

Esther – An Old Testament Historical Book – Part 1 of 2

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All references in red are from: Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). *The Lutheran Study Bible*. St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

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Date: The account of Esther takes place during the reign of King Ahasuerus; he reigned from 486-465 BC; he married Esther in 478 BC; and Mordecai issued the edict about the Judeans in 474 BC.

Purpose: To record the Lord's providential deliverance of the Judeans from destruction by their enemies in the Persian Empire (760).

Challenges for Readers: *God's Name Never Used.* A confusing feature of the Book of Esther is that God is never directly mentioned or named, even though numerous references to devotional practices are made in chs 4–9 (e.g., fasting and observance of Purim, which would involve prayer) (761).

Blessings for Readers: The Book of Esther is a beautiful portrayal of courage in the face of danger and the triumph of good in the face of powerful, sinister forces.... As you study Esther, remember why God worked through Esther and Mordecai to deliver the people of Judah. It was all part of God's plan that the Savior would be born to that people in the land God had designated, and at just the right moment, "when the fullness of time had come" (Gal. 4:4) (761).

Outline:

I. **Threat to Judeans (chs 1–5)**

- A. King's Banquets (1:1–9)
- B. Queen Vashti's Refusal (1:10–22)
- C. Esther Chosen Queen (2:1–18)
- D. Mordecai Discovers a Plot (2:19–23)
- E. Haman Plots against Judeans (ch 3)
- F. Esther Agrees to Help Judeans (ch 4)
- G. Esther Prepares a Banquet (5:1–8)
- H. Haman Plans to Hang Mordecai (5:9–14)

II. **Deliverance of Judeans (chs 6–10)**

- A. King Honors Mordecai (6:1–13)
- B. Esther Reveals Haman's Plot (6:14–7:6)
- C. Haman Is Hanged (7:7–10)
- D. Esther Saves Judeans (ch 8)
- E. Judeans Destroy Enemies (9:1–19)
- F. Feast of Purim Inaugurated (9:20–32)

The King's Banquets (1:1-9): The Bible tells us that King Ahasuerus, a.k.a. King Xerxes, ³ "...gave a feast for all his officials and servants. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were before him, ⁴ while he showed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days, 180 days. ⁵ And when these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in Susa, the citadel, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace.... ⁸ And drinking was according to this edict: 'There is no compulsion [*They were permitted to drink as they desired.*].' ... ⁹ Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women in the palace that belonged to King Ahasuerus."

1. Drinking alcoholic beverages:

- a. Doing so is not wrong (1 Tim. 5:23;), but drinking to excess is wrong and foolish.
- b. ^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 6:9-10** “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Queen Vashti’s Refusal (1:10-22): ¹⁰ “On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded...the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, ¹¹ to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at. ¹² But Queen Vashti refused to come... At this the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him.”

2. The king and his friends were drunk, so the queen refused to show herself.
3. There was concern that other women would begin to despise their husbands, even as Vashti had done, so she was banished from ever coming before the king again.

Esther Chosen Queen (2:1-18): Since Vashti was banished, a search was made for a new queen. Esther, whose Hebrew name is Hadassah and who was being raised by her relative named Mordecai, was chosen as one of the many possible replacements. The king would spend one night with each woman, as he was making his choice. The Bible records that ¹⁷ “the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.”

Mordecai Discovers a Plot (2:19-23): ²¹ “In those days, as Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king’s eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. ²² And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai. ²³ When the affair was investigated and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows.”

Haman Plots Against the Jews (3:1-15):

4. Haman becomes angry with Mordecai: ¹ “...King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite..., and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him. ² And all the king’s servants who were at the king’s gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage. ³ Then the king’s servants who were at the king’s gate said to Mordecai, ‘Why do you transgress the king’s command?’ ⁴ And when they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai’s words would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew.”
5. Haman gets permission to kill all Jews: ⁸ “Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, ‘There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king’s laws, so that it is not to the king’s profit to tolerate them. ⁹ If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed... ¹¹ And the king said to Haman, ‘...do with them as it seems good to you.’”
6. Instructions to kill were issued: ¹³ “Letters were sent by couriers to all the king’s provinces with instruction to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar...”

Esther Agrees to Help the Jews (4:1-17):

7. Mordecai learned of the plot: Therefore, he put on sackcloth and ashes, which were a physical and visible demonstration of his sorrow – he could feel the uncomfortable sackcloth and people could see the ashes.
8. Mordecai asked Esther to approach the king: It was a huge request; Esther explained why:
¹¹ “All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law--to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live.”
9. Mordecai laid out the facts to Esther:
¹³ ... “Do not think to yourself that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews.
¹⁴ 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?”
 - a. Is God always aware of everything (Heb. 4:13)? Y N
 - b. Can God accomplish anything through any of us (Eph. 3:20)? Y N
10. God moved Esther to risk her life: Esther said:
¹⁶ “Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.”
 - a. *hold a fast ... three days*. “Fasting often occurred from morning until evening, over one day’s duration (Judges 20:26; 2 Sam. 1:12). Esther’s severe fast showed how critical this time was for her and her people” (767).
 - b. *if I perish, I perish*. “These oft-quoted words show Esther’s faith, courage, and humility. She did not assume that she was going to accomplish her mission, and she was ready to sacrifice herself in the attempt” (767).
 - c. Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13 ESV). Jesus did that for us; may we also love others to the point that we are willing to risk, even lay down, our lives for them!

Esther Prepares a Banquet (5:1-8): Esther stood in the king’s court, risking her life; then the king
² “...held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.
³ And the king said to her, “What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom.”
⁴ And Esther said, “If it please the king, let the king and Haman come today to a feast that I have prepared for the king.” // During the feast the king asked her to make her request, but, instead, she asked the king and Haman to come to another feast the next day; then she would make her request.

Haman Plans to Hang Mordecai (5:9-14): Remember, Mordecai was scheduled to die very soon with all other Jews, yet, that very day, when Mordecai refused again to bow, Haman was filled with wrath. Then, after consulting with his wife and others, they said,
¹⁴ ... “Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it. Then go joyfully with the king to the feast.’ This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made.”

11. *fifty cubits high*. “Gallows are 75 ft, the height of a six-story building” (768).