

Times and Trends in Esther

(Some Information about the Background to and Content of the Book of Esther)

Preface, or The Read This First Bit First (That's why it is first)

This introduction is intended to provide information about the historical Bible narrative of Esther to make it more enjoyable, more instructive and more understandable for you. It is intended to accompany a series of Bible Studies on the text of the book. I am aware that we are all at different stages in our understanding about the Bible. Therefore, I have tried to write in easy English and not be too technical if you are not technical, yet to be instructive enough for those who want to know more. You can read it in any order, but it was written with front bit first and that is the best way to read it, but if you get out of your depth, you can dip into it anywhere to satisfy your interest. Happy dipping! If this is not enough and you want to know even more, then you can get the first two books listed in the Bibliography. This is my basic reference sources for what is found here.

Disclaimer: (The Fine Print., or the 'I told you so,' bit.)

Nothing in this world is perfect: least of all that which you are reading now. I admit it; because that's the way all things are. It is all work in progress. However I have tried to give an as true, faithful and logical view of the topic as I am able. Also, I cannot give a 'Because' to your every 'Why.' Keep searching for yourself, and then share that with others.

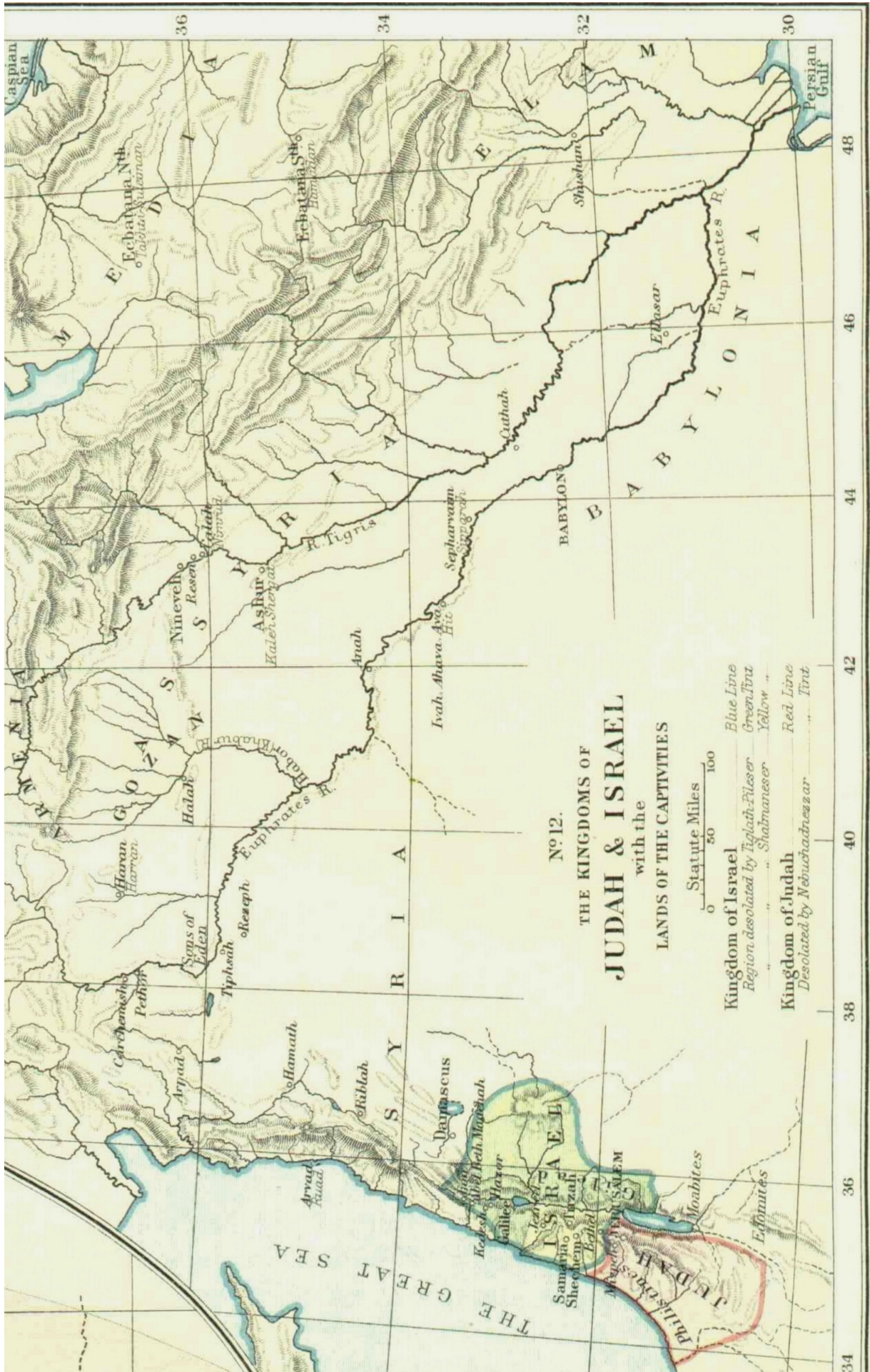
Other Stuff

My presupposition is this: the Bible is God's written word from Genesis to Revelation, and that it is a reliable representation of the acts and facts it presents. These texts have been wonderfully preserved over all time because God caused them to be preserved for we who would need to read them in later generations. In most cases they are in a condensed or summary form due to the need to record much information using the limited writing materials then available. The Bible demonstrates local national culture, historical perspective and the writer's own personality. Thus prayerful study is necessary for understanding, and that is what we are doing.

God's Aim and Mine. The Bible reveals God's plan and purpose in His creation. Central to it is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The culmination of His plan is the presentation of the Kingdom of God through Jesus to the Father. The value of His plan to us individually is the offer of salvation, or life eternal in the presence of, and kingdom of God. Nothing else will do. Knowing about the Bible is not enough. Knowing about God is not enough. Experiencing God in Christ personally is 'it'. Whilst the purpose of this guide is to provide the background beneficial to understand what is going on in Esther, my prayer is that you will personally know Him more and more day by day.

Bibliography. (Only act on this bit if you enjoy punishment.)

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 Bible quotations are from the NASB unless otherwise noted.



About the Book of Esther

Ahasuerus Who?

