

# Esther And The Death Decree

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## Introduction

In this paper I discuss the background for the death decree of Xerxes and Haman against the Jews in the days of Esther and draw a practical lesson from that story for the modern reader.

In the book of Esther we have a historical precedent for the events of Dan 11:44 ("But reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many"). If Dan 11:44-45 is soon to be fulfilled, i.e., if the second coming of Christ is near (as we see in 12:1-3), then the events of Esther are soon to be repeated. Otherwise one would have to argue that Esth 3:1-15 provides no useful insights for interpreting Dan 11:44-45 or that these verses, at the end of Dan 11, do not describe last events.

## The Story

Let us begin by discussing the main characters in the story of the book of Esther and the story itself.

### The main characters

Five persons figure prominently in the book of Esther. These are Xerxes I (486-465) (=Ahasuerus), Vashti, Esther, Mordecai, and Haman. One way of getting to know these individuals from and through the text is to study their names. See Appendix. Below, however, I take a historical rather than linguistic approach.

*Xerxes.* Historically the Ahashuerus of KJV (Heb. *ʾḥašwērōš*) was Xerxes I (486-465). He was the "fourth" king, referred to in the following passage from Daniel:<sup>1</sup>

"Now then, I tell you the truth: Three more kings will appear in Persia, and then a fourth, who will be far richer than all the others. When he has gained power by his wealth, he will stir up everyone against the kingdom of Greece." (Dan 11:2)

Xerxes' massive, but unsuccessful, campaign against Greece has been described by any number of historians. A particularly good account of those events is provided by N. G. L. Hammond in his book entitled, *A History of Greece to 322 B.C.*<sup>2</sup>

*Vashti.* It is significant that Vashti was deposed and not summarily executed when she refused to come to the banquet hall at Xerxes' command (see Esth 1:12). This fact illustrates the great force of her personality and influence at court. There is a wide contrast between Vashti, who was not afraid not to go to the king when he had summoned her, and that of Esther, who was afraid to go to the king when he had not summoned her.

The Greek historian Herodotus speaks in three passages (7.61, 114; 9.109-12) of a Persian queen named Amestris, wife of Xerxes I.<sup>3</sup> If Vashti is Amestris, then her refusal to appear before Xerxes is typical of the other things we know about her. Amestris was in every way a match for Xerxes and capable of revolting cruelty. She was also the mother of Artaxerxes I (465-424).<sup>4</sup> Identifying Vashti with Amestris is linguistically plausible in view of the close relationship between the Hebrew and Greek forms of her name (see Appendix). If this identification is correct, then Vashti was a force to be reckoned with in Persia long after Esther became titular queen in her place.

*Esther.* We know Esther only from the present story. There is no extra-biblical information concerning her. Notice that in the book that bears her name, Esther's real name is Hadassah ("Myrtle"). She is "also known as Esther" (Esth 2:7).

*Mordecai.* The few lines that tell us about Mordecai's family in the book of Esther contain highly useful information.

(5) Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, (6) who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah. (Esth 2:5-6)

Jair was undoubtedly Mordecai's biological father,<sup>5</sup> but it does not follow from this that Shimei preceded Jair by only one generation or that Kish preceded Shimei by one generation. It is not the author's purpose to tell us many things about Mordecai's immediate ancestors but to tell us one very important thing about his more distant ancestors, i.e., that ultimately Mordecai came from the same family as King Saul (see 1 Sam 9:1-2). Shimei is less illustrious than Kish (Saul's father) but also figures in the sacred text. If the Shimei of Esth 2:5 is the man who cursed David as he fled before Absalom (see 2 Sam 16:5-8)—because David had dethroned Saul—then, for good or bad, it is clear that Mordecai had prominent ancestors. This fact must be understood in order to appreciate fully what is happening in the story.<sup>6</sup>

Once the above family arrived in the East they put down roots, which we learn from the Babylonian provenience of Mordecai's name (Mardukkaya < Marduk, patron deity of Babylon; see Appendix). Having done so, one branch of the family moved on to Persia and became prominent in government affairs there.

