

THE BOOK OF ESTHER

By

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USUALLY, I HAVE TALKED TO YOU ABOUT THE THINGS that belong in your Bible, but which didn't get there because the translators changed them or left them out. Now I am going to reverse that: I am going to talk to you about something they left in your Bible which doesn't belong there: and that is the Book of Esther.

Those of you who have read it have been puzzled by it, I know; it is a very curious thing to find in the Bible. In the entire Book of Esther, it not only does not mention the name of God once, it doesn't even use the mere title, God, once. It never mentions prayer to God for help or thanksgiving to God for deliverance. It is completely and brutally materialistic story of murder and robbery and how did that get in your Bible?

Well, let us look at this a bit. First of all, let us summarize what it says in the Book of Esther. The scene is laid in the Persian Empire, after the overthrow of Babylon by the Medo-Persian Empire: Persia swallowed up Media and it became just the Persian Empire.

It opens with the statement that Ahasuerus gave a six month long feast, or more properly a debauch, for his nobles. Now, Ahasuerus is not the name of any person; literally, it means the mighty one, and in English usage it would correspond to "his majesty." You could apply it to any king of any kingdom in all world history, and it would apply as well to one as to another.

There has been considerable speculation as to which Persian king it was talking about, and there is nothing whatsoever in either the Book of Esther or history, to guide them, but judging by the approximate time it was supposed to have occurred, some have guessed that this Persian king might have been Xerxes. I have even seen in some modern translations where they put in the name Xerxes, which is downright forgery and

falsification because, in any of the original versions of the Book of Esther, it doesn't name anybody. All the known history of Xerxes' reign proves that the events of the Book of Esther did not take place during his reign.

So anyway, this un-named king gave a six month long feast for his nobles, and it mentions how plentiful the wine supply was, and at the end of a six month debauch for the nobles, he gave a lesser party of one week for the less important people who worked at the palace.

While drunk, he commanded that his queen, Vashti, be brought out and shown to the people, that they could see her beauty and if you think that meant Vashti being brought out dressed in royal robes, it didn't. She was to be brought out naked, so they could see her physical beauty.

Well, she, being a dignified person, refused to do this. So the drunken king called a council of some seven or eight of his drunken nobles to decide what should be done to punish a queen who refused to do what her husband told her to do. And, by the way, you cannot find a Persian name among all these nobles; they are all Semitic and Babylonian names. These noblemen said, "Well, this is more serious than you realize: it is not only that she defied you, but if you let her get away with this, then our wives will also refuse to obey us, and every husband in the kingdom is going to have trouble making his wife obey." So they said, "Depose her as queen: fire her; get another queen in her place."

They decided that that sounded like the best thing for drunken people to decide, so they went ahead with that decision, and he deposed her. That in substance is chapter one of the Book of Esther.

So the king, according to the book, had all the most beautiful virgins of the kingdom brought in and put in his harem, and they were to be there a year before he inspected any of them, to see if any of them was sufficiently attractive to become the queen. During that time, if one was too fat, they could put her on a diet and slim her down; if she was too thin, they could feed her well and build her up - so that whenever she got to see the king, she was in her most attractive condition.

The story goes on to say that one Mordecai, a Jew who lived at the king's palace, had brought up his cousin as, ostensibly, his daughter. In the English translation, they give her name as Esther; in the original, it gave her name as Hadassah. Have you read in the society columns of your newspapers about the Jewish women's society of Hadassah doing this and that? Well, that is the Hebrew equivalent of what is called Esther in your Bible.

When the king was having all the most beautiful virgins brought into his harem, Esther or Hadassah was among them, and she was kept there in the king's harem for a year before she got to see this king. Now during all this time, although this was an oriental country with oriental customs, Mordecai got to go into the harem every day to talk with Esther - according to the book.

Mordecai was well known as a Jew. Esther was known to have been raised as his daughter; and every day during the year she was in the king's harem, this Jew, supposedly her father, actually her uncle, called there to talk with her, and yet nobody suspected that she was a Jewess.