There has been confusion about the identity of the Ahasuerus found in Esther 1:1. Ancient sources do not make it easy for the ordinary reader because of the many languages and authors involved in these historical works. We have identified the Ahasuerus of Esther with Xerxes. Older reference books which you may have can show different detail to that adopted in our studies. You should work through the question for yourself and come to a settled opinion, and know why you hold it.

Ahasuerus is mentioned often in Esther. In the opening verses we have:

1:1 Now it took place in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, :2 in those days as King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne which was at the citadel in Susa,

In verse one the words between the commas are a parenthesis which identifies this Ahasuerus from the others. He was the Ahasuerus who reigned at the height of Babylonia's power. This has to be Xerxes. After him and because of him the power of the kingdom began to decline.

An Ahasuerus is also included in Ezra:

Ezra 4:4 Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them from building, and hired counsel-lors against them to frustrate their counsel all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.
:6 Now in the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.
:7 And in the days of Artaxerxes, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and the rest of his colleagues wrote to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the text of the letter was written in Aramaic and translated *from* Aramaic

These verses appear as a summary of local and official opposition to the work of Ezra. We are assuming that they are consecutive in time order. The order known to history of these kings is Cyrus, Cambyses together with the usurper Gomates, Darius, Xerxes, Artaxerxes. Ezra's list follows this order. It makes Ahasuerus to be Xerxes. If however Ahasuerus was between Cyrus and Darius as some people think, then he would have to be Cambyses. There are some time difficulties with that.

Ahasuerus is mentioned in Daniel 9:1:

9:1 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans— :2 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was *revealed* as the word of the LORD . . .

Daniel makes Darius the Mede the son of an Ahasuerus. Of him the Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia says, "He is not to be confused with the later Persian Monarch, Darius I Hystapes 521-486. His father's name was Ahasuerus, the Hebrew equivalent of Xerxes. Darius the Mede was born in the year 601/600 B.C. for at the fall of Babylon (October 539 he was sixty-two. Daniel 5:31)." vol1, p425. He was a Chaldean or Mede and was earlier than the Persians.

The author of Esther takes trouble to identify the Ahasuerus in this story as he who ruled from India to Ethiopia when the kingdom of Persia consisted of 127 provinces. This was when the empire was about at its greatest extent. Compare this with the wording of Daniel 11:2.

The name Ahasuerus in our English Bible is from the Latin, through the Hebrew, and then from the Babylonian, whereas Xerxes is the Greek name for this character we are identifying as 'our Ahasuerus.' For more on this see Wikipedia - Ahasuerus.

