

Esther

The King Throws a Lavish Party

1:1¹ The following events happened² in the days of Ahasuerus.³ (I am referring to⁴ that Ahasuerus who used to rule over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces⁵ extending all the way from India to Ethiopia.⁶) 1:2 In those days, as King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa⁷

1 sn In the English Bible Esther appears adjacent to Ezra-Nehemiah and with the historical books, but in the Hebrew Bible it is one of five short books (the so-called Megillot) that appear toward the end of the biblical writings. The canonicity of the book was questioned by some in ancient Judaism and early Christianity. It is one of five OT books that were at one time regarded as *antilegomena* (i.e., books “spoken against”). The problem with Esther was the absence of any direct mention of God. Some questioned whether a book that did not mention God could be considered sacred scripture. Attempts to resolve this by discovering the tetragrammaton (YHWH) encoded in the Hebrew text (e.g., in the initial letters of four consecutive words in the Hebrew text of Esth 5:4) are unconvincing, although they do illustrate how keenly the problem was felt by some. Martin Luther also questioned the canonicity of this book, objecting to certain parts of its content. Although no copy of Esther was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, this does not necessarily mean that the Qumran community did not regard it as canonical. It is possible that the absence of Esther from what has survived at Qumran is merely a coincidence. Although the book does not directly mention God, it would be difficult to read it without sensing the providence of God working in powerful, though at times subtle, ways to rescue his people from danger and possible extermination. The absence of mention of the name of God may be a deliberate part of the literary strategy of the writer.

2 tn Heb “it came about”; KJV, ASV “Now it came to pass.”

3 tn Where the Hebrew text has “Ahasuerus” (so KJV, NAB, NASB, NRSV) in this book the LXX has “Artaxerxes.” The ruler mentioned in the Hebrew text is Xerxes I (ca. 486-465 B.C.), and a number of modern English versions use “Xerxes” (e.g., NIV, NCV, CEV, NLT).

4 tn Heb “in the days of Ahasuerus, that Ahasuerus who used to rule...” The phrase “I am referring to” has been supplied to clarify the force of the third person masculine singular pronoun, which is functioning like a demonstrative pronoun.

5 sn The geographical extent of the Persian empire was vast. The division of Xerxes’ empire into 127 smaller provinces was apparently done for purposes of administrative efficiency.

6 tn Heb “Cush” (so NIV, NCV; KJV “Ethiopia”) referring to the region of the upper Nile in Africa. India and Cush (i.e., Ethiopia) are both mentioned in a tablet taken from the foundation of Xerxes’ palace in Persepolis that describes the extent of this empire. See ANET 316-17.

7 tn Heb “Shushan” (so KJV, ASV). Most recent English versions render this as “Susa.”

sn The city of Susa served as one of several capitals of Persia during this time; the other locations were Ecbatana, Babylon, and Persepolis. Partly due to the extreme heat of its summers, Susa was a place where Persian kings stayed mainly in the winter months. Strabo indicates that reptiles attempting to cross roads at midday died from the extreme heat (*Geography* 15.3.10-11).

the citadel.⁸ 1:3 in the third⁹ year of his reign he provided a banquet for all his officials and his servants. The army¹⁰ of Persia and Media¹¹ was present,¹² as well as the nobles and the officials of the provinces.

1:4 He displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his majestic greatness for a lengthy period of time¹³ – a hundred and eighty days, to be exact!¹⁴ 1:5 When those days¹⁵ were completed, the king then provided a seven-day¹⁶ banquet for all the people who were present¹⁷ in Susa the citadel, for those of highest standing to the most lowly.¹⁸ It was held in the court located in the garden of the royal palace. 1:6 The furnishings included linen and purple curtains hung by cords of the finest

8 tn The Hebrew word בִּירָה (*birah*) can refer to a castle or palace or temple. Here it seems to have in mind that fortified part of the city that might be called an acropolis or citadel. Cf. KJV “palace”; NAB “stronghold”; NASB “capital”; NLT “fortress.”

9 sn The third year of Xerxes’ reign would be ca. 483 B.C.

10 tc Due to the large numbers of people implied, some scholars suggest that the original text may have read “leaders of the army” (cf. NAB “Persian and Median aristocracy”; NASB “the army officers”; NIV “the military leaders”). However, there is no textual evidence for this emendation, and the large numbers are not necessarily improbable.

11 sn Unlike the Book of Daniel, the usual order for this expression in Esther is “Persia and Media” (cf. vv. 14, 18, 19). In Daniel the order is “Media and Persia,” indicating a time in their history when Media was in the ascendancy.

12 sn The size of the banquet described here, the number of its invited guests, and the length of its duration, although certainly immense by any standard, are not without precedent in the ancient world. C. A. Moore documents a Persian banquet for 15,000 people and an Assyrian celebration with 69,574 guests (*Esther* [AB], 6).

13 tn Heb “many days” (so KJV, ASV); NASB, NRSV “for many days.”

14 tn The words “to be exact!” are not in the Hebrew text but have been supplied in the translation to bring out the clarifying nuance of the time period mentioned. Cf. KJV “even an hundred and fourscore days.”

15 tc The Hebrew text of Esther does not indicate why this elaborate show of wealth and power was undertaken. According to the LXX these were “the days of the wedding” (αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ γάμου, *hai hēmerai tou gamou*), presumably the king’s wedding. However, a number of scholars have called attention to the fact that this celebration takes place just shortly before Xerxes’ invasion of Greece. It is possible that the banquet was a rallying for the up-coming military effort. See Herodotus, *Histories* 7.8. There is no reason to adopt the longer reading of the LXX here.

16 tc The LXX has ἕξ (*hex*, “six”) instead of “seven.” Virtually all English versions follow the reading of the MT here, “seven.”

17 tn Heb “were found.”

18 tn Heb “from the great and unto the small.”

linen¹ and purple wool on silver rings, alabaster columns, gold and silver couches² displayed on a floor made of valuable stones of alabaster, mother-of-pearl, and mineral stone. **1:7** Drinks³ were served in golden containers, all of which differed from one another. Royal wine was available in abundance at the king's expense. **1:8** There were no restrictions on the drinking,⁴ for the king had instructed all of his supervisors⁵ that they should do as everyone so desired.⁶ **1:9** Queen Vashti⁷ also gave a banquet for the women in King Ahasuerus' royal palace.

Queen Vashti is Removed from Her Royal Position

1:10 On the seventh day, as King Ahasuerus was feeling the effects of the wine,⁸ he ordered Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven eunuchs who attended him,⁹ **1:11** to bring Queen Vashti into the king's presence wearing her royal high turban. He wanted to show the people and the officials her beauty, for she was very attractive.¹⁰ **1:12** But Queen Vashti refused¹¹ to come at the king's bidding¹² con-

veyed through the eunuchs. Then the king became extremely angry, and his rage consumed¹³ him.

1:13 The king then inquired of the wise men who were discerners of the times – for it was the royal custom to confer with all those who were proficient in laws and legalities.¹⁴ **1:14** Those who were closest to him were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan. These men were the seven officials of Persia and Media who saw the king on a regular basis¹⁵ and had the most prominent offices¹⁶ in the kingdom. **1:15** The king asked,¹⁷ “By law,¹⁸ what should be done to Queen Vashti in light of the fact that she has not obeyed the instructions of King Ahasuerus conveyed through the eunuchs?”

1:16 Memucan then replied to the king and the officials, “The wrong of Queen Vashti is not against the king alone, but against all the officials and all the people who are throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. **1:17** For the matter concerning the queen will spread to all the women, leading them to treat their husbands with contempt, saying, ‘When King Ahasuerus gave orders to bring Queen Vashti into his presence, she would not come.’ **1:18** And this very day the noble ladies of Persia and Media who have heard the matter concerning the queen will respond in the same way to all the royal officials, and there will be more than enough contempt and anger! **1:19** If the king is so inclined,¹⁹ let a royal edict go forth from him, and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media that cannot be repealed,²⁰ that Vashti²¹ may not come into the presence of

¹ **sn** The *finest linen* was byssus, a fine, costly, white fabric made in Egypt, Palestine, and Edom, and imported into Persia (BDB 101 s.v. ביון; HALOT 115-16 s.v. ביון).

