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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my thanks to Professor S. David Sperling for his unlimited assistance and guidance throughout the entire process of writing this thesis. He was always available for consultation and gave me much needed direction along the way. He was not only a great source of help academically, but a great source of emotional support as well. Both of these are greatly appreciated.

The initial work which inspired this thesis was written at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles, for Professor Stanley Gevirtz. I thank him for sharing his knowledge and his warmth with me.

It was Professor Richard D. Hecht of the University of California at Santa Barbara who got me interested in Bible in the first place--and so I shall be forever grateful to him.

I dedicate my thesis to my friend Nancy Alpert: my editor and friend (not necessarily in that order) without whose love, moral support and editorial assistance this thesis would never have been completed.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Esther is often dismissed as a fanciful, secular story. It resembles none of the four scrolls with which it is commonly linked nor does it seem to fit in with any other books of the Bible. The glaring difference between Esther and the other books is the absence of God. While the Book of Ruth and the story of Joseph in the Book of Genesis resemble Esther in narrative style, in both of these stories, it is God that leads the story to its ultimate conclusion. This is not the case in Esther. According to the text we have, people, not God, successfully resolve the conflicts of Esther.

Our attitude toward the Book of Esther manifests itself on Purim each year when the book is read: we jeer and curse the evil Haman while we silently cheer for Mordecai and Esther as they overcome Haman and save the Jews of Persia. The story is read with gaiety and frivolity; it is an exciting book where the Jews manage to conquer anti-Semitism and live happily ever after.

This work is an attempt to disprove the allegation that the book of Esther is a fanciful and secular story. In fact, the Book of Esther is a serious, carefully woven literary tale with religious content.

In an earlier work, at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles, I examined several expressions contained in Esther which were used elsewhere in the Bible in strictly religious contexts. As a result of that study, I concluded that since

the author of the Book of Esther purposely excluded God from the book, and changed otherwise religious expressions to secular ones, the book should be considered unreligious. In re-examining the Book of Esther, I found that there were even more of these "religious" expressions than I had initially analyzed. Now, however, rather than concluding that the omission of God from these expressions was a deliberate anti-religious act on the part of the author, I have concluded that the author was concealing something. This paper attempts to understand what the author wanted to convey to us by deleting God from places in which we would normally expect the name of God to appear.

Another aspect of the book to be explored by this paper is the fact that Esther's Judaism is kept a secret. Although Mordecai orders Esther to conceal the fact that she is Jewish, it would not be difficult for people at King Ahashuerus' court to discover that Esther was Jewish. Esther's messengers, for example, know that she is Jewish because they send messages between Esther and Mordecai, her uncle who is a well-known Jew. The fact that Mordecai is Jewish would seem to suggest that others at the court could also uncover Esther's Jewish affiliation because of the close connection between Esther and Mordecai.

Commentators have noted this issue. For example, Paton states:¹

Mordecai still managed to keep in communication with Esther, even after she had become Queen; but how this was done or how it could be carried on without revealing Esther's race, the author does not explain. Mordecai was well known to be a Jew; and, if he used

the Queen to communicate his intelligence to the King, it must have been conjectured that they were related.

Paton also expressed surprise that the Queen's secret was kept until the end of the story in Esther 8:1²:

Now for the first time the king discovers that Mordecai is a connection of Esther. How the King could have remained in ignorance of this fact until this late date is as extraordinary as Haman's ignorance up to the moment when the blow falls.

Paton mentions this issue, but does not explore it further. This paper will attempt to explain why neither the King nor Haman realizes that Esther is Jewish or that Esther and Mordecai are related.

The final issue to be examined concerns the genealogies of Mordecai and Haman. Mordecai is described to us in Esther 2:5 as *בן יאיר בן שמעי קיש איש מנין* "son of Jair son of Shimei son of Kish, a Benjaminite". Haman is called *הממדיא אגגי* "the son of Hammedata the Agagite" (Esther 3:1). King Saul was also referred to as the "son of Kish," (I Samuel 10:21) and he waged a war against the Amalekites under the rule of King Agag. Could there be a connection between Mordecai and Haman, on the one hand, and King Saul and Agag, on the other? Both Moore³ and Paton⁴ refer to this connection, but do not delve any deeper into its significance. This paper will examine this connection in greater detail.

In analyzing the issues of the absence of God from the Book of Esther, the secret of Esther's background and the genealogies of Mordecai and Haman, it is also necessary to explore the issue of when the book was written in the form in

which we read it. The dating of the book is relevant to the other issues and may in fact help to analyze them more fully.

Notes to Chapter 1

¹Paton, Lewis B., A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther, p. 191.

²Paton, p. 267.

³Moore, Carey A., Esther.

⁴Paton, p. 167 and p. 194.

Chapter 2

The Secret of Esther's Background

One reason that the Book of Esther is often dismissed as a fanciful and light tale is the fact that it is unbelievable as a story. That King Ahashuerus has unwittingly married a Jew and the fact that Esther's Judaism remains undiscovered until the very end of the book, despite her close ties with Mordecai, seem to further confirm the book's lack of credibility.

It is difficult to believe that the people in King Ahashuerus' court did not know that Esther was Jewish, and yet this secret is critical to the development of the plot. A close reading of the Book of Esther, however, not only suggests that the author carefully wove the narrative and was acutely aware of which characters in the story had access to the information that Esther was Jewish, but lends support for the conclusion that the author intended the book to be believable.

In Esther 2:10, after Esther has been installed at the court with the other young women in order that the King may choose a wife, the reader learns that Esther obeys her uncle Mordecai and does not reveal her background to anyone.

לֹא הִגִּידָה אֵשֶׁת אֲחֵיהָ אֵת מִצְרָתָהּ וְאֵת מִשְׁפָּחָהּ כִּי מֵרְדֵּכָי
לֹא תִגִּיד

Esther did not reveal her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had told her not to reveal it.

In Esther 2:11, Mordecai walks around in front of the harem to see how his niece is doing at the court.

וּבְכֵן יוֹם יוֹם מֵרְדֵּכָי מֵתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי חֵזֶר בֵּית הַנְּשִׁים לִדְעוֹת אֵת

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שָׁלוֹם אֶסְתֵּר וְהָיָה יוֹשֵׁב בֵּהּ

Every day Mordecai would walk about in front of the court of the harem, to learn how Esther was faring and what was happening to her.

At this point in the narrative, a connection could be made between Esther and Mordecai by anyone observing them at the court. Realistically, however, it is unlikely for anyone to realize the tie between them. Since this was prior to the time that Esther became queen there would be no reason for anyone in the court to pay special attention to Mordecai; he would simply be regarded as one of the courtiers.

The King chooses Esther as his queen because he loves her more than all the other women. In Esther 2:20, one learns that even after her coronation, Esther does not reveal her background:

אֵין אֶסְתֵּר מְגִידַת מוֹלָדוֹתָהּ וְאֵת עַמּוּדָהּ כִּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה עֲלֶיהָ מֶרְדֳּכַי
וְאֵת מֵאוּזָהּ מֶרְדֳּכַי אֶסְתֵּר עָשָׂה כִּאֲשֶׁר הָיְתָה בְּאִמְרוֹתָיו אֵל

But Esther still did not reveal her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had instructed her, for Esther obeyed Mordecai's bidding, as she had done when she was under his tutelage.

In Esther 2:22, Mordecai uncovers a plot against the king and passes the information on to Esther, who informs the king on behalf of Mordecai.

וַיִּלְמַד הַמֶּלֶךְ לְמֶרְדֳּכַי וַיֵּצֵא לְעֵינָיו אֶת אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה וְהָיָה אֶסְתֵּר
לְמַעַן הַשֵּׁם מֶרְדֳּכַי

Mordecai learned of it (the plot against the king) and told it to Queen Esther, and Esther reported it to the king in Mordecai's name.

This is the first instance where the king might have connected Esther with Mordecai. However, nothing in the text suggests that the king knows that Mordecai is Jewish. Even if the King realizes that Esther and Mordecai know each other, he would have no way of concluding that either is Jewish or even that they are blood relations.

In Esther 3:4, Mordecai tells his fellow courtiers that he is Jewish.

ויהי באחרון אשון יום ויום ועם שמוע אלהים ויגזר להחן לראות
היחזקו צדק מרדכי כי הגזר להם אשר הוא חזני

When they (the king's courtiers who were at the palace gate with Mordecai) spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see if Mordecai's resolve would prevail, for he had explained to them that he was a Jew.

In Esther 3:5-6, Haman plots to kill the Jews because of Mordecai.

וירא החן כי אין מרדכי כרע ומשתחוה לו ויחמא החן חמר
ויבן בדין לטעם יד מרדכי לעבדו כי הגזר לו את עם
מרדכי וידקש החן לטעמו את כל היהודים אשר בכל הממלכה
אשרוה עם מרדכי

When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel or bow low to him, Haman was filled with rage. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, having been told who Mordecai's people were, Haman plotted to do away with all the Jews, Mordecai's people, throughout the kingdom of Ahashuerus.

From these two passages, we learn that Mordecai's fellow courtiers and Haman all know that Mordecai is Jewish.

Even though Haman knows that Mordecai is Jewish, it is interesting that he does not mention this when he requests per-

mission from the king to destroy the Jews. Haman asks only to be allowed to kill **עם אחד** "a people," and not the "Jewish people."

Esther 3:8-9

וַיֹּאמֶר הָמָן לְמֶלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ וַיֵּשֶׁן עִם אֶחָד מִבְּנֵי וְהַכְרִיז
בֵּין הָעַמִּים כֹּכַד מִכְנִיָּה מְלֻכּוֹתָךְ וְנִתְּנָהּ שָׁנָה אֶחָד עַם
וְאֵל זֶה הָעַמִּיךְ אֵינָם עֹשִׂים וְלֹאֲמֶךְ אֵין טוֹר לְהַרְגֵּם.
אִם עַל הָעַמִּיךְ טוֹב יִכְתֹּב לְאַסְדָּם וְעֲשֶׂה אֲלֵהֶם כִּכֹּר כִּסֵּם
אֲשֶׁרֶם עָלָי יִבִּי עָלֵי הַמַּלְאכָה לְהַבִּיא אֵלַי הָעַמִּיךְ

Haman then said to King Ahashuerus, There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king's laws, and it is not in Your Majesty's interest to tolerate them. If it please Your Majesty, let an edict be drawn for their destruction, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the stewards for deposit in the royal treasury.

It is reasonable to assume that when the King approves Haman's petition in Esther 3:10-11, he does so without even knowing the name of the people he has doomed to destruction. One possible explanation is that Haman did this on purpose, in order to trick the King.

וַיֹּסֶר הָמָן אֶת טַבַּעַת מַמְסָד יָדוֹ וַיִּתְּנָהּ לְהָמָן בֶּן הַחַמְדָּה הָאֲגִי
צֶרֶר הַיְּהוּדִים. וַיֹּאמֶר הָמָן לְמֶלֶךְ הַכֹּכַד נָתַן עָלָי וְהָעַם לַעֲשֹׂה
כִּלְכִּל בְּדִינִיךָ.

Thereupon the king removed his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman son of Hammedata the Agagite, the foe of the Jews. And the king said, the money and the people are yours to do with as you see fit.

But two verses later, in Esther 3:13, there can be no doubt in the reader's mind as to which people were to be de-

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stroyed. It is not clear, however, whether the King realizes which people are to be destroyed.

וְשֵׁלֹא סִבְרִים בְּיַד הַמֶּלֶךְ אֵלֶּכָּה כֹּה מְהִינָה הַמֶּלֶךְ לְחַשְׁמִיז לְיָדָיו
וְלֹאֲבֵד אֶת כָּל הַיְּהוּדִים מִיָּמֶר וָיָמָּה וְכָן טָל וְנָשִׁים בְּיוֹם אֶחָד
בְּשָׁלוֹשׁ עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ טָל הוּא חֹדֶשׁ אָדָר וְשָׁלֹשׁ עָשָׂר

Accordingly, written instructions were dispatched by courtiers to all the king's provinces to destroy, massacre, and exterminate all the Jews, young and old, children and women, on a single day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, that is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions.

