

## The Book of Esther

### I. THE RISE OF ESTHER (ESTHER 1-2).

- A. The rejection of Vashti (1:1-21).
  - 1. In the third year of his reign, the Persian monarch Ahasuerus gave a fantastic feast which lasted 180 days. It was attended by thousands of his kingdom officials, coming from every one of the 127 provinces, stretching from India to Ethiopia (1:1-4).
  - 2. During the final week of the feasting the king called for his wife, Vashti, to come in and parade her beauty before some of his important, but half-drunk friends. The queen curtly refused to display herself in this cheap manner (1:5-12).
  - 3. Burning with anger, the king acted upon the advice of his crony friends and banished his wife forever from his presence, lest the other women of the kingdom get ideas from her insubordination (1:13-21).
- B. The selection of Esther (2:1-20).
  - 1. After his anger had cooled, the king regretted his hasty action, but was unable to change the strict Persian law even though he himself had decreed it (2:1).
  - 2. At the suggestion of his aides, he allowed an empire-wide beauty search to begin, with the winner of the contest to become his new wife (2:2-4).
  - 3. Among the beauties brought to the palace was a Jewish girl named Hadassah, also known as Esther. The beautiful young maiden had been raised by her older cousin, whose name was Mordecai, of the tribe of Benjamin (2:5-8).
  - 4. Esther gained immediate favor with Hegai, the headmaster of the Miss Persian pageant. However, upon the advice of Mordecai, Esther did not reveal her Jewish identity at this time (2:9-11).
  - 5. The contest lasted some four years, but after the king had seen all the available "finalists," he wholeheartedly chose Esther to become his next queen (2:12-17).
  - 6. To celebrate this event, Ahasuerus threw another big party, and even went so far as to lower taxes in his province (2:18-20).
- C. The detection of Mordecai (2:21-23).
  - 1. Mordecai, who had become a palace official, overhears at the gate a plot of two guards to assassinate Ahasuerus (2:21).
  - 2. He reports this to Queen Esther, who in turn informs the king. Both guards are executed. This was all duly recorded in the book of the history of King Ahasuerus' reign (2:22-23).

### II. THE LIES OF HAMAN (ESTHER 3-5).

- A. Infernal servitude.
  - 1. Soon after Esther had become queen, Ahasuerus appointed as his prime minister a vicious politician named Haman (3:1).
  - 2. The arrogant Haman soon learned a Jew named Mordecai was refusing to bow before him, as had been commanded (3:2-4).
  - 3. Haman hatched a plot to exterminate not only Mordecai, but every other Jew living in the Persian Empire. He approached the king with the following "recommendations."
    - a. That there is a "certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom, and their laws are different from all people; neither keep they the king's laws. Therefore, it is not for the king's profit to tolerate them" (3:8). This, of course, was a brazen lie!
    - b. That he, Haman, would be happy to contribute the sum of \$20 million into the royal treasury for the expense involved in this purge (3:9). He then planned to butcher them like cattle.
    - c. The careless and heartless king agreed to this, without even checking the identity of this "certain people" to say nothing of their guilt (3:10-11).
    - d. Royal riders were sent forth to announce this edict of execution which decreed that all Jews would be killed on February 28 of the following year, 473 B.C. (3:12-15).
- B. Intestinal fortitude (4-5).
  - 1. As seen in Mordecai (4:1-14).
    - a. Upon learning of the decree of death, Mordecai immediately identified with his people and went into deep mourning (4:1-3).
    - b. Unaware of the new law, Esther learned of her cousin's sorrow and inquired concerning the reason behind it (4:4-6).
    - c. Mordecai informed her and advised that she visit the king immediately (4:7-9).
    - d. Esther pointed out to him that she had not been summoned to Ahasuerus' inner court for thirty days and to walk in uninvited would very possibly bring instant death (4:10-12).
    - e. Mordecai answered with what is, perhaps, the key statement in the entire book (4:13-14).
  - 2. As seen in Esther (4:15--5:14).

