

Commentary on the Book of Esther

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Esther 1

1 Now it took place in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, 2 in those days as King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne which was at the citadel in Susa, 3 in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his princes and attendants, the army officers of Persia and Media, the nobles and the princes of his provinces being in his presence. 4 And he displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty for many days, 180 days.

Ahasuerus, King of the Medes and Persians and its 127 provinces (c.f. Daniel 6:1-2) and who had taken over the Babylonian empire, enjoyed the splendor of his royal glory and majesty, and he celebrated a great feast for 180 days with his nobles and princes. This took place in Susa, one of the capitals during the third year of his reign. This party was clearly over-the-top and extravagant, for it lasted nearly half of a year. This was not an occasion to honor the Lord or to come up with ideas so that the rest in the kingdom could also enjoy the splendor and riches of the ruling classes, but it was the richest and most powerful eating, drinking, and being merry, thinking only of themselves and their selfish pleasures. It was a flaunting of power and an indulgence of the flesh and its lusts. Like Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in Daniel 4 or Belshazzar in Daniel 5, this is another instance of a pagan king thinking that the world revolves around him. As the story of Esther works its way out, a different reality becomes clear, a reality in which God is sovereign over the affairs of men regardless of the nation which is in power because He remembers those who belong to Him and He uses them to do great and mighty things. Thus, God always gets the glory, and His children will enjoy His splendor forever in heaven. His banquets and feasts will put these of Persia to shame (Revelation 19:7-10). Plus, children of God don't need to get drunk or participate in lewd behavior (Isaiah 5:11-12, 1 Peter 4:3) in order to have fullness of joy which they have in Christ (Psalm 16:11).

5 When these days were completed, the king gave a banquet lasting seven days for all the people who were present at the citadel in Susa, from the greatest to the least, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. 6 There were hangings of fine white and violet linen held by cords of fine purple linen on silver rings and marble columns, and couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and precious stones. 7 Drinks were served in golden vessels of various kinds, and the royal wine was plentiful according to the king's bounty. 8 The drinking was done according to the law, there was no compulsion, for so the king had given orders to each official of his household that he should do according to the desires of each person. 9 Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus.

At the end of the near six month long party for the leaders, the king invited the rest of the people who were present at the citadel in Susa from the least to the greatest to a seven day banquet in the king's

court. The elites had partied it up for 180 days, but a small sampling of the “little people” at least got 7 days of celebration and feasting. The description of just how lavish the amenities of the king’s courts were is astounding with the colors of royalty draped throughout the gardens held up with silver rings and marble columns. Then there was the gold and silver furniture which rested upon a mosaic floor with all kinds of extravagant materials including precious gem stones (still, this is nothing compared to the New Jerusalem for the redeemed in eternity- Revelation 21). Even the drinks were served in golden vessels, and the king had a bounty of special royal wine. The idea of servant leadership and humility (John 13:5-20) does not coincide with the pagan belief of the powerful flaunting their wealth and thinking of themselves above the rest (James 2:1-7). As Luke 22:25-26 says, “And He said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called ‘Benefactors.’ But *it is* not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant.” The Law of the Medes and Persians was a serious, binding thing, as was the case when Darius signed the law forbidding prayer to God and was bound to cast his friend Daniel into the lion’s den (Daniel 6:8-9). Even the king of Persia could not change the law once it was sealed and official (Daniel 6:17). In this case, there was no law compelling people to drink or not drink, but each person could drink or not drink as he saw fit. Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the palace, which is noted as belonging to the king, not to both king and queen. The queen did not have equal power with the king, but the male dominance of the culture is apparent throughout the Book of Esther.

10 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, 11 to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown in order to display her beauty to the people and the princes, for she was beautiful. 12 But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king’s command delivered by the eunuchs. Then the king became very angry and his wrath burned within him.

On the last of the seven days of feasting, or the king’s 187th day of feasting, the king was drunk with wine, as he had probably been for most of the partying, something the Bible says is not fit for a king. Proverbs 31:4-5 says, “It is not for kings, O Lemuel, It is not for kings to drink wine, Or for rulers to desire strong drink, For they will drink and forget what is decreed, And pervert the rights of all the afflicted.” He commanded seven of his palace leaders who served under him directly to summon the queen to appear before the people and the princes for the purpose of displaying her beauty. The king wanted to show off the physical attractiveness of his wife. However, this doesn’t sound like it was complimentary to her and dignifying, but it seems to carry the idea of forcing her to be somewhat or possibly even significantly inappropriate in how she would flaunt her beauty. In his drunken stupor, the king was looking for more pagan and dehumanizing selfish pleasures to satisfy himself. The queen, perhaps having had enough of this kind of treatment by the king or being pushed beyond her breaking point, decided not to appear when the king commanded her. This was a dangerous move because the king was the authority, and he burned with anger and was ready to pour out his wrath on Vashti. If she had a legitimate reason not to come and if the king’s motives were really pure, there would be no reason to be

wrathful. But clearly some sort of power play was at work here, and the king had had enough of his queen failing to be subservient to him.

13 Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times—for it was the custom of the king so to speak before all who knew law and justice 14 and were close to him: Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media who had access to the king's presence and sat in the first place in the kingdom— 15 "According to law, what is to be done with Queen Vashti, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs?" 16 In the presence of the king and the princes, Memucan said, "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but also all the princes and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. 17 For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women causing them to look with contempt on their husbands by saying, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in to his presence, but she did not come.' 18 This day the ladies of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's conduct will speak in the same way to all the king's princes, and there will be plenty of contempt and anger. 19 If it pleases the king, let a royal edict be issued by him and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media so that it cannot be repealed, that Vashti may no longer come into the presence of King Ahasuerus, and let the king give her royal position to another who is more worthy than she. 20 When the king's edict which he will make is heard throughout all his kingdom, great as it is, then all women will give honor to their husbands, great and small."