If our assumptions are true, where does the story of Esther fit into history? First, get the big picture. Look at your accompanying map. It shows Israel and Judah on the left, on the Mediterranean sea board, a broad sea side area and right up into present day Turkey, known as 'the Levant'.

The Hebrews, years before left Egypt with Moses, which is to the south-west, and not shown on our map. They became one of a number of smaller kingdoms in the Levant. Egypt had been the dominant world power for many, many hundreds of years. After Israel divided into two, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah as shown on the map, Assyria began to challenge for dominance in the Levant. Assyria is found in the middle of the map, a little to the north on the Tigris River. Its capital was Nineveh. The Assyrians captured Samaria capitol of Israel in B.C. 722 and removed all the inhabitants to their own country.

The Assyrian empire fell, over a period of 20 or so years, B.C. 625-605 and was absorbed into the Babylonian empire. There is almost no historical record of the event, but it was prophesied by God through Nahum some decades before.

Over a period of time the Persian kings subjected remaining kingdoms of the Levant to tribute, or tax paying, status, and because Judah gave so much trouble they eventually overthrew Jerusalem and forced all the skilled and able people to march to Babylon to live there, leaving only some of the farming community to remain and pay them tribute. This story is told in the closing chapters of 2 Kings.

In the North East is Media, an ancient kingdom of only some 385 square km. At the time of the fall of Assyria, their leaders had begun to push their territories south to Elam and toward Babylonia. It was from this area that Cyrus came when he went against Babylon. Elam joined in with him.

One night Belshazzar, the prince-regent of Babylon, was feasting with his nobles when a hand appeared writing on the wall. It foretold the imminent fall of the Babylonian empire, which was about to occur, to the Medes of which Cyrus was king. The story is told in Daniel chapter 5. The city fell to the soldiers of Cyrus that same night. The new empire of Medes and Persians is known as the Medo-Persian Empire replacing the Achaemenid Empire. It lasted until the Greek king Alexander the Great conquered it in B.C. 330.

Babylonian Rulers before Cyrus are sometimes known in books as Neo-Babylonian kings. The kings who were in control of Babylon and the events that occurred when the empire fell to Cyrus were prophesied by Isaiah, see Isaiah 14:22 . It also details the relationship between Nabonadius and Belsharusue, who is called Belshazzar in our Bibles. (Personal relationships in the Hebrew often seem vague to western minds. In this verse you should read the relationships as 'the son and nephew' or possibly 'son and grandson'. Some English translations do not bring this out and a

better rendering is given in the AV, ASV and the Living Bible.) Isaiah's prophecy is confirmed in the interpretation of the writing delivered by Daniel. He was almost certainly aware of the prophecy of Isaiah.

The Neo-Babylonian Kings with *Hebrew Prophets* in *Italics* for the major period of the 68 years of the Jewish captivity.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date B.C.</u>	<u>Reign</u>	<u>Bible Ref.</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Nebuchadnezzar	604-561	43	Many	
<i>Daniel</i>	606-533		Daniel 1-5	Up to 3 rd year of Cyrus
<i>Ezekiel</i>	592-572			Up to 14 th year of captivity
Evil-Merodach	561-559	2	2 Kings 25:27, Jeremiah 52:31	
Negral Sharezer	559-555	4		
Laborosoarchod	555 (9 months)			Murdered as a youth
Nabonadius	555-538	17	Daniel 5	Absent at fall
Belsharusue	556-539	26/27	Daniel 5	Belshazzar in English, son and deputy of Nabonadius

The entries in a lighter colour are kings not mentioned in your Bible, but as you may want to count them into your reckoning in some places, they are included.

The Persian Kings (showing some options) and *Hebrews & Prophets* for this period. For the sake of completeness all the kings are given. Those in a lighter colour are the kings not mentioned in the Bible.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date B.C.</u>	<u>Reign</u>	<u>Bible Ref.</u>	<u>Optional IDs, Comments</u>
Cyrus	558-529	29	Ezra 1	B.C. 536, son of Hystaspes
<i>Ezra</i>	536-458/7			
Cambyases	529-522	7	Ezra 4:6	IF Ahasuerus?
Gomates	522-521 (3 months)			(Maji Imposter of Smerdis)* Not counted in Dan 11:2
Darius I	511-486	35	Ezra 4:5,24 & 6-7	Darius son of Hystaspes
<i>Haggai</i>	520		Haggai, Ezra 5&6	
<i>Zechariah</i>	520-518		Zechariah, Ezra 5&6	
Xerxes	485-465	21	Dan 11:2	Ahasuerus
<i>Esther</i>				
Artaxerxes	465-425	40	Ezra 7	Cyaxares I of secular history
<i>Nehemiah</i>	445-433		Nehemiah 13	
<i>Malachi</i>	433-425		Malachi, Nehemiah 13	
Xerxes II	423 (45 days)			Son of Artaxerxes I, murdered by Sogdianus
Sogdianus	424-423			Half-brother, rival of Xerxes II, murdered by Darius II
Darius II	423-405			(Nothus) Half-brother and rival of Xerxes II
Artaxerxes II	404-359			(Mnemon) (see also Xenophon) son of Darius II
Artaxerxes III	358-338			(Ochus) Son of Artaxerxes II
Arses	338-336			(Artaxerxes IV) Son of Artaxerxes III
Darius III	336-330			(Codomannus) Great-grandson of Darius II

