I. Introduction

A. Author

1. Do not know who the author was.
   
   a. Baba Batra — "the man of the great Synagogue"
   
   b. Josephus and Ibn Ezra — Mordecai
   
   c. Author was a Persian Jew
   
   d. The author of this book made use of
      
      (1) Some of Mordecai’s writings, 9:20
      
      (2) The official records of the kings of Media and Persia, 2:23; 10:2
      
      (3) The eyewitness accounts were preserved through oral tradition.

2. "Esther" is from Ishtar, a Persian or Akkadian word meaning, "star" (Venus).

B. Date

1. Probably written after the death of Ahasuerus (Xerxes)

2. According to 10:2 the official state history of the reign of Ahasuerus had already been written when the book of Esther was composed.

3. Ahasuerus died by assassination in 465 B.C.

4. The absence of any traces of Greek influence evidence that the book may not be dated later than 330 B.C.

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5. The intimate and exact knowledge of Persian culture of the 5th century B.C. indicates the most likely date to be somewhere between 460-450 B.C.

C. **Canonicity:** The unique nature of the book of Esther has created difficulties, but the following indicate the book should be considered canonical:

1. **The Council of Jamnia** (90 A.D.),
   
   a. Discussed among other things the OT cannon
   
   b. The very fact the canonicity of Esther was challenged indicates that it had *earlier* been considered canonical.
   
   c. Jamnia is seen as the confirmation of public opinion and not the deciding of public policy.

   "The theory that an open canon was closed at the 'Council' of Yavne about 90 C.E. goes back to Heinrich Graetz in 1871, who proposed (rather more cautiously than has since been the custom) that the 'Council' of Yavne *led to* the closing of the canon. Although others have lately expressed hesitations about the theory, it complete refutation has been the work of J. P. Lewis and S. Z. Leiman.

   The combined result of their investigations is as follows:
   
   (a) The term 'synod' or 'council' is inappropriate. The academy at Yavne, established by Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai shortly before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., was both a college and a legislative body, and the occasion in question was a session of the elders there.
   
   (b) The date of the session may have been as early as 75 C.E. or as late as 117 C.E.
   
   (c) As regards the disputed books, the discussion was confined to the question whether Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs (or possibly Ecclesiastes alone) make the hands unclean, i.e. are divinely inspired.
   
   (d) The decision reached was not regarded as authoritative, since contrary opinions continued to be expressed throughout the second century.

   The assumption that the canon was closed at Yavne about 90 C.E. has been elaborated by different writers in various ways. Some have seen it as part of the reorganization of Judaism after the fall of Jerusalem; some, as part of the polemic against Christianity; and some, as of a piece with the standardization of the masoretic text. If, however, the canon was not closed about 90 C.E. but a long time before, all these corollaries lose the premiss on which they depend. Similarly, any inference that the canon was decided by councils must be abandoned. The session at Yavne was not a council, and the decision it made was not regarded as authoritative: and, in so far as there is a parallel with ecclesiastical councils, it should be noted that the earliest important Christian council to deal with the canon was the Council of Hippo, as late as 393 C.E. The role of councils, therefore, was not so much to decide the canon as to confirm decisions about the canon already reached in other ways."
2. **Josephus** (cir. 90 A.D.) indicates that the same books we have in our present Old Testament (including Esther) are the same ones considered canonical by Jewish leaders of his day.

3. **Melito of Sardis** (170 A.D.) went to Palestine and confirmed the canonicity of the O.T as we have it.

4. **Origen**, Christian scholar of about 250 A.D. confirms the canon of the O.T. as it is today.

5. **The Jewish Talmud** of about 400 A.D. confirms the book's canonicity.

6. **Academic Scholarship** of 21 centuries (manuscript discoveries, archaeological discoveries) has amassed evidence which is convincing to the honest individual.

7. **Feast of Purim** — the only reasonable explanation for the feast.

D. **Xerxes (486-465), 21 years.**

   1. The Ahasuerus who chose the Jewish maiden, Esther, as his queen.

      a. He was the son of Darius and thus was his successor, "the son of Darius by Atossa, a daughter of Cyrus."

      b. He had been especially groomed to be his father’s successor.

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3Ibid., 39.
2. Just prior to the death of Darius, Egypt and other areas of the empire rebelled.
   a. Xerxes acted quickly to bring these under control
   b. He turned his attention toward Greece, making careful preparations for an attack.
   c. "For three years Xerxes planned for the impending invasion. A canal was built to avoid the tempestuous cape of Athos where Darius had lost a large portion of his fleet. Bridges were erected and provisions were assembled at strategic places in preparation for the attack."\(^4\)
   d. Herodotus states that the size of the army of Xerxes was 5,283,220 which is no doubt an exageration. The invading army was probably no more than 180,000 men.\(^5\)

3. In 480 B.C. Xerxes invaded Greece.
   a. His arrogance is amazing
      (1) He sent ahead heralds to the Greek cities giving them an opportunity to surrender.
      (2) The banquet of Esther 1:3 was probably to display his pomposity and power in preparation for this invasion
      (3) He built a pontoon bridge across the Dardanelles Strait using 674 boats
         (a) A storm temporarily destroyed the bridge
         (b) Xerxes "scourg'd" the sea and executed the engineers

\(^4\)Ibid., 40.

\(^5\)Cf. The Persian Empire and the West, CAH, 4: 271-273.
b. A few Greek cities surrendered but most were willing to fight for their independence.

c. Athens and Sparta joined hands to fight Persia and asked others to join them.

d. Greece lost most of the early battles

(1) Thessaly and Tempe were first lost.

(2) Leonidas, king of Sparta determined to fight the Persians at Thermopylae with 10,000/300 men.

(3) "[T]he Athenians decreed to meet the invader in full force in their ships with the assistance of what other Greeks would join them, and the allies decided by a majority of votes to occupy Thermopylae. Leonidas, the aged king of Sparta, led forth 4000 Peloponnesian hoplites including his royal guard of 300 Spartiates. He picked up 700 Thespians and 400 Thebans in Boeotia, and found 1000 Phocians and the whole levy of the Opuntian Locrians mustered in response to a massage in advance at Trachis. We may reasonably add the Trachinians, who appear in Diodorus as 1000 Malians. With Helots and light-armed troops, who are not reckoned, the total force may have amounted to 10,000 men.”

e. "The Spartans under Leonidas, were prepared to check the advance of the Peisians into central Greece, but Greece was betrayed by a Malian named Sphialtes. The Persians were shown a path over the mountain to the rear of the Greeks. The Spartans fought to the end, and Leonidas became a hero by dying at his post. The Persians, however won an important objective, for mid-Greece had opened before then. By August Xerxes was in Athens. He burned the temples on the Acropolis, allegedly in revenge for the burning of Sardis.”

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6Bury, 282; emphasis added.

7Pfeiffer, Between, 41.
4. With victory almost in sight Xerxes moved to attack the Greek fleet at Salamis.
   a. This battle proved to be the turning point of the war.
   b. The Greeks, though outnumbered both on land and sea, defeated the Persian army and caused Xerxes to flee.

5. The only hope left for Xerxes now was his land army.
   a. This army was placed under Mardonius.
   b. Mardonius attacked and despoiled Attica.
   c. At Meggara the Greeks took the offensive, Mardonius was killed, and the Persian army fled, leaving Greece in control of the territory

6. **Xerxes (Ahasuerus in Esther) and the Jews — Married Esther**
   a. Xerxes was the son of Darius by Atossa, a daughter of Cyrus.
   b. He lived 14 years after the loss of Greece, but little is known about him in that time.
   c. He was murdered by a usurper, Artabanus, who is said to have reigned 7 months before being killed by Artaxerxes, the 3rd son and legitimate heir to Xerxes.
   d. He was about 55 years old when he was assassinated.
   e. He was very rich and indulgent and habitually acted like an impudent, petulant brat, as several actions indicate
      
      (1) The pontoon bridge
      (2) The Vashti incident
      (3) The hasty acquiescence to Haman's actions
      (4) He liked ostentatious displays
      (5) He was susceptible to flattery and fawning courtiers

E. **Historical Difficulties in Esther**
1. Herodotus, Greek historian of the 5th century B.C., says that a woman named Amestris, daughter of a Persian named Otanes, was Xerxes’ queen in the 7th year of his reign

   a. The book of Esther says Esther was.

   b. Amestris and Esther cannot be the same person since Amestris was a Persian and Esther Jewish

   c. There is no contradiction because Herodotus does not say Esther was not a queen at some time during the reign of Xerxes

   d. Therefore, there is no contradiction

      (1) Xerxes could have given his banquet in the 3rd year of his reign (483 B.C; Es 1:3) and deposed Vashti, then made Amestris queen.

      (2) After this, Xerxes entered into his first campaign against Greece (480 B.C.) and was defeated.

      (3) He returned, deposed Amestris and elevated Esther to queenship in the 7th year (479-478 B.C.; Est 2:16) of his reign.

      (4) Omission by Herodotus of Esther and Vashti does not mean he contradicts the Bible.

      (5) Omission in the book of Esther of Amestris does not mean that the Bible contradicts Herodotus.