² **tn** The Hebrew noun מִטָּה (*mittah*) refers to a reclining couch (cf. KJV “beds”) spread with covers, cloth and pillow for feasting and carousing (Ezek 23:41; Amos 3:12; 6:4; Esth 1:6; 7:8). See BDB 641-42 s.v.; HALOT 573 s.v.

³ **tn** Heb “to cause to drink” (Hiphil infinitive construct of שָׁקַח, *shaqah*). As the etymology of the Hebrew word for “banquet” (מִשְׁתֶּה, *mishteh*, from שָׁתָה, *shatah*, “to drink”) hints, drinking was a prominent feature of ancient Near Eastern banquets.

⁴ **tn** Heb “the drinking was according to law; there was no one compelling.”

⁵ **tn** Heb “every chief of his house”; KJV “all the officers of his house”; NLT “his staff.”

⁶ **tn** Heb “according to the desire of man and man.”

⁷ **sn** Vashti is the name of Xerxes' queen according to the Book of Esther. But in the Greek histories of this period the queen's name is given as Amestris (e.g., Herodotus, *Histories* 9.108-13). The name Vashti does not seem to occur in the nonbiblical records from this period. Apparently the two women are not to be confused, but not enough is known about this period to reconcile completely the biblical and extrabiblical accounts.

⁸ **tn** Heb “as the heart of the king was good with the wine.” Here the proper name (King Ahasuerus) has been substituted for the title in the translation for stylistic reasons.

⁹ **tn** Heb “King Ahasuerus”; here the proper name has been replaced by the pronoun “him” in the translation for stylistic reasons. Cf. similarly NIV, NCV, CEV, NLT “King Xerxes.”

¹⁰ **tn** Heb “was good of appearance”; KJV “was fair to look on”; NAB “was lovely to behold.”

¹¹ **sn** Refusal to obey the king was risky even for a queen in the ancient world. It is not clear why Vashti behaved so rashly and put herself in such danger. Apparently she anticipated humiliation of some kind and was unwilling to subject herself to it, in spite of the obvious dangers. There is no justification in the biblical text for an ancient Jewish targumic tradition that the king told her to appear before his guests dressed in nothing but her royal high turban, that is, essentially naked.

¹² **tn** Heb “at the word of the king”; NASB “at the king's command.”

¹³ **tn** Heb “burned in him” (so KJV).

¹⁴ **tn** Heb “judgment” (so KJV); NASB, NIV “justice”; NRSV “custom.”

¹⁵ **tn** Heb “seers of the face of the king”; NASB “who had access to the king's presence.”

¹⁶ **tn** Heb “were sitting first”; NAB “held first rank in the realm.”

¹⁷ **tn** These words are not present in the Hebrew text, but have been supplied in the translation for clarity (cf. NIV, NCV, CEV, NLT, all of which supply similar phrases).

¹⁸ **tc** The location of the prepositional phrase “according to law” is somewhat unusual in the Hebrew text, but not so much so as to require emendation. Some scholars suggest deleting the phrase as an instance of dittography from the final part of the immediately preceding word in v. 14. Others suggest taking the phrase with the end of v. 14 rather than with v. 15. Both proposals, however, lack adequate justification.

¹⁹ **sn** Heb “If upon the king it is good”; KJV “If it please the king.” Deferential language was common in ancient Near Eastern court language addressing a despot; it occurs often in Esther.

²⁰ **sn** Laws...that cannot be repealed. On the permanence of the laws of Media and Persia see also Esth 8:8 and Dan 6:8, 12, 15.

²¹ **sn** Previously in this chapter the word “queen” accompanies Vashti's name (cf. vv. 9, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17). But here, in anticipation of her demotion, the title is dropped.

King Ahasuerus, and let the king convey her royalty to another¹ who is more deserving than she.² **1:20** And let the king's decision which he will enact be disseminated³ throughout all his kingdom, vast though it is.⁴ Then all the women will give honor to their husbands, from the most prominent to the lowly.⁵

1:21 The matter seemed appropriate to the king and the officials. So the king acted on the advice of Memucan. **1:22** He sent letters throughout all the royal provinces, to each province according to its own script and to each people according to its own language,⁶ that every man should be ruling his family⁷ and should be speaking the language of his own people.⁷

Esther Becomes Queen in Vashti's Place

2:1 When these things had been accomplished⁸ and the rage of King Ahasuerus had diminished, he remembered⁹ Vashti and what she had done and what had been decided¹⁰ against her. **2:2** The king's servants who at-

tended him said, "Let a search be conducted in the king's behalf for attractive young women.¹¹ **2:3** And let the king appoint officers throughout all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the attractive young women to Susa the citadel, to the harem¹² under the authority of Hegai, the king's eunuch who oversees the women, and let him provide whatever cosmetics they desire.¹³ **2:4** Let the young woman whom the king finds most attractive¹⁴ become queen in place of Vashti." This seemed like a good idea to the king,¹⁵ so he acted accordingly.

2:5 Now there happened to be a Jewish man in Susa the citadel whose name was Mordecai.¹⁶ He was the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjaminite, **2:6** who had been taken into exile from Jerusalem¹⁷ with the captives who had been carried into exile with Jeconiah¹⁸ king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken into exile. **2:7** Now he was acting as the guardian¹⁹ of Hadassah²⁰ (that is, Esther), the daughter of his uncle, for neither her father nor her mother was alive.²¹ This young woman was very attractive and had a beautiful figure.²² When her father

¹ **tn** *Heb* "her neighbor"; NIV "someone else."

² **tn** *Heb* "who is better than she." The reference is apparently to worthiness of the royal position as demonstrated by compliance with the king's wishes, although the word טוב (toḅ, "good") can also be used of physical beauty. Cf. NAB, NASB, NLT "more worthy than she."

³ **tn** *Heb* "heard"; KJV, NAB, NLT "published"; NIV, NRSV "proclaimed."

⁴ **tc** The phrase "vast though it is" is not included in the LXX, although it is retained by almost all English versions.

⁵ **sn** For purposes of diplomacy and governmental communication throughout the far-flung regions of the Persian empire the Aramaic language was normally used. Educated people throughout the kingdom could be expected to have competence in this language. But in the situation described in v. 22 a variety of local languages are to be used, and not just Aramaic, so as to make the king's edict understandable to the largest possible number of people.

⁶ **tn** *Heb* "in his house"; NIV "over his own household."

⁷ **tc** The final prepositional phrase is not included in the LXX, and this shorter reading is followed by a number of English versions (e.g., NAB, NRSV, NLT). Some scholars suggest the phrase may be the result of dittography from the earlier phrase "to each people according to its language," but this is not a necessary conclusion. The edict was apparently intended to reassert male prerogative with regard to two things (and not just one): sovereign and unquestioned leadership within the family unit, and the right of deciding which language was to be used in the home when a bilingual situation existed.

⁸ **tn** *Heb* "after these things" (so KJV, NASB, NRSV). The expression is very vague from a temporal standpoint, not indicating precisely just how much time might have elapsed. Cf. v. 21.

⁹ **sn** There may be a tinge of regret expressed in the king's remembrance of Vashti. There is perhaps a hint that he wished for her presence once again, although that was not feasible from a practical standpoint. The suggestions by the king's attendants concerning a replacement seem to be an effort to overcome this nostalgia. Certainly it was to their advantage to seek the betterment of the king's outlook. Those around him the most were probably the most likely to suffer the effects of his ire.

¹⁰ **tn** Or "decreed" (so NAB, NASB, NRSV); TEV "and about his proclamation against her."

¹¹ **tn** *Heb* "young women, virgins, good of form." The same phrase also occurs in v. 3.

¹² **tn** *Heb* "the house of the women" (so KJV, ASV). So also in vv. 9, 11, 13, and 14.

¹³ **tn** *Heb* "their ointments"; cf. NIV, CEV, NLT "beauty treatments."

¹⁴ **tn** *Heb* "who is good in the eyes of the king."

¹⁵ **tn** *Heb* "the matter was good in the eyes of the king." Cf. TEV "The king thought this was good advice."

¹⁶ **sn** *Mordecai* is a pagan name that reflects the name of the Babylonian deity Marduk. Probably many Jews of the period had two names, one for secular use and the other for use especially within the Jewish community. Mordecai's Jewish name is not recorded in the biblical text.

¹⁷ **map** For location see Map5-B1; Map6-F3; Map7-E2; Map8-F2; Map10-B3; JP1-F4; JP2-F4; JP3-F4; JP4-F4.

