The Book of Esther

Introduction

In 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (modern day Iraq) captured the Southern Kingdom of Judah, and took Jewish captives to Babylon, for the 70 years of captivity predicted by Jeremiah (Daniel 9:1-2). Near the end of that 70 years, Babylon was captured by the Persians (modern day Iran), who allowed the Jews to return to their Land.

Esther takes place in the Persian period (539-331 B.C.), after many of the Jews returned from their exile back to Judah to rebuild the temple and city walls. Many captives, however, chose not to return to their homeland. The prophetic command was to return to the land after the 70 years of captivity (Isa 48:20; Jer 29:10; 50:8; 51:6), to the place where the Lord could bless them under the covenantal promises (Deut 28). Esther and her cousin Mordecai had not returned to the land and did not seem interested in doing so.

The Persian monarch mentioned in the book of Esther is Xerxes (485-465 B.C.), known from other sources as Ahasuerus. The events in this book occurred between Ezra 6 and Ezra 7. They extend over a decade—from 483 B.C. (Xerxes’ 3rd year; Es 1:3) to 473 (the end of Xerxes’ 12th year; Es 3:7). So the book describes a particular time in the Persian Empire, but no hint is given when the book was written nor is there any explicit evidence about its original readers. Most likely, the author lived in the Land, writing to encourage the Jews that God was working on their behalf, even though some Jews had refused to come back to the land.

At the time of this book, the Jews back in the Land were struggling to rebuild their nation and to reestablish temple worship. It took them 21 years to complete the building of the temple (536-515 B.C.), and as evident in the last half of the book of Ezra, the people were not in good spiritual condition. Nehemiah wrote that the reason was because the people were not living in obedience to God, so were under God’s curse rather than His blessing (Deut 28-30).

Esther is one of only two books in the Bible in which the name of God is not mentioned (Song of Solomon is the other). The New Testament does not quote from the book of Esther, nor have copies of it been found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Mosaic Law is never mentioned in the book nor are the sacrifices or offerings referred to. It mentions nothing explicitly supernatural. Prayer is never mentioned in the book, though fasting is. In other exilic and postexilic books, prayer is prominent (Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah). Both Esther and Mordecai seem to have no spiritual awareness except in their assurance that God would protect His people. The book gives no hint of who wrote it, but whoever it was knew the Persian culture well, describing the events as an eyewitness.

It’s commonly understood that the book is an example of the providence of God. All the happenings recorded are the outworking of circumstances in their natural sequence. God so manipulates all non-miraculous events so as to bring about a predetermined outcome. Even though the people do not acknowledge God’s presence, He is always at work. The message of this book is that God ***is***, and that God acts through history to accomplish His purposes—regardless of whether humans acknowledge Him or not. Our free-will choice affects our destiny, but it does not frustrate the sovereign plan of God.

Since the book was about a great Jewish victory, the book quickly became popular among the Jewish people. Josephus made the earliest explicit reference to Esther as already being a part of the Jewish scriptures. The Jewish canon was complete, including Esther, by the beginning of the Christian Era,

and all the Old Testament books were accepted by early Christians.

Some say the book was written as an explanation of the Jewish Feast of Purim that is celebrated even today among the Jews. “Purim” is translated “lots” in Esther. The Jewish holiday commemorates the saving of the Jewish people from the archenemy Haman. The holiday is celebrated by exchanging gifts of food and drink, donating charity to the poor, eating a celebratory meal, public reading of the Scroll of Esther (usually in a synagogue), and reciting additions to the daily prayers and the grace after meals. Other customs include wearing masks and costumes and parades. It is celebrated on the 14th day of the Hebrew month of Adar (approximately in February or March).

Commentary

1. **Esther Elevated to Queen of Persia (1:1–2:23)**
2. **The Great Banquets of Xerxes (1:1-9)**

**Verse 1—*Now it took place in the days of Ahasuerus*** [Persian; Greek “Xerxes”]*,* ***the Ahasuerus who reigned from India*** [present-day West Pakistan]***to Ethiopia*** [in northern Africa]***over 127 provinces*** [political subdivisions, of which Judah was one]*—*he ruled the Persian Empire for 21 years, from 485 to 465 B.C. He is also mentioned in Ezra 4:6 and Daniel 9:1. Ahasuerus was the grandson of Cyrus the Great (550-530 B.C.) and son of Darius I (520-486 B.C.)

**Verse 2—*in those days as King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne which was at the citadel in Susa*** [Greek; Hebrew “Shushan”]. This was the location of the royal winter residence, about 150 miles north of the Persian Gulf and 200 miles east of Babylon. In the summer, Susa was unbearably hot. The Greek geographer Strabo said Susa was so hot in the summer that lizards and snakes burned to death if they crossed the street at noon and that cold water placed in the sun could be used for a bath immediately! Fire destroyed the royal buildings during the reign of Artaxerxes (465-424 B.C.), but they were rebuilt by Artaxerxes II (404-358).

—A “citadel” was an acropolis or fortified area that stood 72 feet above the rest of the city. A wall two and one-half miles long surrounded it” [Constable].

**Verses 3-4—*in the third year of his reign*** [482 B.C.]***he gave a banquet for all his princes and attendants, the army officers of Persia and Media, the nobles and the princes of his provinces being in his presence*. *And he displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty for many days, 180 days***—It’s commonly thought that he used this six months to meet with his leaders to plan a campaign against the Greeks. Displaying his riches was meant to be an encouragement to victory. The Greek historian Herodotus referred to this meeting and said Ahasuerus took four years (484-481 B.C.) altogether to prepare for this Greek campaign. He won some battles against the Greeks, but in the end, he had to retreat home defeated in 479.

**Verse 5—*When these days were completed, the king gave a banquet lasting seven days for all the people who were present at the citadel in Susa, from the greatest to the least, in the court of the garden of the king’s palace.*** This week-long banquet was for everyone in the city, *from the greatest to the least.* Perhaps Mordecai was one of these guests. This banquet was for the men, as the women had their own banquet (v. 9). Secular sources say that as many as 15,000 guests were entertained at once at Persian banquets.

**Verse 6—*There were hangings of fine white and violet linen held by cords of fine purple linen on silver rings and marble columns, and couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and precious stones***—Archaeologists have found the remains of Xerxes’ palace and have verified the accuracy of the opulence described in this verse. [Dieulafoy, “History of the Persian Empire,” Chicago University Press, 1948]

**Verses 7-8—*Drinks were served in golden vessels of various kinds, and the royal wine was plentiful according to the king’s bounty. The drinking was done according to the law, there was no compulsion, for so the king had given orders to each official of his household that he should do according to the desires of each person***—that is, the king was liberal with the wine, and each one could drink as much as they desired. They were neither compelled nor restricted. However, it’s known that drinking was a prominent feature of ancient Near Eastern banquets.

**Verse 9—*Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus***—The only known name of Xerxes’ queen was Amestris, who was a cruel woman. Some scholars say the king had more than one wife. Some say Vashti was just another name for Amestris. But not enough is known about this period to reconcile completely the biblical and extrabilical names.

1. **Vashti’s Dethronement (1:10-22)**
2. **Vashti’s refusal to obey the king (1:10-12)**

**Verse 10—*On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine***—When the condition is brought on by alcohol, it also implies the impairment of judgment.

***—he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs***—a eunuch was a man who was castrated, having his sexual organs removed, leaving the individual with no reproductive ability or sex drive. These men were used as harem attendants or had other government positions where being a eunuch made them immune to seduction and compromise. Often in ancient times, however, a man could be referred as a “eunuch” but not physically such. They were generally important court officials such as Treasurers or Advisors whose loyalty was absolute and so trusted that they were considered eunuchs.

***—who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus***—the king’s most personal attendants, who had access to the harem (Esther 2:15).

**Verse 11—*to bring Queen Vashti before the king*—**the Queen is to appear with the full escort of the king’s most personal attendants.

**—*with her royal crown*—**a rare word used only in Esther, also used for the adornment on the head of the king’s horse (Esther 6:8). It probably does not refer to the “crown” in the European sense but to the Persian “turban.”

***—in order to display her beauty to the people and the princes, for she was beautiful*—**There is no implication that the king wanted her to do anything immoral or to expose herself, although that is the reason that has been attributed to her throughout history.

**Verse 12—*But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king’s command delivered by the eunuchs*—**Regardless of the reason for her refusal, and we do not why she refused, but her action was a breach of etiquette. The important point for the writer was that she did not appear, not why she did not appear.

**— *Then the king became very angry and his wrath burned within him*—**A person does not say “no” to the king. Therefore, her response made him furious. She embarrassed him in front of other men gathered to experience the power and majesty of the king. Not knowing how to handle his uncooperative and disobedient wife, he turned the whole affair into a matter of state.

