

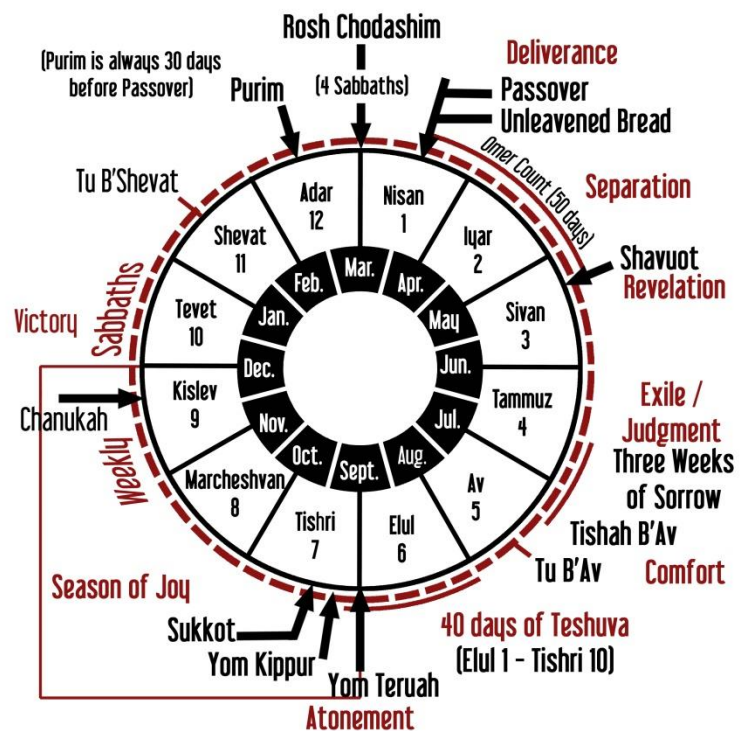
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|---------|-------------------------------|-------|-------------|--------|----------------|
| Week #: | 33 | Text: | Esther 1-10 | Title: | Feast of Purim |
| Songs: | | | | | |
| Videos: | Purim Song – The Maccabeats | | | | |
| | Audio Reading: Book of Esther | | | | |

Feast of Purim

Purim is an annual celebration of the defeat of an Iranian mad man’s plan to exterminate the Jewish people.

Purim is celebrated annually during the month of Adar (the second month of Adar) on the 14th day. In years where there are two months of Adar, Purim is celebrated in the second month because it always needs to fall 30 days before Passover.

It is called Purim because the word means “lots” – referencing when Haman threw lots to decide which day he would slay the Jews. The fourteenth was chosen for this celebration because it is the day that the Jews battled for their lives and won. The fifteenth is celebrated as Purim also because the book of Esther says that in Shushan (a walled city), deliverance from the scheduled massacre was not completed until the next day. So the fifteenth is referred to as *Shushan Purim*.



Traditions for the Feast of Purim:

- It is customary to read the book of Esther – called the Megillah Esther – or the scroll of Esther. It means **the revelation of that which is hidden**
- While reading it is tradition to boo, hiss, stamp feet and rattle noise makers whenever Haman’s name is mentioned for the purpose of “blotting out the name of Haman”.
- When the names of Mordechai or Esther are spoken, hoots and hollers, cheering, applause, etc., are given as they are the heroes of the story.
- It is customary to have a party during Purim, and also to dress up, especially as kings and queens.
- Gifts are often given during Purim to friends, family and charity.
- Hamentaschen is a triangular fruit-filled cookie that is common to make for Purim as well. Hamentaschen is pronounce like “Ha-men-tah-sh-en” and literally means “Haman’s pocket” and is meant to represent Haman’s three cornered hat.
- Masks are worn because it is a story in which everything is hidden. Here are some things that are hidden in this story:
 - Esther’s identity and family heritage. She is renamed ESTHER, but her Hebrew name is HADASSAH.
 - Mordecai saving the life of the king
 - Haman’s deception of his plan to kill the Jews
 - Purpose for Esther being queen – for such a time as this

- Esther's name means **to conceal** or **to be hidden**
- God's name is hidden in the book of Esther – it's the only book in the Bible in which it does not appear, yet God is clearly working throughout the story. In Deuteronomy God says He is going to one day hide His face from them because of their turning to other gods. This is now when that is taking place.

