

Esther: New European Christadelphian Commentary

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PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. Charities such as Carelinks Ministries and the Christadelphian Advancement Trust endeavour to provide totally free copies worldwide according to resources and donations available to them. But there is a desire by many to go beyond those brief comments on each chapter, and delve deeper into the text. The New European Christadelphian commentary seeks to meet that need. As with all Divine things, beauty becomes the more apparent the closer we analyze. We can zoom in the scale of investigation to literally every letter of the words used by His Spirit. But that would require endless volumes. And academic analysis is no more nor less than that; we are to live by His word. This commentary seeks to achieve a balance between practical teaching on one hand, and a reasonable level of thorough consideration of the original text. On that side of things, you will observe in the commentary a common abbreviation: “s.w.”. This stands for “same word”; the same original Greek or Hebrew word translated [A] is used when translated [B]. This helps to slightly remove the mask of translation through which most Bible readers have to relate to the original text.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But finally- don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Esther Chapter 1

Esther 1:1 Now it happened in the days of Ahasuerus (this is Ahasuerus who reigned from India even to Ethiopia, over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces)- The LXX adds at this point: "In the second year of the reign of Artaxerxes the great king, on the first day of Nisan, Mardocheus the son of Jarius, the son of Semeias, the son of Cisaus, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Jew dwelling in the city Susa, a great man, serving in the king's palace, saw a vision. Now he was of the captivity which Nabuchodonosor king of Babylon had carried captive from Jerusalem, with Jachonias the king of Judea.

And this was his dream: Behold, voices and a noise, thunders and earthquake, tumult upon the earth. And, behold, two great serpents came forth, both ready for conflict, and there came from them a great voice, and by their voice every nation was prepared for battle, even to fight against the nation of the just. And, behold, a day of darkness and blackness, tribulation and anguish, affection and tumult upon the earth. And all the righteous nation was troubled, fearing their own afflictions; and they prepared to die, and cried to God: and from their cry there came as it were a great river from a little fountain, even much water. And light and the sun arose, and the lowly were exalted, and devoured the honorable. And Mardocheus who had seen this vision and what God desired to do, having awoke, kept it in his heart, and desired by all means to interpret it, even till night. And Mardocheus rested quiet in the palace with Gabatha and Tharrha the king's two chamberlains, eunuchs who guarded the palace. And he heard their reasoning and searched out their plans, and learnt that they were preparing to lay hands on king Artaxerxes: and he informed the king concerning them. And the king examined the two chamberlains, and they confessed, and were executed. And the king wrote these things for a memorial: also Mardocheus wrote concerning these matters".

Esther 1:2 that in those days, when the King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom which was in Shushan the palace- The impression is given that he had recently ascended the throne and was seeking to demonstrate his power and authority. "Shushan" is the Hebrew word for "lily", which was iconically associated with the Jerusalem temple (s.w. 1 Kings 7:19,22,26; 2 Chron. 4:5). This sets the scene for the impression discussed on :7 that we have here a fake, imitation kingdom and temple of Yahweh.

Esther 1:3 in the third year of his reign, he made a feast for all his princes and his servants; the powerful ones of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him- The impression is given of a man with huge power "before him". And this powerful man is set to be manipulated by the invisible hand of God working through a nervous, not very spiritually strong Jewish refugee teenager.

Esther 1:4 He displayed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even one hundred and eighty days- This was the kind of thing Hezekiah did after his deliverance, giving all glory to himself rather than Yahweh and His Kingdom. Riches, glory, honour, majesty and Kingdom are words and ideas all associated with Yahweh's Kingdom, which is the ultimate Kingdom; and which will be displayed eternally and not for 180 days. Again this sets the scene for the impression discussed on :7 that we have here a fake, imitation kingdom of Yahweh; just as Rabshakeh described the kingdom of Assyria in identical language to the description of Yahweh's Kingdom, where Jews would dwell with confidence under their own vine and fig tree. The kingdoms of the world continue to present themselves to us as God's Kingdom, enjoyable now if we submit to them.

Esther 1:5 When those days were fulfilled, the king made a seven day feast for all the people who were present in Shushan the palace, both great and small, in the court of the garden of the king's palace- LXX adds in various different details: "Then, I say, the days of the marriage feast were completed, the king made a banquet to the nations who were present in the city six days, in the court of the king's house". This would imply that his queen was a new queen; and that he was kindly disposed towards foreigners. See on :11.

Esther 1:6 There were hangings of white, green and blue material, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and marble pillars. The couches were of gold and silver, on a pavement of red, white, yellow and black marble- The LXX brings out the similarities with the tabernacle and the pavement of emerald upon which Yahweh

was manifest to Moses in Ex. 24:10 and which becomes the picture of the Heavenly throne room in Rev. 4:3: "On a pavement of emerald stone, and of pearl, and of Parian stone, and open-worked coverings variously flowered, having roses worked round about". The motif of flowers was likewise found in some of the tabernacle furnishings and equipment (Ex. 25:31 etc.). See on :7 for the significance of all this.

Esther 1:7 They gave them ample drinks in golden vessels of various kinds, including the wine of the kingdom, according to the bounty of the king- These golden cups may well have been those looted from the temple and used by Belshazzar. For Cyrus to order them sent back to Jerusalem would be a fair statement of repentance by him. Again the impression is given as in :6 that this was a fake tabernacle and temple; see on :2,4,8,9,10,14. And yet even within that, the glory of God was being worked out by the God who is invisible in Esther, "God" never being mentioned in the Hebrew text. This was to teach that God was not inactive with the Jews in exile, although He was not visible as He had been in the time of the tabernacle and temple. And that is a lesson for us today.

Esther 1:8 In accordance with the law- This undefined reference to "the law" may be another hint as in :6,7 that we are being given here a picture of a fake tabernacle / temple system.

The drinking was not compulsory; for so the king had instructed all the officials of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure- The LXX changes the sense: "And this banquet was not according to the appointed law; but so the king would have it". This was to nudge him towards accepting that his law could be broken or amended, as it was to be later with the destruction of the Jews.

Esther 1:9 Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to King Ahasuerus- "The royal house" is literally "the house of the kingdom", the term used for the temple in 2 Chron. 2:1,12. This extends the impression discussed on Esther 1:7 that we have here a fake, imitation temple of Yahweh.

Esther 1:10 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carcass, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king- This may continue the theme of a fake imitation of the heavenly throne room, which has seven spirits (Angels?) standing before the throne of God.

Esther 1:11 To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the royal crown, to show the people and the princes her beauty; for she was beautiful- The LXX confirms the impression of :5 LXX that Vashti was only now becoming queen: "to enthrone her, and crown her with the diadem".

Esther 1:12 But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by the eunuchs. Therefore the king was very angry, and his anger burned in him- Seeing the king was drunk and he had this idea whilst he was drunk (:10), the intention was surely to have her strip or dance naked.

Esther 1:13 Then the king said to the wise men who knew the times, (for it was the king's custom to consult those who knew law and judgement- Her refusal probably broke no law; see on :15; Esther 3:5. Here the king finds himself trapped by his own laws; he obviously wanted to have her slain, but he could find no law which prescribed death. The only law relevant was the law which said the queen could be killed if she came to the king without an invitation. There was apparently no law regarding what would happen if she refused an invitation. God wanted to save that drunk man, with his hurt pride. And so He was nudging him to realize that his own laws were going to have to be broken if he really wanted to have his way; which meant that he was not in fact divine. For divine beings were imagined to be unchanging, and to never change their laws. This was going to be developed when later he wishes to change his law to destroy the Jews. God likewise works with us.

Esther 1:14 and those next to him were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king's face, and sat first in the kingdom)- The idea of some in the throne room who see the king's face is another of the suggestions listed on :7 which suggest we have here an imitation of the Heavenly throne room.

Esther 1:15 What shall we do to the queen Vashti according to law, because she has not done the bidding of the King Ahasuerus by the eunuchs?- As explained on :13, "according to law" she couldn't be punished; for there was likely no law governing such a refusal.

Esther 1:16 Memucan answered before the king and the princes, Vashti the queen has not done wrong to only the king, but also to all the princes, and to all the people who are in all the provinces of the King Ahasuerus- If there was a law prescribing death in this case, it would have been cited. But there was none. See on :13. And so Memucan comforts the king that indeed they considered she had "done wrong" and labours the implications of what she had done.

Esther 1:17 For this deed of the queen will become known to all women, causing them to show contempt for their husbands when it is reported, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she didn't come'- The male assumption of female obedience was such that there was no law prescribing what should be done if a queen refused to come to a king's party. This was God beginning to nudge the king towards obedience and perception of His principles, and to resign his claims to be divine. We would likely not have bothered even trying to work with such a drunken megalomaniac. We would write him off as too hard a case. But God works so gently and persistently with all kinds of people, to lead them to repentance.

Esther 1:18 Today, the princesses of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's deed will likewise tell all the king's princes. This will cause much contempt and wrath- The execution of Vashti would have put an end to such fears. And the king surely wanted to do this; but he was trapped by his own legal system, just as he was to be later on when he makes the law to kill the Jews. He was going to end up killing his queen whom he loved, which he had earlier wanted to do to his former queen but couldn't. This paradox was to try to teach him the folly of his own laws and respect of them. It was to help him realize he was not divine, and God's invisible grace was more powerful than any legal system.

Esther 1:19 If it please the king, let a royal commandment go from him and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it cannot be altered, that Vashti may never again come before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate to another who is better than she- Kingship and power were thought to be expressed by making laws and not changing them. The God of Israel however does change His position on things, alters His purpose in accordance with human response (Jer. 18:8-10), and annulled His own eternal law. He does so unashamedly, in reflection of His sensitivity. The LXX has "and let him not alter it". The king could change his own laws but it would involve a loss of face and an admission he was not divine; for they thought that God cannot change in any way. Hence the refusal of Darius to change his law about Daniel was not because he was unable to, but because he lacked humility.

Esther 1:20 When the king's decree which he shall make is published throughout all his kingdom (for it is great), all the wives will give their husbands honour, both great and small- The reminder of the greatness of the kingdom was an appeal to his vanity. Their solution was actually very weak. It amounted to: 'If a woman refuses to dance naked before her husband's friends, then he can divorce her and take another wife'. This was fairly mild for the Persians; the death penalty wasn't in view. Through all this, God was working. Although the Name of God doesn't occur in the Hebrew text of Esther, the letters Y-H-V-H are found in various forms throughout the book as acrostics, and this is an example (Esther 1:20; 5:4,13; 7:5,7).

Esther 1:21 This advice pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan- Again the king is being nudged towards realizing that he is not sovereign and all wise and powerful, as he was addressed. He did the word of an adviser, who came up with a plan he didn't conceive; and the lesson was repeated to him in Esther 2:4. He was being prepared to agree to do the words of Esther and Mordecai later. And God likewise works with people today, using one situation or experience to prepare them for another.

Esther 1:22 for he sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to its writing, and to every

people in their language, that every man should rule his own house, and that it should be published in the language of each people- This idea is alluded to in 1 Tim. 3:5, where a brother is supposed to "rule his own house" spiritually. And yet in the same letter (1 Tim. 5:14) a woman is supposed to rule the household (Gk.); perhaps subverting the expectation of male rulership in practical matters, and yet saying in 1 Tim. 3:5 that the cultural expectation that a man should "rule the household" be reinterpreted in spiritual terms.

