



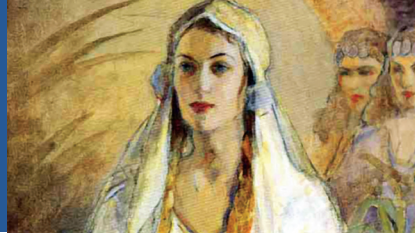
The Life of **Esther**

The Story of a Jewish Exile in Persia
Who Helped Save Her People
from Destruction by Their Enemies



International Fellowship
of Christians and Jews®

The Life of Esther



Lesson 1

Esther Is Crowned Queen in Persia

Scripture to Read **Esther 1:1-2:23**

Esther was a Jew living in the kingdom of Persia, more than a century after Nebuchadnezzar had carried the southern kingdom of Judah into captivity in Babylon. Interestingly, even though the name of God does not appear in the book of Esther, He was orchestrating events as symbolized by Esther's name (which means "in secret" in Hebrew). God was quietly working through Esther, and His "fingerprints" are all over the story as He protects His people from annihilation. The book of Esther begins with a very unusual "beauty contest" held in the court of the mighty Persian king, Ahasuerus, to replace Queen Vashti after she angered the king.

When Esther became one of the candidates in this contest, she consulted Mordecai, her older cousin and guardian, for advice on how to conduct herself. Esther won the king's favor with her beauty, and Mordecai won his favor by uncovering a plot to assassinate the king. Mordecai told Esther, who reported it to the king and made sure he knew that Mordecai was credited. That seemingly small detail became the key to the entire story.

Think About It

An old Jewish proverb says God creates a solution before he creates a problem. Understanding this can help take some of the stress out of our problems.

Just as God was working behind the scenes in Esther, so too we may not see His overt presence in world events and/or our individual lives. But are in His caring eye nonetheless!

Going deeper

1. Why do you think Vashti refused to appear at the banquet as the king had commanded, even though she knew that to disobey was dangerous?

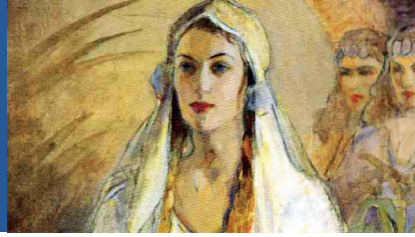
2. “*The laws of Persia and Media*” (Esther 1:19) were famous for being unchangeable once they were written down. What did the king’s divorce decree mean to Vashti’s future?

3. Why did Mordecai forbid Esther from revealing her nationality as a Jew?

4. According to Esther 2:19, Mordecai had a place “*at the king’s gate.*” What was significant about having a position at the gate of a city in that day?

5. Why was Esther so careful to make sure that Mordecai was given credit for his loyalty to King Ahasuerus?

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Lesson 2

Haman Hatches a Murderous Plot

Scripture to Read **Esther 3:1-15**

This chapter introduces us to Haman, an official in the court of King Ahasuerus of Persia. Haman was an Amalekite, enemies whom God had commanded Israel to destroy (Exodus 17:14). The rabbis said Amalek stands for all those who represent evil, not just physical descendants like Haman. Thus Israel's duty even today is to ask, "Who are Amalek, and what is our duty toward them?" Haman was honored by the king, and became enraged when Mordecai refused to bow before him. Mordecai evidently believed that such an act would have been the same as bowing before a foreign god, a violation of God's command to Israel (Exodus 20:5).

Haman's hatred became so intense that he turned his fury against all the Jews in Persia. The king's callous lack of interest in knowing which people Haman wanted to destroy, and his failure to investigate Haman's charges, gave this evil man what he wanted. He had the king's authority to issue an unchangeable decree to destroy all the Jews in the kingdom on one day — an early example of bitter anti-Semitism. Persia had such an effective system of government and communication that every province in the kingdom got the order in their own language, in plenty of time to prepare for that horrible day.

Think About It

The story of Esther is another example of the ancient scourge of anti-Semitism. Haman's determination to annihilate the Jews as "undesirables" reminds us that hatred can grow and spread in any environment against the Jews.