(Adapted from Unfolding Drama of Redemption, Scroggie Vol 1: p416, p492 & p493)

*Smerdis (the Maji) The real Smerdis was the brother of Cambyases II. There is some confusion about the detail of his life, but the historian Herodotus says that he went

with Cambyses to Egypt but was sent home to Susa. Cambyses in a dream saw him sitting on the throne and sent a hit man to kill him. Upon his death in 522 B.C. a pretender took his place, who gained popularity with the people by proclaiming a tax amnesty for three years, then proclaimed himself king. Darius gives credence to the story by naming the usurper. Smerdis the Maji ruled 8 months before the fraud was discovered and he was slain. This character is not counted as a genuine king in the prophecy of Daniel 11:2.

The Kingdom under Cyrus

Cyrus was God's anointed, or to put it more simply, his chosen one. As we read the Scripture about this man it is hard not to put too much added meaning upon his actions and words as we read them in the Bible. We need to read them in their historical context to better understand them. Like all significant world events in the plan of God, his life and actions were prophesied well in advance. Anyone reading God's prophetic records and watching current events could probably have anticipated the outcome. The prophecy is so detailed.

For more on this, see:

2 Chronicles 36:17-23. The prophecy of Jeremiah mentioned is Jeremiah 29:10.

Ezra ch. 1. 2 Chronicles 36:22&23 is repeated here as a catch line of the colophon in 2 Kings and the story continues on; an often used literary technique in those days, dating back even to Genesis.

Isaiah 44:26-45:7. Isaiah wrote these words some 200 years before they happened, and he called Cyrus by name. Liberal teachers could not believe this degree of detail could be possible as a prophecy and made up a theory that the last part of Isaiah was fraudulently written after the event and only pretended to be a prophecy. However there is no solid reason for the idea. You may have some books like this in your possession. If so junk them. God consistently predicts accurately and in detail, world events which are significant to His purposes. He does this to inform those who believe Him, who also are his and who will live through them. Others for one reason or another simply miss out.

The transportation and scattering of a rebellious subject people had happened earlier. It had been a well established policy of dominant world rulers for at least a thousand years. By this time there were many people from many such nations living in Babylon. Cyrus inherited a very multi-cultural kingdom. He was anxious to gain favour and firmly establish his new government.

Cyrus did not unilaterally favour the Jewish people. It was his political policy to secure the loyalty and trust of all these foreign nationals living in his lands. To gain the support of these peoples, he began restoring the religious buildings, images and instruments taken from these ethnic groups by the previous regime. There is good archaeological verification of the policy of Cyrus on the Cyrus prism which was discovered in 1879. It tells how he had restored the temples and returned the gods and religious objects of peoples living to the East. An English translation is available on the Internet. If you want it and can't get it, ask and it shall be given you.

Daniel was a youth when he was transported in the first group of prisoners to go to Babylon and he lived throughout the period of forced captivity. His part historical, part prophetic book was written at different times in this period and is not strictly in chronological order. It needs separate study. He was alive into the first years of the reign of Cyrus at least (Daniel 9:2) He lived to see the proclamation of Cyrus for the return of the Jews and reconstruction at Jerusalem.

