

# ESTHER

# INTRODUCTION

The Book of Esther is a graphic narrative, which relates how God's people were preserved from ruin during the fifth century B.C.

The book takes its name from the beautiful, orphaned Jewess who became the queen of the Persian king Ahasuerus. He is generally believed to have been King Xerxes I who succeeded Darius I in 485 B.C. and ruled for twenty years over 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia. He lived in the Persian capital of Shushan. At this time a number of Jews were still in Babylon under Persian rule, even though they had been free to return to Jerusalem (Ezra 1; 2) for over fifty years. The story takes place over a period of four years, starting in the third year of Xerxes' reign.

Esther is a study in the survival of God's people amidst hostility. Haman, the king's second in command, wants the Jews destroyed. He manipulates the king to call for their execution. Esther is brought on the scene and is used by God to save her people. Haman is hanged; and Mordecai, a leader to the Jews in the Persian Empire, becomes prime minister. The Feast of Purim is then instituted to mark their deliverance.

A unique feature of Esther is that the name of God is not mentioned. However, the imprint of God and His ways are obvious throughout, especially in the lives of Esther and Mordecai. From a human perspective, Esther and Mordecai were two of the most unlikely people to be chosen to play major roles in shaping a nation. He was a Jewish Benjamite exile; she was his adopted, orphaned cousin (2:7). Esther's spiritual maturity is seen in her knowing to wait for God's timing to make her request to save her people and to denounce Haman (5:6-8; 7:3-6). Mordecai also demonstrates a maturity to seek God for timing and direction. As a result, he knew the right time for Esther to disclose her identity as a Jew (2:10). These obviously divinely controlled restraints proved to be crucial (6:1-14; 7:9, 10) and testify to the book's spiritual base.

Finally, both Esther and Mordecai feared God, not men. Regardless of the consequences, Mordecai refused to pay homage to Haman. Esther risked her life for the sake of her people by going to the king without being summoned. Their mission was always to save the life that the enemy planned to destroy (2:21-23; 4:1-17; 7:1-6; 8:3-6). As a result, they led a nation into freedom, were honored by the king and given greater authority, privileges, and responsibilities.

One of the main purposes of the Book of Esther is to show us from the lives of Esther and Mordecai a classic example of successful teamwork. Their relationship vividly portrays the unity that the Lord Jesus prayed for His disciples to experience (John 17). The success of their individual roles, even their very survival, depended entirely upon their unity. Esther also shows how God destroys those who try to harm His people. From this we are reminded that He is faithful to destroy Satan and that His sovereign purposes ultimately prevail.

Queen Esther is similar to Jesus in several ways. She lived in submission, dependence, and obedience to her God-given authorities Mordecai and King Ahasuerus even as the Lord Jesus, during His earthly ministry, lived in total submission, dependence, and obedience to His Father God.

Esther also fully identified herself with her people and fasted for three days as she interceded to God on their behalf (4:16). Hebrews 2:17 tells us that "in all things He [Jesus] had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest." As such, He both fasted and prayed for His own (Matt. 4:2; John 17:20).

Third, Esther gave up her right to live in order to save the nation from certain death. For this she was exalted by the king. In like fashion Jesus gave up His life that a world of sinners might be saved from eternal death and was highly exalted by God (Phil. 2:5-11).

Although the Holy Spirit is not mentioned directly, it is His work that produced in both Esther and Mordecai the deep level of humility, leading to their mutual love and loyalty (see Rom. 5:5).

The Holy Spirit also directed and energized Esther to fast for her nation and to call her people to do the same (see Rom. 8:26, 27).

(Spirit Filled Life Bible's Introduction to Esther, A. Joy Dawson)

## Esther 1:1-22

Xerxes's feast ended in heaviness by his own folly. An unhappy quarrel between the king and queen, broke off the feast abruptly, and sent the guests away silent and ashamed.

I. It was certainly the king's weakness to send for Vashti into his presence when he was drunk, and in company with gentlemen in the same condition. *When he was in high spirits from wine* Vashti must come, well dressed as she was, *wearing her royal crown*, that the princes and people might see what a beautiful woman she was, v. 10, 11. With this,

1. He dishonored himself as a husband, who ought to *cover an offense against her* (Gen. 20:16), not uncover it.

2. It was against the custom of the Persians for the women to appear in public, and he put a great hardship on her when he did not request, but command her to do so uncouth a thing, and make her a show.

II. *She refused to come* (v. 12); though he sent his command by seven honorable messengers, yet she persisted in her denial. Had she come, while it was evident that she did it in pure obedience, it would have been no reflection on her modesty. Perhaps she refused in a haughty manner, and then it was certainly evil; she *scorned to come at the king's command*. What humiliation this was to him!

III. The king immediately became outraged. He who had rule over 127 provinces had no rule over his own spirit, but he *burned with anger*, v. 12.

IV. Though he was very angry, he would not do anything until he had consulted his advisors. Of these advisors it is said that they were learned men, for they *were experts in matters of law and justice*,—that they were wise men, for they *understood the times*,—and that the king put great confidence in them and honored them, for they *had special access to the king and were highest in the kingdom*, v. 13, 14.

1. The question proposed to this cabinet council (v. 15): *According to the law, what must be done to Queen Vashti?*

2. The proposal which Memucan made, that Vashti should be divorced for her disobedience.

(1) He shows what would be the bad consequences of the queen's disobedience to her husband, if it were passed by.

(2) He shows what would be the good consequence of a decree against Vashti that she should be divorced.