Daniel was in the same place as Esther – different times though. Nehemiah was also in the palace – the same place where Esther was – and possibly during the same time frame as Esther.

The Queen & the Cupbearer: Connections between Esther & Nehemiah

The Old Testament book of Nehemiah takes place during a time of exile and captivity for the Jewish people.

In this fascinating account, Nehemiah, the Jewish cupbearer to the Persian King Artaxerxes, successfully petitions to take a group back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls after hearing they are in disrepair.

Recently I noticed a few interesting connections between Nehemiah and the story of Esther.

In Nehemiah 1 we read that the setting is the “citadel of Susa”. This is the same city in which the young Esther was forced to participate in a “beauty pageant” at the whim of a king named Xerxes (Esther 1). As you may remember, Esther becomes the next Queen of Persia and eventually risks her life to save the Jewish exiles living in Persia from extermination.

1. Esther and Nehemiah as Contemporaries

I've heard many sermons on Nehemiah in my lifetime, but don't recall anyone ever mentioning this connection between Esther and Nehemiah. This may have to do with the fact that the books of Nehemiah and Esther are not placed in chronological order in the Bible. The Book of Esther is placed after the Book of Nehemiah, but her story actually came first [3]. This opens the possibility that Esther and Nehemiah could have lived as contemporaries in the same city for a period of time. Here's where it really gets interesting!

2. The Relationship between Artaxerxes 1 and Esther

King Artaxerxes not only allowed Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem, he even agreed to a request for supplies (Nehemiah 2:8). From what we know of Artaxerxes heritage, this is hard to understand. What made him sympathetic to the plight of the Jewish homeland, even to the point of providing resources? Was it his personal relationship with Nehemiah that accounted for his behavior, or was there something more?

There may have been some political reason for his sympathy, but there are also some personal factors to consider. Most scholars believe that Artaxerxes was the son of Esther's husband, Xerxes. (Some have suggested that he was the son of Esther and Xerxes, but it is more probable that he was born to one of Xerxes' other wives). Regardless, this means that depending on how long she lived, Esther and Artaxerxes may have lived on the palace grounds at the same time. While we can't be sure a personal relationship existed, we can safely assume that Artaxerxes would have been very familiar with the story of Esther.

3. Esther's Mission Extended – Beyond Saving the Jews?

I had trouble finding much historical evidence about the connection between Artaxerxes 1 and Esther in my brief search. But I did find this interesting article written for the Huffington Post by Yaacov Cohen:

“After the immediate danger to her community passed, Queen Esther stayed with Ahasuerus (Xerxes). Why did she stay with him, rather than restart her life? We need to put the Book of Esther into an historical context to better understand Esther's choice. The story of Esther happened after Cyrus, the

first Persian King, called for all deported Jews to return to Jerusalem to build the House of God (538 B.C., Ezra 1:2). Most of the Jews preferred the comfortable life of the Persian Empire to an arduous life rebuilding their devastated homeland. The Talmud sees Haman's decree as a punishment from Heaven to these Jews. When, several years later, Nehemiah asked the Persian King for permission to return to Zion and rebuild Jerusalem, "the Queen is sitting by him" (Nehemiah 2:6), and she influenced the King's decision to approve Nehemiah's request. The Queen described in the Book of Nehemiah is Queen Esther. She stayed with Ahasuerus and sacrificed her personal happiness to complete her ultimate mission to enable the building of the Second Temple and the return to Zion".

