1:6 The language here is exactly that used about God’s tabernacle and temple. The cups used in :7 may well have been those taken from Yahweh’s temple in Jerusalem (Jer. 52:19; Dan. 5:2). The Persian empire is therefore being presented as a fake Kingdom of God on earth. God’s people living there had to break from it and obey the command to return to the desolate land of Judah and rebuild God’s true Kingdom there. We have the same call in responding to the Gospel today, in leaving this world, which appears to be God’s Kingdom but isn’t, and take the hard, self-sacrificial journey in life towards His true Kingdom which will be re-established on earth at Christ’s return. "His glorious kingdom" (:4) uses the same two Hebrew words as in Ps. 145:11,12, where we read [in a Psalm that may well have been written or used by the righteous remnant in Babylon] that it is *Yahweh* God of Israel who has a Kingdom of glory, and who ultimately hears the cry of His people in distress, as Ahasuerus did. The Kingdom of Media and Persia had books in which the good and bad deeds of the citizens were written (10:2); and so in the one true Kingdom, there are ‘books’ from which the ultimate King will judge His people. Clearly, the Kingdom of Ahasuerus is being set up as an anti-Kingdom of God, with an antichrist figure ruling it, faking the Kingdom of God.

2:5 *Mordecai*- So much of later Isaiah is taken up with mockery and criticism of the Babylonian gods and the Marduk cult. The book of Esther, with Mordecai as the joint hero, named as he was after Marduk, demonstrates how caught up were the Jews with the Babylonian gods. Ezekiel repeatedly reveals the idolatry of the Jewish captives. Isaiah was therefore an appeal for the Jews to quit the Marduk cult and believe in the radical prophecies about the overthrow of Babylon. The situation is analogous to how the New Testament is full of references to the Roman imperial cult of empire worship. So much of the Bible is like Isaiah and the New Testament- a radical, counter-cultural call to see our present world for what it is, and to perceive that the ways of God simply can’t be mixed in, watered down or compromised with the way of this world.

2:7 ‘Esther’ in Persian means ‘star’ and appears a reference to Ishtar or to the Persian *stara*, or ‘star’, the Babylonian goddess of love. Even her Hebrew name Hadassah means ‘myrtle’, a tree which is a native of Babylon, not Israel.

2:9- see on 4:1-3.

3:7- see on 4:1-3; 7:8. Haman decided on his plan to kill the Jews in the first month, Nisan, but his roll of the dice dictated that he execute it in the 12th month. This gave the Jews and Esther / Mordecai nearly a whole year to try to get out of the situation. The fact this plan was made around Jewish Passover time [hence the mention of the month Nisan] perhaps suggested to the thoughtful that God would work a similar Passover deliverance as He had from Egypt. Here we see providence, a Divine hand intervening (Prov. 16:33). And that Divine hand intervenes and works even through our own failure.

3:9 It’s apparent that the Jews were no longer sitting weeping by the rivers of Babylon, but had become influential and wealthy throughout the empire- hence Haman’s desire to kill and plunder them. The vast sum he offered to the King for permission to do this was presumably on the basis that a percentage of the plunder would be given to the King; for Herodotus estimated Haman’s offer to approximate to two thirds of the annual income of the Persian empire. The only way he could realistically have offered this would’ve been on the basis that the Jews were wealthy and he would totally plunder them. Hence when the whole plan was reversed, the Jews were allowed to plunder their enemies (8:11). They certainly didn’t take any wealth with them into captivity; they must have experienced meteoric prosperity and success in all their business dealings. Hence their desire to materially support the exiles who wished to return, but most of them were too caught up in the good life to heed the call to come out from Babylon / Persia. And we, faced with that same call in these last days, must enquire whether we’re not the same.

3:13 The decree was made to “destroy… and cause to perish” the Jews throughout the provinces of Persia / Babylon (3:13; 7:4). This phrase uses the two Hebrew words which we find together three times in the list of curses to be brought upon a disobedient Israel (Dt. 28:20,51,63). Yet by her wonderful self-sacrificial mediation, Esther brought about the deferment and even annulment of those justifiable curses. God’s prophetic word was again changed- due to a mediator, who of course pointed both backwards to Moses, and forwards to the Lord Jesus. God is so eager to save us that He is willing to change His stated purpose about sinners.

4:1-3 The complete absence of God’s Name in Esther indicates how they had forgotten the Name of their God in Babylon. It’s also odd that there is no mention of prayer in the story- when prayer was the obvious recourse of God’s people. The omission is so obvious- as if to point out that the Jews were not the prayerful community which they should’ve been. When we read of Mordecai rending his clothes and putting on sackcloth and ashes, we expect to read of him praying – for prayer accompanies those two things in 2 Kings 19:1-4 and Joel 1:14. Even Esther appears to accept her possible destruction in a fatalistic way rather than in faith- “If I perish, I perish” (:16). There’s a contrast with Daniel, who gathered his friends and gave himself to prayer before going in to the King; she gathered her friends and asked them to fast, but there’s no specific mention of prayer. What she did was brave, but it seems to be more human bravery than an act of spiritual faith. The omission of any mention of prayer seems intentional- to highlight that the Jewish community were simply not prayerful as they should’ve been. The book of Esther was surely to encourage the Jews that despite their weakness, God was prepared to work with them. Esther appears to have slept with [‘went in unto’] the King before he married her; eaten unclean food (2:9; cp. Dan. 1:5, 8), and finally married a Gentile. And she didn’t tell her husband that she was Jewish for the first 5 years of their marriage (2:16; 3:7).  It’s almost certain that she would’ve acted like a Persian woman religiously in order for this to be the case; she certainly wasn’t an observant keeper of the Mosaic law. She’s almost set up in contrast with Daniel, who refused to defile himself in these ways and maintained his conscience in the same environment at whatever cost. But the point of Esther is to show that God was eager to work with such as Esther, He hadn’t quit on His people. And of course if Esther and Mordecai had done the right thing and returned to Judah as commanded, the whole situation would never have arisen, and there would’ve been no Jews left in Babylon to persecute. It seems that the history in the book of Esther is an example of how God sent ‘fishers and hunters’ to encourage the Jews to return as He commanded them (Jer. 16:16)- but even then, they didn’t.

