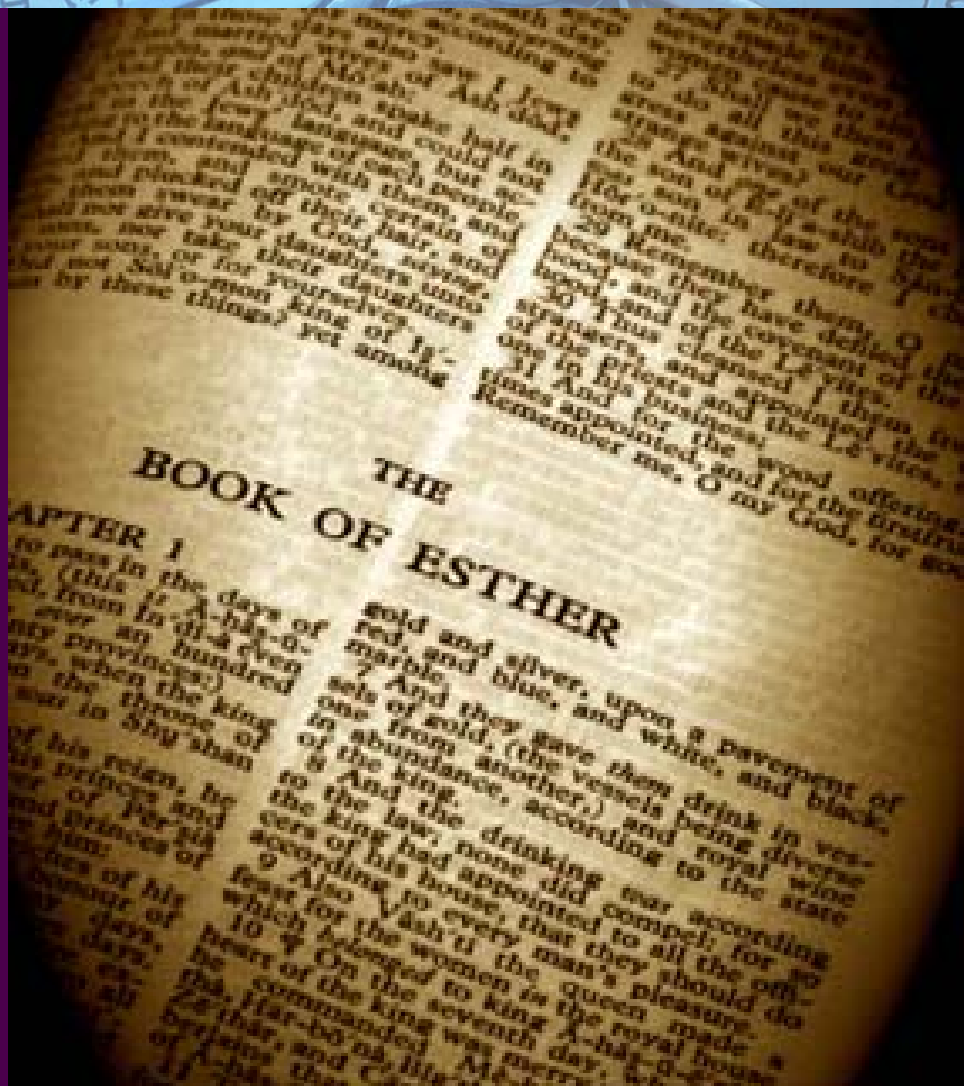




OUTREACH ISRAEL NEWS

REACH TEACH ENCOURAGE DISCIPLE



FEBRUARY 2009

THE MESSAGE OF ESTHER



OUTREACH ISRAEL NEWS

REACH TEACH ENCOURAGE DISCIPLE

STATEMENT OF BELIEF

Outreach Israel Ministries and TNN Online

There is One Almighty Creator God of the Universe, who has revealed Himself to us in the manifestations of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Yeshua the Messiah (Jesus Christ) came in fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies of the Scriptures and is fully God. It is mandatory for us to believe in a Divine Redeemer to be saved. Salvation is a free gift of God to all who receive Messiah Yeshua into their lives and confess of their sins. Those who reject Messiah will be consigned to eternal punishment.

The Holy Scriptures, Genesis-Revelation, are the inspired, infallible Word of God as revealed in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts.

There is only one assembly of chosen ones/elect, the people of Israel, of which all Believers in Messiah are a part. God does not have two groups of elect: Israel and "the Church."

The Torah (Genesis-Deuteronomy) is the foundation of all Scripture, was followed by our Messiah Yeshua, and is to still be followed and studied by Believers today.

Yeshua the Messiah is coming to gather the saints after the Tribulation period.

OIM is an *agapē* ministry, freely and benevolently giving the vast majority of its teachings and resources, without charge, to those who desire to be spiritually nourished.

For a fuller Statement of Faith, consult the OIM website

Outreach Israel News is the monthly newsletter of Outreach Israel Ministries, a non-profit organization with an emphasis on reaching, teaching, and encouraging the Messianic community. Subscription to **Outreach Israel News** is without cost and supported only by donation.