There were seven wise men, princes of the people, who had direct access to the king, not having to be summoned first, and who were well versed in the law of the land. The king asked them what should be done with Vashti because she failed to submit to the whims and commands of the king. Memucan, one of the wise men, argued that Vashti did indeed do wrong to the men of the kingdom from the king down to the princes and other men. He was concerned with the fact that she set an example to the rest of the women in the land to be able to defy the whims and commands of their husbands just as she had done to the king. He argued that the women throughout the kingdom would now look on their husbands with contempt and speak rebelliously toward them, refusing to obey them. This pagan perversion of the idea of love and submission in marriage took on the form of the husbands ruling over and dominating their wives rather than treating them as equals and loving them as more important than themselves. The men tried to oppress the women and seemed to enjoy being boss over them. Vashti's example could create quite a tumult for every married man in the kingdom if they didn't do something to re-intimidate them and put them in their place, or so the wise men argued. The idea from the wise men was to write a new law into the laws of the land, which could not be repealed even by the king. It would state that Vashti could no longer come into the presence of the king and that her position as queen must be given to another. To them, she had lost her worthiness to be queen because she wouldn't do everything the king said, even if she objected to it. They believed that upon the issuance of this edict that the women of the land would continue to allow themselves to be dominated and submit to their husbands who did not live with them in an understanding way (1 Peter 3:7). God's design in marriage is for the husband to meet his wife where she is at, to listen to her, to understand her and her needs, and to be a servant-leader in the home. It is not to dominate her and force her to do the husband's every bidding.

21 This word pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed. 22 So he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province according to its script and to every people according to their language, that every man should be the master in his own house and the one who speaks in the language of his own people.

The king liked what Memucan had proposed, and so he put it into law that every man should be the master in his own house. Each husband was also to speak to his wife in his and her native tongue so that she understood the commands and did as she was told. Perhaps the men had the opportunity to learn the common language of the land, whereas the women did not. Thus, they would have needed to hear their own tongue in order to be able to properly submit to their husbands' orders. This law was communicated throughout the land, and the king could move on to the process of selecting a new queen. Even the process of selecting the queen showed that the king was the master, picking his queen rather than wooing her according to her corresponding desire for him.

Esther 2

2 After these things when the anger of King Ahasuerus had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her. 2 Then the king's attendants, who served him, said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king. 3 Let the king appoint overseers in all the provinces of his kingdom that they may gather every beautiful young virgin to the citadel of Susa, to the harem, into the custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let their cosmetics be given them. 4 Then let the young lady who pleases the king be queen in place of Vashti." And the matter pleased the king, and he did accordingly.

Vashti, despite her beauty, wasn't good enough for the king, nor was the harem that he already possessed. He used this opportunity, once his anger had subsided, to appoint people throughout the land for the express purpose of seeking out the most beautiful young women of the land and bringing them into his harem in Susa. The young women were to be put into the custody of Hegai, a servant of the king, who actually appears to have "being in charge of the palace women" as a job description. Being in the custody of a person is not the same as being cared for by a caretaker. The women were treated clearly as lesser, as more like property than persons, and as trinkets to be used by the king as he desired. The women were to be given cosmetics so that they could make themselves as fancy and visibly perfect as possible. The focus of the king was purely on externals and who would best submit, not on true love for the whole person and being equal partners in ruling the kingdom. Whoever pleased the king according to his standards would take the place of Vashti and become queen.

5 Now there was at the citadel in Susa a Jew whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite, 6 who had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the captives who had been exiled with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had exiled. 7 He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had no father or mother. Now the young lady was beautiful of form and face, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.

The account of Esther is less about Persia and the king, and it is far more about God and His working to preserve His chosen nation, the Jews. Mordecai had been taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Mordecai was responsible for taking care of Esther, his cousin, because her father and mother had died. Esther was extremely good-looking. Both the features of her face and the form of her body was beautiful. If she hadn't been, the king, given his fixation on purely external physical beauty, would never have considered choosing her. Even down to the last physical detail, God had a plan and purpose for Esther. The question was whether or not she would use the opportunity that she had been given with her God-given beauty to be used as an instrument for God's glory in His plan of saving his nation in this time.

8 So it came about when the command and decree of the king were heard and many young ladies were gathered to the citadel of Susa into the custody of Hegai, that Esther was taken to the king's palace into the custody of Hegai, who was in charge of the women. 9 Now the young lady pleased him and found favor with him. So he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and food, gave her seven choice maids from the king's palace and transferred her and her maids to the best place in the harem. 10 Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make them known. 11 Every day Mordecai walked back and forth in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and how she fared.

Esther was chosen on account of her physical beauty to be part of the king's recruitment process. She was taken to be part of this beauty pageant of sorts. Whether she objected to the idea or not is not given, but the impression given by Scripture when it talks of her being taken and put into custody seem to represent that there really wasn't a choice to be made. It wasn't a matter of whether or not she should go, but, given that she was going, the question was regarding how she would respond and conduct herself. Esther found favor with Hegai, and he provided her quickly with foods and cosmetics as well as seven maids to help her. He even transferred her to the best place in the harem. Surely Hegai recognized that she was attractive, but so were the other women. Thus receiving his favor seems to imply that there was something different, special, and particularly attractive and winsome in terms of Esther's personality and character. Perhaps she found a way to be respectful in a culture of male dominance without also compromising her own dignity. However, receiving favor ultimately involves the sovereign caretaking of God Who allows His servants to find favor because of His favor upon them, just as He did with Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 39:4, 21), Nehemiah before King Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 2:8), and Daniel in Babylon (Daniel 1:9). God's plan and hand was all over the events of Esther's life from beginning to end. This is because He knows beforehand what good works each of His children will be called to do, and He empowers them to do it (Ephesians 2:10). Esther did not disclose that she was of Jewish descent as Mordecai had advised her. There would be a time for that, but it was not in her best interest to do that at the start. She wouldn't be given a fair opportunity to advance, survive, and prosper otherwise. Mordecai came by the place where Esther was kept day after day to make sure that she was alright and to stay in touch with her. A godly support and influence is a great encouragement and benefit especially when one is in a hostile environment and a corrupt one at that.

12 Now when the turn of each young lady came to go in to King Ahasuerus, after the end of her twelve months under the regulations for the women—for the days of their beautification were

completed as follows: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and the cosmetics for women— 13 the young lady would go in to the king in this way: anything that she desired was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. 14 In the evening she would go in and in the morning she would return to the second harem, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not again go in to the king unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.