¹⁸ **sn** *Jecooniah* is an alternative name for Jehoiachin. A number of modern English versions use the latter name to avoid confusion (e.g., NIV, NCV, TEV, NLT).

¹⁹ **tn** According to HALOT 64 s.v. אָמָן the term אָמָן (*omen*) means: (1) "attendant" of children (Num 11:12; Isa 49:23); (2) "guardian" (2 Kgs 10:1, 5; Esth 2:7); (3) "nurse-maid" (2 Sam 4:4; Ruth 4:16); and (4) "to look after" (Isa 60:4; Lam 4:5). Older lexicons did not distinguish this root from the homonym אָמַן (*aman*, "to support; to confirm"; cf. BDB 52 s.v. אָמַן). This is reflected in a number of translations by use of a phrase like "brought up" (KJV, ASV, RSV, NIV) or "bringing up" (NASB).

²⁰ **sn** *Hadassah* is a Jewish name that probably means "myrtle"; the name *Esther* probably derives from the Persian word for "star," although some scholars derive it from the name of the Babylonian goddess Ishtar. Esther is not the only biblical character for whom two different names were used. Daniel (renamed Belteshazzar) and his three friends Haniah (renamed Shadrach), Mishael (renamed Meshach), and Azariah (renamed Abednego) were also given different names by their captors.

²¹ **tn** *Heb* "for there was not to her father or mother." This is universally understood to mean Esther's father and mother were no longer alive.

²² **tn** *Heb* "beautiful of form." The Hebrew noun תְּאוֹרָה (*to'ar*, "form; shape") is used elsewhere to describe the physical bodily shape of a beautiful woman (Gen 29:17; Deut 21:11; 1 Sam 25:3); see BDB 1061 s.v. Cf. TEV "had a good figure."

and mother died, Mordecai had raised her⁴ as if she were his own daughter.

2:8 It so happened that when the king's edict and his law became known² many young women were taken to Susa the citadel to be placed under the authority of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the royal palace³ to be under the authority of Hegai, who was overseeing the women. **2:9** This young woman pleased him,⁴ and she found favor with him. He quickly provided her with her cosmetics and her rations; he also provided her with the seven specially chosen⁵ young women who were from the palace. He then transferred her and her young women to the best quarters in the harem.⁶

2:10 Now Esther had not disclosed her people or her lineage,⁷ for Mordecai had instructed her not to do so.⁸ **2:11** And day after day Mordecai used to walk back and forth in front of the court of the harem in order to learn how Esther was doing⁹ and what might happen to her.

2:12 At the end of the twelve months that were required for the women,¹⁰ when the turn of each young woman arrived to go to King Ahasuerus – for in this way they had to fulfill their time of cosmetic treatment: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfume and various ointments used by women – **2:13** the woman would go to the king in the following way: Whatever she asked for would be provided for her to take with her from the harem to the royal palace. **2:14** In the evening she went, and in the morning she returned to a separate part¹¹ of the harem, to the authority of

Shaashgaz the king's eunuch who was overseeing the concubines. She would not go back to the king unless the king was pleased with her¹² and she was requested by name.

2:15 When it became the turn of Esther daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai (who had raised her as if she were his own daughter¹³) to go to the king, she did not request anything except what Hegai the king's eunuch, who was overseer of the women, had recommended. Yet Esther met with the approval of all who saw her. **2:16** Then Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus at his royal residence in the tenth¹⁴ month (that is, the month of Tebeth) in the seventh¹⁵ year of his reign. **2:17** And the king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she met with his loving approval¹⁶ more than all the other young women.¹⁷ So he placed the royal high turban on her head and appointed her queen¹⁸ in place of Vashti. **2:18** Then the king prepared a large banquet for all his officials and his servants – it was actually Esther's banquet. He also set aside a holiday for the provinces, and he provided for offerings at the king's expense.¹⁹

Mordecai Learns of a Plot against the King

2:19 Now when the young women were being gathered again,²⁰ Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate.²¹ **2:20** Esther was still not divulging her lineage or her people,²² just as

¹ **tn** Heb “had taken her to him.” The Hebrew verb לקח (laqakh, “to take”) describes Mordecai adopting Esther and treating her like his own daughter: “to take as one's own property” as a daughter (HALOT 534 s.v. לקח 6).

² **tn** Heb “were heard” (so NASB); NRSV “were (had been) NIV proclaimed.”

³ **tn** Heb “the house of the king.” So also in vv. 9, 13. Cf. NLT “the king's harem.”

⁴ **tn** Heb “was good in his eyes”; NLT “Hegai was very impressed with Esther.”

⁵ **tn** Heb “being looked at (with favor).”

⁶ **tn** Heb “of the house of the women” (so KJV, ASV). So also in vv. 11, 13, 14.

⁷ **tn** Cf. v. 20, where the same phrase occurs but with the word order reversed.

⁸ **tn** Heb “that she not tell” (NRSV similar); NASB “that she should not make them know.”

⁹ **tn** Heb “to know the peace of Esther.”

¹⁰ **tc** The LXX does not include the words “that were required for the women.”

tn Heb “to be to her according to the law of the women”; NASB “under the regulations for the women.”

¹¹ **tn** Heb “second.” The numerical adjective שני (sheniy, “second”) is difficult here. As a modifier for “house” in v. 14 the word would presumably refer to a second part of the harem, one which was under the supervision of a separate official. But in this case the definite article would be expected before “second” (cf. LXX τὸν δεῦτερον, *ton deuteron*). Some scholars emend the text to שנית (shenit, “a second time”), but this does not completely resolve the difficulty since the meaning remains unclear. The translation adopted above follows the LXX and understands the word to refer to a separate group of women in the king's harem, a group housed apparently in a distinct part of the residence complex.

¹² **tc** The LXX does not include the words “was pleased with her.”

¹³ **tn** Heb “who had taken her to him as a daughter”; NRSV “who had adopted her as his own daughter.”

¹⁴ **tc** The Greek mss Codex Alexandrinus (A) and Codex Vaticanus (B) read “twelfth” here.

¹⁵ **tc** The Syriac Peshitta reads “fourth” here.

¹⁶ **tn** Heb “grace and loyal love.” The expression is probably a hendiadys.

¹⁷ **tc** The LXX does not include the words “more than all the other young women.”

¹⁸ **tn** Heb “caused her to rule.”

¹⁹ **tc** The LXX does not include the words “and he provided for offerings at the king's expense.”

²⁰ **tc** The LXX does not include the words “Now when the young women were being gathered again.” The Hebrew word שנית (shenit, “a second time”) is difficult in v. 19, but apparently it refers to a subsequent regathering of the women to the harem.

²¹ **sn** That Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate apparently means that he was a high-ranking government official. It was at the city gate where important business was transacted. Being in this position afforded Mordecai an opportunity to become aware of the plot against the king's life, although the author does not include the particular details of how this information first came to Mordecai's attention.

²² **sn** That Esther was able so effectively to conceal her Jewish heritage suggests that she was not consistently observing Jewish dietary and religious requirements. As C. A. Moore observes, “In order for Esther to have concealed her ethnic and religious identity...in the harem, she must have eaten... dressed, and lived like a Persian rather than an observant Jewess” (Esther [AB], 28.) In this regard her public behavior stands in contrast to that of Daniel, for example.

Mordecai had instructed her.¹ Esther continued to do whatever Mordecai said, just as she had done when he was raising her.

2:21 In those days while Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan² and Teresh,³ two of the king's eunuchs who protected the entrance,⁴ became angry and plotted to assassinate⁵ King Ahasuerus. **2:22** When Mordecai learned of the conspiracy,⁶ he informed Queen Esther,⁷ and Esther told the king in Mordecai's behalf.⁸ **2:23** The king then had the matter investigated and, finding it to be so, had the two conspirators⁹ hanged on a gallows.¹⁰ It was then recorded in the daily chronicles in the king's presence.

Haman Conspires to Destroy the Jews

3:1 Some time later¹¹ King Ahasuerus promoted¹² Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, exalting him and setting his position¹³ above that of all the officials who were with him. **3:2** As a result,¹⁴ all the king's servants who were at the king's gate were bowing and paying homage to Haman, for the king had so

commanded. However, Mordecai did not bow,¹⁵ nor did he pay him homage.