- a. Esther immediately ordered a three-day fast among the Jews, and determined that she would "go in unto the king, which is not according to the law. "And if I perish, I perish" (4:15-16). (See also Dan. 3:17-18.)
- b. Three days later Esther entered the king's inner court, uninvited, but to her relief, she was warmly received (5:1-2).
- c. The queen did not reveal her request at this time, but simply asked that both the king and Haman attend a banquet she was preparing the next day. Ahasuerus quickly agreed (5:3-8).
- d. Upon learning of his invitation, the vain Haman became puffed up with pride. But when, he saw Mordecai standing at the palace gate, still refusing to bow, he was furious (5:9).
- e. He related both his joy and frustration to Zeresh and his friends at home (5:10-14).

### III. THE PRIZE OF FAITH (ESTHER 6-10).

- A. The execution of a beast--Haman (Est. 6-8).
  1. Scene one--the king's bedroom (Est. 6).
    - a. Ahasuerus experienced a case of royal insomnia and ordered the reading of some historical records, hoping perhaps that this dull material would put him to sleep (6:1).
    - b. The reader, by "chance," just happened to begin reading at the place which related how Mordecai had once saved the king's life by exposing an assassination plot. The king, now fully awake, asked: "What honor and dignity hath been bestowed upon Mordecai for this?" (6:2-4). The answer from his advisor was: "There has nothing been done for him."
    - c. At this exact moment Haman arrived at Ahasuerus' palace, seeking the king's permission to hang Mordecai. The king, still determined to reward Mordecai (neither Ahasuerus nor Haman, of course, knew what the other was thinking) used Haman as a sounding board and inquired (6:5-6).
    - d. The arrogant and self-centered Haman immediately thought Ahasuerus had him in mind and brazenly suggested the following:
      - (1) That the man to be honored be clothed in the king's own royal robes.
      - (2) That he be placed upon Ahasuerus' personal horse.
      - (3) That he be allowed to wear the king's crown.
      - (4) That the king's most noble prince lead this hero, seated upon the horse, through the streets of the city, shouting his praises for all to hear (6:7-9).
    - e. The king quickly agreed to all this and then turned to Haman and ordered his wicked prime minister to perform all this for Mordecai. The totally dumb-struck Haman stumbled out to obey Ahasuerus' command and later hurried home, utterly humiliated! Even there he received no comfort, but heard his wife say (6:10-13).
    - f. While they yet spoke, he received the message to attend Esther's banquet (6:14).
  2. Scene two--the king's banquet hall (7).
    - a. The treachery learned (7:1-6).
      - (1) Esther warned the king that a plot was underway to slaughter both her and all her people. The king, filled with astonishment and then anger, asked: "Who is he, and where is he, who would presume in his heart to do so?" (7:1-5).
      - (2) Esther pointed to Haman and replied: "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman" (7:6).
    - b. The tables turned (7:7--8:17).
      - (1) Ahasuerus, unable to speak because of his fury, walked outside into his palace garden for a moment (7:7).
      - (2) Filled with horrible fear, the cowardly Haman begged Esther to intercede to the king for him. In his terrible fright he accidentally fell upon the couch where Esther was reclining (7:8).
      - (3) At this point Ahasuerus walked back in and viewed what he interpreted to be a rape attempt on the part of Haman. Upon learning of the nearby gallows that Haman had built for Mordecai, the king roared out in his wrath for Haman himself to be hanged that very night. The order was immediately carried out (7:9-10).
      - (4) After his execution, Ahasuerus gave Esther Haman's estate and appointed Mordecai his new prime minister (8:1-2)
      - (5) Both now begged the king to reverse Haman's order. But the law of the Medes and Persians once made, was immutable, and not even Ahasuerus himself could change it. Ahasuerus then did the next best thing. He ordered the Jews to defend themselves. Mordecai immediately sent copies of this new decree to all of the 127 provinces (8:3-14).
- B. The institution of a feast--Purim (9-10).
  1. The Jews prepared themselves and were able to slaughter their enemies (9:1-19).

2. Mordecai and Esther then instituted a new memorial feast called Purim, to commemorate yearly their great salvation from Haman (9:20-32).
3. Mordecai became a great and godly statesman, respected by both Jews and Gentiles for his abilities and actions (10).