Each young lady was given twelve months of time to attend to her external beauty, six months with various oils and skin treatments followed by six months of various perfumes and makeups. This was vanity to the max, twelve months of preparation for a one time visit with the king to see if he approved. Each young lady could bring in whatever she wanted from the harem to the king, perhaps a particular wardrobe item, dancing apparatus, or something else to highlight her beauty and even her seductive prowess if she so desired. Whether actual sexual acts happened is not given, but it could well have been an interview tactic. But what would win the king's heart? It is not like he was lacking for sex given his harem and concubines. What would make him choose a queen? Each interview happened in the evening, and the next morning the "contestant" would be returned to a second harem under the care of Shaasghaz who was in charge of the king's concubines. There was no guarantee of a second chance, but the king could summon one of them a second time as he was trying to narrow his options and settle on one final choice for queen.

15 Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai who had taken her as his daughter, came to go in to the king, she did not request anything except what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the women, advised. And Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her. 16 So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus to his royal palace in the tenth month which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

When Esther's turn to go in to the king arrived, she didn't take anything in with her except what Hegai advised her. Hegai would have been around long enough to know what the king enjoyed as well as what annoyed him. Having his advice had to be a great advantage. This is again a sign of God's favor resting upon Esther, and she received favor and approval of all who saw her. The king picked Esther above all the rest, and she was brought to his palace in the seventh year of his reign. Esther, a Jew, would become the next queen of Persia. Even with His people in captivity on account of their wickedness and rebellion, God still had a plan, He still made a name for Himself, and He was still on the throne.

17 The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found favor and kindness with him more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. 18 Then the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his princes and his servants; he also made a holiday for the provinces and gave gifts according to the king's bounty.

The king loved Esther more than all the women. He had many to choose from on any given day to spend time with, but it was Esther whom he enjoyed and adored more than any other. He actually showed her favor and kindness, a side of him that hadn't been evident before. External beauty alone would not bring this out of the king, but there had to be something about Esther's inner beauty and character

qualities that had this effect and influence upon the king (Proverbs 31:30). Esther was given the royal crown as Queen of all Persia. A Jew was given this honored position with the mightiest man on the earth at the time. God was showing Himself powerful and faithful to His people even in the midst of difficult circumstances, circumstances which they had brought upon themselves on account of their rebellion and disobedience to Him. The king threw a special banquet for Esther so that all knew that it was done in her name, and he even declared a national holiday on account of his love for her and gave lavish gifts throughout the land.

19 When the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. 20 Esther had not yet made known her kindred or her people, even as Mordecai had commanded her; for Esther did what Mordecai told her as she had done when under his care.

Mordecai continued to stay in touch with Esther and to look after as best as he could from the king's gate. Esther still had not disclosed that she was a Jew as Mordecai had instructed her. When she lived with Mordecai, she listened to him and did what he told her to do (Exodus 20:12). Being able to honor and respect this loving father figure in Mordecai probably served her well in seeking to gain the favor of the king. In a land which favored male dominance, being able to be respectful had to be a great advantage to her in helping her get the king's favor, something she would need in the future on account of her people.

21 In those days, while Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's officials from those who guarded the door, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. 22 But the plot became known to Mordecai and he told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name. 23 Now when the plot was investigated and found to be so, they were both hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the Book of the Chronicles in the king's presence.

A significantly important event transpired that would shape future events by putting Mordecai's name in Persian history for good. Mordecai was in his usual place at the king's gate hoping to check up on Esther. Two of the king's officials who guarded the door became angry with the king and plotted to kill him. Mordecai, in respect for the king (Romans 13:1-6) and his law (Esther 4:2), not condoning murder, and caring about the well-being of Esther (who knows what could happen to her if the king was attacked), informed Esther of the plot. Esther then warned the king, and he investigated the plot. It was found out to be true, and the conspirators were hanged. Importantly, the event was documented and logged in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Persia. This event was sovereignly orchestrated by God, and it would play a major role in the unfolding of God's plan in the lives of Esther and Mordecai.

Esther 3

3 After these events King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and established his authority over all the princes who were with him. 2 All the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman; for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage. 3 Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why are you transgressing the king's command?" 4 Now it was when they had spoken daily to him and he would not listen to them, that

they told Haman to see whether Mordecai's reason would stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew. 5 When Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage to him, Haman was filled with rage. 6 But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him who the people of Mordecai were; therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

Haman is revealed as the villain in this story. The king appointed him as second in command to the extent that all the servants at the gate were ordered by the king to bow down and pay homage to Haman. He was so arrogant and power hungry that he actually wanted people to bow before him as if they were worshipping him as some sort of god. Mordecai, however, not wanting to violate the commands of God to worship only Him and to not have any idols (Exodus 20:3-6), refused to bow before Haman. The other servants of the king asked Mordecai why he was breaking the king's command, for they could likely see that he was putting himself in great danger. They had to know that Haman was so hungry for power and control that there was no way that he would let Mordecai's rebellion and non-compliance go without punishment. Day after day they pleaded with Mordecai to change his mind and conform, but he would not listen to them. Mordecai explained that he was a Jew and that this was not consistent with the worship of God, and they went to Haman to see if Mordecai's reason would be enough to exempt him. But Haman had no concern for Mordecai or the God of the Jews, and he was filled with rage toward Mordecai. He just wanted power for himself, and the Jewish God could be an impediment to achieving his goal. Thus, he purposed to destroy all of the Jews through the whole kingdom of Persia. His hate was so deep because of his great pride that he was willing to commit mass genocide just to keep his ego growing.

7 In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, Pur, that is the lot, was cast before Haman from day to day and from month to month, until the twelfth month, that is the month Adar. 8 Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of all other people and they do not observe the king's laws, so it is not in the king's interest to let them remain. 9 If it is pleasing to the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who carry on the king's business, to put into the king's treasuries." 10 Then the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. 11 The king said to Haman, "The silver is yours, and the people also, to do with them as you please."