Esther Chapter 2

Esther 2:1 After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus was pacified, he remembered Vashti and what she had done, and what was decreed against her- The LXX reverses this: "he no more mentioned Astin, bearing in mind what she had said, and how he had condemned her". This is perhaps painting a picture of the king as generally living for the moment and forgetting the past and its implications. It would explain why he agrees to Haman's request in an irresponsible manner, forgetting that his servant Mordecai was a Jew. And it fits with his forgetting of how Mordecai had saved him from assassination, and he had forgotten to reward him.

Esther 2:2 Then the king's servants who served him said, Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king- As explained on :1, he had forgotten the whole issue with Vashti, perhaps because he was drunk for many days whilst it was all going on (Esther 1:10). He likely had many wives and concubines and may literally have forgotten about the whole business. He is now as it were reminded by his servants of his publicized intention to replace Vashti, as if he needed to get on with it. The long period of time in the program for finding a replacement for her (:12), five years after Vashti was fired (:16), would suggest that he had many wives and was not seeking as it were a singular wife; it was just one of his wives who was being replaced by another.

Esther 2:3 Let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the beautiful young virgins to the citadel of Susa, to the women's house, to the custody of Hegai the king's eunuch, keeper of the women. Let cosmetics be given them- This house of the women and "keeper of the women" would suggest that Vashti was far from his only wife / queen and he had a special harem of women.

Esther 2:4 and let the maiden who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti. The thing pleased the king, and he did so- Again the king is being nudged towards realizing that he is not sovereign and all wise and powerful, as he was addressed. He did the word of an adviser, who came up with a plan he didn't conceive; and this is a repeat of the lesson given to him in Esther 1:21 when again he is obedient to the words of others. He was being prepared to agree to do the words of Esther and Mordecai later. And God likewise works with people today, using one situation or experience to prepare them for another.

Esther 2:5 There was a certain Jew in the citadel of Susa, whose name was Mordecai, son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish a Benjamite- So much of later Isaiah is taken up with mockery and criticism of the Babylonian gods and the Marduk cult. The book of Esther, with Mordecai as the joint hero, named as he was after Marduk, demonstrates how caught up were the Jews with the Babylonian gods. Ezekiel repeatedly reveals the idolatry of the captives. Isaiah was therefore an appeal for the Jews to quit the Marduk cult and believe in the radical prophecies about the overthrow of Babylon. We know from Ez. 8, Jer. 44 and Zech. 5 that many Jews had accepted the idols of their Babylonian conquerors, rather like Ahaz did after his defeat by Assyria (2 Kings 16:10). The spirit of ridiculing the idolatry of Babylon whilst living in it, waiting the call to leave, is so relevant to modern Christians working, living and waiting in latter day Babylon. Mordecai was a descendant of the family of Saul; he isn't presented as a particularly spiritual man to start with. The fact he worked in the palace also indicates that, seeing he would have to go along with much paganism to do his job. If the LXX is correct, he sacrificed his own intended wife because he loved the idea of having power and prestige more than he did his wife. Again, not a very spiritual impression.

Esther 2:6 who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away- Note the triple repetition of "carried away". This is to set up the similarity but spiritual contrast with Daniel who is described in the same way.

Esther 2:7 He brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter; for she had neither father nor mother- "Myrtle" ["Hadassah"] is a plant native to Persia and not Palestine; and the group of myrtle trees in Zech. 1:8,10,11 appears to represent Persia. Esther, "Star", is another reference to Marduk (see on :5). She is hardly presented as a spiritually minded young woman, but as a Jewess who had totally assimilated into Persia.

The maiden was fair and beautiful; and when her father and mother were dead, Mordecai took her for his own daughter- LXX "And he had a foster child, daughter of Aminadab his father's brother, and her name was Esther; and when her parents were dead, he brought her up for a wife for himself". This would be rather similar to how Uriah

raised Bathsheba (according to Nathan's parable of the man with the lamb) to become his wife, and she did so. Seeing Mordecai hadn't yet married Esther, she would have been very young, perhaps still in her mid teens. That God should use such a youngster is typical of how He uses the meek and weak for His great purposes.

Esther 2:8 So it happened that when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together to the citadel of Susa, to the custody of Hegai, Esther was taken into the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women- Hegai and his college of women was not simply a safe place for the women to stay. It was effectively a college for sex workers. And Esther willingly entered it, on Mordecai's arrangement. The whole intention was to produce women who could fulfil the king's various desires.

Esther 2:9 The maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness from him. He quickly gave her cosmetics and her portions of food- She is contrasted with young Daniel, who in this situation refused to eat such food. She is presented as spiritually weak.

And the seven choice maidens who were to be given her out of the king's house. He moved her and her maidens to the best place in the women's house- Hegai clearly had a big influence upon who was finally accepted. He knew the king's taste in women as it was his job to pander to it and arrange fulfilment for him. His instinctive liking of Esther amongst the many competitors was therefore providentially arranged.

Esther 2:10 Esther had not made known her people nor her relatives, because Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make it known- This was surely an indication of spiritual weakness; and yet God worked through it, just as He may use marriage *out of* the faith to bring someone *to* the faith. She stands in stark contrast to Daniel, and yet similar to Jonah who in his weakness did not tell / make know his people to the sailors (Jonah 1:8 s.w.)- and at that point, he was representative of a spiritually weak Judah in exile.

Esther 2:11 Mordecai walked every day in front of the court of the women's house, to find out how Esther was doing, and what would become of her- Mordecai really wanted his plan to succeed, but for the wrong reasons. But God chose to work through it, rather than turn away from a poorly motivated man and his weak daughter.

Esther 2:12 Each young woman's turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after her purification for twelve months (for so were the days of their purification accomplished, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet fragrances and with preparations for beautifying women)- The long period of time in the program for finding a replacement for her (:2) would suggest that he had many wives and was not seeking as it were a singular wife; it was just one of his wives who was being replaced by another. 'Going in to the king' surely is the familiar euphemism for the sexual act. To be willing to do this with a Gentile outside of marriage is surely an indication of spiritual weakness.

Esther 2:13 The young woman then came to the king like this: whatever she desired was given her to go with her out of the women's house to the king's house- This doesn't just refer to whatever cosmetics or clothing she desired. She had been given seven female assistants. The idea was that she would conceive and put on a sex show for the king; for the idea was that she was to do what Vashti had refused to do. But see on :15. The Gentile Vashti thereby appears as more moral and ethical than the Jewish Esther, as we find so often in Biblical history.

Esther 2:14 In the evening she went, and on the next day she returned into the second women's house, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, who kept the concubines. She came in to the king no more, unless the king delighted in her, and she was called by name- That Esther 'went in' to the king in the evening and then returned in the morning, having spent the night with the king, to the separate dwelling, of women with whom the king had slept and who were no longer virgins, indicates clearly enough that she slept with him. She knew this was to be the procedure and that statistically he was unlikely to 'marry' her seeing there were many such competitors. To participate in this, let alone with the enthusiasm for it which Mordecai showed, was clearly sinful and a betrayal of all the moral principles Israel were supposed to be committed to.

Esther 2:15 Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, came to go in to the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's eunuch, the keeper of the women, advised. Esther obtained favour in the sight of all those who looked at her- I suggested on :13 that she had been given the seven other young women in order to prepare a sex show for the king. But it could appear that she didn't take them with her, and only used the cosmetics and clothing provided. Perhaps it was this unusual departure from the norm which focused the king's attention singularly upon her. So perhaps she too was being taught that her even slight attention to some level of morality was being blessed.

Esther 2:16 So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus into his royal house in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign- "The royal house" is literally "the house of the kingdom", the term used for the temple in 2 Chron. 2:1,12. This extends the impression discussed on Esther 1:7 that we have here a fake, imitation temple of Yahweh. This was about five years after the Vashti incident; see on :2.

Esther 2:17 The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she obtained favour and kindness in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown on her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti- This was also from God; He worked on the tastes and perceptions of the king so that he favoured Esther. For all such attraction is subjective and deeply personal. But God worked through this.

Esther 2:18 Then the king made a great feast for all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces, and gave gifts according to the king's bounty- "Holiday" is literally "release"- from taxation, or from military service, or from both, for a specified period.

Esther 2:19 When the virgins were gathered together the second time, Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate- It would seem that the gathering of virgins to the king for him to choose a queen was a regular occurrence. The houses for the girls were already built and the system of preparing them was already organized. But it could be that there was an attempt to replace Esther with the puppet of some other group. Esther had won the conquest because (under God's hand) the king preferred her. But there were likely men interest groups like Mordecai who wanted their daughters to be chosen. The repetition of Mordecai being "In the king's gate" in :21 would suggest that it was because of his position there that he uncovered the assassination plot. And this would have solidified his position, when perhaps it was under threat from other pretenders who were aware that Esther was his daughter, even though the king seems unaware of it.

Esther 2:20 Esther had not yet made known her relatives nor her people, as Mordecai had commanded her; for Esther obeyed Mordecai, like she did when she was brought up by him- LXX "and Esther changed not her manner of life" may suggest she did not have any spiritual transformation whilst in the palace. She was still a spiritually weak young woman who rose up to the situation.

Esther 2:21 In those days, while Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs who were doorkeepers, Bigthan and Teresh, were angry, and sought to lay hands on the King Ahasuerus- LXX claims they were angry because Mordecai had been promoted.

Esther 2:22 This thing became known to Mordecai, who informed Esther the queen; and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name- This was clearly the invisible hand of God working to set up Esther and Mordecai positively in the king's eyes.

Esther 2:23 When this matter was investigated, and it was found to be so, they were both hanged on a tree; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the king's presence- And yet the king seems to have forgotten about Mordecai, who was well known as a Jew, because he signs the decree for killing all the Jews without thinking about that. He comes over as a superficial man with no interest in the past or its consequences. And yet God was working to nudge even such a person towards Him.

Esther Chapter 3

Esther 3:1 After these things- Between the seventh (Esther 2:16) and the twelfth (Esther 3:7) years of Xerxes' reign.

King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes who were with him- Again we see the superficial nature of the king, to promote such a person to the greatest position of power. "Agagite" is a form of "Gog", and so he is set up as the representative of the latter day attempted persecutor of God's people. But Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews* xi. 6. 5) and the Targum understand this to mean that Haman was descended from Agag, king of Amalek. But Mordecai was a descendant of Kish (Esther 2:5), and thus connected with Saul, who had conquered Agag. This would partly account for the natural personality clash between Haman and Mordecai. It would also mean that the people killed by the Jews towards the end of the story would likely have been Amalekites, and this would therefore have been a fulfilment of the prophecies about Yahweh's unceasing war with Amalek (Ex. 17:16) and Israel's final victory over them through Messiah (Num. 24:7 "higher than Agag").

Esther 3:2 All the king's servants who were in the king's gate bowed down, and paid homage to Haman; for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai didn't bow down or pay him homage- Although I have painted Mordecai as spiritually weak, he remained devoted to his insistent belief in Yahweh as the only God. And yet we get the impression that he harnessed this religious belief to augment his side of a personality clash with Haman- as we see so often in church life.

Esther 3:3 Then the king's servants who were in the king's gate said to Mordecai, Why do you disobey the king's commandment?- This question may have been from inquisitive interest; they were surprised a Jew wouldn't bow down to a man. And yet there were many Jews in Shushan, as archeology also bears out; enough to kill hundreds of men as recorded later in Esther 9:15. They hadn't see any other Jew articulate their belief in this way- a tacit reflection upon the spiritual weakness of the Jews generally, highlighting all the more the sensitive conscience of Daniel. For it is so hard to uphold principles when our own brethren don't uphold them or consider them merely cosmetic issues. Not bowing down to men was however not specifically commanded in the Mosaic law, and there are accounts of Israelites bowing down to men (1 Kings 1:16; 2 Sam. 14:4; 18:28). It would be a reflection of a very sensitive conscience toward God to refuse to do so. Perhaps he reasoned that the Messianic king would be higher than Agag (Num. 24:7) or that Haman was setting himself as a divine figure. And yet Mordecai was clearly not such a high sensitized believer; the very fact he worked in the palace was evidence enough. For whenever Daniel was promoted to power, he seems to have slipped out of the job and is only later recalled. This confirms my suggestion on :2 that Mordecai was using religious issues as part of a personality struggle with Haman. And we must beware we don't do the same. See on Esther 6:10.