A cuneiform tablet from the end of the reign of Darius I or the beginning of that of Xerxes (Ahasuerus) mentions an official named Marduka, whom some scholars have identified with the biblical Mordecai.<sup>7</sup>

*Haman.* The book of Esther tells us that Haman was an Agagite (see Esth 3:1, 10; 8:3, 5). The term "Agag" occurs elsewhere in the Bible (see Num 24:7; 1 Sam 15:8). There may be no connection between the earlier biblical references to Agag and the one found in Esther, but if there is, then Haman was born in the royal line of what had once been the Amalekites.

The name "Haman" does not reflect its bearer's ethnic origins but has an Elamite source (see Appendix). And in fact Susa, where much of the story of Esther takes place (in southern Iran), had once been an Elamite city.<sup>8</sup> The author of the narrative is careful to point out, however, that Haman himself is not genetically an Elamite. He is an Agagite.

In 1 Sam 15:8 it seems that "Agag" is the personal name of an Amalekite king. But Balaam was addressing another earlier Amalekite king with the name Balak when he said, "Their king will be greater than Agag" (Num 24:7). Who was the Agag mentioned in Num 24? Perhaps at one time there was a great ancestral king named Agag and Balaam was saying that any future Israelite kings would be greater than this earlier Amalekite king. But by the time of Balaam (and certainly by the time of Saul) "Agag" had become a royal title, with a meaning among the Amalekites similar to that of "Pharaoh" among the Egyptians. Both passages can be read in this sense.

Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, to the east of Egypt. (8) He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. (1 Sam 15:7-8)

"Water will flow from their buckets;  
their seed will have abundant water.  
Their king will be greater than Agag;  
their kingdom will be exalted." (Num 24:7)

In 1 Sam 15:8 the expression "Agag king of the Amalekites" has a meaning comparable to that of "Pharaoh king of the Egyptians." Clearly no king of Egypt had the name "Pharaoh." That term was not a name at all but a title, meaning "Great House."<sup>9</sup> In Num 24:7 the thrust of saying, "Their king will be greater than Agag," is that, "Their king will be greater than your king," i.e., the Hebrews will be greater than the Amalekites.

*Summary.* From their names, and from other historical information we know about them, Ahasuerus was Xerxes I (not Artaxerxes II as some have speculated)<sup>10</sup> and queen Vashti, when deposed, was not forgotten. It took time for Esther to gain any part of her predecessor's influence at court. Mordecai descended from a pre-Davidic royal line among the Hebrews and Haman descended from the royal line among the Amalekites.

Thus, on the one hand the drama of the book of Esther is between Xerxes and two of his wives and on the other hand between Xerxes and two of his ministers.

In regard to the second of these two dramas, Haman and Mordecai are both far from their ancestral homelands. Both are descended from royal families. Both bear the names of foreign deities. Both have risen to the top in government circles. In all of these respects the two men have much in common.

In their rivalry is played out once again the contest between the Amalekite Agag (whatever his name might have been) and the Hebrew king (Saul), as recounted in 1 Sam 15. In 1 Samuel a Hebrew very nearly annihilates the whole Amalekite race, while in Esther an Amalekite very nearly annihilates the whole Jewish race. Neither man carries the task to completion. If Saul had been more diligent in doing exactly what he was told, no such comparisons would have been called for. There would have been no crisis for God's people in later years. But Saul did not obey and the result was a near total disaster for God's people.

Haman and Mordecai are not merely an Amalekite of some description and a Hebrew, but fellow family members with the original actors in the historic conflict of 1 Sam 15. It is a moot question just how clearly this fact was understood at the time and entered into the feelings of personal antipathy that the two men had for each other. It would be consistent with the rest of

the story, however, if each had had a detailed and well-informed understanding of his own people's national history. The clarity with which Haman's people remembered Saul's actions can be judged by how well Mordecai's people have remembered Haman's actions. And these were well educated men.

