

# Commentary on Esther

## Bible Study Notes and Comments

by David E. Pratte



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# Comments on the Book of Esther

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## Table of Contents

[Chapter 1](#), [Chapter 2](#), [Chapter 3](#)  
[Chapter 4](#), [Chapter 5](#), [Chapter 6](#)  
[Chapter 7](#), [Chapter 8](#), [Chapter 9](#)  
[Chapter 10](#)

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Notes to the reader: To save space and for other reasons, I have chosen not to include the Bible text in these notes (please use your Bible to follow along). You can find study questions to accompany these notes at [www.gospelway.com/classbooks](http://www.gospelway.com/classbooks). The abbreviation “**b/c/v**” means “book, chapter, and verse.” Also, when I ask the reader to refer to a map, please consult the maps at the back of your Bible or in a Bible dictionary.

# Introduction to the Book of Esther

## A. Background of the Book

### **Theme**

An historical narrative showing how God spared the people of Israel in exile by means of a courageous Jewish maiden.

### **Author**

unknown

### **Location**

Events occurred in Shushan (Susa) the capital of Persia during the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) – 1:2. (See MAP.) Although many Jews had been permitted to return to Judea under a decree by Cyrus, many Jews remained in Persia or lands where they had been taken captive.

### **Main characters**

Ahasuerus (Xerxes) - king of Persia

Haman – Chief of all the princes under Ahasuerus

Mordecai – A Jew in Shushan, a Benjamite, yet loyal to the king

Esther – A beautiful Jewish maiden, orphaned but raised by Mordecai, her cousin (his uncle's daughter – 2:7)

### **Summary of contents by section:**

Chap. 1,2 – Esther becomes queen in place of Vashti

Chap. 3-5 – Haman rises to power and plots the death of Mordecai and the Jews

Chap. 4-7 – Esther pleads on behalf of her people; Haman is slain

Chap. 8-10 – Jews win the victory over their enemies

### **Suggested commentaries**

Keil; Biblical Illustrator; Waldrons

## B. Historical Setting

Events in the book of Esther occur in Persia during the period of restoration of the Jews from Babylonian captivity (see list of 15 periods of Bible history). When Persia came to power after defeating Babylon, they allowed captives to return to their homelands. The story of Esther began in the third year of Xerxes (1:3), after Zerubbabel had led the first group of Jews to return under Cyrus, but before Ezra led the second group to return under Artaxerxes (see introductory notes on Ezra and Nehemiah).

### **Major empires of the ancient world:**

\* Assyria – overthrew Israel (northern tribes)

\* Babylon – overthrew Judah under Nebuchadnezzar

\* Medo-Persia – overthrew Babylon in 538 BC

Cyrus – decreed return of the Jews to Judea

Cambyses – 530-522 BC

Darius “the Great” – 522-486 BC

Xerxes (Ahasuerus) of the Book of Esther – 486-465 BC (NKJV footnote on 1:1 says 485-464 BC)

Artaxerxes – 465-424 BC

(These were followed by other minor rulers)

\* Greek – Alexander the Great defeated Persia

\* Roman

# Esther 1

## I. Esther Replaces Vashti as Queen – Chap. 1,2

### A. Vashti Angers the King and He Determines to Remove Her - Chap. 1

#### ***1:1-12 – Setting of the story***

These events occurred in the reign of Ahasuerus, king of Persia. He is also called Xerxes in secular history (NKJV footnote, cf. introductory notes). He ruled over 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia. Obviously, this was a great empire, the greatest of that day, having overthrown the Babylonian Empire.

The events occurred in the capital city of the empire which is called Shushan or Susa. Specifically, they occurred in the citadel, a fortified palace.

#### ***1:3-5 - The king's feast begins***

The story begins during the third year of the king's reign. The nobles, officials, and princes of the provinces he ruled were called to witness a great display demonstrating the greatness of his kingdom and majesty. The nature of this demonstration is not described exactly, but it is called a feast that lasted 180 days (6 months).

At the end of these days, he had a specific feast that lasted seven days. All the people, great and small, were present in Shushan in the court of the palace garden.

#### ***1:6-8 - A description of the feast***

The palace was decorated with curtains of white and blue bound up by fine linen cords with purple on silver rods and marble pillars. People sat on couches made of silver and gold (Keil says this refers to gold and silver thread woven into the cloth of the couches), which were placed on a mosaic pavement of alabaster, turquoise, white and black marble.

The people were then given golden vessels to drink from, each vessel being different from the others. In the vessels was royal wine served in abundance. However, the law required that drinking was not compulsory. The officers of the household were instructed to provide so each person could drink as he pleased.

This describes the lavish provisions of the feast and how it demonstrates the wealth of the king and his kingdom.

#### ***1:9-12 - Vashti refuses to come before the men of the banquet***

While the men were feasting, the queen Vashti made a feast for the women in the palace. This apparently created no problems.

However, on the seventh day of the feast, the king was merry with wine. He then commanded the seven named eunuchs to bring Vashti before the king wearing her royal crown, so the people and officials could observe her beauty. She was beautiful to behold, and the king in effect wanted to show her off.

However, Vashti refused to come despite the command of the king. This infuriated the king. This was the event that led later to the queen being deposed, as the subsequent verses show.

We may wonder at the wisdom or folly of Vashti's decision. Most commentators uphold her (especially Clarke, Keil, and Zerr). However, some question her conduct (see Henry). Whether she was justified in her refusal or not depends on exactly what the king asked her to do and what her reasons were for refusing, and this seems hard to determine.

Obviously the men at the feast were drinking and probably some were drunken. No self-respecting woman, especially if beautiful and yet modest, would want to be a toy displayed before such men. Doubtless she would be submitted to suggestive thoughts and probably even suggestive remarks. Furthermore, Oriental women were generally extremely modest, covering them-

selves thoroughly, especially in the presence of men. For the men to look on her beauty would require some display. She may have felt this was a violation of her dignity and/or her modesty.

On the other hand, if all she was required to display was her face, if she was not expected to expose more of herself (which some commentators suppose was expected of her), it is hard to say that she would have been wrong to go. The very fact she refused to go implies that she felt something out of the ordinary was being asked of her. It is possible, however, that she was haughty and simply determined to please herself regardless of her husband's wishes.

Perhaps we do not need to decide the right or wrong of her case, since we do not know the specifics. However, we do need to realize that God instructs women to submit to their husbands, unless they are asked to sin against God (Genesis 2:18; 3:16; Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18; 1 Corinthians 11:3; 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:12-14; 3:4,12; Titus 2:4,5; 1 Peter 3:1-7). On the other hand, immodesty is definitely sinful, so if a husband did request his wife to practice such, she should refuse.

### ***1:13-15 - The king consults with his advisors regarding Vashti***

The king then called a meeting of his trusted advisors. These were wise men who understood the times. This is explained to mean that they knew the law and justice as properly applied in that society at that time (though some theorize that it might also have included the practice of Astrology). Cf. 1 Chron. 12:32, which is similar and does not seem to have any reference to Astrology. The seven closest advisors are named, being the princes of Persia and Media. They had the highest rank as princes in the kingdom and so had access to the king's presence.

The king then inquired of these men what he should do about Vashti. She had disobeyed a direct command of the king taken to her by the eunuchs. He evidently thought some penalty should be assessed against her.

### ***1:16-18 - Memucan expresses concern that Vashti's disobedience may spread to other women***

The advisor who spoke up was Memucan (at least he is the one whose advice is recorded). He said that Vashti's conduct was not just an act of rebellion against the king, but it was a wrong done to all the princes and all the people because of its influence. The queen was so prominent that, if she were allowed to rebel against the king without consequence, then other women would follow her example and would show contempt for the authority of their husbands. The women would all hear what had happened and would use Vashti's example as justification for them to do likewise.

The principle that Memucan states here is an important principle (though we do not know that it is proper to apply it in this case). It is true that the conduct, especially of prominent people, has an influence on others. When people in positions of authority and prominence are known to practice sin, the result is harmful influence on people of the nation. This is a legitimate concern.

Of course, as discussed already, it could be that the principle is misapplied in Vashti's case. If her conduct was justified, then this is not a right conclusion in her case. In that case what could have been done would be to send a proclamation explaining to everyone why the queen did as she did. Women could still be admonished to respect their husband's authority and men would be admonished not to request their wives to act improperly.

### ***1:19-22 - The decree to depose Vashti***

The recommendation was that Vashti should be punished by royal decree removing her from her position as queen and forbidding her to come anymore before the king. Someone else would then be chosen as queen in her place. Such a proclamation would give all the women of the empire reason to respect the will of their husbands.

Note that we are told that, when such royal decrees were made, they were recorded in the laws of the Medo-Persian Empire and then could not be altered. No one could change them, not

even the king himself. This was a fundamental law of the empire. We will see that this principle of law becomes quite significant in other applications as the story proceeds.

Such an action by the king would have the effect of a divorce, though in some technicalities it might not have actually been a divorce. She was deposed from being queen, but we will see that the king had a large harem of which only one woman would be queen. So she might still have remained in his harem. Nevertheless, she would never be favored to come before the king, so she was at least in disgrace and banished from his presence for life. Yet having been queen, it seems unlikely (to me) that she was hereby granted permission to marry some other man. If such were the case, then this was not technically a divorce. Nevertheless, if it was a divorce, such was permitted under the Old Testament law but would not be permitted under the gospel (Deut. 24:1ff; cf. Matt. 19:3-9).

The king and other princes were pleased by this advice. So letters were sent to all the provinces stating the decree. These were translated into the language of each of the provinces, so that people everywhere would know that each man should be respected as head of his house.

## Esther 2

### B. Esther Is Chosen as Queen - Chap. 2

#### **2:1 - The king remembers Vashti's conduct**

After some time had passed since the banishment of Vashti, King Ahasuerus thought further about her actions and the decree that had been made against her. That decree had declared that her royal estate as queen would be given to someone else (1:19), but to this date no one had been chosen as queen.

#### **2:2-4 - A plan for choosing a replacement**

Some of the king's servants suggested a plan. They suggested that the kingdom be canvassed for beautiful young maidens. Officers in all the provinces would seek out maidens and bring them to the palace in Shushan. There they would be placed in the house of the women – the harem such as were kept by most kings (cf. Solomon).

These women were apparently to become wives and/or concubines of the king. They would be put in the keeping of a eunuch named Hegai, custodian of the women. They would then be given “beauty preparations” (cf. vv 9,12) followed by an opportunity to please the king. The one who pleased him best would be chosen queen in Vashti's place. So a selection would be made from among the young maidens in the harem to find one of the group to be queen.

This plan satisfied the king, so he decreed that it be so done.

#### **2:5,6 - Introduction to Mordecai**

The record now introduces the hero and heroine of the story. Mordecai was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin. Some of his lineage is given, and we are told that he was in Shushan the palace, though his exact responsibility there is never made clear.

Mordecai was a captive among the Jews during the days following the time in which Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had carried away as captives Jeconiah, king of Judah, and other Jews. See 2 Kings 24:6-17; 2 Chronicles 36:10,20; Jer. 24:1. It is uncertain, from the reading, exactly who v6 refers to as having been taken captive. It could refer to Mordecai's great grandfather Kish, the last named person in the previous verse (as in the NKJV). Or it could refer to Mordecai himself (cf. NKJV footnote). Keil points out that it had been some 120 years since the beginning of the captivity. Babylon had since been overthrown by Persia, and several Persian kings had come and gone. It is unlikely that Mordecai was this old, especially if he had a cousin as young as Esther. Keil suggests that perhaps Mordecai was not born when his ancestors were carried captive, but it was still proper to speak this way since his ancestors were taken captive and he was born as their offspring in captivity.