Ezra, Esther and Nehemiah

Ezra and Nehemiah are the two principal restoration agents at Jerusalem of the Persian kings to be found in the Old Testament. Ezra tells of the edict and the transfer of Jewish people to Jerusalem for the rebuilding of the temple. After construction had begun, as recorded in Ezra chapter 4, opposition to the restoration also began, encouraged by the exclusionist attitude of Jews themselves (4:3), possibly with good cause. They had learned nothing from the placating policies of Cyrus. This local opposition continued all during the reign of Cyrus, even as far as the reign of Darius. Read Ezra 4:4&5. This opposition therefore extended through the shorter reigns of Cambyses (Ahasuerus) and Gomates. It therefore continued through the story of Esther, and is unquestionably part of what Esther experienced at Susa. Esther tells us the plans of Haman were empire wide, that is from India to Ethiopia, and all in between. It was serious stuff.

Opposition grew and intensified. In the early days of the reign of Ahasuerus, the opponents in the Levant wrote to the king to stop the work. They also wrote to Artaxerxes, the next after Ahasuerus, a letter of mischief charging the returned exiles with rebellion and treason See Ezra 4:8-16. The king replied with an order to stop the work. It did not recommence until the time of Darius and under the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah.

The adversaries wrote again to the new king, now Darius. They gave details. Darius to his credit searched for and found a copy of the decree of Cyrus in the fortress of the Median city of Ecbatana. It must have been a very thorough search (see your map). The wording of the decree is given in Ezra 6:2-5. He then reaffirmed the instructions and ordered the adversaries to leave the work well alone. The temple was finished in the sixth year of Darius, 516.

When another new king, Artaxerxes - Longimanus ascended the throne, he issued a decree allowing a further migration of willing volunteers to return Ezra 7:11. He provided for them supplies and precious metals to facilitate their temple ministries. The Babylonian kings did this to gain favour with their subject peoples and requested that their subjects make offering to their gods on his behalf. See Cyrus Cylinder wording, which is confirmed by Ezra 7:23. Non compliance to this order was confiscation, banishment and or death.

In Artaxerxes 20th year, half way through his reign, in 445 B.C. Nehemiah sought and obtained permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem for the security of the city and its temple. The same old persecution came against them. The enemy conspired to take arms against them Nehemiah 4:8. The builders toiled, fight ready day and night to build the walls. Nehemiah 4:23. The wall was finished and dedicated as recorded in Nehemiah 12:27-30.

There is a reason for the need of this new security. Between the days of Ezra and Nehemiah the subject king of Syria, Megabyzos 457-445, successfully rebelled against the Persian king forcing peace terms. It is the first evidence of internal decay in the Medo-Babylonian kingdom. He was also then free to oppose Babylonian interests in the Levant. This explains both the anxiety of Nehemiah to complete the security of Jerusalem and the temple, and also that of Artaxerxes in funding them. It ensured the loyalty of willing subject peoples in the region as well as fortifying one of his strongholds on his overland route to his possessions in occupied Egypt.

A Sequential Bible Reading and Esther Placement Plan for These Years.

Ezra 1-4 536-520	Ezra 5-6 520-516	Esther 483-465	Ezra 6-10 458	Interval 457-445	Nehemiah 445-433
Daniel 10-12 Haggai Zechariah		Interval (18 years)	1 year	12 years	Malachi
Cyrus Cambyses (as Ahasuerus*) Artaxerxes Darius		(See section 'The Book of Esther' Below) Xerxes as Ahasuerus	- - - - Artaxerxes - Longimanus - - -		
558- - - - -486		485-465	465	- - - - - 425	

Adapted from Chart 98, Unfolding Drama of Redemption, Scroggie Vol1, p450

*If, as some people hold, Cambyses is the Ahasuerus of Esther, then there would be a need for us to reorder this chart to place that book before Haggai and Nehemiah. In time we will probably learn more about the ancient past and this ambiguity will be cleared up. This plan seems most likely at the present.

We can almost only learn this by digging up the past and Archaeology has yet a long way to go in Iraq and Iran, and other Middle Eastern countries. When archaeological workers can get free access to those countries we may well be able to answer some of these questions.

Xerxes as Ahasuerus. A brief background

Xerxes I of Persia, was also known as Xerxes the Great. The second son of Darius and the first son of Atossa, a daughter of Cyrus. He had the blood lines to be king. His father nominated him as successor. He was crowned B.C. 486.

In B.C. 490 the Persians under Darius crushed a revolt by Iona and then planned to take Greece, but on the plain of Marathon the Greeks defeated the far superior Persians causing a retreat. Darius then raised a huge army, but died.

Xerxes continued his father's campaigns. In B.C. 480 he went to war against the Greeks with two million men. It was he who punished the sea with three hundred lashes because his pontoons were wrecked by an angry sea.