Upon hearing of this edict, Mordecai walks through the city in mourning clothes:

Esther 4:1

וּמֹרְדֵכַי יָדַע אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁמָע וַיִּרֶם מִרֹּדְכַי אֶת בִּגְדָיו וַיִּלְבֵּשׁ
טָל וְאֶכָּר וַיֵּלֶךְ בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר וּצָעַק בְּצִלְעָה גְדוּלָּה וְאֵרָה

When Mordecai learned all that had happened, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes. He went through the city, crying out loudly and bitterly.

Until now, we have learned from the text that the King may be aware of some connection between Esther and Mordecai (since Esther revealed in Mordecai's name the plot against the King and we know that Mordecai's courtiers and Haman all know that Mordecai is Jewish). The question now becomes whether or not anyone realized that Mordecai and Esther were related.

In Esther 4:4, Esther's maidens and eunuchs come tell her about Mordecai's actions.

וְהַבָּחֳרִים וְהַשְּׂפָחִים אֲשֶׁר אִתָּהּ וְסִרְסִיָּה וַיַּגִּידוּ לָהּ שֶׁמֹּרְדֵכַי עָשָׂה
כֵּן וְשֵׁלֹא בִּגְדָיו לְחַשְׁמִיז אֶת מֹרְדֵכַי וְלִסְרִיָּה

מחשיו ואל קבם.

When Esther's maidens and eunuchs came and informed her, the queen was greatly agitated. She sent clothing for Mordecai to wear, so that he might take off his sackcloth, but he refused.

We may conclude from this verse that Esther's maidens and eunuchs know at least that Esther and Mordecai were connected in some way and that Esther should be informed about what Mordecai was doing. Assuming that Esther's maidens and eunuchs know that Mordecai is Jewish, they may also guess that Esther is Jewish as well. Esther, however, does not know why Mordecai was dressed in mourning garb since in the next verse she sends a messenger to learn the reason for Mordecai's actions:

Esther 4:5

מקרא אסתר ליתק מוסר יחמק אטר החיז לנסה מלכות
עם מרדכי לרעה מה נה ואם מה נה.

Thereupon Esther summoned Hatach, one of the eunuchs whom the king had appointed to serve her and sent him to Mordecai to learn the why and wherefore of it all.

In Esther 4:8-14, Mordecai implores Esther, even threatens her, through Hatach, to intercede with the King on behalf of the Jews. It is especially interesting that Mordecai acts as though Esther has hidden her Judaism on her own initiative whereas she was previously commanded by Mordecai not to reveal her background. Mordecai puts the blame and the responsibility entirely upon Esther.

Esther 4:12-13

ויאמר למרדכי אל צדי אסתר. ואמר מרדכי להשיב אל
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אמר אל תחזי בנבטך למלך בית המלך מכה
היהודים

When Mordecai was told what Esther had said, Mordecai had this message delivered to Esther, "do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king's palace."

The first instance in which we learn that the King knows that Mordecai is Jewish occurs after Esther has interceded in accordance with Mordecai's instructions, by approaching the King without being summoned. Esther has requested that the King and Haman attend a feast that she will prepare. The night before the feast, the King reviews the book of records and discovers that Mordecai was never rewarded for averting a plot against him. The King commands Haman to reward him and refers to Mordecai as a Jew.

Esther 6:10

ויאמר המלך למחן מהר קח את הרכוש ואת הסוס כאשר
צוית וטעם בן למרדכי היהודי הושב בטעם המלך אל
תבם צד מכה אשר צדד

Quick then said the king to Haman. Get the garb and the horse as you have said and do this to Mordecai the Jew, who sits in the king's gate. Omit nothing of all you have proposed.

In Esther 5:13 and Esther 6:13 there is evidence that Zeresh, Haman's wife and all of Haman's friends know that Mordecai is Jewish.

Esther 6:13

ויסבר מחן לזרש אשתו ולכל אהביו את כל אשר צוהו
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וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ חֲכָמָיו וְזֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ אִם מֵיְדֵי הַיְּהוּדִים מֵרָחֵב
אֶתֶר הָאֶלֶף לִפְנֵי לִפְנֵי לֹא יוֹסֵף לוֹ כִּי נָפֹס תְּבוֹס לִפְנֵי.

There Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had befallen him. His advisers and his wife told him "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish stock, you will not overcome him. You will fall before him to your ruin."

By this point in the narrative, it appears to be fairly common knowledge that Mordecai is Jewish: the King, Esther's maidens and eunuchs (including Hatach, who was appointed by the King), Mordecai's fellow courtiers at the King's gate, Haman, and Haman's wife and friends all know that Mordecai is Jewish. However, the King does not know that Esther is Jewish, nor is it at all clear whether he knows that it is the Jews whom Haman has plotted to destroy.

Just as Haman conceals from the King the fact that he wants to destroy the Jews, Esther conceals from King Ahashuerus the fact that she belongs to the Jewish people and wants to save them from Haman's plot. In Esther 7:3-4, Esther alludes to her people without stating that she is Jewish.

וַתֵּן אֶסְתֵּר חֲמֵסָה וְאָמַר אִם מֵצֵאתָ חַן בְּעֵינֶיךָ חֲמֵסָה
וְאִם עַם חֲמֵסָה טוֹב תֵּתֵן לִי נָשִׁי בְּטָאֲמֶת וְעַד בְּדִקְטָתִי.
כִּי (מִכְרִי אֲנִי וְעַד לְחַמִּיז לְיָדוֹה וְעַד אֶל לְעַבְדִּים
וְעַבְדִּיחָהּ מִכְרִי חֲמֵסָה כִּי אִין חֲבֵר שֶׁהָ בִּנְךָ חֲמֵסָה.

Queen Esther replied, "If your majesty will do me the favor, and if it pleases Your Majesty, let my life be granted me as my wish, and my people as my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be de-

stroyed, massacred, and exterminated. Had we only been sold as bondmen and bondwomen, I would have kept silent, for the adversary is not worthy of the king's trouble."

It is not until Esther 8:1 that Esther reveals her connection to Mordecai to the King.

ביום ההוא נתן המלך אחשורוש לאסתר המלכה את בית חמון
 צרר היהודים ומרדכי בא לפני המלך כי הגיעה אסתר מזה
 חלל לה.

That very day King Ahashuerus gave the property of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther. Mordecai presented himself to the king, for Esther had revealed how he was related to her.

In Esther 8:5-6, Esther clearly discloses that she is Jewish:

ואמר אם יעז המלך טוב ואם מצאתי חן לפני וכשר הדבר
 לפני המלך וטובה אני בעיניו יתב להשיב את הספרים מחשבתי
 חמון בן המצוא האלף אשר כתב לאבד את היהודים אשר
 בכם מצויה המלך. כי איכבר אוכל וראיתי ברעה אשר ימצא
 את עמי ואיכבר אוכל וראיתי באבדן מועדתי.

"If it please Your Majesty, she said, and if I have won your favor and the proposal seems right to Your Majesty, and if I am pleasing to you, let dispatches be written countermanding those which were written by Haman son of Hammedata the Agagite, embodying his plot to annihilate the Jews throughout the king's provinces. For how can I bear to see the disaster which will befall my people, and how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred."

In Esther 8:7, the King explains that he has ordered Haman to be executed for plotting against the Jews.

ואמר המלך אחשורוש לאסתר המלכה ומרדכי היהודי הנה

ב"ר יהון נתיב עאשר ואטו תמו עס יהם עס אשר עס
י' צו ב'ח'צ'ים.

Then King Ahashuerus said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, "I have given Haman's property to Esther, and he has been impaled on the stake for scheming against the Jews."

This is an interesting statement which seems contradictory to the narrative. Since neither Esther nor Haman mention the name of the people that Haman wishes to destroy, Haman was impaled for having plotted against **צא אש** or Esther's **אש** or Mordecai, who had saved the King's life. It is only later that the King learns that the Jews were the target of Haman's plot.

At first glance, then, it seems unbelievable that it is not common knowledge that Esther is Jewish in the Book of Esther. But upon a careful reading of the story, we see that the narrative is woven in such a way that separate groups of people have only certain information. While each group has access to certain pieces of information, either about Esther, Mordecai or both of them, no one person possesses enough information to draw any conclusions. In this way, Esther's identity remains secure in order for her to save her people at the last minute, thereby heightening the development of the plot.

For example, only Esther's maidens and eunuchs know that Esther and Mordecai are related and are both Jewish. Their job, however, requires that they maintain their mistress'

confidentialities, and so they are unable to disclose the information that they possess.

Mordecai's fellow courtiers, and Haman and his wife and friends, all know that Mordecai is Jewish and that Haman is scheming to kill the Jews, but none of these people know that Mordecai and Esther are related. Thus they do not know that Esther is Jewish.

The King knows that Mordecai is Jewish, but does not know that Mordecai is related to Esther. The King does not know that Haman plots against the Jews, only that Haman wants to destroy an allegedly disloyal people. Nor does the King know at first that Esther is asking him to save the Jews, only that her life be granted as her wish and her people as her request. Thus, the King could not conclude that Esther was Jewish.

The author very cleverly and deliberately dispersed the information into the hands of various characters in order for the plot to evolve, with no one character able to draw conclusions, or in the case of Esther's maidens and eunuchs, able to disclose the information they possess.

Chapter 3

Linguistic Evidence of God's Presence in the Book of Esther

I have mentioned above that some of the phrases which appear in Esther in non-religious contexts are found elsewhere in the Bible in religious contexts. In Esther, however, these same phrases appear without God or any religious elements. In this section, I will examine those expressions.

1. Old and Young Alike דמכזב וזד דטן

In Esther 1:5 and 1:20, the phrase דמכזב וזד דטן
"old and young alike" appears.

Esther 1:5

ובמלואת ימים האלה עשה המלך דכב וזד
הנחלים בטון הבירה דמכזב וזד דטן משה
שבע ימים בחצר ארץ בית המלך.

At the end of this period, the king gave a banquet for seven days in the court of the king's palace garden for all the people who lived in the fortress Shushan, old and young alike.

Esther 1:20

ושמו בלש המלך אשר יעשה דכב מלכות כי רבה
היא וכד הנשים יתנו ידן לבסעיהן דמכזב וזד דטן.

Then will the judgment executed by your Majesty resound throughout your realm, vast as it is; and all wives will treat their husbands with respect, old and young alike.

This phrase appears in only one other place in the Bible:

II Chronicles 34:30

וידע המלך ביה יהוה וכל איש יהודה וישיב ירושלים והכהנים
והלויים וכל העם מלכד וידע קטן ויקרא באזניהם את כל
דברי ספר הברית תחלה ביה יהוה.

And the king went up into the house of Yahweh, and all the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, old and young, and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of Yahweh.

Expressions similar to מלכד וידע קטן do appear elsewhere:

II Chronicles 31:15

בדרי הכהנים באמנה לתת לאזניהם במחלקיהם כדעם
כדעם.

In the cities of the priests, faithfully entrusted to give their portions (of the offerings) to their brethren by division, old and young alike.

Jonah 3:5

ואמינה אנשי נינוה באמנה ויקראו כלם ויעשו שמים
מלכד וידע קטן.

So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest even to the least of them.

Jeremiah 6:13(12)

(...אם יהוה) כי מקטנם וידע גדולם כלם קוצצו חצב ומחבוא
וידע כהן כלם חוטא שקר.

(...says Yahweh) "For from the least of them even to the greatest of them everyone is greedy for grain, and from the prophet even to the priest everyone deals falsely."

Jeremiah 31:33

ולא ילמדו חזק איש את רעהו ואיש את אחיו לאמר רצו

אם ידוע כי כולם יבטחו אולי לחקתם ודע יבטחו
אם ידוע כי אסתר פשוטה ופחיתא לא אצבר חסד.