In the meantime, Mordecai discovered that some people were conspiring to murder the king, to assassinate him. So he went to the harem and told Esther about this. Now here again you get another curious thing brought in here. According to the book, even the queen herself could not send any message to the king, no matter how important; she would have been killed if she had done so. She had to wait until such times as the king chose to send for her; and then, if he said, you may speak, she could say, well, can I tell you something? And if he said, yes, she could go ahead; otherwise they would kill her - according to the Book of Esther.

During the year she was in the harem, Esther, knowing about the plot to murder the king, had to keep silent about it. Eventually the king chose her as queen, and then she got an opportunity to tell him about the assassination plot, and so he had the conspirators hanged. But remember now, the king knew of this, because he is the one who ordered the hanging of the conspirators, and he ordered the official record to be made that Mordecai

was the one who had given the information that enabled him to hang the conspirators before they could get around to assassinating him.

The book does not explain why they were so negligent in letting it drift almost a year before Esther got a chance to warn the king, but, anyway, they hadn't "bumped him off" in that time. It says that one Haman had been made prime minister above all the princes. So Haman became prime minister. Now he was a very wealthy man, and it gives you a hint of how this came about. It says, all year long "they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman from day to day, and month to month..." casting lots; in other words, dice. This was the early progenitor of Las Vegas. And, since in all gambling games the odds are weighted in favour of the house, and quite often helped along a little bit by sundry scientific methods, Haman became very, very wealthy, in addition to being second in power only to the king, in the kingdom.

Now Mordecai the Jew refused to bow to Haman, which enraged Haman greatly. This was an insult to his dignity, so he began plotting revenge. He went to the king and told the king that the Jews were a people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of the kingdom - and it said the kingdom was divided into 127 provinces. And here were these wicked Jews scattered throughout the kingdom.

So Haman offered to pay the king ten thousand talents of silver, if the king would grant him the privilege of massacring the Jews and stealing whatever property they might have. A talent was 65 pounds in weight. So 65 times 10,000 would be 650,000 pounds of silver, which worked out as roughly equal to about 20 million dollars; and then, when you translate that into the greater purchasing power of money in that day, I wouldn't be, surprised if it would be the equivalent of offering the king 20 billion dollars in terms of today's money values, for the privilege of killing off the Jews and taking their property.

Contrary to the actions of any oriental monarch that I have ever read about, the king turned down the offer and said, "O, be my guest; do it free of charge." He wouldn't accept this 20 million dollars. He said, "Just go ahead and kill them."

So the king issued an edict which he ordered published in all the provinces of the kingdom, and he ordered it translated from the Persian into whatever was the most common language spoken in each province, stating that at a time to come, on the 13th day of the month Adar, that the people should kill the Jews and take their property. Now, if anybody was still in doubt that Mordecai was a Jew, all doubt was now dispensed with.

Mordecai went into public mourning, fasting and wearing sackcloth, as did the rest of the Jews when they heard that they were going to be slaughtered. Now the book never says that any one of them prayed to be delivered from this massacre; they simply put on sackcloth and fasted, in mourning against their coming massacre.

Then Mordecai sent word to Esther, who by this time was queen, that unless she could get the king to change this edict, that she like the other Jews would be killed, because she was a Jewess too. So she agreed she would try to persuade the king to change his mind.

The new queen, Esther, known by all who knew her as having been raised as the daughter of the Jew Mordecai, now doubly advertised her Jewishness by also dressing in sackcloth and fasting and mourning, and compelling all her maidservants to do likewise. Unless any of the people of the kingdom were in a state of total unconsciousness, how they could have avoided knowing that she and Mordecai were Jews, is not explained.

So Esther decided how to do this, how she would change the king's mind. She gave to great banquets some little time apart, and she had the king and Haman invited to attend these two banquets, which they did. At both of these, the first one as well as the second, the king was so well pleased that he told Esther, "I will give you anything whatever you will ask." Did she ask, well, don't massacre the Jews? No, not a word; not until the second one, and she wasn't even sure that he would be in a good mood when he came to the second – but she let it go until the second banquet.

Now between these two banquets, Mordecai again insults and angers Haman still more, so Haman is in a furious rage. Remember that he has already gotten authority from the king to kill every Jew in the kingdom.