Notice in passing that the traditional Scripture reading at Purim was the one which begins with the words, "Then came Amalek" (Exod 17:8-16).<sup>11</sup> Evidently the connection I have been trying to point out between the stories of Esther and of 1 Sam 15 was not lost on Jewish scribes and scholars in the generations following Esther and on up through the period of the Mishnah.

### The story itself

Below we talk first about the historicity of the account and then about the events detailed within it.

*Historicity of the account.* For an overview of recent challenges to the historicity of the book of Esther see a paper by William H. Shea entitled, "Esther and History."<sup>12</sup> I will not recount his argument here, but merely append one comment.

According to Carey A. Moore, "Persian queens had to come from one of seven noble Persian families, a custom which would have automatically ruled out an insignificant Jewess,"<sup>13</sup> such as Esther. Shea points out that this claim is factually incorrect. It is either false altogether or there were exceptions to it.

Certainly Darius married other wives besides one from the Seven; and his son, Xerxes, who succeeded him, was not the son of this wife. Xerxes' wife, Amestris, was the daughter of Otanes; but this Otanes was the son of a certain Sisamnes, while the Otanes who was one of the Seven was the son of Pharnaspes. Ctesias xiii. 51, moreover, says that she was the daughter of Onophas; and he was not one of the Seven.<sup>14</sup>

Having made this qualifying remark, however, notice that the king's seven nobles do appear in the story (see Esth 1:13-14). It is significant that they are the ones to suggest that King Xerxes get another queen (vss. 15-20). This is perfectly consistent with the custom Moore mentions and all the more so if he could be expected to choose that queen from one of the seven families represented by those making the suggestion. It is also significant that the idea of not limiting the choice to one of the above seven families comes from the king's personal attendants. Acting on their advice the field of candidates is opened to include members of any family in the realm.

Here we have a transparent example of power politics at court. Could it be that the king's seven advisors and his personal attendants had different interests and saw themselves as being in competition with each other? If so, the fact provides a context for understanding the similar competition between Haman and Mordecai. All of this is entirely plausible in view of what Moore says. And in fact, apart from Moore's objection I for one would not have seen the significance of these details of the story. But while there might well have been a custom of choosing queens from one of seven prominent families, in the actual event it did not always happen that way.

*Events in the account.* The item of greatest interest here is not the attraction between Xerxes and Esther but the hostility between Haman and Mordecai.

There are no prophecies elsewhere in Scripture to the effect that a believing woman would one day rise to high political office. But there are prophecies to the effect that all of God's remnant people will be thrown into deep distress just before Christ comes. It is with this latter fact in view that the story of danger and deliverance in the book of Esther holds special significance for the present generation, living as we do in the end time.

When Mordecai refuses to honor Haman properly, Haman determines to take revenge not only on Mordecai himself or his immediate family. Persian nobles did everything on a grand scale. Instead he sets about to destroy everyone related to Mordecai in any way--which, with or without his knowing it, includes the king's wife. Xerxes grants Haman's request and without asking so much as a question or giving the matter any serious thought signs an unalterable law which consigns the whole Jewish race to death. The decree is written on "the thirteenth day of the first month" (Esth 3:12) (April 17, 474 B.C.) and is taken to the farthest corners of the realm by fast couriers, although the better part of a year would pass before it could go into effect.<sup>15</sup>

Learning of this horrible state of affairs, Esther and all the Jews living in Susa prepare themselves by undergoing a very rigorous fast ("Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day" [Esth 4:16]) and then Esther goes before the king at the risk of her life. The king is pleased with her and eventually issues a second decree counteracting the first one.

## Discussion

A major problem in the book of Esther is that it does not refer to God. Nor, when Esther fasts, does the text specifically state that she fasts and prays--only that she fasts.

Conservative Evangelicals draw some startling conclusions from these facts,<sup>16</sup> but we should not make too much of them. If merely repeating the word "God" were an adequate test of canonicity, then the pseudepigraphical Letter of Aristeas would be not only more canonical than Esther but more canonical than Nahum or Habakkuk.

Aristeas purports to tell how the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek at the request of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246 B.C.). In vss. 187-202 ten Jewish envoys bring the scrolls to be translated and the king, hosting a banquet in their honor, poses questions to each in turn. All make the word "God" prominent in their otherwise rather bland answers.