And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor and every man his brother, saying, "Know Yahweh, for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," says Yahweh, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

Jeremiah 16:6(5)

כי כה אמר יהוה אל תביא ביה מנוח ואם תלך
לסוד ולעמך להם כי אספתי את שוואי ואת חסדי
הנה נאם יהוה אל חסד ואהבה וחסד וחסד
חכמים האלה הנאם לא ידעו ולא יסבנו להם ולא
תעבד ולא יקרה להם.

For thus says Yahweh, "Enter not into the house of mourning, neither go to lament nor bemoan them, for I have taken away my peace from this people," says Yahweh, "both love and mercy. Both the great and the small shall die in this land; they shall not be buried, neither shall people lament for them, nor gash themselves for them, nor make themselves bald for them."

Psalms 115:13

יברך יראי יהוה חקתים עם הגדלים.

God will bless those who fear Yahweh, both small and great.

II Chronicles 36:18

והכל כלי בית האלהים והקטנים והגדולים
בית יהוה ואצרות חסד וחסד וחסד וחסד

And all the vessels of the House of God, great and small, and the treasures of the House of Yahweh and the treasures of the king, and of his princes.

In all of these examples, the expressions similar to למבד וידקטן are used exclusively in relation to God and/or the worship of God. Only in Esther does this expression appear without any mention of God.

2. Decorative Items בולף, שש, כסף, צהב, ארגמן, תכלת

In Esther 1:6, there is a description of the vast riches of Ahashuerus' kingdom which the King displayed in his palace for his party guests:

Esther 1:6

חור כרסם ותכלת אחוז בחבלי בולף וארגמן עם גלג'י
כסף וזמני' שש מטמ צהב וכסף עם נצבם בהט ושש
ובר וסחרת.

There were hangings of white cotton and blue wool, caught up by cords of fine linen and purple wool to silver rods and alabaster columns, and there were couches of gold and silver on a pavement of marble, alabaster, mother-of-pearl, and mosaics.

These decorative items are also referred to elsewhere in the Bible to describe the altar, the tabernacle or the Temple.

Numbers 4:13

ובשנן את החצבת ופרשו עליה בלף ארגמן.

And they shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth on it.

Exodus 26:1¹

ואת המשכן תעשה עשר יריעות שש משער תכלת וארגמן
ותעשה שש כרסים מעשה חשב תעשה אהב.

Moreover thou shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen, and blue,

and purple, and scarlet, with keruvim of artistic work thou shall make them.

II Chronicles 2:13

בן אשה מבנות בן ואביו איש צרי יוצר לעשה בזהב
ובכסף בנחשת בברזל באבנים ובדמים באריזון בתבליט
ובדול וברחמים ולבנת כס פטל ונחשד כס מחשבך אשר
ינתן לו דם חכמך וחכמ' אבני צויר אביר.

The son of a woman of the daughters of Dan, and his father was a man of Tyre, skillful to work in gold, and in silver, in brass, in iron, in stone, and in timber, in purple, in blue, and in fine linen, and in crimson, also to engrave any manner of engraving, and to work all kinds of artistic work, to do whatever shall be put to him, with your skillful men of my lord David, your father.

I Chronicles 29:1-2

ויאמר צויר המלך לכם יהיה שלמה בן אחז בחר בו אלהים
נער ורך והמלאכה גדולה כי לא לאדם הבירה כי ליהודה אלהים.
ובכל כח' הכינות לבית אלהי הנה עתה והכסף לכם ונחשת
לנחשת הברזל לברזל והדמים לבנים אבני שיהם וחלואים אבני
פוך וקרח וכל אבן ידיר ואבן שיש לרב.

And David the king said to all the congregation, "Solomon my son, whom alone God has chosen, is yet young and tender, and the work is great, for the palace is not for man, but for Yahweh God. Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of my God the gold for things to be made of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and the brass for things of brass, the iron for things of iron, and wood for things of wood, onyx stones, and stones to be set, glistening stones, and coloured stones, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance."

These items were so well known as Holy decorations,

that they were also used for clothing gods:

Jeremiah 10:6-10

מֵאִין כַּחֲךְ יְהוָה לְעוֹלָם אֵת וְעוֹלָם שֶׁחַךְ בְּבִדּוּרָה.
 אִם לֹא יִדְאָךְ מֵעַתָּה הַגּוֹיִם כִּי לֹךְ יֵאָתֶר כִּי בִכְסֵי
 חֲכָמֵי הַגּוֹיִם וּבִכְסֵי מַעֲלָמוֹת מֵאִין כַּחֲךְ. וּבִאֲתָר יִבְעֲרוּ
 וּבִכְסֵי מִטְרֵי הַבְּדִים עִם חָא. כִּסֵּף מִדְּקֵה מִטְרֵשִׁישׁ יִבְא
 וְצִיָּה מֵאֻפָּז מִצִּיָּה חֲרֹשׁ וְיִצִי צִוְרֵי תְבֻלָּה וְאַרְגָּמָן
 לְבוּשֵׁי מִצִּיָּה חֲכָמִים כֻּלָּם. וְיִהְיֶה אֱלֹהִים אִתָּךְ הוּא
 אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים וְחֵמֶךְ עוֹלָם מִקִּבְּלוֹ תִרְחֹשׁ הָאֵל וְלֹא יִכְלֹ
 גּוֹיִם צִמְחוּ.

Forasmuch as there is none like you, Yahweh, you are great, and your name is great in might. Who would not fear you, O king of the nations? For to you it is fitting, for among the wise men of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like you. Stupid and senseless are they all: the teaching of their vain idols is but wood! Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Ufaz, the work of the craftsman, and of the hands of the founder: blue and purple is their clothing, they are all the works of skillful men. But Yahweh is the true God, the living God, and an everlasting king: at God's anger the earth shall tremble and the nations shall not be able to abide God's indignation.

Judges 8:26-27

וְיֵהּ מִשְׁקֵלֵי צִמְחוּ אֵת שֶׁאֵל אֶלֶף וּשְׁבַע מֵאוֹת נֶחֱד
 לְבַד מִן הַתְּרִמָּה מִתְּנִיבוֹת וּבְגָדֵי הָאֲרָגָמָן שֶׁעַל מֵעַל חֲבִין
 וְעַבְדֵי מִן הַתְּרִמָּה אֵת בְּצוּרֵי הַמִּיָּדִים. וְיֵהּ אֵת אֶתֶר לְבַד
 וְצִיָּה אֵת בְּצִוְרֵי הַתְּבֻלָּה וְיֵהּ כֵּן שֶׁרָאָה אֶתֶר שֶׁם יֵהּ לְעִדְרוֹן
 וְלִבְיָהּ מִתְּנִיבוֹ

And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was one thousand seven hundred shekels of gold, besides the crescents, and the eardrops, and the purple garments that were on the kings of Midyan, and besides the chains that were about their camels' necks. And Gideon made an ephod of this, and put it in his city, even in Ofra, and all Israel went astray there after it, which things became a snare to Gideon and his house.

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In two cases these precious decorative objects adorn people:

Proverbs 31:22

מרבצים עשתה לה שט וארגמן עבשה.

She makes herself coverlets, her clothing is fine linen and purple

Song of Songs 5:15

שוקיו עמודי שט מ'סדים עם אבני פז מראהו
לבנון בחור כארזים.

His legs are pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold, his countenance is like the Lebanon, excellent as the cedars.

With the two exceptions described above, the words used to describe the royal palace party decorations in Esther 1:6 most often appear in descriptions regarding God, gods, the altar or the Temple.

3. Conveyed By ביצ

The expression ביצ "conveyed by," appears in Esther 1:12:

מאמן המלכה ושת לבוא בזכר המלך אשר ביצ הסריסים.

But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command conveyed by the eunuchs.

This phrase is not at all uncommon in the Bible. It is generally used to describe how a character acts through a vehicle. It occurs in many different contexts when used with action verbs such as: send שלח, abandon עזב, fall נפל, sell נמך, give נתן. It is interesting, however, that when ביצ is used with verbs which involve speech such as: יצא, קרא, דיבר, צוה, פקד, זכה, it is used exclusively with

God as the subject, acting through someone else.

Exodus 9:35

וַיִּכְזֶב לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְלֹא שָׁמָּה אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה
יְהוָה בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה.

And Pharaoh's heart was hard, neither would he let the children of Israel go, as Yahweh had spoken by Moses

Exodus 35:29

כֹּל אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לִבָּהּ אֶת־מַעֲמֵל עֲבֹדָה לַיהוָה
אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה הֵבִיאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נִצְבֵּה לַיהוָה.

Every man and woman, whose heart made them willing to bring for all manner of work, which Yahweh had commanded by the hand of Moses, to be made.

I Samuel 28:15

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂמוּאֵל אֶל שָׁאוּל לָמָּה הִרְצִיתָן לִי עֲשָׂה אֵת וַיֹּאמֶר
שָׁאוּל צֵר לִי מֵאֵד וּפְלִשְׁתִּים נִלְחָמִים בִּי וְאֵלֹהִים סָר מֵעָדִי
וְלֹא עָנִי עֲדָה לִי בְּיַד הַנְּבִיאִים אֲמַר בּוֹדְחָה וְאֶקְרָא לָךְ
לְהוֹצִיעַנִי מִן אֶשְׁמֶה.

And Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disquieted me, to bring me up?" And Saul answered, "I am greatly distressed, for the Philistines make war against me and God has departed from me, and answers me no more, neither by prophets nor by dreams, therefore I have called you, that you may make known to me what I shall do."

II Kings 17:13

וַיֹּצֵד יְהוָה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וַיְהִיזֶה בְּיָד כֹּהֵן נִבְיָא בֶּן תִּצְהַר לְאִמֶּה
שֶׁבַח מִדְּרָכֵיכֶם הָרָעִים וּשְׁמִירוֹ מִצִּוֹת חֻקֵּיכֶם כִּכְסֵּי הַתִּרְוֶה
אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי אֶת אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם וְאֲשֶׁר שָׁמַרְתִּי אֵלֵיכֶם בְּיַד עֲבָדֵי
הַנְּבִיאִים.

When Yahweh testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying: Turn from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the Torah which I commanded your ancestors, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets.

In Esther, בִּי "conveyed by" is always used with verbs which involve speech. However, unlike other contexts in the Bible where God would be the subject of the sentence, in Esther, the phrase always appears with a human agent.

4. Committed an Offense עָוָה

In Esther 1:16, the verb עָוָה "committed an offense" appears.

וְאַחֲרַיִם מְמֻכָּן לְפָנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַשָּׂרִים לֹא עָוָה הַמֶּלֶךְ לְבָבוֹ עֲוָה
וְשֵׁי הַמַּעֲכָה כִּי עָוָה כָּל הַשָּׂרִים וְעָוָה כָּל הַדְּמוֹת אֲשֶׁר
בְּכָל מְדִינַת הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֻׁרָשׁ.

Thereupon Memucan declared in the presence of the king and the ministers: "Queen Vashti has committed an offense not only against Your Majesty but also against all the officials and against all the peoples in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus."

עָוָה, from the root עָוָה, is used in only two contexts in the rest of the Bible: either to refer to offenses against God, or, less frequently, to refer to offenses against a king.

Exodus 34:6-7

וַיֹּצֵא יְהוָה אֶת בְּנוֹ וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה מִן הָאֵשׁ וַיֹּאמֶר מִן הָאֵשׁ
אֵפִים וְרֹב חֲסִדוֹתָיו. נָצַר חֲסִד לְעַמִּים נֶשֶׁא עֹן וּבִשָּׁע מִטָּה
וַיִּקְרָה לֹא יִקְרָה בְּקִרְבִּי אֲבֹהַ עַם בְּנֵי וְעַם בְּנֵי עַם
שְׂמִים וְעַם רַבִּים.

