

The Book of Esther

Introduction

One of the greatest dramas ever written is the book of Esther. Fictional tales can captivate the imagination, but a story involving real characters and events is always more engaging. Such is the story of Esther. The author deftly weaves the elements of great drama: a riveting plot, a diabolical villain, and courageous heroes. Most importantly, Esther has conflict—in spades. Its plot, “annihilation of the Jews,” moves with cliffhanger pace within the context of imperial rule. As for the story’s theme, “reversal of fortune,” no story can match Esther. Finally, it ends happily—at least for the good guys. Who could ask for anything more?

The book’s happy ending is the cause of the establishment of the feast of Purim, which celebrates the Jews deliverance from destruction. Jews throughout the world, after 2,500 years, still celebrate this feast. In the celebration, Jews read aloud the Megillah, a scroll containing the book of Esther, on Purim eve and Purim day. During the reading at the synagogue, it is customary to boo, hiss, stomp feet, and rattle noisemakers whenever Haman’s name is mentioned.

The Main Characters

- Ahasuerus:¹ World-ruler, King of Medo-Persia
- Vasti:² Wife of Ahasuerus
- Esther: Wife of Ahasuerus
- Modecai the Jew: Guardian of Esther, protagonist of the story
- Haman: Second in command to Ahasuerus, antagonist of the story

Act I: A Party, A Queen Lost

Scene I: Party Time



The Persian Empire about 500 B.C.

The Medo-Persian Empire was immense. It stretched from India to Ethiopia and was organized into 127 client states ruled by governors or satraps (Esther 1.1). The realm was ruled by “Ahasuerus.” This designation was not a name but a title, like Pharaoh, Czar, or Shah. Ahasuerus’ title meant “The Mighty” but his name was Astyages. He was also known by the titles Artaxerxes (“Great King”) and “Darius (“The Restrainer”) the Median.” In the third year of his reign, Ahasuerus threw a party to end all parties at his palace in Shushan. It lasted six months. Throughout these months, the king wine and dined the nobles and rulers of his 127 provinces. At the end of these days, he hosted a party for the people which lasted a week (Esther 1.3-5).

His wealth was incalculable. Beautifully colored fabrics hung from the walls, ceilings, and marble pillars. The couches upon which guests reclined were fashioned of silver and gold. Intricately designed floors were inlaid with red, blue, black, and white marble. Guests were served, not with silverware, but with goldenware, and wine flowed from the king’s vintage reserves (Esther 1.6-8). These entertainments and splendors left guests breathless and demonstrated decisively that Ahasuerus was king of the world. In addition, Vashti, Ahasuerus’ beautiful wife, hosted a sumptuous party for her court.

Scene II: A Party Crisis

On the last day of the people's party, Ahasuerus sent word for Vashti to come before the people to display her beauty. We do not know what prompted the king's command. Did he think of it on his own accord? Was it suggested to him? Was it an innocent idea or was something untoward behind the idea? Whatever the cause, he ordered her to appear (Esther 1.10-11).

When the king's chamberlains arrived at the queen's quarters with the message, Vashti told the ministers she would not appear. As we do not know what prompted the king's command, we do not know why the queen refused. Did she think it inappropriate to appear before the people? Whatever her thoughts, her refusal was blatant disobedience and publicly embarrassed the king before his subjects. Had she feigned sickness or offered another excuse, the king could have saved face. But outright refusal placed the king in an awkward political position which created an international crisis (Esther 1.12).

The queen's refusal had a sobering effect on the partiers. Merriment ceased. The king called for his closest counselors to consider how to deal with Vashti's refusal. Ahasuerus was an absolute monarch. His word was law and he held almost unbounded power. To refuse him was unthinkable. The objective of the council was clear: "What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law, because she has not performed the commandment of the king Ahasuerus by the chamberlains (Esther 1.15)?"

Scene III: A Queen Lost

The queen's refusal to obey the king created a political crisis. Her disobedience had "not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people who are in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus" (Esther 1.16). The king's advisers feared unless the king addressed this unseemly

breach forcefully, women in the empire would cease to obey their husbands (Esther 1.17-18). Thus, the council recommended Vashti be deposed as queen (Esther 1.19). The king acceded to this council and published the decree throughout the empire (Esther 1.20-22).