      (6) Remember, Herodotus' omission of Belshazzar

2. Esther 2:5-6 has been offered by some as evidence of the historical inaccuracy of the book of Esther.

   a. Critics insisted this passage is incorrect because it implies that Mordecai was taken captive from Palestine in the deportation of Jehoiachin in 597 B.C.
b. Mordecai was, of course, a contemporary of Xerxes

c. That would have made Xerxes and Nebuchadnezzar contemporaries — a historical impossibility!

d. However, the proper antecedent of the relative pronoun ἦλθεν ("who") in verse six is not Mordecai but Kish, his great grandfather.

e. Actually, the time between the deportation of Jehoiachin in 597 B.C. and the time of Mordecai (483 B.C.) is just the right amount of time for the three generations between Kish and Mordecai.

3. Some question the accuracy the number in 9:16 that the Jews killed 75,000 enemies throughout the empire in one day.

a. First, the emperor commanded that the Jews in every "in every city" carry out this execution.

b. Second, there were 500 executed in Susa, the capital, in one day (9:6). It would only require that 500 be executed in 150 cities each to total 75,000.

c. The size of the Persian empire (Asia Minor and parts of Greece on the west, to India on the east; Armenia on the north, to Palestine and Egypt on the south) makes the figure quite possible.

4. Some scholars questioned Mordecai's until the archaeological find of one Marduk-ai-a (Mordecai?), an official in Susa during the reign of Xerxes.⁸

5. Archaeology has confirmed the accuracy of the palace descriptions in Esther — the ruins located in Susa revealed definite portions of the palace

a. The “king’s gate,” 4:2
b. The “inner court,” 5:1
c. The “outer court,” 6:4
d. The “palace garden,” 7:7
e. One of the dice or lots (called “Pur” in Persian) were found (3:7)!

F. **Form and Structure** — the book exhibits several structures

1. **Various Feasts**

   a. 10 banquets (5 sets of 2)$^9$

   (1) Xerxes' banquet for the nobility, 1:2-4  
   Xerxes's banquet for the men of Susa, 1:5-8  
   (2) Vashti's banquet for women, 1:9  
   Esther's enthronement banquet, 2:18  
   (3) Haman and Xerxes' banquet, 3:15  
   Jews' feasting/Mordecai's glory/counter decree, 8:17  
   (4) Esther's 1$^{st}$ banquet, 5:4-5  
   Esther's 2$^{nd}$ banquet, 7:1-9  
   (5) The 1$^{st}$ feast of Purim — Adar 14, 9:17-19  
   The 2$^{nd}$ feast of Purim — Adar 15, 9:18

   b. These banquets illustrate **reversals**

   (1) The two banquets of "(1)" are in contrast to the Purim feasts of "(5)"

   (2) In "(2)" the banquet that culminates in Vashti's demotion (1:9) is in contrast to the banquet celebrating Esther's enthronement (2:18)

   (3) In "(3)" Haman and Xerxes celebrate the decree to destroy the Jews (3:15) in contrast to the Jews' celebration following the counter decree (8:17)

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2. "There is a sense in which the whole book of Esther could be summed up in the two Hebrew words from 9:1—nahápök hū',"¹⁰ "the reverse occurred," NRSV, "had been changed."— cf. Levenson's chart.¹¹

A  Greatness of Ahasuerus, 1:1-8
  B  2 Banquets of the Persians, 1:1-8
  C  Esther Identifies as Gentile, 2:10-20
  D  Elevation of Haman, 3:1
  E  Anti-Jewish Edict, 3:12-15
  F  Fateful Exchange of Mordecai and Esther, 4
  G  1st Banquet of the Threesome, 5:6-8
  H  Royal Procession, 6
  G' 2nd Banquet of the Threesome, 7:1-6
  F'  Fateful Exchange of Mordecai and Esther, 7:1-6
  E'  Pro-Jewish Edict, 8:9-14
  D'  Elevation of Mordecai, 8:17
  C'  Gentiles Identify as Jews, 8:17
  B'  2 Banquets of the Jews, 9:20-32
  A'  Greatness of Ahasuerus and Mordecai, 10

a. "A-G" = negative in character; "A'-G'" = positive in character

b. "H" indicates that chapter 6 is the book's pivot

(1) Haman's hopes are dashed
(2) Mordecai's take a turn for the better
(3) Haman's wife's comment is the precise turning point:

Esther 6:13 — "If Mordecai, before whom your downfall has begun, is of the Jewish people, you will not prevail against him, but will surely fall before him."

G. Theological Themes¹²

¹⁰Bechtel, 6, cf. Levensenon, 8.

¹¹Levenenson, 8; cf. Bechtel, 6.

¹²Bechtel, 7-16
1. **The Importance of Proportion** — Parallels occur everywhere, as if the author is producing a great "balancing act," indicating people need a sense of proportion — "all things in moderation."

a. *Ahasuerus*’ *180-day drinking bout* for the entire army is designed to display, the great wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and pomp of his majesty, 1:4

(1) This is followed by a 7 day bash in Susa

(2) The royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king with drinking by flagons, without restraint, 1:7-8

(3) While the party is designed to display the king's great wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and pomp of his majesty, it ends with his public embarrassment — Vashti refuses his order to come — the man who controls the Persian army cannot control his wife.

(4) It takes 7 individuals to do some of the most menial jobs

(a) 7 eunuchs to fetch Queen Vashti, 1:10
(b) 7 lawyers to decide her punishment, 1:13-14

(5) Bechtel summarizes, "All the beautiful young virgins of the empire are herded into the harem so that the king can choose one to be queen (1:1-4). An entire year is required to ready them for one night in the royal bedroom (2:12). The royal signet ring is passed around with a freedom that shows hardly any regard for the power it gives to the one who wears it. Finally, the most powerful man in the empire is powerless to revoke a law he was tricked into passing."\(^{13}\)

b. *Haman's* sense of proportion is even worse

(1) Mordecai's refusal to bow incites Haman to exterminate an entire race, 3:5-6

\(^{13}\)Bechtel, 8.
(2) His edict is not just a general order of extermination but, an order "to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children . . . and to plunder their goods," 3:13

c. **Esther**, in perfect proportion, provides a specific contrast

(1) She asks for nothing except what Hegai the king's eunuch . . . advised, 1:13, 15

(2) In the matter of the planned assassination of Ahasuerus, she hurries to save him, but give Mordecai the credit, 2:22

(3) In contrast to all the drinking parties, she orders a 3-day fast (which is appropriate to her mission) before going into the king uninvited, 4:16

(4) When pleading for her and her people's lives her rhetoric matches Haman's word for word — "let my life be given me – that is my petition – and the lives of my people – that is my request. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace," 7:4

(5) She and Mordecai draft a counter edict to Haman's, that is dictated by his extremes, 8:11— "By these letters the king allowed the Jews who were in every city to assemble and defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, with their children and women, and to plunder their goods"

d. **Esther and Haman** are clear counterweights in this story

2. **Challenge of a Faithful Life in an Unfaithful Culture**

a. Living faithful to God is definitely easier when surrounded by fellow believers than when all alone.
b. "North American Christians . . . must deal daily with the tensions that arise between Gospel and an aggressively individualistic, consumeristic culture. How do we live faithfully within this tension? Do we deny that there is any tension and simply 'become like the nations'? Do we heighten it and attempt to cut ourselves off from all contact with outside influence? Or do we seek some sort of critical compromise, adapting to our culture wherever possible while still straining to maintain the integrity of faith?\textsuperscript{14}

c. \textit{Limited power} of the Jews in Esther illustrates several ways that very few Jews have control

\begin{enumerate}
\item Esther and Mordecai are descendants Exilees, 2:5-11
\begin{enumerate}
\item These verses are full of \textit{passive verbs}
\item Contrast with the \textit{active verbs} of those rounded up, 2:1-4
\item Esther is doubly exiled and doubly vulnerable — Exiled and a young woman
\item She has two options
\begin{enumerate}
\item The Vashti option — refuse, fight, stand up
\item Compromise — Esther adopts
\end{enumerate}
\item Mordecai's behavior is like both Vashti's and Esther's
\begin{enumerate}
\item He refuses to bow to Haman
\item Yet encourages Esther to hide her identity
\end{enumerate}
\end{enumerate}
\item The eunuchs are powerful, but limited
\begin{enumerate}
\item Some eunuchs chose to be so, but most did not
\item They made the best of a bad situation
\item They are in powerful positions
\end{enumerate}
\end{enumerate}

\textsuperscript{14}Bechtel, 10.
(d) Yet they must make difficult choices
(e) Bigthan and Teresh, like Vashti, rebelled
(f) Hegai and Harbona, like Esther, compromised

d. The "God Factor" overrules all of this.

(1) The absence of God's name does not imply the absence of God

(2) There is the reference relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, 4:14

(3) God can be seen in the many "Divine coincidences" that show up15

(a) 2:19-23: Mordecai warns the king

(b) 3:7-11: Haman's lot casting seems not to be ruled by Haman's gods, but God — the Jews had an entire year to prepare

(c) 5:1-8: Ahasuerus is seated on the throne when Esther comes to plead her case — had he not been she would have been thrown out or arrested

(d) 6:1-5: Ahasuerus has insomnia on what might have been Mordecai's last night to live

(e) 7:1-6: Esther 2nd banquet occurs after Mordecai has been rewarded and after Haman's gallows had been built, cf. 6:4

(f) 7:7-10: Ahasuerus returns "just at the right time" to see Haman throwing himself on the couch where Esther reclined and thinks Haman is assaulting her, cf. 7:8

4. "All of these so-called coincidences occur at critical junctures in the story. Without them, the story would have a very different—and very tragic—resolution.