In the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, five years after Esther had become queen, Haman finally decided to put his plan into action. He had been waiting for eleven months, from the first month to the twelfth month, for the lot to fall in a sign of good favor before he made his move. This was a nod to the pagan gods of Persia, hoping that they would empower and bless his diabolical plan against the Jews and their jealous God. So, believing fortune was on his side, he went to the king. He told the king that it was dangerous to keep the Jews alive in the kingdom because they followed laws that were different from those of all other people. Their jealous God demanded worship alone, whereas other deities of other conquered nations could easily be absorbed into a plurality of pagan worship. God doesn't do that, for He stands above as the one true God. Haman argued that the king's interests demanded that he issue a

decree to have the Jews destroyed. He even wanted to pay the people who carried out the killing with silver from the king's treasury. Perhaps he figured that plundering the Jews would more be a significant return on that investment (v. 13). The king bought into the plan, and told Haman that he could do as he pleased with the king's silver and with the Jews. With the king's signet ring, Haman could make the law and see that it was accomplished according to his desires, he being the enemy of the Jews.

12 Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and it was written just as Haman commanded to the king's satraps, to the governors who were over each province and to the princes of each people, each province according to its script, each people according to its language, being written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring. 13 Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces to destroy, to kill and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to seize their possessions as plunder. 14 A copy of the edict to be issued as law in every province was published to all the peoples so that they should be ready for this day. 15 The couriers went out impelled by the king's command while the decree was issued at the citadel in Susa; and while the king and Haman sat down to drink, the city of Susa was in confusion.

Very shortly thereafter in the next month Haman put his plan into action. He summoned the king's scribes to have them write up the law so letters could be sent to each province in its script and to each people and language group in their respective languages. The law was written in the king's name and sealed with his ring. There was no doubt that the order was official, there was no confusion as to the message, and the Jews in Persia were in imminent danger of being wiped out. The order would be carried out on the thirteenth day of the month Adar, eleven months away. All the Jews, men and women and children, no matter how young or old, would be killed and their possessions taken as plunder. The law was visible for all to see so that the people could be ready for the day in which thousands of Jews were to be exterminated. The countdown was on. This threw the city of Susa into confusion, for people had to wonder why this was happening. Any other foreigners had to be concerned that this would happen to them sometime, too. Great instability and fear throughout the land would have resulted. But the king and Haman sat down to drink, content and merry about their plan.

Esther 4

4 When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly. 2 He went as far as the king's gate, for no one was to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. 3 In each and every province where the command and decree of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing; and many lay on sackcloth and ashes.

When Mordecai heard about the law that the king and Haman had put into effect and the coming deadline for annihilation, he began mourning by putting on sackcloth and ashes according to Jewish customs and wailing loudly and bitterly. He didn't go past the king's gate in sackcloth, however, because it was against the law. He wasn't trying to break any laws or be disrespectful to the king, but he was

trying to show the agony that the law had brought upon him and his people. In each and every province, the Jews began wailing and weeping and laying on sackcloth and ashes, mourning over the law that had been decreed.

4 Then Esther's maidens and her eunuchs came and told her, and the queen writhed in great anguish. And she sent garments to clothe Mordecai that he might remove his sackcloth from him, but he did not accept them. 5 Then Esther summoned Hathach from the king's eunuchs, whom the king had appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was. 6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai to the city square in front of the king's gate. 7 Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact amount of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. 8 He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict which had been issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show Esther and inform her, and to order her to go in to the king to implore his favor and to plead with him for her people.

When the queen's maidens and servants came and told her about the Jews mourning, she writhed in anguish. She knew something was really wrong to create such a demonstration and mourning, but she didn't have all the facts. As Esther 1 indicated, the women of the palace were segregated and often did their own thing. She sent clothes to Mordecai so that he could take off his sackcloth and enter the king's gate. But he refused, for this was not a time to stop mourning. So since Mordecai would not come to her, she sent one of her servants Hathach to go to Mordecai to learn more. Hathach found Mordecai in front of the king's gate, and he told him the whole story. He told him about how he refused to bow to Haman and how Haman began an agenda to destroy him and his people. He told him about how Haman had promised to enrich the king's treasuries when the Jews were destroyed by plundering them. He also gave Hathach a copy of the edict from Susa concerning the destruction of the Jews. He wanted Hathach to inform Esther about everything so that she could fully understand the severity of the situation and that the Jews needed her help. Specifically, he wanted her to go in to the king and implore his favor. The king adored Esther, and perhaps he would listen to her, grant her favor, and agree to save the Jews, her people.

9 Hathach came back and related Mordecai's words to Esther. 10 Then Esther spoke to Hathach and ordered him to reply to Mordecai: 11 "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days." 12 They related Esther's words to Mordecai.

Hathach told Esther all that Mordecai had told her. She told Hathach to return to Mordecai and to remind him of the law of the land, that no one, not even the queen, was allowed to go in to the inner court of the king unless they were first summoned by the king. The penalty of going in without being first summoned was death unless the king granted them his favor by holding out the golden scepter, thereby sparing the person's life. Esther had not been summoned to come to the king at all for an entire month. Thus, if she was going to seek the king's favor, she would have to risk her life.

13 Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?"

Mordecai expressed to Esther his utmost confidence in God to save the Jews one way or the other. But he warned her not to shrink back in this time, for she, being a Jew as well, would also likely be killed given the wrath of Haman and the fact that the law could not be reversed. Furthermore, Mordecai reminded her that perhaps God had ordained all of the events of her life just for this very moment. Perhaps it was for such a time as this that God had allowed her to attain royalty. She needed to recognize her responsibility to speak up and be courageous in this time rather than be fearful and suffer a shameful death or even the punishment of God. If she was going to die, it ought to be in an act of bravery and worship of God. Mordecai wanted her to have confidence in God and to go to the king and seek his favor. When God gives His people opportunities, they need to take them. When believers do not do something that they know they should do, it is sin (James 4:17).

15 Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, 16 "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." 17 So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him.