3:3 Then the servants of the king who were at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why are you violating the king's commandment?" **3:4** And after they had spoken to him day after day¹⁶ without his paying any attention to them, they informed Haman to see whether this attitude on Mordecai's part would be permitted.¹⁷ Furthermore, he had disclosed to them that he was a Jew.¹⁸

3:5 When Haman saw that Mordecai was not bowing or paying homage to him, he¹⁹ was filled with rage. **3:6** But the thought of striking out against²⁰ Mordecai alone was repugnant to him, for he had been informed²¹ of the identity of Mordecai's people.²² So Haman sought to destroy all the Jews (that is, the people of Mordecai)²³ who were in all the kingdom of Ahasuerus.

3:7 In the first month (that is, the month of Nisan), in the twelfth year²⁴ of King Ahasuerus' reign, *pur*²⁵ (that is, the lot) was cast be-

¹ **tc** The LXX adds the words "to fear God."

² **tn** This individual is referred to as "Bigthana," a variant spelling of the name, in Esth 6:2.

³ **tc** The LXX does not include the names "Bigthan and Teresh" here.

⁴ **tn** *Heb* "guarders of the threshold"; NIV "who guarded the doorway."

⁵ **tn** *Heb* "sought to send a hand against"; CEV "decided to kill."

⁶ **sn** The text of Esther does not disclose exactly how Mordecai learned about the plot against the king's life. Ancient Jewish traditions state that Mordecai overheard conspiratorial conversation, or that an informant brought this information to him, or that it came to him as a result of divine prompting. These conjectures are all without adequate support from the biblical text. The author simply does not tell the source of Mordecai's insight into this momentous event.

⁷ **tc** The LXX simply reads "Esther" and does not include "the queen."

⁸ **tc** The LXX adds here "the things concerning the plot."

⁹ **tn** *Heb* "in the name of Mordecai" (so NRSV); NIV "giving credit to Mordecai."

¹⁰ **tn** *Heb* "they both were hanged." The referent (the two eunuchs who conspired against the king) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

¹¹ **tn** Or "on a pole"; KJV, ASV "on a tree."

¹² **tn** *Heb* "after these things" (so KJV, ASV); NAB, NASB, NIV "After these events."

¹³ **tn** *Heb* "made great"; NAB "raised...to high rank"; NIV "honored."

sn The promotion of Haman in 3:1 for reasons unexplained contrasts noticeably with 2:19-23, where Mordecai's contribution to saving the king's life goes unnoticed. The irony is striking.

¹⁴ **tn** *Heb* "chair"; KJV, NRSV "seat"; NASB "established his authority."

¹⁵ **tn** *Heb* "and" (so KJV, NASB, NRSV). Other modern English versions leave the conjunction untranslated here (NAB, NIV, NCV, NLT).

¹⁵ **sn** *Mordecai did not bow.* The reason for Mordecai's refusal to bow before Haman is not clearly stated here. Certainly the Jews did not refuse to bow as a matter of principle, as though such an action somehow violated the second command of the Decalogue. Many biblical texts bear witness to their practice of falling prostrate before people of power and influence (e.g., 1 Sam 24:8; 2 Sam 14:4; 1 Kgs 1:16). Perhaps the issue here was that Haman was a descendant of the Amalekites, a people who had attacked Israel in an earlier age (see Exod 17:8-16; 1 Sam 15:17-20; Deut 25:17-19).

¹⁶ **sn** Mordecai's position in the service of the king brought him into regular contact with these royal officials. Because of this association the officials would have found ample opportunity to complain of Mordecai's refusal to honor Haman by bowing down before him.

¹⁷ **tn** *Heb* "Will the matters of Mordecai stand?"; NASB "to see whether Mordecai's reason would stand."

¹⁸ **sn** This disclosure of Jewish identity is a reversal of the practice mentioned in 2:10, 20.

¹⁹ **tn** *Heb* "Haman." The pronoun ("he") was used in the translation for stylistic reasons. Repeating the proper name here is redundant according to contemporary English style, although the name is repeated in NASB and NRSV.

²⁰ **tn** *Heb* "to send a hand against"; KJV, NRSV "to lay hands on."

²¹ **tn** *Heb* "they had related to him." For stylistic reasons this has been translated as a passive construction.

²² **tc** The entire first half of the verse is not included in the LXX.

²³ **tc** This parenthetical phrase is not included in the LXX. Some scholars emend the MT reading נַחַם ("people") to נִיחַ ("with"), arguing that the phrase is awkwardly placed and syntactically inappropriate. While there is some truth to their complaint, the MT makes sufficient sense to be acceptable here, and is followed by most English versions.

²⁴ **sn** This year would be ca. 474 B.C. The reference to *first month* and *twelfth month* indicate that about a year had elapsed between this determination and the anticipated execution.

²⁵ **tn** The term פּוּר (*pur*, "lot") is an Akkadian loanword; the narrator therefore explains it for his Hebrew readers ("that is, the lot"). It is from the plural form of this word (i.e., *Purim*) that the festival celebrating the deliverance of the Jews takes its name (cf. 9:24, 26, 28, 31).

fore Haman in order to determine a day and a month.¹ It turned out to be the twelfth month (that is, the month of Adar).²

3:8 Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, “There is a particular people³ that is dispersed and spread among the inhabitants⁴ throughout all the provinces of your kingdom whose laws differ from those of all other peoples. Furthermore, they do not observe the king’s laws. It is not appropriate for the king to provide a haven for them.”⁵ **3:9** If the king is so inclined,⁶ let an edict be issued⁷ to destroy them. I will pay 10,000 talents of silver⁸ to be conveyed to the king’s treasuries for the officials who carry out this business.”

3:10 So the king removed his signet ring⁹ from his hand and gave it to Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, who was hostile toward the Jews. **3:11** The king replied to Haman, “Keep your money,¹⁰ and do with those people whatever you wish.”¹¹

3:12 So the royal scribes¹² were summoned in the first month, on the thirteenth day of the month. Everything Haman commanded was

written to the king’s satraps¹³ and governors who were in every province and to the officials of every people, province by province according to its script and people by people according to its language. In the name of King Ahasuerus it was written and sealed with the king’s signet ring. **3:13** Letters were sent by the runners to all the king’s provinces stating that¹⁴ they should destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jews, from youth to elderly, both women and children,¹⁵ on a particular day, namely the thirteenth day¹⁶ of the twelfth month (that is, the month of Adar), and to loot and plunder their possessions. **3:14** A copy of this edict was to be presented as law throughout every province; it was to be made known to all the inhabitants,¹⁷ so that they would be prepared for this day. **3:15** The messengers¹⁸ scurried forth¹⁹ with the king’s order.²⁰ The edict was issued in Susa the citadel. While the king and Haman sat down to drink, the city of Susa was in an uproar!²¹

Esther Decides to Risk Everything in order to Help Her People

4:1 Now when Mordecai became aware of all that had been done, he²² tore his garments and put on sackcloth and ashes. He went out into the city, crying out in a loud²³ and bitter voice. **4:2** But he went no further than the king’s gate, for no one was permitted to enter the king’s gate clothed in sackcloth. **4:3** Throughout each and every province where the king’s edict and law were announced²⁴ there was considerable²⁵ mourning among the Jews, along with fasting, weeping, and sorrow.²⁶

1 tc The LXX adds the following words: “in order to destroy in one day the race of Mordecai, and the lot fell on the fourteenth day of the month.” The LXX reading is included by NAB.

1b Heb “from day to day and from month to month” (so KJV, NASB).

2 tn Since v. 7 seems to interrupt the flow of the narrative, many scholars have suggested that it is a late addition to the text. But there is not enough evidence to warrant such a conclusion. Even though its placement is somewhat awkward, the verse supplies to the reader an important piece of chronological information.

3 tn Heb “one people.” Note the subtle absence at this point of a specific mention of the Jewish people by name.

4 tn Heb “peoples” (so NASB, NIV); NAB “nations”

5 tn Heb “to cause them to rest”; NASB “to let them remain”; NAB, NIV, NRSV “to tolerate them.”

6 tn Heb “If upon the king it is good”; KJV “If it please the king.”

7 tn Heb “let it be written” (so KJV, ASV); NASB “let it be decreed.”

8 sn The enormity of the monetary sum referred to here can be grasped by comparing this amount (10,000 talents of silver) to the annual income of the empire, which according to Herodotus (*Histories* 3.95) was 14,500 Euboic talents. In other words Haman is offering the king a bribe equal to two-thirds of the royal income. Doubtless this huge sum of money was to come (in large measure) from the anticipated confiscation of Jewish property and assets once the Jews had been destroyed. That such a large sum of money is mentioned may indicate something of the economic standing of the Jewish population in the empire of King Ahasuerus.