Esther 3:4 Now it came to pass, when they spoke daily to him and he didn't listen to them, that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's position would stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew- Haman was apparently unaware Mordecai was a Jew; it was the servants who told him of this. Again we are left with the impression that Mordecai was not a particularly strong believer, and was using the issue of not bowing down to any apart from Yahweh as an excuse to legitimize his native despising of Haman. See on Esther 4:1.

Esther 3:5 When Haman saw that Mordecai didn't bow down nor pay him homage, Haman was full of wrath- Circumstances repeat in human lives, both within the same life and between persons. This was just the response of the king when Vashti refused to expose herself. Like the king, Haman wanted to have the disrespectful person murdered. But there was no law in place, apparently, which allowed him to do this. It was just assumed that all bowed down to the first minister, just as it was assumed that wives must obey their husbands, especially if he was the divine king. See on Esther 1:13.

Esther 3:6 But he scorned the thought of laying hands on Mordecai alone, for they had made known to him Mordecai's people. Therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even Mordecai's people- We have here an insight into the thought processes of Haman which only an inspired record could give. Haman thought for a moment of just destroying Haman, but scorned that thought, and instead went on to thinking of destroying all the Jews. Again we see how sin starts from within the human mind and not due to any possession by demons or a cosmic Satan figure. See on Esther 4:13.

Esther 3:7 In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, and chose the twelfth month, which is the month Adar- The idea is that every day they cast lots to see which month and day they should do it on, but the date given was about as far distant within the course of a year as possible. There was therefore going to be maximum time for the Jews to defend themselves, and for the king to change his mind. As Ahasuerus felt bound by his own law and couldn't kill Vashti as he wanted to, so was Haman. He obviously wanted to execute the massacre as soon as possible; but he was disallowed from doing this by his own structures of superstitions and laws.

Esther 3:8 Haman said to King Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom, and their laws are different from other people's. They don't keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not for the king's profit to allow them to remain- There is the implication that the king was so dim witted or befuddled by alcohol that he didn't even ask for the "people" to be defined, and just gave his signet ring to Haman to do as he wished. It could well be that he made these decisions whilst drunk (see on :15; Esther 7:2), and his personality was such that he didn't worry about the past but just lived for the present, with no thought to the implications of what he had done or agreed in the past. For surely he knew that Mordecai was a Jew (Esther 6:10) and that the Jews were in positions of power throughout the empire.

The restoration prophecies speak of how "all nations" are to be gathered to Zion; they are those who scattered Judah amongst the nations; not every literal nation. And who "scattered" Israel? The Hebrew word is used in Jer. 50:17 to describe how Babylon scattered Judah amongst the nations. And most significantly, the same word occurs again in Est. 3:8: "And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people *scattered abroad* and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom...". It is quite wrong for us to imagine Judah sitting quietly by the rivers of Babylon, all huddled together. They were scattered throughout all the many provinces / colonies of the Babylonian empire. This was why Cyrus' decree bidding the Jews return to rebuild Jerusalem had to be published "throughout all his kingdom" (Ezra 1:1), and Jews living "in any place" of that kingdom were included in the invitation. It was Babylon who had "parted my land" by dividing it up amongst the various 'Samaritan' peoples who were transported there from other conquered territories. And their being in Babylon is paralleled with being scattered to the four corners of the world as it was known to them: "Ho, ho, come forth, and flee from the land of the north, saith the LORD: for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heaven, saith the LORD. Deliver thyself, O Zion, that dwellest with the daughter of Babylon" (Zech. 2:6-7). And consider Zech. 7:14: "But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them [i.e. this concerns the Babylonian invasion], that no man passed through nor returned". Indeed, Zech. 8:7,8 speaks of the restoration as coming from both West and East of Israel, implying that the Babylonians had sold some of the Jews as slaves in Greece and north Africa.

Esther 3:9 If it pleases the king, let it be written that they be destroyed; and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who are in charge of the king's business, to bring it into the king's treasuries- Meaning apparently that he would pay this if he had permission to plunder the Jews (Esther 4:7). This meant they had acquired significant wealth; and this was doubtless why most of them didn't return to the land under Cyrus, and thereby precluded the reestablishment of God's Kingdom which was then possible. They therefore chose their little kingdom rather than the things of God's kingdom. And this is the problem with wealth. The huge financial offer was perhaps attractive for the king because of the need to prepare for the upcoming war with Greece which was then looming.

Esther 3:10 The king took his ring from his hand, and gave it to Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy- To give Haman authority to act in his name was surely unwise. Especially when it would not surely have been hard to perceive that Haman had his personal agendas for wanting the Jews destroyed, and was a man obsessed. Again the king comes over as seriously lacking judgment, perhaps due to making these decisions when drunk (:15).

Esther 3:11 The king said to Haman, The silver is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you- This may be a reference to the assumption that the "silver" or wealth of executed persons went to the state; rather than saying Haman could keep it all for himself; for the intention was still to pay the money to the king's treasuries (Esther 4:7). But again this sounds like the wild kind of promise made when drunk (see on :15).

Esther 3:12 Then the king's scribes were called in on the first month, on the thirteenth day of the month; and all that Haman commanded was written to the king's satraps and to the governors who were over every province, and to the princes of every people, to every province according to its writing, and to every people in their language. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus, and it was sealed with the king's ring- "The thirteenth having been found to be a lucky day for the massacre itself, Haman may have thought it advisable to choose the same day of the first month for entering upon the preparation for it". The word for "princes" is a technical terms referring to the chiefs of the various conquered peoples.

Esther 3:13 Letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to plunder their possessions- The LXX claims to report a copy of the letter: "And the message was sent by posts throughout the kingdom of Artaxerxes, to destroy utterly the race of the Jews on the first day of the twelfth month, which is Adar, and to plunder their goods.

And the following is the copy of the letter; The great king Artaxerxes writes thus to the rulers and inferior governors of a hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India even to Ethiopia, who hold authority under him. Ruling over many nations and having obtained dominion over the whole world, I was minded (not elated by the confidence of power, but ever conducting myself with great moderation and gentleness) to make the lives of my subjects continually tranquil, desiring both to maintain the kingdom quiet and orderly to its utmost limits, and to restore the peace desired by all men. But when I had enquired of my counsellors how this should be brought to pass. Aman, who excels in soundness of judgment among us, and has been manifestly well inclined without wavering and with unshaken fidelity, and had obtained the second post in the kingdom, informed us that a certain ill-disposed people is mixed up with all the tribes throughout the world, opposed in their law to every other nation, and continually neglecting the commands of the king, so that the united government blamelessly administered by us is not quietly established. Having then conceived that this nation alone of all others is continually set in opposition to every man, introducing as a change a foreign code of laws, and injuriously plotting to accomplish the worst of evils against our interests, and against the happy establishment of the monarchy; we signified to you in the letter written by Aman, who is set over the public affairs and is our second governor, to destroy them all utterly with their wives and children by the swords of the enemies, without pitying or sparing any, on the fourteenth day of the twelfth month Adar, of the present year; that the people aforesaid and now ill-disposed to us having been violently consigned to death in one day, may hereafter secure to us continually a well constituted and quiet state of affairs".

Esther 3:14 A copy of the letter, that the decree should be given out in every province, was published to all the peoples, that they should be prepared against that day- LXX "all the nations", looking ahead to the day when "all nations" will be gathered against the Jews. The stress upon all provinces and languages (:12) is a reflection of how widely the Jews had been scattered in the previous 70 years.

Esther 3:15 The couriers went forth in haste by the king's commandment, and the decree was given out in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Shushan was perplexed- The haste was no doubt ordered by Haman because he feared the king might change his mind. if the king was an alcoholic, this would explain his apparent memory loss and acting as if he was unaware of the consequences of his past actions and decisions.

Esther Chapter 4

Esther 4:1 Now when Mordecai found out all that was done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and wailed loudly and a bitterly- He wished to now come out openly as a Jew. He doubtless realized that so much suffering was going to come on God's people because of his refusal to bow to Haman, due to his personality clash with him (see on Esther 3). And this in itself was good for him spiritually- for he openly identified himself now with God's people, instead of teaching Esther not to do so, and not being known to Haman as a Jew initially (Esther 3:4). His wailing is recorded in the LXX: "A nation that has done no wrong is going to be destroyed". If this is indeed so, he was far from understanding the persistent prophetic message- that Judah had indeed done wrong and were therefore in exile, and were worthy of complete destruction.

Esther 4:2 He came even before the king's gate; for no one was allowed inside the king's gate clothed with sackcloth- He was hoping to thereby be noticed and the message relayed somehow to Esther, with whom he didn't have constant contact. He wanted her to "come out" and do as he was doing.

Esther 4:3 In every province, wherever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, weeping and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes- This may well be the language of repentance. God's plan had been that the exiles would repent and then return to restore the Kingdom. But they generally didn't return, preferring the kingdom of Babylon and their own wealth to that of Yahweh. This persecution was the sending of "hunters" to chase them back, and bring them to repentance (Jer. 16:16). And they did repent- but when their destruction was averted by the prayer and repentance of a minority, they returned to their old position. Which is why the book of Esther finishes rather sadly, with the Jews again wealthy and even more prosperous and established within their local societies, and thereby even less likely to return to the land.

Esther 4:4 Esther's maidens and her eunuchs came and told her this, and the queen was exceedingly grieved. She sent clothing to Mordecai, to replace his sackcloth; but he didn't receive it- She this began to openly identify herself with Mordecai and the Jews, although at this point she had not heard about the decree; for it was known that Mordecai was a Jew, and now she is moved to identify with him. This first response from her was then developed by God until she totally "came out" in self-identification as a Jewess. She did what was not worldly-wise, because of her grief for people. God likewise gives us opportunities to make small responses to Him, He develops our consciences until we are then given larger opportunities to respond. She could of course have disowned any knowledge of Mordecai or stressed she was only his adopted daughter. But we must ask how we would have responded; how emotionally do we feel connected to the rest of God's people?

Esther 4:5 Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, whom he had appointed to attend her, and commanded him to go to Mordecai, to find out what this was, and why it was- As noted on :4, Esther at this point didn't know about the decree; but she had been moved to identify with the Jews by deciding to openly care for Mordecai and thus identify herself with him. And God was going to move her further along the path of "coming out" for Him.

Esther 4:6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai, to the city square which was before the king's gate- See on :10.

Esther 4:7 Mordecai told him of all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews- Meaning apparently that he would pay this if he had permission to plunder the Jews (Esther 3:9). This meant they had acquired significant wealth; and this was doubtless why most of them didn't return to the land under Cyrus, and thereby precluded the reestablishment of God's Kingdom which was then possible. They therefore chose their little kingdom rather than the things of God's kingdom. And this is the problem with wealth. The huge financial offer was perhaps attractive for the king because of the need to prepare for the upcoming war with Greece which was then looming.

