land. Aliens will join them and unite with the house of Jacob.

Isa 14:2 Nations will take them and bring them to their own place. And the house of Israel will possess the nations as menservants and maidservants in the LORD'S land. They will make captives of their captors and rule over their oppressors.

Isa 14:3 On the day the LORD gives you relief from suffering and turmoil and cruel bondage,

Zec 14:1 A day of the LORD is coming when your plunder will be divided among you.

Zec 14:2 I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city.

Zec 14:3 Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle.

Zec 14:4 On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south.

Zec 14:5 You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

Zec 14:6 On that day there will be no light, no cold or frost.

Zec 14:7 It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime -- a day known to the LORD. When evening comes, there will be light.

Zec 14:8 On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter.

As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. This word was a command to execute Haman, which is not actually recorded in the text. The understanding comes from the metaphor of antiquity. The ancients sometimes covered the heads of those about to be executed.

Est 8:1 That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came into the presence of the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her.

Est 8:2 The king took off his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman, and presented it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed him over Haman's estate.

Est 8:3 Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews.

Est 8:4 Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she arose and stood before him.

Est 8:5 "If it pleases the king," she said, "and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces.

Est 8:6 For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?"

Est 8:7 King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "Because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have hanged him on the gallows.

Est 8:8 Now write another decree in the king's name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king's signet ring--for no document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked."

All now knew of Esther's nationality. The safety of Esther and Mordecai was from all indication something the King could guarantee but the proclamation to the Provinces was another case.

Est 8:9 At once the royal secretaries were summoned ... They wrote out all Mordecai's orders to the Jews, and to the satraps, governors and nobles of the 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush. These orders were written in the script of each province and the language of each people and also to the Jews in their own script and language. Est 8:10 Mordecai wrote in the name of King Xerxes, sealed the dispatches with the king's signet ring, and sent them by mounted couriers, who rode fast horses especially bred for the king.

Est 8:11 The king's edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate any armed force of any nationality or province that might attack them and their women and children; and to plunder the property of their enemies.

Est 8:12 The day appointed for the Jews to do this in all the provinces of King Xerxes was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar.

Est 8:13 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 that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.

Est 8:14 The couriers, riding the royal horses, raced out, spurred on by the king's command. And the edict was also issued in the citadel of Susa.

Messengers on horseback were dispatched immediately. Special emphasis is placed here upon the speed with which Mordecai's letters were sent out.

Est 8:15 Mordecai left the king's presence wearing royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen. And the city of Susa held a joyous celebration.

Est 8:16 For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor.

The king empowered Mordecai to issue a new decree to counteract the first and he left the "how to" to the newly empowered Mordecai. Mordecai devised a unique plan, no doubt under the guidance of God the Holy Spirit. The Jews were permitted to arm and defend themselves.

Est 8:17 In every province and in every city, wherever the edict of the king went, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them.

This produced great rejoicing everywhere and many became Jewish proselytes given this latest of many miracles in Persia where God's providence and watch-care over Israel had become famous. When evangelism occurs, it often happens in great swells both during and just after periods of war and pestilence. Now that she had revealed her nationality to Xerxes Esther was happy to present Mordecai to the king as her guardian.

The king had already delighted to honor Mordecai for exposing the plot against his life; so, it was perfectly natural for him to give the Jew his signet ring and to appoint him chief minister of the empire. The official letters were now prepared in the same way as those which Haman sent in his awful decree. The date was June 25, 474 B.C., a little over two months after the first decree was issued, this would allow more than eight months for the Jews to prepare their defenses. The Satraps ironically enough had to sell the Jews their weapons.

Wycliffe in his Encyclopedia has written: "Four main ideas seem to be set forth in Mordecai's decree:

(a) the Jews were to gather into groups by the thirteenth of Adar (our February or March);

(b) they were to defend their lives;

(c) they were to kill those who attacked them; and

(d) they were to take the spoil of their attackers. The power of the people ... refers to their military forces."

Having issued the decree, Mordecai clothed himself in royal apparel of blue and white (the royal colors of Persia), a great crown of gold, and a robe of fine linen and purple. Israel had now begun to experience one of the greatest deliverances of God since the Exodus, and the lesson was obvious to many.

Est 9:1 On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king was to be carried out. On this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but now the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them.

It would seem that many Satraps decided not to attack the Jews for fear of the Jews themselves and because of their fear of the new second in command Prince Mordecai. It would also seem logical that having seen the providence of God's care for Israel, they possessed a degree of trepidation.

Est 9:2 The Jews assembled in their cities in all the provinces of King Xerxes to attack those seeking their destruction. No one could stand against them, because the people of all the other nationalities were afraid of them.

Est 9:3 And all the nobles of the provinces, the satraps, the governors and the king's administrators helped the Jews, because fear of Mordecai had seized them.

There were many Persian citizens who took full advantage of the first decree to attack their hated Jewish neighbors. Deprived of full government support and faced by a zealous and newly encouraged people, they were totally defeated. In Shushan itself five hundred Persians, plus Haman's ten sons, were slain.

Est 9:5 The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did what they pleased to those who hated them.

Est 9:6 In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men.

Concerning the statement "on the spoil laid they not their hand" (KJV) perhaps the Jews refrained from taking advantage of their rightful privilege, in order that the purity of their motives might be made evident to all.

Est 9:14 So the king commanded that this be done. An edict was issued in Shushan, and they hanged the ten sons of Haman.

Est 9:15 The Jews in Shushan came together on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and they put to death in Shushan three hundred men, but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

Several other requests were made by Esther and granted by the King; all of which were designed to further protect the Jews of Persia. The Feast of Purim was then established by special letters to commemorate this tremendous deliverance. And now for our last Chapter.

The Westbank Bible Church accepts direct donations to further the spreading of the Gospel. You can mail or drop off a check or money order made payable to Westbank Bible Church, 4010 Bee Cave Road, Austin, Texas 78746

We do not authorize any third party to solicit donations on behalf of the Church.