#### **2:7 - Introduction to Esther**

Mordecai had a young cousin named Hadasseh (Chaldee meaning “myrtle”) or Esther (Persian meaning “a star”). She was Mordecai's uncle's daughter, therefore Mordecai's cousin. But she had no living father or mother (v15 says her father was named Abihail). When her parents had died, Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter and raised her (see also on v15). She was fair and beautiful.

#### **Lessons about caring for needy relatives**

Note here an admirable quality in Mordecai. He was willing to make the effort to care for a relative in time of need. This is exactly what 1 Timothy 5 teaches Christians to do. If people today would recognize their individual responsibility to care for needy relatives, as Mordecai had done, we could solve much of the “widow and orphan” problem.

Note that Esther was a true orphan – she had neither mother nor father. Had her parents been living, they would have been responsible to care for her. But at their death she became the

responsibility of a relative to individually provide for. This is God's way and is best for all involved. Today the church should care only for saints who have no relatives (in the church) to care for them. And then the church should oversee the work, rather than sending the needy person and/or a financial contribution to an institution (Acts 6; 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3; 1 Timothy 5).

For further information, see our article about church organization and work at our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).

### ***2:8,9 - Esther pleases the custodian of women***

When the decree was issued to bring fair maidens into the king's harem, Esther was among those chosen. Whether or not she had any choice in this selection is not stated.

She was placed under the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women, who was especially pleased with her. He quickly gave her the beauty preparations to prepare her to go before the king (v12). Seven maidens were chosen to attend her, and she was moved into the best place of the house of women. Apparently there were various degrees of honor among the women of the harem, and from the beginning Esther was given a favored standing.

### ***2:10,11 - Mordecai's care for Esther***

To this point Esther had not revealed to anyone in the palace that she was Jewish. Presumably this would have hindered her chances of being selected as queen. So Mordecai had warned her not to speak about her nationality, and she obeyed him (cf. v20). This shows that Esther and Mordecai were attempting to have her chosen queen; if not, they could have easily eliminated her selection by revealing her nationality.

Mordecai apparently had access at least to the courtyard of the house of women. This appears to have been the consequence of his position, whatever it was. It would not have been because of his relationship to Esther, for had that been revealed it would have identified her as a Jew (we will see that Mordecai was known to be a Jew).

So Mordecai went everyday to pace in front of the court of the women's quarters. There he sought to learn about Esther's well being, though we are not told exactly how they communicated.

### ***2:12-14 - Description of the means of selecting a queen***

These verses describe how a queen would be selected from among the young maidens.

Each young woman was given twelve months to prepare before going in to see the king. She would receive six months' treatment with oil of myrrh followed by six months' treatment with perfumes and other preparations. The details are not stated except that this was a procedure every woman went through to beautify her to meet the king. Remember, this was the king of the greatest empire on earth!

After a woman had completed her preparation, she would be appointed an evening to spend with the king. She could have anything she wanted to take with her to attempt to impress the king. No doubt many would choose special clothing, jewels, or other ornaments.

When a virgin's turn came, she would go to the king in the evening, then after she returned in the morning she would go to a second house. The first house was for women being prepared for their first visit with the king. This second house was for women in the harem who had already seen the king at least once. It was under the custody of a different chamberlain named Shaashgaz.

A woman in this second house could go to visit the king again only if he called for her by name. Apparently in the meantime they would simply live there as part of the harem. In this way the king could have more than one visit with a woman, either to get to know her better in his choice of a queen, or just to enjoy her. Doubtless even after a queen was selected, the king could still choose to spend any given night with any woman in his harem of his choosing.



## **2:15,16 - Esther's turn to visit the king**

Esther's turn to visit the king came in the seventh year of his reign in the tenth month (named Tebeth). This would have been four years after Vashti was deposed (cf. 1:3).

When Esther's turn came to go before the king (we are here told her father's name was Abihail), she did not ask for anything special to take with her. She took only the things that Hegai the custodian advised her to take. Yet her beauty and charm were such that she obtained favor of all who saw her even without special aids.

## **2:17,18 - Esther chosen as queen**

Esther so impressed Ahasuerus that she obtained grace and favor before him above all the other maidens. He loved her above all the other women and determined to make her queen and set the crown upon her head in place of Vashti.

To celebrate the crowning of the new queen, the king held a great feast for his officials and servants in her honor. He proclaimed a holiday and gave gifts to the people.

### **Notes about Esther's marriage to Ahasuerus:**

1) We may ask whether it was proper for Esther to marry a divorced man. But we must remember this occurred under the Old Testament, in which God tolerated divorce and remarriage as well as plural wives. Consider the cases of David and Solomon, and compare Matt. 19:3-9; 5:31,32; etc. Jesus explained that the Mosaic Law tolerated such conduct because of the hardness of the people's hearts, though it was not what God had originally intended.

Today, however, a marriage like that of Esther to Ahasuerus would be adultery, since Jesus' teaching returned to God's original marriage law of one man for one woman for life (except if one divorces a spouse for fornication). If one divorces for any other cause and remarries, the remarriage is adultery (see also Rom. 7:2,3).

For further information, see our articles about divorce and remarriage at our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).

2) We may also wonder why a Jew was permitted to marry a non-Jew in light of the passages forbidding intermarriage to people of other nations under the law. This had been a great concern in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. See Nehemiah 9:30; 13:23-27; Ezra 9 & 10; Deut. 7:1-5; Josh. 23:12,13; etc. (and see other references and notes on the passages in Ezra and Nehemiah).

Some may wonder if this case was justified as an exception in that God intended to use Esther to save the Jews. But how would Mordecai and Esther know this at the time of the marriage? Should such "end justifies the means" be accepted?

The proper explanation appears to be that the Old Testament prohibited intermarriage, not with people of all other nations, but only with people of the nations that had dwelt in and around Canaan. Those nations were known to be excessively idolatrous. God cast them out of the land and gave it to Israel because the iniquity of those nations was "full." They surrounded Israel and so would be a continual temptation to them. These reasons did not apply to other nations, and the prohibition is nowhere stated regarding them.

## **2:19,20 - The king did not know Esther was a Jewess**

We are told that the event here recorded took place "when virgins were gathered a second time." Esther was queen at the time (v22), so this was after the first time that young maidens were gathered to find a queen and Esther had been chosen. Keil concludes there must have been a later time, after Esther was chosen, when maidens were gathered, not to choose a queen, but simply to increase the king's harem.

At this time Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. Again it is unclear what his position was that kept him there, whether business or government affairs, we are not told.

Again v20 reminds us that Esther still had not made known her nationality. Mordecai had told her to not do this, and she obeyed him even as she had when he was bringing her up. This fact becomes significant in the subsequent story.

***2:21-23 – Mordecai saves the king's life***

Somehow, as he was about his business at the gate, Mordecai learned of a plot by two eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, who intended to kill the king. They were doorkeepers, so in some sense they were responsible to guard the doors. They became very angry at the king and sought to lay hands on him.

Mordecai learned of the plot and revealed it to Esther. She in turn warned the king, giving Mordecai credit as her source of information (she could do this without revealing her relationship to him).

The accusation against these men was investigated and determined to be true. The men were then hung on a gallows, and the king's life was spared. All this was then recorded in the chronicles, the official record of royal history.

This event also reveals the admirable character of Mordecai. The story may seem to be told here just for the sake of interest, but we will later learn that this record in the chronicles plays a major role in the subsequent story.

## Esther 3

### II. The Rise of Haman to Power and His Decree Against the Jews – Chap. 3-5

#### A. Haman Decrees the Death of the Jews - Chap. 3

##### **3:1,2 - Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman**

The events recorded here occurred sometime later, after Esther had become queen and after Mordecai had saved the king's life (we are not told how long after). There arose to prominence a man named Haman. He was the son of Hammedatha, an Agagite. Exactly what this tells us about his background is unclear (cf. on vv 2-4). The king exalted Haman till he was above all the princes of all the provinces. In such a great Empire, this was surely a very exalted position.

As part of his exalted position, the king's servants were required to bow to him and pay homage. This was done at the command of the king.

However, we are told that Mordecai for some reason refused to bow. The reason is not given here but will be discussed more fully in the following verses. This refusal of Mordecai became the occasion for serious conflict that became the basis of the entire story of the book.

##### **3:3,4 - Mordecai challenged for his stand**

Mordecai was then asked, by other of the king's servants who sat in the gate, why he acted in this way, especially since he was disobeying the king's command. He was disregarding, not just Haman, but the king himself. The account does not record his exact answer, but v4 shows that his explanation was based on the fact he was a Jew. This plus the fact that Haman determined to slay all Jews (v6) shows that Mordecai's reason for refusing to bow was based on his religion and nationality as a Jew. Clearly a reason of this nature would be required to explain the strength of Mordecai's convictions.

The servants spoke to Mordecai every day questioning him about his conduct, but he refused to listen. Finally the servants reported to Haman about Mordecai's conduct, to see whether or not Mordecai was going to be able succeed in his defiance of the law.

The record does not explain why, as a Jew, Mordecai believed he could not bow to Haman. Jews did at times bow to kings – 2 Sam. 14:4; 18:28; 1 Kings 1:16; etc. Two common explanations exist:

(1) Rulers of heathen empires were at times (though not always) honored as gods (cf. Acts 12). So bowing to the rulers was viewed as worship or reverence to a deity. If this was the intent in Haman's case, Jews could not participate since it would be idolatry. In this case, however, it is strange that such homage would be required toward Haman, but nothing mentions that such homage was required toward the king himself.

(2) It is possible that "Agagite" means Haman was a descendant of the Amalekites, whose kings were called "Agag" (cf. Pharaohs, Caesar, Herod, etc.; see 1 Sam. 15). If so, God had commanded what attitude Jews should have toward Amalekites – Ex. 17:14,15; Deut. 25:17-19.

##### **Lessons from Mordecai's example**

The example of Mordecai is worthy of our consideration and imitation. From him we can learn the importance of standing for God's will regardless of the opposition. He refused to sin or violate his conscience despite the great forces that were brought against him.

(1) First, he was disobeying a direct command of the king (cf. Acts 5:29).

(2) He had to withstand the continual urging of his companions, who sought to pressure him to participate (vv 3,4).

(3) He was clearly in the minority, perhaps completely alone, in the stand he took. Surely his conduct would be noticed in any crowd, since all the others would be bowing when he would not (the comments of his companions show that others did notice).

(4) He was threatened with death, not just to himself, but to all his people. But even after this decree was officially signed, he still refused to bow (5:9).

Other Bible characters have stood with equal courage in the face of opposition. Daniel refused to eat the king's dainties or to cease praying though it meant being cast into a lion's den. The three Hebrews refused to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's image, though the penalty was the fiery furnace. Joseph refused to commit adultery with Potiphar's wife, though it meant prison. Peter and John continued preaching Jesus thought it meant beating and imprisonment. So Paul and all the apostles and Stephen were persecuted, as was Jesus Himself.

Many of us would have given in to the pressure and excused our participation as being just as "a little matter." But examples such as that of Mordecai should give us courage. We should consider also our own influence on others for good or bad.

Will we stand up and do right when: (1) we are made fun of for teaching others about Jesus? (2) we are called "chicken," "holy Joe," etc. for refusing to practice sin? (3) we are persecuted and even threatened with physical violence? (4) our job is threatened because we refuse to lie, cheat, give to United Way, etc.?

### ***3:5,6 - Haman determines to destroy the Jews***

When Haman realized what Mordecai was doing, he became fiercely angry. He wanted to lay hands on Mordecai, but he decided not to, because he had been told that Mordecai was a Jew. Presumably he understood that Mordecai's religion/nationality was the reason for his refusal to bow. He decided that, rather than just attempting to lay hands on Mordecai, he would attempt to destroy all the Jews in the whole empire.

Note the pride and cruelty of this man:

(1) Note Haman's pride: It was not enough that he was honored with such a high position and such favor with the king. In spite of this, his anger burned over so little a thing as a man who would not bow to him (cf. 5:11-13).