Esther 4:8 He also gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given out in Shushan to destroy them, to show it to Esther, and to declare it to her, and to urge her to go in to the king to make supplication to him, to make

request before him for her people- Heb. 'ask for favour'. The passion and love of God leads Him time and again to apparently contradict Himself. He says that He will cast Judah out of their land, they would go to Babylon and serve other gods there, "where I will not show you favour" (Jer. 16:13). But actually Esther and her people were shown favour there [s.w. Esther 4:8; Esther 8:5]. She was to ask the king for favour, but clearly she was asking God for favour, even though they were unworthy of it. And God was gracious [s.w. 'show favour'] to those in exile (Is. 30:18,9; Am. 5:15; Mal. 1:9), and their deliverance from Haman is an example of it. But Jer. 16 goes on to state that God would not ever hide His eyes / face from the iniquity they had committed, i.e. the reason why they were in captivity (Jer. 16:17). But actually He did do just that- He hid His eyes from the sin of Judah and the sin of the exiles (Is. 65:16); the hiding of His face from them was in fact not permanent but for a brief moment (Is. 54:8). God then outlines a plan- He will recompense their sin double, and this would lead them back to Him (Jer. 16:18). But this was to be an unrepeatable, once-for-all program that would "cause them to know mine hand... and they shall now that my name is The Lord" (Jer. 16:21). This double recompensing of Judah's sin happened in the exile in Babylon (Is. 40:2), and therefore the joyful news was proclaimed to Zion in Is. 40 that now the Messianic Kingdom could begin. But there wasn't much interest nor response to the call to return to Judah in order to share in it. The exile didn't cause God's people to repent nor to know His Name. It wasn't the once-for-all program which He intended. Now none of this makes God out to be somehow not serious or unreliable. Rather is it all an indication of His passion and how deeply He wishes His plans of redemption for us to work out. He's not ashamed to as it were humiliate Himself, lay Himself open to petty critics, in His passion for us. Thus God was so [apparently] sure that the exile would bring about Judah's repentance and return to Him: "Thy lovers shall go into captivity: surely then shalt thou be ashamed and confounded for all thy wickedness" (Jer. 22:22). But actually the very opposite happened. It's rather like "They will reverence my son" (Mt. 21:37)- when actually they crucified Him.

Esther 4:9 Hathach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai- LXX adds that Mordecai appealed to her to respond, "remembering, said he, the days of thy low estate, how thou wert nursed by my hand: because Aman who holds the next place to the king has spoken against us for death". Her own salvation by grace was to move her to save others; and this again is a timeless principle for us all.

Esther 4:10 Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message to Mordecai- All this communication through a messenger meant that surely the news of the Esther-Mordecai relationship and her intended actions would have not been secret and would have started to spread within the palace and further.

Esther 4:11 All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that whoever, whether man or woman, comes to the king into the inner court without being invited, there is one law for him, that he be put to death; except those to whom the king might hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live. I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days- This lack of invitation would have made her wonder whether she had fallen out of favour with him; although he had many wives and concubines. "To come in to the king" could possibly allude to the sexual act; and "thirty days" might suggest she was menstruating. There is a purposefully ambiguity in these things. Because we are being invited to imagine how it might have been, to enter thereby into her angst. She was initially unwilling to risk death in order to save her people. She needed to be persuaded by the later reflection of Mordecai that she would be found out as a Jewess and also be slain herself; and that God would indeed deliver His people but her refusal to cooperate with His plan would result in her death anyway (:13,14). We see again her development; from selfish self-preservation to a wider sense of responsibility for her entire people. And in broad outline terms, this is something we are all to pass through. See on Esther 6:4; 8:3.

Esther 4:12 They told to Mordecai Esther's words- See on :10.

Esther 4:13 Then Mordecai asked them to return answer to Esther, Don't think to yourself that you will escape in the king's house any more than all the Jews- As noted on Esther 3:6, we have here an insight into the thought processes of Esther which only an inspired record could give. The Bible continually emphasizes the importance of self-talk and how we think in our hearts. She was tempted to adopt a path of thought which was effectively saying that she would be the only Jew who would survive; and that was not going to happen. The 'house of the kingdom' of Babylon would not save her from death.

Esther 4:14 For if you remain silent now, then relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place, but

you and your father's house will perish. Who knows if you haven't come to the kingdom for such a time as this?- Mordecai speaks with authority, but he is only making assumptions; that if help came from another quarter, then Esther and her family, including Mordecai, would "perish" even if the other Jews didn't. And the source of that 'perishing' would be God's judgment, not Haman. "Mordecai also seems confident that deliverance would arise from "another place". From another place" clearly means "God", but God is never mentioned in the book of Esther. Perhaps at the time Mordecai just had a distinct hunch that deliverance would come, but when he thought about who else, humanly, apart from Esther, could effect this deliverance... he would conclude that it would have to be God alone. So we see this otherwise secular, weak believer being provoked by circumstance to have a greater faith. Everyone in the story is being nudged towards greater faith and spirituality through the dysfunction of them all. This is the marvel of God's working. But the basis for Mordecai's confidence that "deliverance" would arise is because the same word was used by the prophets for how God's people would be "delivered" from the lands of their exile to return and reestablish His Kingdom in Zion (e.g. Ez. 34:10,12,27).

Esther 4:15 Then Esther asked them to answer Mordecai- LXX "Esther sent the man that came to her to Mordecai, saying"; see on :10.

Esther 4:16 Go, gather together all the Jews who are present in Shushan and fast for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day. I and my maidens will also fast the same way. Then I will go in to the king, which is against the law- The text carefully omits any mention of prayer to God, perhaps because of His statement that He would hide His face from them in the captivity. She was being taught what the king had been taught in Esther 1:15 (see note there); that law could not save. She had to go outside the law for salvation, which meant a total casting of herself upon grace. She clearly feels her inadequacy; she feels the need for the fasting of others. And she is now unashamed to identify herself with the Jews, for this message was sent through a messenger (:15) which would have meant that her identification with the Jews was now going to be spread around everywhere. There was a large Jewish community in Shushan; able to kill 300 men (Esther 9:15).

And if I perish, I perish- The idea may be that she was going to perish anyway, if the decree wasn't changed. She had accepted Mordecai's warning about this in :13,14. And yet it is hard to avoid a sense of fatalism, using the same construction as in Gen. 43:14. She had faith and weakness at the same time, as we would likewise have had. Again we are left wondering whether she had faith, or was merely fatalistic. This is to help us enter deeper into her possible feelings and to identify with her.

Esther 4:17 So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him- Again we see a breaking of the paradigm that a woman was always to be obedient to a man. LXX adds various exaggerated claims about Esther's righteousness and prayers to God, e.g. "And having taken off her glorious apparel, she put on garments of distress and mourning; and instead of grand perfumes she filled her head with ashes and dung, and she greatly brought down her body, and she filled every place of her glad adorning with the torn curls of her hair".

Esther Chapter 5

Esther 5:1 Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal clothing- Perhaps because as stated in Esther 4:17 she had taken it off in order to mourn and cover herself in sackcloth.

And stood in the inner court of the king's house, next to the king's house. The king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, next to the entrance of the house- "The royal house" is literally "the house of the kingdom", the term used for the temple in 2 Chron. 2:1,12. This extends the impression discussed on Esther 1:7 that we have here a fake, imitation temple of Yahweh.

Esther 5:2 When the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, she obtained favour in his sight; and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther came near, and touched the top of the sceptre- The record is as it were a video shot by the Divine cameraman. We see her standing there, see her fingers touching the very tip of the sceptre. And we get the feeling that the outcome finally will be good for her.

Esther 5:3 Then the king asked her, What would you like, queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you even to the half of the kingdom- Esther was breaking paradigms here; it was the king who always gave invitations, and not his wife. She effectively comes to dominate him, although in a very humble and nervous way, used by God.

Esther 5:4 Esther said, If it seems good to the king, let the king come with Haman today to the banquet that I have prepared for him- It seems to me that she intended to ask for mercy for the Jews. But her nerve fails here, and she asks them to come to a banquet. And when they come, her nerve fails her again, and she asks them to come to another banquet. And God worked through that weakness. Because the final request was made the night after he had recalled how Mordecai had saved him. And the intrigue and suspense was built up, his attention was particularly focused upon this one of his many wives, who was demanding his attention two or three days running. I don't personally interpret Esther here as the cleverly calculating, amateur psychologist female. Rather do I see a nervous teenager who gets stage fright at the last minute, twice. And God worked through her nervousness. Perhaps after each failure to make the request, she beat herself up for her weakness. But God worked through it. This is His style, right up to this day. LXX "To-day is my great day"; probably the king didn't even know Esther's birthday, just as he didn't know her family or relationship to Mordecai (Esther 8:1). Maybe it wasn't her birthday, and she just blurted out whatever came into her mind. Through all this, God was working. Although the Name of God doesn't occur in the Hebrew text of Esther, the letters Y-H-V-H are found in various forms throughout the book as acrostics, and this is an example (Esther 1:20; 5:4,13; 7:5,7).

Esther 5:5 Then the king said, Bring Haman quickly, so that it may be done as Esther has said. So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared- The command to bring Haman "quickly" was because such invitations were usually given well in advance, and Esther was breaking all the paradigms by wanting everything quickly, throwing last minute parties.

Esther 5:6 The king said to Esther at the banquet of wine, What is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request? Even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed- This apparently unlimited offer leads us to expect that Esther is now going to seize the moment and ask for the Jews not to be destroyed. The Biblical text often works like this, setting up expectations in the mind of the reader or hearer, and then presenting an unexpected outcome. We are all expecting now for her to make the request, and the next verse heightens that sense of expectation- and we are then the more involved in the plot when again, Esther doesn't make the request as she maybe intended to.

Esther 5:7 Then Esther answered and said, My petition and my request is this- The pause implied in the text heightens our sense of suspense as to whether she will find the strength to make her true request. And again her nerve fails and she rather dumbly asks for more time.

Esther 5:8 If I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I will prepare for them, and I will do tomorrow as the king has said- This could be read as saying 'I do have a petition; but your attendance at my banquet tomorrow will

mean that you have agreed to the petition I have in my heart, but which I'm not telling you right now'. This would perhaps be the best support for an argument that Esther calculated all this, rather than just getting stage fright each time she was asked to tell her petition. The ambiguity and difficulty of interpretation is intentional- to direct our thinking to her motivations, to get the reader into the mind of Esther.

Esther 5:9 Then Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart, but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he didn't stand up nor move for him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai- The record juxtaposes his prideful joy with the jealousy which then beclouds him as he sees Mordecai, dressed in sackcloth, refusing to stand up. The Esther record gives wonderful insight into the feelings and thought processes of the characters in a way in which contemporary literature of the time doesn't; the stories are full of unrealistic exaggerations, whereas the Bible focuses upon real situations and upon the state of the heart. And here we see the typical power of jealousy; a focus upon one man and his actions, eclipsing all other blessings.

Esther 5:10 Nevertheless Haman restrained himself, and went home. There, he sent and called for his friends and Zeresh his wife- The impression is given that he wanted to murder Haman immediately, or at least ask the king to authorize it. But he waits for another day, because of the desire to do nothing without first seeking advice. And it was that day which altered the entire outcome. Again we see a man of great power, but bound by his own traditions and legal structures; just as was the king when Vashti refused to come and he wanted to kill her.

Esther 5:11 Haman recounted to them the glory of his riches, the multitude of his children, all the things in which the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king- He had ten sons (Esther 9:7). Here again we see a connection with the situation in Esther 1, where the glory of Ahasuerus is presented and then he is manipulated and circumscribed by a woman and his own laws and culture.