We ask for your prayers for the *International Fellowship of Christians and Jews* as we seek to stand strong against the anti-Jewish hatred that is erupting with renewed anger and violence in many parts of the world today.

Going deeper

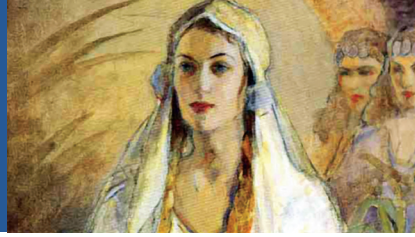
1. What great victory did God give the Israelites over the Amalekites in the days of Moses (Exodus 17:8-16)? Do you believe God is still fighting for His people Israel today?

2. The date chosen for the Jews to be killed was almost a year after the *pur*, or lot, was thrown. How did God use this delay to thwart Haman's plan?

3. Haman offered to pay an enormous amount of silver, worth millions of dollars, to those who would kill the Jews. What does this offer reveal about Haman's position in Persia?

4. What two particular actions of King Ahasuerus gave Haman the confidence that he had the king's full approval for his evil plan (see. vv. 10 and 15)?

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Lesson 3

Esther Prepares to Expose Haman

Scripture to Read **Esther 4:1-5:14**

The publication of Haman's edict to kill all the Jews in Persia caused great anguish and mourning among the exiles from Israel. Mordecai mourned publicly by wearing sackcloth and crying in public. Esther seemed to be unaware of the edict when her servants told her something was terribly wrong with Mordecai. She sent one of her attendants to Mordecai, who sent back a copy of the order with a plea for Esther to go to the king on behalf of her people.

But Esther was reluctant to do that, since by entering the king's presence without being called for could mean death. But Mordecai responded with the famous question, "*Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?*" (4:14). Esther approached the king, was received with favor, and began laying a plan to expose Haman's murderous plot.

Think About It

We continue to trace the unseen work of God in the events of Esther's life and the Jews in Persia. His eye was on His people, and according to Psalm 121:4, the "Guardian of Israel" never sleeps.

This means that God is alert to your situation today. Ask Him to help you be sensitive to His leading in your life.

Going deeper

1. **Mordecai reminded Esther that even she would not escape death if Haman's plot was carried out. How did Mordecai know this? (Hint: read Esther 3:13.)**

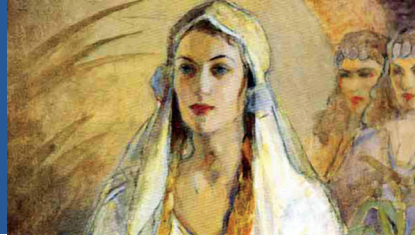
2. **Why did Esther ask Mordecai and the Jews in Susa to fast for three days before she went in to see the king?**

3. **What offer did King Ahasuerus make to Esther that let her know he was willing to grant any request she wanted to make?**

4. **For whatever reason, Esther decided not to expose Haman on the first day of her banquet. Explain how Haman's stature in the king's eyes might have caused her to delay.**

5. **Haman soothed his rage against Mordecai by bragging about his greatness to his friends. How did Haman's arrogance on this occasion contribute to his downfall?**

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Lesson 4

Haman Is Exposed and Executed

Scripture to Read **Esther 6:1-7:10**

A sleepless night on the part of King Ahasuerus became a dramatic turning point in the story of Esther. The king ordered his servants to read to him from his royal record, where he found that Mordecai had never been rewarded for exposing an assassination plot. Ahasuerus was determined to use any court official who was available to honor Mordecai. In God's providence, that official was Haman, who was coming to ask permission to hang Mordecai.

When the king asked Haman what should be done to honor a deserving man, Haman arrogantly assumed he was the honoree, and described a lavish ceremony to honor the man the king had in mind. Haman had to do this for Mordecai, but the shame Haman felt at this humiliation was nothing compared to the doom that awaited him.