Therefore they gave this judgment against her, that she should *never again enter the presence of the king*, and this judgment so ratified as never to be reversed, v. 19.

3. The edict that passed according to this proposal, signifying that the queen was divorced for insubordination, according to the law, and that, if other wives were in like manner undutiful to their husbands, they must expect to be in like manner disgraced (v. 21, 22): were they better than the queen?

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

The king being under the influence of wine and merriment was caught up in the moment for making the request of the queen. **For whatever reason the queen did not come, did the king handle the situation in a wise manner? Characterize king Ahasuerus.**

**Is the king's predicament with queen Vashti a good lesson for us to learn; and that is to think out the consequences before we ask someone to do something.**

## Esther 2:1-23

Vashti being humbled for her pride, Esther is advanced for her humility. Observe,

I. The extravagant course that was taken to please the king with another wife instead of Vashti. Josephus says that when his anger was over he would have been reconciled to Vashti but that, by the constitution of the government, the judgment was irrevocable. Therefore, to make him forget her, they planned how to entertain him first with a great variety of concubines. All the provinces of his kingdom must be searched for fair young virgins, and officers appointed to choose them, v. 3.

II. The overruling providence of God bringing Esther to be queen. She came in her turn, after several others, and it was found that Esther excelled them all. Concerning Esther,

1. Her origin and character.

(1) She was one of the exiles, a Jewess and a sharer with her people in their bondage.

(2) She was an orphan; her father and mother were both dead (v. 7), but, when they had forsaken her, then the Lord took her up, Ps. 27:10.

(3) She was a beauty, *lovely in form and features*, v. 7. Her wisdom and virtue were her greatest beauty, but it is an advantage to a diamond to be well set.

(4) Mordecai, her cousin, was her guardian, *brought her up, and took her as his own daughter*. Let God be acknowledged in raising up friends for the fatherless and motherless; let it be an encouragement to that pious instance of charity that many who have taken care of the education of orphans have lived to see the good fruit of their care and pains,

abundantly to their comfort. Mordecai being Esther's guardian we are told, [1] How much he cared for her, as if she had been his own child (v. 11). [2] How respectful she was toward him. Though in relation she was his equal, yet, being in age and dependence his inferior, she honored him as her father—*followed his instructions*, v. 20. She did not *reveal her nationality or family background*, because Mordecai had charged her that she should not, v. 10. He did not bid her tell a lie to conceal her parentage; he only told her not to proclaim her country. She being born in Shushan, and her parents being dead, all took her to be of Persian descent.

2. Her advancement. Who would have thought that a Jewess, a captive, an orphan, was born to be a queen, an empress! The king's eunuch honored her (v. 9), and was ready to serve her. The king himself fell in love with her. The more natural beauty is the more agreeable. *The king was attracted to Esther more than to any other women*, v. 17. Now he did not need to take time to deliberate; he is soon determined to *set a royal crown on her head and make her Queen*, v. 17. This was done in his seventh year (v. 16). He graced the ceremony of her coronation with a *royal banquet* (v. 18). He also *proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces*. Esther still *followed Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up*, v. 20. Mordecai sat *at the king's gate*: that was the height of his advancement: he was one of the porters or door-keepers of the court.

This good service which Mordecai did to the government, in discovering a plot against the life of the king, is here recorded, because the mention of it will again occur to his advantage (v. 21-23). No step is yet taken towards Haman's plan for the Jews' destruction, but several steps are taken towards God's plan for their deliverance. God now gives Mordecai an opportunity of doing the king a good turn, that he might have the fairer opportunity afterwards of doing the Jews a good turn.

1. A plot was laid against the king by two of his own servants, who sought *to assassinate him*, v. 21.

2. Mordecai got notice of their treason, and, by Esther's means, revealed it to the king, thus confirming her in and recommending himself to the king's favor.

3. The traitors were hanged, as they deserved, but not until their treason was, after investigation, fully proved against them (v. 23), and the whole matter was recorded in the king's journals, with a particular remark that Mordecai was the man who discovered the treason.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

### **Where were Esther and Mordecai from and what was their relationship to each other?**

**Though the name of God is not mentioned in the book of Esther can you see the finger of God or said in another way, God working through people, circumstances, etc. to achieve His purpose?**

### **Esther 3:1-15**

I. Haman advanced by the prince, and consequently adored by the people. Haman was an Agagite (an Amalekite, says Josephus), probably of the dependants of Agag, a common name of the princes of Amalek, as appears, Num. 24:7. The king took a liking to him (princes are not bound to give reasons for their favors), made him his favorite, his confidant, his prime-minister of state. It is plain that he was not a man of honor or justice, of any true courage or steady conduct, but proud, and passionate, and vengeful; yet was he promoted, and favored, and there was none so great as he.