Esther 5:12 Haman also said, Yes, Esther the queen let no man come in with the king to the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and tomorrow I am also invited by her together with the king- His overweening pride is being set up for a mighty fall; and this is typical of the Biblical record, to focus upon pride as the reason for judgment. What he was most proud of turned out to be the very point of his destruction.

Esther 5:13 Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate- This is the power of jealousy; a focus upon one man and his actions, eclipsing all other blessings. He kept in his mind the image of this man "sitting" instead of standing up and bowing. It is such mental images which are the root of so much jealousy. See on Esther 7:7; 6:13. Through all this, God was working. Although the Name of God doesn't occur in the Hebrew text of Esther, the letters Y-H-V-H are found in various forms throughout the book as acrostics, and this is an example (Esther 1:20; 5:4,13; 7:5,7).

Esther 5:14 Then Zeresh his wife and all his friends said to him, Let a gallows be made fifty cubits high, and in the morning speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on it. Then go in merrily with the king to the banquet. This pleased Haman, so he had the gallows made- 75 feet high. "According to Persian law the power of life and death resided in the king alone". So Haman was assuming that he could get Mordecai executed, even though there was apparently no legal apparatus for him to do so. Again we see a theme of Esther continued- that the characters are all forced to act outside of the law. This was surely to prepare the Jewish audience of the book to realize the limitations of Mosaic law, especially in the casuistic sense in which they liked to use it.

Daniel's prophecy that there would be a time of trouble for Israel, followed by a resurrection and judgment, may have had a potential fulfilment in Haman's persecution. The LXX of Esther 5 at this point includes her prayer to God, in which she says that Haman was seeking to hinder the work of the temple. This would explain why initially the Samaritans persuaded the Persians to make the work cease, but then (humanly inexplicably) another edict is given for it to resume. The people were delivered (Dan. 12:1), as they were by Michael the Angel manipulating Esther. But the resurrection, judgment and Kingdom didn't follow, because Israel weren't ready for it. Then those who turned many to righteousness- i.e. the priesthood, in the primary context- would be rewarded (Dan. 12:3). But Malachi and Haggai repeatedly criticized the priesthood at the time of the restoration for being selfish and not

teaching Israel (Mal. 2:7). Daniel and Jeremiah were heartbroken that there had to be such a delay to the full fulfilment of the Messianic restoration of the Kingdom.

Esther Chapter 6

Esther 6:1 On that night, sleep fled from the king. He commanded the book of records of the chronicles to be brought, and they were read to the king- Although the Name of God doesn't occur in the Hebrew text of Esther, the letters Y-H-V-H are found in various forms throughout the book, e.g. as acrostics (Esther 1:20; 5:4,13; 7:5,7), and several times in this chapter. The message is clearly that God was active, but in a subtle, hidden way. His insomnia was due to an unconscious sense that something wasn't right, that a payback hadn't been made, or that a payback against himself was now due. Gramatically, there seems a word missing here. Literally, his sleep was taken from him; but the grammar requires the definition of who took it from him. And that isn't stated. Some versions have supplied "God" or "the Lord", but this isn't in the original. The name of God never occurs in Esther. We are to understand only by implication that it was God. The book of records is that alluded to in Mal. 3:16, the "book of remembrance" kept before God concerning His servants.

Esther 6:2 It was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who were doorkeepers, who had tried to lay hands on the King Ahasuerus- The fact the king had forgotten this reflects his superficial character, focusing only upon the present. But even such a person still has a conscience and a fear of judgment which keeps them awake at night.

Esther 6:3 The king said, What honour and dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this? Then the king's servants who attended him said, Nothing has been done for him- Again we get the impression that the king was forgetful, because he lived only for the immediate present and forgot his responsibilities and undertakings, perhaps resultant from his alcoholism. Likewise he had divorced Vashti and agreed to search for a replacement for her, but had to be reminded five years later to get on and do so. The recollection of having been saved by grace led him to naturally feel that he should do something positive for this man Mordecai. Any move against that man was not going to be well received by him. The entire situation is true to life and has the ring of psychological credibility to it- in contrast to the histories written at the time by uninspired writers.

Esther 6:4 The king said, Who is in the court? Now Haman had come into the outer court of the king's house, to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him- We learnt from Esther 4:11 that anyone entering the inner court without invitation was risking their life. Haman's bitterness and jealousy was enough to lead him to risk his life by entering into the court on his own initiative to ask the king to let him kill Mordecai. The proud, self confident Haman approaching the king on his own initiative is set up in parallel to the nervous, humble Esther doing the same- risking her life to save, rather than to destroy.

Esther 6:5 The king's servants said to him, Behold, Haman stands in the court. The king said, Let him come in- Haman was risking his life to enter uninvited, but such was his obsessive jealousy.

Esther 6:6 So Haman came in. The king said to him, What shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honour?- It is tempting to imagine that the king was aware of Haman's antipathy toward Mordecai, and already suspected foul play in the plan to exterminate the Jews. At least, it seems he may well have asked the question knowing that Haman would reply as he did, assuming that he was in view.

Now Haman said in his heart, Who would the king delight to honour more than myself?- Again we see the focus of the record upon the human heart and its self-talk.

Esther 6:7 Haman said to the king, For the man whom the king delights to honour- Haman's eyes were on the throne, and so he asks that this person be set up as the successor of the king; thinking it should be himself. See on :8.

Esther 6:8 Let royal clothing be brought which the king wears, and the horse that the king rides on, and on the head of which a crown royal is set- "Royal clothing" is LXX "the robe of fine linen". As noted on Esther 1, the palace and regal system is being set up as a fake temple and Kingdom of God. But the impression given here is that Mordecai is being set up as the king, wearing the king's own clothing, riding the king's horse with a royal crown upon it. David's command for Solomon to ride upon his own horse meant that he wanted Solomon to be the next king after him (1 Kings 1:33). See on :9. This grossly exaggerated response to Mordecai's faithfulness was typical of powerful eastern

monarchs; we recall how Pharaoh made the prisoner Joseph to be the Prime Minister of Egypt when just hours before he had been wallowing in a dungeon, and was totally unknown to Pharaoh. This would have been shocking to Haman; that Mordecai was suddenly being declared the successor to Ahasuerus. It seems typical of his irresponsible behaviour. But it was tantamount to replacing Haman with Mordecai; for surely Haman's eyes were on the throne for himself.

Esther 6:9 Let the clothing and the horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man whom the king delights to honour with them, and have him ride on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him, 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honour!' - The man of the king's "delight" is a way of saying 'Whom he wishes to set upon his throne'; it is used in that sense in 2 Chron. 9:8 and possibly 1 Sam. 18:22. The woman whom the king 'delighted in' was made queen (Esther 2:14 s.w.). See on :8.

Esther 6:10 Then the king said to Haman, Hurry and take the clothing and the horse, as you have said, and do this for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Let nothing fail of all that you have spoken- "The Jew" means that now Mordecai has declared his Jewishness; or perhaps a note had been made of this in the chronicles, and the king was thereby reminded of it. It could be that the king was unaware that the nation to be destroyed were the Jews; or that he had agreed to it whilst drunk (see on Esther 3:8) and was unaware of what he had really agreed to. The paradox was that a man who was publically disobedient to the king's command to bow before Haman (Esther 3:3) was now being exalted. Again the king is being nudged towards realizing the trap of his own legalism. He had made a law which a man whom he was deeply indebted to- had broken! He likely had heard of Mordecai's disobedience, because it was performed publically and was known by the king's servants.

Esther 6:11 Then Haman took the clothing and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and had him ride through the city square, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honour!- The record naturally invites us to imagine the tone of voice in which he said this. Haman felt he had to be obedient to the king's commandment- to honour a man who was disobedient to the king's commandment (Esther 3:3).

Esther 6:12 Mordecai came back to the king's gate, but Haman hurried to his house, mourning and having his head covered- The roles are now reversed; recently Mordecai had been weeping with covered head in the king's gate, and now Haman was. Esther mourns before going to the first banquet; and now Haman does before the second banquet. The way God brings about justice reflects His full awareness of all that has gone on in the past; unlike human justice. See on :14.

Esther 6:13 Haman recounted to Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and Zeresh his wife said to him, If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him, but you will surely fall before him- These "wise men" were those who had thrown the lots in order to choose the day of the massacre (Esther 3:7). Suddenly their wisdom changed- from advising to massacre the Jews and kill Mordecai, to now predicting that Haman was not going to succeed but would himself perish. Again, the folly of Persian customs, traditions and wisdom is being developed. Zeresh, his friends and wise men had only yesterday been joining him in glorying over his enemy; and now they change completely, and he is left awfully alone. The book of Esther perhaps functioned as a means of telling the Jews in exile that they were preferring the kingdom of Persia over that of Yahweh; and the kingdom they preferred was terribly weak and compromised at its very foundations. They say that he is going to "fall" before Mordecai; and it was exactly Mordecai's refusal to "fall" before Haman which had been so engraved in Haman's memory (see on Esther 5:13). And again we find repeated the theme of a wife being wiser than her husband and willing to be separate from his positions, as Vashti and Esther were before Zeresh; and what she says comes to pass.

Esther 6:14 While they were yet talking with him, the king's eunuchs came, and hurried to bring Haman to the banquet that Esther had prepared- Just as Haman had "hurried" the messengers carrying his decree to kill the Jews, so he was "hurried" by the messengers to come to the banquet; see on :12.

Esther Chapter 7

Esther 7:1 So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen- The record helps us see it all happening as if in a video. Haman went first to the king and then together they two came to Esther.

Esther 7:2 The king said again to Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is your petition, queen Esther? It shall be granted you. What is your request? Even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed- "The banquet of wine" confirms the connection between the king and alcohol discussed on Esther 3:8. "Banquet" is literally "the drinking". But in Yahweh's system of things, "wine is not for kings" (Prov. 31:4). The kingdom of Persia is set up as most definitely not the kingdom of God, to which the exiles ought to have aspired rather than to prosperity in Persia's kingdom. Again we the readership wait with baited breath, knowing that surely now Esther has to overcome her stage fright and speak. And she does.

But I will argue on Esther 8-10 that although Esther is indeed heroic and a commendable example of the triumph of good over evil, neither she nor Mordecai go far enough. For they do not seek the restoration of the Jews to Judah. She is set up in conscious contrast with Nehemiah, also a Jew in the palace at Shushan. He too asked for a favour, and whilst also very nervous is asked by the king "What is your request?" (Neh. 2:4). His request was for the restoration of the Jews to their land. Esther by contrast says nothing about the restoration, but asks only for short term deliverance.

Esther 7:3 Then Esther the queen answered, If I have found favour in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request- "My request" reflects her understanding that their salvation was being made to depend upon her requesting it. The same words are used in Ezra 7:6, the only time outside of the book of Esther, to describe how "the king granted [Ezra's] request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him". Perhaps Esther had been encouraged by Ezra's example, knowing that the invisible hand of God made kings of Persia grant requests. We too should be directed and inspired by Biblical examples, and those within our own experience of the brotherhood. The ideas of 'finding favour in your sight' and asking for petitions / requests being granted are more commonly associated with people praying to God; indeed the whole verse is intended to recall Moses' plea to Yahweh to save the people, if indeed Moses has "found favour in Your sight" (Ex. 33:12,13,17). This young, nervous, not very spiritually strong teenager was suddenly catapulted into the place of Moses, Judaism's most revered figure. We are surely intended to conclude that her begging the king was a reflection of her prayers to God, or at least, she would have perceived that her petitioning the king was effectively petitioning Yahweh. Again, she was led closer to God by her experience.