Members of the Board:

Mark Huey
Margaret McKee Huey
Russ and Lynda Kroeker
Grant and Julie Richards
Mark and Lynn Davis
J.K. McKee

© 2009 Outreach Israel Ministries
OIM is a 501(c)(3) non-profit
educational ministry

Mark Huey
director

Margaret McKee Huey
office manager

J.K. McKee
TNN Press

Jane McKee and Maggie McKee-Huey
youth ministries

Outreach Israel Ministries
1492 Regal Court
Kissimmee, FL 34744

Phone: (407) 933-2002
Fax: (407) 870-8986
Web: www.outreachisrael.net
www.tnnonline.net
E-mail: info@outreachisrael.net

OIM UPDATE

February 2009

With the shorter days lengthening and longer nights shortening in the Northern Hemisphere, we are finally looking forward to the advent of another Spring season as new life returns to the landscape. But before the calendar reaches the month of Aviv/Nisan and we commemorate the Passover, there is another celebration that has a tendency to get overlooked by many in the Messianic community of faith. This celebration is very important to us as Believers, and we need not overlook it any more as we consider our Father's faithfulness toward His people.

Because *Purim* is not listed in Leviticus 23, but has rather become the celebration of the deliverance of the Persian Jews as recorded in the Book of Esther, most assemblies have a tendency to commemorate the heroic events with a play that memorializes Esther and Mordecai as they challenge the villainous Haman. Is it sufficient for us to simply reduce what *Purim* teaches us to a play? J.K. McKee's article, "The Message of Esther," explains that when Esther is taken seriously, it has important things to teach us today about God's direct interest in our salvation and well being. Hopefully, this year while you celebrate the courage of Esther's actions that led directly to the saving of the Jewish people, we will all be inspired to be more useful in the work of the Kingdom. Additionally, the FAQ section addresses the composition of the Book of Esther. Hopefully, these facts will increase your understanding of this era.

As initially announced in last month's newsletter, we have just launched our new YouTube channel at <youtube.com/tnnonline>. Expect to see regular updates and teachings, which will once again present our balanced and engaged perspective of Messianic things. The OIM Book Fund continues to move ahead as we have put some of the final edits together on *Hebraic Roots: An Introductory Study*, along with a new cover. Your continued support of these efforts is greatly appreciated!

The Health and Nutrition Update focuses on economical ways to avoid some of the chronic diseases that are plaguing many that have not judiciously monitored their diets over the years. Our research has again found some excellent advice for those seeking to maintain good health through consistent supplementation.

Finally, if you have contributed financially to OIM in 2008, you should have already received a statement for your tax return by a separate letter. We want to thank all of you for your faithful support of our ministry, and we pray that your joining with us in 2009 will bear much spiritual fruit for advancing the mission of God's Kingdom. May His blessings be abundantly bestowed upon you as we work together in the years to come!

Until the restoration of all things...

William Mark Huey

THE MESSAGE OF ESTHER

by J.K. McKee

The Book of Esther is one of the most important books in the Bible. While Esther is commonly considered during the season of *Purim*, the specific concepts it communicates often go underappreciated. Esther is much, much more than just cheering when the name “Mordecai” is mentioned, or booing to “Haman,” or dressing up and participating in a play. Esther gives us a snapshot of the Diaspora Jewish community following the fall of the Babylonian Empire, the complexities of the Jews having to live under Persian rule, the antiquity of anti-Semitism preceding the time of Yeshua, the workings of God behind the scenes through normal people, and most especially how God uses women to accomplish His tasks. Esther also tells us what happens after God’s people are spared from certain doom, and how they are to protect themselves.

The story of Esther begins during the reign of the Persian King Ahasuerus or Xerxes, who reigned between 486-465 B.C.E. While Bible readers most often know this king for the role he plays in the Book of Esther, history at large knows Xerxes as the Persian king who failed to conquer Greece.¹ The account of Esther opens up when Xerxes intends to display “the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty” for “a full 180 days” (Esther 1:4). In the midst of a great banquet he holds after the time of celebration (Esther 1:5-8), the intoxicated king intends to display his wife Vashti to those gathered. Nothing is stated in the Biblical text regarding why he asks of this—only saying that Xerxes wanted to “display her beauty” (Esther 1:11)—but one can only imagine a woman walking into a crowd of drunken men and what they were thinking. Vashti, as one can only expect, refuses the request of the king who “became furious and burned with anger” (Esther 1:12).

King Xerxes consults with his closest advisors, wanting to know what is to be done with his wife (Esther 1:14-15). They tell him that if something is not done, wives all over Persia and Media will imitate Queen Vashti, and there will be gross disrespect of husbands and men in general (Esther 1:17-18). They rule that Queen Vashti not be allowed into his presence again, and specifically that “the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she” (Esther 1:19). So significant was this, that “He sent dispatches to all parts of the kingdom, to each province in his own script and to each people in its own language, proclaiming in each people’s tongue that every man should be ruler over his own household” (Esther 1:22).

After this declaration and with his own anger subsided, King Xerxes is advised, “Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king” (Esther 2:2), and commissioners are sent to the provinces of the Persian Empire to search for a new queen. In the capital city of Susa, a Jewess named Hadassah, “also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features” (Esther 2:7), had been taken by her older cousin Mordecai as a daughter. The search commences, and she was found to

¹ Duane A. Garrett, ed., et. al., *NIV Archaeological Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 716; note on Esther 1:1.

have all the right qualities and won the favor of the head of the king's harem. Leaving, Mordecai tells her not to reveal her Jewish heritage (Esther 2:10). We are told that Esther "had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women...And this is how she would go to the king" (Esther 2:12, 13). Esther was the one woman who "the king was attracted to...more than any of the other virgins" (Esther 2:17), being made queen.