And Yahweh passed by before him and proclaimed:
 "Yahweh, Yahweh, mighty, merciful, and gracious,
 longsuffering and abundant in love and truth,
 keeping troth to thousands, forgiving iniquity,
 and transgression and sin but who will by no means
 clear the guilty, punishing the iniquity of the
 fathers on the children, and on the children's
 children, to the third and to the fourth gener-
 ation."

II Samuel 24:17

ואמר צלל אל יהוה בראש ארץ ישראל ויהוה
 ואמר הנה אנכי חטאתי ואנכי חסידים ואשר חטאתי
 עשו יחי לא יצק ב' ודבית אבי.

And David spoke to Yahweh when he saw the angel
 that smote the people, and said, "Lo, I have
 sinned, and I have done perversely, but these
 sheep, what have they done? Let your hand, I
 pray you, be against me and against my father's
 house."

I Kings 8:47

והשיבו אל לבם בארץ אשר נשבו שם ושובו והתחננו
 אליך בארץ שביהם לאמר חטאתי וחסידים רשעו.

Yet if they take thought in the land where they
 were carried captives, and repent, and make
 supplication to you in the land of their captors,
 saying, "We have sinned, and have done perversely,
 we have committed wickedness."

Psalms 106:6

חטאנו עם אבותינו חסידים רשעו.

We have sinned with our ancestors, we have committed
iniquity, we have done wickedly.

Job 33:27

שם אנשים ואמר חטאתי וישר חסידים ולא שנה לי.

He should then assemble a row of men, and say,
 "I have sinned, and perverted that which is right,
 and it profited me not."

II Chronicles 6:37

והשיבו אל לבבם בארץ אשר נשבו שם וישבו ויהתנו
אלך בארץ שבים לאחור חטאנו חסרנו ונשנו.

Yet if they take thought in the land where they are carried captive, and turn and pray to you in the land of their captivity, saying, "We have sinned, we have done amiss, and have dealt wickedly."

The above examples depict עזר used in reference to God. As mentioned previously, עזר is also infrequently used in reference to a king.

II Samuel 19:20

ויאמר אל המלך אל משה עי אבני עין ואם תזכר את אשר חסר עבדך היום אשר יצא אבני המלך מירושלים עולם המלך אל לבו.

And he said to the king, "Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me, neither remember that which your servant did perversely the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart."

In the Book of Esther, עזר is used only with a human subject.

5. Bow and Kneel כרע, חור

In Esther 3:2, it is written:

וכם עבדי המלך אשר בשער המלך כרעים ומשתחוים להמן
כי בן צוהם המלך ומרדכי לא יכרע ולא שיתחור.

All the king's courtiers in the palace gate knelt and bowed low to Haman, for such was the king's order concerning him, but Mordecai would not kneel or bow low.

The roots חור and כרע appear together in only three other places in the Bible:

Psalms 95:6

באו נשתחוו ונקרעו לפני יהוה עשנו.

O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before Yahweh our maker.

II Chronicles 7:3

וככל בני ישראל ראים ברצח האש ובאור יהוה עש
הגיע ויכנס אפים ארצה עם הרצבה וישתחוו ואלצו
עיהו כי טוב כי עולם חסדו.

And when all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of Yahweh was upon the house, they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement and prostrated themselves and praised Yahweh, saying, "For God is good, for God's steadfast love endures forever."

II Chronicles 29:29

וככלם להודיעו בעדו המלך וכס הנחמדים את וישתחוו.

And when they had made an end of offering, the king and all who were present with him bowed down, and prostrated themselves.

In the three examples of "bow" and "kneel" found outside of the Book of Esther, people only כרע and תור "bow" and "kneel" before God. It is only in Esther that people offer these gestures to a human being.

6. Commandment מצוה

There is an expression, עבר מצוה, which occurs in Esther 3:3:

ואחרי ערב המלך אשר בשער המלך להורגו מצוה אתה
עבר את מצוה המלך.

Then the king's courtiers who were in the palace gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's commandment?"

There are only two other examples of this expression found in the Bible. An exact parallel is contained in II Chronicles and a similar phrase is found in Deuteronomy.

II Chronicles 24:20

וְהָיוּ אֲדָרִים לְבָשָׁה אֶת צְבָרִיהָ בֶן יְהוֹיָצָק הַכֹּהֵן וַיֵּשְׁמְצוּ
מִצֵּד לָעָם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לָהֶם כֹּה אָמַר הָאֱלֹהִים עֲמֹד אֲתָם
עֲבֹרִים אֶת מִצְוַת יְהוָה וְלֹא הִצְלַחְתֶּם כִּי עֲבַרְתֶּם אֶת
יְהוָה וַיִּצְטַב אֲתָכֶם.

And the spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, and he stood above the people, and said to them, "Thus says God, 'why do you transgress the commandments of Yahweh, though you cannot succeed?'"

Deuteronomy 26:13

וְאָמַרְתָּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּעֵת הַקִּדְשׁ מִן הַיּוֹם וְהָאָז
נָתַתִּי לָעָם וְלֹאֲרָה עִיטָם וְלֹאֲמַחֲנֶךָ כִּכֹּר מִצְוַתְךָ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָ
לֹא עֲבַרְתִּי מִמִּצְוֹתֶיךָ וְלֹא שָׁכַחְתִּי.

Then you shall say before Yahweh your God, "I have removed the hallowed things out of my house, and also I have given them to the Levite, and to the stranger, and to the fatherless, and to the widow, according to all your commandments which you have commanded me, I have not transgressed your commandments, neither have I forgotten them."

In other instances in the Bible, the word מצוה is most often used in reference to a commandment of God, but it is also used occasionally in connection with a king's commandment:

Deuteronomy 5:28

וְאָמַר כֹּה עָמַד עֲמָדִי וְאֶבְרַח אֵלֶיךָ כֹּה

המצוה והדברים והמשפטים אשר תלמדם ואתם בארץ
אשר אני נתן להם לנחלתם.

But as for you, stand here by me, and I will speak to you all the commandments, and the statutes, and judgments which you shall teach them in the land which I gave them to possess.

Joshua 22:5

ך שחזרו מאד לעשות את המצוה ואת התורה אשר צוה
אתכם משה עבד ה' לאהבה את ה' אלהיכם
ועל כל דבריו ועשות מצותיו ולעבדה בו ולעצבן בכם
לבבכם ובכל נפשכם.

But take great care to do the commandment and the Torah which Moses, the servant of Yahweh commanded you, to love Yahweh your God and to walk in all God's ways, and to keep God's commandments and to hold fast to God and to serve God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Isaiah 36:21

ויחזקו ולא ענו את דבר כי מצוה המלך היא לאמר
לא תענה.

But they held their peace, and answered him not a word, for the king's commandment was, "Answer him not."

The concept of מצוה "commandment," and especially "transgress a commandment" are almost exclusively connected to God. In the Book of Esther, however, these words are used to describe the King's commandment.

7. Cry Out צעק

The word צעק appears in Esther 4:1:

ואמר כי יום אב כל אשר נעשה וקדש מרובי אב בגבול
ויעש עק ואמר ויצא בטק היד ויצעק צעקה גדולה ומרה.

When Mordecai learned all that had happened, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes. He went bitterly through the city, crying out loudly and bitterly.

Throughout the Bible, נצק most often appears in conjunction with God. People usually cry out to God. Like

נצור, however, the word is occasionally used in reference to crying out to a king.

Psalms 42:6

נצקתי אלך יהוה ארצו אתה מחסי חלקי
בארץ החיים.

I cried to you, Yahweh, I said, "You are my refuge and my portion in the land of the living."

II Samuel 19:29

כי לא היה כע בית אבי כי אם אנשי מלך לאנני המלך
ותש את עבדך באבני שמתך ומה י לי עוד צבך
ולצדק עוד אל המלך.

For all my father's house were but men guilty of death before my lord the king, yet you did set your servant among them that did eat at your table. What right therefore have I yet to cry out any more to the king?

There is another instance in the Bible where someone cries out after hearing bad news:

I Samuel 4:13

ויבוא והנף עמ' שב עם הכבא יצ צדק חצבה כי היה לבו
חורז עם ארון האלהים והאיש בא להגיד בעיר ותצעק כל העיר.

And when he came, Eli sat upon a seat by the way-side watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told it, all the city cried out.

In this example, the people were crying out because the ark of the covenant of God was taken from Israel by the Philistines.

We see, then, that נזק "cry out" is always identified with God, except in Esther.

8. Fasting, Weeping, Wailing, Sackcloth, Ashes

צום, בכי, מוסב, שק, אפר

When the Jews of Persia hear of the decree which was sent out concerning their fate, they go into a state of mourning:

Esther 4:3

ובכל מדינת ומדינת מלכות אשר בדר המלך וזמן מלכות
אדם גדול ליהודים וצום ובכי ומוסב שק ואפר יצא לרבים.

Also, in every province that the king's command and decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing, and everybody lay in sackcloth and ashes.

The words אפר, צום, בכי, מוסב, שק are all words associated elsewhere in the Bible with mourning.

Jonah 3:5

ויאמרו אנשי נין באמרים ויקראו צום וילבשו שק
מגדולם ועד קטנם.

So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them

Daniel 9:3

ואתנה את פני אל אצני האלהים לבקש תפלה
תחנונים בצום ושק ואפר.

And I set my face to Yahweh God, to seek
by prayer and supplications, with fasting,
and sackcloth, and ashes.

Joel 2:12

אלהם דתה נאם יהוה שבו עצי הכל לבבכם וצום
ובכי ומאספז.

Yet even now says Yahweh, "Turn to me with
all your heart and with fasting and with
weeping and with mourning."

In all of these other examples, however, the mourning
practices are addressed to God. It is only in the Book of
Esther that these mourning customs are practiced without
even the mention of God.

9. Thirty Days שלושים יום

In Esther 4:11, Esther says that she has not been
summoned to the King for a period of 30 days.

Esther 4:11

כל עמצי המלך ודם מדינת המלך יודעים אשר כל איש ואשר
אשר יבוא אל המלך אל החצר הפנימית אשר לא יקרא אתה
דבר עמיתו לבד מאשר יושט לו המלך את שרביט הצהב
ואיה ואני לא נקראתי לבוא אל המלך צה שלושים יום.

All the king's courtiers and the people of the king's
provinces know that, if any person, man or woman,
enters the king's presence in the inner court with-
out having been summoned, there is but one law for
him - that he be put to death. Only if the king
extends the golden scepter to him may he live.

Now I have not been summoned to visit the king for the last 30 days.

This period of time occurs in only two other places in the Bible:

Numbers 20:29

ויראו כל העדה כי לא אהרן ויבכו את אהרן שלשים יום כל בית ישראל.

And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron for 30 days, all the house of Israel.

Deuteronomy 34:8

ויבכו בני ישראל את משה במדבר ארבע שלשים יום ויטוו יחי בכי אדם משה.

And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moav for 30 days, and the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.

Both of these examples refer to a thirty-day mourning period: a thirty-day mourning period for Moses and one for Aaron. The Esther usage of this time period does not refer to a period of mourning. However, it is interesting that in Esther 4:11, the thirty-day period follows the mourning imagery of Esther 4:1 (see #7 above). It seems, then, to be a continuation of that mourning imagery in which God is usually present.

10. Relief and Deliverance נח והצלה

The words נח and הצלה appear together only in the Book of Esther.

Esther 4:14

כי אם החרש תחרישי בעת הזאת נח והצלה יצא/3

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For if you do at all remain silent at this time, then shall relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from elsewhere; but you and your father's house will perish.

𐤒𐤑𐤍 from the root 𐤒𐤑 appears most often with
 the name of God as an action that is performed by God:

II Kings 18:35

מי בכל אלהי הארצו אשר הציעו את ארצם מיני
כי יצו יהיה את ירושלים מיני.

Which of all the gods of the countries, have delivered their country out of my hand, that Yahweh should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?

Genesis 31:9

י"ב אדר' ב' חמשה עשר ימים.

Thus God has taken away the cattle of your father, and given it to me.