9 sn Possessing the king’s *signet ring* would enable Haman to act with full royal authority. The king’s ring would be used to impress the royal seal on edicts, making them as binding as if the king himself had enacted them.

10 tn Heb “the silver is given to you”; NRSV “the money is given to you”; CEV “You can keep their money.” C. A. Moore (*Esther* [AB], 40) understands these words somewhat differently, taking them to imply acceptance of the money on Xerxes’ part. He translates, “Well, it’s your money.”

11 tn Heb “according to what is good in your eyes”; NASB “do with them as you please.”

12 tn Or “secretaries” (so NIV, NRSV, NLT).

13 tn Or “princes” (so NLT); CEV “highest officials.”

14 tn The words “stating that” are not in the Hebrew text but have been supplied in the translation for clarity.

15 tn Heb “children and women.” The translation follows contemporary English idiom, which reverses the order.

16 tc The LXX does not include the words “on the thirteenth day.”

17 tn Heb “peoples” (so NASB, NRSV).

18 tn Heb “runners.” So also in 8:10, 14. Cf. NAB, NASB, NIV, NRSV “couriers.”

19 tn Or “went forth in haste” (so ASV).

20 tn Heb “with the word of the king.”

21 sn *The city of Susa was in an uproar.* This final statement of v. 15 is a sad commentary on the pathetic disregard of despots for the human misery and suffering that they sometimes inflict on those who are helpless to resist their power. Here, while common people braced for the reckless loss of life and property that was about to begin, the perpetrators went about their mundane activities as though nothing of importance was happening.

22 tn Heb “Mordecai.” The pronoun (“he”) was used in the translation for stylistic reasons. A repetition of the proper name here is redundant in terms of contemporary English style.

23 tn Heb “great.”

24 tn Heb “reached” (so NAB, NLT); KJV, NASB, NIV “came”; TEV “wherever the king’s proclamation was made known.”

25 tn Heb “great” (so KJV, NIV, NRSV, NLT); NAB “the Jews went into deep mourning.”

26 sn Although prayer is not specifically mentioned here, it is highly unlikely that appeals to God for help were not a part of this reaction to devastating news. As elsewhere in the book of Esther, the writer seems deliberately to keep religious actions in the background.

Sackcloth and ashes were characteristic¹ of many. **4:4** When Esther's female attendants and her eunuchs came and informed her about Mordecai's behavior,² the queen was overcome with anguish. Although she sent garments for Mordecai to put on so that he could remove his sackcloth, he would not accept them. **4:5** So Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs who had been placed at her service,³ and instructed him to find out the cause and reason for Mordecai's behavior.⁴ **4:6** So Hathach went to Mordecai at the plaza of the city in front of the king's gate. **4:7** Then Mordecai related to him everything that had happened to him, even the specific amount of money that Haman had offered to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews to be destroyed. **4:8** He also gave him a written copy of the law that had been disseminated⁵ in Susa for their destruction so that he could show it to Esther and talk to her about it. He also gave instructions that she should go to the king to implore him and petition him on behalf of her people. **4:9** So Hathach returned and related Mordecai's instructions⁶ to Esther.

4:10 Then Esther replied to Hathach with instructions for Mordecai: **4:11** "All the servants of the king and the people of the king's provinces know that there is only one law applicable⁷ to any man or woman who comes uninvited to the king in the inner court – that person will be put to death, unless the king extends to him the gold scepter, permitting him to be spared.⁸ Now I have not been invited to come to the king for some thirty days!"

4:12 When Esther's reply⁹ was conveyed to Mordecai, **4:13** he¹⁰ said to take back this answer to Esther: **4:14** "Don't imagine that be-

cause you are part of the king's household you will be the one Jew¹¹ who will escape. If you keep quiet at this time, liberation and protection for the Jews will appear¹² from another source,¹³ while you and your father's household perish. It may very well be¹⁴ that you have achieved royal status¹⁵ for such a time as this!"

4:15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: **4:16** "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa and fast in my behalf. Don't eat and don't drink for three days, night or day. My female attendants and I¹⁶ will also fast in the same way. Afterward I will go to the king, even though it violates the law.¹⁷ If I perish, I perish!"

4:17 So Mordecai set out to do everything that Esther had instructed him.

Esther Appeals to the King for Help

5:1 It so happened that on the third day Esther put on her royal attire and stood in the inner court of the palace,¹⁸ opposite the king's quarters.¹⁹ The king was sitting on his royal throne in the palace, opposite the entrance.²⁰ **5:2** When the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she met with his approval.²¹ The king extended to Esther the gold scepter that was in his hand, and Esther approached and touched the end of the scepter.

¹ **tn** *Heb* "were spread to many"; KJV, NIV "many (+ people NLT) lay in sackcloth and ashes."

² **tn** The words "about Mordecai's behavior" are not in the Hebrew text, but are supplied in translation for the sake of clarity. Cf. NIV, NLT "about Mordecai"; TEV, CEV "what Mordecai was doing."

³ **tn** *Heb* "whom he caused to stand before her"; NASB "whom the king had appointed to attend her."

⁴ **tn** *Heb* "concerning Mordecai, to know what this was, and why this was."

⁵ **tn** *Heb* "given" (so KJV); NASB, NRSV, TEV, NLT "issued"; NIV "published"; NAB "promulgated."

⁶ **tn** *Heb* "the words of Mordecai" (so KJV); NIV, NRSV, CEV "what Mordecai had said"; NLT "with Mordecai's message."

⁷ **tn** *Heb* "one is his law"; NASB "he (the king NIV) has but one law"

⁸ **tn** *Heb* "and he will live"; KJV, ASV "that he may live"; NIV "and spare his life."

⁹ **tn** *Heb* "the words of Esther"; TEV, NLT "Esther's message."

¹⁰ **tn** *Heb* "Mordecai." The pronoun ("he") was used in the translation for stylistic reasons. A repetition of the proper name here is redundant in terms of contemporary English style.

¹¹ **tn** *Heb* "from all the Jews"; KJV "more than all the Jews"; NIV "you alone of all the Jews."

¹² **tn** *Heb* "stand"; KJV, NASB, NIV, NLT "arise."

¹³ **tn** *Heb* "place" (so KJV, NIV, NLT); NRSV "from another quarter." This is probably an oblique reference to help coming from God. D. J. A. Clines disagrees; in his view a contrast between deliverance by Esther and deliverance by God is inappropriate (*Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther* [NCBC], 302). But Clines' suggestion that perhaps the reference is to deliverance by Jewish officials or by armed Jewish revolt is less attractive than seeing this veiled reference as part of the literary strategy of the book, which deliberately keeps God's providential dealings entirely in the background.

¹⁴ **tn** *Heb* "And who knows whether" (so NASB). The question is one of hope, but free of presumption. Cf. Jonah 3:9.

¹⁵ **tn** *Heb* "have come to the kingdom"; NRSV "to royal dignity"; NIV "to royal position"; NLT "have been elevated to the palace."

¹⁶ **tn** *Heb* "I and my female attendants." The translation reverses the order for stylistic reasons.

¹⁷ **tn** *Heb* "which is not according to the law" (so KJV, NASB); NAB "contrary to the law."

¹⁸ **tn** *Heb* "of the house of the king"; NASB, NRSV "of the king's palace."

¹⁹ **tn** *Heb* "the house of the king"; NASB "the king's rooms"; NIV, NLT "the king's hall." This expression is used twice in this verse. In the first instance, it is apparently the larger palace complex that is in view, whereas in the second instance the expression seems to refer specifically to the quarters from which the king governed.

²⁰ **tn** *Heb* "the entrance of the house" (so ASV).

²¹ **tn** *Heb* "she obtained grace in his eyes"; NASB "she obtained favor in his sight"; NIV "he was pleased with her"; NLT "he welcomed her."

5:3 The king said to her, “What is on your mind,¹ Queen Esther? What is your request? Even as much as half the kingdom will be given to you!”

5:4 Esther replied, “If the king is so inclined,² let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him.” 5:5 The king replied, “Find Haman quickly so that we can do as Esther requests.”

So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared. 5:6 While at the banquet of wine, the king said to Esther, “What is your request? It shall be given to you. What is your petition? Ask for as much as half the kingdom,³ and it shall be done!”