Esther decided to be brave and to put her faith in God. She asked Mordecai to tell all the Jews in Susa to assemble together to fast and pray for her for three days. She and her maidens would do the same. Evidently, Esther had had a positive influence on her maidservants because they were going to fast with her and seek the favor of God for her and for the preservation of her people. They obviously cared for her, which is a sign that she had been kind and gracious to them. They were quite possibly putting their lives on the line as well as conspirators with the Jews should Esther fail to get the king to do something. Mordecai went and did what Esther had asked, and they all prayed and fasted, seeking the Lord's favor and protection. Esther was willing to die if that is what doing the right thing meant.

Esther 5

5 Now it came about on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace in front of the king's rooms, and the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room, opposite the entrance to the palace. 2 When the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, she obtained favor in his sight; and the king extended to Esther the golden scepter which was in his hand. So Esther came near and touched the top of the scepter. 3 Then the king said to her, "What is troubling you, Queen Esther? And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be given to you." 4 Esther said, "If it pleases the king, may the king and Haman come this day to the banquet that I have prepared for him."

On the third day, Esther did as she said she would and entered the king's inner court against the law. The king gave her favor and extended to her the golden scepter. She came near and touched the top of the scepter, having been received by the king and spared of her life. The king in an atypical show of

compassion asked Esther what was troubling her. Interestingly, in an empire which didn't value women, a woman was used of God to intercede on behalf of the Jews to win the heart of a chauvinistic king. God is indeed able to humble the proud and to show Himself strong at any time and in any place. Esther probably looked worn down after fasting for three days, and the king wanted to know what was happening. He cared about her and even respected her, though he would probably never have said as much. He said that whatever she asked he would give her up to half the kingdom, an extremely generous offer indicative of how much he appreciated his queen. Esther jumped on this opportunity to invite both the king and Haman to a private banquet which she would have prepared for them. Esther had a plan, and she put it into action.

5 Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly that we may do as Esther desires." So the king and Haman came to the banquet which Esther had prepared. 6 As they drank their wine at the banquet, the king said to Esther, "What is your petition, for it shall be granted to you. And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be done." 7 So Esther replied, "My petition and my request is: 8 if I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and do what I request, may the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king says."

So quickly Haman was summoned and they had a banquet together which Esther had prepared. As they drank wine, the king asked Esther again what she wanted and affirmed his promise to grant her up to half of the kingdom. Esther asked for the king and Haman to come to a second banquet the next day, and at that time she would make her request of the king.

9 Then Haman went out that day glad and pleased of heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate and that he did not stand up or tremble before him, Haman was filled with anger against Mordecai. 10 Haman controlled himself, however, went to his house and sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh. 11 Then Haman recounted to them the glory of his riches, and the number of his sons, and every instance where the king had magnified him and how he had promoted him above the princes and servants of the king. 12 Haman also said, "Even Esther the queen let no one but me come with the king to the banquet which she had prepared; and tomorrow also I am invited by her with the king. 13 Yet all of this does not satisfy me every time I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." 14 Then Zeresh his wife and all his friends said to him, "Have a gallows fifty cubits high made and in the morning ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on it; then go joyfully with the king to the banquet." And the advice pleased Haman, so he had the gallows made.

Haman left the banquet very happy and pleased given that he had risen to such status to be invited to two banquets in a row with just him, the king, and the queen. But when he saw Mordecai again at the king's gate and that he again did not show him reverence or tremble before his presence, he was filled with anger towards him. He controlled himself from doing anything immediate toward Mordecai, and he went home and called for his friends and wife, Zeresh, to come together. Then he bragged about how rich he was, how many sons he had, how powerful he was, and how even Queen Esther had invited him to a private banquet. He spoke about how special he felt given that he was going to yet another private banquet with just him and the king and queen. Yet he also recounted how angry Mordecai made

him and how just that one man made him miserable despite all of the prosperity he had in his life. His wife and his friends counseled him to build a huge gallows approximately seventy-five feet high upon which he would hang Mordecai and be done with the "disrespectful" Jew forever. He planned to ask the king the next morning for permission to hang Mordecai, and then he would be able to go to the banquet with peace of mind, having been rid of his adversary. The advice pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made right away. Mordecai's life was now in immediate danger.

Esther 6

6 During that night the king could not sleep so he gave an order to bring the book of records, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. 2 It was found written what Mordecai had reported concerning Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who were doorkeepers, that they had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. 3 The king said, "What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" Then the king's servants who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him." 4 So the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace in order to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows which he had prepared for him. 5 The king's servants said to him, "Behold, Haman is standing in the court." And the king said, "Let him come in." 6 So Haman came in and the king said to him, "What is to be done for the man whom the king desires to honor?" And Haman said to himself, "Whom would the king desire to honor more than me?" 7 Then Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king desires to honor, 8 let them bring a royal robe which the king has worn, and the horse on which the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown has been placed; 9 and let the robe and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble princes and let them array the man whom the king desires to honor and lead him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him, 'Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor.'"

Again, it becomes clear how God is sovereign over the affairs of men and honors whom He wills to honor and brings low those whom He wishes to destroy. The Lord moved the king during that very night, perhaps even as Haman was having the gallows built, to have trouble sleeping. He asked for the book of the chronicles, the records of the kings of Persia. He read about his own life and saw that Mordecai had been instrumental in saving his life. He asked his servants if Mordecai had received any honor yet from the king on account of his life-saving act. They said that he had not, and the king wanted this done immediately. So he asked if anybody was in the king's outer court who could be summoned to bring honor upon a man that the king favored. Haman was in the court because he was waiting for a chance to ask the king for permission to kill Mordecai, the very person the king was intending to honor. Haman was summoned in. He assumed that he was the one whom the king was intending to honor, and thus he stated that the one whom the king desired to honor should get the royal treatment, even being paraded through the city square on horseback and robed in royal splendor. This was to be a horse that the king himself had actually ridden and a robe that he himself had actually worn. The one the king wanted to honor would even get to wear the royal crown and be led through the city by one of the king's noble princes. It was to be declared that that is how the king honors those whom he desires to honor. Haman wanted to make sure that he would be showered with praise and honor by as many people as possible and be given new honors that he could go home and brag about. He had no idea that

the king wasn't planning to honor him but his archenemy Mordecai. Not only would he not get to hang him, but he would have to exalt him. God has a way of turning the tables and honoring those who honor Him.