4:8 God had said that He would cast Judah out of their land, they would go to Babylon and serve other gods there, “where I will not show you favour” (Jer. 16:13). But actually Esther and her people were shown favour there [s.w. Esther 4:8; 8:5]. God was gracious [s.w. ‘show favour’] to those in exile (Is. 30:18,9; Am. 5:15; Mal. 1:9). Here we see God’s pure grace to His weak people.

4:16 See on :1-3.

5:4 When Esther’s nerve failed and she cops out of making her request by asking the King and Haman to come to a banquet, she finds herself saying: “Let the King come with Haman today”. The Hebrew text reads: “Ybw’ Hmlk Whmn Hywm”- the first letter of those four Hebrew words spells YHWH, the Name of God which never occurs in the book of Esther. Truly God’s strength is made perfect in human weakness. In that very moment of failure, the cop out, God was revealed in His essence. And He proceeded to work through the element of suspense which her request created… to pique the King’s desire to help, and to raise Haman’s pride at having been invited, so that he would act even more foolishly, leading to his downfall. It could also be noted that Esther’s entire intercession could so easily have been spoilt if Haman had suspected her machinations against him. But he didn’t; he felt very honoured to have been invited by Esther to the banquet, and he boasted about it. In other words, Esther concealed her true feelings towards him. And where did she learn to do that? Surely in a lifetime of concealing her true Jewish identity and religious feelings, when actually she shouldn’t have done so.

7:6 The Septuagint here calls the man Haman ***ho diabolos***- the devil (with the definite article), referring to Haman, not to any supernatural being. The word simply means an enemy.

7:3 Esther made her request for “my life… my people” in parallel; and when her own safety was assured, she didn’t just relax and mop her brow with relief, she went on to petition for them- with all the risks this involved for her (see too 8:3). We can’t possibly just rejoice in our own salvation, that we have found the Lord and are secured in Him; if we have truly experienced this, we will wish to share it with others.

7:4 Esther, in an eloquent type of Christ’s mediation for us, risked her life because she felt that “we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed”. If she’d have kept her mouth shut, she wouldn’t have been destroyed. But she fought and won the same battle as we have daily or weekly before us: to identify ourselves with our weaker and more suffering brethren.

7:8 Although Esther was weak spiritually, yet God worked through her to save His undeserving people. The story brings out a number of coincidences which on reflection could only have been from God. The way Haman collapses and it appears he’s tried to rape Esther is one such. Another is the way that Mordecai isn’t rewarded for revealing the plot to kill the King- the King seems to have forgotten about it, overlooked it, and therefore he was all the more inclined to do Esther and Mordecai a real favour when required. This is all especially remarkable when we read historian Herodotus’ note that Ahasuerus [or Xerxes] was noted for rewarding loyalty. It was surely no mere human co-incidence that the very morning the King has had a bad night and remembered Mordecai and decides to honour him, that Haman arrives to request Mordecai’s death. See on 3:7.

8:5- see on 4:8.

8:7 The God who has given us His Son will, through His mediation, surely "freely give us all things" in response to our prayers (Rom. 8:32-34). This passage is alluding to the LXX here: "If I have freely granted you all that was Haman's, because he laid his hand on the Jews, and hanged him on a gallows [cp. the cross], what do you further seek?"; and the King then gives Esther whatever she requests. Note the repetition of ideas: if death on a cross had been granted, then all other things would be freely granted to the mediator / intercessor, for the good of her / His people.

10 Ezekiel had prophesied that those who survived the famine and invasion of Judah would go into captivity, "and I will draw out a sword after them" (Ez. 5:2,12). We would expect from this that the exiles would be persecuted and slain in captivity, and this surely was God's intended judgment. But in Esther we find the exiles in prosperity, in positions of power, and respected by their captors; and Jeremiah concludes his long prophecy with the information that Jehoiachin, Judah's exiled King, was exalted "above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon" and he was given special favour and honour by the King of Babylon (Jer. 52:31-34). We can only understand these things as pure grace. God showed tenderness and favour to His people in captivity, far above what He had intended or what they deserved. And He does the same with us- He gives us so much more than we deserve. And yet most of Judah abused that grace; they were so taken up with the good life God gave them in captivity that they chose to remain there and not participate in the restoration. And we so easily can end up abusing His grace likewise. In this sense the book of Esther has a sad ending- the Jews are even more popular, even richer. Our loving Father gives us as His children what we beg Him for materially- but so often, it’s not for our good spiritually. God must be *so* torn- between giving us what we want, what we whine for, what humanly we obviously need and would desperately like to have… and yet knowing that this is not for our spiritual good. We wonder what happened to Esther. Ahasuerus was slain soon after the events of the book of Esther- typically, the wife and supporters of the King would’ve been slain or persecuted. Was this not another prod from God for Esther and Mordecai to return to Judah?