II Chronicles 32:11

הָעָם יִתְקִיחוּ חִסֵּי אֲבֹתָם לִפְנֵי אֲבֹתָם עֲזָרוֹת
בְּרַעַב וּבְצָרָה לְאִמָּר הִלֵּךְ אֲלֵהֶם יִצְחָק מֶלֶךְ
חֶמֶד אֱמוּנָה.

Is not Hezekiah persuading you to give yourselves over to die by famine and by thirst, saying, "Yahweh our God shall deliver us out of the king of Assyria"?

א only appears in three other places in the Bible. There is only one appearance of א elsewhere which is at all similar to its meaning in Esther.

Exodus 8:11

וירא פריה כי היתה הרומה והכבד אה אלה ואלה נחמה

אֵלֶּיֶם כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה.

But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not to them, as Yahweh had said.

The "respite" רַחֵם referred to here is God's ceasing the plague of frogs.

In the rest of the Bible, then, both רַחֵם and הַצִּלָּה "relief and deliverance" refer to actions done by God. Only in Esther is it not specified where Mordecai anticipates רַחֵם and הַצִּלָּה, "relief and deliverance" to come from.

11. Wish and Request בְּרֵשָׁה וְשֵׁאֵלָה

The words שֵׁאֵלָה and בְּרֵשָׁה "wish" and "request" appear six times in parallel form in the Book of Esther:
Esther 5:6

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאִסְתֵּר בְּמֵשֶׁה הֵי"ן מֶה בְּרֵשָׁתְךָ יְיָ לֵךְ
וְהִנֵּה בְּרֵשָׁתְךָ עַד חֲצִי הַמַּמְלָכָה וְהַשֵּׁשׁ

During the wine drinking the King asked Esther,
"What is your wish? It shall be granted you.
And what is your request? Even to half the
kingdom, it shall be fulfilled."

Esther 5:7

וְהָיָה אֲמָתִי וְהָאִמָּה שֵׁאֵלָה וּבְרֵשָׁה.

My wish, replied Esther, my request

Esther 5:8

אִם מְצָאָה חַן בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאִם עֵם הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב לְמַעַן אֶהְיֶה
שֵׁאֵלָה וְעֵשֶׂה אֶת בְּרֵשָׁתִי יְהוָה הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָיָה אִם הַחֲשִׁידָה
אֲשֶׁר אֲשֶׁה לָהֶם וְהָיָה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה הַמֶּלֶךְ.

If Your Majesty will do me the favor, if it please Your Majesty to grant my wish and accede to my request, let Your Majesty and Haman come to the feast which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do Your Majesty's bidding.

Esther 7:2

ואמר המלך לאסתר גם ביום השני בחשמה היין
מה שאניק אסתר המלכה נתתן לך ומה בדשתיך
דך חצי המלכה ומה.

On the second day, the king again asked Esther during the wine drinking, "What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to half the kingdom, it shall be fulfilled."

Esther 7:3

ותם אסתר המלכה וטאמר אמ מלכתי חן בעיניך
המלך ואם דם המלך טוב תתן לי נפש בטלתי ומה בדשתי.

Queen Esther replied: If Your Majesty will do me the favor, and if it please Your Majesty, let my life be granted me as my wish, and my people as my request.

Esther 9:12

ואמר המלך לאסתר המלכה בשושן הבירה הריא
היחזים ואבד חמש מאה איש ואם עשרת
בני המן בשאר מדינות המלך מה עשו ומה שאניק
ינתן לך ומה בדשתיך דך ומה.

The King said to Queen Esther, "In the fortress Shushan alone the Jews have killed a total of five hundred men, as well as the ten sons of Haman. What then must they have done in the provinces of the realm! What is your wish now? It shall be granted you. And what else is your request? It shall be fulfilled."

שאלה in other contexts in the Bible, is most often used in conjunction with requests from God.

I Samuel 1:27

אם יתן ה' הבעדתי וימן יהיה לי אג שאלתי אשר שאלתי מנחם.

For this child I prayed: and Yahweh has given me my petition which I have asked of God.

Psalms 20:6

נרנר בישועתך ובשם אלהינו נצנץ ימלא יהיה בך משאלותינו.

May we rejoice in your salvation, and in the name of our God set up our banner! Let Yahweh fulfill all of my petitions.

Psalms 37:4

והתעלג עס יהיה וימן עס משאלת לבך.

Delight yourself also in Yahweh; and God will give you the petitions of your heart.

שאלה also, although less frequently, is used in connection with people:

Judges 8:24

ויאמר אליהם גידון אשאלה מכם שאלה ויגו לי איש נצם שאלה כי נצח' צהב להם כי ישמעאלים הם.

And Gideon said to them, "I would make a request of you, that you would give me every man the earnings of his spoil" (For they had golden earnings, because they were Ishmaelites.)

בקש is used much more generally throughout the Bible for all types of requests. Although שאלה and בקש appear six times in parallel in the Book of Esther, they never appear together anywhere else in the Bible.

12. To See My People ראה גמלי

In Esther 8:6, Esther reveals compassion for her people:

כי איבער אונס וואויל ברודר אשר יוצא את עמי
ואיבער אונס וואויל באבן חולדני.

For how can I bear to see the disaster which will befall my people! And how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred.

There are only two other instances of the phrase "to see my people" in the Bible:

Exodus 3:7

ואמר יהוה דבר ראשון את ענין עמי אשר בחציהם ואמר
3צדקתם שמעתי לפני ר' יצחק ב' יצחק ב' אבא.

And Yahweh said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows."

I Samuel 9:15-16

יורה דעה אר ארן שואל יום אחד לפני בוא שאול לשאר
כשר חזר אולם אלך איש מאלי בנימין ומשתה לנגיד עם
עמי ושואל מושיע את עמי מייד הפסוקים כי ראיתי את
עמי כי באר צדקת אלי.

Now Yahweh had revealed to Samuel a day before Saul came, saying, "Tomorrow about this time I will send you a man out of the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be a prince over my people Israel, that he may save my people out of the hand of the Philistines, for I have looked upon my people, because their cry is come to me."

In these two examples, God shows compassion when seeing Israel, God's people suffer. The Book of Esther offers

the only example where a person demonstrates this type of compassion.

In addition, the word עמי by itself is used primarily by God in reference to Israel.

Psalms 50:7

שמע עמי ואזכרנה ישראל ואעידנה בק אלהים
אלהיוק אני.

Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O
Israel, and I will testify against you:
I am God, your God.

Once again, we see an expression that is used elsewhere in the Bible with God, appear in Esther with a human agent.

13. Fear of פחד (in construct form)

In Esther 8:17, we find the expression פחד היהודים :

ובכל מדינה ומדינה ובכל עיר ועיר מקום אשר צוה המלך
ועתה מגיע שחור ושטון ליהודים משתדל יום טוב רבים מזה
הארץ מתהדדים כי נפל פחד היהודים עליהם.

And in every province and in every city, when the king's command and decree arrived, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many of the people of the land professed to be Jews, for the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them.

In Esther 9:3, we find a similar expression פחד מרדכי :

ובם שרי המדינות והאחשדרפנים והבאים ושם המלכה אשר
לחמך משמים את היהודים כי נפל פחד מרדכי עליהם.

Indeed, all the officials of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and the king's stewards, showed deference to the Jews, be-

cause the fear of Mordecai had fallen upon them.

These two expressions are unique, for **פחד** does not appear with any name other than God elsewhere in the Bible. The commonly used expression is

I Samuel 11:7 **פחד יהוה** :

וַיִּקַּח צִמְד בָּקָר וַיִּנְחֲמֵהוּ וַיִּשְׁלַח בְּכֶם גַּם וְשָׂרָאֵם בְּיַד הַחֲלָשִׁים
לְאַחֵר אֲשֶׁר אֵינָם יָצְאָ אַחֲרֵי שָׂאֹל וְאַחֵר שְׂמוּאֵל כִּי יֵצֵא
לְבָקְרוֹ וַיִּפֹּל פָּחַד יְהוָה עַל הָעָם וַיָּצְאוּ כָאֵשׁ אֶחָד.

And he took a yoke of oxen, and cut them up in pieces, and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, "Whoever comes not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen." And the fear of Yahweh fell on the people and they came out with one consent.

Psalms 36:2

לֹא־מַעַשׂ לִרְשָׁע בְּדָמָי לֵבִי אֵין פָּחַד אֱלֹהִים לְעֵינָיו.

Transgression speaks to the wicked within his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes.

Also in Isaiah 2:10, 19, 20 there is the expression:

מִפְּנֵי פָחַד יְהוָה וּמִהֲדָר גָּאֻן.

Because of the fear and majesty of Yahweh.

In Genesis 31:42, **פחד** is used in construct form with **יצחק** to mean God:

לֹא־יָדָעְתִּי אֶת אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִי אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם וּפָחַד יִצְחָק הֵיזְלִי כִּי עָנִי
כִּי־קָם שְׁלֵחַתִּי אֶת עֵינִי וְאֶת יָדַי כִּפִּי רָאִה אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאכֶל אֹמֶשׁ.

Were it not that the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the "Fear" of Isaac, had been with me, surely you would have sent me away now empty. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and he rebuked you last night.

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פֶּחַד "fear of ____" is yet another example of a Biblical expression which appears in the rest of the Bible with the name of God and in Esther with the names of people.

14. The Description of the Holiday of Purim

In Esther 9:20-23, the celebration of Purim is described:

וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹרְדֵכַי אֶת הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיְשַׁלַּח סְפָרִים אֶל כָּל
הַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל מִצְרַיִם הָאֶמֶלֶךְ אֲשׁוּרְכּוֹשׁ הַקְּדוּבִים וְהַרְחֹקִים.
עֲקָיִים עֲלִידִים לְחַיִּים עֲשִׂים אֶת יוֹם אֲרֻבַּס עֲשֶׂה לְחֻצֵּשׁ בְּזֶר
וְאֶת יוֹם חֲמִשֶּׁה עֲשֶׂה בּוֹ בְּכָל שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה. כִּי אִמִּים אֲשֶׁר נָתַן בָּהֶם
הַיְּהוּדִים מֵאִיְּבֵיהֶם וְהַחֲדָשׁ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָהֶם מִיָּגוֹן לְשִׂמְחָה וּמֵאֲבָד
לְיוֹם טוֹב לְעִשׂוֹת אֶתֶּם יְמֵי מִשְׁתֵּה וּשְׂמֵחָה וּמְעֻלָּה מְנִי אִישׁ
לְרֵעֵהוּ וּמִתְּנָה לְאֶבְיוֹנָיו. וְקִבֵּץ הַיְּהוּדִים אֶת אֲשֶׁר הִזְנוּ לְעִשְׂוֹ
וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר כָּתַב מֹרְדֵכַי אֵלֵיהֶם.

Mordecai recorded these events. And he sent dispatches to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Ahashuerus, near and far, charging them to observe the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar, every year, the same days on which the Jews enjoyed relief from their foes and the same month which had been transformed for them from one of grief and mourning to one of festive joy. They were to observe them as days of feasting and merry-making, and as an occasion for sending gifts to one another and presents to the poor. The Jews accordingly assumed as an obligation that which they had begun to practice and which Mordecai prescribed for them.

This is markedly different from other Biblical descriptions of holidays. Purim, unlike the other Biblical holidays, is not described as a festival of God.

Leviticus 23:4-8

אלה חודשי יהוה מקראי קדש אשר תקראו אצלם בחגגם. בחגג
הראשון בארבעה עשר לחודש בין הערביים פסח ליהוה. ובחמשה
עשר יום לחודש חג המצות ליהוה שבוע ימים מצה
תאכלו. ביום הראשון מקרא קדש יהיה לכם כע מלאכת עבודה
לא תעשו. והקרבנות אשר ליהוה שבוע ימים ביום השביעי מקרא
קדש כע מלאכת עבודה לא תעשו.