Many people cannot handle honor without becoming proud and conceited. They become tyrants who demand cowering submission by their subjects. Likewise, people today are often easily offended when people do not honor and praise them as they think they ought to be. Cf. Romans 12:3-5; Philippians 2:2-5; Proverbs 6:16-19; 16:5,18; 13:10; 1 John 2:15-17; Romans 1:30,32; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5; 1 Corinthians 13:4,5; 2 Timothy 3:2; Luke 14:7-11; Galatians 6:1; Colossians 3:12,13.

(2) Note Haman's cruelty: It would have been bad enough had he sought to imprison one man to satisfy his own ego. Worse yet would have been an attempt to slay one man. Yet so great was Haman's cruelty, he would have massacred a whole nationality of people for his pride. And these were law-abiding people, hard workers, etc. Mordecai had proved his loyalty to the king (2:21-23). Yet he would have slain them all because Mordecai did not adequately satisfy his vanity.

### ***3:7 - Haman chooses a time to accomplish his plot***

These events occurred in the twelfth year of Ahasuerus, which would have been five years after Esther became queen (2:16ff). Haman then proceeded with his plan.

He began by having the lot ("Pur") cast before him to determine what month and day would be most favorable to attempt his plans. "The lot" throughout the Bible is a means of making decisions by some activity that would appear to be an act of chance (throw dice, toss a coin, etc.). However, it was believed that the gods would make the lot turn out such that it would reveal what was true or best. When inspired men did such by God's guidance, the result would be accurate. But here Haman appealed to his sources, which no doubt were false gods or perhaps even

astrologers or magicians. Note that such consultation was probably fairly common by rulers in that day.

The result was that the month chosen was the twelfth month. However, as we will see, this was not a day favorable to Haman's purpose at all. This whole book shows that God watches over and cares for His people. We may suffer and be tried, but the final result will be for our good. But false gods cannot defeat God's purpose. Astrology is worthless. All appeals to other sources of supernatural information are inferior. If we want truth, we must go to God and His word.

### ***3:8 - Haman approaches the king for permission***

To achieve his goals Haman then went to the king to obtain permission to slaughter the Jews. He stated some partial truths but by no means told the whole truth.

First he said there was a certain group of people who were scattered throughout the provinces of the empire who, in spite of being scattered, yet persisted in abiding by their own laws which were different than those of other people. This was true in a sense, since they followed God's law. But this was not necessarily bad in any sense.

Haman, however, charged that these people did not keep the king's commands, though he gave no specifics. This may have been true in the sense that they were not bowing to Haman. But in general the Jews were loyal citizens, as Mordecai had shown in sparing the king's life. The Jews' disobedience was hurting no one but Haman! Yet he argued that the people were not profitable to the king, as though this would justify his request. He did not mention his real reason for hating the Jews – the fact that one man would not bow to him, and he was therefore determined to destroy a whole nation! Note the manner in which evil men pursue their goals by half truths and false insinuations.

### ***3:9 - Haman makes his request of the king***

Having poisoned the king's mind against the people, Haman then boldly requested the destruction of these people. To clinch his request, he offered to give 10,000 talents of silver into the king's treasury if the king would approve the decree (the Waldrons point out that 10,000 talents of silver would equal 375 tons!). This bears all the earmarks of graft and bribery, as is so common in many governments. To pay the king for permission to slaughter thousands of his subjects, however, is the grossest sort of evil! This had been smoothed over, however, by the accusation that the people were rebellious and unprofitable in the kingdom anyway. No information is given regarding where Haman would obtain such a fabulous amount of money. Perhaps he intended to take it from the spoils of the murdered Jews (3:13).

Note that, at this point, Haman had not even identified who these people were that he wanted destroyed. He had not named them as Jews. Nevertheless the king approved the request. Surely, though, the king learned who it was, at least when the decree was actually issued.

### ***3:10,11 - The decree is authorized***

The king then took his ring, the official seal by which he authorized decrees, and gave it to Haman. The seal was a sign of authority. He thereby authorized Haman to do as he pleased regarding these people, but the king refused the money. He did not want the bribe, but he granted Haman's wish anyway. Apparently he was so favorably inclined toward Haman that he trusted him and simply granted his request without question. He authorized that act at Haman's discretion.

Later the king realized his mistake when he learned the true character of Haman. This should teach us the importance of carefully choosing our close, trusted companions. Haman was an evil companion who corrupted Ahasuerus (1 Cor. 15:33). We must be very careful what influence people have on us and whose advice we take. Check matters out carefully. Surely in a matter that determined the lives of millions of people, the king should have been more careful and done more investigating. We need to take a lesson from his example.

### ***3:12 - The decree is written and sealed***

Having received authority from the king, Haman acted without delay. On the thirteenth day of the first month the decree began to be written. It was to be executed on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month. This length of time no doubt was helpful to the Jews in giving Esther time to work on the problem.

Haman had a decree written to all the rulers in all the provinces in the language of those provinces. This decree was done by the authority of the king, sealed with his ring. Hence, the people knew they must obey.

### ***3:13-15 - The letters sent***

The letters bearing the decree went by courier into all the provinces. The decreed said to destroy, slay, and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, including women and little children. This was to happen on the appointed day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month. People then were authorized to plunder the possessions of the Jews. The spoil would no doubt serve as a motivation to people to comply with the decree.

Note that the decree, had it been carried out, would have meant virtually the end of the Jewish nation, for it included all provinces, and almost all the world (especially where Jews were) was under this empire. Such would have been a terrible blow to God's people. Would He allow this or would He defend them? Further, consider the consequences to God's plan for man's redemption. If the Jews had been destroyed, how could Jesus be a descendant of Abraham, Jacob, and David as God has promised? No doubt, God could have found a way to accomplish His purpose in any case. But instead He chose to preserve the nation in the manner that we will see.

Note that Haman's evil would not only have affected himself, but he included the king in his evil, and now he was about to include all the people of the empire in his evil. All would have been involved in an act of mass murder. So our sins often affect those around us.

Mass murder, especially of Jews, has often occurred and is always an abomination. Pharaoh decreed destruction of Israelite babies, and so did Herod. Germany murdered millions in Germany. Communists did such a thing in many nations, not just to Jews, but to all who opposed communism. In our own society, abortion is a mass murder of a class of people.

The decree went out by rapid post to inform all the people to get ready for the actual day. The decrees perplexed the people, and rightly so: why murder a whole nationality of people? Why should the people have to be the ones to do it? Who would be the next victims? Meantime, the king and Haman were bosom buddies, drinking together, enjoying themselves, apparently unconcerned about the tremendous impact of their act.

## Esther 4

### B. Mordecai Persuades Esther to Appeal to the King - Chap. 4

#### **4:1 – Mordecai mourn the decree**

When Mordecai heard of the decree that Haman had influenced the king to make, he felt deep sorrow and mourning. This was expressed by tearing his garment, wearing sackcloth, and crying out with a loud, bitter cry in the midst of the city (presumably publicly).

Mordecai, of all people, should have felt deep sorrow for the decree, since his conduct had occasioned it. Had he alone been threatened for his conduct, that would have been a great enough source of grief. But his conduct had led to a decree of destruction, not just against him or even against his own family, but against the whole Jewish population – all Jews, everywhere on earth. How much greater burden could a man have to bear? Surely it was cause for great sorrow.

Here and in the following story we see another great quality of Mordecai. He felt a deep sense of responsibility for the consequences of his own conduct. Unlike some, he was not indifferent to the suffering or sorrow that could come to others as a consequence of his conduct. It touched his heart, so he determined to do something about it.

Of course, this did not mean Mordecai was convicted that his conduct had been wrong. We will see that he continues to maintain the same conduct. The point is that it grieved him that Haman had reacted so sinfully to Mordecai's stand for truth.

(It may appear at this point that Mordecai did not yet know that his conduct had occasioned the decree, but v7 implies he did know.)

#### **4:2,3 - The sorrow spreads among the Jews**

He expressed his grief even as far as the gate of the king's palace. He could not, however, enter the gate, because it was against the rules for one who was wearing sackcloth to enter.

Mordecai's grief was shared by Jews in every province. As the decree arrived and was made known, the Jews recognized the danger they faced. They mourned, fasted, wept, and wailed, lying in sackcloth and ashes.

#### **4:4 - Esther seeks to console Mordecai**

To this point Esther had not heard about the decree. She did not yet know that her own husband, influenced by Haman, had decreed the death of all her people! Her servants (maids and eunuchs) were the ones who informed her, but apparently they just told her that the Jews were grieving, perhaps specifically that Mordecai was wearing sackcloth at the gate.

It seems doubtful that these people knew she was a Jew. So far as the record states, she had not yet made this known (2:20). They may have known she had some friendship with Mordecai, or they may have simply informed her of the matter as news (since it had stirred up the whole city – 3:15). Even now it appears that they did not inform her the specifics of the case and its effect on her own people, since Mordecai later explained this to her. But she knew the Jews were grieving, especially Mordecai, and this was enough to cause her distress.

She responded by sending Mordecai better clothing to wear instead of the sackcloth, but he refused it. Apparently she sought simply to comfort and cheer him. But his grief was too great to be so easily set aside. Keil suggests that maybe she offered these garments so that, without the sackcloth, he could then enter the gate and talk to her about what was troubling him. When he refused, however, she found a different way to communicate with him.

#### **4:5-7 - Esther communicates with Mordecai through her eunuch**

When Mordecai refused to be comforted or to come to her, Esther then sent an apparently trusted servant named Hathach to talk to Mordecai. She wanted him to learn the reason for Mordecai's distress.

Hathach accordingly met Mordecai outside the gate in the square of the city. Apparently this was a place of public access, and there Mordecai could go, even in his sackcloth.

Mordecai then explained to Hathach (so he could tell Esther) about the decree and what it would mean. Mordecai, however, knew more than just the decree. By some means he had learned who was responsible and even how much money Haman had offered to pay into the king's treasuries to bring about the Jews' destruction.

I do not know that this means the king had decided to accept the money from Haman (cf. 3:9,11). But it would show Esther how devious Haman was and how deeply determined he was to accomplish his purpose.

#### ***4:8 - Mordecai urges Esther to plead for her people with the king***

To help Esther see for herself what the problem was, Mordecai even sent her a copy of the decree itself. Note here the value of documenting our statements, especially when they involve an accusation against others. People need to know that our accusations are really true, and there is special power in personal eyewitness of the evidence.

Mordecai then gave instruction to Esther to go herself to talk to the king and appeal to him on behalf of her people. Note that Mordecai did more than just grieve over the problem. He had a plan for dealing with it. He knew Esther was in a position to influence the king, so he asked her to use her situation as a means to benefit God's people. Likewise, when we face difficult circumstances, we may grieve and must ultimately trust God for deliverance, but we should also consider what we can do about the problem and use our opportunities to resolve it.

Note that, at this point, if not before, Hathach would have learned Esther's nationality. The only possible exception would have been if Mordecai had communicated with Esther by means of a sealed letter (though the language does not seem to imply this). If in fact he did learn her nationality, he must have been a trusted servant indeed to keep this matter from eventually coming to the attention of the people, especially the king.

#### ***4:9-12 - Esther seeks to avoid the duty***

As a faithful servant, Hathach delivered Mordecai's message to Esther. Esther then responded with a message sent back to Mordecai.

Esther's first reaction to the instruction was much like that of Moses when God called him to go tell Pharaoh to release the Israelites. All she could do was to look at the difficulties and make excuses. And she had good cause for concern! She pointed out that Persian law forbade anyone to enter the inner court where the king was, unless the king called him to come. Any who entered unbidden would be killed, unless the king held out his golden scepter to him. Then the person would be spared to have an audience with the king. So Esther feared to go unbidden to speak to the king.

Further, she pointed out that she had not been called to an audience with the king in the previous thirty days. This would indicate that she foresaw no opportunity to speak to the king – it was not like she had an appointment with him every day! Furthermore, the fact he had not called might indicate he did not particularly desire to see her. This would make it especially dangerous for her to go.