On the second day of Esther's banquet, the Jews' enemy met his fate as Ahasuerus demanded to know who wanted to harm her and her people. Haman pled for his life, but this only angered the king more. Haman was led away to die on the gallows he had built for Mordecai — a vivid reminder of God's promise to curse those who curse the people of Abraham (Genesis 12:3).

Think About It

The Bible says, "Let another praise you, and not your own mouth"

(Proverbs 27:2). This principle is dramatically illustrated in the life of Haman.

You may believe you deserve praise, or even a raise, for a job well done. But the wisest thing to do may be to allow God to bring you that recognition in His time and way.

Going deeper

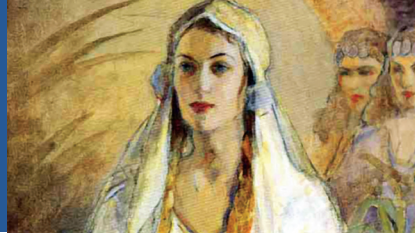
1. **Haman got himself into trouble because he had let his anger take control of him. What lessons can we learn from his poor example?**

2. **Why do you think God arranged for Mordecai to be publicly honored by his worst enemy in the Persian capital of Susa?**

3. **When Haman rushed home from his humiliating experience and told his wife what had happened, what fact told her that her husband was doomed?**

4. **As far as we know, this was the first time Ahasuerus realized that Esther was a Jew. How did this knowledge change his former attitude toward the Jews (see 3:10-11)?**

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Lesson 5

The King's New Decree

Scripture to Read **Esther 8:1-17**

Haman was now out of the way, but his death did not solve all the Jews' problems. The king's decree to destroy them could not be revoked. But as Esther pleaded with Ahasuerus to save her people, he gave Mordecai the authority to write another decree giving the Jews in the Persian kingdom the right to defend themselves on the day set for their annihilation. This decree went out by the same courier system, giving the Jews about nine months to prepare themselves to defend their families and property.

Notice how completely God had reversed the circumstances. Mordecai now had the king's signet ring and position of power that Haman once possessed, and Haman's scheme to confiscate the Jews' property (3:13) resulted in his own property being confiscated and given to the Jewish queen, Esther. God's hand was so evident in these things that many Persians became Jewish proselytes, or followers of the God of Israel!

Think About It

When we have the courage to act on our faith, God honors us and other people notice. This is one of the best witnesses we can have to the reality of God and the authenticity of faith.

With this in mind, take a few minutes today to think about your life and how you can honor the Lord in every area.

Going deeper

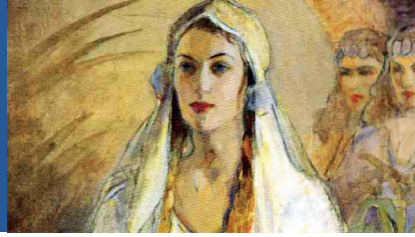
1. King Ahasuerus learned that he had a second reason to show favor to Mordecai, in addition to the loyalty Mordecai had shown earlier. What was this second reason?

2. Esther approached the king again, pleading with him to save her people. How does this scene contrast with her earlier attitude toward appearing before Ahasuerus (see 4:11)?

3. Explain in your own words how the success of Mordecai and Esther illustrates the biblical principle, “*Those who honor me I will honor*” (1 Samuel 2:30).

4. What had the people of Persia who became followers of the God of Israel learned about His power and character?

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Lesson 6

The Jews Defeat Their Enemies

Scripture to Read **Esther 9:1-19**

The plan that Esther and Mordecai made to thwart the genocide planned by Haman against the Jews worked to perfection. Jews from the city of Susa to the most remote provinces of this vast empire were ready on the prescribed day, and instead of being destroyed they won a great victory over their enemies. But even though King Ahasuerus gave the Jews permission to plunder their enemies' property, they refused to take anything.

Even more amazing was the permission that Ahasuerus gave Esther to allow the Jews in Susa to continue the battle for a second day. Esther may have known about more attacks that were planned, or she may have wanted to ensure the end of her people's enemies. The ten sons of Haman were among those enemies who fought against the Jews, and they also suffered the same fate as their father. Haman's drastic plan demanded a drastic response.