All of this is to say that God is very much a character in this book, though one who evidently prefers to remain anonymous. This should be of considerable comfort to those of us who are struggling to remain faithful in the midst of an unfaithful culture. Like the Jews, the women, and the eunuchs in the book of Esther, we must make difficult decisions about whether to adopt, reject, or adapt to our situation. Yet God is with us in the midst of that struggle. We may wish at times that God's presence and power were a little more obvious. But as the incarnation itself illustrates, even God sometimes chooses to steer from the front."

3. Power of the Written Word

a. Note the number of references to writing

(1) to write — כהמ — 24
(2) law/decreed/edict — דר — 19
(3) letter/letter-writer — נדס — 12
(4) Copy — ונתינן — 3
(5) letter/missive — הגיה — 2
(6) Annals — דבירה — 2
(7) Decree — חנש — 1

b. The spoken word is often paired with the written word

c. A verbal word, כְּפָר, from the king is followed immediately by a reference to the written law, אֵד, 1:19; 2:8; 4:3; 9:1

d. The edict of chapter 1 foreshadows those of Haman (ch. 3) and the counter edict, 8:9ff.

e. The annals of Ahaseurus play a pivotal role in chapter 6

16Bechtel, 14
(1) "If the king had not been 'sleepless in Susa," and if the servants had not read the precise passage, Mordecai would have been hanged the very next morning and the whole story would have taken a terrible turn for the worse"\(^\text{17}\)

(2) Unread words are powerless, allowing truth to be buried.

f. Two mass mailings are described in chapter 9.

(1) Mordecai sends those in 9:22-23 and 9:26-28

(2) Esther sends the ones in 9:29-32

(3) "The emphasis . . . is on remembering and keeping the story of their deliverance alive. What better way to do this than to read the story aloud?"\(^\text{18}\)

(4) In fact, "Christians can learn much . . . by: (1) reading the book in its entirety, (2) reading it aloud, and (3) reading it interactively," and (4) "by reading it repeatedly."

II. Pomp and Circumstance Produce Excess, 1:1-9

A. Ahasuerus is the Hebrew equivalent of the Persian Khshayarsha (Xerxes in Greek), and refers to Xerxes 1(486-465), v. 1

1. Ahasuerus means literally "mighty man"

2. Note the phraseology, Ahasuerus, the . . . Ahasuerus who ruled... or "Ahasuerus, the mighty man who ruled"

3. This is not the "Ahasuerus" of Ezra 4 and Daniel 9

\(^{17}\)Bechtel, 15.

\(^{18}\)Bechtel, 16.
4. He ruled from **India to Ethiopia**, or from the Indus River on the east to Ethiopia (Cush, in Hebrew) in the south, and to Lydia (Asia Minor) on the east.

5. He sits not simply on a throne, but on **his royal throne**, v. 2

B. His banquet, **banquet, בָּנַquet,** is literally a "drinking party," that lasts **one hundred eighty days,** and was **for all his officials and ministers. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces,** v. 3-4

1. The purpose of this banquet is to display **the great wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and pomp of his majesty,** v. 4

2. "The author is . . . extravagant with words, never missing the opportunity for extra nouns and adjectives, especially if they have something to do with pomp and circumstance." ¹⁹

3. Scholars think this banquet occurred about 2 years before Xerxes invaded Greece.

4. According to Herodotus it was at this feast Xerxes announced:

   As Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius, have enlarged the empire, I wish to do the same. I propose to bridge the Hellespont, march through Europe, and fire Athens for burning Sardis and opposing Datis and Artaphernes. By reducing Attica and Greece, the sky will be the only boundary of Persia.

¹⁹Bechtel, 21.
5. With such going on, one cannot help but wonder, "Who's minding the store?"

C. Yet there is more!

1. After 180 days of partying the reader would think the guests are sated.

2. However, **When these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in the citadel of Susa, both great and small, a banquet lasting for seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace (v. 5)!**
   
   a. The 1st banquet focused on quantity
   
   b. This one focuses quality — its is only for **the people present in the citadel of Susa, both great and small**

   c. Even so, there were extremely costly decorations (vv. 6-7a), and **the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king**, v. 7b.

   d. Such drinking occurred by flagons, without restraint . . as each one desired, v. 8

D. Yet there is even more! — **Queen Vashti gave a banquet for the women in the palace of King Ahasuerus**, v. 9

E. If the men and women had separate parties, might these be comprised of "stag-type" parties in which all sorts of immorality was practiced?

III. The "No" from the Queen Sparks a State Crisis (Excessive Response), 1:10-21

A. **Merry with wine** — drunk, v. 10a

B. **He commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who attended him** — 7 men to see to his needs, v. 10b

C. They were to bring Queen Vashti before the king, wearing the royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the officials her beauty; for she was fair to behold, v. 11
1. She represents his prime piece of property that will "crown" his display up to this point.

2. Such excess, the desire to show her off, takes 7 eunuchs

3. Only problem — she won't come!, v. 12

4. The rabbis suggested that Vasti was to appear wearing only the crown, i.e., nude/naked (Esther Rabbah III 13, p. 54)
   a. The text does not say that — **wearing the royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the officials her beauty; for she was fair to behold**, v. 11
   b. Maybe so, maybe not
   c. "The point to which the whole narrative builds is this. In spite of the king's immense wealth and power, he cannot control his own wife."20

5. This refusal turns into a national crisis in which all of his counselors must offer advice
   a. The king was enraged, and his anger burned within him, v. 12
   b. **Then the king consulted the sages who knew the laws (for this was the king's procedure toward all who were versed in law and custom and those next to him were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven officials of Persia and Media, who had access to the king, and sat first in the kingdom)**, vv. 13-14
   c. To appreciate the excessive impotence of the king we must put it in our terms

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20Bechtel, 24
(1) President Obama summons the first lady to a special all male party of his friends and advisors to display "a new piece of jewelry and her beauty."

(2) She refuses to come

(3) He then gathers all of his advisors in order to figure out what to do!

6. The irony is that because such a powerful king is really so powerless he does not know what to do — he must ask, According to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti

D. Verses 16-20, is brilliant advice in terms of psychology

1. Vashti's defiance is a crime against everyone in the empire
2. Ahasuerus is not the only humiliated man
3. And Memucan may truly be worried that every woman will behave this way
4. The excess continues — Vashti's disobedience plunges the nation into a crisis
5. Ironically, however, publishing the decree that Memucan suggests publishes the humiliation of the king!

E. Verses 21-22 the king follows this advice

F. Overall, the most powerful monarch on earth in these short verses is described as:

1. Defied, manipulated, and humiliated
2. He seems out of touch with reality
3. Is it not so with many rulers?

IV. Hangover," the "Morning After," Ezra 2:1-4

A. Verse 1: Turn out the lights, the party's over"

1. Gone are the lawyers, the secretaries, the caterers, Vashti, and the King's anger
a. Ahasuerus is portrayed as a man, not a king — depressed and contemplating his decision

b. **He remembered Vashti** is ambiguous
   
   (1) The reader immediately thinks of her defiance
   
   (2) But room is left for other memories as well — she wasn't such a bad wife afterall

c. **And what she had done and what had been decreed against her** distances Ahasuerus from the responsibility

B. **Verses 2-4** indicates that not much has changed — again note the excess

1. "Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king. And let the king appoint commissioners in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in the citadel of Susa under custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; let their cosmetic treatments be given them. And let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This pleased the king, and he did so.

2. Not just women, but virgins, and **beautiful young** ones at that!

3. These are to be sequestered for the king's use only

4. The one that **pleases the king be queen**

5. **Cosmetic treatments**, דּוֹקָה, tamrûqêhen, "rubbings," refers to the use of massage with perfumed oils

6. Of course the idea **pleased the king**!? Why wouldn't it please any sensual oriented male!? — beautiful young virgins, coming to him each evening for him to determine which one pleased him the most!

V. **Esther is Caught in the Dragnet, 2:5-11**
A. **Verses 5-7** abruptly changes scenes to establish Esther's family history and set some of the plot for the story. Bechtel summarizes:

Commentators have long been confused about the details of this genealogy. One way of reading the Hebrew would seem to imply that Mordecai himself had been carried off into exile, which would make him well over 100 years old at the time of this story. . . . Another way of reading the Hebrew interprets Mordecai's great-grandfather, Kish, as the one who was carried off, which clearly makes better sense historically. . . . In either case, the author does seem to be making an effort to establish a connection between Mordecai and the house of Saul (King Saul was . . . a Benjaminitne whose father's name was Kish; see 1 Sam. 9:1-2). The relevance of this connection will become clear as the rivalry between Mordecai and Haman the Agagite develops, since it reflects an ancient rivalry between Saul and Agag (see 1 Sam. 15).  

B. **Mordecai** and **Esther** sound very much like Babylonian deities and as such reflect tensions. Whether "Mordecai the Jew," or "Queen Esther the Jew," Each . . . deal with the requisite difficulties in his or her own way, but the tensions and dangers they experience are equally real. Their struggle to live faithfully within these tensions reflects the plight of their people, and hints at one of the most powerful themes in the book. . . . " — How shall God's people live in the world?  

