

# ESTHER

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## **Esther 1**

### ***1:1–4***

The book of Esther was written anonymously; therefore, it cannot be dated. However, the story coincides well with the reign of King Ahasuerus of Persia. Ahasuerus (pronounced ay-haz-yoo-eer-uhs), also known by the Greek name Xerxes, ruled from 486 to 465 BC. His kingdom covered a very large area, and his palace was located in Shushan (Susa), Persia.

Three years into his reign, Ahasuerus arranged a feast to which he invited all the high-ranking and powerful people around him. He wanted to show them his splendor and riches. The feast lasted one hundred and eighty days.

### ***1:5–8***

When the large and long feast was over, King Ahasuerus ordered another feast at the garden court of his palace. He invited both “great and small.” The feast lasted seven days. The court was elaborately decorated. Even the drinking vessels were made of gold. Wine was in abundance, and everyone drank according to their own pleasure. Historians maintain that the culture of the time required that all those who attended a king’s feast drank while the king drank. However, at this particular feast, King Ahasuerus allowed his guests to drink according to their own desires.

### ***1:9–12***

Ahasuerus’s wife was Queen Vashti. While the king’s seven-day feast was taking place, Vashti made a separate feast for the women. Near the end of the feast, Ahasuerus asked his seven chamberlains (eunuchs) to

bring Vashti to him so that he could display her beauty before the court. Vashti refused to come and put herself on display, so the king became angry.

### **1:13–17**

Queen Vashti, according to the laws of the time, broke the law by not coming to King Ahasuerus as he ordered. He therefore asked the seven princes of Persia and Media, who were in his midst, for advice on what to do with Vashti. According to one of the princes, she offended not only her husband by her disobedience but also all who lived in his kingdom. The princes became concerned that all husbands would be despised because of her defiance. The king again demanded that Queen Vashti be brought to him, but she again refused to come.

### **1:18–22**

Because of Queen Vashti's disobedience to the king, the princes were concerned that the women of the kingdom would show contempt toward their husbands. Therefore, the princes suggested to the king that a law be decreed that Vashti be replaced as queen. Included in the decree was a law that "all wives shall give to their husbands [honor]. . . . Every man should bear rule in his own house." The suggestions pleased Ahasuerus, and the decree went out to all the people.

## **Esther 2**

### **2:1–4**

The events in chapter 1 occurred in the third year of King Ahasuerus's reign. The events in chapter 2 occurred some years later (see verse 16). By then, King Ahasuerus's anger against Vashti had been soothed, but he still remembered her disobedience and the subsequent decree that she be replaced as queen. A search for a suitable young woman occurred. All young women were gathered into the harem at the king's palace and put into the custody of Hege (Hegai), the king's eunuch, or "keeper of the women." There they were given beauty treatments in preparation for the king's selecting his new queen.

### **2:5–7**

Mordecai was a Jew who had been carried away captive into Babylon. In this chapter we see him having lived in Susa and in the king's palace. He was the adoptive father of Hadassah (also known as Esther). Mordecai raised her as his own daughter.

### **2:8–11**

Esther was one of the many young women gathered into the king's palace and put under the custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch. Of all the young women that were gathered, the king liked Esther the most and

gave her preferential treatment. Mordecai, her adoptive father, advised her not to tell the king, nor anyone else, that she was Jewish. Mordecai also kept an eye on her each day to see what would become of her.

#### **2:12–14**

While under the custody of the king's eunuchs, the young women were groomed with oils and underwent other "purifications." This process lasted twelve months. Esther was then transferred to the charge of another eunuch, who had custody of the harem of concubines in the king's court.

#### **2:15–20**

Esther obtained favor in the sight of King Ahasuerus and those in his court. He eventually made her queen, replacing Vashti. Esther kept the secret that she was Jewish, and her adoptive father, Mordecai, still kept an eye on her as he sat at the palace gate.