II. Mordecai adhering to his principles with a bold and daring resolution, and therefore refusing to revere Haman as the rest of the king's servants did, v. 2. He was urged to it by his friends. *Day after day they spoke to him* (v. 4), to persuade him to conform, but all in vain: he did not listen to them, but told them plainly that he was a Jew, and his conscience would not allow him to do it. It does not appear that anyone had scruples about conforming to it except Mordecai; and yet his refusal was pious, conscientious, and pleasing to God, for the religion of a Jew forbade him,

1. To give such extravagant honors as were required to any mortal man, especially so wicked a man as Haman was. In the apocryphal chapters of this book (*ch. 13:12-14*) Mordecai is brought in thus appealing to God in this matter: *You know, Lord, that it was neither in contempt nor pride, nor for any desire of glory, that I did not bow down to proud Haman, for I could have been content with goodwill, for the salvation of Israel, to kiss the soles of his feet; but I did this that I might not prefer the glory of man more than the glory of God, neither will I worship any but you.*

2. He especially thought it an act of injustice toward his nation to give such honor to an Amalekite, one of that nation with which God had sworn that he would have perpetual war (Exod. 17:16) and concerning which he had given that solemn charge (Deut. 25:17), *Remember what the Amalekites did.*

III. Haman pondering revenge. Some who hoped to curry favor with Haman informed him of Mordecai's rudeness, waiting to see whether he would bend or break, v. 4. Haman then observed it himself, and was *enraged*, v. 5. It is soon resolved that Mordecai must die. Haman thinks his life nothing towards a satisfaction for the insult: thousands of innocent and valuable lives must be sacrificed to his indignation; and therefore he vows the destruction of all the people of Mordecai, for his sake, because his being a Jew was the reason he gave why he did not revere Haman.

Haman does not doubt being able to find desperate and bloody hands enough to cut all their throats if the king will but give him leave (v. 7-15). He obtained leave, and commission to do it.

I. He makes a false and malicious representation of the Jews, and their character, to the king. v. 8. He would have the king believe.

1. That the Jews were a despicable people, and that it was not for his credit to harbor them: "*There is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces as fugitives and vagabonds on the earth, and inmates in all countries, the burden and scandal of the places where they live.*"

2. That they were a dangerous people. "They have laws of their own, and do not conform to the statutes of the kingdom, and may be looked on as disaffected toward the government, which may end in rebellion."

II. He bids leave to destroy them all, v. 9. He knew there were many who hated the Jews. *Let a decree be issued, therefore, to destroy them.* Only give orders for a general massacre of all the Jews. If the king will gratify him in this matter, he will give him a present of *ten thousand talents*, which shall be *put into the royal treasury*. This, he thought, would obviate the strongest objection that the government must sustain loss in its revenues by the destruction of so many of its subjects. No doubt Haman knew how to reimburse himself from the plunder of the Jews, which his soldiers were to seize for him (v. 13), and so to make them bear the charges of their own ruin.

III. He obtains what he desired, a full commission to do what he would with the Jews, v. 10, 11. The king was so bewitched with Haman, that he was willing to believe the worst concerning the Jews, and therefore he gave them up into his hands, as lambs to the lion: *Do with the people as you please.* So little did he consider how much Haman would gain in the plunder, that he gave him likewise the ten thousand talents: *Keep the money.*

IV. He then consults with his soothsayers to find a lucky day for the intended massacre, v. 7. The resolve was taken up in the first month, in the twelfth year of the king, when Esther had been his wife about five years. The lot fell to the twelfth month, so that Mordecai and Esther had eleven months to defeat the plot. Haman, though eager to have the Jews cut off, yet will submit to the laws of his superstition. God's wisdom serves its own purposes by men's folly. Haman has appealed to the lot, and to the lot he shall go, which, by adjourning the execution, gives judgment against him and breaks the neck of the plot.

V. The bloody edict is drawn up, signed, and published, giving orders to the militia of every province to be ready for *the thirteenth day of the twelfth month*, and, on that day, to murder all the Jews, men, women, and children, and seize their belongings, v. 12-14. No crime is laid to their charge; but die they must, without mercy.

VI. The different temper of the court and city as a result. The court was very merry about it: *The king and Haman sat down to drink.* Haman was afraid lest the king's conscience should afflict him for what he had done, to prevent which he kept him drinking. This cursed method many take to drown their convictions, and harden their own hearts and the hearts of others in sin. The city was very sad about it: *The city of Susa was bewildered*, not only the Jews themselves, but all their neighbors who had any principles of justice and compassion. It grieved them to see men who lived peacefully treated so barbarously. But the king and Haman cared for none of these things.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

Haman had everything going for him but was so incensed that Mordecai did not give him the respect he thought he deserved that it ate at him like a canker. Satan used this sin in Haman and made him a weapon to destroy God's chosen people. **Who else in scripture was Satan allowed to drive to commit an atrocious crime much like Haman's?**

Luke 22:3

### **Esther 4:1-17**

An account of the general sorrow that there was among the Jews at the publishing of Haman's bloody edict against them.

1. Mordecai cried bitterly, *tore his clothes, and put on sackcloth*, v. 1, 2. He not only thus vented his grief, but proclaimed it, that all might take notice of it that he was not ashamed to profess himself a friend to the Jews, and a fellow sufferer with them. It was nobly done thus publicly to espouse what he knew to be a righteous cause, and the cause of God, even when it seemed a desperate and a sinking cause. Mordecai knew that Haman's spite was against him primarily, and that it was for his sake that the rest of the Jews were struck; and therefore it troubled him greatly that his people should suffer for his scruples. But, being able to appeal to God that what he did he did from a principle of conscience, he could with comfort commit his own cause and that of his people to Him. Notice is here taken of a law that *no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter the king's gate*. None must come near the king in a mourning dress, because he was not willing to hear the complaints of such. Nothing but what was happy and pleasant must appear at court. This obliged Mordecai to keep his distance, and only to come before the gate, not to take his place in the gate.

2. All the Jews in every province laid it much to heart, v. 2. They denied themselves the comfort of their tables (for they fasted and mingled tears with their food and drink), and *they lay in sackcloth and ashes*.

