

The Story of Esther and the Feast of Purim

The Book of Esther, Chapters 1 to 10 (all of it), showing how God has His hand on circumstances and “coincidences” to thwart the schemes of man and put His own plans and purposes to work.

Slides 1-6, to music (Lana Ross classical guitar version of Purim song) introducing the stories’ characters: Esther, King Xerxes, Mordecai, Haman, Vashti, Advisors and Attendants.

Slide 7, map of Persian Empire.

Esther: When the Assyrians conquered Israel, and the Babylonians conquered Judah, both deported their Jewish captives. My cousin Mordecai was one of the Jews carried into exile from Judah by the Babylonians. Mordecai adopted me when my parents died and we now live in Susa, the capital city of Persia.

The Persian Empire that superseded the Assyrians and Babylonians follows a policy of repatriation and allowing their conquered nations to keep many of their political and religious systems. The Persian philosophy is that this will foster contentment and decrease rebellion. This is why after 70 years of Judah in exile, King Cyrus of Persia encouraged Jews to return to live in Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. Since Cyrus, we’ve had other kings, including Darius, the one who was overjoyed when Daniel came safely out of the lion’s den*, and now we’ve got King Xerxes.

(Slide 8: Susa, capital city of Persia, c.483-479 BC)*

I was taken to the king’s harem, along with many other young women. We were all there for a year, having beauty treatments. We were then sent to the king one at a time for him to choose his favourite to be his new wife.

(Slide 9 – start of character icon slides)

This all came about because of what happened when the king was giving a banquet for all his nobles and officials...

King: I’m very rich and my kingdom is amazing! Drink as much wine as you like! We are going to feast for weeks and weeks! Bring Queen Vashti to me so I can show her off as well!

(Slide 10)

Esther: But Queen Vashti had replied:

Vashti: I don’t want to and I’m not going to!

Esther: This had caused a panic in the king’s household. *(Slide 11)* The king’s advisors told him...

Advisor: If the king let’s her get away with this, all the women will start behaving the same way and there will be social chaos!

King: By royal decree I command that Vashti is never again to enter my presence. What else shall I do?

Advisor: Choose someone to replace her. Let us gather beautiful young women from all over your kingdom, bring them to your harem, give them a year of beauty treatments, and then send them to you one at a time for the king to choose his favourite.

(Slide 12)

Esther: Mordecai said to me...

Mordecai: Don't tell them you're Jewish

Esther: My attendants at the harem told me I was their favourite... *(Slide 13)* And so did the king

King: You're my favourite! You will be my queen instead of Vashti. Let's have a banquet! Let's have a holiday! Let's have presents!

(Slide 14)

Esther: Meanwhile, Mordecai over-heard a plot to assassinate the king, told me about it, I told the king, and the plot has been foiled. *(Slide 15)* The king also decided...

King: I want to promote Haman, make him my right hand man. All you other officials have to show your respect to Haman by kneeling and bowing down to him.

Esther: But Mordecai said...

Mordecai: I can't do that. I refuse to kneel and bow down to Haman. I bow down to God only.

(Slide 16)

Esther: I saw Mordecai sat at the gate wearing sackcloth and ashes and crying, and sent my attendant to him to find out what was going on. Mordecai told my attendant, who reported the story back to me. Haman's descendants were Amalekites*, long-term enemies of the people of Israel. Haman's response to Mordecai's decision not to bow down to him had been extreme...

(Slide 17)

Haman: GRRRR! How dare Mordecai treat me with such disrespect! He thinks he's so special, being a Jew. Well he's not! He and all his people are nothing! And I will show him that! I will have all the Jews in the Persian kingdom killed. All of them!

King, I have something to tell you. In your kingdom are a race of people called the Jews, who do not obey the king's laws. If you let me kill them all I can rid you of that problem and put all their money in to your royal treasury.

King: Do with them whatever you think best.

Haman: Messengers come here! Take this message to every province in the kingdom: We have thrown dice to choose a day on which to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, men, women and children. And then we can plunder all their goods.

(Slide 18)

Esther: And there was more to Mordecai's message to me...

Mordecai: Esther, you have to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for your people.

Esther: I sent this message back to Mordecai via my attendant – But you know if I go to the king in the inner court when he hasn't summoned me, I will be put to death, unless the king extends the gold sceptre to me and chooses to spare my life! Mordecai replied...

Mordecai: If you stay silent, God will provide another way to rescue his people, but you and your father's family will not be spared. Maybe it's for exactly "such a time as this" that you ended up as queen?

(Slide 19)

Esther: I need help. Get all the Jews in Susa to fast for me for three days and three nights. I and my attendants will do the same. Then I will go before the king, even though it is against the law. And if I die, I die.

How many times had I heard the story of Moses standing up to Pharaoh? A great man of God laying aside his own safety, trusting the Lord to deliver him and all God's people. And now it was my turn. I had never felt less heroic in all my life. But there I was, in the palace, with the potential of being able to ask the king for mercy. The twists and turns of fate, with God's hand upon them, had brought me to this time and place. Un-summoned, I walked into the inner court and started approaching the king...