#### **2:21–23**

As Mordecai sat at the palace gate, he overheard two of the king's eunuchs plotting to assassinate King Ahasuerus. Mordecai told Esther, who in turn told Ahasuerus of the plot. The plot was confirmed, undone, and the plotters were punished.

### **Esther 3**

#### **3:1**

Haman, one of the king's officers, was a descendent of Agag, king of the Amalekites, who were the long-time staunch enemies of the Israelites (see Exodus 17). Haman had been promoted to a high seat in the king's court.

#### **3:2–6**

The king commanded his servants to bow and give reverence to Haman. Because he was a Jew, Mordecai refused to bow to Haman—a fact he had told the king's servants. Haman became so angry that he planned to annihilate Mordecai and all the Jews in King Ahasuerus's kingdom.

#### **3:7**

During the entire the twelfth year of Ahasuerus's reign, the king's servants cast lots in order to select an opportune date to annihilate all Jews living in the kingdom. The lot fell on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month Adar (see verse 13).

Note: *Pur* is the ancient Persian word for "lot." Casting lots was a traditional Persian way to seek guidance in accomplishing something. We will see toward the end of the book of Esther that on the thirteenth day

of Adar, the Jewish people overcame those who sought to destroy them. To commemorate that victory, the Jewish holiday of Purim (the Hebrew plural rendering of *Pur*) is celebrated each year on the fourteenth day of the month Adar.

### **3:8–12**

Haman planned to destroy all Jews living in the kingdom. He even was willing to pay ten thousand talents of silver into the king's treasury to make it happen. The king gave Haman authority to carry out his plan by making a decree that the king sealed with his ring. The written decree was sent to all people of the kingdom.

### **3:13–15**

The attempt to rob and kill all Jews in Ahasuerus's kingdom happened on the thirteenth day of Adar according to the lot that was cast (see verse 7). All the non-Jewish people of the kingdom were commanded to take part in the task. Verse 15, however, implies that not all the people of Susa shared Haman's animosity toward the Jews. Haman and the king heartlessly celebrated the impending slaughter.

## **Esther 4**

### **4:1–4**

At the palace, Mordecai received word of Haman's plot to annihilate the Jews in Ahasuerus's kingdom. Mordecai put on sackcloth and went into the city outside the king's gate. Other Jews throughout the kingdom did the same. In ancient Israel, wearing sackcloth covered with ashes was a way to express anguish and mourning. For example, in Genesis 37:34 we read, "And Jacob rent his clothes, and put [on] sackcloth . . . and mourned for his son many days." Since Mordecai was dressed in sackcloth outside the king's gate (entering the gate dressed in that manner was strictly against court etiquette), Esther grieved and sent him other clothing to wear, but Mordecai refused to receive it.

### **4:5–9**

Esther was concerned about Mordecai standing outside the king's gate dressed in sackcloth and ashes. Therefore, she sent Hatach, one of the king's eunuchs assisting her, to go out to the gate and ask Mordecai what was going on. Mordecai told Hatach the details of Haman's plot to annihilate all Jewish people in the kingdom. He gave Hatach a copy of the king's decree as proof of the plot and asked him to suggest to Esther that she go to the king and plead for the safety of the Jews. Hatach returned to the palace and relayed to Esther the words of Mordecai.

**4:10–12**

Esther once again spoke with Hatach, who had earlier suggested that she go to the king and plead for her people. There was an unconditional law that forbade anyone to enter the king's inner court without being called there to be received by the king. Esther could be put to death if she broke that law. Hatach relayed Esther's message of concern to Mordecai.

**4:13–14**

Mordecai sent a response to Esther reminding her that just because she lived in the palace did not mean that she would escape death when all the other Jews in the kingdom were to be killed. Despite that dismal thought, Mordecai sensed that the Jews would somehow be delivered. He did not know how that deliverance would come about ("deliverance [would] arise to the Jews from another place"). It is possible that he sensed divine providence would protect the Jews. For example, he told Esther that she perhaps would have a part in that deliverance since she came "to the kingdom [at] such a time as this."