C. **Verse 8:** So when the king's order and his edict were proclaimed, and when many young women were gathered in the citadel of Susa in custody of Hegai, Esther also was taken into the king's palace and put in custody of Hegai, who had charge of the women.

1. Hundreds of young women gathered to the emperor's palace.
   a. רָבְוֹת ravvoth means "large number, great number, myriads."
   b. This was no ordinary beauty pageant
   c. The contestants did not enter of their own choice.
   d. They were “gathered,” נִבְרָת הָבוֹת, and Esther was “taken,” הֶלְבֹּת, indicating they were compelled to be made part of the emperor’s harem — as her people had been "taken," so she is "taken."

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21 Bechtel, 30  
22 Bechtel, 30-31
2. This "beauty contest" is more accurately described as a "sex contest"
   a. These virgins were forced to compete for the emperor’s favor
   b. The losers did not return home but remained in his harem
3. Polygamy was/is a common practice in the ancient/modern world
   a. *Concubines and slaves* were part of the *booty taken in ancient wars*, cf. Judges 5:28-30
   b. In such wars:
      (1) The great majority of men would be massacred
      (2) The women and children became concubines and slaves.
         (a) Concubinage is the state of a woman or youth in an ongoing, quasi-matrimonial relationship with a man of higher social status. Typically, the man has an official wife and, in addition, one or more concubines. Concubines have limited rights of support from the man, and their offspring are publicly acknowledged as the man's children, albeit of lower status than children born by the official wife or wives; these legal rights distinguish a concubine from a mistress
         (b) Historically, concubinage was frequently voluntary (by the girl and/or her family's arrangement), as it provided a measure of economic security for the woman involved. Involuntary, or servile, concubinage sometimes involves sexual slavery of one member of the relationship, typically the woman, being a pleasure slave to the man.
      (3) Of course the strongest man or the chief of the clan would assert his right to the choice of captives.
   c. Through the centuries polygamy/concupinage became a status symbol.
(1) **Solomon** 700 wives & 300 concubines.
(2) **Emperors and kings** could afford to support such harems.

d. Facts about **polygamy**

(1) **Violates the natural sex-drive** in man, *1 woman for 1 man.*

(2) In an **agricultural society** which did not have the benefits of technological work-savers, a **man would desire to produce as many offspring as possible** (more workers). So **women and children** were usually considered “property.”

(3) **Polygamy and harems** produce **jealousy, intrigue, ruination, financial disaster slavery and moral guilt. Solomon’s polygamy bankrupted Israel** and brought about a divided kingdom saturated with idolatry.

4. **Excursus:** Similar things go on in the modern world; cf. The **Emir of Kuwait: Jaber III al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah,** who died January 15, 2006

*Kuwait's Reclusive Leader Is Under Attack at Home and Abroad for Being a Modern-day Nero: Fiddling with Luxury While His Country Burns. How Much Longer Can He Hang On?*

As legend has it, Amthal, the sister of the Emir of Kuwait, found her brother a new bride—virtually every week—before the war. On Thursday night the Emir would marry her. And on Friday they would be divorced. This system allowed the Emir, 64, to stretch the Islamic law that allows a man four wives. Since only three of his spouses were permanent, he could change the fourth as frequently as he changed his kaffiyeh. "He's a very religious man," says one well-placed Kuwaiti with ties to the royal family. "He doesn't fool around on his wives." The arrangement provided an endless supply of willing virgins for the Emir. Not only did they achieve a special status in Kuwaiti society, but they received a monthly salary and a car. "If he stayed married to a girl for a really long time, usually less than a year, she got a house." his subject says. If one of his countless wives bore him a child, she was royally lavished with a game-show assortment of loot. How many children does he have? "That's hard to
tell,” the Kuwaiti says. "Maybe 30 to 50 under age 18. Over 18? I don't think even he could tell you."n25

5. All of the above indicates Esther did not choose to become a member of Xerxes’ harem — she had no choice, except death to herself and probably to her family.

D. Verse 9: The girl pleased him and won his favor, and he quickly provided her with her cosmetic treatments and her portion of food, and with seven chosen maids from the king's palace, and advanced her and her maids to the best place in the harem.

1. Esther pleased (חַיָּהָ) Hegai, supervisor of the emperor’s harem.

2. Just how she pleased him we are not told

3. She won his favor (זָבָר). 

   a. He quickly provided her with her cosmetic treatments

   b. He quickly provided her portion of food — מְנָהָה, or special food, cf. Daniel 1:5; Esther 9:19

   (1) NRS Daniel 1:5 The king assigned them a daily portion of the royal rations of food and wine. They were to be educated for three years, so that at the end of that time they could be stationed in the king's court.

   (2) NRS Esther 9:19 Therefore the Jews of the villages, who live in the open towns, hold the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a day for gladness and feasting, a holiday on which they send gifts of food to one another.

4. He quickly provided her seven chosen maids from the king's palace — probably the seven loveliest and most efficient of all the servant girls, suitable to the exceptional charm of Esther herself.

23 www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20063363,00.html; cited September 17, 2008.
5. He quickly **advanced her and her maids to the best place in the harem** — Apparently she had been given quarters in a less desirable part of the harem when she was first brought to the palace.

### E. Verses 10-11: Esther did not reveal her people or kindred, for Mordecai had charged her not to tell. 

**Every day Mordecai would walk around in front of the court of the harem, to learn how Esther was and how she fared.**

1. **Evidently her Jewishness was not discernible**

2. **Why did Esther not reveal** that she was a Jew?

3. Several unlikely answers have been given.

   a. **Mordecai reasoned,** *"If Esther is chosen queen, it can only be because God desires to make her the instrument of His purpose. If she reveals that she is a Jewess, she will prejudice her choice"* — Why would Mordecai want her to win the contest?

   b. **She did not reveal she was from royal origin hoping the emperor might think she was of humble origin and send her away** — There is no evidence Esther was of royal lineage.

   c. **Ibn Ezra says,** “So that she might observe her religious obligations secretly. If she revealed her Jewish faith she would be forced to transgress” (cf. Dan. 1 and 6) — This is possible

   d. **Another Jewish tradition says Mordecai’s modesty dictated that Esther’s racial ties not be known; he modestly wanted to forego the advancement and publicity which would come to him if his relationship to Esther (when she became queen) were known**

(1) **We would question whether** Mordecai could have been that accurate with his premonitions.

(2) **How could he know** with certainty that Esther would become queen?

4. The most natural reason is that **Esther should combat the anti-Jewish feeling, the prejudice promoted by Haman** (cf. 3:5-6; 5:13; 6:13; 8:11)
a. Jews suffered similarly in Egypt, Babylon, the Intertestamental and Roman Periods

b. Mordecai seems to be attempting to protect his cousin from any violence should her ancestry be made known.

5. Evidence of Mordecai's concern for Esther's safety and well-being is evidenced in that Every day he would walk around in front of the court of the harem, to learn how Esther was and how she fared

a. He was had access to the palace in some official capacity
b. He used that opportunity to know how Esther fared.

F. In short, Mordecai knew the truth about Esther ethnic background would only bring suffering (perhaps death) to her and the Jewish people if such information should be divulged at an inopportune time.

G. The above indicates that Esther "is more than just a pretty face."

1. Both readers and Hegai recognize her worth
2. He grants her special favors and "promotes" her to first place in the harem
3. Is this promotion a blessing or a curse?

VI. Esther is Chosen Queen, 2:12-18

A. Verse 12: The turn came for each girl to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their cosmetic treatment, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and cosmetics for women.

1. After being twelve months under the regulations for the women probably refers to training in Persian customs.

2. Regulations, וְדַּת, describes generally the cosmetic treatment of six months with oil of myrrh and perfumes and cosmetics

a. וְדַּת is an important word in Esther
(1) Used to describe what is customary, 1:8, 13

(2) Used to describe what is irrevocably decreed, 9:13

(3) The impression is that everything is done "decently and in order"

(4) Esther must conform to these in so far as is possible

b. **Oil of myrrh**

(1) **Myrrh** is from the Hebrew word רמו, which *derives from a small tree* growing in Arabia

(a) The *gum resin exudes in small tear-like drops which dry to a rich brown or reddish-yellow, brittle substance, with a faint though agreeable smell* and a warm, bitter taste.

(b) רמו refers to “a bitter weeping, or drops of bitterness.”

(2) **Oil of myrrh** was probably used as a *cosmetic* in this Persian “law” for purification.

(a) It may have even been *used medicinally*

(b) It was offered *as an anesthesia to Jesus* at his crucifixion.

c. The period of purification consisted of 6 months application or oil of myrrh plus 6 months *perfumes and cosmetics for women*.

(1) **Perfumes**, אֲרַיָּה, refers to the *balsam-tree and is translated "spice"* in Song of Solomon 5:1

_NRS Song of Solomon 5:1_ I come to my garden, my sister, my bride: I gather my myrrh with my spice, I eat my honeycomb with my honey, I drink my wine with my milk. Eat, friends, drink, and be drunk with love.
(2) Cosmetics, קדרות, means, cleansing or rubbing

d. Refer to the 1 year process of cosmetic, medicinal and dietary preparation of every young girl brought into the emperor's harem — making her "soft" for the king — more excess

B. Verses 13-14: When the girl went in to the king she was given whatever she asked for to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. 14 In the evening she went in; then in the morning she came back to the second harem in custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the concubines; she did not go in to the king again, unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.