Not only is he second in command of the whole kingdom, and therefore able to do it on his own, but he has even gotten the specific decree from the king, published as official law - and he knows that Mordecai is a Jew. But with all this fuming with rage he doesn't do a thing about it. But after having been authorized to kill all the Jews, some day or other he is going to ask the king to have Mordecai hanged; and, in anticipation of it, he builds a big high gallows on which Mordecai can be hanged - he doesn't wait until he has asked the king, to do that.

The book says that somebody reminds the king that Mordecai was the man who reported the assassination plot and saved the king's life, and no reward has ever been given him for this. So the king decides. Yes, there should be a reward for Mordecai. So Haman the prime minister comes in about that time and the king says, "Haman; what should be done for the man whom the king desires especially to honour?" Haman says to himself, "Well, that must be me; who else could it be?"

So Haman says, "Why, the thing to do is dress him in royal robes, have him ride upon your own horse, bring him through the streets, parade him before the people with heralds there blowing trumpets and telling the people, This is the man the king delights to honour."

Then the king says, "Well, that sounds like a good idea. Haman, you do that for Mordecai."

Well, that rather stuns Haman; he has waited too long to get Mordecai put away. So he goes home to consult with his wife, and his wife says, "if (note this now), if Mordecai is a Jew, you are certain to fall before him."

How anybody could have had any question about whether Mordecai was a Jew or not, is not explained, but it is still apparently in doubt in everybody's mind. But at this second banquet, Haman rather misbehaves himself, incurs the king's wrath, and Esther now reveals to the king, what everybody in all of Persia must have known by that time, that she is a Jewess, and she says, "The official proclamation (the king's edict) has gone out, to kill all the Jews in the kingdom."

You remember how that came about. There was a personal discussion between Haman and the king: Haman offered a bribe equal to 20 million dollars for, the privilege of killing all the Jews and taking their property, and the king thought it was such a good idea he wouldn't even take any payment, and the king himself issued the edict that it should be done. But now, when Esther tells him that the edict has gone out, that on the 13th day of Adar, which is not yet come, the Jews are to be killed, the king is astonished to hear that any of this has happened; he doesn't know anything about it. Well, he orders Haman to be hanged, and Haman is hanged on the big high gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

Then the king tells Esther that he will set aside this decree, and he says, "You write a new decree: anything, whatever that you want, and seal it with my seal, so it is official - anything you want, send it out."

Now you remember, this was the same Medo-Persian, empire which came in and conquered Babylon, and you remember, in the early days of it, the prophet Daniel was still alive in Babylon. And you should also know that everything which archaeologists have discovered, that has any bearing on the events in the Book of Daniel, has consistently confirmed the book of Daniel as truthful. And Jesus Christ himself spoke of him as "Daniel the prophet," so I think we can accept as true what is in the Book of Daniel.

Some of the pagans in Babylon wanted to get rid of Daniel, so they went to this Persian king and said, "We would like you to make a decree that, for a month to come, any man who offers any prayer to any god except you, oh King, shall be killed." Well, that flattered the king. All the people would have to pray to him as god so he said, "Fine, I will do it," and he made the decree.

So the pagans watched Daniel for a few days and they caught him praying to Yahweh God. Then they went back to the king and said, "Aha, you remember that decree you made?"

"Yes."

Well, we have caught this fellow Daniel praying to a different god; so, under the law, he has to be killed ---- thrown to the lions."

It says that the king liked Daniel very much, and he tried to find some way to get around this, and relieve Daniel of the penalty. But the pagans reminded the king that the law of the Medes and Persians could not be altered. Now it doesn't mean that they couldn't ever make a new law, but what it meant was, that so far as the law which had been passed, it could not be altered retroactively. Then the king, squirming around and trying to get out of it, found he couldn't. So you remember he had Daniel thrown into the lion's den and only the help of God got Daniel out again.

But when Esther asks the king to set aside the law that was made, he does so and tells her to write any kind of a decree she wants, sign it with his seal and make it official - changing the law of the Medes and Persians. So she wrote a new decree which says that the Jews are hereby authorized and commanded.... to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to, take the spoil of them for a prey" (Esther 8: 11).

Well, that part of the, Book of Esther is certainly authentic, so far as it reveals Jewish character. You remember, as soon as the Jews came to power in Russia they began murdering the Christians including the women and the children. So the Book of Esther goes on to say many of the people of the land became Jews, for fear of the Jews. "And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them" (Esther 9: 3) - because Mordecai had been appointed prime minister now, in place of Haman.