Initial battles were successful, but the Greeks defeated Xerxes with 300 men at the pass of Thermopylae and later at the naval battle at Salamis and he withdrew to Babylon. It is said that only a quarter of his 2,000,000 men returned. These defeats proclaimed to the world that the Medo Persians could be defeated. The fact and the nature of this Persian intervention in Greek affairs was prophesied by Daniel in the fact and nature of it, but not in detail, many years in advance. See Daniel chapter 11 especially verse 2. The significance of this prophecy only became fully evident with the passing of time. Therefore in your reading of the Bible do not pass lightly over seemingly insignificant prophecies. There are more prophecies to be fulfilled or completed in the future than all those in the past. (If you read more of Daniel 11, remember that Bible prophecies often include time jumps which beg careful study.)

It is said by one of the ancient historians that after these military defeats Xerxes gave up conquest campaigns and concentrated on internal affairs and on his harem. (I do not remember where I read that.) This thought brings us to:

The Book of Esther

The Date and Historicity

When did the events take place? Probably Zechariah 9-14 was written during the interval between Ezra chapter 6 and chapter 7. Almost certainly the story of Esther took place in these years. To understand the times of Esther better read these contemporary texts. Only a small number of Jews returned under the first edict, an estimated 50,000. In the past 70 years most of the exiles of Judah and the remnants of the Israelite exiles to Assyria, had established themselves well in the lands of the Babylonian empire, owning property, conducting business and raising their families. Most by then had not seen Palestine, and their passion for it had waned. The success of the Jewish population in exile probably had something to do with the animosity of Haman. Judah and Jerusalem was still very much a part of the Babylonian empire, unlike Syria under Megabyzos 457-445 which had some independence (As explained, top of page 8.)

When was the book written? K A Kitchen answers this for us, "There is good reason to date the book to the fifth or fourth century B.C. and to regard it as historically based, and not a novel." (*On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, Endnote 40, p520.) The book reads as though it was written soon after the events took place. It used, as part at least of its source and verification, the chronicles of the kingdom. It is history.

The Jewish nation accept the narrative as part of their history and annually celebrate the deliverance of the nation with the Feast of Purim.

The Book

The book leans heavily on the Persian records as indicated in Esther 2:23, 6:1 & 10:2. Many Persian customs and court procedures are recorded and stories conform to what we know of the time. These fit easily into what Archaeology tells us. There is no reference to the name of God, no mention of Palestine, Jerusalem, or the Law. Jews are only referred to in the third person, Esther is referred to as 'the Queen' and Mordecai as 'the Jew.' It is written by Jews and for Jews in an oftentimes hostile land and is obviously written in retrospect. We do not know the name of the author. The book is possibly as much Persian as Jewish.

With all this in mind, Dr E W Bullenger, (See the Companion Bible Appendix 60, p85, available on the Internet), reveals that hidden in Esther is the name of Yahweh, the second person of the Godhead in the Old Testament. It is included as an acrostic in the Hebrew text at crucial points in the story. It is spelled twice forwards, twice backwards, twice by initial letters and twice by final letters. The name is translated in the Revised Standard Version as Yahweh. It is translated as LORD in the Authorised Version. Other Bibles follow one of these two conventions. You probably have one or the other in your own Bible. The Hebrews call the word YHWH or YHVH the sacred Tetragrammaton. You can see how we get our YeHoVaH from these letters. There is an interesting summary of Bullenger's work in Scroggie v1, p470 and it is worth your time to examine it.

The Scene

The city is Shushan, the Armenian name of an important administrative centre called Susa in Persian. Cyrus captured the city in 538 B.C. and his son Cambyses made it his capital. The present city there is Shush. It is in modern Iran.

The Principal Characters

Queen Vashti presents as an upright, modest and virtuous woman. The name in modern Persian means 'excellent.' Hebrew teaching holds that Vashti was the daughter of King Belshazzar, grand daughter of King Evil Marduk and granddaughter of King Nebuchadnezzar II. But apparently it also holds that she had a tail. Hebrew traditions often contain elements that make us wonder. Thereby hangs a tale, because it is also Hebrew tradition that when she was ordered to appear wearing her royal crown before the drunken lords, that the command implied that that was all she was to wear, but this is also unsupported by more direct historical record. She was hardly done by.

Queen Esther. Esther is Persian and means 'star.' Her Hebrew name was Hadrassah meaning 'myrtle.' She was an orphan and was reared by her cousin Mordecai as a Jewess. This up bringing is evident in her commitment to her people, that whilst respecting the authority and majesty of the King, she was willing for self sacrifice for Her people as necessary:

"Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." Esther 4:16.