It appears Ahasuerus became dispirited as a result of his decision (Esther 2.1). Perhaps he realized the decision had been precipitous and unwise. Perhaps he loved Vashti and missed her companionship as queen. Perhaps word had come to him Vashti regretted her behavior. But what to do? The law of the Medes and Persians was irrevocable. To cheer the king and focus his mind on happier matters, his ministers came up with a grand plan: an empire-wide beauty contest (Esther 2.1-3). This would pep up even a glum king.

Scene IV: Mordecai the Jew

The next scene introduces Mordecai, a Jew who held a civil service job in the palace. He was of the tribe of Benjamin. The significance of his genealogy becomes important as the story unfolds. His great-grandfather had been among the deportees by Nebuchadnezzar's defeat of the Jews (Esther 2.5-6), known as the Babylonian Captivity. He had become the guardian of a young Jewish girl, Hadassah (Esther) who was an orphan and the daughter of Mordecai's uncle. The girl was physically stunning (□□□□) as well as a delightful companion (□□□□) (Esther 2.7).

Act II: A New Queen, A Plot Thwarted

Scene I: A Queen Gained

The king's command to select his new queen attracted many young women. The Scriptures do not reveal the specifics of the process other than the women came to the palace at Shushan and were under the care of Hegai, chamberlain in charge of the women (Esther 2.8, 15). Esther became Hegai's favorite (Esther 2.9), and Mordecai, with access to the palace, kept close

watch over her. He made her promise to keep her Jewish identity a secret. That secret became a key factor in her future and the future of her people (Esther 2.10-11).

The women selected to be under Hegai's care were "finalists" in the contest. Their preparation before appearing before the king was extensive: a year-long spa treatment (Esther 2.12-14). When Esther's turn came to see the king, her presentation pleased him, largely, it seems, because of Hegai's tutoring. Esther was the kind of girl who was attractive to everyone who interacted with her (Esther 2.15). She was drop-dead gorgeous and delightful company. We read, "the king loved Esther above all the women" (Esther 2.17) and chose her for his queen. As a wedding celebration, the king, happy again, announced a holiday of gift giving and threw a grand fête "Esther's Feast" to honor his new queen (Esther 2.18).

Scene II: A Plot Discovered and Thwarted

All regimes have intrigue and Ahasuerus' was no different. Two of his ministers, Bigthan and Teresh, who governed access to the king, plotted to kill him. Somehow, most likely due to Mordecai's attention to Esther and careful attendance to palace matters, Mordecai learned of the plot. Esther quickly brought Mordecai's knowledge of the conspiracy to the king. As a result, the men were seized, questioned (most likely tortured), and hung. The case was recorded in the chronicles of the king (Esther 2.21-23). That record later became extremely important.

Act III: An Enemy Revealed

Scene I: Elevation of Amalek

In Chapter 3, Haman, the story's antagonist, is introduced. Haman was extremely wealthy and had attracted Ahasuerus' favor. As a result, Ahasuerus promoted him above the princes that were with him. This indicated Haman was of royal blood.

He was the son of Hammadatha the Agagite. Who was this?

The Agagites were Amalekites (1 Samuel 15.8), descendants of king Agag. The Amalekites originated from Esau (Genesis 36.12) and became mortal enemies of the Jews. Moses fought with them in the famous confrontation in which Aaron and Hur held up Moses' arms (Exodus 17.8-13). God gave a prophecy about them following Israel's victory (Exodus 17.14-16). Balaam later elaborated upon Amalek's future in his own prophecy (Numbers 24.5-7, 20). When Saul became king, God told him to destroy the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15.1-2). Saul was a Benjamite—the same tribe as Mordecai. Saul disobeyed God and it cost him kingship (his dynasty) over Israel. Instead of killing King Agag of the Amalekites, Saul spared him and preserved the good livestock seized in the battle. He rationalized these animals could be offered as sacrifices to God. Samuel went to Saul and told him “to obey is better than sacrifice” (1 Samuel 15.22) and killed Agag himself (1 Samuel 15.32-33).

Mordecai knew Haman was a descendant of King Agag. Mordecai also knew the Scriptures about the generational animosity of the two peoples, of God's command to destroy the Amalekites, and how his ancestor (King Saul) had failed. He knew God's prophecy concerning the fate of the Amalekites. These reasons explain his refusal to bow before Haman (Esther 3.2). The king's servants did not understand why Mordecai refused to honor Haman (Esther 3.3-4). They did not know the long history of warfare and hatred between the Amalekites and the Jews or about what God had promised concerning them.