In due time the 13th day of the month Adar arrived and the Jews began a wholesale massacre of the Persians, who, for some reason or other, put up no resistance. Not only out in the various towns of the province, but in the king's palace itself, the Jews came in, armed with swords, and raged through the corridors and rooms of the palace, butchering the king's servants in the king's own palace. And the first day, in the palace alone, they slaughtered 500 of the king's officers and servants in his palace.

So at the end of this first day, the king finds out that all this commotion had gone on in the palace and 500 of his own officers and servants had been killed, and he expresses his delight, how fine this was, and asks Esther, "Well, how is the slaughter going out in the provinces?"

She tells him, "Fine; blood is flowing in rivers."

"Well, what else would you like?"

Then she said, "I would like to have another day of slaughter ordered, the 14th of Adar, tomorrow."

"Fine: that is the way it is to be."

So on the 14th day of Adar, the Jews massacred 300 more of the king's officers and servants, in his own palace; that is 800 of his staff who have been slaughtered in his own palace. And they slaughtered other people throughout the kingdom to the number of at least 75 thousand people that the Jews have slaughtered and stolen all their property. So the book says that the 14th day of Adar was made the feast of Purim.

Suppose you read that in a magazine, suppose your ten year old child read it in a magazine, do any of you have a child so feeble minded that he could believe there was some element of truth in this? Even if he didn't know ancient history, even if he didn't know oriental. customs, could he be duped by anything as absurd as this? And yet you are told in your churches to believe this, because it got in your Bible by a process I am going to tell you about.

Because of the time it was written and because of the circumstances of its origin and because of the many discrepancies in it, such as I have mentioned, this book was not accepted among the Jews for somewhere around two-and-a-half to three centuries. When it was written cannot be fixed with exactness. It is found in a copy of the Septuagint; that is the translation of the Old Testament into Greek which was begun, roughly, around 300 B.C. in Alexandria. And it is found in a copy of the Septuagint which cannot be dated earlier than about 160 B.C. But all through

the rest of the B.C. period, better than a century and a half, and for practically the first century A.D., no Jew would accept this fable as being inspired scripture. It was a well known work of fiction. As I said, nowhere in it, does it mention God; nowhere does it speak of prayer for deliverance or prayer of thanksgiving.

At a later time-oh, the book had been in existence two centuries, at least - some of the Alexandrian Jews wrote what you will find in some copies: a part that is not in most of our Bibles. They wrote a last few paragraphs, telling how the Jews had offered prayers of thanksgiving to God for their deliverance, and for, the loot they stole. Now do you think that even the Jews would have dared to add another chapter to Isaiah or Jeremiah? No. Remember that all through this period the scribes were so careful in copying the manuscripts of the Old Testament, on every line they counted the number of words and then they counted the number of letters on that line. And when they made a new copy, they checked it: did it have so many words containing so many letters on that line. They did this to make sure that there would not be inadvertent errors in the copying. But here they add what you might say is practically a last chapter to the Book of Esther, showing that the Jews themselves did not regard it at that time as being holy scripture at all.

At any rate, the thing went on until about the end of the first century A.D. Now you remember the Jewish rascality became so intolerable that the Romans couldn't put up with it any longer, and the Roman, general in charge of Syria and Palestine marched with his armies to capture Jerusalem. And of course the Jews shut the gates against him; and so he threw his army around the city, in a siege ring, but then the emperor at Rome died. And who was to be his successor? His own army said, "You are, the best qualified for emperor, and if necessary we the army will make you emperor." So he dropped the siege of Jerusalem and hurried home and he was made emperor

His son Titus resumed the siege of Jerusalem in the year 69 A.D. The siege lasted about a year, and in A.D. 70 the Romans captured Jerusalem. You will find this all written up in great length of course in Josephus' history, "The Antiquities of the Jews" and "The Wars of the Jews." When

the Roman armies came in, of course the people fled from the country and all the smaller cities that couldn't be defended, into Jerusalem, which had massive fortifications and could possibly be defended. So you might say that all the Jews in Palestine were cooped up in Jerusalem. During the siege they engaged in savage fighting among themselves; more of them were killed in their own fighting; in Jerusalem, than were killed by the Romans. But their total losses, from their own internal fighting; from battle losses against the Romans, from famine, and from pestilence, were about a million. The rest of them, were captured by the Romans.