1. After a full year of preparation, each maiden made her best presentation of herself.

2. She was given whatever she asked for — to make each girl to appear as alluring and as desirable as possible.

3. Each maiden presented herself before the emperor in the evening

   a. She stayed with the emperor that night and returned the next day to the second harem . . . [for the] concubines

   b. The Persian emperor’s harem was apparently divided into three “houses”

      (1) A royal residence for the queen
      (2) A house for the “women” (secondary wives or concubines)
      (3) A house for the virgins.

   c. Departing her 1st visit from the emperor’s chambers, the young woman returned to the 2nd house — no longer a virgin.

      (1) Sexual intercourse was the reason for her spending the night.
After that 1 night, she was never permitted to be in his royal chambers again unless the emperor called for her by name.

If a young virgin was not chosen as queen, she returned to the harem of concubines for the rest of her life.

They were virtual prisoners — never be allowed to return to the world.

Verses 15-16: When the turn came for Esther daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had adopted her as his own daughter, to go in to the king, she asked for nothing except what Hegai the king's eunuch, who had charge of the women, advised. Now Esther was admired by all who saw her. When Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus in his royal palace in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign

1. The greatly detailed genealogy seems to be the narrator's way of presenting "Esther's coming out" — "It signals her emergence as a discreet character who will, from this time forward, begin to exert a certain level of independence."  
2. We do not know how the turns for each girl's appearance were determined.
   a. Possibly by casting of lots?
   b. Arbitrary decision of the eunuch?
3. When Esther’s turn came she did not seek any of the extras offered to the maidens (2:12-14) for their appearance before the emperor.
   a. Was this an attempt to persuade the emperor to reject her from being queen?
   b. Did her modesty cause her to refuse the cosmetics and alluring clothes available?

24Bechtel, 33.
c. Whatever the reason, she was admired by all that looked at her.

d. The fact that there was no jealousy among the women against Esther attests to her graciousness toward them even while in competition with them.

4. Verse 16, as if writing in the annals of the king, states that something significant, which needed to be remembered for all time, was about to happen — Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus in his royal palace in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

5. Esther had every right to feel resentment.

a. She was taken, note the passive voice.

b. Yet she was held in favor by all who looked upon her.

c. No little Jewish girl could be apathetic about facing what Esther faced.

d. She was about to sacrifice her virginity to a Persian monarch.

e. There was the chance that she might become queen.

f. She might also become merely one of his concubines/sex toys.

g. Her composure is marvelous, to say the least.

6. She was presented to the emperor in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth.

a. This is the only time in the Bible that the month Tebeth is mentioned.

b. It was also in the seventh year of his reign, which may have been shortly after (less than a year) Xerxes at Salamis and Plataea in about 480 B.C.

c. If so, he returned home in 479 B.C. and selected Esther as his queen.
d. If Xerxes was *about 55 at his assassination* he was *about 40 years old when Esther appeared* before him.

e. We have *no way of knowing Esther’s age.*

D. *Verses 17-18:* the king loved Esther more than all the other women; of all the virgins she won his favor and devotion, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. 18 *Then the king gave a great banquet to all his officials and ministers*—"Esther's banquet." He also granted a holiday to the provinces, and gave gifts with royal liberality

1. **The king loved Esther more than all the other women**

a. Does the word *women, נשים,* refer to the women in the emperor’s harem

b. *Or to the virgins who appeared* before Esther.

c. However, *of all the virgins she won his favor and devotion,* seems to *indicate the latter.*

2. **The crown, כתר, probably a heavily be jeweled turban.**

3. He *gave a great banquet to all his officials and ministers* which he named "Esther's banquet."

a. This banquet parallels the banquet of chapter 1

   (1) Ahasuerus spares not expense

   (2) All the officials are invited

b. **Banquet, מִשָּׁלֶג,** refers to a “drinking-bout” in 1:9-11.

c. This was *strictly a Persian festival* which the Jews did not observe

4. Xerxes also *granted a holiday to the provinces,* which has been variously explained:
a. Release from paying taxes, forced labor, prisoners, military service?

b. Likely it simply refers to "a holiday, a rest"

c. Having acquired the most beautiful and personable woman in the empire he felt especially generous and gave gifts

d. Again, note the excess, even though Esther's introduction to the Persian people is a resounding success

VII. God Save the King, 2:19-23

A. Verses 19-20: When the virgins were being gathered together [a second time], Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. Now Esther had not revealed her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had charged her; for Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him.

1. Textual Issue: Verse 19 literally says virgins were being gathered together a second time

2. We are not told why virgins were being gathered together for a second time

3. Whatever the reason, although Xerxes loved Esther, he still was sexual licentious and continued his polygamous desires, adding more concubines to his harem.

4. Even so, the point of the account is the discovery of the plot against Xerxes’ life.

5. Though now Queen of Persia, Esther obeyed Mordecai and did not reveal her linage.

   a. Mordecai should have been promoted to some official position

   b. Esther's silence indicates that this has not happened.

B. Verses 21-23: In those days, while Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Ahasuerus. But the
matter came to the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai. When the affair was investigated and found to be so, both the men were hanged on the gallows. It was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.

1. **The king's gate** was the usual large, *fortified entrance to the palace* enclosure.
   
   a. *Such gates used as courts of justice*, public forums and places to learn daily, news.
   
   b. *Guards of those gates were in a place of high honor*
   
   c. These **two well-trusted officials** were *angry* with the emperor and *planned to assassinate him*
   
   d. Such were *common practices* in the ANE
   
   e. *Xerxes* was ultimately *assassinated by Artabanus*, the *captain of the guard*, and *Aspamitras*, a chamberlain and eunuch.
   
   f. *Not told how Mordecai knew* — this is one of those "divine coincidences" found in the book of Esther.\(^{25}\)
   
   g. **Mordecai's interest** in preserving the emperor *likely involved*
      
      (1) His humane *concern for the emperor*
      
      (2) *Esther's well-being* as well as the *Jewish community*.
         
         (a) *Xerxes' assassination meant Esther's being deposed and murdered.*
         
         (b) *Jewish people would lose their queen.*

2. The **plot was revealed** and the **two conspirators executed**.

3. **Hanged on the gallows** probably *does not mean hanging as we know it*:

\(^{25}\)Cf. Bechtel, 35.
a. Only Ahithophel and Judas are recording as hanging themselves

b. Jews would “hang” a corpse on a “tree” (or stake) after execution or death (cf. 2 Sam 4:12; Gen 40:19; Deut 21:22; Josh 8:29; 10:26-27).

c. The Philistines did this to Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam 21:12).

d. The “tree” was a pole or stake that could be lowered to receive its victim and then raised and fixed into the ground so the public could view it.

e. The Persians, according to Herodotus (III; 125 and IX; 78) and Plutarch, impaled the live/dead bodies of criminals and on sharpened poles via the rectum or chest.

f. These are the "gallows" in 6:4; 7:10; 8:7; 9:13, 25.

g. Archaeological inscriptions have been found of the Mesopotamian civilizations which confirm that impaling victims on stakes was a method of execution cf. Lachish Reliefs.
Impalement is a term that refers to situations in which objects are driven through the body, causing deep stabbing wounds.

(a) It can refer either to accidental events or to deliberate wounding used as a method of torture or execution.

(b) Impalement as a method of torture and execution involves a person being pierced with a long stake.

(c) The penetration could be through the sides, through the rectum, through the vagina, or through the mouth.

(d) This method leads to a painful death; sometimes taking days.

(e) The stake would often be planted in the ground, leaving the impaled person suspended to die.

(f) Crucifixion was one form of impalement.
(2) In some forms of impalement, the stake would be inserted so as to avoid immediate death, and would function as a plug to prevent blood loss, thus extending the person's agony for as many as three days.

(3) After suitable preparation of the victim, including public torture and rape, the victim was stripped and an incision was made in the groin between the genitals and rectum.

(4) A stout pole with a blunt end was inserted.

   (a) The blunt end would push vital organs to the side where a sharp end would pierce them, hastening death.

   (b) A conveniently suitable branch was often used.

   (c) The pole would often come out of the body at the top of the sternum and be placed against the lower jaw so that the victim would not slide farther down the pole.

   (d) Often, the victim was hoisted into the air after partial impalement.

   (e) Gravity and the victim's own struggles would cause them to slide down the pole. Death could take many days.

h. The use of impalement as a form of execution in civilizations of the Ancient Near East (Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greeks, Romans, Middle Ages, etc.)

4. These were recorded in the king's chronicles (somewhat like our Presidential Papers)

   a. Whenever the king wanted to be reminded of past events they would be read out to him.

   b. Xerxes permanently recorded this event for future reference and use.
c. Though *not recorded for Mordecai’s benefit*, this event *later played a crucial part in the survival of Mordecai*, Esther and the whole Jewish community (6:1 ff).