1. **The wise men’s advice (1:13-22)**

**Verse 13—*Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times*—**the king’s advisors [of which was Daniel earlier in Babylon (Dan 2:48) and Persia (Dan 6:1-3)]. His request for legal precedent avoids any admission of his own inadequacy to handle the situation.

***—for it was the custom of the king so to speak before all who knew law and justice*—**this was crucial because even the king was not above the law. Once something was law, it could not be revoked (Esther 8:8).

**Verse 14—*and were close to him: Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media who had access to the king’s presence and sat in the first place in the kingdom—***Memucan seems to be the spokesman (v. 16). But his motivation was not about what happened to the king or the law, it was for himself and that the queen’s behavior would result in his own wife looking with contempt on him, resulting in *plenty of contempt and anger* (vv. 17-18). Laws don’t matter—his response was purely pragmatic advice.

**Verse 15—*“According to law, what is to be done with Queen Vashti, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs*—**But it seems like there was no law to deal this particular situation (had it even ever happened before?), which is why the king is asking what should be done.

**Verse 16—*In the presence of the king and the princes, Memucan said, “Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but also all the princes*—**Memucan says that her action did not only wrong the king, but it wronged the other princes sitting there with the king, including himself.

***—and all the peoples***—in fact, it wronged **all** the people

***—who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus***—in fact, it wronged **all** the people in **all** the provinces. The sin of her inaction was not simply this moment at the banquet but a wrong against thousands of people (in Memucan’s estimation). How or why?

**Verse 17—*“For the queen’s conduct will become known to all the women***—her rebellious attitude toward her husband—who is king—will influence other women in the kingdom

***—causing them to look with contempt on their husbands by saying, ‘King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in to his presence, but she did not come’***—If the queen did not obey her husband, the wives of the lesser nobles would be encouraged to disobey their husbands.

**Verse 18—*“This day the ladies of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen’s conduct will speak in the same way to all the king’s princes, and there will be plenty of contempt and anger*—**All this will result in a lot of arguments, contempt and anger between other husbands and wives.

**Verse 19—*“If it pleases the king*—**It’s interesting that these words occur 9 times in the Old Testament, and 7 of them are in the book of Esther (Neh 2:5, 7; Es 1:19; 3:9; 5:4, 8; 7:3; 8:5; 9:13).

***—let a royal edict be issued by him and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media so that it cannot be repealed*—**(Dan 6:8; Esther 8:8). Even the king was not higher than the law, even though he was the one who made the law!!

***—that Vashti may no longer come into the presence of King Ahasuerus*—**Vashti was fired!!But the Bible does not tell us what happened to her after this.

***—and let the king give her royal position to another who is more worthy than she*—**that is, a woman who will obey the king completely. Here is the beginning of the idea of a new and better queen.

**Verse 20—*“When the king’s edict which he will make is heard throughout all his kingdom, great as it is, then all women will give honor*** [“precious, prized”]***to their husbands, great and small”***—how would this punishment of Vashti cause the women of the empire to consider their husbands to be precious or prized?

**Verses 21-22—*This word pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed. So he sent letters to all the king’s provinces, to each province according to its script and to every people according to their language*—**the Persians had a sort of “pony express” to communicate information quickly throughout the whole kingdom.

***—that every man should be the master*** [“chieftain, ruler”]***in his own house***—Saying the men should be rulers and that women should value as precious their own husbands are two vastly different things. But evidently these princes thought they were the same thing.

***—and the one who speaks in the language of his own people*—**When a marriage took place between people of different ethnic backgrounds, the mother’s language would normally prevail in the home and tend to become the language of the children (Neh 13:23-24). But this edict says the language of the marriage and home should be the man’s language. Something that would be an outward “proof” of him being master of his home.

1. **Choosing a New Queen (2:1-23)**
2. **The search (2:1-4)**

**Verse 1—*After these things*—**during the four years between his divorce to Vashti and marriage to Esther, he had been fighting his campaign against the Greeks, and had returned home in defeat.

***—when the anger of King Ahasuerus had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her***—There seems to be a tinge of regret for his decisions. If he wanted to reinstate Vashti, it was prevented because of his decree that was irreversible (Dan 6:14-15). But it seems he does want to have a queen. It’s part of his …*displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty* (1:3-4). He cannot display his harem!!

**Verse 2—*Then the king’s attendants, who served him***—throughout the book, the king was led along by his officials. Like all men in power, he had to rely on others to be his eyes and ears on the outside, and he did not always receive the best information. For sure, they did not want Vashti reinstated for fear she would turn against them for their previous advice. Jewish tradition says Vashti was executed.

***—said, “Let beautiful young virgins*** [lit. “young, unmarried women,” assumed to be virgins]***be sought for the king*—**the point is not that the king needed a woman—he had a harem full of women, plus he had the power to have any woman in the kingdom. With a snap of his finger, she’d be in his presence and in his bedchamber. He does not want a one-night encounter. He wants a wife, a queen to sit beside him publicly when he displays his splendor (1:3-4).

**Verse 3—*“Let the king appoint overseers in all the provinces of his kingdom that they may gather every beautiful young virgin to the citadel of Susa***—His attendants had advised him to get rid of Vashti, and now they had a plan to replace her as queen. The plan was to search all 127 provinces of the kingdom to find every beautiful virgin and bring them to the capital of Susa. These would be women of different cultures the Persians had conquered.

***—to the harem***—the fact that he had a harem in Susa is known from other sources. New women were constantly being brought into the Persian harem to replace the older women.So it wasn’t that he merely wanted a woman for sex. He wanted a wife, a queen.

***—into the custody of Hegai, the king’s eunuch, who is in charge of the women***—in the harem

***—and let their cosmetics be given them***—this was not simply to put on makeup. Rather, *twelve months under the regulations for the women—for the days of their beautification were completed as follows: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and the cosmetics for women* (v. 12). At the end of one year, the young woman would then come before the king as an audition, so to speak, for becoming queen.

**Verse 4—*“Then let the young lady who pleases the king be queen in place of Vashti”***—So the king would have at least 365 young women from which to choose a queen, from the best of the land.

***—And the matter pleased the king, and he did accordingly*—**he ordered the search to begin. Fathers apparently did not voluntarily present their daughters, as evidenced by the king’s appointment of officials to search for the candidates and bring them to the capital.

1. **Esther as a candidate (2:5-11)**

There is a pause in the story to explain who Esther and Mordecai were.

**Verse 5—*Now there was at the citadel in Susa***—living in the Persian capital city of Susa. We are not told why they were living specifically in Susa.

*—****a Jew***—At the time of Abraham, his descendants were called “Hebrews,” which means Bedouin or “wanderer.” After Jacob was renamed “Israel,” his descendants were called the “children of Israel” or “Israelites.” When the kingdom divided, the Northern Kingdom kept the name “Israel” and was made up of 10 tribes. The Southern Kingdom was Judah, named for the larger of two tribes. Judah was captured by Babylon, which was captured by Persia. These people were called “Jews,” from the tribe of Judah.

***—whose name was Mordecai***—his name appears 58 times in this book but nowhere else in the Bible.

***—the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite****—*The Southern Kingdom of Judah was made up of the larger tribe of Judah and the smaller tribe of Benjamin, the tribe of King Saul.

**Verse 6—*who*** [i.e., “Kish”]***had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the captives who had been exiled with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had exiled***—this was in 586 B.C. If Mordecai was taken captive, he would now be 120 years old and Esther would be 70. So it was Kish who was taken into exile into Babylon. And Babylon was conquered by Persia. So that’s how Jews, namely Mordecai, ended up being in Persia.

—These Jews will later explain the enmity between Mordecai and Haman.

—Therefore, Mordecai and Esther were both born in this foreign country, out of the land of Israel.

**Verse 7—*He was bringing up Hadassah*** [Hebrew, means “myrtle,” a beautiful fragrant tree]*,* ***that is Esther*** [Persian, means “star,” derived from Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess of love]—Jews call her Hadassah, not Esther. Some think she was given the Persian name “Esther” at her coronation, much as Daniel and his 3 friends were re-named with Babylonian names when they were captured (Dan 1:7).

*—****his uncle’s daughter***—that makes Mordecai and Esther cousins. Both Mordecai and Esther are the two most important characters in the book, and their relationship is of the greatest importance for this story.

*—****for she had no father or mother****—*her father was Abihail (v. 15; 9:29). Her age at the time of the death of her parents is not given

*—****Now the young lady was beautiful of form and face***—ALL the women who came to the harem were beautiful young virgins. Even Queen Vashti was described as “beautiful” (1:11). But Esther’s beauty surpassed the others. It’s described as “beautiful of form AND face.” So it must be the character and personality of Esther that was attractive to Hegai and then to the king.