As these events occur at the palace, Mordecai was sitting outside at the gate (Esther 2:19). Minding his own business, perhaps wondering what is going on inside, he overhears a conversation between two of the king's officers. These two men, Bigthana and Teresh, "became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes" (Esther 2:21). Mordecai relays the news to Esther, who reports it to the king on his behalf (Esther 2:22). As a result, the two were executed and their bodies publicly displayed or "hanged" (Esther 2:23).

Following this we are introduced to Haman, one of the Persian nobles, and a man whom the author of Esther considers to be an Agagite.² King Xerxes honors Haman, yet "Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor" (Esther 3:2). Mordecai enraged Haman, who was promptly told that "he was a Jew" (Esther 3:4). "When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged" (Esther 3:5), and rather than wanting to just do damage to Mordecai or bring him harm, "Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes" (Esther 3:6). The scheming Haman then goes before his king, and speaks the insidious words,

"There is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom whose customs are different from those of other people who do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will put ten thousand talents of silver into the royal treasury for the men who carry out this business" (Esther 3:8-9).

King Xerxes promptly gives Haman his signet ring in approval (Esther 3:10). Ironically enough, it was not the style of the Persians to exterminate people, as the Persians were widely known for their tolerant attitudes unlike the Assyrians or Babylonians who had preceded them. Haman receiving Xerxes' immediate approval is a testament to his ability to connive and manipulate with lies, some of the distinct qualities of (state) anti-Semitism seen throughout later history. We are told, "Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and little children...A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so that they would be ready for that day" (Esther 3:13-14).

Upon hearing about this genocidal plot against his people, Mordecai "tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly" (Esther 4:1). It is also recorded, "In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing" (Esther 4:3). Esther herself "was in great distress" (Esther 4:4). Mordecai relays what has happened to Esther via her servant,

² Agag was the deposed king of the Amalakitites, whom King Saul let live (1 Samuel 15).

and how Haman was at the center of the plot to kill all the Jews in Persia. Mordecai “urge[d] her to go into the king’s presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people” (Esther 4:8).

Just going before the king of Persia was not an easy thing to do, even for his queen. Esther relays the message to Mordecai, “All the king’s officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life” (Esther 4:11). Esther knows the gravity of going before King Xerxes. Yet, Mordecai is sure that she is told: “if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. **And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?**” (Esther 4:14, emphasis mine). Mordecai is confident that the Jewish people will not be exterminated, but if Esther fails to act there will be a price to pay as her family will die. Esther asks Mordecai for the Jews in Susa to fast for her, as she contemplates what is to be done.

After three days, Esther “stood...in front of the king’s hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne...When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter” (Esther 5:1-2). Esther was indeed in the right place at the right time, and King Xerxes is so happy to see her, that he says, “What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you” (Esther 5:3). Rather than telling the king right then and there the problem her people were facing, she asks if she can hold a banquet for the king and Haman (Esther 5:5), and it is granted.

During this banquet, both King Xerxes and Haman are found drinking wine. The king once again asks Esther what her request is, and she asks them if they can have another banquet the following day (Esther 5:7). As he leaves, “Haman... went out in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai at the king’s gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage. Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home” (Esther 5:9-10). When he arrived home, Haman “boasted...about his vast wealth” and specifically “all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials” (Esther 5:11). Even more interesting, Haman specifically says, “I’m the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave” (Esther 5:12). Yet this is followed by the perturbed remark, “all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king’s gate” (Esther 5:13). Haman’s wife asks that they build a structure³ up to seventy-five cubits high on which to display Mordecai’s corpse. We are told: “**This suggestion delighted Haman**” (Esther 5:14, emphasis mine).

While Haman continues in his schemes to destroy the Jews, King Xerxes could not sleep. As a sure remedy, “he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bithgana and Teresh...who had conspired to assassi-

³ In v. 14 Zeresh says “Have a gallows built,” yet the Hebrew source text reads *ya’asu etz* or “Let them prepare a tree” (YLT), or “wood.”

nate him” (Esther 6:1-2). The king asks what kind of honor had been bestowed upon Mordecai for his act of preservation, and is told that nothing had yet been done (Esther 6:3-4). While this is happening, “Haman is standing in the court” (Esther 6:5), and upon entering the king asks him, “What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?” (Esther 6:6a). And as it is said, “Haman thought to himself, ‘Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?’” (Esther 6:6b). Haman was so self-consumed that it was only natural that any reward dispensed by the leader of the Persian Empire could go to *him*. Haman tells the king,

“For the man the king delights to honor, have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king’s most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, ‘This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!’” (Esther 6:7-9).

Perhaps thinking that he will be paraded around the city in the Fifth Century B.C.E equivalent of a ticker-tape parade, King Xerxes tells Haman, “Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king’s gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended” (Esther 6:10). In a twist of complete irony, rather than having this honor done to *himself*, Haman must parade the man he hates with a passion—Mordecai—around the city on horseback. He has to proclaim to the city: “This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!” (Esther 6:11). Humiliated, Haman rushes home and reports what has taken place (Esther 6:12). Haman’s wife gives him some sound advice: “you cannot stand against [Mordecai]—you will surely come to ruin!” (Esther 6:13), and following this Haman is prepared to go to Esther’s second banquet.