VIII. Unjust Deserts, 3:1-6

A. *Verses 1-2: After these things*, coming on the heels of Mordecai's good deed, one expects him to be promoted.

1. Instead, **Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite**, is promoted
   a. 1 Samuel 15 Saul's failure to exterminate Agag, king of the Amalekites
   b. This failure lost Saul his kingdom
   c. Saul/Mordecai are Benjamites! Cf. Esther 2:5
   d. So, family history alone would account for bad blood between them
   e. Haman's promotion only adds insult to injury.
   f. "In a twisted echo of the lawyers' advice in 1:19, Mordecai's well-deserved seat of honor has been given to one who is *not* better than he."\(^{26}\)

2. *Verse 2*: Even so, **the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and did obeisance to Haman**, which, not surprisingly, contrasts with Mordecai's response, **But Mordecai did not bow down or do obeisance**.

B. *Verse 3*: Surprisingly for the reader, the servants ask, **Why do you disobey the king's command?**

1. We are not told why Mordecai refuses to obey, but several hints popup in the text.

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\(^{26}\)Bechtel, 36.
2. Their "family histories" — Saul/Agag vs. Mordecai/Haman

3. הָיְשַׁתַּפֵּה, yīšṭaphēh, hishtaphel imperfect 3rd person masculine, from הָיָה, can mean "bowing before a person of higher prominence," but it can also mean "worship."
   a. Following this line, the reader is reminded of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan 3)
   b. Nothing in the text indicates that the king's command involved worship

4. Perhaps Mordecai is being stubborn — maybe he thought he deserved the promotion
   a. This certainly brings the human element into the story
   b. Mordecai is breaking the law — the king commanded it
   c. Imagine, had you saved the king and had a family member in the royal family, would not you have expected to be promoted?
   d. Readers are often uncomfortable with this idea because we want our characters always "to do the right thing."

C. Verse 4: When they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman
   1. Was not Haman alert enough to see it for himself?
   2. The reader gets the idea the were reluctant to inform on Mordecai, and yet, the finally tell Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's words would avail; for he had told them that he was a Jew

D. Verses 5-6 record more excess
   1. 5: When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or do obeisance to him he becomes infuriated
2. Instead of plotting to "punish" Mordecai for his insubordination, Haman plots to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, v. 6

3. Haman's promotion instead of Mordecai, followed here by Haman's planned genocide of the Jews is another indication of excesses:

Throughout the book there has been a attern of people getting far less—or more—than they deserve. Excess, disproportion, and overreaction seem to be the order of the day in Ahasuerus's court. What we realize now, however, is that we "haven't seen anything yet." Haman makes Ahasuerus look like Mr. Moderation\textsuperscript{27}

IX. Haman's Lucky Day, 3:7-11

A. \textit{Verse 7}: Haman is a very methodical man, who is so confident that he casts the lot to determine the day of genocide before he even talks with the king\textsuperscript{1}

1. Casting lots were common in the ANE, cf. Num 26:55-56; Jonah 1:7

2. They were done to determined what the will of the gods/God in regard to a particular activity

3. Several providential issues spring up here, as summarized by Bechtel

The irony of its use . . . is compounded . . . when we realize that it may be Mordecai's God rather than Haman's gods who determine the "lucky" day. After all, the date is set a full twelve months in the future, thus giving the Jews time to prepare and the plot of the story time to unfold. Perhaps this stroke of providence is a preview of the help "from another quarter" that Mordecai refers to in 4:14. In any case, the date turns out to be more propitious for the Jews than it is for Haman.\textsuperscript{28}

B. \textit{Verse 8} records Haman's presentation of his case to the king

1. It is a study in misconstrual and manipulation.

\textsuperscript{27}Bechtel, 38.

\textsuperscript{28}Bechtel, 39.
a. There is a certain people scattered and separated among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom — they throughout the empire and do not mingle with the other people

b. Their laws are different from those of every other people — they have their own laws and customs

c. They do not keep the king's laws

d. The implication is it is not appropriate for the king to tolerate them.

2. The reader expects Ahasuerus to say something like, "How dare they!"

C. Instead, verse 9, Haman presses his point and offers a bribe for the Jews' destruction— If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued for their destruction, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who have charge of the king's business, so that they may put it into the king's treasuries."

1. This is a tremendous sum

a. Perhaps $10,000,000

b. Herodotus estimated the sum equal to the annual revenue in silver of the whole Persian empire.

c. Naturally, some scholars doubt whether anyone could have paid this amount

2. Haman may be bluffing.

3. At any rate, it indicates just how much Haman hates Mordecai — excess

D. Verse 10 taking his signet ring from his hand and giving it to Haman indicates Ahasuerus' desire "not to be bothered with the details

1. Instead he transfers his power to Haman to "write the law."
2. He does this without any questions or investigation.

E. Verse 11: The money is given to you, and the people as well, to do with them as it seems good to you.

1. May indicate Ahasuerus turns down the bribe
2. However, Mordecai’s report of the incident to Hathach, Esther’s attendant, implies that Xerxes did, after all, accept the money (cf. 4:7).
3. So, The money is given to you probably indicates that Haman is authorized to destroy the Jews and plunder their possessions, thus recouping his money.

F. Haman has his hands full

1. He has the king's signet ring
2. He has the money and will recoup more once the Jews are destroyed
3. He has the Jews in his hands — do with them as it seems good to you
4. Haman has it all

X. Signed, Sealed, and Delivered, 3:12-15

A. Verse 12: the edict was issued on the thirteenth day of the first month, or the day before the Jewish Passover, Exod 12:6; Lev 23:5

1. The irony should be obvious — the Jews destruction has been ordered on the eve of the anniversary of their greatest deliverance!
2. The rest of the verse indicates the irrevocability of the law and the fact that it went everywhere — the genocide was to be complete

B. Verse 13: records the excess once again — Haman had requested for the people to be destroyed. The edict gives orders

1. to destroy
2. to kill
3. to annihilate
4. Everyone — Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day
5. to plunder their goods
C. *Verse 14* records the fact that all Persians should prepare for that day

D. *Verse 15* is filled with irony:
   1. The couriers go out with the edict
   2. *Haman sat down to drink* while *the city of Susa* was thrown into confusion

XI. A Grief Observed, 4:1-3

A. *Verses 1-2* focus on Mordecai
   1. In the usual ANE manner of mourning, *Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went through the city, wailing with a loud and bitter cry*
   2. He eventually stops at *the entrance of the king's gate*
   3. These actions seem to indicate that he wants "to attract as much attention as possible"\(^{29}\) to his and his people's plight

B. *Verse 3* broadens the focus to the grief of every Jew in the entire empire
   1. Mordecai's fate and the fate of his people are intertwined
   2. Ditto with Esther, as we shall see

XII. What Does the Queen Know, and When Does She Know it? 4:4-8

A. *Verses 4-5* calls attention to Esther's isolation
   1. At the end of chapter 3 Haman and Ahasuerus sit down for a drink while the Susa is thrown into confusion, Esther

\(^{29}\)Bechtel, 44
2. Similarly Esther knows very little, though deeply distressed (whatever that means) at Mordecai's grief.

3. She sent garments to clothe Mordecai, but he would not accept them.

4. So she commands Hathach to go to Mordecai to learn what was happening and why.

   a. In spite of the fact that the news is being proclaimed throughout the empire, Esther, and those like her, know practically nothing.

   b. Therefore her distress might have been because Mordecai's actions were about to reveal her secret — that the impending slaughter of Haman.

B. Verses 6-7: Mordecai told him all that had happened to him — in Mordecai's mind he bears no responsibility, none of his actions can be traced to this.

   1. As in our world, information leaks, for how does Mordecai know the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries — a private conversation between Haman and the king?

   2. Mordecai is well connected.

C. Verse 8: Mordecai sends to Esther a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction . . . and charge[ed] her to go to the king to make supplication to him and entreat him for her people.

   1. This countermands his earlier orders not to reveal her heritage.

   2. She is to make supplication . . . and entreat him for her people.

   3. Esther's fate is "inextricably intertwined with the Jews"30.

XIII. God Save the Queen, 4:9-17

A. Verses 9-11: Esther responds by explaining what she faces should she go uninvited to the king — if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner

30 Bechel, 47.
court without being called, there is but one law— all alike are to be put to death, v. 11

1. She then explains
   a. If any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—
   b. All alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden scepter to someone, may that person live
   c. I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days

2. Her doubt at following Mordecai's advice is certainly reasonable!
   a. This is not cowardice as her later actions show
   b. One can hardly blame her for thinking this through.
   c. Esther is no "type/flat" character (cf. Bathsheba) — she thinks for herself, and has "grown" since her introduction

B. Verses 12-14: Mordecai responds to Esther's doubts with what has become one of the most famous statements in the Bible — Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.