The Romans sold some of these Jews for slaves; they couldn't get much of a bid for them, because who would pay good money for a Jew slave? Did you ever get good honest work out of a Jew? The Romans, drove out the rest of them, drove them out of Palestine, and forbade them to return under penalty of death. And the great bulk of them moved on north into the huge city that was then known as Byzantium, which later became Constantinople. Here was a huge city with very well established commercial institutions. So here was a place where the Jews, instead of working, could go into business and make money; and you know, "beezness is beezness."

After the fall of Rome, after the Jews were driven out, some of the Jewish rabbis began saying, "Well, this Book of Esther which talks about Jews murdering thousands of people, and stealing all their property, this is our kind of scripture." And you may say that pretty close to 100 A.D. is the first time that any Jew started taking the Book of Esther seriously.

In the Talmud you will find that Rabbi Simeon Ben Lachish, who lived about 300 A.D., says, "The Book of Esther ranks next to the Law in holiness and Importance."

And their great rabbi Maimonides, who lived during the Middle Ages, said this: "Although the prophets will pass away when Messiah comes, the Book of Esther and the Law will remain."

If you look up the Book of Esther in the Jewish Encyclopaedia, you will find they do not take it seriously, and I quote word-for-word from the

Jewish Encyclopaedia: "The Jews' well known skill in transforming and enriching traditional narratives was applied to the Book of Esther."

Now let us see what we can find out, when we analyse this. First of all, you remember the name which has been anglicised into Esther was Hadassah. Where does it come from? It is the Babylonian Hadashatu, literally the bride, which was the name of a Babylonian pagan goddess.

No doubt you all remember that Ishtar was the Babylonian goddess of sexual intercourse, corresponding to the Roman Venus; and the Syrian form of Ishtar was Esther. Good honest scripture? No! And that ought to be a giveaway in itself. But let us look further into this thing now.

Mordecai: Mordecai is not a Hebrew name at all. It is a Grecianized form of the name of a Babylonian god. Remember that in these ancient languages it was customary, early, to write the consonant letters, not the vowels; and when at a later time they began writing the vowel letters in too, in different places, you didn't always have the same vowels used and get the same pronunciation. If you will take a present day London cockney, a New England Yankee, and a southern white man, they all speak the English language, but they don't pronounce it the same, do they? And yet the ancestors of all of them spoke identically the same English when they were living in England.

Now, similarly, with these other languages you find some variations in pronunciation in different places and in different centuries. So this Babylonian god is mentioned in your Bible, sometimes with the name Marduk, sometimes with his name Merodach; and it represents those variations in pronunciation, but it is talking about exactly the same pagan god. So Marduk or Merodach, the Greeks called Mordecai. You remember that Esther and Mordecai were cousins. If you go into the Babylonian pagan legends, they tell you that Marduk and Ishtar were also cousins.

Now what about Haman? After the pronunciation very slightly from Haman to Humen and you have the name of a Persian pagan god.

The king's wife, Vashti: Vashti was the name of a Persian goddess.

The name of Haman's wife, Zeresh, is a slight corruption of Kerisha, which is the name of another Persian goddess.

So the whole story of the Book of Esther is a slight change, an embroidering of a Babylonian legend about a conflict between Babylonian gods and Persian gods, in which the Babylonian gods triumphed over the Persian gods. Remember, the Jewish Encyclopaedia says, "The Jews' well known skill in transforming and enriching traditional narratives was applied to the Book of Esther."

Now let us look at it again. The Book of Esther tells you the kingdom was divided into 127 provinces; but all the historical records show there were 20 provinces, no more.

The Book of Esther says that the Jews were scattered and dispersed throughout all the provinces of the kingdom. Now this was not true during the period of the Persian Empire. You remember that Alexander the Great on his great world conquering expedition across western Asia overthrew the Persian Empire.

Alexander started in 331 B.C. and his whole period, from then on to the end of his life, was eleven or twelve years; I forget which. Alexander died at the end of that period and his kingdom, you remember, was broken up into four pieces, with each of his four principal generals taking over one part of the kingdom. So when the Greek period started, with Persia and Babylon governed by this Macedonian Greek general and his descendants, during that period, you did have, it is true, some scattering of the remaining Jews who had not come home from Babylon, back to Palestine.