10 Then the king said to Haman, "Take quickly the robes and the horse as you have said, and do so for Mordecai the Jew, who is sitting at the king's gate; do not fall short in anything of all that you have said." 11 So Haman took the robe and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city square, and proclaimed before him, "Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor."

The king told Haman to do all that he just described and do it for Mordecai the Jew, making sure to give him precisely every honor that he had just gone on and on about. Haman put the robe on Mordecai and led him on horseback through the city square proclaiming his honor. This had to be the ultimate humiliation for him. He, being so proud, had to be the one leading another through the city like a servant while treating Mordecai like he was royalty.

12 Then Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman hurried home, mourning, with his head covered. 13 Haman recounted to Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and Zeresh his wife said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish origin, you will not overcome him, but will surely fall before him."

Mordecai didn't let the experience inflate his ego, for there was still an impending annihilation to be concerned about. He stayed focused and went back to his normal place and activities. Haman, however, was distraught and ran home with his head covered, mourning and feeling humiliated. He told his wife and his friends what had happened. His wise men and his wife said that, if Mordecai was indeed a Jew, then Haman would not be able to overcome him. In other words, the king had just given an extremely high honor to a Jew, the very people he was plotting to annihilate. It wouldn't go over so well when the honored Mordecai was killed by Haman on the planned date of destruction. Thus, Haman had a major problem on his hands which pitted him against the king and against Mordecai. He would soon find that he was up against Esther and her God as well.

14 While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hastily brought Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared.

Before Haman and his associates could hatch a backup plan, the king's servants came and brought him to the banquet which Esther had prepared for him and for the king.

Esther 7

7 Now the king and Haman came to drink wine with Esther the queen. 2 And the king said to Esther on the second day also as they drank their wine at the banquet, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be done." 3 Then Queen Esther replied, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me as my petition, and my people as my request; 4 for we have been sold, I and my people,

to be destroyed, to be killed and to be annihilated. Now if we had only been sold as slaves, men and women, I would have remained silent, for the trouble would not be commensurate with the annoyance to the king.” 5 Then King Ahasuerus asked Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who would presume to do thus?” 6 Esther said, “A foe and an enemy is this wicked Haman!” Then Haman became terrified before the king and queen.

The king, Esther, and Haman drank wine and had a banquet, and it continued into the second day. The king reiterated his pledge to do for Esther whatever she requested up to half of the kingdom. She opened up and made her request. She said that she wanted her life, clearly identifying herself with the Jews as one who would be killed under the law. She made it clear that she whom the king favored would also be killed if the law was to be carried out. She stood up for her people and begged for their lives and for hers. She understood how to season her speech with salt and to be gracious (Colossians 4:6), particularly given the history of the king with Vashti. She said that if only the law had been to enslave her and her people that she would not have even bothered the king to make a request of him, but, given that the law was a matter of total annihilation, she decided it was worth the king’s time to speak up. Her humble mode of speaking to the king was supportive of his ego and in no way a threat to his desire for power, and it was a very shrewd and yet innocent way to speak to him (Matthew 10:16). The king asked Esther who was intending to do this. One would think that the king would remember that this law was given his approval (Esther 3:10-11), but perhaps he was somewhat drunk or distracted by his concubines when he decided to give Haman the signet ring. Furthermore, now that he knew that Esther whom he loved was a Jew and that Mordecai who saved his life was also a Jew, it would make sense that he would be far less interested in wiping the Jews out and believing Haman’s arguments concerning the danger of allowing them to live. Haman had a lot of power, but the king liked Esther more. Esther seized on the opportunity and boldly declared that Haman was the person behind all of this and that he was a foe and enemy to the king for wanting to wipe out the queen and Mordecai along with the rest of the Jews. At this, Haman grew terrified, for he knew his life was in serious jeopardy. He had the wrath of both king and queen aimed squarely at him. This sequence of events illustrates just how the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord to move it as He wishes (Proverbs 21:1), at one time going along with the extermination of an entire people and the next seeking the death of the person who came up with the idea. God worked through Esther’s boldness and faith to change the mind and heart of the king.

7 The king arose in his anger from drinking wine and went into the palace garden; but Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that harm had been determined against him by the king. 8 Now when the king returned from the palace garden into the place where they were drinking wine, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, “Will he even assault the queen with me in the house?” As the word went out of the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face. 9 Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs who were before the king said, “Behold indeed, the gallows standing at Haman’s house fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai who spoke good on behalf of the king!” And the king said, “Hang him on it.” 10 So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king’s anger subsided.

In this passage, God's sovereignty is seen in both the sequence of events and the precise timing of their unfolding. The king was upset and angry over what he had just heard regarding Haman's plan and its implications, and Haman could tell that he was probably going to be put to death. So he begged of his life from Queen Esther while the king walked out into the palace gardens. He fell on the couch begging for his life, but, when the king came back in, he thought that Haman was assaulting the queen. Immediately, the guards covered Haman's face and made preparations for his death. There was no changing the king's mind or reasoning with him at this point, and the timing of events was just right so that Haman would end up getting executed. One of the servants pointed out that there were gallows in Haman's yard that had been made for Mordecai. But since Mordecai was now the king's friend, the king instructed Haman to be hung on the very gallows that he had built. "He who digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him" (Proverbs 26:27). So Haman was hanged, and the king's anger subsided. But there was still the matter of dealing with the law that had been passed.

Esther 8

8 On that day King Ahasuerus gave the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther; and Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had disclosed what he was to her. 2 The king took off his signet ring which he had taken away from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.

In an unusual act of delegation to the queen, the king trusted Esther to decide what to do with the house of Haman. Haman had earlier bragged about how many riches he had and how many sons he had, but now Esther put Mordecai in charge over his entire house. The king even gave him his signet ring, trusting him in terms of speaking for him. Esther had made it clear to the king that Mordecai was a relative and like a father to her. Given the king's love for Esther, it only made sense that he trusted Mordecai also, particularly given Mordecai's history of saving his life.