3. Esther the queen, on a general intimation of the trouble Mordecai was in, *was in great distress*, v. 4. Mordecai's grief was hers, and the Jews' danger was her distress. Esther sent a change of clothing to Mordecai, but because he would make her aware of the greatness of his grief, and consequently of the cause of it, *he would not accept them*, but was as one who refused to be comforted.

So strictly did the laws of Persia confine the wives, especially the king's wives, that it was not possible for Mordecai to have a conference with Esther, but various messages are here carried between them by Hathach, whom the king had appointed to attend her.

I. She sent to Mordecai to know more fully what the trouble was which he was now lamenting (v. 5) and why it was that he would not put off his sackcloth.

II. Mordecai sent her an authentic account of the whole matter, with a charge to her to intercede with the king: *Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him* (v. 7), what a resentment Haman had against him for not bowing to him, and by what methods he had procured this edict. He sent her also a true copy of the edict, that she might see what imminent danger she and her people were in, and charged her, if she had any respect for him or any kindness for the Jewish nation, that she should rectify the misinformation with which the king was deceived.

III. She sent her case to Mordecai, that she could not, without peril of her life, address the king.

1. The law was explicit, and all knew it, that whoever came to the king uncalled should be put to death, unless he was pleased to *extend the gold scepter to them*. This made the royal palace little better than a royal prison, and the kings themselves could not but become morose. It was bad for their subjects; for what good had they of a king who they might never have liberty to apply to for the redress of grievances. It is not thus in the court of the King of kings: to the footstool of his throne of grace we may at any time *come boldly*, and may be sure of an answer of peace to the prayer of faith. It was particularly very uncomfortable for their wives (for there was no proviso in the law to exempt them).

2. Her case was at present very discouraging. Providence so ordered it that, just at this juncture, she was under a cloud, and the king's affections cooled towards her, for *thirty days had passed since she had been called to go to the king*.

IV. Mordecai still insisted on it that, whatever hazard she might encounter, she must apply to the king in this great affair, v. 13, 14. He suggested to her,

1. That it was her own cause, for that the decree to *annihilate all the Jews* did not hold her exempt: "*Do not think therefore that because you are in the king's house, that the palace will be your protection, and the crown save your head: no, you are a Jewess, and, if the rest are cut off, you will be cut off too.*"

2. That it was a cause which, one way or other, would certainly be carried, and which therefore she might safely attempt. "*If you should decline the service, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place.*" This was the language of a strong faith, which *did not waiver through unbelief regarding the promise* when the danger was most threatening, but *against all hope believed in hope*.

3. That if she deserted her friends now, through cowardice and unbelief, she would have reason to fear that some judgment from heaven would be the ruin of her and her family: "*You and your father's family will perish, when the rest of the families of the Jews shall be preserved.*"

4. That divine Providence had an eye to this in bringing her to be queen: "*Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?*" We should every one of us consider for what end God has put us in the place where we are, and, when any particular opportunity of serving God and our generation offers itself, we must take care that we do not let it slip.

V. At this point Esther resolved, whatever it might cost her, to apply to the king, but not until she and her friends had first applied to God. Let them first by fasting and prayer obtain God's favor, and then she should hope to find favor with the king, v. 15, 16. She spoke,

1. With the piety and devotion that became an Israelite, for she believed that God's favor was obtained by prayer. She knew it was the practice of good people, in extraordinary cases, to join fasting with prayer. She therefore,

(1) Desired that Mordecai would direct the Jews who were in Susa to *sanctify a fast and call a solemn assembly*, to meet in the respective synagogues to which they belonged, and to pray for her, and to keep a solemn fast.

(2) She promised that she and her family would sanctify this fast in her quarters in the palace, for she might not come to their assemblies. Those who are confined to privacy may join their prayers with those of the solemn assemblies of God's people: those who are absent in body may be present in spirit.

2. With the courage and resolution that became a queen. "*When we have sought God in this matter, / will go in to the king to intercede for my people. / know it is against the king's law, but it is in accordance with God's law; and therefore I will venture, and, if I perish, I perish. I cannot lose my life in a better cause. Better do my duty and die with them.*" She did not say this in despair or anger, but in a holy resolution to do her duty and trust God with the result.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

**After Esther's reply (Esther 4:10-11) to Mordecai on the danger she could face approaching the king what three facts did Mordecai remind her of?**

Esther 4:13-14

## **Esther 5:1-14**

When the time appointed for their fast was finished Esther lost no time, but on the third day, when the impressions of her devotions were fresh on her spirit, she addressed the king. Now she *put on her royal robes*, that she might the better recommend herself to the king, and laid aside her fast-day clothes. In the Apocrypha (Esther 14:16), she thus appeals to God: *You know, Lord, I abhor the sign of my high estate which is on my head, in the days in which I show myself*, etc. She stood in *the inner court in front of the king's hall*, expecting her doom, between hope and fear.

When the king saw her he was pleased with her. *We are told,*

1. That he protected her from the law, and assured her of safety, by *holding out to her the gold scepter* (v. 2), which she thankfully *touched the tip of*, thus presenting herself to him as a humble petitioner.

2. That he encouraged her address (v. 3): *What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request?* Esther feared that she should perish, but was promised that she should have what she might ask for, though it were *half the kingdom*. Let us from this story infer, as our Savior does from the parable of the unjust judge, an encouragement to *always pray* to our God, *and not give up*, Luke 18:6-8. Esther came to a proud imperious man; we come to the God of love and grace. She was not called; we are: the Spirit says, *Come*, and the bride says, *Come*. She had a law against her; we have a promise, many a promise, in favor of us: *Ask, and it shall be given you*. She had no friend to introduce her, or intercede for her, while on the contrary he who was then the king's favorite was her enemy; but we have an advocate with the Father, in whom he is well pleased. *Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace*.