Such objections would naturally arise in anyone's mind in such a case. No doubt there was legitimate cause for concern. One might also remember Ahasuerus' treatment of Vashti as a sign of how he treated queens who displeased him. If Esther's request likewise angered the king, he could easily decide to eliminate another queen and replace her.

Keil wonders why she did not simply send a message to the king and request an audience. This alternative, however, does not appear to have been considered by anyone in the case. Perhaps such was simply not allowed. Or perhaps she feared she would be required to give her reasons for wanting an audience, and that might require her to reveal too much (especially in light of



Haman's power) when she was not personally able to plead her case to the king. In any case, this alternative for some reason was not given serious consideration.

Had any of us been in Esther's place, we would no doubt have also been concerned about these problems. Yet it was also clear that such objections would not relieve her of her duty. When we consider the grave consequences to her people, we should clearly see what her duty was. And as Mordecai eventually pointed out, she was destined to die if the decree was carried out and her nationality became known. So why not risk her life now in the hope of saving as many Jews as she could. Doubtless in her heart she knew what her duty was. But like all of us, she hoped to find a different solution that did not involve such danger. How many times do we make excuses facing circumstances of far less consequence!

This message was then delivered to Mordecai.

#### ***4:13 - Mordecai replies to Esther's excuses***

Mordecai's response comprises one of the richest sections of the book. Though God is never mentioned, Mordecai's reply reveals deep faith in the providence of God. In stating his views, he helps us to a much deeper understanding and appreciation of God's providence.

Mordecai first reminded Esther of the personal danger she would face if she refused to aid God's people. She herself was a Jew. She need not think, though she was queen, that she would escape perishing with the other Jews. In fact, he assures her that, if she refused to help, she would perish despite the fact he is convinced God would then find some other means to save the Jews (see v14).

We too need to consider such lessons as this. We may fear the problems we may face if we serve God, but we need to have a much greater fear of the consequences we will face if we do not serve God (Luke 12:4,5). Yes, people may oppose us, mock us, reject us, or even persecute and kill us if we do God's will. But we will suffer eternally if we do not serve God. Do not think that we can neglect our opportunities to do God's will and yet escape punishment. And do not think we are exceptions to God's laws because we have special privileges in life: power, money, fame, or military might.

Note that Mordecai did not accept Esther's excuses, but neither did he deny the danger. He simply pointed out that the case was such that she must act despite the danger. In much smaller ways (usually), we face similar situations. The case is not that we face no hardships or that we can ignore the hardships. Rather, the nature of the situation is such that we need to act despite the hardships!

Further, Mordecai did not allow his personal attachment to Esther to sway his judgment about what she needed to do. Surely he too recognized the danger she faced, and he was concerned for her. He had raised her and repeatedly proved his love for her. But he overcame his tendency to seek her protection and insisted that she must act despite the danger. So at times we face situations where natural attachments and emotions might lead us to seek the safety and protection of loved ones. But we must overcome those tendencies when necessary to urge loved ones to act in ways that God's will requires. As with Mordecai, we must remember that they face a worse danger if they disobey God than they do if they displease men.

Esther had made excuses. Mordecai responded by offering encouragement to do right. That is what we must do for other Christians and loved ones. We must not be easily persuaded to give up our stand for what is right, simply because people resist it. We must persist when the will of God is at stake and the consequences are great. People who make excuses at first may yet be persuaded if we persist.

#### ***4:14 - Mordecai expresses confidence in God's plan***

Mordecai states his conviction that Esther would suffer if she did not use her position to benefit God's people. He says she and her father's house would perish. Yet even if she did fail to act, he was confident that God would find some other means to save His people.

How could he know this? He knew the Jews were God's people, and the promises of God to Abraham required that his descendants must continue, not be destroyed. Despite his grief, Mordecai knew somehow God must spare the nation so that the promised blessing on all nations (salvation through Christ) must yet come. Many Jews might suffer; many might even be slain. Yet the nation must live on to fulfill God's plan. This is a firm statement of God's providence working in the world to accomplish His purposes.

He also affirmed that Esther may have come to power as queen for the very purpose of being useful to God's purpose as this very time. Compare this to the story of Joseph, who came to political power at the time needed to save the Israelites. Here again was strong evidence of Mordecai's faith in God's providence.

### **Note lessons we learn here about God's providence.**

1) God's power still works in the world, even today, to accomplish His purposes. All that He has promised must come to pass. He is able to make it come to pass. There are things He may determine to do that we do not know what His determination is. But when He has revealed His will, we can be sure that He has the means to bring it to pass (as Mordecai knew God would spare Israel based on His stated promise). So sometimes we can know what He will do, because He has said so. Other times we may not know, because He has not spoken regarding the matter. But we can be sure that He has a plan to carry out His will, and He has the power to work in the Universe to accomplish His will. And we can be sure that, whatever that plan entails, it will be good in the end for those who are faithful to Him.

2) Mordecai also knew that God may use human agents to accomplish His providence, but He does not necessarily depend on any particular human agent. In this way, He does not violate the free will power to choose of any individual. He could use Esther, but she still had the power to choose whether to respond to His will or not. If she chose not to do so, He would use some other agency. God has many resources and many ways to accomplish His will. He is not limited by man's choices, but the choices any individual makes will determine whether God will bless or punish that individual.

3) God is able to work in providence without miraculous means. There is no miracle (an event impossible by natural law) anywhere in the book of Esther, yet it is evident that God is working. So today, the age of miracles has passed. When we teach that, some people argue that the conclusion is that God does not work in the world at all any more. Such statements show ignorance and lack of faith in God's providence. He proves in stories like this that He is perfectly capable of bringing about His will on earth even without miracles. Since miracles have ceased, He is still able by providence through natural law to accomplish His will.

For further information, see our article about miracles and direct revelation at our Bible Instruction web site at [www.gospelway.com/instruct/](http://www.gospelway.com/instruct/).

4) God may work long in advance of an event in order to have the arrangements made to accomplish His will when the time comes. Mordecai said that Esther may have come to this place of authority for this very purpose. God has the power to know ahead of time what will happen, so He can work as needed to prepare for the situation when it arrives. Then when the time comes, everyone and everything is in place to accomplish His plan.

5) Furthermore, we humans often cannot tell, even when we see events unfold, what God's intentions are; and sometimes we may not even be sure that He is the One who is causing some event. Mordecai said, "Who knows whether ..." He had faith God would accomplish His purpose, but he could not know ahead of time who or what means God would use.

So today people are mistaken when they attempt to read "signs" to reveal God's will for them by interpreting events around them. They are likewise mistaken to claim, based on what they see or experience in life, that "God led me to do such and such," or "I just knew the Holy Spirit was leading me to ..." God's will is revealed in Scripture. Other than that, we cannot know what His will and plans are, nor do we know for sure how He is working in any given situation. Neverthe-

less, though we may not know how, like Mordecai, we can be sure that God is working to achieve His goals.

6) Even though Esther could not be sure God intended to use her, yet Mordecai insisted that she should do what she could do in the circumstance. She should seek to further His cause and aid His people. She had special advantages, so she should use them.

Likewise, we too must use our blessings and advantages to do God's will, even though we may not know how God intends to work out His will here. As parents, we have a unique opportunity to teach our children. As employees, we may influence other workers. If we have wealth, we may support gospel preachers and help the needy. If we are able speakers, we may preach the gospel. If we have singing ability, we may be song leaders. Whatever advantages we have, we should seek to use them for the Lord.

It likewise seems to me that we should use what advantages we have in our nation to help bring about God's will for His people. And we do not have to know for sure what the outcome will be of any situation to do this. Esther used her position as Queen. Paul later used his advantages as a Roman citizen. American Christians should likewise use the advantage we have to vote for candidates that we believe will further decency and good morals. The fact other people do not have these advantages does not excuse us from using them when we do have them, just as the fact other people are not queens did not excuse Esther from using her position as queen. And we do not have to know for sure what God's plans are before we act. Esther did not know God would use her to save His people, but Mordecai still taught that she would be punished if she did not try to use what advantage she had to accomplish God's will.

#### ***4:15-17 - Esther agrees to make an appeal to the king.***

Having considered Mordecai's appeal and reasoning, Esther sent him her response. She determined that she would go before the king as Mordecai had instructed.

She said, "If I perish, I perish!" We all ought to admire and imitate such courage. We should be willing to serve God according to His will regardless of what price we may have to pay. No matter what the problems, difficulties, or dangers must be, we must proceed. If we perish, we perish. But God will still be pleased and will reward us eternally. Esther's courage should inspire us.

Note she said that such an act would be against the law. Actually, it would be against the law only if the king did not choose to recognize her. But even so in that case, she would be obeying God rather than men, so it would still be right for her to so act (Acts 5:29). We too should have the courage to violate human law when necessary to obey God.

#### ***She first sought God's blessings by fasting.***

Before making her request of the king, she determined that she and her servants would fast. And she requested that all the Jews in Shushan join her in this fast. God is not mentioned, but that is the purpose of fasting (see the examples in Ezra and Nehemiah). She seeks to make request of God before she makes request of the king.

This too should be our attitude. Esther was about to work for God, and we have many works we do for Him that we also want Him to bless. Let us appreciate the value of prayer, so we ask His blessings on our work for Him. Sometimes our work too involves some dangers. Let us cast our burdens on Him in prayer. Fasting too can serve a useful purpose in our lives.

Having learned of Esther's decision, Mordecai joined her and did as she requested (i.e., he urged the people to fast on her behalf).

So the scene is set for Esther to go before the king to make request to save the people from destruction.

## Esther 5

### C. Esther's First Banquet for Haman and the King - Chap. 5

#### **5:1 - Esther appears before the king**

On the third day (of the time the Jews were fasting – 4:16) Esther made her appearance before the king. She put on her royal apparel and stood in the inner court across from the place where the king sat on his throne. We should appreciate the courage this took, as described in 4:8-17.

Her request would be difficult to make for several reasons: (1) She sought to defeat a decree made by the authority of the king. (2) She knew she had a powerful adversary in Haman, who determinedly hated Mordecai and the Jews. (3) She would have to reveal for the first time that she herself was a Jew. How would the king react to this? (4) Finally, she must go unannounced before the king, an act which of itself would automatically cost her life if the king showed her no favor.

Yet she had resolved to do what was right and needed (4:13-16). She had diligently requested God's blessings on her efforts (4:16). So she then acted courageously on her resolve. So we must do when facing opposition or great responsibility. Let us too proceed when we must preach to influential people, rebuke a brother for sin, stand for our convictions against angry family and friends, etc.

#### **5:2,3 - The king spares Esther**

When the king saw Esther standing in the court, she found favor in his sight. So he extended the golden scepter to grant her permission to approach him, thereby sparing her life. She came forward and touched the top of the scepter (apparently the proper means of response for one who had been permitted to approach the king).

The first hurdle she so greatly feared had been crossed (4:11). Surely we must see God's providence at work. Note that no miracles had occurred, but her plea had thus far been answered.

Then the king asked Esther what her request was. He promised to give her whatever she asked for, even if she asked for half of his kingdom! What a reception! Surely this was more than Esther dared even hope for, though she still had not reached her ultimate goal.

It is interesting to observe that many of the bad things we fear never really happen. But this is especially true when, like Esther, we put our faith in God. Instead of death, as she feared, she had been offered half of the greatest empire in the world.

#### **5:4 - Esther gives the invitation to the first banquet**

Esther did not immediately make known her real request. She simply began by requesting Haman and the king to come to a banquet she had prepared that day.

Here we see great wisdom and patience on Esther's part. It may have been a temptation, after so favorable a reception, to proceed with her ultimate request. But instead, she courted the king's favor and prepared his heart to receive her ultimate request. Her request was great, her purpose momentous, and the need overwhelming. She did not rush to the conclusion but proceeded calmly and wisely.