Mordecai. The name is Akkadian or early Babylonian for Marduk their god. His father was Kish a Benjamite and he was deported to Babylonia with Jeconiah in B.C. 597. He was at the time of Esther's accession as Queen a watchman, a kind of sentry or policeman at the gate of Susa. Part of his duty was to warn of danger. In the course of his duties he heard of a plot against the King which he reported to Esther. The King was delivered and the would be assassins hanged. Mordecai, was in due course, because of his wisdom and ability, elevated to a place of great importance in the kingdom. These events were recorded in the royal records. See Esther 10:1-3.

An undated cuneiform document was uncovered near Susa, dating to the time of Xerxes I and it refers to a Marduka (Mordecai) who was a high official, a counsellor at Xerxes' court at Susa. It also refers to others, including a Matakas who was an influential eunuch. Both these persons equate well with the characters in the book of

Esther. The name Mordecai was also the name of one of those returning to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel, as recorded in Ezra 2:2 and Nehemiah 7:7. It is not impossible that these Mordecai are one person, but it is not necessarily so.

Haman. According to Young p443, the name means 'celebrated'. He was the son of Hammedatha who was called as an Agagite.

The derivation of the name Hammedatha is uncertain but appears to be Elamitic (See your map) and comes to us in Esther from the Persian relating to the moon or a month, the period of the moon. (Brown, Driver, Briggs.)

Agag is the name of the king of the Amalakites who was spared by Saul when the Lord had instructed him to slay them completely. Saul thought he knew better than God and spared Agag and the best of his flocks. His disobedience cost him his kingship.

The Amalakites fought against the Hebrews under Moses when he was leading them to the Promised Land. Amalek is typical of the vast procession of people who have and still do seek to annihilate God's people Israel and their friends. However, God has decreed that His plan of Redemption through His Christ will not fail.

Careless seems the great Avenger; history's pages but record One death-grapple in the darkness twixt old systems and the Word; Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne, Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown, Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.

New occasions teach new duties; Time makes ancient good uncouth;
They must upward still, and onward, who would keep abreast of Truth; Lo,
before us gleam her camp-fires! we ourselves must Pilgrims be, Launch
our Mayflower, and steer boldly through the desperate winter sea, Nor
attempt the Futures portal with the Pasts blood-rusted key.

James Russell Lowell

Amalek also has a 'teaching by Type.' It is a picture of the flesh or self life of the believer. Before we knew the Lord, we lived wholly for self.

Paul describes it in Ephesians 2:

And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

Then we found Jesus Christ and trusted in Him. Paul describes it like this:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Even though we are now the Lord's, our Amalek, our 'flesh' or our tendency to still live in our own interests and appetites, keeps creeping up on us and attacking us from an unexpected quarter. We have to learn to resist and repel him. Paul talks about the real nature of this spiritual warfare at the end of his letter:

Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore, take up the full armour of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.

Of course there is a lot of information between Ephesians two and six which will help us put off this old self and become the new man in Christ Jesus that God wants us to be. Important as this teaching is, it is really outside our study on Esther. However know this: when God gave this word:

. . . the LORD hath sworn *that* the LORD *will have* war with Amalek from generation to generation. Exodus 16,17 (AV).

He was not only talking about Moses and his enemies in the desert. He was also talking to us about our enemy, which is also us; and how to overcome this problem.

Now, back to Esther.

Haman is the last mentioned of the Old Testament Agagites, the worshippers of the moon god. Whether the assignation, 'the Agagite' is a national identity, a personal appellation, or the name of a cult is not clear. However there is no doubt that there is a direct association with the old tendency to genocide which began when God called Abram out of Ur; whereby Satan is in rebellion with the Kingdom of the Most High God.

If you want to know more about this reasoning read the next section looking up the references as you go, otherwise skip it.

The Old Enemy Attacks Again.

The derivation of the name of Haman's father, Hammedatha is uncertain but appears to be Elamitic (Elam: see your map) and comes to us in Esther from the Persian and has to do with the moon or the month, the period of the moon. (Brown, Driver, Briggs.)

Amalek first appears when a consortium of kings came from the East against the territories in the Levant and put them into servitude, then after twelve years paying taxes, these tribute nations rebelled. Their overlords subdued them again and began to transport significant people, including Lot, and the riches of their cities to their captors home countries. (This ongoing strategy of the impoverishment of troublesome subject nations and the enslavement by removal of key people was well

alive and active at this early date. It was universal, being used also by Egypt.) Among the people they transported were the Amalakites Genesis 14:1-16.