3. That all the request she had to make to him, at this time, was that he would please come to a banquet which she had prepared for him, and bring Haman along with him, v. 4, 5. She would endeavor to bring him into a pleasant humor, and soften his spirit, that he might with the more tenderness receive the complaint she had to make to him. She would please him, by seeking the favor of Haman his favorite, and inviting him to come whose company she knew he loved and whom she desired to have present when she made her complaint.

4. That he readily came, and ordered Haman to come along with him (v. 5). There he renewed his kind enquiry (*Now what is your petition?*) and his generous promise, that it should be granted, *even up to half the kingdom* (v. 6), a proverbial expression, by which he assured her that he would deny her nothing in reason.

5. That then Esther thought fit to ask no more than a promise that he would please to accept of another treat, the next day, in her apartment, and Haman with him (v. 7, 8), intimating to him that then she would let him know what her business was. Putting it off thus she knew would be well taken as an expression of the great reverence she had for the king, and her unwillingness to be too pressing on him.

Haman, in whom pride and wrath had so much the ascendant.

I. Puffed up with the honor of being invited to Esther's feast. He was *happy and in high spirits* about it. v. 9. He thought it was because she was exceedingly charmed with his conversation that the next day she had invited him also to come with the king.

II. Mordecai was as determined as ever: *He neither rose nor showed fear in his presence*, v. 9. Haman can as ill bear it as ever: indeed, the higher he is lifted up, the more impatient is he of contempt and the more enraged at it. Gladly would he have drawn his sword and run Mordecai through for insulting him thus; but he hoped shortly to see him fall with all the Jews, and therefore with much ado prevailed with himself to forbear stabbing him.

III. Pondering revenge, Haman was assisted by his wife and his friends, v. 14. For the pleasing of his fancy they advise him to *have a gallows built*, and have it set up before his own door, that, as soon as he could get the warrant signed, there might be no delay of the execution. This is very agreeable to Haman, who has the gallows made and fixed immediately; it must be fifty cubits high, for the greater disgrace of Mordecai and to make him a spectacle to everyone who passed by. They advised him to go early in the morning to the king, and get an order from him for the hanging of Mordecai.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

## **Show how Haman's hatred for Mordecai and the Jews has gradually grown into completely taking over his life?**

Esther 5:13

## **Esther 6:1-14**

When Satan put it into the heart of Haman to plan Mordecai's death, God put it into the heart of the king to plan Mordecai's honor. The steps which Providence took towards the advancement of Mordecai.

I. *That night the king could not sleep*. His *sleep fled away* (so the word is); and perhaps, like a shadow, the more carefully he pursued it the further it went from him.

II. When he could not sleep he called to have the book of records, the Journals of his reign, read to him. v. 1. But God put it into his heart to call for it, rather than for music or songs, which would have been more likely to compose him to rest.

III. The servant who read to him selected that article which concerned Mordecai. Among other things it was found written that Mordecai had discovered a plot against the life of the king and prevented the execution of it, v. 2. How Mordecai's good service was recorded we read in 2:23, and here it is found on record.

IV. The king enquired *what honor and recognition had Mordecai received for this*, suspecting that this good service had gone unrewarded.

V. The servants informed him that nothing had been done to Mordecai for that eminent service; in the king's gate he sat before, and there he still sat. Humility, modesty, and self-denial, though in God's account of great price, yet commonly hinder men's advancement in the world. Mordecai rises no higher than the king's gate, while proud ambitious Haman gets the king's ear and heart; but, though the aspiring rise fast, the humble stand fast. Mordecai is at this time, by the king's edict, doomed to destruction, with all the Jews, though it is acknowledged that he deserved dignity.

It is now morning, and people begin to stir.

I. Haman is so impatient to get Mordecai hanged that he comes early to court, before any other business is brought to get a warrant for his execution (v. 4), which he makes sure that he shall have at the first word. He could tell the king that he was so confident of the justice of his request, and the king's favor to him in it, that he had got the gallows ready: one word from the king would complete his satisfaction.

II. The king is so impatient to have Mordecai honored that he sends to know who is in the court who is fit to be employed in it. Word is brought him that Haman is in the court, v. 5. *Bring him in*, says the king, the fittest man to be made use of both in directing and in dispensing the king's favor; and the king knew nothing of any quarrel he had with Mordecai. Haman is brought in immediately, proud of the honor done him in being admitted into the king's bed-chamber *before he was up*. Now Haman thinks he has the fairest opportunity he can wish for to solicit against Mordecai; but the king's heart is as full as his, and it is fit he should speak first.

III. The king asks Haman how he should express his favor to one whom he had marked as a favorite: *What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?* v. 6.

IV. Haman concluded that he himself is the favorite intended, and therefore prescribes the highest expressions of honor that could be bestowed on a subject. Now Haman thinks he is carving out honor for himself, and therefore does it very liberally, v. 8, 9.

V. The king confounds him with a positive order that he should immediately go himself and give all this honor to Mordecai the Jew, v. 10. If the king had but said, as Haman expected, *You are the man!* But how is he thunderstruck when the king bids him not to order all this to be done, but to do it himself to Mordecai the Jew, the very man he hated above all men and whose ruin he was now plotting!

VI. Haman dares not dispute nor so much as seem to dislike the king's order, but, with the greatest reluctance brings it to Mordecai, who did no more cringe to Haman now than he had done, valuing his counterfeit respect no more than he had valued his concealed malice. The apparel is brought, Mordecai is dressed up, and rides in pomp through the city, recognized as the king's favorite, v. 11.

