

ESTHER

The account of Esther is recorded in the book named after her in the Old Testament. She was adopted by Mordecai, her older cousin, after her parents died. Mordecai was amongst the captives taken from Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Esther was living in Persia 100 years later. King Ahasuerus or Xerxes, was the son of the Persian King Darius I. He ruled the Persian Empire 486-465 B.C covering India to Ethiopia. Persia is modern-day Iran. Esther lived in the citadel of Susa, where king Xerxes lived.



Esther, a beautiful Jewish girl, rescued her people from a plot to be annihilated. Esther became Queen of Persia, replacing Queen Vashti who had been vanquished, as the king requested Vashti's presence wearing her crown at one of his banquets so he could show off her beauty, but she refused, which was against their laws.

The attendants of King Xerxes searched throughout the land for beautiful young virgins to replace Queen Vashti. Esther, whose Hebrew name was Hadassah, was among the virgins taken to the palace. At Mordecai's request, Esther had concealed her Jewish background. Mordecai visited the king's harem each day for a report on Esther. All women were to receive a year's beauty treatments before meeting with the king. Esther had obtained the King's favour and eventually became the new queen.

For such a time as this?" (Esther 4:13–14).

Haman, a descendant of Agag (king of the Amalekites) was promoted to highest official in the King's court. The Amalekites had been Israel's greatest enemies (Exodus 17:14–16). God had instructed King Saul years earlier to destroy the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:3) but disobeyed. Mordecai sat at the palace gate. Royal officials at the king's gate bowed down to honour Haman, except for Mordecai, he refused. Haman had discovered Mordecai was a Jew and so devised a plan to have him and all the Jewish people annihilated. Haman had craftily acquired a royal decree which was issued to all provinces that all Jews, young and old, women and children on the 14th day of the month of Adar were to be annihilated. There was great mourning among the Jewish people. Haman had gallows built ready on which to hang Mordecai.

Sometime later while sitting at the king's gate, Mordecai overheard two officials plot an assassination attempt on King Xerxes life. Mordecai passed the information on to Esther and she reported it to king Xerxes, even though the Jews were exiles there. As a result, the assassination attempt had been thwarted. Mordecai's name was then recorded in the king's chronicles as the man who had revealed the plot to save the king's life.

Esther had been unaware of Haman's plan to destroy her people. She was informed by maids Mordecai was in distress, wearing sackcloth and ashes, wailing loudly and bitterly. He refused clothing Esther had sent him. She sent a messenger to enquire what was wrong. Mordecai informed Esther of the royal decree and asked her to go before the king and beg for mercy, to plead on behalf of her people (Esther 4:8).

It was not lawful to enter the king's presence without being invited. Esther had not been in the presence of the king for the last thirty days. Esther sent word back to Mordecai that she was unable to help, but Mordecai responded.

"Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:13–14).

Haman had the king's support for his plot, but the king was unaware of Haman's full intent. If the Jews were to survive, Haman's plot had to be stopped. Esther agreed to go and speak with the king, even if it put her life at risk. The lives of her people demanded she took the risk. She asked the Jewish people to fast for three days while she and her maids fasted also.

"Then I will go to the king, though it li against the law," she said, "and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16).

On approaching King Xerxes, he was pleased to see her. He held out the golden sceptre towards her that was in his hand, which was the sign he accepted her presence. The king called for Haman, while he asked Esther what she would like, even up to half of the kingdom. Esther invited Haman and the King to attend two banquets. At the second banquet the following day, she would then present her request, both men agreed.

Xerxes had difficulty sleeping that night and ordered the records of his reign to be read to him. The King heard of the account of Mordecai uncovering the assassination attempt which saved his life. The king also learned that nothing had been done to repay Mordecai, so the King pondered over how he could honour him. Haman went home and told his family how honoured he was to be invited to a banquet by the Queen. Haman was unaware of Esther's Jewish background. Haman seen Mordecai on his way home which had made him furious, he had showed no honour or fear in Haman's presence.