   1. On the surface Mordecai's seems to interpret Esther's hesitancy with cowardice and/or selfishness
      a. Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews remind her
         (1) "You can die now or later"
         (2) Either way your life is forfeit
         (3) Her only change is to approach the king
(4) This is not just a countermand to his previous orders to keep her Jewishness secret, cf. v. 8 with 2:20

b. It sounds like a veiled threat. Mordecai will reveal her Jewishness if Esther does not!

c. We do not know this for sure, but the characters seem to be talking past each other

2. Further, there is another way — **if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter**, v. 14

a. This is not clear, but only a hint

b. "[I]t is the closest thing in the entire book to an overt reference to God's presence and power to intervene in the interest of a happy ending."\(^{31}\)

c. Stated more positively, **Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this**

C. **Verses 15-17:** for whatever reasons, Esther agrees, which indicates several things

1. She makes plans; v. 16 sounds like a battle plan

a. Her humility and piety — She cannot do this alone — **gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf**, v. 16

b. Compare this to Haman who is so overconfident he goes ahead with the date before getting permission, cf. 3:7

c. She is incredibly brave — **If I perish, I perish**

2. **Verse 17:** reinforces this concept — **Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.**

\(^{31}\)Bechtel, 49.
XIV. Dinner for Three, 5:1-8

A. Verse 1 highlights Esther's inner and outer dignity
   1. Inner — On the third day recalls the 3 days of fasting before this event, revealing the god-fearing, pious woman, sacrificing herself for her people
   2. Outer — her royal robes contrasts with the sackcloth her people are wearing and emphasizes her opulence and power in the court

B. Verse 2 reverberates with tension.
   1. The king saw Queen Esther standing in the court — would he hold out his scepter, allowing her to live?
   2. The tension is quickly resolved — she won his favor and he held out to her the golden scepter that was in his hand

C. Verse 3 coming as it does on the heels of what the reader knows — Esther's life hang in the balance! — is dizzying — What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom.
   1. The reader wants to scream, "ASK HIM!"
   2. But instead, verse 4 stops the reader in his tracks

D. Verse 4 instead records Esther's odd request, If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to a banquet that I have prepared for the king
   1. The Reader Screams, "What?! You had him where you wanted him! You wasted your opportunity!"
   2. Esther is wiser than we, however:
      a. "It is clearly an invitation to the king; Haman's inclusion is made to look like and after thought."32

32Bechtel, 52.
b. Esther is much more aware of the need to flatter and prepare for the request than just asking — this is persuasion at its best.

c. By planning a banquet she can set the trap for Haman that gives him no wiggly room — he would be delighted to come

E. *Verse 5* shows the king's enthusiasm for the idea — more partying, but a private one this time.

F. *Verse 7*: once they are drinking Ahasuerus repeats his offer, *What is your petition? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.*

G. *Verse 8*: If I have won the king's favor, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet that I will prepare for them, and then I will do as the king has said.

1. It echoes verse 4 — another missed opportunity and more stalling
2. Has Esther lost her nerve?
3. Maybe something is not quite right?
4. Maybe she needs more time to think exactly what to say
5. Maybe "God is leading her to delay. . . . [Maybe] God inspires Esther's delay in order to give Haman more rope with which to hang himself."

XV. Haman Develops Indigestion, 5:9-14

A. *Verse 9*: Haman left the banquet **happy and in good spirits**, which quickly change, because **when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate, and observed that he neither rose nor trembled before him, he was infuriated with Mordecai**

B. Verses 10-13: Haman Haman restrained himself until he gets home, whereupon he held "a pity party."

1. He called his friends and **recounted to them the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and**

33Bechtel, 54
the ministers of the king. Haman added, "Even Queen Esther let no one but myself come with the king to the banquet that she prepared. Tomorrow also I am invited by her, together with the king.

a. Wow!
b. Nothing is held back; his ego knows no limits
c. He continues to swell with pride

2. This is in total contrast to the humble queen, who is risking her life to save her people

3. Verse 13: is the pin that bursts the balloon — Yet all this does me no good so long as I see the Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate

a. This megalomaniac is totally out of balance

b. He has everything, but is unhappy because 1 person does not honor him!

C. Verse 14 suggests how to remove the 1 problem in his life — Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged on it; then go with the king to the banquet in good spirits." This advice pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made.

1. As we have seen this is not the way we think of hanging

2. It is impalement

3. Fifty cubits high = a 6 story building

4. This suggests a little "overkill" — more excess

5. The real irony is that Mordecai is already condemned to die — remember the law Haman enacted?

6. Once this is accomplished he can go with the king to the banquet in good spirits

XVI. No Rest for the Wicked, 6:1-5
A. Author Frederick Buechner once said that a coincidence is just God's way of remaining anonymous. If that is so, then God seems to be taking a very active . . . role in this chapter."³⁴

B. **Verses 1-2** reflect the 1st two "coincidences"

1. The king has an attack of insomnia — **On that night the king could not sleep**

2. He decides to have the book of records, the annals, . . . read to him — something that would put anyone to sleep!

3. He hear read **how Mordecai had told about Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, and who had conspired to assassinate**

C. **Verse 3**: He inquires **What honor or distinction has been bestowed for this?** To which the servants reply, **Nothing has been done for him**

D. **Excursus: The Two Coincidences Considered**

1. Chapter 5 concludes with Esther's planning another banquet
2. Chapter 5 also informs us that Haman has planned Mordecai's execution
3. Mordecai may be dead by the time the 2nd banquet occurs
4. "Esther cannot possibly intervene for him *before* the banquet because she knows nothing of Haman's plans. (They were hatched, remember, in the privacy of his home and due to be enacted first thing in the morning.) If ever there was a moment for *deus ex machina* [an unexpected solution due to divine influence, rcb], this is it."³⁵

³⁴Bechtel, 57.

³⁵Bechtel, 57; Bechtel would use the more traditional definition than the one I have inserted into her quotation — (1) *In Greek and Roman drama, a god lowered by stage machinery to resolve a plot or extricate the protagonist from a difficult situation*. (2) *An unexpected, artificial, or improbable character, device, or event introduced suddenly in a work of fiction or drama to resolve a situation or untangle a plot*. (3) *A person or event that provides a sudden and unexpected solution to a difficulty*, cf. [http://www.answers.com/topic/deus-ex-machina](http://www.answers.com/topic/deus-ex-machina), cited February 23, 2009, emphasis added.
5. Such "coincidences" are entirely consistent with one's belief in providence.

XVII. Delusions of Grandeur, 6:6-9

A. **Verse 6:** a 3rd coincidence adds to the powerful impression created by the previous two

1. Just while the king is pondering what should be done for Mordecai, Haman enters planning to request Mordecai's execution!

2. Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for him.

B. **Verse 8:** reflects a wonderful plot twist

1. The king asks Haman, *What shall be done for the man whom the king wishes to honor?*

2. The egomaniacal Hamnan thinks, *Whom would the king wish to honor more than me?*

3. He blurts out, *let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and a horse that the king has ridden, with a royal crown on its head, v. 8*

C. **Verse 9:** But this is not enough, he heaps on the honor mechanisms, *Let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials; let him robe the man whom the king wishes to honor, and let him conduct the man on horseback through the open square of the city, proclaiming before him: 'Thus shall it be done for the man whom the king wishes to honor*

1. This is probably not the first time he has indulged this fantasy

2. A horse **with a royal crown on its head**?!

3. Such ambitions!

4. To wear the king's own clothing and ride the king's own horse asserted the individual had been given the power of the king! Cf. 1 Kgs 1:33

a. Haman already has the king's signet ring, 3:10
b. The only thing Haman would like to be the king, would be the queen herself — Esther, who if he knew her race, would want her dead!

XVIII. Haman's Waking Nightmare, 6:10-14

A. Verse 10: Haman's dream turned to a nightmare when he heard, Quickly, take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to the Jew Mordecai who sits at the king's gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned.

1. To say Haman has regrets would be an understatement
2. One second he was imagining himself as the most powerful person in the empire
3. The next he is basically Mordecai's lackey
4. At the same time, the reader wonder's, "Doesn't the king know about Haman's plan to eradicate the Jews?"
   a. The narrative in chapter 3 mentions the Jews in such a way that the king might not have known who Haman wanted eradicated
   b. At the same time, he should have heard about it.
   c. Now he is honoring a Jew, whose race is in Haman's sights
   d. Ahasuerus thus look pretty dull here.

B. Verses 11-12: Haman does his duty and returns home mourning and with his head covered.

1. We are not told of Mordecai's reaction
2. He returns to the king's gate, though we are uninformed about his reaction
3. The reader, however, does not doubt the was probably puzzled.

C. Verse 13: Haman's family and friends waste no time in distancing themselves from him
1. If Mordecai, before whom your downfall has begun, is of the Jewish people, you will not prevail against him, but will surely fall before him

2. Note the shift to the 2nd person pronoun

3. They want no part of Haman's problem — Earlier they had taken Haman side, cf. 5:14


D. Verse 14: immediately the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman off to the banquet

1. The reader is reminded of Vashti, cf. 1:10-12

2. Circumstances (providence?) seems to have conspired against Haman

3. He seems to be totally unprepared, though Esther is "sitting on ready"

XIX. Esther Argues Her Case, 7:1-6

A. Verse 1: Haman must feel completely out of control, even though he and the king . . . went in to feast with Queen Esther.

1. Everything is dependent on Esther

2. Will she state her case and how will she craft her argument?

3. We thought she may have missed her chance in 5:6-7

B. Verse 2 on the second day, as they were drinking wine, is exactly the right time

1. By waiting, Haman has been publicly shamed and Mordecai honored

2. This is exactly the right time, since at this banquet

3. There has been plenty to drink when the king says, What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.

36Bechtel, 61.
C. **Verse 3**, Esther's response to the king's 2-part question is near perfect poetic parallelism

1. After the polite showing of respect, *If I have won your favor, O king, and if it pleases the king*, Esther cuts right to the chase

2. . . . let my life be given me— that is my petition— and the lives of my people— that is my request.