(Slide 20)

King: Queen Esther! I'm so happy to see you! What can I do for you? What can I give you? I'd give you up to half my entire kingdom!

Esther: I'd like you and Haman to come to a banquet I've prepared for him.

King: Excellent! We will come!

(Slide 21)

Esther: I know this may not seem like the time for a banquet, but I had to build up to the big request. It's not the sort of thing you can just come out with. At the banquet the king again asked...

King: What can I do for you? What can I give you? I'd give you up to half my entire kingdom!

Esther: Come to another banquet tomorrow, and then I will answer the king's question.

A lot can happen in one day. My life has been spared, we've had a banquet, and *(Slide 22)* Haman's gone home, passing Mordecai sat at the gate on his way...

Haman: How can I enjoy the queen's favouritism to the full when Mordecai still insults me with his lack of bowing and kneeling? His behaviour puts a grey cloud over even the best of days.

Esther: Haman's wife and friends advised...

Advisor: Build a gallows, twenty metres high, and tomorrow morning, hang Mordecai on it! Then you can go to the second banquet feeling happy!

(Slide 23)

Esther: But at the same time, the King was having a sleepless night, and tired of tossing and turning, he ordered the official records of his kingdom to be brought and read to him. The part they read included the account of how Mordecai had uncovered the plot to assassinate the king.

King: What has been done to honour and reward Mordecai for this?

Esther: Learning that nothing had been done for Mordecai, the king wondered how best to show his gratitude now. *(Slide 24)* At that moment, Haman arrived, with the intention of asking for the king's permission to hang Mordecai, but before he had a chance to do so, the king asked him...

King: What should I do for the man I wish to honour?

Esther: Haman, of course, assumed the king meant him! So he suggested...

Haman: Take one of the king's robes and have one of your highest noblemen put it on the man you wish to honour, sit the man on a horse the king has ridden, put a royal crest on the horse's head, and lead the man on the horse through the city streets shouting "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honour!"

King: Haman, you are my highest nobleman. Go and do all of that for Mordecai the Jew.

(Slide 25)

Esther: Haman was humiliated! But he had to do everything for Mordecai, just as he had suggested, and so he found himself leading a horse with Mordecai dressed in the king's robe sat on it, shouting...

Haman: "This is what is done for the man the king delights to honour!"

Esther: Haman's wife and friends were changing their tune now...

Advisor: You are unable to defeat Mordecai! It must be because of his God! This isn't going to end well for you!

(Slide 26)

Esther: But before they could say anymore, Haman was taken away to attend my second banquet, where the king asked me...

King: What can I do for you? What can I give you? I'd give you up to half my entire kingdom!

Esther: Your majesty, my request is that I may live and my people may live. My people and I have been sold for slaughter. If it were nothing more serious than being sold into slavery I would have kept quiet and not bothered you about it, but we are about to be killed, everyone of us!

King: Who would dare do such a thing?!

Esther: Our enemy and our persecutor is this evil man, Haman!

(Slide 27)

Advisor: Haman has had a gallows built at his house to hang Mordecai on, the man who saved your majesty's life...

King: Hang Haman on it! Hang him! Esther, I give you all of Haman's property. *(Slide 28)* Mordecai, you saved my life, and I now learn that you are related to my queen. I give you these royal robes, a gold crown, and my signet ring. You will be second only to me.

(Slide 29)

Esther: The edict sent out by Haman ordering the murder of all the Jews was a signed and sealed royal document and this meant it could not be revoked, but as I begged again for the life of my people the king gave Mordecai and I permission to write an edict to the Jews that would offset Haman's plan, by giving the Jews the right to assemble and protect themselves and to kill anyone who might attack them.

Across the kingdom, thousands of the Jew's enemies were killed on the day that Haman had intended all the Jews should die. And then a great celebration was held.

(Slide 30: Happy Purim!) It was decided that the anniversary of the Jew's salvation should be celebrated every year as a reminder of the time that grief and despair had been turned into joy and happiness. This is the Feast of Purim, named after the dice or lots, called "pur" in Persian, that Haman used to decide what day his plan to kill all the Jews should be carried out.

(Slide 31) And that is the story of how, almost 1000 years after my people's escape from Egypt*, I found myself being made Queen of a foreign country and in a position to help them escape from another enemy.

**page 1277 The Narrated Bible in Chronological Order – by F. LaGard Smith – suggested date of story of Esther, c.483-479 BC; page 1230 suggested date Daniel in lions’ den c.541-540 BC; page 105 suggested date for Exodus c.1446 BC; Good News Bible footnote re. Est 3:1 – “Haman, son of Hammedatha, a descendent of Agag” – Agag was the Amalekite king executed by Samuel, see 1 Samuel 15*

See accompanying slides for matching up script to chapter and verse in the Bible.

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