3 Then Esther spoke again to the king, fell at his feet, wept and implored him to avert the evil scheme of Haman the Agagite and his plot which he had devised against the Jews. 4 The king extended the golden scepter to Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the king. 5 Then she said, "If it pleases the king and if I have found favor before him and the matter seems proper to the king and I am pleasing in his sight, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the king's provinces. 6 For how can I endure to see the calamity which will befall my people, and how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?" 7 So King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "Behold, I have given the house of Haman to Esther, and him they have hanged on the gallows because he had stretched out his hands against the Jews.

Esther had to go to the king yet a second time and risk her life again. She went weeping and mourning over the law that was still on the books concerning the annihilation of the Jews. The king needed to do something. Fortunately, he extended the scepter to her again and listened to her. Esther was again very respectful and deferential to the king by falling on the ground before him and only standing before him after he had granted her favor. She was very honoring to his authority by not ordering him or

commanding him to act but by saying that if she had the king's favor and if the king was deemed it proper that something should be done about the law to protect the Jews. She wisely reminded the king of Haman's treachery and his association with the law so that the king would want to get rid of all traces of his legacy. She also shrewdly expressed that she didn't think that she could continue on if annihilation was to come to her countrymen, and thus she was again appealing to the king's adoration of her. While she and Mordecai had been protected, their countrymen were not. This needed to be fixed.

8 Now you write to the Jews as you see fit, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring; for a decree which is written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's signet ring may not be revoked."

The king gave Mordecai permission to write in the king's name and to use the king's signet ring to make a new law as he saw fit regarding the future of the Jews. The old law could not be cancelled or revoked even by the king, but a new law could be put in place that could change the dynamics that the old law put into place.

9 So the king's scribes were called at that time in the third month (that is, the month Sivan), on the twenty-third day; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded to the Jews, the satraps, the governors and the princes of the provinces which extended from India to Ethiopia, 127 provinces, to every province according to its script, and to every people according to their language as well as to the Jews according to their script and their language. 10 He wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, and sealed it with the king's signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horses, riding on steeds sired by the royal stud. 11 In them the king granted the Jews who were in each and every city the right to assemble and to defend their lives, to destroy, to kill and to annihilate the entire army of any people or province which might attack them, including children and women, and to plunder their spoil, 12 on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar). 13 A copy of the edict to be issued as law in each and every province was published to all the peoples, so that the Jews would be ready for this day to avenge themselves on their enemies. 14 The couriers, hastened and impelled by the king's command, went out, riding on the royal steeds; and the decree was given out at the citadel in Susa.

The new law allowed the Jews to assemble themselves to fight back and to plunder any who would attack them. Given that a Jew, Mordecai, was in a position of second in command, those who wished to opposed the Jews were much less than before. Even some of the princes, satraps, and governors assisted the Jews rather than choosing to fight against them. They were afraid of Mordecai because of how powerful and influential he had become (Esther 9:3). People even converted to being Jews because they were so afraid of their power and influence (v. 17). The day that had previously been a day of doom was now an opportunity for the Jews to, according to the law, avenge themselves on any who would use the old law to try and kill them. The law was spread throughout the land so that all could know and be informed about it.

15 Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a large crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. 16 For the Jews there was light and gladness and joy and honor. 17 In each and every province and in each and every city, wherever the king's commandment and his decree arrived, there was gladness and joy for the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many among the peoples of the land became Jews, for the dread of the Jews had fallen on them.

Upon getting this law passed and sent out, Mordecai exited the presence of the king in robes of royalty and with a large crown. It was clear that the Jews had been saved from an impossible situation and a certain annihilation and that a major power shift had been put into place. The city of Susa shouted and rejoiced, for the people rejoice when a good man comes into power but groan when the wicked rule (Proverbs 29:2). For the Jews in particular there was a burden removed, and gladness and joy returned. They were even viewed as having honor in the land rather than as oppressed, weak, and conquered exiles and slaves. Some even converted to Judaism out of fear given the influence of Esther and Mordecai in positions of power. As the news spread, the Jews celebrated a holiday and had a feast. Chapter one began with the Jews having been humiliated and conquered and living in a foreign land under foreign laws while the king and his nobles feasted and celebrated for 180 days. Now, it was the Jews' turn to feast and celebrate, for God had shown Himself strong once again.

Esther 9

9 Now in the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar), on the thirteenth day when the king's command and edict were about to be executed, on the day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, it was turned to the contrary so that the Jews themselves gained the mastery over those who hated them. 2 The Jews assembled in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm; and no one could stand before them, for the dread of them had fallen on all the peoples. 3 Even all the princes of the provinces, the satraps, the governors and those who were doing the king's business assisted the Jews, because the dread of Mordecai had fallen on them. 4 Indeed, Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces; for the man Mordecai became greater and greater. 5 Thus the Jews struck all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying; and they did what they pleased to those who hated them. 6 At the citadel in Susa the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men, 7 and Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, 8 Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, 9 Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha, 10 the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Jews' enemy; but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

The thirteenth day of the twelve month was when both Haman's law and Mordecai's law came into effect. The Jews were ready to fight and to subdue those who hated them and wanted them dead, and those who were still bold enough to attack the Jews could do so. There were some who hated the Jews so much that they wanted to regain mastery over them, but what happened was that the enemies of the Jews were killed. The Jews regained mastery over their enemies. No one could stand before the Jews even though some tried, and the dread of them spread across the land. Even the Persian authorities assisted the Jews out of fear and respect for Mordecai, who was in a great position of power

and whose fame and influence grew greater and greater. On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, it was the Jews who killed their enemies, not the other way around. Five hundred of the enemies of the Jews were killed in the citadel in Susa alone including the ten sons of Haman. Though the Jews had the right under the Persian law to plunder them, they chose not to. Their mission was not to try to take riches from Persia and provoke a fight but only to preserve their nation and to kill those who were continually and actively trying to kill them.