It simply can't be that we rejoice in our own salvation, and don't want to breathe a whimper of that good news to others. Esther made her request for "my life... my people" in parallel; and when her own safety was assured, she didn't just relax and mop her brow with relief, she went on to petition for them- with all the risks this involved for her (see on Esther 8:3). We can't possibly just rejoice in our own salvation, that we have found the Lord and are secured in Him; if we have truly experienced this, we will wish to share it with others.

Esther 7:4 For we are sold- This could mean that the huge sum of money offered by Haman if the Jews were destroyed may not have been a reference to their goods being plundered; but rather to Haman 'buying' the Jews through a huge donation to the treasury. Esther here is an eloquent type of the Lord's mediation for us, risked her life because she felt that "we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed". She was tempted to reason that if she'd have kept her mouth shut, *she* wouldn't have been destroyed. But she fought and won the same battle as we have daily or weekly before us: to identify ourselves with our weaker and more suffering brethren. The Lord Jesus didn't sin Himself but He took upon Himself our sins- to the extent that He *felt* a sinner, even though He wasn't. Our response to this utter and saving grace is to likewise take upon ourselves the infirmities and sins of our brethren. If one is offended, we burn too; if one is weak, we are weak; we bear the infirmities of the weak (Rom. 15:1).

I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish- This is Esther 'coming out' as a Jewess; she seems to emphasize the point: "we... I and my people... we...". It appears only later that she stated her relationship to Mordecai (Esther 8:1). We reflect how little the king knew about his wives; he didn't know her nationality, her parents nor even her birthday (see on Esther 5:4).

But if we had been sold for bondservants and bondmaids, I would have held my peace, although the adversary could not have compensated for the king's loss- Haman the adversary had offered to compensate for the lives of the Jews by paying money to the treasury. But she is saying that even if the Jews had been enslaved and not killed, the loss to the king would never have been compensated by money. She argues for the value not only of human life, but of that human life being lived in freedom and not slavery. And we note her usage of the word "we" in reflection of her connection with her people.

Esther 7:5 Then King Ahasuerus said to Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he who dared presume in his heart to do so?- Again we note the emphasis of the record upon "his heart". Surely the king knew the answer. "Where is he" could as well be translated "How could he...", as if the king is now angry with himself for letting this happen. Or perhaps he really was so disconnected from reality that he didn't guess it was Haman. We notice this disconnection from reality several times in the record (not least his not enquiring which people were to be destroyed before agreeing, and failing to make the connection between the Jews being destroyed and Mordecai being a Jew). Through all this, God was revealing His Name. Although the Name of God doesn't occur in the Hebrew text of Esther, the letters Y-H-V-H are found in various forms throughout the book as acrostics, and this is an example (Esther 1:20; 5:4,13; 7:5,7).

Esther 7:6 Esther said, The adversary and the enemy is even this wicked Haman!- These words "adversary and enemy" are frequently used together in the Psalms, in prayers that the adversary and enemy would not triumph but that God would triumph over them. Surely Esther was alluding to them. She could have tried to tactfully point out that the destruction of the Jews would involve her and Mordecai being killed, and work towards some negotiated solution, without wishing to offend Haman. But she calls him "this wicked Haman!". It was all or nothing. If the king took Haman's side, she would lose her life. For this was not a tactful approach. It was an outburst of accusation. But it worked. Likewise in standing up for God's people, it is all or nothing; nice speak and negotiated solutions cannot be the answer.

I imagine that Esther could have resolved her personal problem in a quite different way. She had invited Haman and the king to a banquet / drinking of wine. She could have chatted them up nicely, waited until they were drunk, and then said to the effect: "Gents, I have a slight problem with this decree about killing the Jews; because actually, I'm a bit Jewish. Can't you just kindly resolve that little problem for me?". And her two guests would likely have proudly chuckled and said to the effect "Sure, no problem, we can just easily fix that, don't you worry, just relax, really it's nothing, sure, sleep easy tonight about that. The whole thing's under our control, nobody will touch you, all's good. And just... bring us the next pink champagne on ice". This was the kind of thing the holocaust was full of. But she didn't take that path. Her spiritual growth was very fast, as it can be in all people. She realized now that it wasn't a case of merely her salvation, but that of the body of God's people. To focus solely upon "me being saved" would be selfish. There is more to relationship with God than that. It's about His glory and the larger picture of His purpose rather than only "me". It takes some decades to realize this; but Esther got there in the course of a few days.

Esther 7:7 The king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine and went into the palace garden- Circumstances again repeated in his life; for he had arisen in fury from the banquet in Esther 1, seeking to have Vashti killed; and he was circumscribed by his own laws, as discussed there. Likewise here, he was angry because he was circumscribed by his own laws. It would be hard to change the law without resigning his own supposed divinity.

Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king- We recall that Haman fixed the picture in his mind of Mordecai not standing up before him in respect, and it led to terrible jealousy complexes (Esther 5:13). And now he stood up and bowed in desperate respect for his life before Mordecai's Jewish daughter. Through all this, God was working. Although the Name of God doesn't occur in the Hebrew text of Esther, the letters Y-H-V-H are found in various forms throughout the book as acrostics, and this is an example (Esther 1:20; 5:4,13; 7:5,7).

Esther 7:8 Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman had fallen on the couch where Esther was- The Esther story is full of the hand of providence. It seems Haman had collapsed, perhaps suffered a heart attack from the stress on top of the alcohol from the "banquet / drinking of wine" (:2). And he fell unconscious onto Esther's couch. That was surely from God, because the king was greeted by the

sight of Haman's prostrate body on his wife's couch.

Then the king said, Will he even assault the queen in front of me in the house?- "Assault" is AV "force", and the idea is not only of force but more manipulation. The word choice reflects the king's anger at how he had been manipulated.

As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face- Condemned criminals were not allowed to see the king's face. The courtiers knew that Haman was condemned to death.

Esther 7:9 Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs who were with the king said, Behold, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman has made for Mordecai, who spoke good for the king, is standing at Haman's house. The king said, Hang him on it!- This may have been one of the eunuchs sent to collect Haman from his house, who had seen the gallows at Haman's home and heard from the surrounding folks what it was intended for.

Esther 7:10 So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified- Earlier, the king's wrath had demanded pacification in killing Vashti. But he was caught by his own legal system, and had been unable to do that. We wonder whether there was any legal basis for the execution of Haman; probably there wasn't. By the letter of the law, he had done everything right. So the execution of Haman was the king departing from the letter of the law; and as discussed on Esther 1:15, this is a major theme of the book. God was nudging the king beyond legalism, and also to a realization that his laws weren't actually very good and needed to be changed. And therefore, he was not the divine being he liked to think he was, who made perfect laws that could never be changed because to do so would be to question his divinity and rightness.

Esther Chapter 8

Esther 8:1 On that day, King Ahasuerus gave the house of Haman, the Jews' enemy, to Esther the queen- "Enemy" here is LXX *diabolos*, the slanderer / enemy. Clearly he is set up as representative of the organized opposition to God's people, although we have here another example of how the word refers simply to a human being and not an external cosmic being. The presence of the article, *the* slanderer / *diabolos*, is significant in that it torpedoed the position of those who argue that every reference to *ho diabolos* refers to the cosmic being of popular theology. It doesn't, for here it refers simply to the man Haman.

Mordecai came before the king: for Esther had told what he was to her- The king was ignorant of this, apparently not knowing much about the personal history of his wives; see on Esther 5:4. We now see them both 'coming out' even more. We are intended to shine as candles not under a bucket but set on a hill. And God gently works to lead us all to a situation where our faith isn't solely personal but is made public.

Esther 8:2 The king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman- The gift of a "house" to a woman and this decision making by a woman was unusual; but the whole story is about the overthrow of traditional, conservative paradigms and legalistic approaches by the movement of God's invisible Spirit.

Esther 8:3 Esther spoke yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and begged him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews- This presumably involved risking death again by going in to the king's audience uninvited. But she had learnt the lesson- that she was not to merely seek her own salvation but to continue to risk her life for that of others. She begs "with tears", apparently more emotionally and passionately than she did when she first asked about the matter. Her passion for the salvation of others had now become stronger than her desire for personal salvation; when according to our reflections on Esther 4:11 her initial reaction to the news of the decree was to consider that she could save herself by keeping quiet, and she had been unwilling to go to see the king uninvited. Such spiritual growth over such a short period can be seen in the lives of God's people today and is possible for each of us.

Esther 8:4 Then the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre. So Esther arose, and stood before the king- The use of the sceptre shows she was still approaching him uninvited and at the risk of her life.

Esther 8:5 She said, If it pleases the king, and if I have found favour in his sight, and the thing seem right to the king, and I am pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the king's provinces- She stresses that Haman wrote the letters- even though they were written in the king's name. But laws of the Persians couldn't be reversed- unless the king was going to admit he wasn't actually divine. And it could be that she was asking him to make this radical step of realization and humility. To "reverse" the decree, or turn it back, was the same idea as 'repenting'. But he refuses, and instead tries to get around the problem by issuing another decree.

Clearly Esther did find favour before both the king and her God. But this apparently contradicts earlier statements in the prophets. But the passion and love of God leads Him time and again to apparently contradict Himself. He says that He will cast Judah out of their land, they would go to Babylon and serve other gods there, "where I will not show you favour" (Jer. 16:13). But actually Esther and her people were shown favour there [s.w. Esther 4:8; Esther 8:5]. God was gracious [s.w. 'show favour'] to those in exile (Is. 30:18,9; Am. 5:15; Mal. 1:9). But Jer. 16 goes on to state that God would not ever hide His eyes / face from the iniquity they had committed, i.e. the reason why they were in captivity (Jer. 16:17). But actually He did do just that- He hid His eyes from the sin of Judah and the sin of the exiles (Is. 65:16); the hiding of His face from them was in fact not permanent but for a brief moment (Is. 54:8). God then outlines a plan- He will recompense their sin double, and this would lead them back to Him (Jer. 16:18). But this was to be an unrepeatable, once-for-all program that would "cause them to know mine hand... and they shall now that my name is The Lord" (Jer. 16:21). This double recompensing of Judah's sin happened in the exile in Babylon (Is. 40:2), and therefore the joyful news was proclaimed to Zion in Is. 40 that now the Messianic Kingdom could begin. But there wasn't much interest nor response to the call to return to Judah in order to share in it. The exile didn't cause God's people to repent nor to know His Name. It wasn't the once-for-all program which He intended. Now none of this makes God out to be somehow not serious or unreliable. Rather is it all an indication of His passion and how deeply He wishes His plans of redemption for us to work out. He's not ashamed to as it were

humiliate Himself, lay Himself open to petty critics, in His passion for us. Thus God was so [apparently] sure that the exile would bring about Judah's repentance and return to Him: "Thy lovers shall go into captivity: surely then shalt thou be ashamed and confounded for all thy wickedness" (Jer. 22:22). But actually the very opposite happened. It's rather like "They will reverence my son" (Mt. 21:37)- when actually they crucified Him.

Esther 8:6 For how can I endure to see the evil that would come to my people? How can I endure to see the destruction of my relatives?- Life lived solely for ourselves, even eternal life, is not endurable if our brethren are not living it with us. This had multiple implications. LXX "How can I survive the destruction...?" suggests she felt she would die with those who died. Her life was bound up with the life of her Jewish people, although previously she was but an ethnic Jewess who had totally assimilated into the life of the Persians. But she in her heart would live and die with them.