Haman's wife and his friends suggested he build gallows on which to hang Mordecai (Esther 5:9–14). So, Haman built 75-foot-high gallows. Haman went to approach the king over Mordecai, but before he had the opportunity, the king asked Haman's advice on how he could honour a man. Haman in his pride, thought that the King was referring to him, and so suggested parading the man through the town wearing a royal robe while riding on a horse, *"Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honour!"* (Esther 6:9). King Xerxes was not aware of Haman's plot and ordered Mordecai to be honoured. To his humiliation, the king ordered Haman to carry out the honour right away. Haman had to obey the King's order and paraded Mordecai, the man whom he hated intensely, through town wearing a royal robe he thought was for himself, while proclaiming the king's admiration for Mordecai.

So Haman got the robe and the horse. He robed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city streets, proclaiming before him, "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honour!"
(Esther 6:11)

Haman rushed home with his head covered in grief and told his wife and friends of the event. Haman's wife and advisors saw this was the start of Haman's downfall.

His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, "Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him—you will surely come to ruin!" (Esther 6:13).

The king's eunuchs came for Haman to take him to the banquet. In the attempt to expose Haman's plot, Esther revealed to the king she was Jewish, and how the Jews were destined to be massacred by a royal decree that had been issued. Esther informed the king her people had been sold to be annihilated. Esther said if they had only been sold into slavery, she would have kept quiet as *"no such distress would justify disturbing the king"* (Esther 7:4). The king was shocked someone would do such a thing to the queen's people. Esther revealed to the king the man who was behind the plot, *"this wicked Haman"* (verse 6). King Xerxes left the room enraged. Haman stayed to plead with Esther for his life. Upon returning, the King saw Haman appealing to the queen for mercy, which he misunderstood to be an attempt to seduce the queen. One of the eunuchs informed the king that Haman had prepared gallows for Mordecai to be hanged on.

Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, "Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?" (Esther 7:8)

Haman received the punishment which he planned for Mordecai. The king ordered Haman to be hanged on the gallows he had built. As soon as the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. After Haman had been hanged, King Xerxes gave Esther Haman's estate and gave to Mordecai Haman's signet ring, which gave Mordecai the same authority as what Haman had. The ten sons of Haman were also hanged.

"Whoever digs a pit will fall into it; if someone rolls a stone, it will roll back on them." Proverbs 26:27

Esther reminded the king that the decree to annihilate the Jewish people was still in force. A royal decree once issued could not be revoked. So instead, another decree was issued which allowed the Jews to arm and defend themselves. When that day had arrived, nearly 75,000 enemies of the Jewish people were killed in the Persian kingdom. The Jews keep this day as a feast, the annual festival of 'Purim', which is to celebrate the deliverance of the Jews.

Anti-Semitism

Haman is an example of what happens to those who oppose God's people. Haman was not the first to try and annihilate the Jewish people, neither was he the last. No other race of people have endured as much persecution as the people of Israel. Hitler also tried to annihilate the Jewish race. Many of us are aware of the events of the Holocaust, where Hitler imprisoned, tortured and killed more than 6 million Jews. Haman wanting to eliminate an entire race due to one man's refusal to bow down to him seems extreme. Haman's hatred was more deep-rooted than just for Mordecai, it extended to all Jewish people. Haman is the source of anti-Semitism in Esther's day, just as Hitler was in the Holocaust.

For Such a Time as This!

Esther is an example of courage and faith. God positions people in government, business and personal situations so that His plans and purposes can be fulfilled. We even see God's influence on the timing on King Xerxes failure to sleep one night. We may not understand what God is doing or realise why we go through certain experiences at the time or why we are connected to certain people, But there will be times we can look back and see how God positioned us in the right place at the right time, like Esther and Joseph. God placing them in positions of power was not a coincidence. Esther was placed in the kingdom when Haman was promoted into a position of power. Esther was positioned in the Persian Kingdom to intercede on behalf of her people, *"for such a time as this!"* Esther trusted God, even if it cost her life. Being faithful and obedient while unsure of the outcome is not easy. The story of Esther shows God's intervention, protection and deliverance. It shows God is in control, even if we cannot see it.