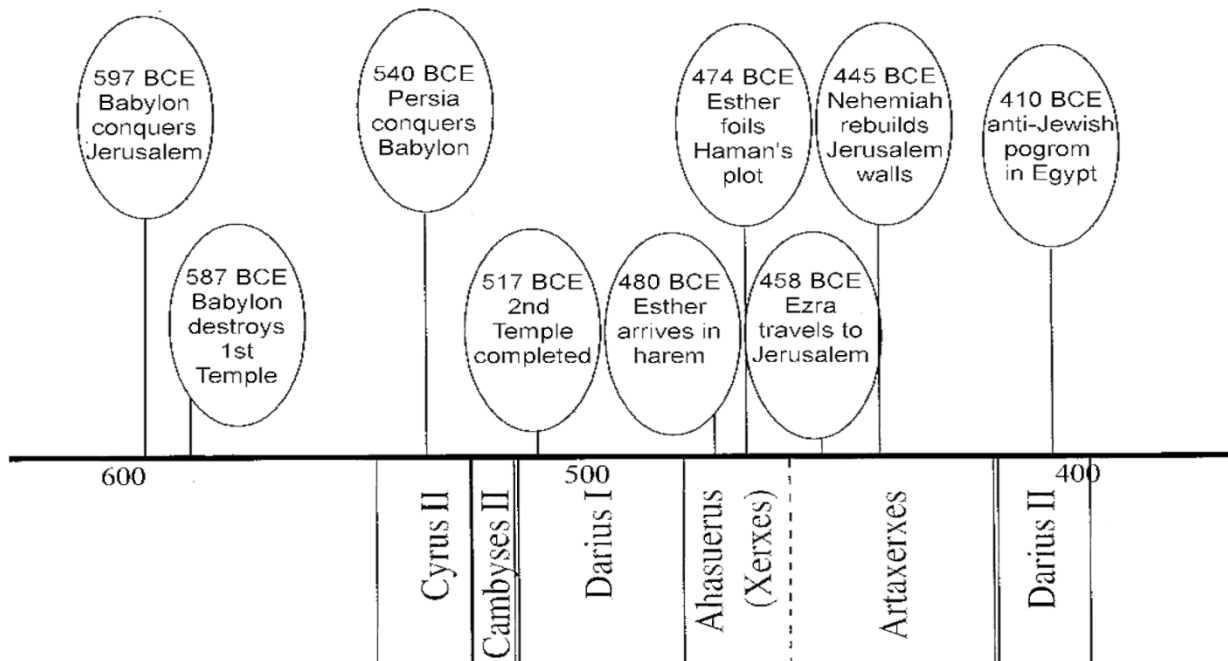
The Significance of the Connection for Women

Whether or not Cohen is right about the queen mentioned being Esther, I don't think it's a stretch to say that Artaxerxes' sympathy for the Jews probably had a lot to do with her witness, influence and integrity. This would be consistent with a pattern seen often in the Old Testament, in which God intentionally chooses a woman to play an instrumental role in accomplishing his purposes (take Miriam, Deborah, Jael, and Huldah, for example). [Note: Huldah was a prophet mentioned in the Hebrew Bible in 2 Kings 22:14–20 and 2 Chronicles 34:22–28. According to Jewish tradition, she was one of the "seven prophetesses", with Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Abigail, and Esther.]

Despite the prevalence of the patriarchal societies that developed after the Fall and the disruption of gender relationships recorded in Genesis 3, this pattern occurs often enough to suggest that these stories are more than incidental – I believe God was clearly making a point!

When studied alone, the book of Nehemiah can come off as a very "male-centric" story. It is mostly men who build the wall, and when the "roll" of Israel is recorded only men's names are recorded. But if we look at the story in historical perspective and consider all of the players involved, it is not hard to make a case that there was more to Esther's mission than the initial saving of the Jewish people from extinction recorded in the Book of Esther. Esther's long obedience in the same direction laid the groundwork for the eventual restoration of Jerusalem.