5:7 Esther responded,⁴ “My request and my petition is this: 5:8 If I have found favor in the king’s sight and if the king is inclined⁵ to grant my request and perform my petition, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet that I will prepare for them. At that time⁶ I will do as the king wishes.⁷”

Haman Expresses His Hatred of Mordecai

5:9 Now Haman went forth that day pleased and very much encouraged.⁸ But when Haman saw Mordecai at the king’s gate, and he did not rise nor tremble in his presence,⁹ Haman was filled with rage toward Mordecai. 5:10 But Haman restrained himself and went on to his home.

He then sent for his friends to join him,¹⁰ along with his wife Zeresh. 5:11 Haman then recounted to them his fabulous wealth,¹¹ his

many sons,¹² and how the king had magnified him and exalted him over the king’s other officials and servants. 5:12 Haman said, “Furthermore, Queen Esther invited¹³ only me to accompany the king to the banquet that she prepared! And also tomorrow I am invited¹⁴ along with the king. 5:13 Yet all of this fails to satisfy me so long as I have to see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.”

5:14 Haman’s¹⁵ wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, “Have a gallows seventy-five feet¹⁶ high built, and in the morning tell the king that Mordecai should be hanged on it. Then go with the king to the banquet contented.”¹⁷

It seemed like a good idea to Haman, so he had the gallows built.

The Turning Point: The King Honors Mordecai

6:1 Throughout that night the king was unable to sleep,¹⁸ so he asked for the book containing the historical records¹⁹ to be brought. As the records²⁰ were being read in the king’s presence, 6:2 it was found written that Mordecai had disclosed that Bigthana²¹ and Teresh, two of the king’s eunuchs who guarded the entrance, had plotted to assassinate²² King Ahasuerus.

6:3 The king asked, “What great honor²³ was bestowed on Mordecai because of this?”

¹ **tn** *Heb* “What to you?”; NAB, NIV NRSV “What is it, Queen Esther?”

² **tn** *Heb* “If upon the king it is good”; NASB “If it please the king.”

³ **sn** *As much as half the kingdom.* Such a statement would no doubt have been understood for the exaggeration that it clearly was. Cf. the similar NT scene recorded in Mark 6:23, where Herod makes a similar promise to the daughter of Herodias. In that case the request was for the head of John the Baptist, which is a lot less than half the kingdom.

⁴ **tn** *Heb* “answered and said.” This is somewhat redundant in contemporary English and has been simplified in the translation.

⁵ **tn** *Heb* “if upon the king it is good.” Cf. the similar expression in v. 4, which also occurs in 7:3; 8:5; 9:13.

⁶ **tn** *Heb* “and tomorrow” (so NASB); NAB, NRSV “and then.”

⁷ **tn** *Heb* “I will do according to the word of the king,” i.e., answer the question that he has posed. Cf. NCV “Then I will answer your question about what I want.”

⁸ **tn** *Heb* “happy and good of heart”; NASB “glad and pleased of heart”; NIV “happy and in high spirits.”

⁹ **tn** *Heb* “tremble from before him”; NIV “nor showed fear in his presence”; TEV “or show any sign of respect as he passed.”

¹⁰ **tn** *Heb* “sent and brought.” The expression is probably a hendiadys (a figure of speech in which a single idea is expressed through two words or phrases), in which case the two verbs could be translated simply as “summoned” (so NAB) or “sent for” (NASB).

¹¹ **tn** *Heb* “the glory of his riches” (so KJV, NASB); NRSV “the splendor of his riches.”

¹² **sn** According to Esth 9:10 Haman had ten sons.

¹³ **tn** *Heb* “caused to come”; KJV “did let no man come in... but myself.”

¹⁴ **tn** *Heb* “called to her”; KJV “invited unto her”; NAB “I am to be her guest.”

¹⁵ **tn** *Heb* “his”; the referent (Haman) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

¹⁶ **tn** *Heb* “fifty cubits.” Assuming a standard length for the cubit of about 18 inches (45 cm), this would be about seventy-five feet (22.5 meters), which is a surprisingly tall height for the gallows. Perhaps the number assumes the gallows was built on a large supporting platform or a natural hill for visual effect, in which case the structure itself may have been considerably smaller. Cf. NCV “a seventy-five foot platform”; CEV “a tower built about seventy-five feet high.”

¹⁷ **tn** Or “joyful”; NRSV “in good spirits”; TEV “happy.”

¹⁸ **tn** *Heb* “and the sleep of the king fled.” In place of the rather innocuous comment of the Hebrew text, the LXX reads here, “And the Lord removed the sleep from the king.” The Greek text thus understands the statement in a more overtly theological way than does the Hebrew text, although even in the Hebrew text there may be a hint of God’s providence at work in this matter. After all, this event is crucial to the later reversal of Haman’s plot to destroy the Jewish people, and a sympathetic reader is likely to look beyond the apparent coincidence.

¹⁹ **tn** *Heb* “the book of the remembrances of the accounts of the days”; NAB “the chronicle of notable events.”

²⁰ **tn** *Heb* “they”; the referent (the records) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

²¹ **tn** This individual is referred to as “Bigthan,” a variant spelling of the name, in Esth 2:21.

²² **tn** *Heb* “to send a hand against”; NASB “had sought to lay hands on.”

²³ **tn** *Heb* “honor and greatness.” The expression is a hendiadys (see the note on 5:10 for an explanation of this figure).

The king's attendants who served him responded, "Not a thing was done for him."

6:4 Then the king said, "Who is that in the courtyard?" Now Haman had come to the outer courtyard of the palace to suggest that the king hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had constructed for him. **6:5** The king's attendants said to him, "It is Haman who is standing in the courtyard." The king said, "Let him enter."

6:6 So Haman came in, and the king said to him, "What should be done for the man whom the king wishes to honor?" Haman thought to himself,¹ "Who is it that the king would want to honor more than me?" **6:7** So Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king wishes to honor, **6:8** let them bring royal attire which the king himself has worn and a horse on which the king himself has ridden – one bearing the royal insignia!² **6:9** Then let this clothing and this horse be given to one of the king's noble officials. Let him³ then clothe the man whom the king wishes to honor, and let him lead him about through the plaza of the city on the horse, calling⁴ before him, 'So shall it be done to the man whom the king wishes to honor!'"

6:10 The king then said to Haman, "Go quickly! Take the clothing and the horse, just as you have described, and do as you just indicated to Mordecai the Jew who sits at the king's gate. Don't neglect⁵ a single thing of all that you have said."

6:11 So Haman took the clothing and the horse, and he clothed Mordecai. He led him about on the horse throughout the plaza of the city, calling before him, "So shall it be done to the man whom the king wishes to honor!"

6:12 Then Mordecai again sat at the king's gate, while Haman hurried away to his home, mournful and with a veil over his head. **6:13** Haman then related to his wife Zeresh and to all his friends everything that had happened to him. These wise men,⁶ along with his wife

Zeresh, said to him, "If indeed this Mordecai before whom you have begun to fall is Jewish,⁷ you will not prevail against him. No, you will surely fall before him!"

6:14 While they were still speaking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived. They quickly brought Haman to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

The King Has Haman Executed

7:1 So the king and Haman came to dine⁸ with Queen Esther. **7:2** On the second day of the banquet of wine the king asked Esther, "What is your request, Queen Esther? It shall be granted to you. And what is your petition? Ask up to half the kingdom, and it shall be done!"

7:3 Queen Esther replied, "If I have met with your approval,⁹ O king, and if the king is so inclined, grant me my life as my request, and my people as my petition. **7:4** For we have been sold¹⁰ – both I and my people – to destruction and to slaughter and to annihilation! If we had simply been sold as male and female slaves, I would have remained silent, for such distress would not have been sufficient for troubling the king."

7:5 Then King Ahasuerus responded¹¹ to Queen Esther, "Who is this individual? Where is this person to be found who is presumptuous enough¹² to act in this way?"

7:6 Esther replied, "The oppressor and enemy is this evil Haman!"

Then Haman became terrified in the presence of the king and queen. **7:7** In rage the king arose from the banquet of wine and withdrew to the palace garden. Meanwhile, Haman stood to beg Queen Esther for his life,¹³ for he realized that the king had now determined a catastrophic end for him.¹⁴

7:8 When the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet of wine, Haman was

¹ *tn* Heb "said in his heart" (so ASV); NASB, NRSV "said to himself."