*—****and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter****—*He was obviously an older man, as he has the role of father in the book. And Esther looks for advice from Mordecai as her father throughout the book, even though she was the queen.

Now back to the story…

**Verse 8—*So it came about when the command and decree of the king were heard***—the idea from the king’s attendants has come to pass—the king’s edict has been proclaimed and there were no exceptions.

***—and many young ladies were gathered to the citadel of Susa into the custody of Hegai***—Josephus (*Antiq.* AI, 200) says there were 400 girls. They were gathered from the empire and taken to the capital.

***— that Esther was taken to the king’s palace***—the verb can mean “taken by force,” “carried away.” These three verbs all portray an event that could not be escaped. Esther was so exceptionally beautiful, there was no question but that she would be gathered and taken to the palace.

***—into the custody of Hegai, who was in charge of the women***—a young woman had to have the favor of Hegai before she could even go into the presence of the king.

**Verse 9— *Now the young lady pleased him and found favor with him***—he must have discerned that she had the qualities that would please the king. So far, we have the background descriptions of Esther, but now, she begins to play an active role in the story.

***—So he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and food, gave her seven choice maids from the king’s palace and transferred her and her maids to the best place in the harem***—this process was one year long. (1) Because he “quickly” provided her with these things, perhaps he moved her before others. (2) He also gave her “seven choice maids” to serve her. (3) And she was transferred to the “best place” in the harem. We don’t know exactly what all these means except, for sure, it was a favored position provided by Hegai. Esther is a success even before Ahasuerus sees her.

**Verse 10—*Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make them known***—Esther kept her Jewish nationality a secret, not telling Hegai, her maids, or anyone else because Mordecai told her not to. At this point, no prejudice against the Jews, especially from Haman, has surfaced in the story. However, the narrator here gives us a slight reason for Mordecai’s command that prompts a vague dread that public disclosure of Esther’s nationality would be dangerous in the extreme, thus preparing us for the events to come [WBC].

**Verse 11—*Every day Mordecai walked back and forth in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and how she fared—***How did Mordecai get information about her from the harem? It was not important to the writer’s purpose to give an explanation. However, his being there was the reason he overheard the assassination plot against the king, which is how the feud started between he and Haman that eventually threatened the entire Jewish nation.

1. **The traditional procedure (2:12-14)**

**Verse 12—*Now when the turn of each young lady came to go in to King Ahasuerus, after the end of her twelve months under the regulations for the women***—they were prepared to have sexual relations with the king. This idiom was used for sexual intercourse (Gen 16:2; 29:21, 23; 2 Sam 11:4; 16:21, 22).

***—for the days of their beautification were completed as follows: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and the cosmetics for women***—Have no idea what all this entails exactly, except to say these women, who were already beautiful—but virgins—were made all they could be. Perhaps this is an exaggeration of the frivolous extravagance of the Persian court.

**Verse 13—*the young lady would go in to the king in this way*—**the king had two criteria: (1) her beauty and (2) her ability to please him sexually.This reminds us of Vashti, where the king wanted to display her beauty (1:11). When Vashti actually used her mind and refused, she suffered his wrath.

***—anything that she desired was given her to take with her from the harem to the king’s palace***—jewels, clothing, etc. One wonders what there could possibly be that he hasn’t already seen.

**Verse 14—*In the evening she would go in and in the morning she would return to the second harem, —to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king’s eunuch who was in charge of the concubines***—the first harem consisted of virgins, under the care of the king’s eunuch Hegai. After the night with the king no longer virgins, the women were now considered concubines and lived in the second harem of concubines, in care of Shaashgaz, the king’s eunuch. For a young woman, this would also mean a future with no marriage and no children.

***—She would not again go in to the king unless the king delighted in her***—

***—and she was summoned by name***—Most of the women, who were not summoned, spent the rest of their lives in the “second harem” of the concubines (still available for the sexual pleasure of the king).

1. **Esther chosen as queen (2:15-18)**

**Verse 15—*Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai who had taken her*** [“adopted”] ***as his daughter, came to go in to the king***

***—she did not request anything except what Hegai, the king’s eunuch who was in charge of the women, advised***—She trusted him to know what would please the king.

***—And Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her***—even the competing virgins

**Verse 16—*So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus to his royal palace in the tenth month which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign***—This would be December/January of 479 B.C.

**Verse 17—*The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found favor and kindness with him more than all the virgins***—(1) she found favor with Hegai, (2) she found favor in the eyes of all who saw her, and (3) she found favor and kindness with the king.

***—so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen***—The search was done. Esther became queen.

***—instead of Vashti***—Vashti is not mentioned again in the book.

**Verse 18—*Then the king gave a great banquet, Esther’s banquet, for all his princes and his servants*—**this reminds us of the first banquet (1:5-8), when Vashti refused to come to the banquet and had given her own banquet instead (1:9). We now have the whole back-story of Esther becoming queen.

***—he also made a holiday for the provinces and gave gifts according to the king’s bounty***—liberally as appropriate for a king.

1. **An attempt on the king’s life (2:19-23)**

**Verse 19—*When the virgins were gathered together the second time***—the meaning of these words is clear, but to what does it refer? Since Esther was chosen as queen, what is the need for a further collection of young women? Although there are numerous interpretations of this phrase, perhaps the easiest is that the king simply continued to gather the virgins even after Esther was chosen as queen.

***—then Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate***—Just as Mordecai had stationed himself at the gate leading to the harem when Esther was there (2:11), now he positions himself at the king’s gate when Esther has become queen. Men who “sat at the gate” were frequently elders and leading, respected citizens who settled disputes that were brought to them (Ruth 4:1-2). There’s no indication that Mordecai had an official job there or was just there keeping tabs on Esther.

**Verse 20—*Esther had not yet made known her kindred or her people, even as Mordecai had commanded her; for Esther did what Mordecai told her as she had done when under his care***—her continued obedience to Mordecai becomes important to the plot. Revealing this secret becomes a pivotal point to the book.

**Verse 21—*In those days*** [when Esther is now the queen]

***—while Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king’s officials from those who guarded the door*** ***became angry***—The cause of their anger is not stated.

***—and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus***—They want to assassinate Ahasuerus. [He was, in fact, assassinated in his bedroom in a similar situation in 465 B.C. in a conspiracy.]

**Verse 22—*But the plot became known to Mordecai***—we don’t know if he overheard them plotting or if he was informed about the plot to kill Ahasuerus.

***—and he told Queen Esther***—we don’t know how, but he was able to tell Esther about this plot

***—and Esther informed the king in Mordecai’s name***—Esther was able to inform the king, giving credit to Mordecai for discovering the plot, but still not mentioning their relationship or her heritage.

**Verse 23—*Now when the plot was investigated and found to be so***, ***they were both hanged on a gallows***—lit. “tree.” History records the Persians impaling on a stake or post rather than being hanged by the neck on a modern-type gallows. Xerxes’ father was known to have once impaled 3,000 men.

***—and it was written in the Book of the Chronicles in the king’s presence***—however, the king forgot all about the situation. It was very unusual to not reward such information, which is an oversight he seeks to correct when made aware of it.

1. **The Feud Between Haman and Mordecai (3:1–8:17)**
2. **Haman’s Plot to Kill Mordecai (3:1-15)**
3. **Haman’s anger with Mordecai (3:1-6)**

**Verse 1—*After these events***—about four or five years after Esther was appointed queen

***—King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite—***This is the first mention of Haman. Archaeologists have uncovered an inscription which indicates that Agag was the name of a province in the Persian Empire. This is probably why Haman was called an Agagite.

***—and advanced him and established his authority over all the princes who were with him*—**Here is a huge contrast. Chapter 2 ends with Mordecai saving the king’s life, but forgotten and not rewarded. And here is Haman, for an unknown reason, who is elevated to authority over all the princes.

**Verse 2—*All the king’s servants who were at the king’s gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman; for so the king had commanded concerning him***—it was the king’s command to bow to Haman.

***—But Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage***—At this point, the narrator does not mention that Mordecai is a Jew until verse 4. It seems to imply that there was some kind of enmity either personally between the two men or perhaps between the Agagites and the Jews.

**Verse 3—*Then the king’s servants who were at the king’s gate said to Mordecai, “Why are you transgressing the king’s command?”***—they are giving Mordecai an opportunity to bow before they turn him in or at least give a good reason why he will not bow.

**Verse 4—*Now it was when they had spoken daily to him and he would not listen to them***—but after a number of days that they tried to get him to bow to Haman and Mordecai would not do it…

***—that they told Haman***—it’s interesting that it was the king’s command Mordecai was disobeying, yet they told Haman, and not the king.