When all had signified by their applause their agreement with the [last] answer, the king said to the philosophers (for not a few of them were present), 'It is my opinion that these men excel in virtue and possess extraordinary knowledge, since on the spur of the moment they have given fitting answers to these questions which I have put to them, and have all made God the starting-point of their words.'<sup>17</sup>

In this way "God" (*theos*) appears seventeen times in sixteen verses. By contrast Nahum (with forty-seven verses) uses the word "God" only twice (1:2, 14) and "the Lord" thirteen times. The book of Habakkuk (with fifty-six verses) says "God" twice (1:12; 3:18) and "the Lord" twelve times.

So, is the Letter of Aristeas more canonical than Nahum and Habakkuk because it repeats the word "God" so many times? And if not, is Esther less canonical than Nahum or

Habakkuk--or any other inspired book of Scripture--because it does not? Admittedly the book of Esther is unusual in not mentioning God at all. But we must keep this fact in perspective.

## The Lessons to Be Learned from the Story

There are at least two important lessons to learn from the book of Esther. The one has to do with learning what will happen to God's people in the end time just before Christ returns. The other has to do with our response to the above events. In the story, Mordecai gets his people into the trouble they face and God uses Esther to get them out of it. Below I consider the deliverance first and then the distress that makes deliverance necessary.

### Deliverance from distress

The absence of religious language in the book of Esther probably tells us more about the unnamed author of the book than about Esther herself. Faced with a threat on her own life and the lives of her people throughout the vast Persian Empire, it is inconceivable that Esther would fast for three days and three nights without at any time thinking to petition God for the help she so badly needs. One evidence that she and all the Jews living in Susa did pray (as well as fast) is that their prayers were answered in such a remarkable way.

It is as Jesus told Nicodemus, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going" (John 3:8). When the leaves rustle and the trees begin to sway we can be sure that the wind is moving them. The effect is evidence of its cause. As regards Esther, the effect is that a great deliverance was gained. The cause to be inferred from this fact is that those who needed deliverance so badly asked to receive it. Before imploring the king for two days Esther implored God for three days. Esther and all her coreligionists in the Persian capital did indeed pray most earnestly, and their request was granted.

If we can agree on the inference that Esther prayed, which I think is amply clear (although the text does not demand it), the lesson to learn from these things can be stated simply. When we ask the same way Esther asked, we will receive the same way Esther received. Nor will it be long before we have occasion to test this principle.

### The distress that makes deliverance necessary

What we read as history in the book of Esther is projected forward as prophecy in the book of Daniel.

"But reports from the east and the north will alarm him, and he will set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many. (45) He will pitch his royal tents between the sea and the beautiful holy mountain. Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him." (Dan 11:44-45)

In the above passage earth's last king of the North sets out "to destroy and annihilate many." Here is the prophetic counterpart to the historic death decree against God's people in

the book of Esther. It is discussed by Ellen G. White in chap. 39 of her book, *The Great Controversy*.<sup>18</sup> When the king of the North sets out to destroy God's people (at the end of Dan 11), Michael stands up to protect them (at the beginning of Dan 12).

"At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. (2) Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. (3) Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever." (Dan 12:1-3)

There is another reason why it says here that Michael "will arise" (vs. 1). This of course could mean nothing more than that He bestirs Himself in some general sense, but in the context of Dan 7:10 ("The court was seated, and the books were opened") the passage before us implies that the session of the heavenly court described in chap. 7 is now at an end. In the New Testament the same scenes are described but in greater detail. The closing arguments in the judgment are seen in Rev 19:1-8. And the manner in which Michael then sets out for the earth, having arisen as in Dan 12:1, is seen in Rev 19:11-21.

