

## 5. A Survey Study of Esther ("God's Providence")

## a. An overview:

Many problems and questions attend discussion of the authorship and composition date of Esther. No author is mentioned in the book, and it seems despite late Jewish traditions ascribing authorship either to the scribes of the Great Synagogue (followers of Ezra) or to Mordecai, that the author will remain unknown to us.

The author displays accurate knowledge of Persian society and architecture as they are now known from archaeological discoveries -- perhaps this knowledge arose from personal experience. Xerxes I reigned over the Persian Empire from 486-465 BC so that, if, as is usually ascribed, he is identified with Ahasuerus, the book could not have been written before 465 BC since Esther 10:2 implies he had died before it was written. There is no reference to the Greek period of ancient Near Eastern history, so Esther was probably written before that period began (about 330 BC). From these facts it seems Esther was written by a Jew living in Persia at some time during the middle of the Persian period (450-400 BC).

Esther is unusual among the books of the Bible in that it does not mention God either implicitly or explicitly. It is also the only biblical book (including the books of the Apocrypha) which has not been found at Qumran (the Dead Sea Scrolls). It was also the last book to be accepted into the Jewish canon. The reason for these last two facts may be the first -- how could a book which was so blatantly "secular" in tone and which did not mention the Lord be considered part of the holy canon? This also seems to be the reason for the great difference between the book of Esther as we have it in our (English and Hebrew) Bible and the version found in the Apocrypha. The apocryphal version, found in the Septuagint (the Greek Old Testament, translated from Hebrew about 274-120 BC), has several lengthy additions. These tend to emphasize the name of God and contain prayers to him, as if to atone for the lack of a "religious" element elsewhere in the book.

The author's sources included Haman's memoirs or notes (9:20) and "the book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia" (10:2). He wrote in narrative prose throughout the entire book.

When we outline Esther we find a very simple outline at our fingertips:

- I. The Plot 1-6
- II. The Plot Defeated 7-10

But a more accurate and demanding outline is this:

- I. The rise of Esther 1-2
- II. Haman's plot against the Jews 3
- III. Mordecai's argument with Esther 4
- IV. Esther's intervention with the king 5-7
- V. The destruction of Haman and his plot 8:1-9:19
- VI. The official establishment of Purim 9:20-32
- VII. Conclusion: the greatness of Mordecai 10

I have also outlined it thus:

- I. The palace problem 1:1-22
- II. The contest 2:1-20
- III. Internal Affairs: 2:21-7:10
- IV. Retribution 8:1-9:19
- V. Commemoration 9:20-32
- VI. Epilogue 10