***—to see whether Mordecai’s reason would stand***—The king’s servants were offended by Mordecai’s flouting of the king’s edict and by his motives (being a Jew). However, the narrator seems to want us to read between the lines—it was being a Jew that was the problem.

***—for he had told them that he was a Jew***—It is unlikely that Mordecai not bowing was for a religious reason, such as obedience to the first two commandments to not bow before other gods because he did not seem to be a practicing Jew in other areas—such as food. Also, up to this point, Mordecai would have been bowing before Xerxes. There are other examples of God’s people bowing before a king or other superiors (Gen 23:7; 27:29; 1 Sam 24:8; 2 Sam 14:4; 1 Kings 1:16). Bowing before a king is not the same as bowing before something or someone claiming to be God (such as the antichrist). There is no historical evidence that the Persian kings wanted to be worshipped as a god.

**Verse 5—*When Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage to him, Haman was filled with rage***—excessively angry. Mordecai not bowing was in front of the other king’s servants, so it might lead to them not bowing also (eg. 1:17-18).

**Verse 6—*But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone***—to refuse or reject something out of feelings of pride or superiority

***—for they had told him who the people of Mordecai were***—the Jews

***—therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus***—this would include the faithful Jews who had returned to the Land of Judah to rebuild the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. It doesn’t seem like Haman has an issue with the Jews, per se, but he is so angry with Mordecai, that he wants to kill Mordecai and any people related to him. It shows he is so excessively prideful, how dare Mordecai not bow to him.

1. **A day of revenge chosen by lot (3:7-15)**

**Verse 7—*In the first month, which is the month Nisan***—about April

***—in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus***—474 B.C.

***—Pur, that is the lot***—This is the basis of the name of the Jewish Feast of Purim (9:26).

***—was cast before Haman***—The Persian religious system stressed fate and chance. However, we know that “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord” (Prov 16:33).

***—from day to day and from month to month, until the twelfth month, that is the month Adar***—It seems like the lot was cast to determine which day and which month for the attack against the Jews. The date by the lot was the 13th day of the twelfth month (see v. 13), that is almost one year later, which gives all kinds of time for other things to develop.

**Verse 8—*Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, “There is a certain people*** [lit. “one people”]—“one” is significant because Haman is insinuating that one among many is not a big deal. Notice, Haman did not mention Mordecai as the special object of his wrath. In fact, he did not even mention it was the Jews.

—***scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom***—they were not a solidified group of people but were scattered throughout all the other people in all the kingdom

***—their laws are different from those of all other people***—However, the Jews did not assimilate with the Persians. Their laws were very different, and at least in Jerusalem, the Jews were following the Mosaic Law and rabbinical teachings.

***—and they do not observe the king’s laws, so it is not in the king’s interest to let them remain***—Whereas the Babylonians took exiles and required them to adapt to Babylonian ways (such as Daniel), the Persians allowed exiles to go back to their own countries and laws (Ezra and Nehemiah). But here, Haman accuses them of not obeying the Persian laws and actually being against the king—trying to get the king on his side.

**Verse 9—*“If it is pleasing to the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed***—kill all Jews

***—and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver***—estimated to weigh about 750,000 pounds of silver, an enormous amount worth millions of dollars in present-day currency. Some estimate that this represented 2/3 of the annual income of the whole Persian Empire.

***—into the hands of those who carry on the king’s business***, i.e., those who do the killing of the Jews

***—to put into the king’s treasuries”***—So the king would not have to pay these men out of his own money. Haman would put this money into the treasury to pay the men. It would not cost the king anything.

**Verse 10— *Then the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews***—as before, Xerxes was easily influenced by his officials (cf. 1:16-22; 2:2-4). The signet ring was the authority of the king.

—Five times in the book of Esther Haman is called the Jews’ enemy (cf. 3:10; 7:6; 8:1; 9:10, 24).

**Verse 11— *The king said to Haman, “The silver is yours***—lit. “the silver is given to you,” i.e., at Haman’s disposal. There is no evidence that Haman actually gave this money to the king. In 4:7, Mordecai said, “the exact amount of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king’s treasuries.”

***—and the people also, to do with them as you please”—***i.e., at Haman’s disposal. The king gave him permission to do whatever he desired with the whole Jewish nation of people. Much like Hitler determined to extinguish every single Jew. Of course, at this point, the king did not know his Queen Esther was a Jewess and that he had just placed his own wife under a death sentence.

**Verse 12— *¶ Then the king’s scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and it was written just as Haman commanded to the king’s satraps*** [a major administrative division of the empire]***, to the governors*** [ruled the provinces or city states within a satrapy] ***who were over each province and to the princes of each people*** [heads of ethnic or tribal groups]***, each province according to its script*** [written alphabet]***, each people according to its language***—this was all-inclusive of everyone in the whole Persian empire, even in Judah.

***— being written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king’s signet ring***—the authority of the king.

**Verse 13— *Letters were sent by couriers*** [“runners”] ***to all the king’s provinces***—

***— to destroy, to kill and to annihilate all the Jews***—a literary device that expresses the idea of thoroughness

***—both young and old, women and children, in one day***—Haman wanted every single Jew killed

***—the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar***—Haman wanted everyone to know the Jews were a condemned people, although they were not to be killed until the day appointed by the lots. Of course, during this whole year, the Jews would have had plenty of time to escape.

***—and to seize their possessions as plunder***—Here we learn that the plunder went to the ones doing the killing, not to Haman to pay into the king’s treasury.

**Verse 14— *A copy of the edict to be issued as law***—As a law, it could not be undone, even by the king (cf. 8:8).

***— in every province was published to all the peoples so that they should be ready for this day***—Also, this empire was huge, covering hundreds of miles. It would take quite awhile for the couriers to reach it all.

**Verse 15— *The couriers went out impelled by the king’s command while the decree was issued at the citadel in Susa***—the capital, where the king’s palace was. Because of their close proximity to the palace, they would know the edict before the rest of the provinces.

***—and while the king and Haman sat down to drink***—The narrator points out Haman’s bloodthirstiness (killing innocent people) and Xerxes’ seeming indifference, while…

***—the city of Susa was in confusion***—uncertainty, unclear, can’t understand, highly agitated. It seems like an empathy of the people for the situation of the Jewish community—perhaps wondering if they would be the next people group to be killed.

1. **Mordecai’s Plan to Save His People (4:1-17)**

**1. Reaction to the edict (4:1-3)**

**Verse 1—*When Mordecai learned all that had been done***—knew about the edict, as he was a person in Susa, who were the first to hear the edict.Although, in the palace, Esther was not aware of the edict (see v. 8).

***—he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes***—expressing grief and anguish for bad news

***—and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly***—He probably had no idea his action would cause a great crisis for all his people, the Jews, and call for them all to be annihilated.

**Verse 2—*He went as far as the king’s gate, for no one was to enter the king’s gate clothed in sackcloth***—Perhaps Mordecai went as close to the palace as possible to attract Esther’s attention.

**Verse 3—*In each and every province where the command and decree of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing; and many lay on sackcloth and ashes***—These Jews out in the provinces had done nothing to deserve this annihilation. It seems they were unaware of the feud between Haman and Mordecai. Just “out of the blue” comes the announcement they were to be killed.

1. **Mordecai’s appeal to Esther (4:4-17)**

**Verse 4—*Then Esther’s maidens and her eunuchs came and told her—***They must have seen Mordecai grieving at the gate. But no reason is given why they felt one Jew’s grief should be reported to the queen. Perhaps they simply knew of her familial relationship.

***—and the queen writhed in great*** [***anguish***, not in text]—to respond with great emotion. At this point she does not know why Mordecai is mourning, but his clothing means something very serious has happened.

***—And she sent garments to clothe Mordecai that he might remove his sackcloth from him***—probably to make it possible for him to come into the palace and inform her of the reason for his actions.

***—but he did not accept them***—no reason is given why he would not accept them

**Verse 5—*Then Esther summoned Hathach from the king’s eunuchs, whom the king had appointed to attend her***—Hathach becomes the go-between. As queen, she had many luxuries, “maidens and eunuchs” were at her disposal.

***—and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was***—out of her concern for him, knowing it was very serious for him to not take the garments she sent.

**Verses 6-7—*So Hathach went out to Mordecai to the city square in front of the king’s gate***—this is a public place

***—Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact amount of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king’s treasuries for the destruction of the Jews***—We do not know how Mordecai learned about the transaction between Haman and the king, and the money Haman promised to pay.