Having stood up at the end of the judgment in heaven, Michael comes to rescue His people here where His help is so badly needed. He does not come alone. Following Him are all the angel armies of heaven (see Rev 19:14). The other party to this great battle is Satan, followed by all the kings of the earth (see Rev 19:19). This other army active in "the battle on the great day of God Almighty" (Rev 16:14) is the one described in Dan 11:44-45 and in these final verses Satan himself is the king of the North. In this capacity he is a usurper, who claims the whole world as his own (see Matt 4:8-9). Thus, while one function of the second coming is to rescue the saints, another is to reassert Christ's rightful rule over our planet (see John 1:3; Heb 1:1-2).

I do not claim that exactly the same events as in Esther's day will happen again. What earth's last king of the North sets out to do in Dan 11:44-45 is not confined to the area between India (the valley of the Indus river, modern Pakistan) and Cush (modern Sudan) (see Esth 1:1). His actions take place on a larger scale. But the parallel between what he does and what Xerxes and Haman did is inescapable.

Elsewhere I argue that when dealing with the events of Dan 11:41-43 Ellen White emphasizes the need for Bible study.<sup>19</sup> The point to emphasize in Dan 11:44-45 (as in Esth 4:12-17) is the need for prayer. The lesson in both cases is simple and unadorned. It cuts at the root of human pride. We would rather read about dramatic battles involving this country and that, making abundant use of atomic weapons, or whatever. And this is what we might expect the angel to talk about. But there is nothing in such descriptions that would humble our natural tendency toward sensationalism. Spectacular events might well occur. It is true that God's people will be in grave danger during the end time. But the angel's point is not primarily that their lives will be threatened. His primary point is that they will be delivered. And my primary point is that some very serious asking will accompany such receiving (see Matt 7:7-8).

To prepare for last events we must learn all over again how to seek the Lord. The promise is, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jer 29:13). We must get the feel of doing this now by trusting God in small things of little consequence. Then when larger trials come (as for example when our lives are in danger, like the Jews during

the days of Esther) we will have a backlog of faith and experience with which to meet them. Christ asks, "when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). The answer is that He will, because "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb 11:6) and the 144,000 obviously do (see Rev 7:1-8). Some--indeed, an innumerable multitude (see Rev 7:9-17)--will have such faith. The question for us is how to be included among them.

This is not a rhetorical question. The vehicle by which we acknowledge to ourselves and to others that God has done something for us is praise. Let us therefore praise God for every blessing, however small. If we never do this--i.e., if we never acknowledge, even to ourselves, that He has done anything for us--how can the memory of past blessings give us confidence to expect even greater future blessings? At least in our quiet time alone with God, we should acknowledge our blessings as specifically and in as much detail as He gives them to us. This, unlike Christian perfection, is an unattainable goal for the Christian. But faith grows by pursuing it. The ABCs of prayer should be extended to include more than asking, believing, and claiming. There must also be praise for answered prayer.

## Discussion

We should be careful not to respond to the message of Dan 11:44-45 as Naaman did to that of Elisha.

But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. (12) Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.

Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed!'" (14) So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy. (2 Kgs 5:11-12)

God's purpose in telling us about future events, as in Dan 11:44-45, is to prepare us for the part we must play in them. Neither telling nor preparing occurs in isolation. Each provides a context for the other. Above I have emphasized preparation. I now emphasize knowledge.

It is true that in many cases the fulfillment of a prophecy is known only after the events occur. But in the present case we will not have that luxury. By the time these events occur, it will be too late to benefit from learning about them. Not every prophecy is understood only in retrospect. Those who received Jesus' warning to escape from Jerusalem before it was destroyed in A.D. 70 (see Matt 24:15-18) did not linger in the city until they saw the walls falling down around them and then reflect on Jesus' warning that they should have gotten out sooner. They understood His words and acted on them, with the result that not one Christian died in the Roman seige of Jerusalem.<sup>20</sup>

So it will be again. The attack described in Dan 11:44-45 is directed against the church, here described as living in spiritual Jerusalem. A whole collage of historical images comes to mind here, but prominent among them is the fact that the remnant includes people who have responded to God's last call to leave spiritual Babylon (see Ezra 1:1-4; Rev 18:4). These



worship Christ "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23)--not necessarily on Mount Zion or on Mount Gerazim, but wherever they might be. And they have gone everywhere ("He said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation'" [Mark 16:15]). So long as the attack was focused on a place, as it was in the first century, those warned to flee could go to another place. But here the attack is global in extent. There is no place left to go. And so their prayers ascend to Christ, who comes from heaven to rescue them in person, "with the clouds, and every eye will see him" (Rev 1:7). This is the second coming.

