

# Esther Saves Her People

A Jewish orphan becomes queen of Persia and must risk her life to save her people from a plot to destroy them. 'For such a time as this.'

Esther 2:1-18 • Esther 3:1-15 • Esther 4:1-17 • Esther 5:1-8 • Esther 7:1-10 • Esther 8:1-17

CHARACTERS: Esther, Mordecai, King Xerxes, Haman

THEMES: Courage, Providence, Identity, Deliverance, God's hidden hand

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IN THE DAYS of King Xerxes of Persia, when Queen Vashti was banished for disobedience, a search began for a new queen. Among the young women brought to the palace was Esther, a beautiful Jewish orphan raised by her cousin Mordecai. Esther won the king's favor and became queen, but on Mordecai's advice, she kept her Jewish identity secret.

Mordecai worked at the palace gate, where he uncovered an assassination plot against the king. He reported it through Esther, and the conspirators were executed. Mordecai's deed was recorded in the royal chronicles.

Then the king elevated a man named Haman above all other nobles. All the palace officials bowed to Haman—except Mordecai, who as a Jew would bow only to God. Haman was furious. Learning that Mordecai was Jewish, he devised a plot not just against Mordecai, but against all Jews throughout the empire.

Haman went to the king: 'There is a certain people dispersed among your provinces who keep themselves separate and do not obey the king's laws. If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them.' The king agreed, giving Haman his signet ring to seal the decree. Letters went

out to every province: on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, all Jews were to be killed and their property plundered.

When Mordecai learned of the decree, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and wept bitterly. Jews throughout the empire mourned. Esther sent a messenger to Mordecai asking what was wrong.

Mordecai sent back the decree and urged Esther to go to the king and plead for her people. But there was a problem: anyone who approached the king without being summoned could be executed—unless the king extended his golden scepter.

'All the king's officials know that anyone who approaches without being summoned is put to death,' Esther replied. 'And I have not been called to the king for thirty days.'

Mordecai's answer changed history: 'Do not think that because you are in the palace you alone of all the Jews will escape. If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance 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?'

Esther made her decision. 'Go, gather all the Jews in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as well. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.'

After three days, Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court. The king saw her and extended his golden scepter. 'What is your request, Queen Esther? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given to you.'

Esther was wise. Rather than blurting out her request, she invited the king and Haman to a banquet. At the banquet, she invited them to another. Haman left in high spirits, already planning a gallows on which to hang Mordecai.

That night, the king couldn't sleep. He ordered the chronicles read to him and discovered that Mordecai had never been rewarded for saving his life. The next morning, Haman arrived early, intending to ask permission to hang Mordecai. But the king spoke first: 'What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?'

Thinking the king meant him, Haman suggested a lavish public procession. Imagine his humiliation when the king commanded, 'Do this for Mordecai the Jew!'

At the second banquet, the king again asked Esther's request. This time she answered: 'If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed.'

'Who has dared to do this?' the king demanded.

Esther pointed. 'The enemy is this vile Haman!'

The king stormed out in rage. When he returned, Haman had fallen on Esther's couch, pleading for his life. 'Will he even assault the queen while she is with me?' the king roared. Haman was led away and hanged on the very gallows he had built for Mordecai.

But the original decree could not be revoked. Instead, a new decree authorized Jews to defend themselves. On the appointed day, the Jews destroyed their enemies. The festival of Purim was established to commemorate their deliverance.

Mordecai became second in rank to the king, and Esther remained queen—the orphan girl who had come to the kingdom for such a time as this.