

Bible Study: The Book of Esther

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[Megillah](#) (book of Esther) is another story of the deliverance of the Jewish people. The Book relates the story of a [Hebrew](#) woman in [Persia](#), born as Hadassah but known as [Esther](#), who becomes queen of Persia and thwarts a [genocide](#) of her people.

The story forms the core of the [Jewish festival](#) of [Purim](#), during which it is read aloud twice: once in the evening and again the following morning. Also called the **Festival of Lots** is a [Jewish holiday](#) which commemorates the saving of the Jewish people from [Haman](#) who threw lots or purim to determine when he would carry out his plot. The books of Esther and [Song of Songs](#) are the only books in the Hebrew Bible that do not mention [God](#).

The biblical Book of Esther is set in the Persian [capital](#) of [Susa](#) (*Shushan*) in the third year of the reign of the [Persian king Xerxes](#).

The Book of Esther consists of an introduction (or [exposition](#)) in chapters 1 and 2; the main action (complication and resolution) in chapters 3 to 9:19; and a conclusion in 9:20–10:3. Another way to look at it is through 6 sections: (1) *Vashti's demotion*; (2) *Mordecai's promotion*; (3) *the decree to destroy the Jews*; (4) *the decree on behalf of the Jews*; (5) *Haman's threats against Mordecai*; and (6) *Mordecai's defeat of Haman*.

Setting

King Xerxes, ruler of the [Persian Empire](#), who ruled between 486 and 465 BC, holds a lavish 180-day banquet, initially for his court and dignitaries and afterwards a seven-day banquet for all inhabitants of the capital city, [Shushan](#) (Esther 1:1–9).

On the seventh day of the latter banquet, Xerxes orders the queen, [Vashti](#), to display her beauty before the guests by coming before them wearing her crown

(1:10–11). She refuses, infuriating Xerxes, who on the advice of his counselors removes her from her position as an example to other women who might be emboldened to disobey their husbands (1:12–19). A decree follows that "every man should bear rule in his own house" (1:20–22).

Xerxes then makes arrangements to choose a new queen from a selection of beautiful young women from throughout the empire (2:1–4). Among these women is a Jewish [orphan](#) named [Esther](#), who was raised by her cousin or uncle, [Mordecai](#) (2:5–7). She finds favour in the King's eyes, and is crowned his new queen, but does not reveal her Jewish heritage (2:8–20). Shortly afterwards, Mordecai discovers a plot by two courtiers, [Bigthan and Teresh](#), to assassinate Xerxes. The conspirators are apprehended and hanged, and Mordecai's service to the King is recorded (2:21–23).

Haman's Plot

Xerxes appoints [Haman](#) as his [viceroys](#) (3:1) - A viceroy is an official who runs a polity in the name of and as the representative of the monarch of the territory.. Mordecai, who sits at the palace gates, falls into Haman's disfavour, as he refuses to [bow down](#) to him (3:2–5). Haman discovers that Mordecai refused to bow on account of his Jewishness, and in revenge plots to kill not just Mordecai, but all the Jews in the empire (3:6).

Haman is a vengeful and egotistical advisor to the king. He hated Mordecai for refusing to bow down to him, so after casting lots – pur lots to choose the month of the year when it would be favorable for significant events, he told the king a lie, “There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom whose customs are different from those of all other people and who do not obey the king’s laws; it is not in the king’s best interest to tolerate them” ([Esther 3:8](#) NIV). The king, who was thought of as weak, gave him authority to handle the fate of the Jewish people. In return, Haman announced a government-issued edict of genocide.

In the 12th year of the King, he obtains the King’s permission to execute this plan, against payment of ten thousand [talents](#) of silver (today in the billions or 200,000 days of labor), and so the edit was written to the governors and officials over the

people in their own language and sealed with the king's signet ring. It was a royal decree issued throughout the kingdom to slay all Jews on that date. (3:13–15).

Esther Appears Before the King

When Mordecai discovers the plan, he goes into mourning and implores Esther to intercede with the King (4:1–5). But she is afraid to present herself to the King unsummoned, an offense punishable by death (4:6–12).

