

# CONTENTS

*Abbreviations* ix

## **I. INTRODUCTION 1**

1. The Art of Simplicity 1
2. The Aim of This Study 2
3. What Is Character? 6
4. The Texts of Esther 9
5. Reading This Book 10
6. The Main Thing 11

## **II. COMMENTARY 13**

Preliminary Remarks 13

Act I. 1:1–22. The Deposal of Vashti 13

Act II. 2:1–23. Esther Becomes Queen; Mordecai Uncovers  
a Plot 26

Act III. 3:1–15. Haman's Scheme 41

Act IV. 4:1–17. Esther's Mission 56

Act V. 5:1–8. Esther Goes to the King 67

Act VI. 5:9–6:14. Haman's Humiliation; Mordecai's Exaltation 73

Act VII. 7:1–10. Esther Defeats Haman 82

Act VIII. 8:1–8. The Grant of Authority 89

Excursus: The Two Days of Acts V–VIII 95

Act IX. 8:9–17. The Counter-decree 98

Act X. 9:1–19. The Battles of Adar 107

Act XI. 9:20–32. The Establishment of the Festival of Purim 116

Act XII. 10:1–3. Epilogue: Mordecai's Accomplishments 128

## **III. HISTORICITY AND DATING 131**

1. Historicity 131

2. Date 139

## CONTENTS

### **IV. GENRES 141**

1. Wisdom Literature? 142
2. A Persian Chronicle? 144
3. Historical Novella or Historical Romance? 144
4. Diaspora Story 145
5. History 148
6. Festival Etiology 151
7. Festival Lection 152

### **V. STRUCTURES 153**

1. Structures and Meanings 153
2. Sequence and Segmentation of Events 154
3. A Major Motif: Feasting 156
4. A Major Theme: Reversal 158

### **VI. VASHTI 164**

1. Vashti's Refusal 164
2. Views of Vashti 164
3. Evaluation in Objective Narration 166
4. Vashti and the Men 167
5. Vashti and Esther 169

### **VII. XERXES 171**

1. A Soul's Surface 171
2. Showing Honor 172
3. Showing Generosity 172
4. Authority and Irresponsibility 173
5. The Sin of Laziness 173
6. King and Kingdom 176

### **VIII. HAMAN 178**

1. Haman's Transparency 178
2. Haman's Motives 179
3. Haman's Folly and Cleverness 182

## CONTENTS

### **IX. MORDECAI 185**

1. Mordecai as an Ideal Figure 185
2. Mordecai's Reserve 191

### **X. ESTHER 196**

1. Passivity 197
2. Activity 199
3. Authority 202
4. Esther as an Ideal 204

Excursus: The Image of Woman in the Book of Esther 205

### **XI. THE JEWS 212**

1. What the Jews Do 213
2. The Character of the Jewish People 217

### **XII. GOD 235**

1. God's Absence 235
2. God's Presence 237
3. The Message of Silence 244

### **XIII. THE WORLD 248**

1. Society 248
2. History and Freedom 249
3. Order 251

### **XIV. THREE BOOKS OF ESTHER 254**

1. Three Versions of Esther 254
2. The Proto-AT 255
3. The Massoretic Text 262
4. The Septuagint 265

*Appendix: Philological-textual Notes* 274

*Postscript: A Decade of Esther Scholarship* 288

*Bibliography* 304

*Index* 319

1. *Topics* 319
2. *Scriptural References* 323

## CONTENTS

3. *Postbiblical Texts (Apocrypha, New Testament, Rabbinic)* 329
4. *Greek Words* 330
5. *Hebrew and Aramaic* 330
6. *Other Languages* 331
7. *Authors and Scholars, Ancient and Modern* 331