We should learn from her example, when we attempt such serious matters. Note that she first obtained God's favor by prayer and fasting. Then she courted her husband's favor by a banquet. Then when she had the favor of God and man, she made her request.

Her method pleased the king and led him to look with favor toward her request. It also showed him how seriously she took the matter she was about to request and how much she wanted his favor. And finally, it gave opportunity to seek the most favorable time to speak. Yet consider how much turmoil all this must have cost Esther in the meanwhile!

Note further that Esther realized that “the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach.” She did not make bold, domineering demands, nor did she nag, nor did she manipulate him, nor did she seek to embarrass him, nor did she whine and complain, as some wives do. She respectfully sought to please him and gain his consent by kind attentions to him. Let godly wives take note!

### ***5:5,6 - The king and Haman go to the first banquet***

Ahasuerus gave order for Haman to be called so they can attend the banquet, as Esther had requested. Both of them were in attendance. (It is interesting how both were available on such short notice. This was providence at work, though it is also possible that Esther checked on the men’s schedules before she gave the invitation. If the king could not have attended that day, she would presumably have set another time for them to come.)

At the banquet, the king again asked Esther what her request was. And again he promised to do or give whatever she wanted, even up to half of his kingdom. This shows that he knew that the banquet itself was not the ultimate goal Esther sought. She had some further request to make, and he realized it.

We are told that this is a “banquet of wine,” but remember that “wine” in the Bible is not always intoxicating. The same word is used for grape juice, whether fermented or not. See Isaiah 16:10; Jeremiah 48:33; Isaiah 65:8; Genesis 40:9-11; Revelation 19:15.

### ***5:7,8 - Esther requests still another banquet***

Esther requested simply that the king and Haman come to another banquet the next day. She promised at that time to let the king know her request.

It is difficult to believe that, in making this request for a second banquet, Esther had any purposes other than the same ones she had for requesting the first banquet (see on v4 above). Nevertheless, the events that eventually transpired between the two banquets were absolutely essential to the success of her request. This shows how fortunate it was that she requested the second banquet. Once again God’s providence was clearly at work, though even Esther could not have understood it at the time.

### ***5:9 - Haman’s joy and frustration***

Haman left Esther’s first banquet feeling joyful and glad of heart. He had been honored by the queen, who had invited him personally to, not just one banquet, but two! Enjoy it while you can, Haman!

But as he was going home, Haman was confronted with the one great grief of his life. Once again he saw Mordecai at the king’s gate. As in the past, Mordecai refused to stand or tremble before Haman – i.e., he refused to give special honor to Haman. This infuriated Haman (cf. 3:2).

Note how Mordecai persisted in refusing to bow to Haman. Even after his conduct had motivated Haman to decree the destruction of Mordecai and all the Jews, still he would not do what violated the law of God. Clearly he was deeply upset to see the consequences that could come on the Jews (4:1-4), and he had taken great steps to try to overcome that problem (4:8ff). But the one step he refused to take was to bow to Haman – an act which he was convinced would be sinful. He would stand firm for the law of God regardless of the consequences. We should learn the lesson. How many of us often give in to far less pressure from friends and spiritual enemies!

### ***5:10-12 - Haman brags to his family and friends***

Despite his anger at Mordecai, Haman did nothing at the moment. Rather, he went on home and called a gathering of his friends and his wife Zeresh. His purpose, we will see, was to brag about his greatness and bask in the glory of his “fan club.” He gave them four proofs of his greatness, all of them material in nature.

(1) He told of his great **riches**. We are not told specifically how rich he was, but apparently his wealth was remarkable enough that he and his friends considered it to be exceptional. He

had enough that he had been willing to offer the king ten thousand talents of silver for decreeing the death of the Jews (3:9).

(2) He had a multitude of **children**. Esther 9:10 says he had ten sons. This was enough that he thought it would impress his friends. Note how, in contrast to today, numerous children was then viewed as a great blessing and a sign of eminence (cf. the stories of Jacob and Job; Psalms 127,128).

(3) He had great **power and authority**. The king had promoted him and set him above the other officials and servants (cf. 3:1,2).

(4) The final proof of Haman's greatness was his **honor**. The proof of this was that he and he alone had been invited to accompany the king to a banquet with the queen. And not only that, but he was invited back to another banquet the next day! This he mistook as a great honor showing that he was above all men in the empire except the king, even in the eyes of the queen.

Here again we see the galling vanity and conceit of this man. He was so stuck on himself and so inflated by his own greatness that he actually called his own brag session! And note that the measure of greatness to him, as with nearly all conceited men, consisted entirely of material pursuits. He considered himself to be great because of apparent success in physical possessions and honors. And note further how he can interpret events such as the invitation to Esther's banquets as having no purpose other than to show his greatness.

Surely we should learn here the lesson of the fleeting and unsatisfying nature of such conceit based on material things. In his very next breath he will acknowledge how unhappy he still is. And we will see further that he is just one day away from complete destruction. Pride goes before a fall. And let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall!

### **5:13 - Haman states his great anger at Mordecai.**

Having listed all his great honors, Haman then stated his great frustration at Mordecai. All these great honors and blessings, he says, avail nothing to him so long as Mordecai sits at the king's gate – i.e., as long as he continues to just sit there, refusing to rise and do obeisance as others did.

Note how this shows even more the colossal enormity of Haman's ego. Having all these great honors, he was yet not satisfied. It all meant nothing to him, because one piddling little Jew refused to bow to him! It was not enough to have wealth, family, and honor from the whole empire. All these people who did honor him meant nothing to him so long as there was just one man who refused to honor him! The idea seems to be that a man so supremely great as Haman thought he was, should not have to put up with such a sleight and disrespect from anyone, let alone such a dog as Mordecai!

This is typical of vain, greedy human nature. Instead of counting our many blessings, we tend to complain about the insignificant problems we have. Instead of appreciating what we have received, we worry about some minor imperfection in our circumstances.

And note how this demonstrates the failure of material prosperity to satisfy. One would think that someone so richly blessed as Haman would be satisfied. No matter how much we have, those whose joy and happiness in life is found in emphasizing material things think that they would be happy if only they could have just a little bit more. The fact is that material things do not ever really satisfy no matter how much we have. People who seek success in material circumstances will always want more. As long as they see any flaw, minor irritation, or unfulfilled desire, they will not be satisfied!

### **5:14 - Haman plans Mordecai's death**

But Haman's "fan club" had a solution for his dilemma! Perhaps he hoped they would come up with a suggestion when he called the meeting. His wife and friends suggested that the simple solution would be to eliminate Mordecai. If he was such a source of irritation to such a great man as Haman, he should just get rid of him! They suggested he build a gallows and then get the

king's permission to hang Mordecai on it. Then he could be truly happy and enjoy the banquet with the queen! All this sounded good to Haman, so he had the gallows built 50 cubits (75 feet – seven stories) high!

See again the conceit of Haman and of his friends on his behalf. They all just assume that a man of Haman's great stature has the right to just wipe out anybody who in any way crosses him, just like swatting a fly! And further they assume that surely a great man like Haman could sway the king to accomplish a little thing like this at Haman's bidding! Then, having satisfied his callous pride by shedding the blood of a righteous man, he could go calmly on and eat a pleasant feast with joy instead of remorse or guilt! See how ego drives a man to such incredible disregard for others. He himself is so important that others are as nothing. He has every right to wipe them out if they so much as cause him a little inconvenience! They are nothing. He is everything!

Note also the danger of bad advice and of having close companionships with people who encourage us in sin and have no scruples against evil. One can be swayed by associates. Haman had influenced Ahasuerus to allow a decree that would wipe out an entire nationality of people. Haman in turn was influenced by his friends to determine to casually slay an innocent man. Note especially the influence of his wife. She could, had she chosen, have been a great blessing to him and given wise counsel. Instead she became a curse to him by joining in giving evil advice.

Here we see Haman at the pinnacle of his glory and power. Here he was so confident that he had everything under control. All the cards were in his hand. But, "what a difference a day makes." As we enter the next chapter we will see that, unknown to Haman, the circumstances that he interpreted as being proof that he was at the peak of success, actually were the circumstances that would bring him down to total destruction.

### III. Haman's Defeat & the Jews' Victory – Chap. 6-10

#### Esther 6

Note that we stand at a dramatic turning point in the story. Up to this point Haman had been rising in power and honor. He had the upper hand and felt assured of success in his efforts to destroy Mordecai and the Jews (5:9-14). We will see how, beginning with this very night, God's providence began to turn all against him. His defeat was so complete that, in one single day he not only failed to achieve his desire to slay Mordecai, but rather he himself fell completely from the king's favor and was slain. Note also how all the story is building to a climax in a single day, as two opposing forces were quite independently seeking the king's favor to achieve totally opposite goals: Haman to slay Mordecai and Esther to deliver Mordecai and all the Jews.

#### A. Mordecai Honored for His Loyalty to the King - Chap. 6

##### **6:1,2 - The king learns of Mordecai's good deed**

On the very night between the two banquets, on the eve of Esther's request to save the Jews and the eve of Haman's request to kill Mordecai, an event occurred that brought Mordecai (and the Jews) to the king's favor.

The king was unable to sleep that night, so he called for the chronicles of his rulership to be brought and read to him. As the chronicles were read, one event mentioned was the fact that Mordecai had saved the king's life by informing him of the conspiracy of Bigthana and Teresh (2:21ff).

No reason is given why the king could not sleep, but surely God's providence was behind it. See how God uses such small things to bring about great purposes. Again no miracle was worked, no great impressive ritual, yet God's providence worked one of the greatest deliveries of history (cf. 4:14). And one thing God used was the sleeplessness of the king. If God can use such small things for great good, surely He can use you and me!

The importance of the fact this information came to the king's attention at this particular time cannot be over-emphasized. By this means God brought Mordecai to the king's favor at the very time that he needed the king's favor.

Note that Haman had argued for the destruction of the Jews on the grounds they were unprofitable to the king (3:8). Yet here was conclusive proof to the king that one Jew was incredibly profitable to him and had in fact saved his life. Another Jew of great value to him was his queen, but he had yet to learn of her nationality. This information could not have come before the king at a more opportune time, for unknown to the king, both Haman and Esther were about to make great requests of the king both regarding this very Mordecai and his people.

##### **6:3 - The king inquires regarding the honor given Mordecai**

Having been reminded of Mordecai's loyal service to him, the king wondered what had been done to reward this service. His attendants informed him that no reward had been given. So the king proceeded to search for a suitable reward.

Several lessons should be learned here. First, it was only right for the king to reward Mordecai. People in authority ought to reward those who serve faithfully, not just punish disobedience. Second, we see Mordecai's attitude toward the reward. He seemingly had no bitterness toward the king for having not rewarded him. When he was rewarded, there is no evidence that he became proud or conceited (like Haman) – cf. v12. He apparently had done service to the king because it was right to do, not because he sought honor from men. Unlike Haman, who later suggested great honors when he thought he would receive them (vv 6ff), Mordecai had apparently made no request whatever for reward. And when none came, he made no complaint to the king.



Finally note, however, that ultimately he received the greatest reward he could hope for. When that reward came, it came at a time that made it far more valuable to Mordecai than any reward that could have been given at the time he did the good deed. Consider the application to our reward. Some want immediate benefits from their conduct, so they emphasize material pursuits. Christians may not receive their rewards immediately, so it may seem (as with Mordecai) that the righteous receive evil, not good, for their reward. But the reward will surely come, and when it does it will be greater than any reward that could be given during this life.

### ***6:4,5 - The king seeks advice about honoring Mordecai***

The king was still trying to think of a good way to reward Mordecai, so he asked who was standing in the court. That is, he wondered who might be present that he could discuss the matter with and get some ideas. Apparently by that time it was day and Haman had come to the palace to make his request for permission from the king to kill Mordecai. So the king's servants told him that Haman was there, so the king ordered to have him brought in.