I. How little Mordecai was puffed up with his advancement. He *returned to the king's gate* (v. 12): he returned to his place and the duty of it immediately, and minded his business as closely as he had done before.

II. How much Haman was cast down with his disappointment. To wait on any man, especially Mordecai, and at this time, when he hoped to have seen him hanged, was enough to break such a proud heart.

III. How his doom was read to him by his wife and his friends: *"Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him—you will surely come to ruin!"* v. 13. *This Mordecai was of Jewish origin; feeble Jews* their enemies sometimes called them, but formidable Jews they sometimes found them. They are holy descendants, praying descendants, in covenant with God, and descendants whom the Lord has all along blessed, and therefore let not their enemies expect to triumph over them.

IV. He was now sent for to the banquet that Esther had prepared, v. 14. He thought it seasonable in hopes it would revive his drooping spirits and save his sinking honor.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

**How do the following events speak to you:**

**The king was unable to sleep, ordered a particular book be read to him, and his attention having been specially directed to the importance, and as yet unrewarded, services of Mordecai.**

**How do the pageantry and prominence affect Mordecai?**

### Esther 7:1-10

The king in a good mood, and Haman in a bad mood, meet at Esther's table.

I. The king urged Esther, a third time, to tell him what her request was, for he longed to know, and repeated his promise that it should be granted, v. 2.

II. Esther, at length, surprises the king with a petition for the preservation of herself and her countrymen from death and destruction, v. 3, 4. That a friend, a wife, should have occasion to present such a petition was very affecting: *Grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request.* To move the king the more she suggests she and her people were bought and sold. They had not sold themselves by any offence against the government, but were sold to gratify the pride and revenge of one man. That it was not their liberty only, but their lives that were sold. "Had we been sold" (she says) "into slavery, I would not have complained; for in time we might have recovered our liberty, though the king would have made but a bad bargain of it. Whatever had been paid for us, the loss of so many industrious hands out of his kingdom would have been more damage to the treasury than the price would countervail." *We have been sold (she says) for destruction and slaughter and annihilation.* She refers to the words of the decree (*Esther 3:13*), which aimed at nothing short of their destruction.

III. The king stands amazed at the remonstrance, and asks (v. 5). "*Who is he? Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?*" We sometimes startle at the mention of that evil which yet we ourselves may be charged with. Xerxes is amazed at that wickedness which he himself was guilty of; for he consented to that bloody edict against the Jews. *You are the man*, might Esther too truly have said.

IV. Esther plainly charges Haman with it before his face: "Here he is, let him speak for himself, for therefore he is invited: *The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman (v. 6)*; it is he who has plotted our murder."

V. Haman is apprehensive of his danger: *He was terrified before the king and queen*; and it was time for him to fear when the queen was his prosecutor, the king his judge, and his own conscience a witness against him.

I. The king retires in anger. He rose from table in great rage, and *went out into the palace garden* to calm himself and to consider what was to be done. v. 7. He blames himself, that he should be such a fool as to doom a guiltless nation to destruction, and his own queen among the rest, on the wicked suggestions of a self-seeking man, without examining the truth of his allegations. He condemned Haman whom he had become close to, that he should be such a villain as to draw him to consent to so wicked a measure.

II. Haman becomes a humble petitioner to the queen for his life. He might easily perceive by the king's hastily flying out of the room that *the king had already decided his fate*. How insignificant Haman looks, when he stands up first and then falls down at Esther's feet, to beg she would save his life and take all he had. How great Esther looks, who of late had been neglected and doomed! Now her sworn enemy admits that he lies at her mercy, and begs his life at her hand. The day is coming when those who hate and persecute God's chosen ones would gladly be indebted to them.

III. The king returns yet more exasperated against Haman.

IV. Those around him were ready to be the instruments of his wrath. The courtiers who adored Haman when he was the rising sun set themselves as much against him now that he is a falling star. As soon as the king spoke an angry word *they covered Haman's face*, as a condemned man; they marked him for execution. Those who are hanged commonly have their faces covered. One of those who had been recently sent to Haman's house, to bring him to the banquet, informed the king of the gallows which Haman had prepared for Mordecai, v. 9.

V. The king gave orders that he should be hanged on his own gallows, which was done accordingly.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

**How did Esther implicate the king in this horrible crime of eliminating the Jews without openly accusing him?**

**What helped the king decide what to do?**

Esther 7:9-10

### **Esther 8:1-17**

1. Haman was hanged as a traitor, therefore his estate was forfeited to the crown, and the king gave it all to Esther.

2. Mordecai advanced. His procession, this morning, through the streets of the city, was but a sudden blaze of honor; but here we have the more lasting promotion to which he was raised. He is acknowledged as the queen's cousin, which until now, though Esther had been four years queen, the king did not know. So humble, so modest, a man was Mordecai, and so far from being ambitious of a place at court, that he concealed his relation to the queen, and her obligations to him as her guardian. Now, at length, *Esther had told how he was related to her*, near akin, who took care of her when she was an orphan, and one whom she still respected as a father. All the trust he had reposed in Haman, and all the power he had given him, are here transferred to Mordecai; for the ring which he had taken from Haman he gave to Mordecai,

and made this trusty humble man his confidant. The queen makes him her steward, for the management of Haman's estate. *She appointed him over Haman's estate.*

Haman, the chief enemy of the Jews, was hanged, Mordecai and Esther, their chief friends, were sufficiently protected; but many others there were in the king's dominions who hated the Jews and desired their ruin, and to their rage and malice all the rest of that people lay exposed for the edict against them was still in force.