As King Xerxes “and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther...the king again asked, ‘Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you?’” (Esther 7:1). With her husband and Haman right there, and with Haman likely unsure of what is going on having had some wine, Esther is direct with her response:

“If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king” (Esther 7:3-4).

The king is naturally astonished, asking Esther, “Who is he? Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?” (Esther 7:5). Esther’s answer is to the point: “The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman” (Esther 7:6).

Haman probably did not know what to do, and we can only imagine the kinds of bodily reactions he had when signaled out as the culprit against Esther and her people. Did he vomit? Did his stomach churn? Did he lose his voice or get a sudden headache? One thing is certain, as King Xerxes ran out of the banquet furious, “Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life” (Esther 7:7b). Returning to address Haman, the king sees him in a prostrated position before Esther. All he has to say is,

“Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?” (Esther 7:8b). Upon saying this, one of the king’s eunuchs informs him that a structure seventy-five cubits high has been built on which Mordecai’s corpse was supposed to be displayed (Esther 7:9). The king’s words are direct: “Hang him on it!” (Esther 7:10). And so “the king’s fury subsided” (Esther 7:10).

This is normally where the common *Purim* play ends the story—with the death of Haman. Yet the Book of Esther still has three more chapters, each of which tells us more about what happened. After Esther has just pleaded for her life, Mordecai is brought in before King Xerxes, is formally introduced, and is given Haman’s estate (Esther 8:1-2). Esther, having been saved, pleads for the lives of all the Jews throughout the Persian Empire (Esther 8:3-5), telling him “For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?” (Esther 8:6). Having just called for the death of Haman, the king is moved to make another ruling:

“Now write another decree in the king’s name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king’s signet ring—for no document written in the king’s name and sealed with his ring can be revoked” (Esther 8:8).

A new ruling in favor of the Jews was sent throughout the empire—“Mordecai’s orders to the Jews, and to the satraps, governors and nobles of the 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush” (Esther 8:9). Mordecai’s ruling was sent in the languages of all, with the direct approval and signet stamp of King Xerxes (Esther 8:9b-10). The Jews were given permission to defend themselves against any aggression, and a set date was given “so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies” (Esther 8:13). Far be it from the Jewish people in the empire being the victims; they are now authorized to go and root out potential foes. As a consequence, the text tells us “many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them” (Esther 8:17). Somehow, these people realized that the Jewish people were going to take the decree seriously, and whether or not they “converted,” they certainly did their best to *blend in*.

This edict was to be carried out on the 13th of Adar, and although “the enemies of the Jews...hoped to overpower them...the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them” (Esther 9:1). “The Jews assembled in their cities in all the provinces of King Xerxes to attack those seeking their destruction. No one could stand against them, because the people of all the other nationalities were afraid of them” (Esther 9:2). In the day of the Jews’ vengeance, the administrators of Persia actually helped them because Mordecai had replaced Haman in Xerxes’ government (Esther 9:3-4)! “The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did what they pleased to those who hated them” (Esther 9:5), and we are specifically told that the ten sons of Haman met their death (Esther 9:6) and whose corpses were displayed (Esther 9:13-14). A great number of the Jews’ enemies were killed during this day.⁵

⁴ Or, Ethiopia.

⁵ Esther 9:16 specifically says that seventy-five thousand were killed, but this could obviously be a rounded number. Furthermore, it is not improbable that being aided by the Persian government, the Persians themselves were responsible for eliminating the Jews’ enemies and any other criminal elements that plagued them.

On the day following, the 14th of Adar, the Jewish people throughout the Persian Empire “rested and made it a day of feasting and joy” (Esther 9:17). The Jews had been saved from complete obliteration, and their enemies had been routed out. The people could now live in peace, wherever they were located, and could remember how Queen Esther was placed by God in the Persian court. This festival was to be “a day for giving presents to each other” (Esther 9:19), and was recorded for posterity by Mordecai (Esther 9:20). It was to be celebrated “annually...as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies” (Esther 9:22). It was called *Purim*, as Haman had “cast the *pur* (that is, the lot) for their ruin and destruction” (Esther 9:23). However, the Jews throughout the empire had been delivered, and were specifically admonished to remember this time of deliverance “every year...at the time appointed” (Esther 9:27).⁶ As it was decreed:

“These days should be remembered and observed in every generation by every family, and in every province and in every city. And these days of Purim should never cease to be celebrated by the Jews, nor should the memory of them die out among their descendants” (Esther 9:28).

The Biblical text is very clear on the need to celebrate Purim *b'kol dor v'dor* or “in all generation and generation” (my translation). “Esther’s decree confirmed these regulations about Purim, and it was written down in the records” (Esther 9:32).

Mordecai is attested to have been alongside King Xerxes (Ahasuerus) in “all his acts of power and might,” and that he is listed “in the book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia” (Esther 10:2). He, as a Jew who was once designated for execution, “was second in rank to King Xerxes, preeminent among the Jews, and held in high esteem by his many fellow Jews, because he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews” (Esther 10:3).

The narrative of Esther when taken as a whole has much more to teach us than the common *Purim* play does it justice. Far be it from Esther being some kind of ironic comedy, the Book of Esther adroitly displays themes common to the human condition such as: love, oppression, goodness, evil, and justice for those who would harm others. While there is no direct mention of God in the account, one can certainly see how the Lord works through the various characters with the Jewish people in the end being saved from certain extinction. As Mordecai clearly told Esther, “perhaps you have attained to royal position for just such a crisis” (Esther 4:14, NJPS). You may have used this sort of expression before and did not know where it came from. Better yet, perhaps you have been in the right place at the right time, and have been able to be used by God for some kind of important service.