Scene II: An Evil Plot

Haman, however, knew the history of warfare between the Amalekites and the Jews. Perhaps, he even knew the prophecies. A normal human response to a personal affront would be anger regarding the offender: Mordecai. Haman reacted in a wholly different manner. His attitude sheds light on God's judgment and prophecy. Instead of punishing Mordecai for his

disrespect, Haman resolved to destroy every Jew in the empire (Esther 3.5-6). Four times in Esther, Haman is declared the Jew's enemy (Esther 3.10, 8.1, 9.10, 24). No other individual in Scripture is so described. Behind Haman's hatred was Satan himself, the source of all hatred of the Jews. In the Abrahamic Covenant, God promised to bless those who blessed the Jews and to curse him who cursed the Jews (Genesis 12.3). The "them" are Gentiles who bless Jews. The "him" is Satan, the source of anti-Semitism. Haman, Satan's agent, designed a plan to destroy the Jews and ordered his wise men to determine the best time to execute it through casting lots or "pur" (פּוּר), i.e., dice.

Scene III: The Proposal and Action

Haman had his plan. He had consulted his soothsayers to determine the date to execute it. The next step was to get the king on board. At a propitious time, Haman approached the king with these words:

"There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of all other people and they do not observe the king's laws, so it is not in the king's interest to let them remain. If it is pleasing to the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who carry on the king's business, to put into the king's treasuries" (Esther 3.8-9).

Haman's argument to the king was that the Jews were disloyal subjects. They followed different laws and did not obey the king's laws. Because of this, he asked the king to write (שְׁמַד) that they be destroyed (שָׂרֵף). The verb "destroy" (שָׂרֵף) is in the Piel (the intensive verb form). Thus, the word carries the sense "annihilate." Haman feigned intense patriotism and loyalty to the king to sell his idea. To

sweeten the proposal, he offered 10,000 talents of silver to pay the executioners. At today's silver price (\$20/oz.), that was over \$200,000,000. Haman was a wealthy man who put his money where his mouth was (Luke 12.34).

Ahasuerus granted Haman's request and gave him permission to spend his money to fund his plan (Esther 3.10-11). The king called his scribes to write the law as Haman had expressed it (Esther 3.12) and sent word to all his provinces. The specific command read:

And the letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey. (Esther 3.13).

The command to "destroy (שָׁח), kill (רָצַח), and annihilate (מָחָה)" all the Jews and to seize their property was to occur on the thirteenth day of Adar. The word שָׁח is a Hiphil infinitive construct which carries a causative sense, i.e., "to cause to destroy," "to cause to exterminate." The next word, רָצַח, is the usual Qal verb form and means, "kill." Lastly, מָחָה, as above, is the Piel (intensive) form and means "annihilate." The command to destroy the Jews was comprehensive. According to the king's command, no Jew was to be left alive. In addition to the enticement of the seizure of Jewish property, Haman provided \$200,000,000 to fund the slaughter.

Ahasuerus and Haman congratulated themselves on this plan. The king thought he was ridding himself of disloyal and rebellious subjects. Haman's motivation was to destroy the hated Jews and avenge his family and people. No doubt Haman thought he would recoup his investment and make a vast profit with the acquisition of Jewish property. The citizenry of the empire

was confused (Esther 3.15). They could not understand what was behind this cause of action. Many no doubt had Jewish friends. What had happened?

Act IV: Mourning and Counteraction

Scene I: A Time to Mourn

When Mordecai learned of the decree, he was devastated. He could not believe Haman, evil as he was, would exercise such devastating vengeance. He clothed himself in sackcloth and went into mourning with other Jews in the empire (Esther 4.1-3). Word came to Esther that Mordecai was in mourning but she did not understand why (Esther 4.4-5). This may seem strange, but it reveals how secluded and cut off from communication the women of the king's harem were—even the queen herself. Therefore, she sent Hatach, an attendant the king had given to her, to learn from Mordecai the nature of the trouble (Esther 4.5-6).