I. The queen here makes intercession with much affection and importunity. She came, a second time, uncalled into the king's presence (v. 3), and was as before encouraged to present her petition, by the king's holding out the golden scepter to her, v. 4. Her petition is that the king, having put away Haman, would put away the harm of Haman and his device against the Jews. This petition Esther presents with much affection: She *pleaded with the king, falling, down at his feet and weeping* (v. 3), every tear as precious as any of the pearls with which she was adorned. *If it pleases the king and if he regards me with favor*—and again, "If the thing itself seems right and reasonable before the king, and if *he is pleased with me*, let the decree be reversed." She enforces her petition with a moving plea: *"For how can I bear to see the destruction of my people?"*

II. The king here takes a course for the preventing of the harm that Haman had intended. The king knew, and informed the queen, that, according to the constitution of the Persian government, the former edict could not be revoked (v. 8): What is *written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's signet ring*, may not, under any pretence whatsoever, be reversed. Yet he found an expedient to undo the devices of Haman, and defeat his plot, by signing and publishing another decree to authorize the Jews to stand in their defense, *vim vi repellere, et invasorem occidere—to oppose force to force, and destroy the assailant*. This would be their effective security. *"Write in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you* (v. 8), saving only the honor of our constitution. Let the harm be put away as effectively as may be without reversing the letters." This edict was to be drawn up and published in the respective languages of all the provinces. The purport of this decree was to commission the Jews, on the day which was appointed for their destruction, to draw together in a body for their own defense. And,

1. To stand for their life, that, whoever assaulted them, it might be at their peril.

2. They might not only act defensively, but might *destroy, kill and annihilate any armed force that might attack them*.

(1) This showed his kindness to the Jews, and sufficiently provided for their safety; for the latter decree would be looked on as a tacit (implied) revocation of the former. But,

(2) It shows the absurdity of their constitution that none of the king's edicts might be repealed; for it laid the king here under a necessity of enacting a civil war in his own dominions, between the Jews and their enemies, so that both sides took up arms *by his authority, and yet against his authority*.

Here is a blessed change, Mordecai in purple and all the Jews in joy.

1. Mordecai in purple, v. 15. Having obtained an order for the relief of all the Jews, he was at ease, he put on the *royal garments*. His robes were rich, *blue and white, of fine linen and purple*; so was his crown: it was *of gold*. These things were marks of the king's favor, and the fruit of God's favor to His people. The *city of Susa* was aware of its advantage in the advancement of Mordecai, and therefore *held a joyous celebration*.

2. The Jews in joy, v. 16. 17. The Jews, who awhile ago were under a dark cloud, dejected and disgraced, now had *happiness and joy, gladness and honor, with feasting and celebrating*. One good effect of this deliverance was that *many people of other nationalities*, who were considerate, sober, and well inclined, became Jews, were converted to the Jewish religion, renounced idolatry, and worshipped the true God only. *We will go with you, for we have heard, we have seen, that God is with you, your shield helper and your glorious sword*, Deut. 33:29.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

### **Show how Mordecai's decree in Esther 8:8-11 was in harmony with God's word.**

Gen. 12:3 Gen. 27:29 Ex. 23:22

### **Esther 9:1-32**

A decisive battle fought between the Jews and their enemies, in which the Jews were victorious. Neither side could call the other *rebels*, for they were both supported by the royal authority.

I. The enemies of the Jews were the aggressors.

II. But the Jews were the conquerors. That very day when the king's decree for their destruction was to be carried out, and which the enemies thought would have been *their day*, proved *God's day*, Ps. 37:13. *They assembled in their cities*, embodied, and stood on their defense, offering violence to none, but defying all. If they had not had an edict to warrant them, they dared not have done it, but, being so supported, they strove lawfully. Had they acted separately, each family apart, they would have been an easy prey to their enemies; but acting in concert, and gathering together in their cities, they strengthened one another, and dared face their enemies. All the officers of the king, who, by the bloody edict,

were ordered to help forward their destruction (*Esther* 3:12, 13), conformed to the latter edict and *helped the Jews*, which turned the scale on their side, v. 3. The provinces would generally do as the rulers of the provinces inclined, and therefore their favoring the Jews would greatly further them. But why did they help them? Not because they had any kindness for them, but because *the fear of Mordecai has seized them*, he having manifestly the countenance both of God and the king. *No one could stand against them* (v. 2), but *they did what they pleased to those who hated them*, v. 5. So strangely were the Jews strengthened and encouraged, and their enemies weakened and dispirited, that none of those who had marked themselves for their destruction escaped. On the thirteenth day of the month Adar they slew in the city of Susa 500 men (v. 6) and the ten sons of *Haman*, v. 10. On the fourteenth day they slew in Susa 300 more, who had escaped the sword on the former day of execution, v. 15. This Esther obtained leave of the king for them to do, for the greater terror of their enemies, and the utter crushing of that malignant party of men. That which justifies them in the execution of so many is that they did it in their own just and necessary defense; they *assembled to protect themselves*, authorized to do so by the law of self-preservation, as well as by the king's decree. The king's commission had warranted them to *plunder the property of their enemies* (*Esther* 8:11), and a fair opportunity they had of enriching themselves with it. But the Jews would not do so by them,

1. That they might, to the honor of their religion, evidence a holy and generous contempt for worldly wealth, in imitation of their father Abraham, who scorned to enrich himself with the spoils of Sodom.
2. That they might make it to appear that they aimed at nothing but their own preservation, and used their interest at court for the saving of their lives, not for the raising of their estates.
3. Their commission empowered them to destroy the families of their enemies, even the *women and children*, *Esther* 8:11. But their humanity forbade them to do that. They slew none but those they found in arms; and therefore they did not take the spoil, but left it to the women and little ones. In this they acted with a consideration and compassion well worthy of imitation.

