**Esther: A Book of Mysteries**

(Commentary from K-House)

Esther is an obscure book to many, even though it is a story of romance and palace intrigue set in the glory days of the Persian Empire. A Jewish maiden, elevated to the throne of Persia as its queen, is used by God to preserve His people against a Hitler-like annihilation. Even the works of Shakespeare's dramatic genius cannot compare with the drama and irony in this captivating epic.

To this day, the Feast of Purim is held to commemorate these events. Instituted by Mordecai to celebrate the deliverance of the Jews from extermination, Purim (from Akkadian, puru, "lots") is so called after the lots cast by Haman in order to determine the month in which the slaughter was to take place. Held on the fourteenth day of the Jewish month of Adar, Purim is one of the most joyous days of the year.

The book of Esther chronicles real historical events. It deals with the Jews escape from genocidal annihilation after their return from Babylonian captivity. Chronologically, Esther makes possible Nehemiah. It was Esther's marriage to the king of Persia that ultimately leads to the rebuilding of Jerusalem and enables the chain of events that led to the appearance of the Messiah five centuries later.   
  
Orphaned as a child and brought up by her cousin Mordecai, Esther was selected by King Ahasuerus to replace the queen when Vashti was disgraced. Haman, the prime minister, persuaded the king to issue an edict of extermination of all the Jews in the Persian Empire. Esther, on Mordecai's advice, endangered her own life by appearing before the king-without being invited - in order to intercede for her people.

Seeing that the king was well disposed toward her, she invited him and Haman to a private banquet, during which she did not reveal her desire but invited them to yet another banquet, thus misleading Haman by making him think that he was in the queen's good graces. Her real intention was to take revenge on him. During a second banquet, Queen Esther revealed her Jewish origin to the king, begged for her life and the life of her people, and named her enemy.

Angry with Haman, King Ahasuerus retreated into the palace garden. Haman, in great fear, remained to plead for his life from the Queen. While imploring, Haman fell on Esther's couch and was found in this ostensibly compromising situation upon the king's return. He was immediately condemned to be hung on the very gallows which he had previously prepared for Mordecai. The king complied with Esther's request, and the edict of destruction was then changed into permission for the Jews to avenge themselves on their enemies.

It is a fascinating story, but one full of Biblical mysteries. There is no mention of the name of God in the book. There is no reference to worship or faith. There is no mention or prediction of the Messiah; no mention of heaven or hell; there is nothing "religious" about it. It is a gripping tale, but why is it here in the Bible? Martin Luther believed it should not be part of the Canon, however the name Esther gives us a clue: it means "something hidden." In studying this book we have discovered that there are numerous surprises hidden behind, and underneath, the text itself.