² *tc* The final comment ("one on whose head the royal crown has been") is not included in the LXX.

tn Heb "a royal crown on his head." The reference is to an official decoration or headdress for horses in royal service. See HALOT 506 s.v. בָּתָר; DCH 4:477 s.v. בָּתָר. Cf. TEV "a royal ornament"; CEV "a fancy headdress."

³ *tc* The present translation reads with the LXX וְהִלְבִּישׁוּ (v^hilbisho, "and he will clothe him") rather than the reading of the MT וְהִלְבִּישׁוּ (v^hilbishu, "and they will clothe"). The reading of the LXX is also followed by NAB, NRSV, TEV, CEV, and NLT. Likewise, the later verbs in this verse ("cause him to ride" and "call") are better taken as singulars rather than plurals.

⁴ *tn* Heb "and let them call" (see the previous note).

⁵ *tn* Heb "do not let fall"; NASB "do not fall short."

⁶ *tc* Part of the Greek tradition and the Syriac Peshitta understand this word as "friends," probably reading the Hebrew term רַחֲמַיִם (rakhmayy, "his friends") rather than the reading of the MT חַכְמָיִם (hakhmayy, "his wise men"). Cf. NLT "all his friends"; the two readings appear to be conflated by TEV as "those wise friends of his."

⁷ *tn* Heb "from the seed of the Jews"; KJV, ASV similar.

⁸ *tn* Heb "to drink"; NASB "to drink wine." The expression is a metaphor for lavish feasting, cf. NRSV "to feast"; KJV "to banquet."

⁹ *tn* Heb "If I have found grace in your eyes" (so also in 8:5); TEV "If it please Your Majesty."

¹⁰ *sn* The passive verb ("have been sold") is noncommittal and nonaccusatory with regard to the king's role in the decision to annihilate the Jews.

¹¹ *tc* The second occurrence of the Hebrew verb וַיֹּאמֶר (vayyomer, "and he said") in the MT should probably be disregarded. The repetition is unnecessary in the context and may be the result of dittography in the MT.

¹² *tn* Heb "has so filled his heart"; NAB "who has dared to do this."

¹³ *sn* There is great irony here in that the man who set out to destroy all the Jews now finds himself begging for his own life from a Jew.

¹⁴ *tn* Heb "for he saw that calamity was determined for him from the king"; NAB "the king had decided on his doom"; NRSV "the king had determined to destroy him."

throwing himself down¹ on the couch where Esther was lying.² The king exclaimed, “Will he also attempt to rape the queen while I am still in the building!”

As these words left the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face. **7:9** Harbona,³ one of the king’s eunuchs, said, “Indeed, there is the gallows that Haman made for Mordecai, who spoke out in the king’s behalf. It stands near Haman’s home and is seventy-five feet⁴ high.”

The king said, “Hang him on it!” **7:10** So they hanged Haman on the very gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. The king’s rage then abated.

The King Acts to Protect the Jews

8:1 On that same day King Ahasuerus gave the estate⁵ of Haman, that adversary of the Jews, to Queen Esther. Now Mordecai had come before the king, for Esther had revealed how he was related to her. **8:2** The king then removed his signet ring (the very one he had taken back from Haman) and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther designated Mordecai to be in charge of Haman’s estate.

8:3 Then Esther again spoke with the king, falling at his feet. She wept and begged him for mercy, that he might nullify the evil of Haman the Agagite which he had intended against the Jews.⁶ **8:4** When the king extended to Esther the gold scepter, she⁷ arose and stood before the king.

8:5 She said, “If the king is so inclined and if I have met with his approval and if the matter is agreeable to the king and if I am attractive to him, let an edict be written rescinding those recorded intentions of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite,⁸ which he wrote in order to destroy the Jews who are throughout all the king’s provinces. **8:6** For how can I watch the calamity that will befall my people, and how can I watch the destruction of my relatives?”⁹

8:7 King Ahasuerus replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, “Look, I have already given Haman’s estate to Esther, and he has been hanged on the gallows because he took hostile action¹⁰ against the Jews. **8:8** Now you write in the king’s name whatever in your opinion is appropriate concerning the Jews and seal it with the king’s signet ring. Any decree that is written in the king’s name and sealed with the king’s signet ring cannot be rescinded.

8:9 The king’s scribes were quickly¹¹ summoned – in the third month (that is, the month of Sivan), on the twenty-third day.¹² They wrote out¹³ everything that Mordecai instructed to the Jews and to the satraps and the governors and the officials of the provinces all the way from India to Ethiopia¹⁴ – a hundred and twenty-seven provinces in all – to each province in its own script and to each people in their own language, and to the Jews according to their own script and their own language. **8:10** Mordecai¹⁵ wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed it with the king’s signet ring. He then sent letters by couriers on horses, who rode royal horses that were very swift.

8:11 The king thereby allowed the Jews who were in every city to assemble and to stand up for themselves – to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any army of whatever people or province that should become their adversaries, including their women and children,¹⁶ and to confiscate their property. **8:12** This was to take place on a certain day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus – namely, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month of Adar). **8:13** A copy of the edict was to be presented as law throughout each and every province and made known to all peoples, so that the Jews might be prepared on that¹⁷ day to avenge themselves from their enemies.

8:14 The couriers who were riding the royal horses went forth with the king’s edict without delay.¹⁸ And the law was presented in Susa the citadel as well.

¹ *tn* Heb “falling”; NAB, NRSV “had (+ just TEV) thrown himself (+ down TEV).”

² *tn* Heb “where Esther was” (so KJV, NASB). The term “lying” has been supplied in the translation for stylistic reasons; cf. NAB, NIV, NRSV, NLT “was reclining.”

³ *sn* Cf. 1:10, where Harbona is one of the seven eunuchs sent by the king to summon Queen Vashti to his banquet.

⁴ *tn* Heb “fifty cubits.” See the note on this expression in Esth 5:14.

⁵ *tn* Heb “house” (so NAB, NASB, NRSV; also in vv. 2, 7). Cf. TEV “all the property.”

⁶ *sn* As in 7:4 Esther avoids implicating the king in this plot. Instead Haman is given sole responsibility for the plan to destroy the Jews.

⁷ *tn* Heb “Esther.” The pronoun (“she”) was used in the translation for stylistic reasons. A repetition of the proper name is redundant here in terms of contemporary English style.

⁸ *tc* The LXX does not include the expression “the Agagite.”

⁹ *tn* Heb “my kindred” (so KJV, NASB, NRSV); NAB “my race”; NIV “my family”; NLT “my people and my family.”

¹⁰ *tn* Heb “sent forth his hand”; NAB, NIV “attacked”; NLT “tried to destroy.” Cf. 9:2.

¹¹ *tn* Heb “in that time”; NIV “At once.”

¹² *sn* Cf. 3:12. Two months and ten days have passed since Haman’s edict to wipe out the Jews.

¹³ *tn* Heb “it was written”; this passive construction has been converted to an active one in the translation for clarity and for stylistic reasons.

¹⁴ *tn* Heb “Cush” (so NIV), referring to the region of the upper Nile in Africa. Cf. KJV and most other English versions “Ethiopia.”

¹⁵ *tn* Heb “He”; the referent (Mordecai) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

¹⁶ *tn* Heb “children and women.” As in 3:13, the translation follows contemporary English idiom, which reverses the order.

¹⁷ *tn* Heb “this” (so NASB); most English versions read “that” here for stylistic reasons.

¹⁸ *tn* Heb “making haste and hurrying”; KJV, ASV “being hastened and pressed.”

8:15 Now Mordecai went out from the king's presence in purple and white royal attire, with a large golden crown and a purple linen mantle. The city of Susa shouted with joy.¹ **8:16** For the Jews there was radiant happiness and joyous honor.² **8:17** Throughout every province and throughout every city where the king's edict and his law arrived, the Jews experienced happiness and joy, banquets and holidays. Many of the resident peoples³ pretended⁴ to be Jews, because the fear of the Jews had overcome them.⁵

The Jews Prevail over Their Enemies

9:1 In the twelfth month (that is, the month of Adar), on its thirteenth day, the edict of the king and his law were to be executed. It was on this day that the enemies of the Jews had supposed that they would gain power over them. But contrary to expectations, the Jews gained power over their enemies. **9:2** The Jews assembled themselves in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to strike out against those who were seeking their harm. No one was able to stand before them, for dread of them fell on all the peoples. **9:3** All the officials of the provinces, the satraps, the governors and those who performed the king's business were assisting the Jews, for the dread of Mordecai had fallen on them. **9:4** Mordecai was of high rank⁶ in the king's palace, and word about him was spreading throughout all the provinces. His influence⁷ continued to become greater and greater.

