Notes on Quiz #8: Women and the Kingdom of Israel

1. According to the Book of Esther, Esther saves her people by
   a. defying the law that she cannot present herself to the king and demanding that he do as she asks
   b. hosting a wine banquet for the king and Haman, at which the besotted king offers her anything
   c. using her authority as the queen to command the guards to prevent the massacre
   d. pleading God for a miracle

Not knowing she is a Jew, the Persian king, Ahasuerus, has fallen for Esther and marries her; she keeps her heritage secret from him at the urging of Mordecai, her cousin and adoptive father. Meanwhile, the king's vizier, Haman, is angered that Mordecai will not bow to him, and in his hubris orders that all Jews in the kingdom be slaughtered and that Mordecai be hanged—despite Mordecai's role in exposing a conspiracy to kill the king by two of his eunuchs. — Esther hears about the planned genocide, but there is a law that says she cannot present herself before the king unless called. So Esther offers a "banquet of wine" to the king and Haman, followed by another the next night. At the second banquet, the besotted king offers to grant any petition of hers, even if it is half the kingdom. Esther tells him that someone plans to murder her people—the very Haman sitting at his side. Enraged, the king orders Haman hanged on the scaffold that had been reserved for Mordecai. Haman's lands are given to Esther, and the Jews are protected and given the property of their abusers. — Throughout the story, Esther shows both humility and determination and is intelligent enough to find a way to assert herself within the restrictions of a woman at court. In the end, the story makes clear that the responsibility to ensure the safety and future of the Jewish people falls on all Jews regardless of gender, not just male authority figures like Mordecai.

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2. In the story of Ruth, after her husband, brother-in-law, and father-in-law all die, the Moabite woman Ruth decides to do
   a. wander the Earth as a holy woman
   b. journey to Babylon to become a priestess
   c. stay in Moab alone
   d. remain loyal to her husband's family and return to his homeland, Judah

Ruth, though Moabite, remains loyal to her husband's family and goes with her heartbroken mother-in-law, Naomi, and her sister-in-law to Naomi's homeland, Bethlehem, in Judah, forsaking her own heritage and gods. She tells Naomi, "your people is my people, and your god is my god." This loyalty to her bereaved mother-in-law is eventually rewarded by Yahweh. She gains a new family, and her son becomes the father of King David. — Part of what's being emphasized here is that in Judah (as generally in the ancient world) on becoming married a woman's duties to her father's family are transferred to her husband's. These duties include religious obligations to the god or gods of the husband's family. The flip side of this is that the covenant with Yahweh does not fall only on men; Ruth's own relationship with god is at the heart of the story. Also relevant is the fact that Ruth clearly stays with Naomi because she loves her and because Naomi needs her; to Ruth, compassion is more important than the suffering she'll experience from leaving her homeland and people.

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3. The Judean landholder whom Ruth meets at the threshing of the grain and who later marries her is
    a. Balthazar
    b. Boaz
    c. Bozo
    d. Weezer

The son of Salmon and his wife Rahab, Boaz was a wealthy landowner of Bethlehem in Judea, and a relative of Elimelech, Naomi's late husband. He notices Ruth, the widowed Moabite daughter-in-law of Naomi, a relative of his, gleaning grain in his fields. He soon learns of the difficult circumstances her family is in and Ruth's loyalty to Naomi. In response, Boaz invites her to eat with him and his workers, as well as deliberately leaving grain for her to claim while keeping a protective eye on her. According to the Book of Ruth, Boaz and Ruth were ancestors of David and therefore of Joseph.

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4. In the Book of Esther, the threat to the Persian Jewish community is sparked by
    a. Mordecai's refusal to bow to the king's vizier, Haman
    b. the Jewish God's wrath at his people's infidelity
    c. the bloodthirsty character of the Persian king, Ahasuerus
    d. a rampage of wild animals

Haman is outraged that the Jew, Mordecai, refuses to bow to him. Taking his action as representing the disloyalty of the Jews as a whole, he then orders the massacre of the Jewish population.

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5. Ahasuerus is the name of Esther's
    a. king
    b. companion
    c. compact with God
    d. cat

Esther was, according to this sacred Hebrew text, the Jewish queen to the Persian king Ahasuerus, who is sometimes identified as Xerxes (reigned 486–465 BCE).

Optional Extra Credit

EC. In the Book of Esther, how is the behavior of Vashti, the previous queen, contrasted with Esther's?

On the seventh day of a festival of food and wine, the king orders Vashti to appear and show her beauty to the assembled attendees; Vashti refuses the summons. The king is advised that her actions are an insult to the king and that word of her disobedience will spread to wives throughout the land, inspiring them to show contempt for their husbands, too. So the king announces to all of Persia that Vashti has lost her position as queen on account of her disobedience. — Esther, on the other hand, is shown as dutiful and respectful to the king and the rules of the palace, implicitly making Vashti look willful and self-sabotaging by her assertiveness. Both Vashti and Esther are shown as being strong women, but only Esther was able to achieve her own goals by engaging with the king rather than counterproductively asserting her own agency.