Scene II: Counteraction

The crisis could not be overestimated. Mordecai revealed to Hatach all that had happened and provided an official copy of the decree (Esther 4.7-8). He told Hatach to show the order to Esther and tell her she must approach the king and make an appeal for the Jews (Esther 4.8-9). Secret, ongoing correspondence began between Esther and Mordecai with Hatach as Esther's trusted courier.

Esther sent word to Mordecai that to approach the king uninvited was extremely dangerous. She had not seen the king for a month and did not know what her standing might be. If he did not favor her, she would be killed. She replied:

“All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to

him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days (Esther 4.11)."

Mordecai's response was straightforward and practical. He told Esther not to think she could escape the reach of the decree. The secret of her Jewish heritage would be discovered and she would be killed. In addition, Mordecai wrote:

"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this (Esther 4.14)?"

This response revealed Mordecai's great faith. He was confident God would deliver the Jews from Haman's wrath. He told her that perhaps she had been placed in her present station to be the agent to deliver her people. This is a great spiritual lesson for us. God will accomplish His will. But He gives us opportunities to partner with Him. Whether we participate or not, His will is sure. He invites us to join Him. If we will, we can celebrate in God's victories. If we will not, we have missed a great opportunity.

Esther responded in faith. She saw the wisdom of Mordecai's words. The one thing she asked Mordecai to do was to gather the Jews and pray for her. This Mordecai agreed to do (Esther 4.17). Esther wrote:

"Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4.16).

Scene III: The Approach

Whether Esther and Mordecai had further communication is unknown. But after the three days, Esther had readied herself to approach the king. What must she have thought during those three days! Would the king look with favor upon her? Would he be in a good mood? Absolute rulers could be temperamental. One can bet Esther made herself as beautiful as she had ever been to see the king.

The walk to the king's court was long. She stood awaiting the king's response. Ahasuerus saw her—and extending his scepter indicated his favor. Quickly, Esther approached the king (Esther 5.1-2). The king was happy to see her—and curious. He knew the law. He knew he had not sent for her. He knew the risk she had taken. He knew something important must be on her mind. So he asked:

“What is troubling you, Queen Esther? And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be given to you” (Esther 5.3).

Rather than blurt out the whole story, Esther had a plan. There was time to save the Jews. But to save them required preparation and finesse. Therefore, she invited the king and Haman to come to a party she was hosting (Esther 5.4-5). Ahasuerus was no fool. He knew Esther had something on her mind. One did not risk one's life to invite the king to a party. Something was up. But he would play along—and find out.

The party Esther prepared was a wine banquet which probably consisted of fine wines and canapés. Again, Ahasuerus asked Esther what was on her mind. No doubt this was beginning to drive him a little crazy. But again, Esther deferred. She answered she wished the king and Haman to come to another party she was having (Esther 5.7-8).

Scene IV: The Haman Household

Haman was ecstatic. He had enjoyed an exclusive audience with

the king and queen at a deluxe wine banquet. Now, she had invited him to join her and the king in another exclusive banquet. Who could claim such favor? It was unprecedented. His star had risen high. However, on the way home his joy was spoiled: he saw Mordecai—the one man in the kingdom who would not bow before him.

When he arrived home he called for his wife and friends to tell them his wonderful news. Haman's words provide a perfect picture of his frame of mind:

¹¹ Then Haman recounted to them the glory of his riches, and the number of his sons, and every instance where the king had magnified him and how he had promoted him above the princes and servants of the king. ¹² Haman also said, "Even Esther the queen let no one but me come with the king to the banquet which she had prepared; and tomorrow also I am invited by her with the king. ¹³ "Yet all of this does not satisfy me every time I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate" (Esther 5.11-13).

To this, Zeresh, Haman's wife, and friends replied,

"Have a gallows fifty cubits high made and in the morning ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on it; then go joyfully with the king to the banquet." And the advice pleased Haman, so he had the gallows made (Esther 5.14).

Haman and his wife deserved each other. They were a perfect match. And what cretins for friends!

Act V: The Reversal: Part I

Scene I: A Sleepless Night

Esther had delayed revealing her petition. She hoped and prayed the king's heart would be receptive to her request. But

time was running out. The next day at the banquet the king would again ask her what she wanted. She realized she could delay no longer. Behind the scenes, as always, God was at work. That evening, Ahasuerus could not sleep. Restless, he ordered the royal records be brought and read to him. Perhaps sleeplessness had afflicted him before and this had proved an effective sedative (Esther 6.1-2).