Think About It

God's miraculous deliverance of the Jews in Esther's day is a powerful reminder that He is the Rock and the Refuge of all who trust in Him.

God also invites us to come to Him each day and exchange our weakness for His strength. Read Isaiah 40:29-31 and thank the Lord for this great promise.

Going deeper

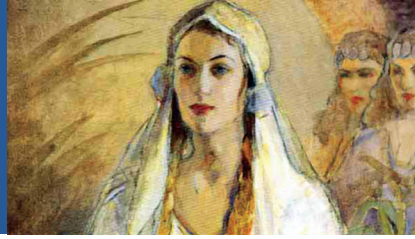
1. **Why do you think the officials of Persia decided to help the Jews in their fight against their enemies?**

2. **Once before, God had put the fear of the Jews in the hearts of their enemies (Joshua 2:8-11). How did this fear help the cause of the Jews in Persia as they defended themselves?**

3. **In what way was the Jews' refusal to plunder their enemies a statement of their dependence on God?**

4. **According to Zechariah 2:7-10, whoever touches Israel touches the "apple" of God's eye. What does this passage teach about the fate of those today who try to destroy the Jews?**

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Lesson 7

A New Feast Is Celebrated

Scripture to Read [Esther 9:20-10:3](#)

The great victory that Esther and Mordecai led in Persia so many centuries ago is still celebrated each year by Jews in the feast of *Purim*, named after the lot (Hebrew, *pur*) that Haman threw to decide the day for the Jews' destruction. The biblical writer described it beautifully as a time when "*their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration.*"

Instead of losing their families and their lives, the Jews of Persia gathered in families to celebrate God's deliverance. And instead of losing all their property, they gave gifts to one another. It is not surprising that Esther and Mordecai felt so strongly about the importance of observing the Feast of *Purim* that they made it into a decree and sent it throughout the empire with the king's full authority behind it. Mordecai became such an important figure in Persia that his story was recorded in the annals of King Ahasuerus.

Think About It

The book of Esther was written to encourage Jews who had returned to the land of Israel from foreign captivity and also faced many obstacles and many enemies. Imagine the encouragement, comfort, and strength they must have received from reading this thrilling story of God's watchful care over His people.

Imagine the comfort you can receive from knowing that God is still watching over you and all of His people today!

Going deeper

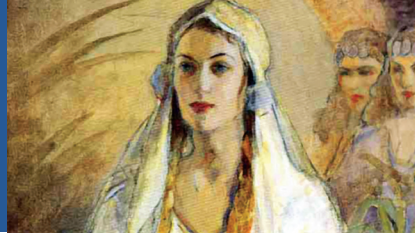
1. Mordecai decreed that the Jews would celebrate *Purim* each year without fail. Why is it so important to remember and celebrate special times of God's blessing?

2. God is clearly the One who caused Haman's evil plan to "come back onto his own head." What does the Bible say about those who "*pursue evil*" (Proverbs 11:19)?

3. According to Proverbs 16:33, whose hand controlled the lot Haman threw to decide the date of his plan? Do you recall how long this date gave the Jews to prepare for their defense (see Esther 3)?

4. Mordecai was highly honored "because he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews." How can we do this today as we seek to bless Israel?

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Answer Key

Lesson 1

1. It has been suggested that King Ahasuerus not only wanted to show Vashti off to his male guests, who were probably drunk, but that she would have been forced to expose herself in inappropriate and humiliating ways.
2. The divorce decree Ahasuerus issued against Vashti most likely meant she was banned from his presence and confined in the harem. Ahasuerus could also have ordered her death had he wished.
3. Mordecai no doubt realized that as a foreign people, Jews were not liked by everyone in Persia. Her nationality could have disqualified Esther from the search for a new queen.
4. The gate of a city was where the city leaders, usually called elders, met to transact the city's business, decide disputes, and perform other duties.
5. Esther probably wanted Mordecai to get credit because she loved him and wanted to see him prosper in the king's service, and knew that such loyalty would be rewarded someday.