In a sense, the rebuilding of Jerusalem is just as much Esther's legacy as it is Nehemiah's.



Esther 1 – Queen Vashti Deposed

This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush:
² At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, ³ and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present.

⁴ For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty. ⁵ When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest who were in the citadel of Susa. ⁶ The garden had hangings of white and blue linen, fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and other costly stones. ⁷ Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king's liberality. ⁸ By the king's command each guest was allowed to drink with no restrictions, for the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man what he wished.

⁹ Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes.

¹⁰ On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Karkas— ¹¹ to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at. ¹² But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger.

¹³ Since it was customary for the king to consult experts in matters of law and justice, he spoke with the wise men who understood the times ¹⁴ and were closest to the king—Karshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memukan, the seven nobles of Persia and Media who had special access to the king and were highest in the kingdom.

¹⁵ “According to law, what must be done to Queen Vashti?” he asked. “She has not obeyed the command of King Xerxes that the eunuchs have taken to her.”

¹⁶ Then Memukan replied in the presence of the king and the nobles, “Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes. ¹⁷ For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say, ‘King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.’ ¹⁸ This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen's conduct will respond to all the king's nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord.

¹⁹ “Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she. ²⁰ Then when the king's edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest.”

²¹ The king and his nobles were pleased with this advice, so the king did as Memukan proposed. ²² He sent dispatches to all parts of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in their own language, proclaiming that every man should be ruler over his own household, using his native tongue.

Esther 2 – Esther Made Queen

Later when King Xerxes' fury had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her. ² Then the king's personal attendants proposed, “Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. ³ Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful young women into

the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them. ⁴ Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it.

⁵ Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, ⁶ who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah. ⁷ Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

⁸ When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. ⁹ She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants selected from the king's palace and moved her and her attendants into the best place in the harem.

¹⁰ Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. ¹¹ Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her.

¹² Before a young woman's turn came to go in to King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women, six months with oil of myrrh and six with perfumes and cosmetics. ¹³ And this is how she would go to the king: Anything she wanted was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. ¹⁴ In the evening she would go there and in the morning return to another part of the harem to the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not return to the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name.

¹⁵ When the turn came for Esther (the young woman Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail) to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her. ¹⁶ She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

¹⁷ Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. ¹⁸ And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality.

Mordecai Uncovers a Conspiracy

¹⁹ When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. ²⁰ But Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do, for she continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up.

²¹ During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. ²² But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. ²³ And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were impaled on poles. All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.

Esther 3 – Haman’s Plot to Destroy the Jews

After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. ² All the royal officials at the king’s gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor.

³ Then the royal officials at the king’s gate asked Mordecai, “Why do you disobey the king’s command?” ⁴ Day after day they spoke to him but he refused to comply. Therefore they told Haman about it to see whether Mordecai’s behavior would be tolerated, for he had told them he was a Jew.

⁵ When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. ⁶ Yet having learned who Mordecai’s people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai’s people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.

⁷ In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, the pur (that is, the lot) was cast in the presence of Haman to select a day and month. And the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar.

⁸ Then Haman said to King Xerxes, “There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king’s laws; it is not in the king’s best interest to tolerate them. ⁹ If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king’s administrators for the royal treasury.”

¹⁰ So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. ¹¹ “Keep the money,” the king said to Haman, “and do with the people as you please.”

¹² Then on the thirteenth day of the first month the royal secretaries were summoned. They wrote out in the script of each province and in the language of each people all Haman’s orders to the king’s satraps, the governors of the various provinces and the nobles of the various peoples. These were written in the name of King Xerxes himself and sealed with his own ring. ¹³ Dispatches were sent by couriers to all the king’s provinces with the order to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and children—on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods. ¹⁴ A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so they would be ready for that day.

¹⁵ The couriers went out, spurred on by the king’s command, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered.

Esther 4 – Mordecai Persuades Esther to Help

When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. ² But he went only as far as the king’s gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. ³ In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

⁴ When Esther’s eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. ⁵ Then Esther summoned Hathak, one of the king’s eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why.