The scribe read the account of how Mordecai had discovered the plot of Bigthan and Teresh to kill the king and how Mordecai had been responsible for saving his life. When the king asked what reward Mordecai had received for saving his life, he was shocked by the response: Nothing. Was the king's life of so little value that the one who had saved him had gone unrewarded? Really, he must tighten up his administrative procedures! While he was mulling this over (it had become morning by then), Haman arrived.

Scene II: From One's Own Lips

Haman had come early to the palace with one purpose in mind: to get the king's permission to hang Mordecai. Perhaps he too had had a restless night, relishing the thought of hanging Mordecai. The king's thoughts were full of gratitude and desire to reward Mordecai. Haman's thoughts were full of hatred and desire to kill Mordecai.

When Haman was announced, the king ordered him to be shown in. How fortunate! Haman was just the man to help him. Before Haman could utter a word, the king asked him, "What is to be done for the man whom the king desires to honor?" Haman's immediate thought was the king meant him. Had not the king elevated him to the number two position in the empire? Had he not dined exclusively with the king and queen last evening? Would he not be attending another exclusive dinner with them this evening? Whom could the king mean but him!

Haman's response was priceless:

⁷ Then Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king desires to honor, ⁸ let them bring a royal robe which the king has worn, and the horse on which the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown has been placed; ⁹ and let the robe and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble princes and let them array the man whom the king desires to honor and lead him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him, 'Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor'" (Esther 6.7-9).

Probably no human being has ever been more stunned by an answer than Haman the Agagite:

Then the king said to Haman, "Take quickly the robes and the horse as you have said, and do so for Mordecai the Jew, who is sitting at the king's gate; do not fall short in anything of all that you have said" (Esther 6.10).

Greater disgrace could not have befallen Haman. He, by his own words, had elevated his hated enemy. He, with his own hands, must honor Mordecai with the glory he coveted for himself. The Scripture recorded:

So Haman took the robe and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city square, and proclaimed before him, "Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor" (Esther 6.11).

Haman hastened home humiliated. He told his wife and advisers what had befallen him. His soothsayers replied: "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish origin, you will not overcome him, but will surely fall before him." Apparently, they had knowledge and insight into God's prophecies and the spiritual battle being waged.

Scene III: The Plot Revealed

Haman had had a bad day. Despite his humiliating experience with Mordecai, Haman thought his day could end well; he would dine with the king and queen that evening and his trampled feelings would be soothed. He was wrong. His day was about to get much worse. After the banquet began, the king repeated his question and asked Esther what she wanted. By this time, he was dying of curiosity. Esther's wine banquets were delightful but what was on his wife's mind (Esther 7.1-2)?

Finally, Esther responded. She was a brave woman. The first item she put on the table was the offer of her own life. The second was she revealed her family background: she was a Jew. Third, she revealed a plot was afoot to destroy her and her people. Fourth, she stated that had her people merely been sold into slavery rather than killed, she would have said nothing. But she added that if this were the case, the king would lose more than he would gain. Why did she say this? She believed the covenant God made with Abraham—that God would bless those who blessed the Jews and curse the one who cursed them (Genesis 12.1-3).

These revelations astonished the king. He knew nothing of his wife's Jewish background. And now she was telling him of a plot to kill her and her people. Who would dare kill the king's wife? We read:

Then King Ahasuerus asked Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who would presume to do thus" (Esther 7.5)?

If Haman had not turned pale already, he did now. Esther turned to Haman and pointed:

Esther said, "A foe and an enemy is this wicked Haman!" Then Haman became terrified before the king and queen (Esther 7.6).

The king became so agitated he had to leave the room. The one

he had trusted, the one he had elevated, was exposed as his greatest enemy. How could he have been so deceived? He was furious.

While the king was in the garden, Haman remained with the queen to beg for his life. He had seen the king's anger and trembled. In pleading for his life, he hovered over the queen, who was still on her couch. From a distance, it appeared he was attacking her—which was what Ahasuerus thought when he reentered the room. Haman lost all hope for life that instant. We read:

Then the king said, "Will he even assault the queen with me in the house?" As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face (Esther 7.8).