These are the feasts of Yahweh, holy gatherings,
which you shall proclaim in their seasons. On
the fourteenth day of the first month towards
evening is Yahweh's passover. And on the fifteenth
day of the same month is the feast of unleavened
bread. On the first day you shall have a holy
gathering, you shall do no servile work. But you
shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh for
seven days, on the seventh day is a holy gathering,
you shall do no servile work.

Exodus 34:22-3

וחג שבוע תעשה לך בכורי קציר חטים וזית חמשת תקלות השנה
שש פעמים בשנה וזאת כע זבולק אל פני האזון וזה אלהי ישראל.

And you shall observe the feast of weeks, of
the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the
feast of ingathering at the year's end. Three
times in the year shall all your males appear
before the Lord Yahweh, the God of Israel.

Leviticus 23:23-24

ויצבר יהוה אל משה לאמר. דבר אל בני ישראל לאמר לאחר חגג השבועי
באחד לחודש יהיה לכם שבועת זכרון תרועה מקרא קדש. כע מלאכת
עבודה לא תעשו והקרבנות אשר ליהוה.

And Yahweh spoke to Moses saying, "Speak to the
children of Israel, saying, 'In the seventh month,
on the first day of the month, shall you have a
sabbath, a memorial of blowing of horns, a holy
gathering. You shall do no servile work, but you
shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh.'"

Leviticus 23:26-32

ויצבר יהוה אל משה לאמר. אך בששור לחצש השביעי הנה יום
 הכפרים הוא מקרא קדש יהיה לכם ועניגם אל נפשותיכם והקרבנות
 אשר ליהוה. וכל מעאכה לא תעשו בשבט היום הנה כי יום
 כפרים הוא לכפר עליכם לפני יהוה אלהיכם. כי כל תפוש אשר
 לא תענה בשבט היום הנה ונכרתה מעמיה. וכל תפוש אשר תעשה
 כל מעאכה בשבט היום הנה והאבדת את תפוש הוא מקרא
 עוה. כל מעאכה לא תעשו חק עולם לצדתיכם בכל משבתיכם.
 שבת שבתן הוא לכם ועניגם אל נפשותיכם בתשעה לחצש בערב
 מדרב עד ערב תשבתו שבתכם.

And Yahweh spoke to Moses saying, "Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement, it shall be a holy gathering to you, and you shall afflict your souls and offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh. And you shall do no work on that very same day, for it is a day of atonement, to make atonement for you before Yahweh your God. For whatever person shall not be afflicted on that same day, he shall be cut off from his people. And whatever person does any work on that same day, the same person will I destroy from among his people. You shall do no manner of work, it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls, on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening shall you celebrate your sabbath."

Leviticus 23:33-34

ויצבר יהוה לאמר. דבר אל בני ישראל לאמר בחמשה
 עשר יום לחצש השביעי הנה חג הסוכה שבועת ימים ליהוה.

And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, 'saying, the fifteenth day of this month shall be the feast of booths for seven days to Yahweh.'"

Leviticus 23:36

שבועת ימים תקריבו אשר ליהוה ביום השמיני מקרא קדש

יהוה לכם והקרבנות אשר עולה עזרתו הוא כע מלאכה
עבד לא תעשו.

Seven days you shall offer an offering made by fire to Yahweh, it is a solemn assembly, and you shall do no servile work.

In contrast to Purim, the date and manner of festival observance for the above holy days (Passover, Shavuot, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret) are commanded by God. Purim is the only holiday mentioned in the entire Bible without even one reference to God.

15. Join With (עוה)

In the book of Esther, the word (עוה) (עוה) appears.

Esther 9:27

דיווח וקבעו היהודים עליהם ועל כחם ועל כל חלומם עליהם
ועל יוצרם עליהם עשים את שני היומים האלה בבתים
וכתובם בכל שנה ושנה.

The Jews undertook and irrevocably obligated themselves and their descendants and all who might join them, to observe these two days in the manner prescribed and at the proper time each year.

In all other instances of (עוה) in the Bible, the word is linked with God.

Isaiah 56:3

ואל יאמר בן הנכר הנעלה אל יהוה לאמר הבדע יבדעני יהוה
אדם עמו ואם יאמר חסדו כי אני עמך יבש.

Neither let the son of the stranger that has joined himself to Yahweh speak, saying, "Yahweh

shall surely separate me from God's people,"
neither let the eunuch say, "Behold, I am
a dry tree."

Isaiah 56:6

ובני הנכר הנלוים עם יהוה עשרת ולאדבה אשם יהוה
להיות לו עבדים כם שחר שבת מועדו ומצותיו בקרבו.

Also the sons of the stranger, that join them-
selves to Yahweh, to serve God, and to love
the name of Yahweh, to be God's servants every
one that keeps the sabbath, and does not pro-
fane it, and all that take hold of my covenant.

Only in the Book of Esther does נלוה mean "join with"
people and not God.

16. Jews יהודים

Excluding its repetitions in the Book of Esther, the
word (יהודים) Jew(s) appears in only four other books of the
Bible. Since it was only in the Exile that Israelites and
Hebrews were known as Jews, the reference in II Kings is to
the people of Judah, not to Jews, since the period of the Kings
was pre-exilic. The word appears approximately ten times in
each of the books of Jeremiah and Nehemia, and once in Zechariah.
"Jews" יהודים appears over forty times, however, in the Book of
Esther. I will present a sample of these instances:
Esther 2:5

איש יהודי היה בשושן הבירה ושמו מרדכי בן יאיר בן
שמאי בן קיש איש ימני.

In the fortress of Shushan lived a Jew by
the name of Mordecai, son of Jair son of
Shimei son of Kish, a Benjaminite

Esther 8:1

ביום ההוא נתן המלך אחשורוש לאסתר חתוכה את ביה חתן צב
היהודים ומרדכי בא עבד המלך כי הגיעה אסתר חתה הלא לה

That very day King Ahashuerus gave the property of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther. Mordecai presented himself to the king, for Esther had revealed how he was related to her.

In Zechariah 8:23, the Jews are spoken about as a God-fearing people:

כה אמר יהוה צבאות ביוםים ההוא אשר יתצדו עשרה אנשים
חכם לשון הגוים והתצדו בכנס איש יהודי לאחד נלך
עמכם כי שמתו אלהים עמכם.

Thus says Yahweh of hosts, "In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men out of all the languages of the nations shall take hold, and shall seize the shirt of him that is a Jew, saying, 'We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"

In both Jeremiah and Nehemiah, there are many references to Jewish ritual observances such as prayer and sacrifice and of the God-related practices of the Jews. When the Jews are discussed, they are spoken of as a religious group of people.

It is only in the Book of Esther that there is mention of the people called יהודים "Jews" but there is absolutely no reference to the beliefs or practices of that people, or to their relationship with God.

17. The Celebration of Purim

Esther 9:30-31 offers additional details about the celebration of Purim:

ושנה ספרים אצל כל היהודים אם שבץ וששלים ומאז

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חז"ל מלכא אחשוורוש דברי שלום ואמת לקיום את ימי הדברים
האלה בצמחיהם כאשר קים עליהם מרדכי היהודי ואסתר
המלכה ובאשר קימום על נפשם ועל צמחיהם וצמחיהם.

Dispatches were sent to all the Jews in the hundred and twenty seven provinces of the realm of Ahashuerus with an ordinance of "Equity and honesty." These days of Purim shall be observed at their proper time, as Mordecai the Jew, and now Queen Esther, has obligated them to do, and just as they have assumed for themselves and their descendents the obligation of the fasts with their lamentations.

This reference to שלום ואמת "Honesty and equity" as well as the reference צמחיהם וצמחיהם "Fasts with their lamentations" seem to be a reference to the fasts in Zechariah 8:19² which are commanded by God:

כה אמר יהוה צבאות: צום הרביעי וצום החמישי וצום השביעי
וצום העשירי יהיה לכם ימים לשמחה ולששון ולמנוחה וצום
ואמת ותלם אהבו.

Thus says Yahweh of Hosts: The fast of the fourth month, the fast of the fifth month, the fast of the seventh month, and the fast of the tenth month shall become occasions for joy and gladness, happy festivals for the House of Judah, but you must love honesty and equity.

This is an additional example of a reference in Esther to an expression in another book of the Bible. In the Zechariah quotation, God plays a prominent part, while in the Book of Esther, God is absent.

The seventeen expressions described above are found throughout the Bible. In all contexts, other than in the

Book of Esther, they are used in situations which in some manner are related to God and/or to religious observance. In Esther, however, these phrases are used in an apparently secular context, since God is not present at all in the Book of Esther.

It is critical to keep in mind the fact that the readers for whom Esther was originally written were quite familiar with the other books of the Bible. Therefore, when those readers examined an expression such as *נִסְתָּרָה* "relief and deliverance," they would immediately recognize it as an expression usually associated with God; they would be aware that in all other Biblical contexts, it is God who brings relief and deliverance. When those readers examined the Book of Esther, they immediately perceived that God was implied in the text through the use of these particular expressions. Though no one of these examples would be enough to accomplish this effect, the cumulative effect of all of these expressions would not have been lost on the ancient Jewish readers. They understood that this was the author's way of including God in the text without mentioning God's name.

Notes to Chapter 3

¹These items are mentioned in over twenty other places in the Book of Exodus.

²Ginsberg, H.L., The Five Megilloth and Jonah, p. 88

Chapter 4

The Genealogies of Mordecai and Haman

In the Book of Esther, Mordecai and Haman are given ancient genealogies. They are each linked to people who were engaged in battle in the Book of I Samuel.

In Esther 2:5, Mordecai is introduced as *מֹרְדֵכַי בֶּן יֵאִיר בֶּן שִׁמְעִי* "Mordecai, the son of Jair, son of Shimei son of Kish, a Benjaminite." In I Samuel 14:51, we are told, *וְדָשׁ אָבִי שָׁאוּל* "and Kish was the father of Saul." The author thus traces Mordecai's genealogy back to Kish, Saul's father.

In Esther 3:1, Haman is introduced as *חָמָן בֶּן חַמְדָּתָא אֲגָגִי* "Haman, son of Hammedata the Agagite." As we learn in I Samuel 15:8, Agag was the king of the Amalekites:

וַיִּבֶשׂ אֶת אֲגָג מֶלֶךְ עַמְלֵק חַי וְעַתָּה כֹּל הָעָם לִפְנֵי חֶרֶב.

And he (Saul) took Agag the King of Amalek alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword.

This connection between Mordecai and Saul, and Haman and Agag is crucial to an understanding of the religious implications of the Book of Esther. This connection demonstrates a continuation of a "holy war" between Israel and the Amalekites.

In I Samuel, the priest, tells Saul to carry out God's commandment to destroy the Amalekites. In relating the commandment to Saul, Samuel quotes God:

I Samuel 15:2-3

פָּקֹדֶת אֶת אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר לֹא עָשִׂיתָ

בדעל אומצרים ענד עך וזכור אה עמלק וזכור
אז כה אשר לו.

"I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek and utterly destroy all that they have."

The instruction to Saul seems to be for the purpose of fulfilling God's commandment to Moses in Exodus 17:14-16. This commandment was given after Amalek attacked Israel at Refidim.

כי אמר אלהים אל נזכר עמלק ומחג השמים. ויבן משה
מצבה ויקרא שמו יהוה נסי. ויאמר כי יז עס כס יה מלחמה
עליו בבעמלק מנצח נצח.

"That I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under the heaven. And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it 'The Lord is my banner' for he said. Because the Lord has sworn by his throne that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.

The conversation between Samuel and Saul in I Samuel 15 is therefore a continuation of the eternal war that God has declared against the descendents of Amalek in Exodus 17.

When Saul carries out Samuel's order, however, he fails to destroy all of the Amalekites. Saul kills all of the Amalekites except that he leaves Agag, the king of the Amalekites, alive.

ויבט אל אגג מלך עמלק חי ואז כה היום החרים
עליו חרב.