**4:15–17**

Esther responded to Mordecai in a message that she would go to the king despite her fear of breaking a law. She would do that even if she perished. However, as a safeguard, she asked Mordecai to gather all Jews in Susa to fast for three days and nights in her behalf. This is evidence that Esther and Mordecai had extreme faith in God and would rely on Him to protect her.

**Esther 5****5:1–2**

As stated in Esther 4:11, if anyone, even the queen, went to the king without being called, that person would be put to death unless the king held out his golden scepter, a symbol of sovereignty. After three days of fasting, Esther, dressed in her royal finery, approached the king. She risked her life in doing so. The king, however, held out the scepter to her, and she was favorably received.

**5:3–5**

The king asked Esther what her request was. He said he was willing to satisfy any request, even to give her "half of [his] kingdom." That kind of offering is also seen elsewhere in the scriptures and appears to be only a gesture rather than a serious offer (see Mark 6:23). Esther took advantage of the gesture and invited the king and Haman (the highest-ranking official in the king's court) to a banquet.

**5:6–8**

The king once again asked Esther what her request was. He would again satisfy that request. Esther responded that she was planning another banquet for the following day. She yet again invited the king and Haman to the event.

**5:9–12**

Mordecai was still sitting at the king's gate and refused to stand up in Haman's presence. That angered Haman, but he refrained from doing anything to Mordecai at that time. He had the next day's banquet on his mind. He was pleased that he was the only man invited to join the king and Esther at the banquet. He went home and boasted to his wife, Zeresh, and to his friends of that special invitation and of his riches and high ranking among the king's princes and servants.

**5:13–14**

Despite Haman's joy in being invited to a banquet with only the king and Esther, he was still furious with Mordecai. Haman had told his wife and friends that Mordecai refused to stand in his presence. They then suggested to Haman that tall gallows be constructed and that he should tell the king at the next day's banquet that Mordecai needed to be hanged. Haman was pleased with that suggestion and had a gallows built.

**Esther 6****6:1–3**

The king could not sleep during the night before the banquet. So to pass the time, he asked that records of significant events (the book of records of the chronicles) be read to him (see 1 Kings 29 for another reference to a book of chronicles of the kings). There he discovered a record of the two doorkeepers who tried to assassinate him (see Esther 2:21). It was Mordecai who had exposed the assassination plot to the king. After the reading, the king asked his servants what had been done to honor Mordecai for his valiant act. They responded that nothing had been done.

**6:4–6**

Haman was in the king's court waiting to speak with the king. He had come to the king to tell him of his plans to hang Mordecai (see 5:14) on the gallows that he had already constructed. However, before Haman could tell the king of those plans, the king asked Haman what should be done to honor someone who had done much for him. Haman thought that the king was referring to him.

**6:7–11**

Haman, having thought that the king wanted to honor him, suggested that he be dressed in royal attire and be paraded on horseback through the city. The king instructed Haman to carry out his suggested plan. However, Mordecai was honored instead of Haman.

**6:12–14**

Haman, humiliated that Mordecai was being honored instead of him, returned to his home with his head covered. Haman told his wife and advisors of his failed plans, and they counseled him that if he was dealing with a Jew, like Mordecai, then he would further fail. His advisors perhaps saw the divine protection that the Hebrews often received. As they were still talking, the king called for Haman to join him and Esther at the banquet. Haman was about to meet his fate, which he had unwittingly set up for himself.

**Esther 7****7:1–4**

On the second day of the banquet, which included only Esther, the king, and Haman, the king asked Esther what she requested of him. Her request was that the king preserve her and her people. By using that expression, Esther revealed to the king that she was a Jew. She also revealed that someone had tricked, or bribed, the king into ordering the annihilation of all Jews in his kingdom (see 3:9). She suggested that if the king allowed the annihilation of all Jews in his kingdom, he would be losing a valuable labor pool. That would not be to the king's benefit.

**7:5–6**

The king asked Esther who had tricked him into ordering the annihilation of the Hebrews in his kingdom. Esther declared that it was Haman. Haman, who was at the banquet, became afraid.