Haman's judgment was suggested by Harbonah, one of the king's eunuchs. He was likely the man who had read the king from the chronicles the night before. He knew of Haman's gallows and had witnessed what had transpired. We read:

⁹ Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs who were before the king said, "Behold indeed, the gallows standing at Haman's house fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai who spoke good on behalf of the king!" And the king said, "Hang him on it." ¹⁰ So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king's anger subsided (Esther 7.9-10).

Act VI: The Reversal: Part II

Scene I: A New Beginning

Ahasuerus gave Haman's wealth to his queen. The amount was likely billions of dollars in today's accounting. The signet ring he had given to Haman he gave to Mordecai. Esther gave Haman's wealth to Mordecai (Esther 8.1-2). Everything that had

been Haman's became Mordecai's.

While this was wonderful, the king's decree to destroy the Jews was still in effect. Esther begged the king to reverse his decree. He had been tricked by wicked Haman. Surely, he could reverse an order based upon deceit (Esther 8.3-6). But according to Medo-Persian law, once a law was enacted, even a bad one, it could not be reversed (Esther 8.8; cf. Daniel 6.12). All the king could do was make another edict. And that was what he did.

The king's scribes consulted with Mordecai to enact a new law instructing the Jews about how to protect themselves. When completed, the new law was communicated by courier to all 127 provinces. The pony express of the old West was nothing new. The ancient Persians had a such a system over 2,500 years before. To ensure speedy communication, Ahasuerus lent his royal steeds for the task (Esther 8.9-14). The original order of the king's command to "destroy (□□□□□□), kill (□□□□□□), and annihilate (□□□□□□)" the Jews was mirrored in the counter-order: □□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□ (Esther 8.11). The new edict allowed the Jews:

to defend their lives, to destroy, to kill and to annihilate the entire army of any people or province which might attack them, including children and women, and to plunder their spoil, (Esther 8.11)

Scene II: Elevation of Mordecai

Like Joseph and Daniel before him, God elevated His man to great power in a Gentile empire. Mordecai became the second in command to Ahasuerus, the position Haman had held (Esther 10.3). On the day he was supposed to die, Mordecai left the king arrayed in royal apparel, clothed in blue and white, wearing a gold crown. As the Lord said, with God, "nothing is impossible" (Luke 1.37).

Mordecai's rise benefited the entire empire. We read, "the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced" (Esther 8.15), "for the Jews there was light and gladness and joy and honor" (Esther 8.16), and

"in each and every province and in each and every city, wherever the king's commandment and his decree arrived, there was gladness and joy for the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many among the peoples of the land became Jews, for the dread of the Jews had fallen on them (Esther 8.17).

What does "dread of the Jews" mean? It means many Gentiles became Jewish proselytes, believers in the God of Israel (Joshua 2.9-11, cf. Rahab became a believer and was in the lineage of Jesus the Messiah). This was a direct blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant.

Scene III: The Jews Fight Back

After the king's decree was published throughout the empire, the Jews armed themselves and prepared to defend against any attackers. Their plotted fate was reversed (Esther 9.1) and again, the Scripture reveals that "dread (פחד) of them had fallen upon all the peoples." This foreshadowed Israel's future position as God's preeminent nation as Moses foretold (Exodus 19.5-6; Deuteronomy 28.1, 13). The "dread (פחד) of Mordecai" also fell upon them and the governors and officers of the provinces helped the Jews (Esther 9.3). This was the work of God. The people and the rulers recognized Mordecai the Jew had risen against impossible odds to defeat Haman the Amalekite.

The Jews fought and destroyed their attackers. The greatest victory, however, was over Haman and the Amalekites, the source of evil. His ten sons were identified by name (Esther 9.7-9) and executed (Esther 9.7-10, 13). The destruction of Haman and his sons seems to have ended the Amalekites; no further mention of them is found and their demise fulfilled

God's prophecy (Exodus 17.14-16; Numbers 24.5-7; 1 Samuel 15.1-3). Five hundred years before, God had commanded King Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin, to destroy them and their livestock (1 Samuel 15.3, 21-22). He disobeyed and failed. Mordecai, of the tribe of Benjamin, destroyed Haman and his sons and did not take a spoil of them (Esther 9.10). Therefore, Mordecai, the Benjamite, unlike his ancestor 500 years earlier, obeyed God and succeeded. He is a picture of Israel failing (1st advent) but succeeding later (2nd advent). Noteworthy also is the parallel/reversal of Haman's wife, Zeresh. She suggested Mordecai be hanged. Ahasuerus' wife, Esther, suggested Haman's sons be hanged (Esther 9.12-14). They were. The Abrahamic covenant was confirmed.