And he took Agag, the king of Amalek, alive,
and utterly destroyed all the people with the
edge of the sword.

In addition to sparing Agag, Saul's men also spare part of the plunder, I Samuel 15:9:

ויחלל שואו נחשם עם אגל ועם מיטב היצאון והבדר
והמשנים ועם הכרים ועם כם היצא ועם אלו המיוח
ובם חמלאכה נחפצה ונחם אתה המיוח.

But Saul and the people had pity on Agag, and on the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them, but everything that was of little value and weak, they destroyed utterly.

This is in direct contradiction of Samuel's orders in I Samuel 15:3

אתה ע"ך והיתר את שחקן והיחזקתם את כם אשר לו ולא
תחזקו עמ"ו והיתר מא"ש עד אשר תחזקו ועד יו"ק משור ועד שר חמ"ס ועד חמ"ק

Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not, but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.

The Book of Esther can be viewed as a continuation of the war between Israel and Amalek that was decreed in Exodus and continued in I Samuel. In Esther, however, there are two important differences.

As described above, Saul deviated from God's command with respect to the Amalekites in two ways: he allowed Agag to remain alive and he took the spoil of his war against Agag. Saul's punishment for disobeying God's commandment was the loss of his kingship.

I Samuel 15:23

כִּי חָטָאתָ דָּם מְרִירָה וְתִרְבִּים פֶּסֶד יוֹן מֵאֵת אֵל
צָבַר מֵרֶר וּמֵאֵסָה מִמֶּלֶךְ.

For rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft,
and stubbornness is like idolatry and terafim.
Because you have rejected the word of God, God
has rejected you from being king.

In Esther, the Jews do not repeat these mistakes.

Haman, the descendent of Agag, is killed, at the command of
the King.

Esther 7:10

וַיִּמְלֹךְ אֶת הָיָן עַל הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר הָבִין לְחִרְבֵּי מִמֶּנּוּ הַמֶּלֶךְ שֶׁבֶר.

So they impaled Haman on the stake which he had
put up for Mordecai, and the king's fury abated.

As if to reinforce the destruction of Haman's descendents,
Haman's ten sons are also slaughtered.

Esther 9:7-10

וְאֵל פֶּרְשַׁנְדָּתָא וְאֵל דַּלְפּוֹן וְאֵל אֶסְפָּתָא וְאֵל פּוֹרָתָא וְאֵל אֶרִידָא
וְאֵל אֶרִידָא וְאֵל פֶּרְשַׁנְדָּתָא וְאֵל אֶרִידָא וְאֵל אֶרִידָא וְאֵל אֶרִידָא
וְאֵל אֶרִידָא וְאֵל אֶרִידָא וְאֵל אֶרִידָא וְאֵל אֶרִידָא.

They also killed Parshandata, Dalphon, Aspata,
Porata, Adalia, Aridata, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai
and Vaizata, the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedata,
the foe of the Jews. But they did not lay hands
on the spoil.

In Esther, unlike in I Samuel, the Jews are expressly
granted permission to take the spoil of their enemies.

Esther 8:11

אֲשֶׁר נָתַן הַמֶּלֶךְ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר בָּכַד עִיר וְעַד עִירָהֶם וְשָׂמְרָם
עַל נַפְשָׁם לְיִשְׂרָאֵל עִירָהֶם וְשָׂמְרָם אֵל כֵּן חֵסֶם עִם וְאֶרֶץ
הַצִּבּוֹר אֶתָּה טָל וְנִשְׁמָה לְבָרֵךְ.

The king has permitted the Jews of every city to assemble and fight for their lives; if any people or province attacks them, they may destroy, massacre, and exterminate its armed force together with women and children, and to plunder their possessions.

Despite such explicit permission to take the booty, the Jews refrain. This was obviously an important issue for the author of Esther because this fact is repeated three times.

Esther 9:10

ובצק לא שלחו את ידם.

But they did not lay hands on the spoil.

Esther 9:15

ויהיו יהודים אשר בשושן למחרת יום ארבעה עשר אלול
אזרחי שושן ויהיו בשושן אלף וצדק לא שלחו את ידם.

And the Jews in Shushan mustered again on the fourteenth day of Adar and slew three hundred men in Shushan. But they did not lay hands on the spoil.

Esther 9:16

ושאר היהודים אשר בארץ המלך נקדו וסמרו את נפשם
ונתו מאביהם ויהיו בשושן חמשה ושלשים אלף
ובצק לא שלחו את ידם.

The rest of the Jews, those in the king's provinces, likewise mustered and fought for their lives. They disposed of their enemies, killing seventy five thousand of their foes; but they did not lay hands on the spoil.

By linking Mordecai and Haman to Saul and Agag, the author of the Book of Esther sets the stage for the continuation of that ancient "holy war" between Israel and Amalek. Thus, despite the absence of the mention of God in the Book of Esther, the fact that Mordecai and Haman are linked to a holy war commanded by God in the Book of Exodus suggests

religious overtones in Esther. The Jews in Esther, however, have learned from the mistakes of Saul. Whereas Saul refrained from killing the king of the Amalekites and took plunder, the Jews in Esther slaughter all of the Amalekites, including Haman's descendents, and they do not plunder the possessions of the Amalekites despite express permission to do so. It is ironic that the Jews of Persia, despite permission, carried out God's commandment concerning plunder more thoroughly than Saul, who presented himself as a fulfiller of God's commandments. In the religious context of I Samuel, the commandment was not carried out, while in the "secular" context of Esther, it was carried out.

Chapter 5

The Absence of God in the Book of Esther

As described above, God is not directly mentioned in the Book of Esther. Commentators offer several theories in order to explain God's absence from the book. Each of these analyses rests on the fundamental premise that the author of Esther deliberately omitted God's name from the book. These theories will be presented in chronological order.

Cassel¹ believes that God was absent from the Book of Esther for political reasons. He assumes that the book was written during the same period in which the events described occurred. In Persian culture, the king is representative of the deity. As a result, it is a very serious charge when Haman accuses the Jews of following their own laws rather than the King's laws (3:8), for if the Jews obey their own laws, they are acting in direct opposition to the King. Cassel then argues by analogy that if the author of Esther were to mention the God of Israel, the king/god of Persia would be offended, and would punish the Jews. It is for this reason, according to Cassel, that the book is written against Haman, rather than against the King. Deleting God from Esther is therefore a politically prudent act by the author. One problem with Cassel's analysis is that the Persian kings were in fact tolerant of different religions. The author would have no political reason, therefore, to be so secretive if the book were indeed written during the Persian period. It will be shown, however,

elsewhere in this thesis, that the book was written much after the Persian period.

Cassel points out God's hidden presence throughout the book. For example, fasting is generally connected with prayer, and both Mordecai and Esther fast. In addition, the idea that God protects Israel is alluded to in 6:13 when Zeresh, Haman's wife, says: "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall is of Jewish stock, you will not overcome him; you will fall before him to your ruin." Cassel interprets this as an awareness of the protection of God. Although Cassel's political analysis of the absence of God is unacceptable, his discussion of God's hidden presence in Esther is supported by the text, as will be shown elsewhere.

Paton² refers to Jehring (1722), Bullinger (1889), and Cumming (1907), all of whom believed that the author of Esther was religious and wanted to demonstrate that God, in a hidden way, was present in history. These three commentators base God's veiled presence on three manuscripts which contain acrostics of the tetragrammaton formed by enlarging the final or initial letters of consecutive words:

1:20 (read left to right)

וְיָאֵלֹהִים אֶת־מֶלֶךְ

5:4 (read right to left)

בִּזְמַן הַיּוֹם הַהוּא

5:13 (read left to right)

כִּי אֵינֶנּוּ שָׁרִי

7:7 (read right to left)

כִּי בִלְתִּי אֶת־הוּא

These orthographic games, however, only show attempts by later writers to insert God into the Book of Esther.

Paton also maintains that God's presence is implied in Esther in verses such as 4:3 and 4:17 where there are references to fasting and wailing which generally have religious associations, and 4:14, where Mordecai is certain that if help does not come from Esther, it will come from elsewhere. According to Paton, the use of *אֲנִי רֵאִי* "become Jews" in 8:17 and *וַיֵּצֵא* "joined the Jews" in 9:27 indicate the author's religious consciousness. Paton did at least address the right issue in trying to prove God's presence.

After discussing God's subtle presence in Esther, Paton must still explain why God is not mentioned directly in the book. Unlike Cassel, Paton does not argue that the author deleted God from the book because of the political ramifications in Persia, because God is mentioned frequently in Persian inscriptions. Paton suggests instead that the Book of Esther was written for the celebration of Purim, a holiday which is celebrated by drinking. In fact, Jews are supposed to drink on Purim until they are unable to distinguish between "Blessed is Mordecai" and "cursed is Haman" (Megilla 7b). In this drunken condition, argues Paton, it would be easy for Jews to inadvertently profane God's name. Therefore, in order to prevent such blasphemy from occurring, the author of Esther avoided this possibility entirely by simply omitting God's name from the book altogether.

Anderson³ agrees with Paton:

It seems plausible that because of the danger of blasphemy in connection with a festival when

considerable license was allowed, the author deliberately avoided religious references which in any way would lead to the profaning of the sanctities of Judaism.

The fact that Jews drink during the Passover Seder, however, did not cause God to be excluded from the Haggadah. It is possible that if God had been put into Esther, the observance of Purim would have become more reverent. This, in my opinion, disproves both Anderson and Paton.

Moore⁴ disagrees with Anderson (and by extension, with Paton, although Moore does not mention Paton specifically). He thinks that Anderson's explanation only accounts for the absence of God's name from the book. Anderson's theory does not explain the absence in Esther of other Jewish elements such as prayer, law or covenant. Moore can explain the absence of sacrifices because of the Persian setting, since sacrifices were only offered in Jerusalem. However, Moore points out that only the fasting, "a comparatively unimportant" religious element, is explicitly mentioned in Esther.

Moore believes that God's hand in history is presupposed in the fast of 4:16, for the fast is clearly an appeal for God's intervention. Moore argues that the reason that God is not mentioned in the Book of Esther, is that the book is Wisdom literature like Kohelet. According to Moore, this is the only explanation for the author's non-inclusion of any Jewish religious elements.

Talmon⁵ agrees that Esther is written like other Wisdom writing. The influence of Wisdom literature explains the absence in Esther of any references to divine intervention,

dietary laws, prayer or covenant.

Gordis⁶, in his commentary, also deals with the absence of God, Sabbath, festivals, Torah and dietary laws. Gordis, however, disagrees that these elements are absent because Esther is of the genre of Wisdom literature. He defines Wisdom literature as the use of human "intelligence and skill for achieving success and happiness in life." In this type of literature people, not God, are the prime movers and therefore reference to God can be deleted. In Biblical Wisdom literature, however, Gordis argues that God's presence is understood. God is not absent from any aspect of Biblical life. It is a fundamental concept in Biblical religion that God operates through human agents. Gordis' theory is supported by Kohelet and Job, Biblical examples of Wisdom literature where God does play an active role.

Gordis believes that the preservation of the Jews was considered a religious obligation by the author of Esther and by the people for whom the author wrote the book. "When composed, its readers had before them the teachings of the Torah and the Prophets. They understood that Israel must live in order to serve." By operating through human agents, God saves the Jews from destruction, without appearing to intervene in the events in Esther. Gordis' observation that when Esther was written, its readers were already familiar with other sections of the Bible, plays an important role in our analysis of the book. This fact is dealt with elsewhere in this thesis.

Fox⁷ believes that God's activities appear beneath the surface in the Book of Esther, and that they are evident in the pattern of human events. While God is not directly present in Esther, the way the events work out eventually convinces Fox that God played a part in them.

Berg⁸ believes that the absence of God in Esther is a reflection of God's "hiddenness" in history. Berg argues that the author believed that God was a hidden cause, which was working behind the surface and controlling human history. This causality governs the order and significance of events.