Lesson 2

1. God helped the Israelites win a famous victory over Amalek as Aaron and Hur held up Moses' hands during the battle. Yes, God has promised to protect His people and defeat their enemies.
2. God used this long delay in Haman's plan to allow circumstances to develop that would bring Haman down and give the Jews of Persia ample time to arm themselves against their enemies.
3. Haman was in the top echelon of Persian leaders, and obviously one of the king's favorites. This allowed Haman to amass a huge amount of wealth and great influence with Ahasuerus.
4. The king gave Haman his signet ring, which was like a blank check to do whatever he wanted, and also commanded that Haman's horrible decree to kill all the Jews be sent to every part of Persia through the king's courier system.

Lesson 3

1. Mordecai had read Haman's order and knew that it called for all Jews in Persia to be killed—no exceptions.
2. Esther knew the law of Persia, which decreed that anyone who entered the king's presence without being summoned was put to death.

3. King Ahasuerus offered to give Esther “*up to half the kingdom*” (Esther 5:3), a statement of his eagerness to grant Esther’s wish.
4. Esther may have realized that, given Haman’s power and favored status with the king, she needed to proceed carefully and see how the king’s mood was before she brought such serious charges against Haman.
5. Haman was not satisfied just to brag, but also took the fatal step of having a gallows built on which to hang Mordecai—the very gallows on which Haman would die.
4. They had seen with their own eyes an unforgettable illustration of the fact that no other god could protect his people like the God of Israel.

Lesson 6

Lesson 4

1. Haman’s anger, which quickly escalated into murderous rage, is a sobering lesson of the destructive power of anger when it is out of control—the angry person himself usually suffering the most in the end!
2. God was humbling proud Haman, a lesson he sorely needed but didn’t learn from. God was also providing an object lesson to everyone in Susa that any attempt to dishonor or harm the Jews would be futile.
3. Haman’s wife somehow knew he was doomed when she found out that his opponent was “*of Jewish origin*” (Esther 6:13). Perhaps she had heard the fame of the God of Israel.
4. Earlier, Ahasuerus had been completely uncaring about the Jews and their awful fate. Now, however, he was concerned for the well-being of his queen’s people.
1. As we have learned, those officials had come to realize, as did Haman’s wife, that fighting against the Jews and their God was absolutely futile.
2. The fear of God not only caused many Persians to join the Jews in defeating their enemies, but it struck fear in the hearts of other nationalities, the implication being that they refused to lift their hands against the Jews.
3. This refusal was a tremendous statement to everyone in Persia that the Jews were relying on God alone to be their Provider as well as their Defender.
4. We are seeing the answer to this question unfold before our eyes today, as Israel’s enemies continue to be frustrated and defeated in their attempts to destroy the Jewish nation.

Lesson 7

Lesson 5

1. The king discovered that Mordecai was a relative of Esther, and her guardian.
2. This time, Esther had no reluctance or worry about her own safety as she approached the king and fell at his feet, pleading with tears for him to do something to help save her people.
3. Even though God’s name is not mentioned in the book of Esther, both she and Mordecai sought God’s favor and will in a very dangerous situation through prayer and fasting.
1. When we take time to recall God’s past blessings, we are expressing praise and thanksgiving, which delights Him. We are also reminding ourselves that He is our Provider and worthy of our praise, thanksgiving, and trust in the future.
2. The Bible says that those who plot and carry out evil are actually planning their own deaths, which is vividly illustrated in the life of Haman.
3. God definitely guided the outcome of Haman’s throw of the lot (*pur* in Hebrew, from which the festival of *Purim* gets its name). The date gave the Jews about a year to prepare a defense.
4. We can speak up for the welfare of Israel in our circle of influence, and “speak up” for Israel in prayer to God. We can also take advantage of opportunities to provide blessing and assistance to Israel and the Jewish people.

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