3. These words both shock and inform — they cannot be misunderstood

D. **Verse 4**, Esther quickly explains — *For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king.*

1. *For we have been sold* is a play on words based on 3:9

   a. Haman had paid for their destruction, יפתח, ²ābad

   b. There is also a word "to enslave," עבד, ⁵ābad

   c. Haman could have mislead the king into thinking he wanted to *enslave* the Jews in order *to destroy* them

   d. The edict (3:13) left no doubt — *to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate*

   e. Though spelled differently, the words sounds are identical

   f. Esther picks up on this in her comments

   "I and my people, to be destroyed (יפתח, ²ābad)
   
   If we had been sold merely as slaves (עבד, ⁵ābad)"

2. She next makes a near apology for begging for her life and the life of the Jews — *If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king*
a. She is capitalizing on the king's confusion
b. Esther quotes the edict verbatim

(1) to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, 3:13
(2) to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated, 7:4

E. Verse 5 indicates the king is slowly beginning to catch on

1. Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?
2. He has not yet made the connection with Haman request in chapter 3

F. Verse 6: Esther swoops in for the kill — A foe and enemy, this wicked Haman!

1. In 3:10 Haman is identified only as the enemy of the Jews.
2. With Esther as such A foe and enemy, no wonder Haman was terrified before the king and the queen

XX. Crime and Punishment, 7:7-10

A. Verse 7: in an attempt to control is well-known rage The king rose from the feast . . . and went into the palace garden,

1. Haman stayed to beg his life from Queen Esther
2. beg is the same word (בַּקֶּשׁ, baqqēš) that the king has been using in his repeated question to Esther, . . . And what is your request? (Cf. 5:3, 6; 7:2)
3. Now it is Haman turn to beg because he saw that the king had determined to destroy him.

B. Verse 8 records that Haman throws himself on the couch where Esther was reclining

1. At this very moment (providence?) the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall
2. Seeing Haman lying where he had thrown himself on the couch where Esther was reclining, the king thought, Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?

3. Even as the king misunderstands, Haman understands — As the words left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face.

C. **Verses 9-10** contain several ironies:

1. Haman was not assaulting the queen, yet he had aspired to those things

2. Remember his wearing the king's clothes and riding the king's horse, cf. Ch. 6

3. Granted he was humiliated, but he suggested it because he desired that recognition

4. He was impaled on the very stake he had created for Mordecai — Look, the very gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman's house, fifty cubits high." And the king said, "Hang him on that.

5. The king finally made a decision!

6. Haman is executed for the crime he did not commit!

D. Esther's character grows:

1. She is patient in implementing her plan

2. She brilliantly analyzes he enemy's methods

3. She is a provocative persuader

4. "Esther's character is so strong by the end of this chapter that we almost begin to feel sorry for Haman. But not quite. In the words of Jane Austen . . ., Haman has 'delighted us long enough" (Pride and Prejudice, chap. 18). We are glad to see him go."37

37Bechtel, 67.
XXI. Just Deserts, 8:1-8

A. This is a day when both Mordecai and Haman got what they deserved.

B. **Verses 2-3:** Mordecai got more:

1. Not just his reward for saving the king
2. But he got the **signet ring, which he had taken from Haman** and **Esther set him over the house of Haman.**
3. **Verse 2** ends with a feeling of "all is well that ends well."
4. However, the law is still in effect, so, after some time passes, Esther must speak with the king again — **Esther spoke again to the king; she fell at his feet, weeping and pleading with him to avert the evil design of Haman the Agagite and the plot that he had devised against the Jews.**
   a. Haman's property will not be of much use to Esther dead
   b. Neither will the signet ring for Mordecai

C. **Verses 4-6** relate the details of Esther's request

1. **Verse 4** reminds of the danger she last faced when she went before the king uninvited — once again, **The king held out the golden scepter to Esther,**

2. **Verses 5-6** she stands before the king and, with great rhetorical skills requests: **If it pleases the king, and if I have won his favor, and if the thing seems right before the king, and I have his approval, let an order be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote giving orders to destroy the Jews who are in all the provinces of the king. For how can I bear to see the calamity that is coming on my people? Or how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?**
   a. Great rhetorical skill is seen in that Haman is totally blamed and property issues are at stake
   b. Esther did not argue for herself
D. Verses 7-8: Ahasuerus repeats what he has done and drops a bombshell

1. See, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows, because he plotted to lay hands on the Jews.

2. Referring to the signet ring he has given to Mordecai, he says, You may write as you please with regard to the Jews, in the name of the king, and seal it with the king's ring.

3. Then he drops the bombshell — for an edict written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's ring cannot be revoked."

4. Evidently, Esther did not understand this rule when she made her request.

5. Seemingly, the king can do nothing to help the Jews — the law is final.

6. Ahasuerus, this mighty king of Persia, with all his excesses, once again seems impotent and can hardly function on his own as when:
   a. He selected a new wife
   b. Gave his signet ring to Haman, then to Mordecai
   c. No his response to Esther's request

7. The text is clear that Mordecai and Esther cannot rely on him for help.

XXII. Mordecai’s Balancing Act, 8:0-16 — Note the following comparisons of the edicts.\(^{38}\)

\(^{38}\)Cf. Bechtel, 73-74.
1:22
he sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, declaring that every man should be master in his own house.

3:12-15a
Then the king's secretaries were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month and an edict, according to all that Haman commanded, was written to the king's satraps and to the governors over all the provinces and to the officials of all the peoples, to every province in its own script and every people in its own language.

8:9
one hundred twenty-seven provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, and also to the Jews in their script and their language

8:9-14
The king's secretaries were summoned at that time in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day; and an edict was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, to the Jews and to the satraps and the governors and the officials of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, one hundred twenty-seven provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, and also to the Jews in their script and their language. He wrote letters in the name of King Ahasuerus, sealed them with the king's ring, and sent them by mounted couriers riding on fast steeds bred from the royal herd. By these letters the king allowed the Jews who were in every city to assemble and defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, with their children and women, and to plunder their goods on a single day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.

A copy of the writ was to be issued as a decree in every province and published to all peoples, and the Jews were to be ready on that day to take revenge on their enemies. So the couriers, mounted on their swift royal steeds,
by order of the king and the decree was issued in the citadel of Susa

urged by the king's command. The decree was issued in the citadel of Susa.

A. The 2nd edict is modeled on the 1st one

1. Every element in the 1st has a counterpart in the 2nd
2. That is because the 2nd's purpose is to counteract the 1st
3. This is necessary to revoke the first

B. There are also differences in the two edicts

1. Mordecai's edict gives permission (self defense) for the Jews to defend themselves — allowed the Jews who were in every city to assemble and defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate

2. The first was sent to the empire to all the king's provinces, giving orders to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews (3:13) while this one is sent to the Jews and to the satraps and the governors and the officials of the provinces (8:9) — Mordecai is taking no chances

3. Mordecai's is more efficient
   a. Haman's was sent by couriers, 3:13
   b. Mordecai's was sent on mounted couriers riding on fast steeds bread from the royal herd (8:10) and the hurried out, urged by the king's command, 8:14

4. After the 1st edict Haman and the king have a drink (3:15), while after the 2nd Haman is noticeably absent

5. Pandemonium breaks out after both edicts, but shouts of joy follow the 2nd, 8:15

6. The Jews are isolated after the 1st, but have many converts after the 2nd, 8:17
XXIII. A War of Words, 9:1-19

A. **Verses 1-2:** When the battle began no one could withstand them, because the fear of them had fallen upon all peoples.

B. **Verse 3:** All the officials of the provinces, the satraps and the governors, and the royal officials were supporting the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai had fallen upon them.

1. This fear tips the balance and allows the reversal described in verse 1

2. The reader senses a fulfillment of 4:14 — relief and deliverance has risen for the Jews from another quarter

C. **Verse 5:** So the Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, slaughterering, and destroying them, and did as they pleased to those who hated them.

1. "[T]he words used to describe the victory are the same in both edicts (3:13; 8:11). . . . [T]he Jews are described as 'slaughtering' (herēg; elsewhere translated as 'kill') and 'destroying' (ʿabdān) those who hated them (see also vv. 6, 7, 12, 15, and 16). One wonders if "annihilate" (šāmad) "is left out . . . to show some measure of self-restraint on the part of Jews."  

2. The Jews did not touch the plunder, vv. 10, 15, 16

D. **Verses 7-10a:** the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews — The naming of the 10 sons of Haman (vv. 7-9) underscores the fact, in contrast to Agag, that no one was left to carry on his hateful legacy

E. **Verse 12:** Ahasuerus philosophically accepts that five hundred people in Susa have been killed

1. He only asks, once again, what is your petition minus the half the kingdom

2. Perhaps he thinks Esther has this already!?

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39Bechtel, 78
F. Verse 13 Esther's request for a 2nd day of defense and the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows does not make her bloodthirsty, but were common practices in the ANE that were used as a kind of "shot over the bow" to anyone who would try something similar.

G. Verses 14-15 report that 300 more in Susa were killed.

H. Verses 16-17 report that 75,000 from the provinces were killed.

I. Verses 18-19 contrasts the differences in the time and reactions between Susa and the provinces — rejoicing occurred at different times.

XXIV. Lest We Forget, 9:20-10:3 describe the establishment of the festival Purim, named for the "pur" (lot) cast by Haman to determine when the Jews should be exterminated, 3:7; 9:24), and the part each played in it.