## Conclusion

There will be yet another death decree against God's people in the future just as there was in the past. Its object will be to rid the earth of the small remnant who refuse to accept the authority of earth's last usurping king of the North over that of God. That is the problem. The solution is that they cry to God for protection. And they receive it, just as Esther did anciently. Christ comes to rescue them--in fulfillment of His promises and in answer to their prayers. The second coming is no pantomime. The events surrounding it have spiritual significance but they are real.

In view of these facts we should lay heavy emphasis on forming the habit of prayer. We should make requests that God can take seriously and state them in a way which shows that we take them seriously. Now is the time to do our preparing, by which I mean that now is the time to learn by practical experience just how powerful and trustworthy God is. Very soon we will need to draw on that knowledge. The time for gaining it will soon be over and Jesus will come.

There is a passage in the Talmud (Megillah 7b) which says, "It is the duty of a man to mellow himself [with wine] on Purim until he cannot tell the difference between 'cursed be Haman' and 'blessed be Mordecai'."<sup>21</sup> This kind of celebrating bears no comparison to the joy of the saints when they are gathered tangibly into the kingdom and they actually see what they have heard about for so long. When they are finally home the saints see that what they have gained is more real than they could possibly have imagined and they are overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude to the One who has provided it for them. They see with increasing clarity what their reward implies and what it cost Jesus to make it available. Nor do they wake up in the morning to find that it was all a dream. On the contrary the realization sweeps over them that their earlier faith had not begun to grasp the breadth or depth of what was promised. Nor is all heaven to be taken in at a single glance. There is more to learn the next day, and the next. As Ellen G. White once remarked,

Heaven will be cheap enough, if we obtain it through suffering. We must deny self all along the way, die to self daily, let Jesus alone appear, and keep His glory continually in view. I saw that those who of late have embraced the truth would have to know what it is to suffer for Christ's sake, that they would have trials to pass through that would be keen and cutting, in order that they may be purified and fitted through suffering to receive the seal of the living God, pass through the time of trouble, see the King in His beauty, and dwell in the presence of God and of pure, holy angels.<sup>22</sup>

Those who expect the church to be taken miraculously from the earth so that any hardship associated with last events can pass them by untouched are in for a very rude surprise. The final movements will be rapid, but not easy.<sup>23</sup> During them Christ's attitude toward

us will be the same as the Father's was toward Him during His hour of greatest trial here on earth. And our attitude toward Christ must be the same as His was toward His Father. We will live, but to go through these events successfully our faith must be stronger than death.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Heb 12:2-3).

Note: All Scripture quotations in this paper, except when noted otherwise, are from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright (c) 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society.

<sup>1</sup>There is a question how to count the four kings. According to William H. Shea, Darius the Mede ruled under Cyrus as viceregent over Babylon ("An Unrecognized Vassal King of Babylon in the Early Achaemenid Period," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 9 [1971]: 51-67, 99-128; 10 [1972]: 88-117, 147-78). Thus, if (during the reign of Darius the Mede) Cyrus (559-530) must still be considered the first king of Persia, the three who would follow him are Cambyses (530-522), Smerdis (522), and Darius I (522-486). The fourth is Xerxes I (486-465). It would also be possible to argue that Darius the Mede was the first king from Daniel's point of view and that the three kings were Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius, thus omitting Smerdis.

<sup>2</sup>Third ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 219-53. See also Hardy, "Historical Overview of Dan 11:2-15," *Historicism* No. 11/Jul 87, pp. 2-4.