**Verse 8—*He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict which had been issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show Esther and inform her, and to order*** [“command”] ***her to go in to the king to implore his favor***—Hathach is obviously telling her information from Mordecai (about Haman’s role) beyond the edict. Mordecai commands her to go to the king, apparently exercising his authority that she accords him as her parent/guardian.

***—and to plead with him*** [the king] ***for her people***—at this point, Hathach would now know Esther was a Jewess

**Verse 9—*Hathach came back and related Mordecai’s words to Esther***—

**Verse 10—*Then Esther spoke to Hathach and ordered him to reply to Mordecai***—Mordecai had ordered Esther to go to the king and plead for the Jews, now Esther ordered Hathach to bring this message back to Mordecai

**Verse 11—*“All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death***—but now Esther knows she has already been condemned to death by the edict.

***—unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live***—an act of mercy

***—And I have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days”***—Her hesitancy, then, is not only because she questions the results of her appeal to the king, since her favor with Ahasuerus is apparently at a very low ebb.

**Verse 12—*They related Esther’s words to Mordecai***—the plural [“they”] is a deliberate change by the narrator, not an error in transmission of the text (though some translators change it to the singular in an attempt to handle an apparent difficulty). In this critical juncture in the development of the scene, the narrator has switched from indirect discourse to direct discourse, the actual words they say.

**Verse 13—*Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, “Do not imagine that you in the king’s palace can escape any more than all the Jews***—the edict was against every single Jew, including Esther. Although whether Haman’s power was great enough to reach to the palace and execute the queen is not stated. Mordecai is planting in Esther’s mind the idea that she would die even if she did not act. So it was death for entering the king’s presence or death at the hands of Haman.

**Verse 14—*“For if you remain silent at this time***—too cowardly to approach the king

***—***[will] ***relief and deliverance*** [***will***] ***arise for the Jews from another place***[?] Answer: NO—it’s not a statement, it’s a rhetorical question. Deliverance can only come from the king if Esther approaches him. There is no other place. His confidence and hope are only in Esther as queen interceding for the Jews with the king.

***—and you and your father’s house will perish***—which at this point is Mordecai and Esther

***—And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?”***—this is another rhetorical question—her appeal is the only hope the Jews have. It does not express doubt or skepticism or possibility but expresses a confident hope.

**Verse 15—*Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai***—Esther makes no further objection. She knows the course of action she must take.

**Verse 16—*“Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way***—There has already been much mourning and fasting (v. 3). But this is an intercessory ***fast for me*:** both for the danger she will face in approaching the king and for the critical nature of her effort to save the Jews.

***—And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish”***—responsibility for the resolution of the crisis now rests upon her. It may seem like a slender hope, lying as it does in the hands of a queen who is currently out of favor and one whose life so far has been devoted to beauty treatments and the royal bed. But the narrator has brought the providence of God into the picture by the fast of the Jewish community and Mordecai’s suggestion there may be a providential purpose behind her position as queen. But is she up to the challenge?

**Verse 17—*So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him*—**gathered the Jews in Susa to fast for Esther for three days and nights before she goes in to the king’s presence.

1. **Esther’s First Banquet (5:1-8)**

**Verse 1—*Now it came about on the third day***—of fasting by the Jews in Susa (4:17) as well as Esther and her maidens (4:6).Any part of a day was counted as a whole day.

***—that Esther put on her royal robes***—so she came as the queen, not a common person

***—and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace in front of the king’s rooms***—she waited there to see what the king would do, as she had already violated the law by entering the inner court (4:11).

***—and the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room, opposite the entrance to the palace***—from this position, he could see Esther standing in the court, evidently like a hallway outside the throne room.

**Verse 2—*When the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court***—the tension builds—what will the king do? She had not seen the king for over a month (4:11), and she came unannounced and not summoned. At this moment he could send her off to be killed for breaking the law.

***—she obtained favor in his sight***—lit. “she won his favor,” an active expression rather than the more passive “found favor.”

***—and the king extended to Esther the golden scepter which was in his hand***—which was permission from him for her to enter the throne room and talk to him***.***

***—So Esther came near and touched the top of the scepter***—so Esther approached the king

**Verse 3—*Then the king said to her, “What is troubling you, Queen Esther?”***—obviously, the king must have concluded this was serious for Esther to come to him when he had not summoned her

***—And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be given to you”***—This is an idiom, an exaggeration, to express the point that she could request whatever she desired and that her wish would be fulfilled (cf. 5:6; 7:2; Mark 6:23).

**Verse 4—*Esther said, “If it pleases the king, may the king and Haman come this day to the banquet*** [lit. “banquet of wine”] ***that I have prepared for him”***—Here we see that the eunuch Hathach had communicated to Esther information about Haman that he had received from Mordecai (4:6-7). Evidently, she came up with this plan during her days of fasting.

**Verse 5—*Then the king said, “Bring Haman quickly that we may do as Esther desires.” So the king and Haman came to the banquet which Esther had prepared***—Of course, prideful Haman assumed he was deserving to be honored by both the king and queen (6:6).

**Verse 6—*As they drank their wine at the banquet, the king said to Esther, “What is your petition, for it shall be granted to you. And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be done”***—for the second time (v. 3), the king assures Esther he will give her whatever her request is.

**Verse 7—*So Esther replied, “My petition and my request is—***This is more accurately broken into two statements. “My petition is…” then she hesitates, creating suspense—she (and we) know what her petition is, but instead of asking it, she requests for them to come to another banquet. One wonders at the difficulty she had in sitting and eating with Haman, whom she knows wants to kill her “father” Mordecai (and herself) and her people.

**Verse 8—*if I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and do what I request, may the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king says”***—We don’t know why she has another banquet. From the narrator’s perspective, the break allows information about Haman’s plot and Mordecai’s reward. But that could have been written before the first banquet. The second banquet was Esther’s idea, not the narrator’s. She is risking another meeting with the king. He might change his mind and not grant her a second banquet or her request. Haman may discover the reason for the banquet. But it turns out to be an integral part of the story.

1. **Haman’s Plot Against Mordecai (5:9-14)**

**Verse 9—*Then Haman went out that day glad and pleased of heart***—Haman was happy and in high spirits. Not only had he been at a banquet of the queen for he and the king, he was also invited to another one on the next day.

***—but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate and that he did not stand up***—show respect

***—or tremble before him***—show fear, especially given the orders by Haman to kill the Jews

***—Haman was filled with anger against Mordecai***—so angry, it overcame his happiness

**Verses 10-12—*Haman controlled himself, however, went to his house and sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh. Then Haman recounted to them the glory of his riches, and the number of his sons*** [ten; 9:7-10, 12]***, and every instance where the king had magnified him and how he had promoted him above the princes and servants of the king***. ***Haman also said, “Even Esther the queen let no one but me come with the king to the banquet which she had prepared; and tomorrow also I am invited by her with the king***—a braggart. All this boasting only accentuated his later humiliation and fall from favor.

**Verse 13—*“Yet all of this does not satisfy me every time I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate”***—Anger and hate overcome riches and happiness

**Verse 14—*Then Zeresh his wife and all his friends said to him***—his friends are as evil as he is

***—“Have a gallows fifty cubits*** [75 feet] ***high made and in the morning ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on it; then go joyfully with the king to the banquet”***—by having Mordecai hanged in the morning, there would be nothing bothering Haman when he went in to the feast the next day.And after all, the Jews were already condemned to death.

***—And the advice pleased Haman, so he had the gallows made***—most likely this was a stake on which a person was impaled. Hanging with a rope from the neck was not used back then. Perhaps it was put on a hill or something which made it 75 high so it could be observed by others. Even building this gallows is in the sovereignty of God, planning ahead when evil Haman himself will be hung from it.

* “Here the tension in the Haman-Mordecai conflict reached its peak. From this point on it was relieved little by little through circumstances that had already been set in motion. As the events unfold, the reader is reminded of seemingly insignificant or forgotten events that the skillful narrator had previously mentioned but had not highlighted” (BKC).
1. **Haman’s Humiliation (6:1-13)**
2. **Discovery of an unrewarded deed (6:1-6)**

**Verse 1—*During that night***—before Esther’s second banquet

***—the king could not sleep***—often reading helps a person go back to sleep

***—so he gave an order to bring the book of records, the chronicles***—it is well known that the Persians kings maintained an elaborate recording system (Ezra 6:1-2).

***—and they were read before the king***—God used the king’s insomnia to learn about Mordecai’s deed. Of all the records of Xerxes’ 12 years of rule up to that time that could have been read, this account was providentially chosen.

**Verse 2—*It was found written***—in the records of facts and events that were important to the kingdom

***—what Mordecai had reported concerning Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’ eunuchs who were doorkeepers, that they had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus***—this was about five years ago (2:16; 3:7). If Mordecai had been immediately rewarded for his saving the king, there would been no need for the plan that was soon to be carried out. Sometimes what seems like a bad thing can result later in an even better thing.