Looking at the place of Esther in the whole of Scripture, it is obvious that there are connections between the figure of Haman and the coming antimessiah/antichrist. Haman was a man filled with self-love and self-worship. He could only think about himself. While the text does not say so explicitly, were the would-be assassins of King Xerxes in Haman’s close confidence? Did Haman as a noble of Persia possibly ever see himself as deposing the king and being installed as a monarch himself? Haman was undoubtedly a man consumed with ambition, and

⁶ Heb. *v'kizmanam b'kol shanah v'shanah*, “according to their season, in every year and year” (YLT).

whose negative traits have lived on throughout history.

Anti-Semitism in the world pre-dated the arrival of Yeshua the Messiah by many centuries. The Book of Esther only gives us a small snapshot of the attitudes that other people have had toward the Jews. Haman manipulated King Xerxes to get him to sign the Jews' death warrant. But in the end as the Jews are saved, they stand up for themselves and are authorized by the government to take care of their enemies. The Jews do not play the role of the victim, instead taking preemptive action and targeting those who would do them harm. What might this teach us about not only when Jews stand up for themselves today—here on the other side of the Holocaust—but when we as Believers might be tempted to be a little too pacifistic? What might this teach us about our spirituality as Messianics, when we might be tempted to victimize ourselves because we have been treated badly? What kind of specific actions can we take to defend ourselves?

Perhaps the most overlooked theme is the role that Esther plays not only as the person able to save her people, but as a woman. Throughout the history of the Bible, it is not as though God *will* use women; **God uses women.** Esther is one of many significant heroines in the Scriptures who are used by the Lord in a mighty way. Yet, far from Esther being a radical feminist, she works within the rules laid out by the Persian establishment, winning the favor of the king. Esther uses her God-given intellect to lay a clever trap for Haman. And, at the end Esther is able to introduce King Xerxes to Mordecai who is then placed in a position second only to his own. The Book of Esther should teach every Messianic male to respect women and highly value the role that they play, as Esther was directly responsible not only for the salvation of the Jewish people—but for eliminating a direct threat to her husband in Haman. Without Esther, the Jewish people would have been annihilated and there would have been no Messiah Yeshua born to save the world!

As you can see, the Book of Esther teaches us much, much more than what is captured in the *Purim* play. While it is good to have a laugh, and indeed God gave us as human beings a sense of humor, Esther is still a very serious story. Esther is a life and death account about how easy it was for the Persian king to be manipulated into thinking that the Jews must be eliminated. Esther teaches us about a very old problem in anti-Semitism that continues to this very day. Yet, it also shows how God orchestrates things behind the scenes, and uses willing vessels to accomplish His salvation history. Like Esther and Mordecai, each one of us can be used by Him for circumstances that require a voice of reason, a temperament of compassion, or a fiery protester who will stand firm for what is right. What message does the Book of Esther teach you? Is it something that will last far behind the holiday of *Purim*?

Esther, Book of: What can you tell me about the composition of the Book of Esther?

Approximate date: 460 B.C.E. (Right, conservative-moderate); 330 B.C.E. (Left)

Author: anonymous (some Right, conservative-moderate, Left)

Location of author: Persia (Right, conservative-moderate); Land of Israel after the exile (most Left)

Target audience and their location: Jewish people in Persian Empire (Right, conservative-moderate); Jewish people having returned from the Babylonian Exile, probably during the time of the Maccabees (Left)



The Book of Esther is one of the most unique texts in the Tanach, with those who read it demonstrating a wide variety of opinions: from Maimonides who placed it second only to the Torah, Luther who thought it was gaudy and sensual, and the feminist theologian who places it at the center of her theology. In the Christian theological tradition, Esther is placed among the Historical books, whereas Jewish tradition places it among the Five Scrolls or *Megillot* to be read during holiday times. Esther tells the story of a Jewish girl who becomes the new queen of Persia, and is placed in a position to save the Jewish people from extinction.

The purpose of Esther's composition was primarily to justify the celebration of *Purim* (*IDB*, 2:150) as a holiday for the Jewish people during and immediately following the reign of the Persian King Ahasuerus, known in Greek historical works as Xerxes (3:7; 9:26-32; cf. Harrison, pp 1087-1088). The young Jewess Esther becomes the queen of Persia, and her cousin Mordecai learns about the genocidal plans of the evil Haman toward the Jews. The location of these events is in the Persian city of Susa. The text may easily be described as a Jewish novella, with the term *Purim* derived from the lot or *pur* (פּוּר) Haman cast to determine the date of execution for the Jews (3:7; 9:24).

Conservative theologians regard the author of Esther as being anonymous (*ISBE*, 2:158; *EXP*, 4:776; Dillard and Longman, 191), but most certainly a Jew. Jewish tradition in the Talmud (b.*Bava Batra* 15a) attributes authorship of the book to the men of the Great Synagogue. The author of Esther was most probably a Persian Jew who was quite familiar with the inner workings and social structure of the Persian Empire, as he demonstrates no knowledge of events or circumstances going on in the Land of Israel. The text of Esther was likely composed before Ezra's return to Jerusalem, and with that was probably written shortly after the events it depicts, sometime in the late Fifth Century B.C.E. Esther 9:22 suggests that the festival of *Purim* was celebrated for some time before Esther's composition:

"[I]t was a month which was turned for them from sorrow into gladness

and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and rejoicing and sending portions of food to one another and gifts to the poor.”