Following the Jews victory over their enemies, Mordecai established a holiday to commemorate it (Esther 9.18-23). The book closes with an explanation of the meaning of Purim (Esther 9.24-32). The celebration is a reminder of the reversal of Haman's evil when he cast "pur" (פּוּר), lots, to discover when to destroy the Jews. God reversed this evil so the days of Pur or Purim became the days in which God turned the Jews misfortune to fortune (cf. Proverbs 16.33). The story concludes with a statement of how Ahasuerus promoted Mordecai to become the second-in-command in the empire. The son of Ahasuerus and Esther was Cyrus. He enacted the edict which allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple (Ezra 1.1-3) and ended the "Babylonian Captivity." No doubt Esther and Mordecai mentored and schooled the lad about the prophecies and promises of God. Truly, the ways of God are past knowing.

The Lesson of Esther

The lesson of Esther is to reveal God is in charge of heaven and earth, even when He chooses to remain hidden. He knows all and will ensure events will turn out as He has promised. The genius of God is He has given man free will to choose while He remains sovereign and controls events to His own purposes.

Haman (a type of Satan) schemed (and was sure of success), but God overturned his plan for His own victory.

Epilogue: The Name of God in Esther

The Name of God in Esther

The reader has no doubt noticed the name of God does not appear in the book of Esther. The Song of Songs and Esther are the only books of the Bible which do not contain God's name. However, while His name is not revealed overtly, it is in the text covertly. Such "hiding" fits with the nature of events in the book's story and action. God's name is revealed through a series of four acrostics (the first letter of each phrase) with His name and a fifth one which contains the verb EHVH, "I AM."³

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|-------------|-------------------------------------|
| Esther 1.20 | □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□□ |
| | YHVH (□□□□□) spelled backward |
| Esther 5.4 | □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ |
| | YHVH (□□□□□) spelled forwards |
| Esther 5.13 | □□□ □□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□ □□□ |
| | YHVH (□□□□□) spelled backward |
| Esther 7.7 | □□□□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□□□□□□□□□ |
| | YHVH (□□□□□) spelled forwards |
| Esther 7.5 | □□□□□□□□□□□□ □□□ □□□□ |
| Exodus 3.14 | "I AM" □□□□□□□□ |

¹ Bullinger, E. W. *The Companion Bible*. [Appendix 57](#). The chart outlines the genealogy of the Persian kings.

| | | | |
|-------------------------------|--|--|--------------------------|
| Herodotus (Lydian Line) | Herodotus, the Behistun Rock, and the Cylinder of Cyrus (Medo- Persian) Combined | Inscription on the Behistun Rock | The Cylinder of Cyrus |
| Alys (Herodotus I.7) | Phraortes I (Herodotus I.96) | | |
| Lydus (Herodotus I.7) | Deiokes= (Herodotus I.94) | Archaemenes | |
| Candaules (Herodotus I.7) | Phraortes II= (Herodotus I.73) | Teispes= | Teispes |
| Gyges (Herodotus I.8) | Cyaxares= (Herodotus I.73) | Ariyaramnes= | Cyrus I |
| Ardys (Herodotus I.16) | | | |
| Sadyattes (Herodotus I.16) | | | |
| Alyattes (Herodotus I.74) | | | |

| | | | |
|--|---|-----------------------|-------------|
| Aryenis=Vasti m. (Herodotus I.74) (Esther 1.9) | Astyages (m. Esther)= (Herodotus I.73) Ahasuerus (Esther 1.1) Artaxerxes (Ezra 6.14; Nehemiah 2.1) "Darius the Median" (Daniel 5.31) | Arsames= | Cambyses |
| | Cyrus "The Persian" (Isaiah 45.1; Ezra 6.14) | | Cyrus II |
| | Cambyses II | | Cambyses II |
| | Hystaspes | Hystaspes | |
| | Darius Hystaspis Artaxerxes (Ezra 7.1) | Darius (Hystaspis) | |

² According to the Midrash, Vashti was the great-granddaughter of King Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon, the granddaughter of King Amel-Marduk and the daughter of King Belshazzar.

³ Bullinger, E. W., *The Companion Bible*. [Appendix 60](#).

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