**Verse 3—*The king said, “What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?” Then the king’s servants who attended him said, “Nothing has been done for him”***—Herodotus indicated that it was a point of honor with Persian kings to reward promptly and generously those who had benefitted them [Moore, *Esther*, p. 64].

**Verse 4—*So the king said, “Who is in the court?”*** —The king wanted to set the matter right without further delay, even though it was during the night.

***—Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king’s palace in order to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows which he had prepared for him***—Haman wanted to hang Mordecai first thing in the morning (5:14), so he was at the palace to get that permission first thing in the day.

**Verse 5—*The king’s servants said to him, “Behold, Haman is standing in the court”***—where Esther had previously stood to go into the king’s presence (5:2).

***—And the king said, “Let him come in”***—Haman must have felt honored to be summoned into the king’s bedchamber.

**Verse 6—*So Haman came in and the king said to him, “What is to be done for the man whom the king desires to honor?”*** —The text suggests that abruptly and without an exchange of greetings, the king asked what should be done for the man the king wants to honor.

***—And Haman said to himself, “Whom would the king desire to honor more than me?”***—Haman assumed the king meant to honor him! One can almost picture the glee on his face. Here is a picture of his pride preceding his fall (Prov 16:18).

1. **Mordecai honored (6:7-11)**

**Verse 7—*Then Haman said to the king, “For the man whom the king desires to honor***—He is so eager to answer, he doesn’t even use court protocol, “If it please the king…” (5:4). It is one of the great ironies of the story that Haman was to decide how the man he desired to hang would be honored.

**Verse 8—*let them bring a royal robe which the king has worn—***the appearance of royalty

***—and the horse on which the king has ridden* *and on whose head a royal crown has been placed***—there are excavations of carvings with horses with royal crests of the kings on their heads

**Verse 9—*and let the robe and the horse be handed over to one of the king’s most noble princes***—to be served by the most noble princes of the king

***—and let them array the man whom the king desires to honor and lead him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him, ‘Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor’”***—Haman did not need money (3:9). He craved respect from his peers and from the population at large (5:11). Haman’s lust for respect (from Mordecai) is what got him into trouble in the first place (3:2, 5; 5:9, 13).

**Verse 10—*Then the king said to Haman, “Take quickly the robes and the horse as you have said, and do so for Mordecai the Jew, who is sitting at the king’s gate;***—This is the first of five times Mordecai is called “the Jew” (8:7; 9:29, 31; 10:3). Up to this point, the king knows of Mordecai’s report of the planned assassination attempt and the court records of that attempt. Esther made the king aware of the attempt in the name of Mordecai, but did not make known he was a Jew or her relationship to him. But maybe from the king’s servants (v. 3) when they read about Mordecai, the king now knows Mordecai is a Jew. However, the king still does not know that the people Haman wants killed are the Jews.Also, the king is still ignorant of two other facts: (1) Esther is Jewish (2:10, 19) and (2) the relationship between Esther and Mordecai (8:1).

***—do not fall short in anything of all that you have said”***—Mordecai, whom Haman hated, had to be honored by Haman. He who wanted respect *from* Mordecai now had to give respect *to* Mordecai.

**Verse 11—*So Haman took the robe and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city square, and proclaimed before him, “Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor”***—At the moment Haman had thought Mordecai would be hanging from the gallows, instead the king chose Haman to give honor and praise to Mordecai as he led him through the city. Mordecai refused to bow before Haman, but now, in essence, Haman had to bow in respect to Mordecai. However, this did nothing to change the king’s edict to kill the Jews.

1. **Haman’s wife affirms his downfall (6:12-13)**

**Verse 12—*Then Mordecai returned to the king’s gate. But Haman hurried home, mourning, with his head covered***—Mordecai had publicly grieved over his people, but now Haman privately grieved over his own humiliation. As excessive as was his pride, his humiliation must have exceeded even it.

**Verse 13—*Haman recounted to Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him—***He had left his wife earlier in much joy thinking of Mordecai’s death, but now he returned humiliated, expecting comfort from his wife.

***—Then his wise men and Zeresh his wife said to him, “If*** [lit. causal, i.e., “since”] ***Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish origin, you will not overcome him, but will surely fall before him”***—Mordecai had been responsible for the beginning of Haman’s downfall. Now they were convinced Haman could not stand against Mordecai. His ruin was assured. What they meant by “Jewish origin” is not certain, but these pagan advisors and the pagan wife of an evil man unknowingly stated the central thrust of this book: neither Haman nor any other human can stand against God’s chosen people, the Jewish nation.

1. **Esther’s Second Banquet (6:14–7:10)**
2. **Haman summoned to the banquet (6:14)**

**Verse 14—*While they were still talking with him, the king’s eunuchs arrived and hastily brought Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared*—**That same day—what Haman knew about Esther is not stated. If he knew of the connection between Mordecai and Esther, he would have been terrified of attending the second banquet.

—This is the fifth banquet mentioned in the book: two were given by the king (1:3, 5), one by Queen Vashti (1:9), and two by Queen Esther (5:4, 8).

1. **Haman exposed and executed (7:1-10)**

**Verse 1—*Now the king and Haman came to drink wine with Esther the queen***—expecting a pleasant meal with the queen, like yesterday. Something to lift Haman’s spirits after his humiliating trip through town with Mordecai.

**Verse 2—*And the king said to Esther on the second day also as they drank their wine at the banquet, “What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be done”***—For the third time (5:3, 6), the king asked Esther for her request.

**Verse 3—*Then Queen Esther replied, “If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king***—Esther did not presume on the good will of Xerxes. She was very courteous and respectful.

***—let my life be given me as my petition, and my people as my request***—Her request was for her own life to be spared and secondly, that the lives of her people would be saved. Without waiting for the king to speak, Esther was quick to explain…

**Verse 4—*for we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed*** [exterminated, destroy completely]***, to be killed*** [ruthless violence, wholesale slaughter] ***and to be annihilated*** [to perish, obliterate]**—**Haman did not want to simply kill some Jews, he wanted to completely obliterate them as a people, so there would not be even one single Jew left.

***—Now if we had only been sold as slaves, men and women, I would have remained silent, for the trouble would not be commensurate with the annoyance to the king”***—actually, enslavement of the Jews could have even been beneficial to the king

**Verse 5—*Then King Ahasuerus asked Queen Esther***—Using their names and titles, the narrator separates the royalty and their married relationship from Haman, like their private conversation.

***—“Who is he, and where is he, who would presume*** [dare, have the audacity, be so bold as] ***to do thus?”***—to want to kill the queen!! If Esther would have begun with “Haman is an enemy,” the king might have risen to his defense. But instead, Esther began with the threat to her own life. There is nothing in Esther’s words that have brought Haman into the picture—however, the reader is expecting she is about to do so!

**Verse 6—*Esther said, “A foe and an enemy is this wicked Haman!”***—see 3:10; 8:1; 9:10, 24. Haman is a **foe** [hostile], and an **enemy** [the opposing side] and **wicked** [corrupt, evil]**.**

***—Then Haman became terrified before the king and queen***—Haman understood his fate was sealed by Esther’s words. It was the king and queen against him. The man who without a twinge of remorse could devote a whole nation to destruction, is in distress at the thought of himself losing his own life.

**Verse 7—*The king arose in his anger from drinking wine***—The king was angry with Haman, not Esther.

***—and went into the palace garden***— The narrator does not tell us why the king left the room and went into the garden. Perhaps, as was his habit (1:13-15; 2:2-4; 6:3-6), he sought the advice from his princes and eunuchs as to what to do with Haman.

***—but Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther***—so the man who set out to destroy all the Jews now finds himself begging for his own life from a Jew!! He must have wanted to assure Esther that he did not know she was a Jew—he did not intend to kill the queen—or her people. If he mentioned that he just intended to kill Mordecai, that would be even worse as he did not know Mordecai was Esther’s “father.”

***—for he saw that harm had been determined against him by the king***—the narrator allows us to see the king’s reaction to Esther’s revelation through the eyes of Haman.

**Verse 8—*Now when the king returned from the palace garden into the place where they were drinking wine***—back into the room where Esther and Haman and the king were having the banquet

***—Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was***—Persians (and later Greeks, Romans, and Jews) reclined on couches when they ate.