Liberal scholars often advocate a later composition for Esther, as early as the late Fourth Century B.C.E. Various Greek “loan words” present in the text make some suggest that Esther is a composition of the early Hellenistic period (*IDBSup*, 280). Liberals will often consider the events portrayed in Esther to be pseudohistorical, and perhaps even to be read as a comedy (*Jewish Study Bible*, 1623). Many doubt that the events ever took place (*IDB*, 2:151), and conclude that they are only a “festal legend” (*IDBSup*, 279). The people in the Book of Esther are often viewed as only being caricatures of other figures that antagonized the Jewish people.

Doubting the historicity of Esther is not only a feature of modern higher criticism, but even some Jews of ancient times doubted its validity (b.*Megillah* 7a; cf. Harrison, 1090). Many try to connect the feast of *Purim* to the Maccabean period and their victory over the Greeks (*IDB*, 2:151; Harrison, 1088-1090; *NBCR*, 412), including Haman being modeled after Antiochus Epiphanes (*ISBE*, 2:158). Many liberals, however, do consider the story of Esther to have great value, particularly concerning Esther as a female protagonist in a male-dominated Persian society.

Conservatives and liberals all recognize that the Book of Esther is not to be taken as “sober history” (*NBCR*, 413; cf. Harrison, 1090-1092), as there are certainly elements in the story that are meant to guide the reader. But how far we take this has led to a diverse array of conclusions. Many liberals will claim that the Persian Empire was tolerant of minorities, thus casting doubt on Esther’s claim of genocide against the Persian Jews. Others will argue, “The writer displays a most intimate and accurate knowledge of the Persian court and customs, so much so that Esther is used to fill gaps in the accounts of classical historians” (*EDB*, 428; cf. *ISBE*, 2:159; Dillard and Longman, 191-192). Conservatives will commonly note that the Greek historian Herodotus writes that King Xerxes was ruthless and despotic (*NBCR*, 413), and that we cannot make broad generalizations of Persian culture.

Perhaps the most significant support for the historicity of Esther among external data is a reference to a certain *Marduka* (Mordecai) among Persian records (*NIDB*, 326; *ISBE*, 2:159), proving that the Biblical Mordecai could certainly have existed. Today there appears to be a trend in liberal scholarship toward accepting some historicity of the text, as some note that “nothing in the story seems improbable, let alone unbelievable” (*ABD*, 2:638), with some even dating the text (or at least a proto-text) in the late Persian period (*Ibid.*, 2:641).

The textual witness for Esther is immense. “[T]here are more MS copies

of Esther than of any other book of the OT" (*NBCR*, 412), and there is extensive Rabbinic commentary on Esther in the Talmud. This high regard for Esther actually sees it placed second to the Torah among some manuscripts (*EXP*, 4:776). There exist three major editions of the text of Esther (Harrison, 1101-1102; *EXP*, 4:781-782; *ABD*, 2:641-642), notably the Hebrew Masoretic Text, Greek Septuagint, and a second Greek edition. There are additions to the Book of Esther found in the LXX that have a major religious character. These chapters are a part of the Apocrypha in Additions to the Book of Esther (*ISBE*, 2:158), and are considered canonical in the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and some Anglican traditions.

A theme seen throughout Esther is an ongoing conflict between Israel and the Amalekites (2:5; 3:1-6; 9:5-10), something that originally occurred during the Exodus (Exodus 17:8-16; Deuteronomy 25:17-19) and continued throughout Israel's history (1 Samuel 15; 1 Chronicles 4:43). The author of Esther views the Amalekites as the epitome and/or sum of Israel's enemies, with Haman depicted as a descendant of King Agag (Harrison, 1085).

The Book of Esther also relies heavily upon the Jewish people being portrayed as God's faithful remnant. Evangelical Christian theologians are very keen to note that the continued existence of the Jewish people demonstrated in Esther is imperative due to the promises of the coming Messiah (Dillard and Longman, 197). Some also suggest a reliance upon the themes seen in the story of Joseph regarding God's preservation of the Jews in Susa (2:3-4; 9, 21-23; 3:4; 4:14; 6:1, 8, 14; 8:6).

It is undeniable that Esther confronts us with a major Tanach example of Israel interacting with other cultures. Our principal protagonist is actually named *Hadassah* (הַדַּסָּה) meaning "myrtle," but is given the Persian name *Ester* (אֶסְתֵּר) meaning "star" (2:7; cf. Harrison, 1085; *EDB*, 427). Understanding Persian history and society is imperative to properly grasp the concepts in Esther, as great banquets are the focal points of much of the story. We also do see drunkenness and lewd sexuality in Esther (*ABD*, 2:633; *Jewish Study Bible*, 1623). A common misconception about the evil Haman "hanging" is that he was hanged on a gallows similar to today, when in the Persian context it was probably impalement followed by the public display or "hanging" of the corpse for the public to see. The writing style of Esther is undoubtedly affected by Persian techniques (Harrison, 1096; *EDB*, 428).