⁶ So Hathak went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king’s gate. ⁷ Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸ He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king’s presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

⁹ Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰ Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, ¹¹ “All the king’s officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king.”

¹² When Esther’s words were reported to Mordecai, ¹³ he sent back this answer: “Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. ¹⁴ 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 your royal position for such a time as this?”

¹⁵ Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶ “Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”

¹⁷ So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther’s instructions.

Esther 5 – Esther’s Request to the King

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king’s hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. ² When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.

³ Then the king asked, “What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you.”

⁴ “If it pleases the king,” replied Esther, “let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him.”

⁵ “Bring Haman at once,” the king said, “so that we may do what Esther asks.”

So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared. ⁶ As they were drinking wine, the king again asked Esther, “Now what is your petition? It will be given you. And what is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.”

⁷ Esther replied, “My petition and my request is this: ⁸ If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king’s question.”

Haman’s Rage Against Mordecai

⁹ Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai at the king’s gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai. ¹⁰ Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home.

Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, ¹¹ Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials. ¹² “And that’s not all,” Haman added. “I’m the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow. ¹³ But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king’s gate.”

¹⁴ His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, “Have a pole set up, reaching to a height of fifty cubits, and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai impaled on it. Then go with the king to the banquet and enjoy yourself.” This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the pole set up.

Esther 6 – Mordecai Honored

That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. ² It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’s officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes.

³ “What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?” the king asked.

“Nothing has been done for him,” his attendants answered.

⁴ The king said, “Who is in the court?” Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the palace to speak to the king about impaling Mordecai on the pole he had set up for him.

⁵ His attendants answered, “Haman is standing in the court.”

“Bring him in,” the king ordered.

⁶ When Haman entered, the king asked him, “What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?”

Now Haman thought to himself, “Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?” ⁷ So he answered the king, “For the man the king delights to honor, ⁸ have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. ⁹ Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king’s most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, ‘This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!’”

¹⁰ “Go at once,” the king commanded Haman. “Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king’s gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended.”

¹¹ So Haman got the robe and the horse. He robed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city streets, proclaiming before him, “This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!”

¹² Afterward Mordecai returned to the king’s gate. But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief, ¹³ and told Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him.

His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, “Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, is of Jewish origin, you cannot stand against him—you will surely come to ruin!” ¹⁴ While they were still talking with him, the king’s eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman away to the banquet Esther had prepared.

Esther 7 – Haman Impaled

So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther’s banquet, ² and as they were drinking wine on the second day, the king again asked, “Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.”

³ Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. ⁴ For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king.”

⁵ King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, “Who is he? Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?”

⁶ Esther said, “An adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!”

Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. ⁷ The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life.

⁸ Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining.

The king exclaimed, “Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?”

As soon as the word left the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face. ⁹ Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, “A pole reaching to a height of fifty cubits stands by Haman’s house. He had it set up for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king.”

The king said, “Impale him on it!” ¹⁰ So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai. Then the king’s fury subsided.

Esther 8 – The King’s Edict in Behalf of the Jews

That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came into the presence of the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her. ² The king took off his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman, and presented it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed him over Haman’s estate.

³ Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews. ⁴ Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she arose and stood before him.

⁵ “If it pleases the king,” she said, “and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king’s provinces. ⁶ For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?”

⁷ King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, “Because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have impaled him on the pole he set up. ⁸ Now write another decree in the king’s name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king’s signet ring—for no document written in the king’s name and sealed with his ring can be revoked.”

⁹ At once the royal secretaries were summoned—on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan. They wrote out all Mordecai’s orders to the Jews, and to the satraps, governors and nobles of the 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush. These orders were written in the script of each province and the language of each people and also to the Jews in their own script and language. ¹⁰ Mordecai wrote in the name of King Xerxes, sealed the dispatches with the king’s signet ring, and sent them by mounted couriers, who rode fast horses especially bred for the king.