***—Then the king said, “Will he even*** [lit. going to, or intend to] ***assault the queen with me in the house?”*** —It may refer to Haman’s violation of the extremely strict rules of court propriety, which prohibited any contact, or even close physical proximity, between courtiers and the women of the harem.***—***However, the two adverbial clauses, lit. “here in the palace” and “here in my presence” suggest the king intended to imply more than the mere violation of the rules of court propriety. It is more probable that the word had the stronger meaning of “assault, violate” in the period of Esther. The king chooses to interpret Haman’s actions as “assault,” providing a charge with which to condemn Haman, while at the same time hiding his own involvement in writing a law condemning the Jews.

—Knowing Esther’s charge against Haman, that he was evil and wanted to even kill her, the king could have interpreted Haman’s actions here as dangerous to Esther.

***—As the word went out of the king’s mouth***—everyone understood Haman was condemned to death

***—they covered Haman’s face***—The court officials (we are not told whether they had been present all along or whether the commotion in the room brought them). There is no evidence that it was a Persian custom to cover the face of a condemned criminal, but it seems that is the meaning here.

—Esther looks on in silence as her enemy was led away.

**Verse 9—*Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs who were before the king said, “Behold indeed, the gallows standing at Haman’s house fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai***—Evidently, Haman’s hatred of Mordecai and his intention of hanging Mordecai on the gallows was knowledge known by others in the palace.Haman’s pride probably offended others in the palace, so they might have been glad to see Haman killed. Harbonah’s suggestion made the execution happen immediately.

***—who spoke good on behalf of the king!”***—But the eunuch pointed out that Mordecai had only spoke good on behalf of the king—in fact, he had saved the king’s life from assassination.

***—And the king said, “Hang him on it”***—Haman was executed for a crime he did not commit!! But he was a terrible threat to the whole Jewish community, Mordecai, and Esther as long as he continued to survive.

**Verse 10—*So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king’s anger subsided***—Whether this was impalement or crucifixion see 2:23 note. So ended the life of one of the most hostile anti-Semitic Jew-haters that ever lived in history.

However, the job of saving the Jewish people, which Mordecai laid on Esther as queen, has really only just begun. Now there is the seemingly impossible task of revoking an irrevocable decree to slaughter a great many innocent people because of the wicked actions of a now-dead man.

1. **Mordecai’s Elevation (8:1-17)**
2. **Exaltation over the house of Haman (8:1-2)**

**Verse 1—*On that day—***all one day: king can’t sleep, reads chronicles, Haman arrives, Mordecai honored and led through the city by Haman, Haman goes home, comes to the banquet, is accused of evil by the queen, is led out to be hanged.

***—King Ahasuerus gave the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther***—Haman, who had hoped to confiscate the Jews’ property (3:13), now had his own property removed and given to Esther, who ***set Mordecai over the house of Haman*** (v. 2).

***—and Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had disclosed what he was to her***—The queen revealed that Mordecai was her “father.” They were related by blood. She brought Mordecai from the king’s gate into the palace.

**Verse 2—*The king took off his signet ring which he had taken away from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai***—making Mordecai a prime minister with power to act in the king’s name

***—And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman***—Haman’s wealth, title, and power now belonged to his enemy Mordecai.

1. **Reversal of Haman’s decree (8:3-14)**

**Verse 3—*Then Esther spoke again to the king, fell at his feet, wept and implored him to avert the evil scheme of Haman the Agagite and his plot which he had devised against the Jews***—it is still “on that day” (v. 1) and she seems to still be with the king where they had the banquet, where Haman was taken away, and the signet ring given to Mordecai.

**Verse 4—*The king extended the golden scepter to Esther***—as a sign of favor and encouragement to rise from her prostrate position and continue to speak to him.

***—So Esther arose and stood before the king.***

**Verse 5—*Then she said, “If it*** [***pleases—***lit. “appropriate” or “proper, right”] ***the king***—the problem is that it might seem right to the king to revoke the letters to kill the Jews, but it was made into a law that cannot be revoked (v. 8).

***—and if I have found favor before him and the matter seems proper to the king and I am pleasing*** [pleasing in appearance, beautiful] ***in his sight***—the king could spare the life of the queen and Mordecai and let the rest of their fellow Jews perish.

***—let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the king’s provinces***—Esther is careful to put the blame on Haman and not on the king for the letters to kill the Jews.

**Verse 6—*“For how can I endure to see the calamity which will befall my people, and how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?”***—Esther was now willing to be known as a Jewess

**Verse 7—*So King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, “Behold, I have given the house of Haman to Esther, and him they have hanged on the gallows because he had stretched out his hands against the Jews***—The king first responded by reminding Esther that he had executed Haman and given his estate to her. He’s already done something to undo Haman’s desires to kill Jews.

**Verse 8—*“Now you write to the Jews as you see fit, in the king’s name, and seal it with the king’s signet ring***—which things were now in the control of Mordecai

***—for a decree which is written in the name of the king and sealed with the king’s signet ring may not be revoked”***—The first decree, written by Haman, cannot be revoked, even by the king. The law is greater than the king, even though the king is the one who wrote the law.

**Verse 9—*So the king’s scribes were called at that time in the third month (that is, the month Sivan), on the twenty-third day; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded to the Jews, the satraps, the governors and the princes of the provinces which extended from India to Ethiopia, 127 provinces, to every province according to its script, and to every people according to their language as well as to the Jews according to their script and their language***—As with the first decree, this one was written in the appropriate languages for each providence. The first decree, to destroy the Jews, had gone out on April 17, 474 B.C. (3:12). This second decree sent out by Mordecai for the Jews to defend themselves went out on June 25, 474 B.C. The Jews had over 8 months to prepare for the day their enemies might attack them, which was March 7, 473 B.C.

**Verse 10—*He wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, and sealed it with the king’s signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horses, riding on steeds sired by the royal stud***—these were strong, fast horses, and obviously sent by the king.

**Verse 11—*In them the king granted the Jews who were in each and every city the right to assemble and to defend their lives, to destroy, to kill and to annihilate the entire army of any people or province which might attack* [*them, including children and women*]*, and to plunder their spoil***—It wasn’t simply that the Jews could defend themselves, they were given permission to take the lives and plunder the spoil of anyone who might attack them, as Mordecai had taken away the property of Haman.

**Verse 12—*on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar)***‚two months and ten days after Haman had issued his order.

**Verse 13—*A copy of the edict to be issued as law in each and every province was published to all the peoples, so that the Jews would be ready for this day to avenge themselves on their enemies.***

**Verse 14—*The couriers, hastened and impelled by the king’s command, went out, riding on the royal steeds; and the decree was given out at the citadel in Susa.***

1. **Popular reaction (8:15-17)**

**Verse 15—*Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a large crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple***—

***—and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced***—Previously, under Haman’s edict the city of Susa had been bewildered (3:15). Now there was a celebration (most likely, the Jews in Susa celebrated).

**Verse 16—*For the Jews there was light and gladness and joy and honor.***

**Verse 17—*In each and every province and in each and every city, wherever the king’s commandment and his decree arrived, there was gladness and joy for the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many among the peoples of the land became Jews, for the dread of the Jews had fallen on them***—it seems that the dread of the superior political and military power now wielded by Mordecai and the Jewish community prompts the people to profess to be Jews. It’s now the “winning” side. It may mean that they pretended to be Jews or took the side of the Jews. It was now dangerous not to be a Jew.

1. **The Jews’ Day of Vengeance (9:1-19)**
2. **A Great Slaughter (9:1-10)**

**Verse 1—*Now in the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar), on the thirteenth day when the king’s command and edict were about to be executed***—Haman’s edict

***—on the day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them*—**the day set aside to overpower the Jews by more enemies than just Haman—no mention of Mordecai’s edict…just…

***—it was turned to the contrary***—lit. “it was overturned.” It was the day of the confrontation of Haman’s edict and Mordecai’s edict.

— ***so that the Jews themselves gained the mastery over those who hated them***—this hatred of the Jews was not expressed previously. Earlier it was only Haman’s hatred of the Jews that was stated.

**Verse 2—*The Jews assembled in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus***—not that there were Jewish cities, but those cities in which Jewish communities exist.

***—to lay hands on those who sought their harm***—lit. “to stretch out a hand against.” The Jews went on the offensive against those who wanted to harm them.

***—and no one could stand before them***—to resist, withstand

***—for the dread of them had fallen on all the peoples***—be afraid of, be terrified of

**Verse 3—*Even all the princes of the provinces, the satraps, the governors and those who were doing the king’s business assisted the Jews***—from local leaders to the princes in the capital

***—because the dread of Mordecai had fallen on them***—Mordecai was now put in power by the king

**Verse 4—*Indeed, Mordecai was great in the king’s house*** ***and his fame spread throughout all the provinces; for the man Mordecai became greater and greater***—Mordecai was not only prominent in the palace, but his reputation spread [lit. “was walking”] throughout the empire. In a few brief months he had become increasingly powerful as prime minister.