The irony here is amazing. The king wanted to ask Haman's advice about how to honor Mordecai, yet at that very moment the reason Haman was there was to ask permission to hang Mordecai! From this point on the irony grows.

### ***6:6 - The king inquires of Haman***

When Haman had entered, the king placed before Haman the question of what he should do to honor the man whom he sought to honor. The king did not name whom he spoke of, but Haman in his mammoth conceit thought surely the king must be speaking of Haman himself. "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?" So he thought up the very greatest honor that he himself would like to receive.

Again we see the incredible vanity of this man Haman. First, he did not even ask who was being discussed but simply assumed without evidence that it had to be himself who would be honored. In his conceit, he could not imagine that anyone else deserved to be honored! It would have been bad enough for him to think that no one would be honored above him, but the king had never even said whom he intended to honor. He simply said that he wanted to honor someone. Haman apparently assumed that, beside himself, no one deserved honor!

Second, thinking he would be honored, he presumptuously sought the greatest honor he could think of, instead of humbly seeking little or no honor. He was a glutton for honor. He had just spent an evening boasting to his family and friends about his own greatness (5:10-14). But was he satisfied with the great honors he had? No! Honor is temporary and, like wealth, one must always seek ever more and more hoping to achieve satisfaction by it.

Now note the irony. Haman sought death for Mordecai and honor for himself. Yet on this very day he would see Mordecai receive the very honor that he sought and invented for himself. And likewise, he himself would receive the very death that he had planned for Mordecai. And all this was by God's providence and answer to prayer.

### ***6:7-9 - Haman's advice to the king***

According to his presumptuous vanity, Haman proceeded to suggest great honors to be given, all the while thinking that he himself would receive those honors. So he suggested that the man be clothed in royal garments that the king himself sometimes wore and that he be placed upon a horse that the king himself sometimes rode, the horse having a royal crest placed on its head. Then one of the king's highest nobles should be assigned to lead the horse with its rider throughout the city square proclaiming that this was the way the king honored the man who had pleased him. Such would be comparable to our "ticker-tape parades," though in a way it would be an even greater honor, since it was given at the command of the greatest king on earth. The man in effect would be honored as "king for a day"!

### **6:10,11 - The king commands this honor for Mordecai**

When Haman had given this elaborate description, the king was so pleased by it that he commanded that all that Haman had spoken should be done immediately in every detail with no exceptions. But, instead of this being done to Haman as he expected, it was to be for the honor of Mordecai the Jew! Worse yet (from Haman's viewpoint), Haman was the one to be assigned to give the honor. He had to lead the horse! And that is exactly what Haman did.

Imagine the shame and horror Haman felt when he heard this verdict. Not only would this great honor not be given to him as he had planned, but instead it would be given to the one whom Haman considered to be his greatest enemy. And Haman himself would have to give it. And he had himself invented the whole thing!

The irony abounds. He had come to the king's presence to ask permission to **kill** Mordecai. Instead, he ended up honoring him. He hated Mordecai, because Mordecai refused to honor Haman as Haman thought he deserved. Now, instead of eliminating his rival, Haman must be the one to give him honor! (Cf. 5:9,13.)

Note that this decree not only honored Mordecai for his righteous conduct, but (unknown to the king) it simultaneously punished Haman for his vanity. And in reality Haman was punishing himself. This is how sin often acts. Had Haman not been so conceited in the first place, he would not have been bothered by Mordecai's conduct, Mordecai would not have been his enemy, and he would not have been bothered by having to honor Mordecai. Haman had never really been harmed at all. Yet he was mortally grieved, because his vanity and pride had been wounded. His pride itself was punishing him! It was, in effect, a self-inflicted wound. So sin often does to people, even in this life. Yet neither Mordecai's reward nor Haman's punishment were yet complete.

### **6:12 - Haman returns home mourning.**

Having been so honored, Mordecai returned to his previous pursuits at the king's gate. Nothing is said about any great pride on his part as a result of the honor he had received. This contrasted to Haman who let honor so go to his head (5:9-14) that when he felt slighted he was really upset (5:13).

After honoring Mordecai, Haman went home in mourning having covered his head. Why? Who had wronged him? No one! Only his pride had been wounded. When he was honored, he gloated. When others were honored, he pouted and threw a tantrum. In contrast, Mordecai showed no signs of gloating over Haman or bragging to his friends, etc. Instead, he simply went back to doing what he had before.

### **6:13 - Haman tells these latest events to his wife and friends**

Having returned home, Haman once again calls his wife and friends together and tells them the latest events, as he had the day before (5:9-14). But his story the day before had been all joy and glory (except for Mordecai's refusal to bow to him). Whereas, on this day he sulked and sought solace for his shame.

Amazingly, his wife and friends, who had so praised him the day before, now predicted his downfall! They said that, if Mordecai was of Jewish descent and had begun to prevail, then there was no way Haman could prevail against him but Haman would surely fall before him!

Note the fickleness of friends, especially when they follow a man for the sake of his fame, wealth, and glory. They are fair-weather friends who, as quickly as they flocked to a man in his time of glory, will desert him when he falls.

Yet is not clear how they could be so sure Mordecai would prevail over Haman. They said Mordecai would prevail because he was a Jew. But they had already known Mordecai was a Jew, since that was the reason Haman sought to kill him (5:13,14). So why conclude now that Mordecai would prevail? Perhaps they saw the significance of the turn of events. Haman had intended to kill Mordecai. But not only had he failed in that purpose, but he had actually ended up honor-

ing Mordecai. Perhaps the friends recognized this as an omen of things to come. Perhaps they also remembered the history of past victories of Israelites over their enemies. They were like the “fans” that cheer on an athletic team when victory seems assured, but then turn in disgust when it begins to lose.

***6:14 - The call to Esther's second banquet***

Now as the irony multiplies, even as his friends were making their predictions of Haman's downfall, the call came from the king's eunuchs for Haman to attend Esther's second banquet. He obviously was feeling bad – not nearly as wonderful as he had felt the previous day when he received the invitation to this banquet. But still he was totally unaware of what lay ahead for him at the banquet. The worst was yet to come.

## Esther 7

### B. Esther's Request & Haman's Downfall - Chap. 7

The story is building to the climax. The “stage” is now set for Esther's request. She has done all she can to prepare the king to be receptive. The king himself, by God's providence, has a favorable attitude toward Mordecai brought to his mind just this very morning. And Haman has been humbled by having to be the one to honor Mordecai. With this background, the story approaches the second banquet.

#### **7:1,2 - The king and Haman attend Esther's second banquet**

Haman and the king then came to Esther's second banquet, as she had requested. At this point neither the king nor Haman was aware of the nature of Esther's request.

However, the king again asked Esther what her request was. And he again offered to give her or do for her whatever she wanted, up to half of his kingdom. He had made this offer twice before (5:3,4,6). Now the time had come for Esther to speak.

#### **7:3,4 - Esther's request**

Esther began her request by speaking respectfully: “If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king...” It is always proper to show respect to those in proper authority when we make request of them. Mordecai's refusal to bow and show **undue** reverence to Haman would not deny or contradict our responsibility to give civil rulers the honor that is properly due them – Romans 13:1-7.

Esther then requested that her life and that of her people (race or nationality) may be spared, because they had been sold to be killed, destroyed, and annihilated. She requested that her life and her people's life be given in response to her petition. “Sold” seems to refer to Haman's offer to pay the king to allow the Jews' death. She said she would have remained silent if it had been simply a matter that they would become enslaved; but when they were condemned to death, she felt she had to speak.

But in any case, she argued, no amount of price paid could really compensate the loss the king would sustain. This appears to refer to Haman's contention that the people were of no profit to the king (3:8), but if they were killed, he would pay the king (3:9). So Esther claims the people were of great profit to the king such that no amount of compensation could really make up for it.

Notice the courage that Esther had in speaking, because she knew her cause was just and God was with her. She had made preparation wisely and carefully to gain the king's favor. But the time had come to speak. No amount of preparation could avoid the fact that sooner or later she had to speak up.

Likewise, there are times when we need to pray for God's help and make preparations to do God's will. But no amount of prayer or preparation eliminates the need for us to act. Prayer does not remove our responsibility to do what we can in God's work. The time comes when we must **act**. Let us truly trust in God's power and protection, but let us also realize that often He uses **our effort** to accomplish His work, so we must do what is best to bring about the needed result.

#### **7:5 - The king asks who is the guilty party**

The king's response was to ask who would be so presumptuous in his heart as to dare to seek to slay all the queen's people. He was clearly angry, and rightly so, that anyone would seek to do such a thing. But remember that he did not know at this point that Esther was a Jew, so he did not realize Haman's involvement (perhaps he did not even know that it was the Jews that Haman had been discussing when he had made his request of the king). Still further, he surely did not yet realize that he himself had been an accessory to the act, since he had given his approval to it.

Like David, who could see an act as being evil when it related to someone else's conduct, he did not see his own act as wrong despite his guilt.

### ***7:6 - Esther identifies Haman's guilt***

Having been asked directly who had sought to slay her people, Esther then boldly and plainly identified the guilty man: "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!"

Notice that Esther was not unwilling to name the specific individual and state plainly that he was evil. Some people today, even in the church, say such should not be done. They tell us not to name specific religious groups or individuals and say they are guilty of sin. But Esther did so, as did Jesus and His apostles. So we must do when it needs to be done for the cause of truth.

Notice also that Esther accused her adversary to his face. Haman was at this banquet and heard her accusation, because she herself had invited him. This gave him an opportunity to defend himself and present his side of the story, if he so chose. She could have chosen to invite only the king, so she could manipulate and politic against Haman behind his back. But she chose rather to confront the issue before the king in the presence of the one she accused. She treated Haman fairly despite the gross and criminal mistreatment he had himself committed against Esther's cousin Mordecai and the whole Jewish people. So we ought to fairly treat even those who oppose us. We should plainly speak against their error, but we should do so fairly.

Having heard the queen's accusation, Haman was terrified. Note how quickly his boasting vanity had changed to cowardice. The man had not considered, when he determined to make the decree, whom all it might affect. He had sought to destroy Mordecai and all his people. Since then he had learned the great favor that Mordecai had before the king, and here he came face to face with the fact that his decree would also lead to the destruction of the queen herself! And the king had just, in Haman's hearing, repeatedly promised to give the queen anything she wants!

Haughty men tend to over-estimate their power. This is one reason why pride goes before a fall. Haman had been so proud of the fact that Esther had invited him to these banquets, but here he realized too late that his decree had far more wide-reaching consequences than he had anticipated. What had seemed to him, in his vanity, to be an easy thing to accomplish, he now realized may be well beyond his ability to carry out. In fact, it was becoming clear that he might be the one to be destroyed. Especially such consequences follow when one is proud against the Lord.

### ***7:7 - Haman pleads for his life***

Having heard the evidence against Haman, whom he had previously favored highly, the king in anger arose, left the banquet, and went for a walk in the palace garden. No doubt he felt angry, not only because Haman had issued a decree which, if carried out, would kill the queen, but also doubtless because Haman had betrayed his trust. He had granted Haman high position and great power and had allowed Haman to issue the death decree as he saw fit, but now the king realized how Haman had betrayed his trust and abused his power. He saw now, presumably for the first time, the tragic danger of allowing a trusted counselor to issue a death decree without himself carefully checking out the consequences.

Rather than making a foolish decision, however, as he had done when Haman had asked to issue the decree, the king this time showed wisdom. Rather than acting rashly, he left the room to consider the matter more carefully before making a decision that he might later regret. It is wise for all people, especially those in authority over other people, to carefully weigh important decisions rather than jumping to conclusions.

When the king had left, Haman realized that the king had turned against him and the result could only be harm for Haman. So while the king was gone, Haman appealed to the queen to spare his life.

