

Esther 3

- Set in during reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes I), who ruled Persia from 486-465
- Susa, made capital of Persian Empire by Cambyses II (d. 522 B.C.) continually inhabited since 4200 B.C., settled since 7000 B.C.

The Feasts of Xerxes (1.1-2.18)

1. The Royal Banquets (1.1-9)

2. A Queen Puts Her Foot Down and Pays the Price (1.10-22)

2.1-18: Esther Becomes Queen

2 virgin – ‘a young woman of marriageable age’, assumed to be a physical virgin

5 ‘Jewish man’, a member of the expatriate Jewish community dispersed throughout the Persian Empire; ‘Mordecai, son of Jair, . . . a Benjaminite’; name derived from the Babylonian Marduk; from the line of Kish connects him to King Saul, the enemy of Agag and the Amalekites (Haman)

6 lit. ‘with the exiles who were with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had exiled’ (Jer. 24.1; 27.20; 1 Chron. 3.16); 597 B.C.; of a noble or prominent family

7 lit. ‘fair of figure and lovely of appearance’; Hadassa – ‘myrtle’; Esther, from Persian *stara*, ‘star’

What is the relationship between Mordecai and Esther?

8-9 How does Hegai treat Esther? What is happening with/to her? Did she volunteer for this?

12-14 The King and the Candidates: ‘to go to’ – in the OT, used at times as a euphemism for sexual intercourse (Gen. 16.2; 29.21, 23; 2 Sam. 16.21-22; Ruth 4.13; 2 Samuel 11.4); told with great reserve

Extravagant hyperbole! Like the description of the king’s party, this is ‘biting satire on the silly artificiality and frivolous extravagance of the Persian court’ (Clines 289).

What does Esther do differently than the other candidates? What does this say about her?

14 ‘he took pleasure in her’ is deleted in LXX.

16 ‘to his royal quarters’ is deleted in LXX

‘the 10th month, the month of Tebeth’ – the post-exilic community adopted the lunar calendar; Tebeth, corresponds to December-January; four years since Vashti’s removal

2.19-23: Mordecai Uncovers a Plot

‘the king’s gate’ – In the 1970s, French archaeologists uncovered a 13,000 foot gate 90 yards from the palace

‘sitting at the king’s gate’- likely means ‘to hold an office in the palace administration’

23 LXX – ‘to hang on a wood’, refers to crucifixion

What is the relationship between Mordecai and Esther now that she is queen?

What might be the importance of this passage (2.19-23)?

3.1-15: The Greatest Threat: Genocide

3.1-6: Haman’s Decision to Exterminate the Jews

Haman is an Agagite (see 2.5)

Genesis 36.12; Exodus 17.8f; 1 Samuel 15

‘Mordecai would not bow down . . .’ – why? Midrashic commentaries – Haman claimed divinity

Jewish obeisance to kings (1 Sam. 24.8; Genesis 23.7)

6 the second sentence is missing in the LXX

3.7-11: Haman Gains the King’s Permission to Execute His Extermination

7 *pur* is an Akkadian (Old Persian) word for ‘lot’, from *pur kararu* – ‘to cast a lot’. The casting of lots among the Persians was a known practice (Herodotus 3.128; Xenophon *Cyropaedeia* 1.6.46)

8a lit. ‘one people scattered and isolated (from other peoples)/unassimilated’

9 a primary medium of exchange in the eastern Achaemenid empire was silver, usually in the form of bars. The weight of a Babylonian talent used after the reform of Darius I is 66.67 pounds (Bivar, “Achaemenid Coins,” 2.612-13). Therefore this payment is 333 tons of silver!! The total annual revenue of the Persian Empire in that era was 10.920 talents. This is likely extravagant hyperbole.

10 signet – a seal on a ring used to mark official documents

11 lit. ‘the silver is given to you’. Who is paying whom? See 4.7 (and 7.4).

3.12-15: Haman Orders the Extermination of the Jews

Satrap, governors, and rulers – intended to be inclusive of all the authorities in the Persian Empire

15 what is the response in Susa to the edict?