**Verses 5-10—*Thus the Jews struck all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying; and they did what they pleased to those who hated them***. ***At the citadel in Susa the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men,***

—***and Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha,*** ***Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha,*** ***Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha,*** ***the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Jews’ enemy***—the names of his ten sons

***—but they did not lay their hands on the plunder***—three times it is stated that the Jews did not lay their hands on the plunder (9:10, 15, 16). The Jews were not doing this for money, as Haman had hoped to do (3:13). They did it in self-defense.

1. **Vengeance in Susa (9:11-15)**

**Verse 11—*On that day the number of those who were killed at the citadel*** [(1) the palace area] ***in Susa was reported to the king***—500 (v. 10)

**Verse 12—*The king said to Queen Esther, “The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman at the citadel in Susa. What then have they done in the rest of the king’s provinces! Now what is your petition? It shall even be granted you. And what is your further request? It shall also be done.”***

**Verses 13-14—*Then said Esther, “If it pleases the king, let tomorrow also be granted to the Jews who are in Susa*** [(2) the capital] ***to do according to the edict of today***—Esther requested that the Jews be given one more day to defend themselves.

***—and let Haman’s ten sons be hanged on the gallows.” So the king commanded that it should be done so; and an edict was issued in Susa, and Haman’s ten sons were hanged***—They were already dead, but impaling them on a gallows would be a visual warning to others. The reader has not been told that the sons participated in their father’s plot, but they shared in their father’s guilt.

**Verse 15—*The Jews who were in Susa assembled also on the fourteenth day of the month Adar and killed three hundred men in Susa***—this is the second day of the battle, when 300 were killed in Susa

***—but they did not lay their hands on the plunder***—again stressing the Jews were not doing it for money, they were doing it for self-defense.

1. **Celebration in the Provinces and in Susa (9:16-19)**

**Verse 16—*Now the rest of the Jews who were in the king’s provinces assembled—***(3) the rest of the provinces

***—to defend their lives and rid themselves of their enemies, and kill 75,000 of those who hated them;***

***—but they did not lay their hands on the plunder***—for the third time, we’re told they did not did not do this for plunder/money but in self-defense

**Verse 17—*This was done on the thirteenth day of the month Adar, and on the fourteenth day they rested and made it a day of feasting and rejoicing***—in the rural areas (see v. 19)

**Verse 18—*But the Jews who were in Susa assembled on the thirteenth and the fourteenth of the same month, and they rested on the fifteenth day and made it a day of feasting and rejoicing***—the Jews in Susa

**Verse 19—*Therefore the Jews of the rural areas, who live in the rural towns, make the fourteenth day of the month Adar a holiday for rejoicing and feasting and sending portions of food to one another***—those from verse 17

1. **Institution of the Feast of Purim (9:20–10:3)**
2. **Mordecai’s Letter (9:20-28)**

**Verse 20—*Then Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters***—not the book of Esther, but that the rejoicing was done on two different days.

***—to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far***—to all the Jews in all the empire—who had received Haman’s edict and then Mordecai’s edict.

**Verse 21*—obliging*** [“to make binding’] ***them to celebrate the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same month, annually***—The Feast of Purim was not established by the Mosaic Law. It was commanded by Mordecai and Esther. It was to be a two-day feast, celebrated every year.

**Verse 22—*because on those days the Jews rid themselves of their enemies, and it was a month which was turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and rejoicing and sending portions of food to one another and gifts to the poor***—two days of celebrating their salvation from destruction

**Verse 23—*Thus the Jews undertook what they had started to do, and what Mordecai had written to them***—they adopted this custom and to celebrate it every year

**Verses 24-25—*For Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the adversary of all the Jews, had schemed against the Jews to destroy them and had cast Pur, that is the lot, to disturb them and destroy them***. ***But when it came to the king’s attention, he commanded by letter that his wicked scheme which he had devised against the Jews, should return on his own head and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows***—this is a summarization of chapters 1–8. However, the situations of Mordecai, Esther, the Jews, and the king are now radically different from what they were in the original story. The Jews are no longer personae non gratae. The king’s reason for executing Haman in 8:7 (different from what motivated him in 7:9) has revealed him as a protector of the Jews. Mordecai is now a high-ranking political advisor to the king. However, Haman remains the same—the enemy of the Jews.

—Also, notice that Mordecai gives credit to the king for saving the Jews, not to himself or to Esther. The king is made to appear as virtually the sole agent in the Jews’ deliverance. Thus Mordecai flatters the king into adopting attitudes favorable to the Jews by speaking as if he already possessed them, thus enlisting the king further in the Jewish cause.

—Also, the festival celebrates deliverance from “Haman’s wicked plan,” not victory over enemies in battle and bloodshed.

**Verse 26—*Therefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur***—Persian, meaning “lot” (3:7), because of Haman’s use of the *pur* (lot) to determine the day for the destruction of the Jews. *Purim* is the plural of *pur*. In this letter, Mordecai explains why the celebration is called Purim. Apart from Mordecai’s letter, the Jewish community at large would have known nothing about either the event of causing *pur* or the foreign term used. However, in a kind of reverse psychology, *pur* produced the day of their vindication and victory. It seems that it is plural because of the two lots cast: one for the day and one for the month (3:7) for the extermination of the Jews.

***—And because of*** (1) ***the instructions in this letter, both*** (2) ***what they had seen in this regard and***

(3) ***what had happened to them***—the whole story of the crisis beginning with Haman’s edict as described in Mordecai’s letter.

**Verses 27-28—*the Jews established and made a custom for themselves and for their descendants and for all those who allied themselves with them*** [proselytes to Judaism]***, so that they would not fail to celebrate these two days according to their regulation and according to their appointed time annually.***

***So these days were to be remembered and celebrated throughout every generation, every family, every province and every city; and these days of Purim were not to fail from among the Jews, or their memory fade from their descendants***—so the Jews would not ever forget

1. **Esther’s Confirmation (9:29-32)**

**Verse 29—*Then Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter about Purim***—Esther used all her authority as queen to confirm Mordecai’s letter to the Jews, to establish the Feast of Purim.

**Verses 30-31—*He sent letters to all the Jews, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, namely, words of peace and truth***—good words of encouragement

***—to establish these days of Purim at their appointed times, just as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had established for them*—**annual Feast of Purim

***—and just as they had established for themselves and for their descendants with instructions for their times of fasting and their lamentations***—She encouraged them to keep the Feast of Purim, just as they had kept the time of fasting on various occasions of national danger and disaster in the past, including 4:3. By the 9th century A.D., the Jews were observing the 13th day as a fasting day, called “Esther’s fast.”

**Verse 32—*The command of Esther established these customs for Purim, and it was written in the book***—It was written in order to be available for future generations. Some understand this verse to be a reference to the Book of Esther itself. Others believe it refers to the scroll used by the compiler of Esther.

1. **The Greatness of Mordecai (10:1-3)**

**Verse 1—*Now King Ahasuerus laid a tribute on the land and on the coastlands of the sea***—Just as the book began, it ends with the imperial power and wealth of Xerxes. As the following statement reveals, the description of the king’s power and greatness is intended to increase the stature of Mordecai, his Jewish prime minister.

**Verse 2—*And all the accomplishments of his*** [the king’s] ***authority and strength,***

***—and the full account of the greatness of Mordecai to which the king advanced him***—

***—are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia?***—The clause uses the identical form and language of the rhetorical question with which the books of Kings and Chronicles concluded the accounts of the kings of Judah and Israel (“and the rest of the acts of Rehoboam and all that he accomplished, are they not recorded in the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah?” [1 Kings 14:29; 15:23; 16:14; 2 Chron 25:26]). In this way, Mordecai, the leader of the diaspora, acquires similar status to the leaders of the community of old.

**Verse 3—*For Mordecai the Jew was second only to King Ahasuerus***—similar to Joseph to Pharaoh (Genesis 41:43). Mordecai is now known as “the Jew.”

***—and great among the Jews and in favor with his many kinsmen***—however, the Book of Esther nowhere states that Mordecai was a righteous individual or that he was careful to follow the Mosaic Law.

***—one who sought the good of his people and one who spoke for the welfare of his whole nation***—He is now great because of his continued actions in seeking the good of his people, the Jews of the diaspora, and promoting the welfare of all their descendants. As such, Mordecai typifies for every diaspora community the possibility of living a creative and rich life in a foreign environment and remaining a devoted and loyal member of their community of fellow Jews.

Also, and far more significantly, Mordecai represents the need (and hope) of the diaspora of having such a friend in high places whose dual loyalty may be the means of deliverance from the evil resident in that world.