How interesting and ironic all this is! Just one day earlier all was going well for Haman (so he thought), all had to bow to him and honor him, and his only problem was that one miserable

Jew would not bow to him. Now one day later here he was having to prostrate himself before a Jew. One day earlier he had exalted and bragged what a great honor it was to him to attend the queen's banquets. Now one day later he realized that the banquets would lead to his downfall and perhaps even his death. One day earlier he was so confident in his power and position that he thought he could take the lives of all his enemies and decree the death of Mordecai for having crossed him. Now one day later, he must beg a Jew to spare his own life!

And then notice how quickly cruel men can become convinced to believe in the value of mercy! When he was in power and thought no one could stop him, he had no mercy whatever on the Jews. He mercilessly decreed them all to die. He had no mercy whatever on Mordecai but built a gallows to hang him. But now, when he was the one about to fall from favor and perhaps lose his life, suddenly he became a great believer in mercy! What a difference it makes whose foot the shoe is on!

### ***7:8 - The king suspects Haman of violence against Esther***

Haman even prostrated himself on Esther's couch as he pled for his life. When the king returned from walking in the garden, he saw Haman and thought he was about to do violence to the queen right in the palace, almost before his very eyes. This, of course, was "the icing on the cake," and angered him to the point of reaching a final verdict against Haman.

The word translated "assault" (NKJV) may otherwise imply rape, but surely the king did not suspect Haman of such a thing at this time and circumstance. However, the king might well suspect Haman of seeking to do violence to Esther for having accused him before the king. He may have thought Haman was trying to force Esther to withdraw her accusation or just that he was seeking vengeance on her in anger.

Again, see how quickly one can fall from favor and the severe consequences when it happened. When Haman had been in favor with the king, the king had interpreted everything he did favorably, even allowing him to decree the death of a group of people without suspecting him of wrong. Now the king's anger leads him to interpret even innocent acts as being evil.

When we have a reputation for doing wrong, people put a bad construction on even our innocent acts. When we have told a lie, people suspect us of lying even when we tell the truth. When we have done violence to others, people fear us even when we have no thoughts of harming them. When a man is known to have committed adultery, his wife and others suspect him of attempting further unfaithfulness anytime he is around another woman. This is why a good reputation is so important. When we have betrayed people's trust, they no longer know when to believe us and when to doubt us.

As the king spoke, his servants covered Haman's face. This evidently was symbolic as a sign of humiliation and condemnation, perhaps even a sign that they recognized Haman stood condemned to death. The servants evidently anticipated from the king's manner and words that Haman was in such disfavor as to be unfit to look upon.

### ***7:9,10 - The death of Haman***

When a person's evil conduct is exposed, people immediately recall other evil he has done. Every bad act comes to light. In Haman's case, one of the king's eunuchs, named Harbonah, recalled to the king what Haman had intended to do to Mordecai. He recalled that Mordecai had spoken good on the king's behalf (actually had saved his life, as described earlier), but Haman had built a gallows fifty cubits high for the express purpose of hanging this very Mordecai!

Here, even as the king considered what punishment to bring upon Haman, is revealed another conspiracy Haman had committed against another of the king's loyal subjects! Not only had he plotted to annihilate a whole nation of people, which would have included the queen herself, but he had specifically plotted the death of one who had saved the king's life! This was the crowning blow revealing Haman's corruption.

What is more, this situation provided a perfect opportunity for poetic justice against Haman. The king decreed that Haman be hung on the gallows he had built for Mordecai! This is exactly what was done, thereby satisfying the king's anger. So here we have the great and final irony in Haman's life, that he was hung on the very gallows he had built for Mordecai.

### **Lessons from the Jews' victory over Haman:**

Note how, in less than 24 hours, Haman's fate had completely reversed. Surely this shows many lessons to be learned at this point.

1) The power of God's providence – With no miracles, using only natural means including many seemingly insignificant events, using human agents yet without violating any human power to choose, working often in ways no human could have perceived at the time, God accomplished His goal and cared for His people. This perfectly illustrates all elements of providence.

2) The importance of trusting God – Haman apparently had all the advantages and blessings though he had no respect for God's will. Esther and Mordecai trusted God though they had virtually no advantages or reason for hope. Yet those who trusted God prevailed in the end.

3) The justice of God – In the end, evil men are punished and the righteous are exalted. In this case this result occurred in this life, but if it does not come in this life, then it will in eternity.

## Esther 8

### C. The Decree to Spare the Jews Is Issued - Chap. 8

#### **8:1,2 - Mordecai and Esther exalted**

##### **Esther given authority over Haman's house**

At this point in the story, Haman had fallen from favor and been slain. However, there is more to the story. We will see even further the greatness of the victory of Esther and Mordecai over Haman's treachery.

First, the king set Esther herself in charge over Haman's house. She was given the great wealth that he had bragged so much about. (I'm not sure how much else was involved in being over Haman's house.) Not only did Haman lose his position and honor that had led to such pride, but he also lost all his wealth to one of the very people whom he had sought to destroy!

But honor was given, not just to Esther, but also to Mordecai. He was advanced to high position before the king. This occurred, not only because of the good he had formerly done in sparing the king's life, but also because Esther told the king about Mordecai's relationship to her. This had not been made known till this point, when Esther revealed her nationality.

##### **Mordecai exalted to Haman's position**

For all these reasons, the king then exalted Mordecai to the very position that Haman had occupied. The ring, which was the symbol of the king's authority and which had been given to Haman, was here given instead to Mordecai. This showed that he was the most exalted of all the king's ministers.

Further, Esther, who had been set over the house of Haman (v1), in turn put Mordecai over that house. All this simply demonstrates that the exaltation, which Haman formerly possessed, now belonged in every detail to the very one whom he considered his chief enemy and whom he had sought to kill. But Haman had been slain in the very manner in which he had intended to slay Mordecai. The reversal is here complete.

There still remained, however, one major problem that had not yet been overcome. We must yet consider how it can be reversed. Haman himself, the issuer of the decree of death to the Jews, had been slain. But the decree itself yet stood. The real root problem had yet to be resolved; only the perpetrator of the problem had fallen.

#### **8:3-5 - Esther requests to reverse Haman's decree**

In tears Esther approached the king again and even fell at his feet, imploring him to counteract the decree that had been made by Haman against the Jews. At first she did as she had done before: she came into the court of the king uninvited, hoping that he would call her forward, rather than allow her to be slain (cf. 5:1ff). (It appears that we are here informed first what her purpose was in going before the king, but she actually makes this known to the king in v5.)

As before, the king held out the golden censer to Esther, granting her the right to speak and not die. She then arose and respectfully asked, according to the king's will, if he was truly pleased with her, if he could write letters to revoke the decree of Haman to annihilate the Jews in all the king's provinces.

##### **The lasting effects of sin**

Notice how Haman's decree actually outlived him. He himself was no longer able to pursue his vindictiveness against the Jews and had even been slain, yet the effect of his wickedness lived on. So with us, the effect of our sins may continue on affecting our lives or the lives of others even after we have repented or even died.

For example, we may live in sin when our children are small; we may later repent and become faithful, yet they may choose to continue in sin. We may teach false doctrine and later



learn the truth and repent, but the people we taught the error may refuse to change. We may drink or smoke for years then later quit, but our body may yet be so diseased that it cannot be healed; or the family that was destroyed by our drinking may never be restored. We may squander our wealth in riotous living, then later repent and be forgiven, yet the wealth is gone, our job may be lost, etc. We may commit adultery then repent, but we must still care of the child we conceived out of wedlock or our spouse may refuse to trust us and determine to divorce us. We may commit murder, but our repentance will not bring the victim back to life. We may commit a crime, but repentance will not free us from prison.

### **Esther's concern for her people**

Esther explained further to the king her motives for her request. She could not stand to see such evil and destruction perpetrated on her people (cf. 7:3,4). Surely it was this love and concern that motivated her to act so bravely on their behalf (4:8-16).

Here is another important lesson for us. We have a grave responsibility to save people around us from destruction. Consider how much more serious is the destruction caused by sin than even that of physical death. If Esther needed to speak out to save her people from death, how much more do we need to save those around us from sin? If we have love and concern as Esther did, we must speak. To fail to speak is to demonstrate that we don't really care for their souls. It is interesting how much effort people are willing to expend to save people from physical danger, yet we do little or nothing when we face the far greater danger of eternal destruction for sin!

### **8:7,8 - The king grants permission for a new decree**

The king then reminded Esther and Mordecai that he had hung Haman and put Esther over his house, because Haman had opposed the Jews. It is unclear whether the king said this to rationalize his own responsibility for the decree against the Jews or whether he was just reassuring them that he was still willing to help further with the problem.

In any case, he then gave them blanket permission to issue whatever decree they wish to make, write it in his name, and seal it with his ring. The one thing they had to remember, however, was that the law of a Persian king could never be reversed once it had been issued in his name and sealed with his ring. This meant, first, that they could not directly revoke the previous decree; it must be allowed to stand, so they must find some other means to solve the problem. The second application of this was that their decree would also be irrevocable. So they should be sure that it was just, realizing that it too could not be reversed. They should not repeat the error of Haman in issuing an unwise decree. This also meant, however, that once they made a new decree, no one in the kingdom could prevent them from carrying it out.

### **8:9,10 - Mordecai and Esther issue a new decree**

Once again the scribes were called to issue another decree. This occurred on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the third month. This means it was two months and ten days since the original decree had been issued (3:7,12). This decree was also to be sent to the Jews and to all the rulers in all the provinces, according to their own language, just as had been done with the original decree (3:12). In addition, we are given further information regarding the size of the empire: it included 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia.

The decree was written again in the king's name, sealed with his ring, and sent out by his couriers, who rode swiftly on royal horses. This was also how the first decree had gone out (3:15).

### **8:11-14 - The decree allows the Jews to defend themselves**

Here we are given the substance of the decree Esther and Mordecai wrote. The decree could not reverse the fact that the Jews' enemies had been given permission to attack them, since the previous decree was irrevocable (v8). So the new decree gave the Jews the right to use force to

defend and protect themselves against their enemies, and in fact, they could even kill and plunder anyone who attacked them. The previous decree had granted the Jews' enemies the right to kill and plunder the Jews. This decree gave the Jews the right to do the same to anyone who did choose to assault them.

It is unclear to me whether this means that they could only act in strict self-defense, slaying only those who physically attacked them on this day, or whether it also granted them the right to take offensive action and attack any who had wronged them in time past or those who might have originally planned to attack them under the original decree (even if they now were to change their mind). It seems that they did the latter, though I am not sure. Such wars were fought at various times by the nation of Israel under the Old Testament. (Note: The latter course would have been as wrong on their part as Haman's original decree had been, but for the fact that these enemies were known to be evil, opposing God's will and His people.)

The day on which the Jews could do this was the same day that Haman had originally decreed for people to destroy the Jews – the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (cf. 3:13). All this, of course, did not technically reverse the original decree, but it had that effect in the end. The original decree had said nothing about whether or not the Jews would be allowed to defend themselves and even to attack those who attacked them. This decree defined that they could strike back against those who attacked them.

We will see, however, that the effect was much greater than that. The effect of the original decree would have been to put all the force of the empire behind those who would attack the Jews. Their enemies would have been openly and officially encouraged by the government of the empire to attack the Jews, and probably the empire's armies and officials would have been encouraged to join in. All who did so would receive the spoils. Now, however, this part would be effectively reversed. It was now clear that the force of the empire was on the Jews' side and against their enemies.

This decree was written and circulated throughout the empire, so the Jews could make ready for the appointed time.

### ***8:15-17 - The Jews rejoice in the new decree***

Mordecai had been exalted to such high position that he was provided apparel to show his position. His clothing was royal apparel of blue and white colors. He wore a great golden crown and also a garment of purple color made from fine linen (probably a robe or outer garment).