The major discussion of the validity of the Book of Esther often concerns the absence of any direct reference to "God" (*EXP*, 4:784-785). Many have considered the text to be entirely secular, and not religious at all. Esther had difficulty gaining canonical status in both the Jewish and Christian theological traditions (*IDB*, 2:151; *ISBE*, 2:158; *EXP*, 4:779; *ABD*, 2:635-638; *EDB*, 427-428; Dillard and Longman, 189), and the Qumran community did not con-

sider it canonical at all. Some Jewish and Christian scholars have considered the book grossly immoral (*ABD*, 2:635). Neither Esther nor Mordecai make a reference to the Torah or Tanach, or demonstrate that they follow the “commandments,” per se.

In response to these claims against Esther, it is proposed that God not being mentioned directly is so that this book could circulate more freely among Jews in Persia (*NIDB*, 326). Many conclude that the anonymity of God is a literary device used to heighten the reader’s sensitivity to Him working through the life circumstances of human beings (*IDB*, 2:150). It is only by God’s faithfulness to His people that they are saved, as He moves on the hearts of the protagonists. The Book of Esther has offered Jews throughout history a great deal of hope during times of distress (*NBCR*, 412).

The Book of Esther is often very important for Messianics during the season of *Purim*. It causes all of us to consider the role of anti-Semitism in today’s world, and the role that we can play to combat it. It most certainly causes us to consider how God works through the human condition without us often seeing. Esther gives us a critical lesson of how God can use us to save and/or help His people during times of terrible distress. Esther is a great text that teaches us about the salvation history of God (Dillard and Longman, 197), and at the same time asks us questions about how He can use *both* men and women to accomplish it.

Bibliography

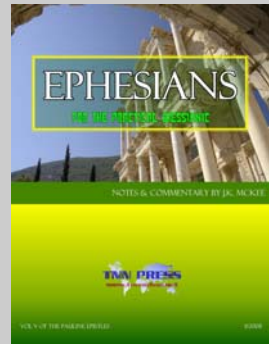
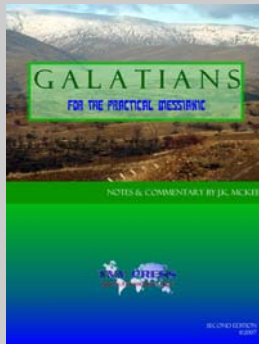
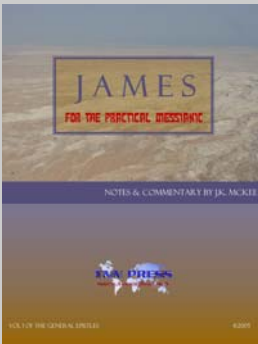
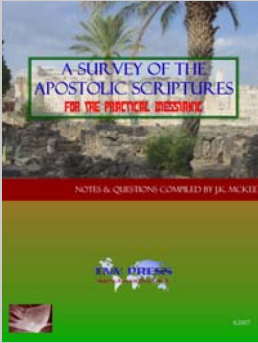
- Baldwin, J.G. “Esther,” in *NBCR*, pp 412-420.
Berlin, Adele. “Esther,” in *Jewish Study Bible*, pp 1623-1639.
Crawford, Sidnie White. “Esther,” in *New Interpreter’s Study Bible*, pp 689-701.
Dillard, Raymond B., and Tremper Longman III. “Esther,” in *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 189-197.
Harrington, Clyde E. “Esther, Book of,” in *NIDB*, pp 326-327.
Harrison, R.K. “The Book of Esther,” in *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp 1085-1102.
Harvey, D. “Esther, Book of,” in *IDB*, 2:149-151.
Huey, Jr., F.B. “Esther,” in *EXP*, 4:775-839.
Humphreys, W.L. “Esther, Book of,” in *IDBSup*, pp 279-281.
Moore, Carey A. “Esther, Book of,” in *ABD*, 2:633-643.
Payne, D.F. “Esther, Book of,” in *ISBE*, 2:157-159.
Rashkow, Ilona N. “Esther, Book of,” in *EDB*, pp 427-429.



Visit our new YouTube channel:
[www.youtube.com/
tnnonline](http://www.youtube.com/tnnonline)

FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC COMMENTARIES

AVAILABLE FROM TNN PRESS



AVAILABLE NOW!

COMING SPRING 2009

TNN Press' "for the Practical Messianic" commentary series is one of the most important resources available in the Messianic movement today. This ever-expanding series addresses the Scriptures from a distinct Messianic viewpoint, that is engaged with contemporary Biblical scholarship and careful attention to detail. Volumes that are presently available tackle some of the most difficult-to-understand texts of the Apostolic Scriptures for Messianic Believers. In the years to come, this series will undoubtedly raise the bar of Messianic Biblical examination to a level that it currently has not seen, as each asks questions that will challenge us spiritually

February 2009 Health Update

Avoiding Chronic Diseases

by Mark and Margaret Huey

With stressful economic times upon us, one of the first tendencies is for people to cut back on their nutritional choices and skimp and save when it comes to diet. For those who suffer from chronic diseases or are concerned about their possible health deterioration—which can lead to diseases like diabetes, arthritis, high blood pressure, heart disease, and/or digestive problems—the following affordable advice from Jeffrey Novick, MS, RD, the nutritionist for the McDougall Program in Santa Rosa, California and the director of health education for the National Health Association, might be helpful:

Novick's first rule then is this: **Eat foods that nourish and sustain the body.** Though he says the ideal would be to eat *only* such foods, this is especially important for those who suffer from a chronic disease. For guidance on what such a diet would look like, Novick looks at eating habits in societies around the world where people routinely lived to 100 or more. Common to these groups (in addition to social engagement, regular moderate exercise and being tobacco-free) was a **plant-based diet with a little animal protein**...so little, in fact, that Novick suggests considering animal protein a condiment, not a main course. With this in mind, here are updated dietary specifics that Novick recommends to nourish and sustain us all, healthy or ill:

Avoid refined foods. More than 90% of the carbs in the US diet are in the form of refined and processed foods and few of these are healthy. Even many foods labeled "whole grains" (including bagels, bread, crackers, cookies and rolls) also have fats, sugars, salt and preservatives that are not, he stresses, on the good-for-you list.