To perpetuate the remembrance of it to posterity,

I. The history was written, and copies of it were dispersed among all the Jews in all the provinces of the empire, *near and far*, v. 20. *Mordecai recorded these events*. And if this book is the same that he wrote, as many think it is, what a difference there is between Mordecai's style and Nehemiah's. Nehemiah, at every turn, takes notice of divine Providence and the *gracious hand of his God* upon him, which is very proper to stir up devout affections in the minds of his readers; but Mordecai never so much as mentions the name of God in the whole story. Nehemiah wrote his book at Jerusalem, where religion was in fashion. Mordecai wrote his at the citadel of Susa, where policy reigned more than piety, and he wrote according to the genius of the place. Because there is so little of the language of Canaan in this book, many think it was not written by Mordecai, but was an extract out of the journals of the kings of Persia.

II. A festival was instituted, to be observed yearly from generation to generation by the Jews, in remembrance of this wonderful work which God performed for them, that *the children yet to be born* might know it, and *tell their children, that they might put their trust in God*, Ps. 78:6, 7. Posterity would reap the benefit of this deliverance, and therefore ought to celebrate the memorial of it. Concerning this festival

1. It was observed—every year on *the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the twelfth month*, just a month before the Passover, v. 21. They kept two days together as thanksgiving days, and did not think them too much to spend in praising God. On the fourteenth day country Jews rested, and on the fifteenth those in Susa, and both those days they kept.

2. It was called—*The Feast of Purim* (v. 26), from *Pur*, a Persian word which signifies *a lot*, because Haman had by lot determined this to be the time of the Jews' destruction, but the Lord, at whose disposal the lot is, had determined it to be the time of their triumph.

3. It was not a divine institution, and therefore it is not called a *holy day*, but a human appointment, by which it was made a *day of joy*, v. 19, 22.

(1) The Jews ordained it, and took it on themselves (v. 27), voluntarily *to continue the celebration they had begun*, v. 23.

(2) Mordecai and Esther confirmed their resolve, that it might be the more binding on posterity, and might come well recommended by those great names. They *wrote*, [1] *With full authority* (v. 29). Esther being queen and Mordecai prime-minister of state. [2] *With words of good will and assurance*. Though they wrote with authority, they wrote with tenderness,

4. It was to be observed—by *all the Jews*, and by *their descendants*, and by *all who join them*, v. 27. A concurrence in joys and praises is one branch of the communion of saints.

5. It was to be observed—that the memorial of the great things God had done for his people might never *die out among their descendants*, v. 28. When Esther, in peril of her life, *came before the king*, he repealed the edict, v. 25 margin. This also must be remembered. Good deeds done for the Israel of God ought to be remembered, for the encouragement of others to do the like. The more cries we have offered up in our trouble, and the more prayers for deliverance, the more we are obliged to be thankful to God for deliverance.

6. How it was to be observed. They should make

(1) A day of cheerfulness, *a day of feasting and joy* (v. 22).

(2) A day of generosity, *giving presents to each other*, as a sign of mutual respect, and being knit by this and other public common dangers and deliverances so much the closer to each other in love.

(3) A day of charity, *sending gifts to the poor*. Those who have received mercy must, as a sign of their gratitude, show mercy. Thanksgiving and almsgiving should go together, that, when we are rejoicing and blessing God, the heart of the poor may rejoice with us. They always, at the feast, read the whole story over in the synagogue each day, and put up three prayers to God. in the first of which they praise God for counting them worthy to attend this divine service; in the second they thank him for the miraculous preservation of their ancestors; in the third they praise him that they have lived to observe another festival in memory of it.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

### **How did the people of the land respond to the new edict?**

Esther 8:17    Esther 9:2

### **What feast was instituted by the Jews in commemoration of their deliverance?**

#### **Esther 10:1-3**

Xerxes had a vast dominion, both in the continent and among the islands, from which he raised a vast revenue. Besides the usual customs which the kings of Persia exacted (Ezra 4:13), he laid an additional tribute on his subjects (v. 1): *The king imposed tribute*. Besides this example of the grandeur of Xerxes, many more might be given, that were *his acts of power and might*. These however are not recorded here in the sacred story, which is confined to the Jews, and relates the affairs of other nations only as they fell in with their affairs.

Long had Mordecai sat contentedly in the king's gate, and now at length he is advanced. The declaration of the greatness to which the king advanced Mordecai was *written in the book of the annals of the kings*, as very memorable, and contributing to the great achievements of the king. He was *preeminent among the Jews* (v. 3), not only great above them, but great with them, dear to them, and much respected by them. He was good, for he did good. He did not disown his people the Jews, though they were aliens and captives, dispersed and despised. Still he titled himself *Mordecai the Jew*. He did not seek his own wealth, or the raising of an estate for himself and his family. His power, his wealth, and all his interest in the king and queen, he used for the public good. He did not side with any one party of his people against another, but, whatever differences there were among them, he was a common father to them all.

(The NIV Matthew Henry Commentary, Matthew Henry)

### **How did Mordecai conduct himself when elevated to his new position?**