**7:7–10**

The king was extremely angry at Haman. Haman knew that he was in trouble and pleaded for his life. One of the king's attendants pointed out to the king the gallows that Haman had built to hang Mordecai. The king then ordered that Haman be taken to that very gallows to be hanged.

**Esther 8****8:1–2**

Esther told the king how Mordecai was related to her. Besides being cousins, Mordecai was her adoptive father. The king gave Haman's ring to Mordecai. He also gave Haman's house to Esther. Mordecai became master of the house.

**8:3–6**

The decree that the king had written, at the urging of Haman, to kill all Jews in his kingdom was still in effect (see 3:12). Letters had already been sent to all provinces of the kingdom. Esther pleaded with the king to reverse the decree.

**8:7–9**

King Ahasuerus gave Esther and Mordecai the authority to write a letter repealing the king's decree to all Hebrews living in the kingdom as well as to the king's officers who served in all the kingdom's provinces. The letter was sealed with the king's ring, making the contents of the letter irreversible.

**8:10–14**

The letter was written in the king's name and sent to every province in the kingdom. It gave permission for the Hebrews to avenge themselves against those who were about to annihilate them on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (see verse 12 and also 3:13).

**8:15–17**

Mordecai went into the city dressed in royal attire. His letter had reached the people, and they rejoiced over the news that they could legally stand up to those who were about to destroy them. Some of the enemy even became Jews themselves because they became afraid of what the Hebrew people would do to non-Hebrew people.

**Esther 9****9:1–4**

The thirteenth day of the twelfth month arrived. It was the day that the enemy was to annihilate the Hebrews in the kingdom. However, with the king's permission, the Hebrews gathered and overwhelmed the enemy. The king's leaders even helped defeat the enemy because the leaders feared Mordecai, whose power and fame had spread throughout the kingdom.

**9:5–10**

The Hebrews slew their enemy, including the ten sons of Haman, who are named. The Hebrews were allowed to take plunder (see 8:11), but they did not. They had put their focus only on defending themselves.

**9:11–14**

After the king reported the count of the number slain in Susa, he asked Esther if she had anything else to request of the king. As usual, he was willing to grant her request. She requested that the ten sons of

Haman be hanged the next day (even after they had already been slain—see 9:10). The king granted the request. They were hanged on the same gallows on which Haman was hanged. Many scholars believe that the manner in which the ten sons were hanged was a public example of what would happen to those who would disobey the law.

### **9:15–19**

The Hebrews fought hard against the enemy and were victorious. However, victory did not come at the same time for those in rural areas as it did for those in the city of Susa. In rural areas, fighting ended on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month; in Susa the fighting ended on the fourteenth day. Both areas celebrated their victories the day after fighting ended. Therefore, those in the rural areas celebrated on the fourteenth day; those in Susa celebrated on the fifteenth day. These celebrations were the beginning of annual festivities that still take place today. The celebrations are called Purim (see the verses that follow).

### **9:20–23**

Mordecai wrote a letter to all Jews in the kingdom officially establishing celebrations to take place on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the twelfth month of each year. These would be days of joyous feasting, gift exchange, and giving to the poor.

### **9:24–28**

The narrator of Esther explained how the annual celebration of Purim came about. It all started with the casting of *Pur* (lots) as described in Esther 3:7. The Hebrew people have been mandated to celebrate it, without fail, from generation to generation.

### **9:29–32**

Mordecai had written a letter to all Jews in the kingdom establishing Purim celebrations. Queen Esther also wrote a decree, confirming what Mordecai had established in his letter. The decree was entered into the book of chronicles of the kings (see 6:1; 10:2).

## **Esther 10**

### **10:1–3**

King Ahasuerus paid tribute to Mordecai, who rose to great power, second to the king himself, and was well received by the people of the kingdom. Mordecai's acts of service to his people were written in the book of chronicles of the kings. They were to be read by subsequent generations.

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