Esther 8:7 Then King Ahasuerus said to Esther the queen and to Mordecai the Jew, If I have freely granted you all that was Haman's, because he laid his hand on the Jews, and hanged him on a gallows, what do you further seek?- We begin to tremour a little with Esther, wondering if the king's patience has worn thin. But we see again the king's shortsightedness and lack of empathy and appreciation of the implication of events and statements. He considered that if Haman was dead, and he had given the wealth of Haman to Mordecai, then there could be no other problem.

Esther 8:8 Write also to the Jews, as it pleases you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring; for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may not be reversed by any man- The idea is that the first decree could not be reversed, but the king could issue a second decree empowering the Jews to defend themselves. Again, as explained on Esther 1:15, the king was caught up in his own legalism. God was trying to nudge him towards realizing that he was not in fact God; for that was the basis upon which they considered that royal laws couldn't be changed, because they thought 'gods' were unchanging. But he is repeatedly taught, and the readership are taught, that any such system of legalism ends up limiting freedom of movement and ends up in contradiction. What is being highlighted is that the God of Israel isn't like that; He can and does change, even His own laws. Casuistic approaches to law were bound to fail, because God Himself is dynamic; the only point at which He doesn't change is His constant love for the sons of Jacob and not punishing them as their sins deserve (Mal. 3:6). His comment that the king's decree could not be reversed "by any *man*" may suggest that he was slightly moving towards the acceptance of a personal God far mightier than himself; for he may mean that "man" couldn't reverse it, not even himself, but God could.

Esther 8:9 Then the king's scribes were called at that time, in the third month Sivan, on the twenty-third day of the first month, which is Nisan; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded to the Jews, and to the satraps, the governors and princes of the provinces which are from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, to every province according to its writing, and to every people in their language, and to the Jews in their writing and in their language- Again we have a tacit recognition of the degree to which the Jews had been scattered, throughout the 127 provinces of the empire- exactly in fulfilment of the prophecies of scattering. For the proud king to do this was also a tacit recognition that his laws and decision making were not infallible and he had been set up to make a major decision which was wrong. It is perhaps to his credit that he allowed the second decree to be written and sent.

Esther 8:10 He wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, and sealed it with the king's ring, and sent letters by courier on horseback, riding on royal horses that were bred from swift steeds- There may have been an attempt to outrun the carriers of the earlier decree, even though they were also "hasted".

Esther 8:11 In those letters, the king granted the Jews who were in every city to gather themselves together, and to defend their life, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish all the power of the people and province that would assault them, their little ones and women, and to plunder their possessions- The second edict is worded in the terms of the first; the Jews were empowered to do to their enemies what those enemies had wished to do to them. This is the repeated basis for judgment in the last day; thus throughout Revelation, the seals of judgment upon latter Israel are then brought upon their abusers in the form of the trumpets and vials. The LXX adds some detail; "he charged them to use their own laws in every city, and to help each other". Haman had previously made a fuss about the Jews' laws. Now they were encouraged to use their own laws, and to use them as they were intended- to help each other,

after the pattern of Esther not thinking only of her own salvation. This was another prod of the exiles towards obedience to the law as intended, and to turn to their God more fully.

Esther 8:12 on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar- This was the date which Haman had chosen by casting lots. And again the hand of God was invisibly in that, for now the Jews had plenty of time to prepare themselves.

Esther 8:13 A copy of the letter, that the decree should be given out in every province, was published to all the peoples, that the Jews should be ready for that day to avenge themselves on their enemies- Vengeance on Israel's enemies was the language of the restoration prophecies and the reestablishment of the Kingdom which was potentially possible at the restoration. But the Jews in Persia were those who hadn't responded to that. And yet it is as if God so eagerly tries to by all means achieve at least a partial fulfilment of those prophecies. They were intended, of course, to see the similarities and return both to their God and His land. But they were content with the very partial fulfilment of what was at that time potentially possible. See on :14; Esther 9:22.

Esther 8:14 So the couriers who rode on royal horses went out, hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment. The decree was given out in the citadel of Susa- The parallel is clearly with the hastening of the king's commandment to destroy the Jews. Esther is full of such inversions. The impression given is that there was to be a complete reversal of their fortunes. But this was the language of the restoration prophecies and the reestablishment of the Kingdom which was potentially possible at the restoration; see on :13.

Esther 8:15 Mordecai went out of the presence of the king in royal clothing of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a robe of fine linen and purple; and the city of Susa shouted and was glad- This is in conscious contrast with how at the first decree, the city of Shushan was perplexed (Esther 3:15; 4:1). As noted on :13,14, the impression given is that there was to be a complete reversal of their fortunes. But they didn't take this theme further, and realize that it was in Zion where their fortunes were to be finally and more totally reversed. They were experiencing a foretaste of what would be possible far more fully if they repented and returned to Zion; but they refused to take that Divine nudge.

Esther 8:16 The Jews had light, gladness, joy, and honour- The springing up of Judah's light is spoken of in Isaiah as happening at the restoration, in terms of Zion's light coming to Jerusalem in the person of Messiah. Likewise joy and gladness was to be Judah's experience in Zion. But it seems what could have been the breaking in of the Messianic kingdom for them even in captivity didn't lead to that Kingdom. For they preferred their own kingdom of wealth in Persia. They remained there; and the true light and joy of Zion wasn't experienced by them. See on :13-15.

Esther 8:17 In every province, and in every city, wherever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had gladness, joy, a feast, and a good day. Many from among the peoples of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews was fallen on them- Although the ideal was that they returned to Zion and experienced light and joy there (:16), it seems God was willing to amend that plan so that their experience of it in captivity led to the Gentiles becoming Jews (as in Esther 9:27). For this is the consistent prophetic picture of the restored Kingdom of God- that Gentiles would join with repentant Judah in forming a multiethnic Kingdom of God in Zion. Just as some Egyptians joined the Jews in their exodus from Egypt, which is constantly alluded to in the restoration prophecies as the prototype for Judah's exodus from captivity, so it began to happen. But they didn't make the exodus; they remained where they were, although all was now set up for them to return. See on :13-16.

Esther Chapter 9

Esther 9:1 Now in the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the month, when the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put into effect, on the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to conquer them, (but it was turned about so that the opposite happened- the Jews conquered those who hated them)- This theme of 'turning about so the opposite happens' is a major theme of Esther. The fasting of Esther is contrasted with the feasting of Haman and the king; and now it is the Jews who are feasting. Instead of the Jews being destroyed by their enemies, they destroy their enemies. The impression given is that there was to be a complete reversal of their fortunes. But this was the language of the restoration prophecies and the reestablishment of the Kingdom which was potentially possible at the restoration; see on Esther 8:13. The turning of curse into blessing is simply because God loves Israel (s.w. Dt. 23:5; Neh. 13:2). But the exiles had doubted His love, as Ez. 18 makes clear. But through this whole incident, God seeks to display His love to His people, and His grace.

Esther 9:2 The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the King Ahasuerus, to lay hands on those who wanted to harm them. No one could withstand them, because the fear of them had fallen on all the people- Their gathering together to help each other was after the pattern of Esther not thinking only of her own salvation. Her example would have been inspirational in the mending of so many interpersonal relationship issues amongst the Jews, just as the Lord's example of mediation and sacrifice to achieve it should likewise for us. For "the fear..." see on :3.

Esther 9:3 All the princes of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and those who did the king's business helped the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai had fallen on them- The fear of Israel falling upon the peoples (also in :2) uses the very same phrase used about the effect of the Exodus miracles upon the Egyptians (Ex. 15:16; Ps. 105:38), with Mordecai functioning as Moses. And yet the same effect as the visible miracles was achieved by the invisible, non-miraculous hand of God working in human and national lives. The implication was that this was all to prepare the exiles for their intended exodus out of Persia and back to their land- but they refused to make good on what was set up for them.

Esther 9:4 For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces; for the man Mordecai grew greater and greater- LXX "For the order of the king was in force, that he should be celebrated in all the kingdom". The king was obviously deeply impressed by Esther and Mordecai, and surely was being himself nudged towards accepting the God of Israel by the transformation he witnessed in these secular Jews towards truly spiritual, brave people of principle.

Esther 9:5 The Jews struck all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and with slaughter and destruction, and did what they wanted to those who hated them- This suggests a primary fulfilment of the prophecy that the exiles in Babylon / Persia would become God's weapons of war with which to judge the nations where they had been taken captive (Jer. 51:20). The intention was that they would judge their captors, return to the land and be part of the reestablished Kingdom of God. But the exiles only allowed a partial fulfilment of this, and remained with their wealth in Persia; see on Esther 8:13-16.

Esther 9:6 In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men- AV "In Shushan the palace". The extent of opposition to the Jews was therefore significant (800 killed in all, :15), despite Mordecai now being the prime minister, and the king clearly pro-Jewish. The pre-existing anti-Jewish sentiment was significant in the palace, and therefore Esther is revealed as the more brave for coming out as Jewish. Haman knew that his plan was tapping in to widespread support. If indeed Haman was the descendant of Agag the Amalekite (see on Esther 3:1) this would mean that the people killed here by the Jews would likely have been Amalekites. This would therefore have been a fulfilment of the prophecies about Yahweh's unceasing war with Amalek (Ex. 17:16) and Israel's final victory over them through Messiah (Num. 24:7 "higher than Agag"). No Messiah figure was in view; but had they returned to the land in faith and repentance, then the restoration prophecies stated that one would have arisen. And so we find here a partial fulfilment of the prophecies about Amalek and Agag, and not a complete one. See on :11.

Esther 9:7 They killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha- The "ten sons" of Haman is a phrase stressed four times in :10-14, and although ten are indeed listed here, the idea may mean "all his children" as in 1 Sam. 1:8. The Jews

interpret Haman as representative of the *yetzer harah*, the evil inclination, which the New Testament at times understands as the great satan / adversary to spiritual life. The Jews then see in the meanings of the names of his sons the various characteristics of the flesh. Each of the names of the sons apparently contain the word "self" in the Persian language. Although the meaning of these names is hard to define, the Jewish view is that these first three names stand respectively for 'distance [from God]', 'door to bad intentions', 'gathering of money'.

Esther 9:8 Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha- See on :7. The Jews define these names as meaning respectively 'a woman's private parts' [if spelt backwards]; 'pride' and 'preying like a lion to destroy others'.

Esther 9:9 Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha- See on :7. The Jews define these names as meaning respectively 'ripping into division', 'subjugation of the righteous' and 'bitterness', the end result of all these various features of the fleshly life.

Esther 9:10 the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Jew's enemy; but they didn't lay their hand on the plunder- This is emphasized, because they had been given the right to do this (Esther 8:11). They were following the example of Abraham who refused to add to his wealth by taking the spoil of his enemies (Gen. 14:23). This can be read as a politically astute decision, so as not to give the impression they had orchestrated all this for their benefit; but there was surely thereby a nudge from God towards remembering that they were Abraham's seed, and ought to return to the land promised them as his seed.

Esther 9:11 On that day, the number of those who were slain in the citadel of Susa was brought before the king- A king would surely be concerned about the outbreak of civil war. The fact he allowed the slaughter to continue right on his doorstep in Susa would suggest that he perceived that those killed were not his own people, but the supporters of Haman, Amalekites. See on :6.

Esther 9:12 The king said to Esther the queen, The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in the citadel of Susa, including the ten sons of Haman; what then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces! Now what is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your further request? It shall be done- Her first intercession had brought her to a position where now the king came to her, guessing what she would like and offering it. She doesn't come to him, he perceives what she wants and offers it to her. We possibly see here some insight into the nature of the Lord's relationship with the Father after He interceded for us on the cross. Rom. 8 describes all this as the intercession of the spirit, as if the Father and Son have a meeting of minds / spirit, and the Father knows and automatically grants what He knows His Son wants for His people.