<sup>3</sup>From Herodotus we learn that Amestris was Xerxes' wife and that she was cruel. Modern writers agree on two additional facts: (1) She was the mother of Artaxerxes I (465-424): "The position of the Queen herself was liable to be overshadowed by that of the Queen-Mother, who took precedence; and the acts of Amestris show how great was her power" (Percy Sykes, *A History of Persia*, 2 vols. [London: Macmillan, 1951], 1:175). (2) Her actions brought about the revolt of Megabyzus (see *ibid.*, p. 217), which may have some bearing on the story of Ezra. See Hardy, "The Chronology of Ezra 4," *Historicism* No. 10/Apr 87, p. 18-41.

<sup>4</sup>According to Richard N. Frye, "The influence of Queen-mother Amestris at the court [of Artaxerxes I], which can only be described as baneful, also set a precedent for the future" (*The Heritage of Persia* [New York: Mentor, 1963], p. 149). Her influence lived on after her death. For the early years of Artaxerxes see Julia Neuffer, "The Accession of Artaxerxes I," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 6 (1968): 64-67. For Artaxerxes I in the Bible see Ezra 4:7, 7, 8, 11, 23; 6:14; 7:1, 7, 11, 12, 21; 8:1; Neh 2:1; 5:14; 13:6.

<sup>5</sup>Jairus is a Hellenized form of the name Jair, as found in the New Testament story of Christ raising Jairus' daughter (see Mark 5:22; Luke 8:41).

<sup>6</sup>Assuming that Mordecai was fifty years old in 473 B.C., when the attack on the Jews occurred and that each ascending generation was born to parents thirty years old, his grandfather would have been too young a hundred years earlier in 586 B.C. to make the trip to Babylon by himself. I do not think it is necessary to confine Esth 2:6 to the two generations before Mordecai. Mordecai was exiled from Jerusalem in the person of his near ancestors. But if I have correct, we do not know who they were. Shimei and Kish were both ancestors of Mordecai but did not live close to him in time.

<sup>7</sup>Encyclopaedia Judaica (Jerusalem, 1972), s.v. Mordecai. "(Mordecai has been identified by some with a finance officer at Susa under Xerxes.) . . . Mordecai is probably the Heb. rendering of a common Bab. personal name Mardukaya. This is found in texts, including one c. 485 BC (*AfO* 19, 1959-60, pp. 79-81) and another concerning an official of Ushtannu,

satrap of Babylon (ZAW 58, 1940-41, pp. 243ff.; cf. S. H. Horn, *BibRes* 9, 1964, pp. 14-25)" (*New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. Mordecai).

<sup>8</sup>The Elamites captured Babylon in 1175 B.C. but after 1150 B.C. are not mentioned again for a number of centuries. "When the Elamites reappear in history in the seventh century BC it is as a conglomeration of principalities friendly or more often hostile to Assyria. The final result of years of intrigues and partial success at times against Assyrian power was the decision of Assurbanipal to ravage and crush the country. About 636 Susa was sacked; its famous ziggurat was razed to the ground and statues of the deities of the Elamites were carried to Assyria. Elam was finished as a power in the world" (Frye, *Heritage of Persia*, p. 85). The restoration of Elam during the seventh century is contemporaneous with the restoration of Babylon. The initial change in both countries' fortunes can be traced to a decline of Assyrian strength, all of which did Elam little good. Assyria brought Elam down just before Babylon brought Assyria down in 609 B.C.--a date that is more significant from a biblical perspective than 612 B.C. (see Ross E. Winkle, "Jeremiah's Seventy Years for Babylon: A Re-Assessment. Part II: The Historical Data," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 25 [1987]: 289-90).

<sup>9</sup>See Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar: Being an Introduction to the Study of Hieroglyphs*, 3rd. ed., Ashmolean Museum (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957), p. 75.

<sup>10</sup>See Shea, "Esther and History," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 14 (1976): 228.

<sup>11</sup>"At the [Feast of the] Dedication [they read the section] 'The Princes'; at Purim, *Then came Amalek . . .*; on the first days of the months, *And on the first days of your months . . .*; at the *Maamads*, from the story of Creation; on the days of fasting, The Blessings and the Cursings" (Herbert Danby, trans., *The Mishnah: Translated From the Hebrew With Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933], Megillah 3:6 [p. 205]).