11 On that day the number of those who were killed at citadel in Susa was reported to the king. 12 The king said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman at the citadel in Susa. What then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces! Now what is your petition? It shall even be granted you. And what is your further request? It shall also be done." 13 Then said Esther, "If it pleases the king, let tomorrow also be granted to the Jews who are in Susa to do according to the edict of today; and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows." 14 So the king commanded that it should be done so; and an edict was issued in Susa, and Haman's ten sons were hanged. 15 The Jews who were in Susa assembled also on the fourteenth day of the month Adar and killed three hundred men in Susa, but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

That five hundred were killed at the citadel in Susa was reported to the king. If that many were dead just there, there had to be thousands of others dead throughout the empire. The king wanted to know if all of what had already transpired had satisfied the request of Queen Esther. She asked that those in Susa be given also the fourteenth, that is, one more day in order to finish the job. The Jews killed three hundred more men who still wanted them dead, but they did not plunder them. They wanted only their lives and freedom, not their riches. Haman's ten sons were also hanged that day.

16 Now the rest of the Jews who were in the king's provinces assembled, to defend their lives and rid themselves of their enemies, and kill 75,000 of those who hated them; but they did not lay their hands on the plunder. 17 This was done on the thirteenth day of the month Adar, and on the fourteenth day they rested and made it a day of feasting and rejoicing.

Altogether, the Jews killed 75,000 of their enemies, those who wanted them dead. They did not plunder them, seeking only their lives, their future safety, and not their enemies' riches. While those in Susa also fought on the fourteenth, the killing throughout the rest of the empire was completed on the thirteenth. The Jews throughout the rest of the empire made the fourteenth a day of feasting and rejoicing.

18 But the Jews who were in Susa assembled on the thirteenth and the fourteenth of the same month, and they rested on the fifteenth day and made it a day of feasting and rejoicing. 19 Therefore the Jews of the rural areas, who live in the rural towns, make the fourteenth day of the month Adar a holiday for rejoicing and feasting and sending portions of food to one another.

The Jews who were in Susa continued fighting on the fourteenth, so they used the fifteenth as a day of feasting and rejoicing. Thus, the Jews of the rural areas and town celebrated on the fourteenth, while the rest celebrated one day later. In contrast to the feasting of the king as described in chapter 1 where it was pagan in nature, focused on fleshly indulgences, and not considerate of those who were less fortunate, the Jewish feasting involved the sharing of food with one another and with the poor (v. 22).

20 Then Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, 21 obliging them to celebrate the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same month, annually, 22 because on those days the Jews rid themselves of their enemies, and it was a month which was turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and rejoicing and sending portions of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

In a letter concerning the celebration called Purim (v. 26), Mordecai formalized the celebration by obliging the Jews to celebrate on both the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month Adar. They were to remember how they were able to rid themselves of their enemies and how God turned their sorrow into gladness. It was to be a time of feasting and rejoicing and sending food to one another as well as gifts to the poor. This was to be a celebration for all of the people of Israel, not just those who could afford to do so. It was also a good example to pagan people and other downtrodden nations within the kingdom that the poor mattered to God, even if they weren't Jewish by birth. Their celebration was not just a remembrance for themselves but a testimony to the rest of the kingdom concerning the faithfulness, power, love, justice, and mercy of their God.

23 Thus the Jews undertook what they had started to do, and what Mordecai had written to them. 24 For Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the adversary of all the Jews, had schemed against the Jews to destroy them and had cast Pur, that is the lot, to disturb them and destroy them. 25 But when it came to the king's attention, he commanded by letter that his wicked scheme which he had devised against the Jews, should return on his own head and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. 26 Therefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. And because of the instructions in this letter, both what they had seen in this regard and what had happened to them, 27 the Jews established and made a custom for themselves and for their descendants and for all those who allied themselves with them, so that they would not fail to celebrate these two days according to their regulation and according to their appointed time annually. 28 So these days were to be remembered and celebrated throughout every generation, every family, every province and every city; and these days of Purim were not to fail from among the Jews, or their memory fade from their descendants.

Here we are given a more in depth record of the reason behind Purim concerning Haman's plot and defeat and the deliverance of the Jews. Mordecai made a record of all of the events so that the Jews would commemorate and remember God's faithfulness to deliver them. He did not want the memory of the events to fade away. Thus, he established an official holiday for them on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month Adar so that they would remember how God delivered them from their enemies and how He turned those dates from sorrow into gladness, from annihilation into victory. They were to feast and rejoice on those days, taking care of one another and not failing to remember the poor. This was not to be a feast only for the well-off of Israel, but all the Jews were to be part of the celebration. God had delivered them all, and they all could participate. Though they were the conquered people, given Mordecai's and Esther's high positions of power, God had shown Himself strong to give them protection, much like He had done with allowing Joseph to rise to power in Egypt and preserving Israel's future then (Genesis 50:20).

29 Then Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter about Purim. 30 He sent letters to all the Jews, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, namely, words of peace and truth, 31 to establish these days of Purim at their appointed times, just as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had established for them, and just as they had established for themselves and for their descendants with instructions for their times of fasting and their lamentations. 32 The command of Esther established these customs for Purim, and it was written in the book.

Queen Esther and Mordecai wrote a second letter concerning Purim to add in a time of fasting and lamentation. Perhaps they were concerned that future generations would just throw a party and forget about the incredible sorrow that had preceded the victory. Thus, by fasting first the Jews would remember how they were about to be killed, and then they could feast and celebrate God's deliverance. This second letter confirmed the importance of Purim, for God had turned their fasting into rejoicing and their mourning into feasting.

Esther 10

10 Now King Ahasuerus laid a tribute on the land and on the coastlands of the sea. 2 And all the accomplishments of his authority and strength, and the full account of the greatness of Mordecai to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia? 3 For Mordecai the Jew was second only to King Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews and in favor with his many kinsmen, one who sought the good of his people and one who spoke for the welfare of his whole nation.

In what appears to be a postscript or summary concerning the book of Esther, it is noted that the rest of the acts about the king and Mordecai were written in the Persian Book of the Chronicles of the Kings. Ahasuerus put a tax on the land and the coastlands of the sea, and he remained strong until his defeat at the hands of the Greeks. Mordecai remained great according to the king's advancing of him, which ultimately pointed to the faithfulness of God. Mordecai was second in command with the king himself only being more powerful politically. Mordecai's legacy is one of greatness among his people, for he had their favor because he sought their good and advocated always for their welfare. Even in a terrible situation during the exile, God still was on the throne, still working, still loving toward His people, and still showing Himself powerful to a pagan world in need of hearing about Him.