However, Mordecai in vs. 13-14 sends a message to her and says, “Do not think that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will raise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father’s family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity just for such a time as this.” Instead, she directs Mordecai to have all Jews fast for three days for her, and vows to fast as well (4:15–16.).

On the third day she goes to the king, who stretches out his sceptre to her to indicate that she is not to be punished (5:1–2). She invites him to a feast in the company of Haman (5:3–5). During the feast, she asks them to attend a further feast the next evening (5:6–8). Meanwhile, Haman is again offended by Mordecai and, at his wife's suggestion, has a [gallows](#) built to hang him (5:9–14).

That night, Xerxes cannot sleep, and orders the court records be read to him (6:1). He is reminded that Mordecai interceded in the previous plot against his life, and discovers that Mordecai never received any recognition (6:2–3).

Just then, Haman appears to request the King's permission to hang Mordecai, but before he can make this request, Xerxes asks Haman what should be done for the man that the King wishes to honor (6:4–6). Assuming that the King is referring to Haman himself, Haman suggests that the man be dressed in the King's royal robes, and crown and led around on the King's royal horse, while a [herald](#) calls: "See how the King honours a man he wishes to reward!" (6:7–9). To his surprise and horror, the King instructs Haman to do so to Mordecai (6:10–11).

Esther Saves Her People

Immediately after, Xerxes and Haman attend Esther's second banquet. The King promises to grant her any request, and she reveals that she is Jewish and that Haman is planning to exterminate her people, including her (7:1–6). Overcome by rage, Xerxes leaves the room; meanwhile Haman stays behind and begs Esther for his life, falling upon her in desperation (7:7). The King returns in at this very moment and thinks Haman is assaulting the queen; this makes him angrier and he orders Haman hanged on the very gallows that Haman had prepared for Mordecai (7:8–10).

Unable to annul a formal royal decree, the King instead adds to it, permitting the Jews to join together and destroy any and all of those seeking to kill them^{[12][13]} (8:1–14). On 13 Adar, Haman's ten sons and 500 other men are killed in Shushan (9:1–12). Upon hearing of this Esther requests it be repeated the next day, whereupon 300 more men are killed (9:13–15). Over 75,000 people are slaughtered by the Jews, who are careful to take no plunder (9:16–17). Mordecai and Esther send letters throughout the provinces instituting an annual commemoration of the Jewish people's redemption, in a holiday called [Purim](#) (lots) (9:20–28). Xerxes remains very powerful and continues his reign, with Mordecai assuming a prominent position in his court (10:1–3).

Lessons Learned

One writer summarized the lessons in the book this way:

Lesson #1: God has a plan for our lives

Mordecai nailed it when he said, “For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to the royal palace for such a time as this” ([Esther 4:14](#) NIV). God loved the Jewish people. And, he didn’t create Esther’s beauty and finesse for her and her alone. Esther was placed in a royal position to assist in the delivery of God’s divine plan.

Lesson #2: We are given divine moments to alter circumstances

As believers, there are no such things as accidents or coincidences. God's timing is providential. Esther's divine moment of providence came by accepting her responsibility to go to the king. However, Mordecai was clear when he said to Esther that she could be the one who saved the people, or not. God will use you only if you're ready—or he will find someone else.

Lesson #3: We must stand with courage

“I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish” ([Esther 4:16](#) NIV). Esther was willing to die to save her people. Sometimes we must stand in courage, even when it is not popular to do so, and risk it all.

Lesson #4: Fasting and [prayer](#) brings clarity and hope for deliverance

God is not mentioned in the Book of Esther even once. But Esther was clear that in this particular situation, a heavenly response was needed for an earthly situation. Esther needed direction. When we need God's grace, fasting and prayer opens the portals for spiritual growth, removes distractions and places us on a path to humility.

Lesson #5: God demands obedience

Esther's obedience saved God's people from genocide. The reality is that Esther didn't know what would happen when she approached the king. She acted in obedience and by doing so she saved a nation and received the best. We don't get a pass on this one.

Lesson #6: God uses everything and everybody for his divine purpose

No part of our lives is untouched. God is in control of every aspect, whether we want him to be or not, and there is nothing that is not subject to him ([Hebrews 2:8](#) NIV). And, the best thing we can do for our lives is to search for and surrender to his will.