<sup>12</sup>See n. 10, above.

<sup>13</sup>*Esther*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), p. xlvii (cited in Shea, "Esther and History," p. 227).

<sup>14</sup>J. S. Wright, "The Historicity of Esther," in J. B. Payne, ed., *New Perspectives on the Old Testament* (Waco, 1970), p. 38, quoted in Shea, "Esther and History," p. 245.

<sup>15</sup>The edict was written April 17, 474 B.C. but would not go into effect until "the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar" (Esth 3:13), i.e., Mar 8, 473 B.C. The Jews had from the middle of the first month to the middle of the twelfth month to consider their fate.

<sup>16</sup>See John C. Whitcomb, "God's Present Work in Israel in the Light of the Book of Esther," *Israel My Glory*, February/March 1990, pp. 12-15. Whitcomb summarizes his argument by stating: "Although Mordecai, Esther, and their contemporaries were uninterested in God and His theocratic program, and although God therefore refused to identify with them officially, these descendants of Abraham still enjoyed His protective hand. Instead of being eliminated by the satanic plot of Haman, they were providentially delivered and, further, they were even enabled to put to death 75,000 of their enemies. Thus, God's providential preservation of His people, even in their unbelief, is one of the major themes of the book" (*ibid.*, p. 15). Whitcomb

here twists the lesson to be learned from the book of Esther exactly 180 degrees. Imploring God for help with fasting for three days on end is not the same as ignoring Him. How many of us have ever fasted and prayed for three days and nights --ever, for anything? Esther and the Jews living in Susa did not respond in faith to Ezra's invitation to return to Judea but in the present story they turned to God for help. Who can say that these very people are not the ones the author of Hebrews has in mind when he writes that by faith some "escaped the edge of the sword" (Heb 11:34)? What more dramatic biblical example of people escaping the edge of the sword is there than this one involving the entire Jewish race? But this strikes at the root of Whitcomb's argument. There is no justifiable basis whatever for saying, as Whitcomb does, that God providentially preserves His people "even in their unbelief." It is not only wrong to say this but doing so carries with it implications that I hope Whitcomb would wish to avoid. Any parallel

between the Jews of Esther's day and those living in modern secular Israel--his main thrust--is out of place.

<sup>17</sup>Letter of Aristeas 200, in R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), vol. 2: Pseudepigrapha, p. 113.

<sup>18</sup>See Hardy, "Toward a Typological Interpretation of Dan 11:40-45," *Historicism* No. 22/Apr 90, pp. 53-56.

<sup>19</sup>See *ibid.*, pp. 44-48.

<sup>20</sup>"On the other hand, the people of the church in Jerusalem were commanded by an oracle given by revelation before the war to those in the city who were worthy of it to depart and dwell in one of the cities of Perea which they called Pella. To it those who believed on Christ migrated from Jerusalem, . . ." (Kirsopp Lake, trans., *Eusebius*, Loeb Classical Library [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926], 3.5.3). F. F. Bruce suggests that in addition to Pella some Christians might have fled to "the less-frequented parts of Transjordan; indeed, the flight of the mother -church into the wilderness and her preservation there during the period of tribulation is reflected in the apocalyptic language of Rev. 12:14. Egypt could also have provided a haven for some refugees; Egypt and Transjordan in later generations were two main centres of 'Ebionite' Christianity--a form of Jewish Christianity which combined some of the traditional theology of the Jerusalem church with elements of Samaritan or Essene character. But many members of the church remained where they were--in Judaea, if not in Jerusalem itself" (F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, Anchor Books [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972], pp. 375-76).

<sup>21</sup>I. Epstein, gen. ed., *The Babylonian Talmud* (London: Soncino, 1938), Megillah 7b.

<sup>22</sup>Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1945), p. 67.

<sup>23</sup>"The agencies of evil are combining their forces and consolidating. They are strengthening for the last great crisis. Great changes are soon to take place in our world, and the final movements will be rapid ones" (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 9 vols. [Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948], 9:11).