9:5 The Jews struck all their enemies with the sword, bringing death and destruction, and they did as they pleased with their enemies. **9:6** In Susa the citadel the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. **9:7** In addition, they

also killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, **9:8** Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, **9:9** Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha, **9:10** the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. But they did not confiscate their property.

9:11 On that same day the number of those killed in Susa the citadel was brought to the king's attention. **9:12** Then the king said to Queen Esther, "In Susa the citadel the Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman! What then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? What is your request? It shall be given to you. What other petition do you have? It shall be done."

9:13 Esther replied, "If the king is so inclined, let the Jews who are in Susa be permitted to act tomorrow also according to today's law, and let them hang the ten sons of Haman on the gallows."

9:14 So the king issued orders for this to be done. A law was passed in Susa, and the ten sons of Haman were hanged. **9:15** The Jews who were in Susa then assembled on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and they killed three hundred men in Susa. But they did not confiscate their property.

9:16 The rest of the Jews who were throughout the provinces of the king assembled in order to stand up for themselves and to have rest from their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand⁸ of their adversaries, but they did not confiscate their property. **9:17** All of this happened on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. They then rested on the fourteenth day and made it a day for banqueting and happiness.

The Origins of the Feast of Purim

9:18 But the Jews who were in Susa assembled on the thirteenth and fourteenth days, and rested on the fifteenth, making it a day for banqueting and happiness. **9:19** This is why the Jews who are in the rural country – those who live in rural cities – set aside the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a holiday for happiness, banqueting, holiday, and sending gifts to one another.

9:20 Mordecai wrote these matters down and sent letters to all the Jews who were throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, **9:21** to have them observe the fourteenth and the fifteenth day of the month of Adar each year **9:22** as the time when the Jews gave themselves rest from their enemies – the month when their trouble was turned to happiness and their mourning to a holiday. These were to be days of banqueting, happi-

¹ *tn* *Heb* "shouted and rejoiced." The expression is a hendiadys (see the note on 5:10 for an explanation of this figure).

² *tn* *Heb* "light and gladness and joy and honor" (so NASB). The present translation understands the four terms to be a double hendiadys.

³ *tn* *Heb* "peoples of the land" (so NASB); NIV "people of other nationalities"; NRSV "peoples of the country."

⁴ *tn* *Heb* "were becoming Jews"; NAB "embraced Judaism." However, the Hitpael stem of the verb is sometimes used of a feigning action rather than a genuine one (see, e.g., 2 Sam 13:5, 6), which is the way the present translation understands the use of the word here (cf. NEB "professed themselves Jews"; NRSV "professed to be Jews"). This is the only occurrence of this verb in the Hebrew Bible, so there are no exact parallels. However, in the context of v. 17 the motivation of their conversion (*Heb* "the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them") should not be overlooked. The LXX apparently understood the conversion described here to be genuine, since it adds the words "they were being circumcised and" before "they became Jews."

⁵ *tn* *Heb* "had fallen upon them" (so NRSV); NIV "had seized them."

⁶ *tn* *Heb* "great"; NRSV "powerful"; NIV "prominent"; NCV "very important."

⁷ *tn* *Heb* "the man Mordecai" (so NASB, NRSV).

⁸ *tc* For this number much of the Greek *MS* tradition reads "fifteen thousand." The Lucianic Greek recension reads "70,100."

ness, sending gifts to one another, and providing for the poor.

9:23 So the Jews committed themselves to continue what they had begun to do and to what Mordecai had written to them. **9:24** For Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised plans against the Jews to destroy them. He had cast *pur* (that is, the lot) in order to afflict and destroy them. **9:25** But when the matter came to the king's attention, the king¹ gave written orders that Haman's² evil intentions that he had devised against the Jews should fall on his own head. He and his sons were hanged on the gallows. **9:26** For this reason these days are known as *Purim*, after the name of *pur*. **9:27** Therefore, because of the account found in this letter and what they had faced in this regard and what had happened to them, the Jews established as binding on themselves, their descendants, and all who joined their company that they should observe these two days without fail, just as written and at the appropriate time on an annual basis. **9:28** These days were to be remembered and to be celebrated in every generation and in every family, every province, and every city. The Jews were not to fail to observe these days of Purim; the remembrance of them was not to cease among their descendants.

9:29 So Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew wrote with full authority to confirm this second³ letter about Purim. **9:30** Letters were sent⁴ to all the Jews in the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the empire of Ahasuerus – words of true peace⁵ – **9:31** to establish these days of Purim in their proper times, just as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had established, and just as they had established both for themselves and their descendants, matters pertaining to fasting and lamentation. **9:32** Esther's command established these matters of Purim, and the matter was officially recorded.⁶

Mordecai's Fame Increases

10:1 King Ahasuerus then imposed forced labor on the land and on the coastlands of the sea. **10:2** Now all the actions carried out under his authority and his great achievements, along with an exact statement concerning the greatness of Mordecai, whom the king promoted, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles⁷ of the Kings of Media and Persia? **10:3** Mordecai the Jew was second only to King Ahasuerus. He was the highest-ranking⁸ Jew, and he was admired by his numerous relatives.⁹ He worked enthusiastically¹⁰ for the good of his people and was an advocate for the welfare of¹¹ all his descendants.¹²

⁷ **tn** Or "the Book of the Official Records."

⁸ **tn** *Heb* "great among the Jews" (so KJV, NASB); NIV "preeminent among the Jews"; NRSV "powerful among the Jews."

⁹ **tn** *Heb* "brothers"; NASB "kinsmen"; NIV "fellow Jews."

¹⁰ **tn** *Heb* "he was seeking"; NAB "as the promoter of his people's welfare."

¹¹ **tn** *Heb* "he was speaking peace to"; NRSV "and interceded for the welfare of."

¹² **sn** A number of additions to the Book of Esther appear in the apocryphal (or deuterocanonical) writings. These additions supply further information about various scenes described in the canonical book and are interesting in their own right. However, they were never a part of the Hebrew Bible. The placement of this additional material in certain Greek manuscripts of the Book of Esther may be described as follows. At the beginning of Esther there is an account (= chapter 11) of a dream in which Mordecai is warned by God of a coming danger for the Jews. In this account two great dragons, representing Mordecai and Haman, prepare for conflict. But God responds to the prayers of his people, and the crisis is resolved. This account is followed by another one (= chapter 12) in which Mordecai is rewarded for disclosing a plot against the king's life. After Esth 3:13 there is a copy of a letter from King Artaxerxes authorizing annihilation of the Jews (= chapter 13). After Esth 4:17 the account continues with a prayer of Mordecai (= part of chapter 13), followed by a prayer of Esther (= chapter 14), and an account which provides details about Esther's appeal to the king in behalf of her people (= chapter 15). After Esth 8:12 there is a copy of a letter from King Artaxerxes in which he denounces Haman and his plot and authorizes his subjects to assist the Jews (= chapter 16). At the end of the book, following Esth 10:3, there is an addition which provides an interpretation to Mordecai's dream, followed by a brief ascription of genuineness to the entire book (= chapter 11).

¹ **tn** *Heb* "he"; the referent (the king) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

² **tn** *Heb* "his"; the referent (Haman) has been specified in the translation for clarity.

³ **tc** The LXX and the Syriac Peshitta omit the word "second."

⁴ **tc** The present translation is based on the Niphal form וַיִּשְׁלַח (*vayyishlahk*, "were sent"; so also NRSV, TEV, CEV, NLT) rather than the reading of the MT וַיִּשְׁלַח (*vayyishlahk*, Qal, "and he sent"). The subject of the MT verb would have to be Mordecai (cf. NAB, NIV, NCV), but this is problematic in light of v. 29, where both Esther and Mordecai are responsible for the letters.

⁵ **tn** *Heb* "peace and truth." The expression is probably a hendiadys (see the note on 5:10 for an explanation of this figure).

⁶ **tn** *Heb* "written in the book" (so NASB); NIV, NLT "written down in the records"; NRSV "recorded in writing."