Whereas the original decree had caused great consternation among the people, this one led to great joy and gladness, even in the city of Shushan. The Jews especially rejoiced with gladness and honor. This was easily understandable considering the seriousness of the original decree.

As news of the decree spread to every province and city, the Jews there would rejoice with feasting and gladness. The result was (as mentioned above) that great fear fell on all the people because of the Jews (this would lead them to fear to attack the Jews on the decreed day and would even lead many to fight on the Jews' side).

In fact, many people even became Jews. This is a clear reference to the practice of proselytes to the Jewish religion. People born as descendants of the Jews were automatically in covenant relationship, but here we are clearly shown that other people could also join the religion.

However, it is not easy to be sure of the motives of these people. It could mean that people converted to Judaism in order to enjoy the honor and wealth that the Jews would receive when the decreed day occurred. Such would be a completely unacceptable reason for converting, since it showed no honor to God. On the other hand, it could be that the people saw that the events that had occurred proved that God was with the Jews. They had seen evidence of His power working in the Jewish nation, so they believed in the God the Jews worshiped.

## Esther 9

### D. The Jews Slay Their Enemies - 9:1-18

#### **9:1,2 - The appointed day arrives**

The day that Haman had appointed for the Jews to be destroyed was the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the twelfth month of the year (Adar). This was the day appointed in the command that Haman had decreed by the authority of the king (cf. 3:13). That decree could not be changed, so on that day the enemies had authority to attack and destroy the Jews. However, at the influence of Esther and Mordecai, a new decree had been issued that on that day the Jews could not only defend themselves but could even slay those who hated them and had wanted to destroy them (8:11,12). So this was the day that the Jews' enemies had hoped to overpower and slay them, but instead the opposite happened and the Jews overpowered and slew their enemies.

In theory, the Jews' enemies could still have prevailed against them, but the reasons why the Jews prevailed are explained as the story unfolds. The Jews gathered together in the cities throughout the provinces of Persia to fight against their enemies. This enabled them to take advantage of the strength of numbers, rather than being attacked individually.

But specifically mentioned is the fact that the fear of the Jews had fallen on all the people. This was probably due to the fate of Haman and the power of Mordecai, as discussed further in the following verses. People had just become convinced that the Jews' enemies would not prevail, so they tended to be afraid to attack them.

#### **9:3-5 - The assistance of government officials**

Another reason the Jews prevailed was that they were assisted by government officials. In fact all the people involved in the king's service helped the Jews. The reason is stated: they recognized and feared the power and influence of Mordecai.

Had Haman still been in power, the people would have believed that they could attack the Jews without harm coming to them. The government would have been behind their attacks, approving it and perhaps even helping in it. But now that Haman had fallen and Mordecai had come to power, the people feared to oppose Mordecai's power. The government now stood with Mordecai, so government agents helped the Jews instead of their enemies.

#### **The influence of Mordecai**

The reason the people feared to oppose Mordecai was, as v4 says, because he was great, increasingly prominent, and his fame had spread throughout the provinces of the empire. This led people to fear to oppose the Jews, so the Jews were able to defeat their enemies with slaughter and destruction as they willed without successful opposition.

#### **9:6-10 - Jews' enemies defeated in the citadel Shusan**

Those whom the Jews killed included 500 people just in the citadel of Shusan itself where the king lived. Included among this number were the ten sons of Haman, who are named in these verses. Haman had sought to slay all the Jews, and he had been extremely proud of all his sons (5:11). But in the end not only did he die, but all his sons also were slain.

We are told, however, that the Jews did not touch the plunder. That is, they took no spoils from those they killed. This is repeated in vv 15,16. The decree that had been issued expressly allowed them to plunder their enemies (see 8:11), but they chose not to do so. Perhaps this was done to show that they did not act from a desire for wealth – theirs was not an attack of aggression for their own gain. Their motives were entirely based on self-defense and protection against those who had sought to harm them.

### ***9:11-14 - The king seeks Esther's further desires***

The king was informed how many people had been killed in the citadel of Shushan (see v6). He then informed Esther of this and of the death of the ten sons of Haman. At that point he did not know how many had been killed elsewhere, but he wondered how many there would be if this many had been killed in the citadel alone.

He then asked Esther what else she would like to have done. Whatever further request she had, he was still willing to grant it.

### ***A decree for another day of slaughter***

Esther's response was: first, she sought yet another day for the Jews to fight against their enemies; but this applied just in Shushan the citadel, not throughout the empire as had been the case on the first day. We are not told exactly why she made this request. Perhaps she had heard already of some of the Jews' enemies who had escaped the first day of slaughter. This would seem to make it clear that the Jews did not just kill those who attacked them, but they took aggression against their enemies. If not so, then why seek another day of fighting?

Second, she wanted the ten sons of Haman to be hung on a gallows. Though they were dead, they would be hung even as Haman had been and as he had sought to do to Mordecai. The king agreed to this request too, so the ten sons of Haman were hung on a gallows. Again, we are not told exactly why she made this request. The sons were already dead. The only purpose I can think of was to make a public display to warn potential enemies of the Jews to not seek to harm the Jews as Haman had.

### ***9:15,16 - The second day of slaughter followed by rest***

As had been decreed, the Jews in Shushan (not the rest of the empire) gathered on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Adar and continued to slaughter their enemies as they had on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the month. The first day they had killed 500 enemies, but this time they killed 300 more. And once again we are told that they took no plunder (see on v10).

The Jews in the other provinces had been told to fight their enemies only on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the month (see v17). So, whereas the Jews in Shushan were still fighting their enemies on the 14<sup>th</sup> day, the Jews elsewhere in the empire rested on that day.

But we are told that, altogether, 75,000 enemies of the Jews had been slain around the empire. Nevertheless, again the Jews did not take plunder for themselves.

### ***9:17,18 - The days of rest described***

These verses clarify the timing of the events. V17 shows that the Jews throughout the empire killed the 75,000 enemies on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the month Adar, as per the decree. Then they rested on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month. The Jews in Shushan had fought on both the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> days, so they rested on the 15<sup>th</sup> day.

So the 14<sup>th</sup> day was a day of feasting and rejoicing for Jews throughout the empire, and the 15<sup>th</sup> day was a day of feasting and rejoicing for the Jews in Shusan. The rest of the chapter then describes how this led to an annual feast for the Jews.

Surely this became a great victory for the Jews. The beginning of the story gave cause for fear that the Jews everywhere might be destroyed. By the end of the story, however, the Jews had won a great victory over their enemies.

## **Feast of Purim Instituted - 9:19-32**

### ***9:19-22 - The 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> days of Adar established as holidays***

The fourteenth day of the month of Adar was celebrated as a holiday for feasting and gladness and for sending presents to one another. But since the Jews in Shushan had celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the month, both the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> days came to be celebrated as an annual holiday among the Jews.

Mordecai wrote letters to all the Jews throughout the empire of the king that they should establish these two days as an annual celebration. These days had been planned as a day of defeat of the Jews leading to sorrow and mourning, but instead they became days of rest from their enemies. So they were set up as an annual remembrance on which the people would feast, rejoice, and send presents to one another and gifts to the poor.

### ***9:23-25 - A memorial to the victory Esther achieved over Haman***

As we have read, Haman had plotted to annihilate all the Jews, but Esther had influenced the king to bring about the fall of Haman and ultimately the death of all his sons. So Haman's plot ended up turning against him. The Jews accepted the decree of Mordecai as a custom in which they remembered this event each year.

Haman had determined this date by the cast of the Pur – i.e., the lot – see on 3:6,7. We will that this led to the name of the annual feast.

### ***9:26-28 - The feast designated Purim***

Because Haman had determined these days by casting the Pur or the lot (v24), the Jews then named the annual holiday Purim. They imposed this day on themselves and their descendants as an annual holiday to be celebrated without fail in these two days every year. The days were to be remembered by every family in every city and province in every generation. This was to insure that the memory of these events would be established and would never perish among the Jews.

### ***9:29-32 - Esther confirms the feast of Purim***

Esther then wrote a letter, in addition to the one Mordecai had written, to confirm the celebration of the feast. She had full authority (apparently as queen) to do so. Mordecai then sent letters to the Jews throughout all the provinces of the empire about this.

So the feast of Purim was confirmed and decreed to all Jews and their descendants. This was also then recorded in a book (perhaps the chronicles of the kings of Persia). This feast is still kept today, still called the feast of Purim, in the month of March.

## **Authority for the feast of Purim**

Some may wonder what authority the Jews had for establishing this holiday. All other Old Testament holy days were established by express statement of God. Did Mordecai and Esther demand that the Jews keep an unauthorized day of worship, which they added to God's law without His approval? If so, does this authorize us today in adding unauthorized acts of worship today, such as instrumental music?

### ***A civil holiday***

So far as the Scriptural record indicates, the day would be equivalent to our civil holidays, such as the fourth of July or Memorial Day, etc.

1) It commemorated a victory over enemies.

2) It was established by civil authority. Mordecai and Esther were high authorities in the Persian Empire. They were not religious leaders as priests nor even kings in the Jewish theocracy in Israel. So far as the record states, they were the only authority behind the holiday, but their authority was entirely civil, not religious.

3) The people then accepted the holiday and bound it on themselves.

Nothing says it was a religious holy day or that violating it would have spiritual significance. There is no grounds, so far as the record states, for proving this was an unauthorized religious observance any more than our civil holidays.

### ***A religious holy day?***

Some might point out that, though the record says nothing about religious significance to the day, yet it must have had religious significance. Surely the Jews would have recognized the

power of God behind this deliverance from their enemies. Surely they would have used the day to glorify God for the deliverance, hence a religious holy day.

Note that this still would not necessarily disprove the civil holiday approach described above. Don't we, as Christians, tend to think of God's blessings on our nation on civil holidays such as Independence Day and Memorial Day? Isn't it proper to thank God for His blessings on our nation on any day, so long as we don't establish a day as a religious holy day? Still nothing in the record indicates Purim to be anything more than that.

Further, if this argument for religious significance is valid, it would only be true to the extent that the book itself never mentions the power or providence of God anywhere in the book or its events. Surely God acted throughout, but nowhere is His involvement mentioned.

So, if Purim was intended to have religious significance, we cannot know it from the book because the book nowhere expresses God's involvement in the events. In that case, it would be as reasonable to conclude that God Himself revealed that the day should be observed religiously as it is to assume in the first place that it was religious. He might have spoken to prophets who in turn revealed this to Mordecai and Esther.

In any case, if we assume that the day was religious despite the fact the book nowhere says so, then it is just as reasonable to assume that God revealed it even though the book nowhere says so. Both conclusions involve assumptions and both are equally reasonable. If people choose to make an argument based on their conclusions aside from what is stated, they have no grounds whatever to object to other equally reasonable conclusions aside from what is stated.

In any case, we have no justification here for adding to our worship today practices that are clearly not included in what God has authorized. Either view described above would show that there is no necessary conclusion that such happened in this passage, and many other passages clearly forbid us to so act. See Matthew 15:9,13; Galatians 1:8,9; 2 John 9-11; Colossians 3:17; Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; 3:5,6; Revelation 22:18,19; 1 Timothy 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:13.

## Esther 10

### F. Conclusion

#### **10:1-3 - Conclusion of the story**

We are told of the greatness of King Ahasuerus and of Mordecai. Ahasuerus imposed tribute on the land and on the islands of the sea. This appears to be a statement of his power: he had power so widespread that people throughout the land and sea paid him tribute.

Also his power and the greatness of Mordecai were recorded in the written chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia (cf. on 6:1). This would emphasize that these men and the story we have studied were real history, not myth or legend. Many things about their lives and work could be confirmed by the Persian history.

The story ends by concluding that Mordecai was a powerful man, second only to the king. The Jews respected him and viewed him as a great man, because he did what was good for the people and worked for their peace and well being.

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