There is no record that Abraham rescued the Amalakites from transportation when he rescued Lot, although a group which included women, called simply "the people" were rescued at the same time. Who were these people? There is a clue in the Hebrew word. The word for 'the people' is " 'Am" (Strong's 5971.) It is a word with wide application generally and means 'people, expressing relationship.' What relationship is indicated? The grammar helps: It is common which takes an article. It is singular, and therefore indicates the group, It is Masculine which indicates a group of the men related to, Abram, Lot and the women he rescued.

These Amalakites were left unrescued in the hands of the eastern kings, to be taken to their new home in the Tigris - Euphrates region. They would not be the whole tribe of Amalek as it was the practice of conquerors transporting subject peoples to take only leaders, the important and the skilled people, and leave the rest to raise tribute. Amalakites remaining in the Levant were a thorn in the side of Israel throughout the kingdom period.

The names of these kings (Genesis 14:2) are also significant, adding to our knowledge of them. Amraphel is an Accadian name. He was king of Shinar, or Babylonia. Next is Arioch who was king of Ellasar. Arioch in Akkadian means, 'servant of the moon god.' and his city was found on the left bank of the Euphrates. It is now Tel Senkarah, Iraq and excavations have provided much subsequent information. Chedorlaomer appears to be the high king of the group and came from Elam. Last named is Tidal which in Hebrew means fearless, but in an ancient Babylonian context it is given as 'great son'. He was king of Goiim, which in the Eastern inscriptions is more directly transliterated as 'Gutium', the land west of Babylonia, and later known as Assyria. These kings were all of the kingdom created by Nimrod, who was a grandson of Ham through Cush (Genesis 10:6-10). From Genesis Ellicott p63, quoting Chald on Genesis p197, and other research.

The sect of moon worship can be traced back to the days of Babel, and can be seen as still active even today. It was out of this that God called Abram, a stand alone worshipper of the Most High God, and he was ministered to by Melchizedek, King of (Jeru)Salem, a priest of the Most High God in the passage we have just considered.

Language. The common language in this area and the countries on the Mediterranean seaboard was already Aramaic, the language still spoken in this region in the time of Jesus. Even today in Iraq it is used by a persecuted Christian minority. However, official communication was also translated into the languages used in the various provinces. See Esther 3:12. Official proclamations were written and translated into all the languages of the subject nations to which they were sent. Knowledge of this practice is well supported by archaeology. It has the same intention of the inscription made by Pilate for the crucifixion of Jesus when he wrote the record in the three official languages of his day, Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

Esther: A Tragedy in Three Acts

Esther contains three separate but interrelated stories: the elevation of a new queen, the rise and fall of an arrogant and ambitious enemy and the story of an escape from antisemitic genocide.

Act 1. Ahasuerus Replaced Queen Vashti with Esther who is then made Queen.

The King holds a feast at which he and his guests become drunk.

Ahasuerus calls Vashti to parade her beauty.

She refuses.

Ahasuerus is embarrassed and after counsel deposes Vashti.

A search is made for a new queen.

Because of her comeliness Esther is chosen.

Accordingly two courtiers conspire against Ahasuerus.

Mordecai discovers this plot and reports it to Esther who reports to Ahasuerus.

Act 2. An official, Haman, an Amalekite, Plans the Genocide of all Jews.

Haman is made chief Visier.

He arrogantly demands obeisance of all whom he meets.

Mordecai refuses.

Haman engineers a decree for the slaughter of all Jews in the kingdom.

Mordecai mourns publicly in protest.

Esther's maids report it to her.

Esther interviews Mordecai and Mordecai challenges her to act.

Esther plans her approach to Ahasuerus.

Esther plays her hand at immense personal risk.

Ahasuerus is sympathetic.

Act 3. Haman's Plot Fails through the Intervention of Esther and God.

In an overplay of hatred Haman plans the hanging execution of Mordecai.

Ahasuerus, unable to sleep reviews the chronicles of the kingdom and Mordecai's unrewarded service is noted.

Ahasuerus orders Haman, in a twist of fortunes, to honour Mordecai.

Esther reports Haman's cruel plans, and finds sympathy.

Haman is hanged on his own gallows and his decree is annulled.

The Jews are given permission to defend themselves against Haman's plot.