Fill up on fiber. Eat plentiful amounts of vegetables, unprocessed intact whole grains like brown rice, oatmeal, quinoa, barley, starchy vegetables (potatoes, yams, corn, etc.) and, yes, beans. In fact, with their high fiber, low fat and high protein, legumes seem to be a common denominator among all populations studied for longevity and health.

Everything in moderation...even good-for-you foods. Novick points out that diets that recommend a "little" this and a "little" that, such as dark chocolate, walnuts and olive oil, can easily lead people to believe it is okay to eat large quantities of these foods, so they end up consuming too much fat and too many calories. While these foods may be good for you in small quantities, they can easily be overdone. Instead, he suggests focusing on the primary foods the diet recommends and using the others as a condiment or an occasional treat.

Of course, we still recommend that people make it a priority to supplement their diet with vitamins, minerals, and nutrients that are not received from eating the typical Western or American diet. This requires allocating your resources appropriately in order to afford supplements. If there is anything we can all learn from others, attempting to get all the nutrition you need from a typical diet is impossible. Consider the above advice and do not forget to supplement for your nutritional needs. Good health is worth the investment!

Make healthy choices!
Mark and Margaret

If you would like to sign up for our
Special Health Updates, please contact us via phone at **(407) 933-2002**
or e-mail info@outreachisrael.net

We are also available to discuss your specific health needs.

JOIN THE TNN PRESS BOOK FUND

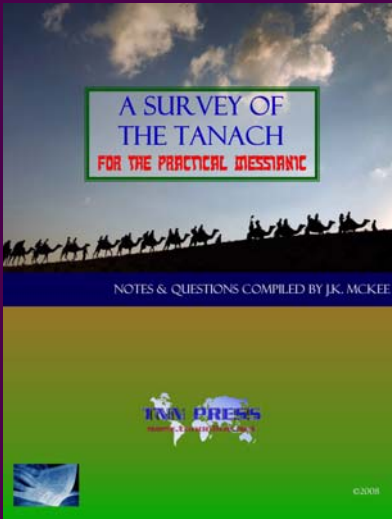


Would you like to see high quality, scholastic, and loving Messianic books like *Hebraic Roots*, *Introduction to Things Messianic*, *Torah In the Balance*, and *When Will the Messiah Return?* available from major booksellers? Do you want your friends to be able to purchase these books without the “fear” of having to contact a Messianic ministry? Join the ongoing **TNN Press Book Fund** today and make this a reality!

The TNN Press Book Fund is the most ambitious project ever embarked upon by our ministry. For over five years, we have been on the cutting edge preparing materials for the long-term future of the Messianic movement, ranging from introductory books to home study guides to commentaries on various books of the Bible. These publications *now* need to be able to have a wider distribution than *just* our ministry. They need to be out there to counterbalance some of the unfair and unloving materials that bring discredit to the Messianic community. They need to promote a Messianic movement that is going to be an influence of positive change in the world. TNN Press offers some of the most well-researched and theologically stable Messianic materials on the market, and it is time to see that our publications are professionally printed.

We are currently preparing our first two books for publication and need your help!

A new commentary available from TNN Press:
A SURVEY OF THE TANACH
FOR THE PRACTICAL MESSIANIC



©2008

Many have stayed away from consulting the Tanach not because of a lack of interest, but because few want to have to deal with the controversies it addresses. Unlike the Apostolic Scriptures, constrained to the First Century C.E., the period of the Tanach stretches back all the way to the beginning of the universe itself. Questions like: *Who was the Pharaoh of the Exodus? Did God actually condone the genocide of the Canaanites?* and *Am I the only one who thinks the Prophets are mentally disturbed?* are debates that many people do not want to enter into. Even more significant is the affect of critical scholarship which has attempted to divide the Torah into non-Mosaic sources, question the inspiration and historical reliability of the text, and even regard much of the Tanach as Ancient Israel's mythology. For a Messianic movement that claims to place a high value on the Tanach, it is time that we join in to these conversations.

A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic takes you through the Old Testament from a distinct Messianic point of view. It presents a theologically conservative perspective of the books of the Tanach, but one that does not avoid some of the controversies that have existed in Biblical scholarship for over one hundred and fifty years. The student, in company with his or her study Bible, is asked to read through each text of the Tanach, jotting down characters, place names, key ideas, and reflective questions. Each book of the Old Testament is then summarized for its compositional data and asks you questions to get a good Messianic feel for the text. This workbook can be used for both personal and group study, and will be a valuable aid for any Messianic Believer wanting to study the whole Bible on a consistent basis.

\$22.50 plus shipping & handling



NEW RELEASE
FROM TNN PRESS!