Esther 9:13 Then Esther said, If it pleases the king, let it be granted to the Jews who are in Shushan to do tomorrow also according to this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows- We see here how circumstances repeat. Esther had previously come to the king with a request to come to a banquet, and then repeated that same request, to come "tomorrow". The Esther story shows clearly how things work according to a Divine plan which is multidimensional and yet has internal consistencies and similarities. See on :12.

Esther 9:14 The king commanded this to be done. A decree was given out in Shushan; and they hanged Haman's ten sons- We have just read in :10 of the murder of his sons. Perhaps the LXX is therefore to be preferred here: "And he permitted it to be so done; and he gave up to the Jews of the city the bodies of the sons of Aman to hang".

Esther 9:15 The Jews who were in Shushan gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and killed three hundred men in Shushan; but they didn't lay their hand on the spoil- This makes a total of 800 killed over the two days. See on :6 for the significance of this anti-Jewish sentiment in Shushan. For "spoil", see on :10. For "gathered themselves together" see on :16. Their refusal to take the spoil is mentioned three times (:10,15,16), and stands in contrast to the intention of taking their property as spoil under Haman's plan (Esther 3:13).

Esther 9:16 The other Jews who were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, defended their lives, had rest from their enemies, and killed seventy-five thousand of those who hated them; but they didn't lay their hand on

the plunder- LXX renders "gathered themselves together" as "and helped one another". They were learning the lesson from the nervous teenager Esther, who didn't just seek her own salvation, but risked her life in order to bring about the salvation of all God's people. We see here how good spiritual attitudes can spread quickly and effectively.

Esther 9:17 This was done on the thirteenth day of the month Adar; and on the fourteenth day of that month they rested and made it a day of feasting and gladness- Israel being given "rest" from their enemies was the sign that they should now inherit the promised land (s.w. Dt. 12:10); rest from their enemies meant that they were to blot out the name of Amalek (s.w. Dt. 25:19). Clearly these things were coming about, seeing that Haman was an Amalekite and those they were killing were likely Amalekites (see on Esther 3:1). But they failed to go further with these Divine possibilities, just as we can fail to; see on Esther 8:13-16. Being given rest meant they could inherit the land (Josh. 1:13 s.w.) but they preferred to remain in Persia. Tellingly, the same word is used in Neh. 9:28, addressed to the exiles: "But after they had rest, they did evil again before You; therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies".

Esther 9:18 But the Jews who were in Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth and on the fourteenth days of the month; and on the fifteenth day of that month, they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness- The subtext to this otherwise positive picture of good triumphing over evil is that their day of feasting and gladness was prophetically intended to be in Zion (Is. 25:6 s.w.). They went into exile exactly because they had days of 'feasting' and didn't respond to the prophetic message (s.w. Is. 5:12). It was in Zion that they were to experience "gladness" (Is. 35:10) when they returned (Is. 51:11). They were to leave the lands of their captivity in "gladness" and thus come to Zion (Is. 55:12 s.w.). But they didn't return. They were to have eternal "gladness... *in their land*" (s.w. Is. 61:7), the day of Jer. 31:7 (s.w.). The "day of gladness" was to be accompanied by the blowing of trumpets (s.w. Num. 10:10), summoning them to Zion. But there is no mention of this; because they didn't want to return there, but to remain in prosperous Persia. See on :21.

Esther 9:19 Therefore the Jews of the villages, who lived in the unwallied towns, made the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, a good day- The existence of Jews even in villages and remote settlements of the Persian empire reflects the degree of their scattering, in fulfilment of the prophecies about this.

And a day of sending presents of food to one another- Generosity to others was a reflection of their personal experience of grace. We are to be generous to others and concern ourselves with their salvation, as God did to us. "Grace" literally means a gift, and the giving of gifts ought to reflect that. As noted on :16, they were learning the lesson from the nervous teenager Esther, who didn't just seek her own salvation, but risked her life in order to bring about the salvation of all God's people.

Esther 9:20 Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, both near and far- LXX "wrote these things in a book". Perhaps here we have the origin of the book of Esther; it was an account by Mordecai of how he, a secular and not very religious Jew, had seen his weaknesses used by God in order to save others; it was written as a testament to grace. But on :29 I will note that the book could equally have been written by Esther.

Esther 9:21 To enjoin them that they should keep the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month Adar yearly- Whilst this was understandable it could be argued that the subtext of the history is negative; there is no mention of them keeping the Mosaic feasts, but instead they created a new one to celebrate in the lands of exile. Instead, they ought to have returned from those lands and not remained there; see on :18.

Esther 9:22 as the days in which the Jews had rest from their enemies, and the month which was turned to them from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning into a good day; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, and of sending presents of food to one another, and gifts to the needy- LXX "a change was made for them, from mourning to joy, and from sorrow to a good day". This change from mourning to joy connects with the prophecies of the restored kingdom, when mourning would be turned to joy for Zion (Is. 51:11; 60:20; 61:3). But Judah hadn't repented nor returned to the land as intended. And yet it is as if God so eagerly tries to by all means achieve at least a partial fulfilment of those prophecies. They were intended, of course, to see the similarities and return both to their God and His land. But they were content with the very partial fulfilment of what was at that time

potentially possible. See on Esther 8:13. For "turned...", see on :1.

Esther 9:23 The Jews accepted the custom that they had begun, as Mordecai had written to them- What is specifically in view is the command to keep the 15th day as well.

Esther 9:24 because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is, the lot, to consume them, and to destroy them- LXX has "the Macedonian" for "Agagite", as if to encourage the reading of the whole story as applicable to the abuse of the Jews by Alexander of Macedon.

Esther 9:25 but when this became known to the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked device, which he had devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows- "Wicked device" is literally wicked thoughts (s.w. Gen. 6:5; Is. 59:7); perhaps some of the Proverbs which use the phrase to speak of wicked plans have Haman in view (Prov. 6:18; 15:26). Again we see the theme continued that it was for his thoughts that Haman was condemned; for the state of the heart is of paramount importance to God. But the phrase is used in Jer. 18:11 of how a "wicked device" against God's people was intended to elicit their repentance. It didn't, and so they went into captivity in Babylon / Persia; and now again, repentance was not elicited as intended.

*Esther 9:26 Therefore they called these days Purim, from the word 'Pur'. Therefore because of all the words of this letter, and of that which they had seen concerning this matter, and that which had come to them- They wanted to especially remember how the lots ["pur"] drawn by Haman were overruled by God to fall in nearly a year's time, so that there was time for Esther's mediation and their preparation. The Divine overruling of the lots was therefore felt to be the parade example of Divine providence in their salvation. But again, this seems rather a case of mistaken focus; the Divine grace of it all and the brave mediation of Esther were not the focus. It could be argued that it was more of a celebration of Jewish good luck than of Divine grace. The root meaning of *pur*, "lots", is 'a thing of nothing' (s.w. Ps. 33:10). Drawing lots was based upon astrology, and the fact the drawing of lots was to the Jews' favour hardly seems an appropriate thing to celebrate. And we are left with the impression that the Jews in Persia would now celebrate Purim religiously; whilst no mention is made of keeping Yahweh's feasts. Again, there is a subtext here that we have to read. But as ever with the book of Esther, it is below the surface.*

Esther 9:27 The Jews established and imposed on themselves and on their descendants, and on all those who joined themselves to them, so that it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to what was written, and according to its appointed time, every year- Note the reference to the Gentiles who "joined themselves to them". Although the ideal was that they returned to Zion and experienced light and joy there (Esther 8:16), it seems God was willing to amend that plan so that their experience of it in captivity led to the Gentiles becoming Jews (as in Esther 8:17). For this is the consistent prophetic picture of the restored Kingdom of God- that Gentiles would join with repentant Judah in forming a multiethnic Kingdom of God in Zion. Just as some Egyptians joined the Jews in their exodus from Egypt, which is constantly alluded to in the restoration prophecies as the prototype for Judah's exodus from captivity, so it began to happen. But they didn't make the exodus; they remained where they were, although all was now set up for them to return.

Esther 9:28 and that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor their memory perish from their seed- This sadly presupposes that Judah were to remain in the lands of their exile. The Divine intention was that they should be provoked by what had happened to return to Judah; see on :18,21.

Esther 9:29 Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority to confirm this second letter of Purim- LXX "wrote all that they had done". Perhaps here we have the origin of the book of Esther; it was an account by Esther of how she, a secular and not very religious Jewess, had seen her weaknesses used by God in order to save others; it was written as a testament to grace. But on :20 I will note that the book could equally have been written by Mordecai. See on :32.

Esther 9:30 He sent letters to all the Jews, to the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth- This sadly presupposes that Judah were to remain in the lands of their exile. The Divine intention was that they should be provoked by what had happened to return to Judah; see on :18,21. "Peace and truth" is the language of the restored kingdom of God (Jer. 33:6); and it is the same term used by Hezekiah when he failed to grasp the potential of the Kingdom being reestablished in his times; he was content with peace and truth in his times alone (Is. 39:8). Likewise the Jews of Esther's time were content with "peace and truth" in their times, rather than seeing that what had happened was to lead them towards the eternal peace and truth with God of His Kingdom and not their own (see on Esther 8:13-16; 9:30). And this is the abiding temptation for all believers; to be satisfied with some degree of "peace and truth" emotionally and intellectually in their lives now, but resign the far greater realities of the Kingdom to come when "peace and truth" shall be in eternal reality.

Esther 9:31 to confirm these days of Purim in their appointed times, as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had decreed, and as they had imposed upon themselves and their descendants, in the matter of the fastings and their cry- LXX suggests differently, to the effect that Mordecai and Esther fasted at the time of Purim, perhaps in recognition of their own weaknesses at the time, asking forgiveness for how they had lived as secular believers before they were forced to give their whole lives to their God and their people: "And Mardocheaus and Esther the queen appointed a fast for themselves privately".

Esther 9:32 The commandment of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book- Confirming my suggestion on :29 that Esther was the author of the book.

Esther Chapter 10

Esther 10:1 King Ahasuerus laid a tribute on the land, and on the islands of the sea- The idea is of imposed forced labour, such as Solomon ordered, and which caused much resentment. Why mention this? Perhaps it is included to signal that all was not well, although the story is to end with good triumphing over evil; see on :3.

Esther 10:2 All the acts of his power and of his might, and the full account of the greatness of Mordecai to which the king advanced him, aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia?- As noted on :1, the story ends positively, but with the subtext that all was not as it could have been. A Jew and a Jewish queen become almost the most influential people on earth at the time, with huge power and might. But still they did not lead their people back to their God and to their land. That is the unspoken conclusion which any spiritually minded, sensitive reader or hearer will come to. Again it is a story of so much potential and Divine grace being as it were wasted.

Esther 10:3 For Mordecai the Jew was next to King Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted by the multitude of his brothers, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his descendants- Even though Mordecai was so highly respected amongst the Jews, there is the implication noted on :2 that Mordecai failed to realize his full potential before God, even if he died respected by his own people. Not only did Cyrus and the other various potential fulfillments of the servant songs fail to rise up to their potential; Judah preferred to stay in the soft life. The sad ending of the book of Esther leaves Judah prosperous in Babylon, having declined the potential exodus back to Zion which God had set them up with. Mordecai and Esther ought surely to have used their huge power to move the Jews to return to the land, as was clearly the wish of God as expressed in the prophets. But they didn't; it seems the secularism which characterized their earlier lives may have returned in later life, and tradition has it that Esther was murdered when the Persian empire fell to the Greeks.