About 536 B.C. was when the Medo-Persian Empire overthrew Babylon. So the Persian Empire there lasted, you might say; from 535 B.C. to 320-318 B.C., a little over 200 years. In that entire period, it was not true that the Jews were scattered throughout the provinces. The Macedonian-Grecian period of rule lasted until Rome took over, and you remember the first appearance of the Book of Esther that we can trace is no earlier than 160 B.C.

Now another thing, to indicate something about the time of writing it, is the language. If somebody came to you all bubbling over with excitement and said, "I have just discovered a manuscript of William Shakespeare, a brand new never-published play by Shakespeare. O, it must be by Shakespeare; see, it is signed with his name."

So you take the manuscript and you start to read it, and it is not written in the archaic English of Shakespeare's day; it is written in present day hippie slang. Are you going to be convinced that Shakespeare wrote it, because somebody put his name on it? It couldn't possibly be his. The language is changed too much in the meantime. All other languages, while they were living languages, have undergone that same type of change. The approximate periods, say, within a century one way or the other, the approximate period of writing ancient books can be determined by the way the language is used, by the vocabulary that is used.

And the Hebrew in the Book of Esther is at least as late as anything in the Old Testament, as late or later even than the Book of Malachi. It shows strong Aramaic tendencies, and you remember, into about the last century B.C., Aramaic was taking over, in place of Hebrew, as the commonly used language in Palestine. And also Greek influences are very common in it. It was written definitely during the Greek period.

As I said, when Alexander died, his empire was broken up; one general took over Persia and Babylon, but another took over Syria and Palestine. So it was during that period of Greek rule in Palestine that the Book of Esther was written.

Another curious thing: of all the people mentioned in this Book of Esther, not one of them is mentioned in any known historical record, and not one of them is mentioned in any other book of the Bible.

Going back to the language of it, by the way, there are a great many words in the Book of Esther that are not used anywhere in the Bible outside of Esther; but they are rabbinical words that are found to be commonly used in the Talmud.

As I said, the names of these people who are supposedly nobles of the Persian kingdom, none of them are Persian names, but they are all Babylonian names.

Mordecai's ability to go into the king's harem every day is something that was never known in any oriental harem, either in the past or in oriental countries today.

During the Persian period, an official decree that was proclaimed was not translated into the languages of the different provinces. The Persians had no doubt whatsoever that they had conquered this territory; they were the bosses, and anybody living there had better find out that the Persians were bosses. And when the Persians put out an official decree, it was in the Persian language, and you had better get somebody to translate it for you; the Persians didn't bother doing it. But the Book of Esther says that these proclamations, first to slaughter the Jews and then to slaughter the Persians, were translated into the different languages of the provinces. So that is another thing, never historically known to have occurred.

Some have speculated that the king mentioned might have been Xerxes. Well, they do that on this basis: that Xerxes was a man of reckless and irresponsible disposition, even for an oriental monarch, and therefore he might perhaps have been the kind of a man to weathervane in every direction like this. But history records first of all, that his queen was named Amestris, not Vashti. History does not record she was ever deposed; and the best historical records we have on the subject, by the great Greek historian Herodotus (called the father of history) records that by Persian law the king could choose a wife only from among the seven noblest families of the Persian nation; not some Jewess pick-up.

Haman's long toleration of Mordecai's insults was something that is never common in the orient, either in the past or now. The queen's inability to send a message to her husband has never been known in either ancient or modern history, in the orient.

In Babylonian pagan lore, the 13th day of the month Adar was unlucky; the 14th day, however, was a lucky day. So the unlucky day for the Jews,

when they were, to be massacred, was changed; and on their lucky 14th day, they completed the massacre of the Persians.

Now you find this curious fairy-tale fable in your Bible today. How and when did it get there? What was the attitude of the Christian church when they were from seventeen to nineteen centuries nearer that time, than we are today? Well, there was no early Christian church that ever accepted the Book of Esther. The Syrian Christians rejected it. The once very extensive Christian sect, the Nestorians, never read it in their Old Testament. One of the early Christian writers; Melito, writing about 170 A.D., does not list it among the list of books which he say were accepted as Scripture.

