

The Book of Esther, fiction or Scripture?

The Book of Esther, a fictional account or Scripture?

The Book of Esther is one of a small literary group of Books (along with Tobit and Judith) with very distinctive characteristics, and text which is difficult to determine. The book of Esther has two forms: one long, the Hebrew; one short, in the Greek. Of the Greek text there are two principal types: that of the current Greek Bible and that of the widely variant recension of Lucian of Antioch. The Greek version contains the following passages not found in the Hebrew: the dream of Mordecai, 1:1, and its explanation, 10:3; two edicts of Ahasuerus, 3:13 and 8:12; the prayer of Mordecai, 4:17; the prayer of Esther, 4:17; a second account of Esther's appeal to Ahasuerus, 5:1, and 5:2; an appendix explaining the origin of the Greek version, 10:3. Jerome placed his translation of these passages after the translated Hebrew text (Vulg. 10:4-16:24).

The Book was admitted to the Canon at a late date, although it has been read and quoted from earlier days and appears in the official canonical list in the West from the time of the 'Roman' Synod of 382 and, in the East, from 682 (the 'in Trullo' Council of Constantinople). The Greek passages of Esther are considered deuterocanonical, that is to say, only recognized after certain hesitancy in the patristic period. The Jewish rabbis were still discussing the status of the Hebrew Esther in the 1st Century, but the book has now become very popular with the modern Jews¹.

The book belongs to a type of literature which treats history and geography with a good deal of 'Freedom.' In the book, the city of Susa is correctly described, along with some Persian customs. Ahasuerus (Hebrew transcription of Xerxes) is well known as an historical figure and the delineation of his character appears to agree with what Herodotus says of him. On the other hand, it is strange that one of the tolerant Achmenid dynasty should agree to sign the order for a pogrom by the Yahudim.² And still stranger that he should authorize a massacre of his own subjects, or that the Yahudim would be so blood thirsty to want to kill 75,000 fellow Persians, or that these Persians should offer no resistance to their own massacre. Moreover, at the time indicated by the narrative, the queen of Persia and consort of Xerxes was Amestris, as recorded in historical records. History leaves no room for either Vashi or Esther. And, if Mordecai was indeed deported under King Nebuchadnezzar, according to Esther 2:6, *he would have been one hundred and fifty years old by the reign of Xerxes* (which is not very likely). The Book of Esther tells of the deliverance of the Yahudim by the actions of a woman. The Yahudim who were settled in Persia are threatened with extermination by Aman, a hostile and all-powerful vizir, and are saved by Esther, a young Yahudi woman who has become queen, and who acts on the advice

¹ The word Jew, is a word that is incorrectly used in many English Bibles, as a simile to translate the Hebrew word "Yahudi (plural *Yahudim*). The word Jew(s) has also become a synonym to translate the Hebrew word "Yisrael or Israelites." Both of these uses are false and deceptive word associations. The English word Jew has no association or relationship to a descendant of one of the original 12 Scriptural tribes of Israel nor does the word Jews relate to any of the descendants of one of the 12 Scriptural tribes named from "Yahudah."

² The Scriptural word "Yahudi" (plural *Yahudim*) refers to one of the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel that was named Yahudah. It may also as in the book of Esther, refer to the 10-1/2 dispersed tribes of the Southern Kingdom, in the Esther story, that were resettled in Persia after their capture by King Nebuchadnezzar BCE 586, see Esther 2:6.

of her uncle, Mordecai. There is a complete reversal of the situation: Aman is hanged and his 10 sons impaled on the stake at the request of Esther (Esther 9:13-14). No wonder "many people of the land were becoming Yahudim, (the religion of the Yahudim) "for the fear of the Yahudim had fallen on them" (Esther 8:17). *It is clear from the Book of Esther that the Yahudim living in Persia at the time were a Religious Sect, not a race, or a distinct people group because of the incorporation of many people of the land that also became (religious) Yahudim.*

What the story does illustrate is the hatred toward the Yahudim, even in ancient times. Their way of life brought them into conflict with their autocratic rulers. The bloodthirstiness of the Book of Esther is very shocking, but we must remember, as in any loosely literary conventions, the harem intrigues and the massacres serve simply to dramatize. As to the book's value for inclusion into the Hebrew Scriptures, there is not much of a redeeming factor in the Book, except maybe for the modern Jew as a fabricated non-historical story, that is, if they relate themselves to the ancient Yahudim of the second Diaspora.

The Greek version of the Book of Esther with its significant additions, was in existence in 114 B.C. when it was sent to Egypt to authenticate the Jewish feast of Purim (Esther 4:13-17). The Hebrew text is earlier; in 160 B.C., according to 2 Maccabaeus 15:36, the Palestinian Yahudim were celebrating a 'Day of Mordecai'; which presupposes that the story, and probably the book of Esther were well known among the Yahudim. The book may therefore be assigned to the end of the Persian, or the beginning of the Hellenistic period. It is very doubtful that the Book is in any way connected with the feast of Purim, because (according to scholars) Esther 9:20-32 is written in a very different linguistic style and reads very much like it was an addition. The origin of the feast of Purim is itself obscure, and it is quite possible that the book came to be connected with it later (2 Maccabaeus 15:36 does not use the term 'Purim', but 'Day of Mordecai') apparently to give it some historical basis.

We at the Assembly of Yahweh consider the Book of Esther interesting Yahudi literature, but it is only a story. We do not give it any 'Scriptural validity' or place any value on it. We believe it has very little historical basis, therefore it is not historically dependable. We consider the book of Esther in the category of the Books of Tobit and Judith as deuterocanonical. It is a book that contains no inspirational or uplifting value. It is our opinion the book should not be included in the Hebrew Bible.

Note: *Portions of this document contain excerpts from the introduction to the book of Esther found in the "Jerusalem translation" of the Bible.*

Presented for truth, by the Assembly of Yahweh, Cascade