Berg interprets verses 4:13-4:14 as showing Mordecai's complete confidence that help will appear. In the story, Mordecai also believes (4:14) that it is not a coincidence that Esther has attained such a position of power. According to Berg, these are examples of God working in a hidden way.

Berg states, "The narrator mirrors the nature of history in his method of narration." In human history as well as in the Book of Esther, the order of human events is only partially discernable to humanity, according to Berg.

Berg also says that in addition to God's working in a hidden way in Esther, the book also demonstrates how people have to work to help themselves. The Jews share responsibility with God in the determination of their fate. In order to accentuate the Jews' role in the process, and to show that God controls history in a hidden manner, the author does not mention God, according to Berg. Thus, Berg believes that God's hiddenness in the world is linked with human responsibility

for what happens in history.

Berg's thesis can be taken a step further. While the Book of Esther mirrors the notion of God's hiddenness from humanity, this concept does not manifest itself by omitting God from the book, but rather by inserting God into the book in a hidden manner. Esther presents a religious view of the world in which God works in a hidden way. The author of Esther shows us that the events of history which seem to be humanly directed, actually are controlled by *אנוכי אלהים* "another place" (Esther 4:14). God acts, but in ways which are not visible to us.

Notes to Chapter 5

- ¹Cassel, Paulus, An Explanatory Commentary On Esther.
- ²Paton, Lewis B., A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther.
- ³Anderson, Bernhard W., "The Book of Esther."
- ⁴Moore, Carey A., Esther.
- ⁵Talmon, Shemaryahu, "Wisdom in the Book of Esther."
- ⁶Gordis, Robert, Megillat Esther.
- ⁷Fox, Michael, "The Structure of the Book of Esther."
- ⁸Berg, Sandra, The Book of Esther: Motifs, Themes and Structure.

Chapter 6

Dating the Book of Esther

When commentators discuss the date of authorship of the Book of Esther, two different dates are usually mentioned: the date of the composition of the original work (*terminus a quo*) and the date by which the book reached substantially the form in which we read it today (*terminus ad quem*).

An analysis of the latter date, the *terminus ad quem*, offers insights to the issues discussed in this thesis, namely the possible reasons for the absence of God in the Book of Esther.

Moore¹ believes that Esther reached its final form in the Persian period (539-332 B.C.E.), based solely upon Esther's positive attitude toward a Gentile king. He contrasts this attitude with the visions contained in the Book of Daniel which reflect the negative attitudes of Jews of the Maccabean Period toward non-Jews. Contrary to Moore's proposition, however, there is more evidence tying the Book of Esther to the Maccabean Period than to the Persian Period.

According to Moore, Stiehl dates the final version of Esther between 165 and 140 B.C.E. based on linguistic evidence: the appearance of Elamite and Persian names in the Book of Esther. Stiehl says that these names reflect the political and cultural situation of the time of Antiochus IV (175-163 B.C.E.) which continued until 140 B.C.E., during which there

was a resurgence of Elamite. Moore, however, dismisses this evidence by arguing that the author of Esther could simply have taken the Elamite names from an early Jewish source. Moore's disagreement with Stiehl seems well-founded since the appearance of these names does not constitute conclusive evidence.

Berg² cites the fact that it was Alexander who introduced prostration as court policy as a part of his Hellenization policy. The fact that prostration is contained in the Book of Esther, according to Berg, may indicate an early Hellenistic date for the book. As further evidence of a Hellenistic dating, Berg argues that the appeal to the chronicles of Media and Persia in Esther 10:2 is similar to the rhetoric of Hellenistic apologia, in which an appeal was made to an accepted authority in order to verify the validity of an argument. However, Berg fails to mention the fact that similar appeals are commonly found throughout the Book of Kings, such as in I Kings 11:41:

וְהַיְדֵּבָר שֶׁלֹּא יָדָע וְכֵן אֵשֶׁר יָדָע וְכֵן אֵשֶׁר יָדָע וְכֵן אֵשֶׁר יָדָע
וְכֵן אֵשֶׁר יָדָע וְכֵן אֵשֶׁר יָדָע וְכֵן אֵשֶׁר יָדָע

And the rest of the acts of Solomon's reign
and all his actions and his wisdom are recorded
in the book of the Annals of Solomon.

The appearance of similar appeals in the Books of Kings therefore discredits any special relationship between Esther and the Hellenistic apologia.

Paton³ concludes that the Book of Esther was written during the period beginning in 135 B.C.E. when the Jews attained their independence. His theory of dating the book at a later

period seems well-supported by the text and is the most credible of the analyses. Paton focuses on the language where the author of Esther refers to Ahashuerus as though he had lived long ago, as evidence that the book was written after the Persian period. He also supports this time frame by the "halo of romance"⁴ with which the author describes the Persian period, which also indicates that the Persian empire had long ended. Since the Jews in Esther are "scattered and dispersed," the author displays a knowledge of the Diaspora of the Greek period. Ahashuerus' edict against the Jews also demonstrates the author's awareness of Antiochus' desire to destroy the Jewish religion, according to Paton.

Paton sees Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman as a reflection of the Jews' feelings of independence. Paton also bases his theory on the fact that the author emphasizes national pride rather than religious zeal, again reflecting the Jews' post-135 B.C.E. independence.

I believe that another reference to the Hellenistic Period in the Book of Esther is the fact that Mordecai and Esther are not presented as religiously observant Jews. In the Hellenistic Period, Jews were "hellenized" and failed to observe the Jewish traditions. The Hellenistic period was also a time in which the Jews were accused of following their own laws, as they were in Esther, rather than the laws of their rulers.

The Book of Esther seems to emerge from a milieu

similar to that found in I Maccabees, a book that was written by an eyewitness to the period depicted (175-135 B.C.E.).

There are similarities between Esther and I Maccabees which lead to a later dating of Esther. Esther is afraid that she will be killed for approaching the King without being summoned (4:11); in I Maccabees 1:50, we are told that anyone who disobeys the king is killed. In Esther, a fear of Mordecai and of the Jews manifests itself (8:17, 9:3); in I Maccabees 3:6 and 3:25 there is a similar fear of Judas on the part of his enemies. In Esther, Ahashuerus claims to have executed Haman for plotting against the Jews (7:7); in I Maccabees 6:11-6:17, Antiochus dies because of his actions against the Jews. In Esther, the King commanded Haman to clothe Mordecai in royal clothes and parade him throughout the city (6:7-11); in I Maccabees 10:62-10:64, the king clothes Jonathan in purple and when those who despise Jonathan see how he was honored, they flee.

These examples demonstrate some of the similarities between the two books. While a more extensive comparison may be undertaken, for our purposes there are enough similarities to reach the conclusion that Esther and I Maccabees were written during approximately the same time period.

In addition, the establishment of holidays in celebration of victories by rulers is a Hellenistic custom. In Esther 9:20-23, Mordecai established the holiday of Purim. In I Maccabees 4:59, Chanukah is also decreed by people, not by God:

And Judas and his brothers and all the congregation of Israel decreed that the days of the rededication of the altar should be observed at their season, every year, for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth of the month of Kislev, with gladness and joy.

The strongest evidence which supports a post-165 B.C.E. dating of the Book of Esther is the concept of the irrevocability of Persian laws. This shows the Book of Esther's dependence on the Book of Daniel. Twice in Esther we see references to the fact that the King's edicts may not be revoked.

Esther 1:19:

אם עז המלך טוב יבא דבר מלכותי ויכתב בזאת ביום
ומה' ולא ידעור אשר לא תבא ושתי לפני המלך אטורוש ומלכותה
יתן המלך לראות הטובה ממנה.

It it please your majesty, let a royal edict be issued by you, and let it be written into the laws of Persia and Media, so that it cannot be abrogated, that Vashti shall never enter the presence of King Ahashuerus. And let your majesty bestow her royal state upon another who is more worthy than she.

And again in 8:8:

ואתם כתבו עז היהודים בטוב בעיניכם בשם המלך ונתתם
בטבעת המלך כי כתב אשר נכתב בשם המלך ונתתם
בטבעת המלך אין להשיב.

And you may further write with regard to the Jews as you see fit. (Write it) in the king's name and seal it with the king's signet, for an edict that has been written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet may not be revoked.

According to the Book of Esther, a well-known law seems to exist in Persia that once a king promulgates a law, such law cannot be revoked. This tradition is not recognized or

depicted outside of the Bible⁶, but it is referred to elsewhere in the Bible. It is also seen in the Book of Daniel 6:16:

באצין גברא אלך יהאשם עס מלכא ואחרין מלכא צע
מלכא צי פת למצי' ופרס צי כס אסר וקיים צי מלכא
יהאשם עס למשנה.

Then those men came thronging in to the king and said to the king, "Know O King, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that any ban that the king issues under sanction of oath is unalterable."

It appears that the author of Esther borrowed this tradition from the Book of Daniel.⁷ It does not appear to be a genuine Persian or Hellenistic custom but rather seems to have been invented for the Book of Daniel where it is an integral part of the plot. This legal technicality is the only way in which Daniel's foes can convince the King to take action against him. The author of Esther borrows this custom to add color to the story. We find further evidence of Esther's dependence on Daniel based on the fact that the authors of both Daniel and Esther mention Media and Persia together as if they are one political unit, which is not an historical fact.

The Book of Daniel is dated at no earlier than 165 B.C.E. If, in fact, the author of Esther borrowed from Daniel, this offers further evidence for a post-165 B.C. date for the Book of Esther.

The evidence for a post-165 B.C.E. dating of the Book of Esther is more compelling than for any other period. This dating is supported both by the text and by the historical

data currently available to us. The similarities between Esther and I Maccabees, the borrowing of material from the Book of Daniel, and our knowledge of the Jews during the Hellenistic Period, strongly support a dating of the Book of Esther after 165 B.C.E.

Notes to Chapter 6

¹Moore, Carey A., Esther.

²Berg, Sandra, The Book of Esther: Motifs, Themes and Structure.

³Paton, Lewis B., A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Grintz, Yehoshua M., "First Book of Maccabees."

⁶Moore.

⁷Baumgarten, Albert I., "Scroll of Esther."

Chapter 7

Conclusions

The main objective of this thesis was to prove that the Book of Esther is neither a secular work nor a fanciful story as is often believed. The book is, indeed, a religious document embodied in a carefully woven narrative. While it is true that the name of God does not appear in Esther, this does not mean that God is absent from the book. The author actually inserts God into the Book of Esther by using expressions which elsewhere in the Bible appear in religious contexts. Through the use of these expressions, the author causes the reader to insert God into the text.

The genealogies of Mordecai and Haman add to the religious atmosphere of Esther. Linking Mordecai and Haman with ancestors such as Saul and Agag, the author conveys the message that the war between Mordecai and Haman is a continuation of the divinely prescribed war which occurs in I Samuel 15, and originated in Exodus 17.

Through the use of language and genealogy, the author of Esther converts a superficially secular text into a religious work. The author shows us a religious view of the world in which God works in a hidden way. According to the view of God presented by the author of Esther, God acts in history in a manner that is not visible to us. In this same way, God acts in a hidden way in the Book of Esther.

Since connections between the Book of Esther and other Jewish literature from the Hellenistic period have been established by this thesis, the dating of the Book of Esther may be tied to a post-165 B.C.E. period. The text becomes more credible as a narrative influenced by the Hellenistic period.

This thesis has also demonstrated that the Book of Esther must be taken seriously as a piece of religious literature. The fact that Esther's background remains a secret until the end of the story heightens the development of the plot. Although based on a superficial reading of Esther, it would seem easy to dismiss that aspect of the story as unbelievable, a careful reading of the book discloses that either the characters did not possess enough information to realize that Esther was Jewish, or in the case of her maidens and eunuchs they were obligated by their positions not to disclose Esther's background.

Very little study has been done of the religious motifs in the Book of Esther, because it is not taken as seriously as other Jewish books. By establishing Esther as a religious book and as a carefully drafted narrative, it is a goal of this thesis to encourage further academic work in the Book of Esther.

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