

# **Did Persian rule lead to the emphasis on action by humans rather than on the Lord for happiness on Earth?**

Dr. Kersey Antia,

May 18, 2018; Updated December 28, 2018

A hitherto undetected but quite plausible result of the Persian rule over Israel, in my humble opinion, is the absence of eminent and powerful presence of God of the pre-exilic books beckoning a hidden thing, a matter of belief, or of hope. Thus, the Persian era books of Ezra and Nehemiah do not consist of angels, divine beings, miracles, or God speaking to anyone. The Persians rebuilt the Temple, but it did not, unlike in the past, have any ark, any tablets, any Tabernacle or any cloud or glory appearing on its inauguration. And the Book of Esther does not even mention God. These books not only contain no divine presence or appearances or miracles or revelations. Indeed, Richard Elliott Friedman has written a book about it, “The Hidden Face of God” – originally published as the “Disappearance of God” (*Harpers*, San Francisco, 1995), though he does not in any way see it as a Persian influence. As Friedman comments, in the absence of kings during this period, the governors and Israel were appointed by the Persian kings and as such “they are human authorities who derive their position not directly from God but from another human authority. Though they are empowered to enforce the law of God (Torah), it is mortal who so empowers them.” He posits that the chain of authority is turning “more human”, and takes a special turn in the book of Esther, which does not mention God, as already noted. The Jews are saved by a Jewess, Esther, who became the wife of the Persian king. “It is an ironic finish”, notes Friedman, “in at least one sense; because of the perceived role of Eve in the first story of the Bible, womankind has frequently been blamed for the initial estrangement from God. It is an ironically appropriate culmination of the shift in the divine-human balance that humans, at the end of the story, should turn to a woman, who is credited with affecting their salvation.” Friedman interprets all this as God ceding “visible control of events to human beings themselves” (pp. 58-59), which to me is reminiscent of what Yasna 34.1 in particular and Zoroastrianism in general which strongly endorses the role of both men and women as collaborators of God. And as regards the (Hamkd) Book of Esther I have often wondered if such a telling but unhistorical story could have been written under any setting other than Persian and what any other royal setting the Jews then would have been so familiar with to write about in such detail! Moreover, such an unprecedented role played by Esther unknown hitherto in Judaism may also suggest an

Iranian influence. I intend to write more about it in future, d.v. (*Deo volente*). Friedman views the phenomenon of God's presence diminishing just as the human role increases as not only among the most important facts of the Bible but also as "at the very heart of the Bible's story". And yet, he regrets, "it has not been observed before" and his students and others "have been amazed that it is not commonly known." He dilates on this theme (pp. 77-95) it remaining unknown so far, which in turn may perhaps directly or indirectly explain why the Persian connection about it still remains hidden and unexplored. Even the Persian rock inscriptions of the times often contain the same message, for instance, of King Darius and King Xerxes which I have quoted at length elsewhere on my thesis for showing they were Zoroastrians as presented to a conference in Italy. Friedman notes that the Hebrew Bible ends, "with a mysterious God who has hidden the divine face from humans, leaving them in apparent charge of their world" (p. 117). If one interprets this as God wanting us humans to be his Hamkaars (collaborators), as in Zoroastrianism, to bring about Frashokereti (renovation), then the link between the two may become clear.

As noted by Jack Miles in *God: A Biography* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1995, pp. 356-7), "the attitude taken in Esther toward the Persian empire is far more benign than that taken in Daniel toward the Persian king and Esther "apparently makes no effort to practice her religion, even secretly." Miles seems to echo Friedman here.

As these ideological developments occurred during or subsequent to the Persian rule, along albeit with many other Iranian "influences" on Judaism as is now commonly acknowledged by most scholars, this aspect of Persian influence needs to be, at least, looked into and investigated further, as I do not have the competency and resources to do so as a Magian or as a clinical psychologist.