Origen, writing about 225 A.D. does not mention it among the books accepted by the Christians as Scripture in his day. For four centuries the Greek Christian church rejected it.

You remember that the Catholic Church adopted as its official Bible the Latin translation by Jerome. Now when Jerome was undertaking to find what books were to be accepted as authentic for the Old Testament, he said, "Well, what do the Jews accept? That is the primary standard." And you remember that it wasn't far from 400 A.D. when Jerome did this. By that time of course the Jews were whooping it up with the utmost enthusiasm, for the Book of Esther as being the most authentic of all the books in Scripture; it told about Jews murdering people and robbing them. So Jerome put the Book of Esther, translated into Latin, into his Bible, and the Catholic Church accepted it.

How do we who are Protestants have it in our Bible? Well, you remember that for many centuries the Catholic Church, the Roman Catholic Church, was also the church in England, and when they finally split up, it was over the high moral principle of whether a divorce should be granted to King Henry VIII. The Church of England, the Episcopal Church, decided that King Henry VIII should be granted a divorce, and the Roman Catholic Church would not grant it. So that was the high moral basis for the Reformation in England. It did not have the basis of the Reformation under Martin Luther which was on matters of principle and doctrine.

Up to this time, the Church of England differed from the Roman Catholic Church on just two points, first of all, they would grant Henry VIII the divorce, which the Roman Catholic Church would not. And secondly, they did not recognize the bishop of Rome as having any more authority than any other bishop. Aside from that, their ritual was the same.

Like the Catholic Church, the Church of England believed that the people who came to church should not be allowed, ever, to find out what was in the Bible; because, if they ever found out, they would learn the priests were not telling them the truth So the Bible was kept in Latin, which the priests could read, and none but a very few scholars among the people were able to read Latin.

When finally the real Reformation began developing in England, to the point where English translations began to be made, the Church of England burned to death several of the early English translators. This was heresy; they were printing the Bible in English. When finally it was accomplished, what Bible did they have to work with? They had the Latin Bible that their church used, plus a few manuscripts in Greek and a very few Hebrew, in some of the monasteries. The Book of Esther, having first gotten into the canon of accepted books through Jerome and the Catholic Church, roughly about 400 A.D., became a part of the Latin Bible and continued in it, down to the time when the Protestant churches split off from the Church of Rome.

Now I think you will agree with me, that the Book of Esther does not belong in your Bible. There is one other book in the Bible that, likewise; I don't believe belongs there either, but it is not harmful; at least it is not like the Book of Esther - and that is the Song of Songs of Solomon. Now that is a very nice little Hebrew play in the Hebrew language, of Hebrew poetry. You can compare it in a way to some of Shakespeare's plays, written in blank verse. As poetry I have no objection to it. On the other hand, I don't see why mere poetry, as such, is entitled to be put in the Bible.

You remember one of the noted English poets, Holeridge, wrote his poem "Kublai Khan" - probably you studied it in school: "In Xanadu, did

Kublai Khan, a wondrous pleasure dome decree, where Alph, the sacred river, ran through caverns measureless to man, down to a sunless sea." As a matter of fact, he dreamed that poem in his sleep, and he woke up with the memory so vivid, he was able to write it down. And the last three or four verses of it, begin to become a bit ridiculous, as you would expect of a dream. But up to that point it is thoroughly good poetry. But I still don't see why we should put that in our Bible, and I don't see why we should put the Song of Solomon in the Bible; it contains no message from God.

But I can understand how the Song of Solomon got into the Bible. You remember that during all those early centuries, the churchmen who were deciding these things lived in their monasteries, unmarried. They couldn't subscribe to Esquire or Playboy, but they did want something they could read that would cheer them up a bit when they considered the bitterness of their solitary lives, and I guess that would be perhaps an explanation of how they came to include the Song of Songs of Solomon. But it doesn't do any particular harm.

If you take out those two books from the Bible, what you have left is based soundly on inspiration, in all the prophetic parts of it, and an authentic history, in all the historical parts of it. All the rest of the Bible, I stand back of, one-hundred percent. But those two books don't belong there.



The Book of Esther - Bertrand Comparet

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