¹¹ The king’s edict granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves; to destroy, kill and annihilate the armed men of any nationality or province who might attack them and their women and children, and to plunder the property of their enemies. ¹² The day appointed for the Jews to do this in all the provinces of King Xerxes was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. ¹³ A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and made known to the people of every nationality so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.

¹⁴ The couriers, riding the royal horses, went out, spurred on by the king's command, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa.

The Triumph of the Jews

¹⁵ When Mordecai left the king's presence, he was wearing royal garments of blue and white, a large crown of gold and a purple robe of fine linen. And the city of Susa held a joyous celebration. ¹⁶ For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor. ¹⁷ In every province and in every city to which the edict of the king came, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them.

Esther 9

On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king was to be carried out. On this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but now the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them. ² The Jews assembled in their cities in all the provinces of King Xerxes to attack those determined to destroy them. No one could stand against them, because the people of all the other nationalities were afraid of them. ³ And all the nobles of the provinces, the satraps, the governors and the king's administrators helped the Jews, because fear of Mordecai had seized them. ⁴ Mordecai was prominent in the palace; his reputation spread throughout the provinces, and he became more and more powerful.

⁵ The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did what they pleased to those who hated them. ⁶ In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. ⁷ They also killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, ⁸ Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, ⁹ Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha, ¹⁰ the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. But they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

¹¹ The number of those killed in the citadel of Susa was reported to the king that same day. ¹² The king said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman in the citadel of Susa. What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? It will also be granted."

¹³ "If it pleases the king," Esther answered, "give the Jews in Susa permission to carry out this day's edict tomorrow also, and let Haman's ten sons be impaled on poles."

¹⁴ So the king commanded that this be done. An edict was issued in Susa, and they impaled the ten sons of Haman.

¹⁵ The Jews in Susa came together on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and they put to death in Susa three hundred men, but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

¹⁶ Meanwhile, the remainder of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also assembled to protect themselves and get relief from their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of them but did not lay their hands on the plunder. ¹⁷ This happened on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy.

¹⁸ The Jews in Susa, however, had assembled on the thirteenth and fourteenth, and then on the fifteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy.

¹⁹ That is why rural Jews—those living in villages—observe the fourteenth of the month of Adar as a day of joy and feasting, a day for giving presents to each other.

Purim Established

²⁰ Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes, near and far, ²¹ to have them celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar ²² as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration. He wrote them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

²³ So the Jews agreed to continue the celebration they had begun, doing what Mordecai had written to them. ²⁴ For Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them and had cast the pur (that is, the lot) for their ruin and destruction. ²⁵ But when the plot came to the king's attention, he issued written orders that the evil scheme Haman had devised against the Jews should come back onto his own head, and that he and his sons should be impaled on poles. ²⁶ (Therefore these days were called Purim, from the word pur.) Because of everything written in this letter and because of what they had seen and what had happened to them, ²⁷ the Jews took it on themselves to establish the custom that they and their descendants and all who join them should without fail observe these two days every year, in the way prescribed and at the time appointed. ²⁸ These days should be remembered and observed in every generation by every family, and in every province and in every city. And these days of Purim should never fail to be celebrated by the Jews—nor should the memory of these days die out among their descendants.

²⁹ So Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter concerning Purim. ³⁰ And Mordecai sent letters to all the Jews in the 127 provinces of Xerxes' kingdom—words of goodwill and assurance—³¹ to establish these days of Purim at their designated times, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had decreed for them, and as they had established for themselves and their descendants in regard to their times of fasting and lamentation. ³² Esther's decree confirmed these regulations about Purim, and it was written down in the records.

Esther 10 – The Greatness of Mordecai

King Xerxes imposed tribute throughout the empire, to its distant shores. ² And all his acts of power and might, together with a full account of the greatness of Mordecai, whom the king had promoted, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia? ³ Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Xerxes, preeminent among the Jews, and held in high esteem by his many fellow Jews, because he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews.