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Esther

The book of Esther is a story about difficult problems that the ancient Jewish people had to face. In Esther's time, most Jews did not live in Israel or Judah. They had been defeated by the Babylonian Empire. So many Jews had left or were forced to leave the homeland that God had promised them. Now they were scattered throughout the world, living under foreign rulers. They almost did not survive as a nation. In this story we see some of the difficulties they faced in living far from home as unwanted strangers.

The situation was especially difficult for Jewish girls and women. Many of them had lost their husbands and fathers. They faced a dangerous world on their own. Many were forced to marry non-Jewish men. One of these women was Esther.

Esther was beautiful. There is no photograph or painting of her. But the Bible gives us a good idea of her beauty. She won the heart of a Persian king. And this was a king who had his choice of the most beautiful young women in his huge kingdom. The book of Esther is about how God used Esther's beauty for his purposes.

Esther lived with her cousin Mordecai in Susa, an important city in Persia. Through an amazing series of events, she became queen of Persia. This opened the door for a Jewish woman in a foreign land to influence one of the most powerful kings in the world.

Mordecai was faithful to God's laws, even while living far away from the land of Israel. In fact, he was so faithful to the Law of Moses that he was called "Mordecai the Jew". In Persia, this name marked him as a follower of the Lord God. And this made him unpopular with some people.

Faithful Mordecai ran into trouble with a selfish Persian official named Haman. He was angry that Mordecai would not bow down to him. Haman wanted to kill Mordecai. But Mordecai was not the only Jew that Haman put in danger. Haman used his power to threaten the lives of all the Jews in the Persian Empire! He told the king that Jews refused to obey Persian laws. And then Haman used a bribe to persuade the king to command that all the Jews be killed. Now, Esther had to use her position as queen to save her people from mass murder.

Would Esther be brave enough to stand up for her people? Would God use her to save his people, or would he let them die scattered throughout the world?

The end of this story tells how the Jewish holiday called Purim began (9:24-32).

The book of Esther tells how a Jewish woman...

Is made the new queen of Persia (1:1 – 2:23)

Hides her Jewish identity, while Haman threatens all Jewish people (3:1 – 4:17)

Makes a plan to save her people (5:1 – 8:17)

Acts to save her people (9:1 – 10:3)

Queen Vashti Disobeys the King

1 This is what happened during the time when Xerxes* was king of Persia. He ruled 127 territories from India to Ethiopia. ² King Xerxes ruled from his throne in the capital city of Susa.

³ In the third year after he became king, he gave a party for all his officials and leaders. The army leaders from Persia and Media were there, as well as the important leaders and officials from the other territories Xerxes ruled.

⁴ The party lasted 180 days, and King Xerxes used this whole time to show off the great wealth of his kingdom and the amazing beauty and riches under his control. ⁵ After this, the king gave another party that lasted for seven days. It was at the front of the palace in an open area surrounded by gardens. All the men in the capital city of Susa were invited, no matter how important they were. ⁶ This garden area was shaded with white and blue linen material. The material was hung with cords of white linen and purple wool tied to silver rings on marble pillars. There were couches made of gold and silver. They were sitting on a floor made from expensive stones and polished shells of different colours set in white marble. ⁷ Wine was served in gold cups, and every cup was different. The king was very generous with his wine, so there was plenty for everyone. ⁸ The king allowed all the guests to have as much wine as they wanted. He had ordered his servants to let the guests decide how much to drink.

⁹ At the same time, Queen Vashti also gave a party for the women inside the palace of King Xerxes.

¹⁰ On the seventh day of the party, King Xerxes was feeling very happy

from all the wine he had drunk. He gave a command to his seven personal servants, Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carcas. ¹¹ He commanded them to bring Queen Vashti to him, wearing her royal crown. She was very beautiful, and he wanted to show off her beauty to the leaders and important people there.

¹² But when the servants told Queen Vashti about the king's command, she refused to come. This made the king very angry. ¹³ It was a custom for the king to ask for advice from those who knew the history of the Persian courts. So the king talked with his experts on the law and legal matters. ¹⁴ The ones he trusted most were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan—seven high officials of Persia and Media. As the highest officials in the kingdom, they had special privileges to see the king. ¹⁵ The king asked them, "What does the law say should be done to Queen Vashti? She refused to obey an order from the king that was sent to her through his servants."

¹⁶ Then Memucan answered the king with the other officials listening: "Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only to the king, but also to all his officials and the people in all the territories ruled by King Xerxes. ¹⁷ I say this because all the other women will hear about what Queen Vashti has done. Then they will stop showing respect to their husbands. They will say, 'King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought to him, but she refused to come.' ¹⁸ Today the wives of the Persian and Median leaders will hear what the queen did, and they will do as she did. They will refuse to obey their husbands, and their disrespect will cause nothing but anger.

* **1:1 Xerxes** Hebrew, "Ahasuerus". He was king of Persia about 485-465 BC.

¹⁹“So if it pleases the king, I have a suggestion. Give a royal command that will become one of the laws of Persia and Media that cannot be changed. The law should say that Vashti must never again appear before King Xerxes. Also, the king should choose someone more worthy to take her place as queen. ²⁰Then when this command is announced throughout your great kingdom, all the women will give respect to their husbands, rich and poor alike.”

²¹The king and his important officials were happy with this advice, so King Xerxes did as Memucan suggested. ²²King Xerxes sent letters to all parts of the kingdom. They were written in all the different languages of the people and in the form of writing used in each territory. These letters announced that every man should rule his own household and decide to use his own language.[†]

Esther Becomes Queen

2 Later, King Xerxes stopped feeling so angry, but he remembered Vashti. He thought about what she had done and the law he had made because of her. ²Then the king’s personal servants made a suggestion. They said, “Let’s begin a search to find beautiful young women for the king. ³Let the king choose supervisors in every part of his kingdom to find these beautiful women and bring them all to the capital city of Susa. They will be put under the care of Hegai, the eunuch in charge of the king’s women in the palace area. He will make sure that they all receive beauty treatments. ⁴Then let the young woman who is most pleasing to the king become the new

queen in place of Vashti.” The king liked this idea, so he did as they suggested.

⁵During this time, a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin named Mordecai was living in the capital city of Susa. He was the son of Jair, son of Shimei, who was the son of Kish. ⁶Mordecai had been carried away from Jerusalem as a captive by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. He was part of the group that was taken away to Babylon with King Jehoiachin[‡] of Judah. ⁷Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, who was also called Esther. She didn’t have a father or a mother, so Mordecai took care of her. He had adopted her as his own daughter after her father and mother died. Hadassah had a lovely figure and was very pretty.

⁸Now when the king’s command was announced, many young women were brought to the capital city of Susa. Esther was one of these women. So, like the others, she was taken to the palace area and put under the care of Hegai, who was in charge of the king’s women. ⁹She pleased Hegai so much that she became his favourite. So right away he ordered beauty treatments and special food for her. He chose seven servant girls from the king’s palace and gave them to Esther. Then he moved her and her seven servants to the nicest part of the women’s living area. ¹⁰Mordecai had warned Esther not to tell anyone she was a Jew, so she said nothing to anyone about her family. ¹¹Every day Mordecai walked back and forth in front of the area where the king’s women lived. He did this so that he could see how Esther was doing and what was happening to her.

[†]**1:22 and decide ... language** This last part of the verse is not in the ancient Greek version.

[‡]**2:6 Jehoiachin** The Hebrew text has “Jeconiah”, another name for King Jehoiachin, who was taken prisoner in the year 597 BC.

¹²All these young women had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments—six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and ointments. Then they each had a turn to spend a night with King Xerxes. ¹³When her time came to be with the king, she could choose to wear or take whatever she wanted from the women's living area. ¹⁴She went into the king's private area in the evening. And in the morning she was taken to a different part of the women's living area. There she was placed under the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch in charge of his wives. She would not go back to the king again unless he was so pleased with her that he asked for her by name.

¹⁵The time came for Esther to go to the king. She was the one Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail. She decided what to wear and what to take with her by following the advice of Hegai, the king's officer in charge of the women. And she delighted everyone who saw her. ¹⁶So Esther was taken to King Xerxes in the palace. This was during Xerxes' seventh year as king, in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth.

¹⁷The king loved Esther more than any of the other women. Of all the young women who were brought to Susa, Esther was the one who pleased him most, and she became his favourite. So King Xerxes put a crown on Esther's head and made her queen in place of Vashti. ¹⁸In Esther's honour the king gave a big party for all his important leaders and officials. He made it a holiday in all the territories and sent out gifts to the people, showing what a generous king he was.

Mordecai Learns About an Evil Plan

¹⁹Mordecai was sitting near the king's gate when the young women were brought together a second time. ²⁰Es-

ther still had not told anyone about her family background. She kept secret the fact that she was a Jew, which is what Mordecai had told her to do. She continued to obey Mordecai as she had done when he was raising her.

²¹Two of the king's officers, Bigthana and Teresh, guarded the doorway to the king's private area. During the time that Mordecai was sitting near the king's gate, these two men became angry with King Xerxes and began making plans to kill him. ²²But Mordecai learned about these plans and told Queen Esther. And Esther took Mordecai's report to the king. ²³The king made sure this report from Mordecai was true. Then he ordered the two officers to be hanged. The king ordered that all this be written down in his book of records, and he watched to see that it was done.

Haman's Plan to Destroy the Jews

3 Some time later, King Xerxes honoured a man named Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite. The king promoted Haman to the most important position among all his officials. ²The king ordered all the officials who served at his palace to bow down and give honour to Haman. But Mordecai refused to bow down or give honour to him. ³Then the king's officials who served at his palace asked Mordecai, "Why don't you obey the king's command to bow down to Haman?"

⁴Day after day, the king's officials spoke to Mordecai, but he refused to obey the command. He said he was a Jew, and that meant he could not bow down to Haman. So they told this to Haman to see if he would do anything about Mordecai. ⁵When Haman saw that Mordecai refused to bow down to him or give him honour, he was very angry. ⁶When Haman learned that Morde-

cai was a Jew, he was not satisfied to kill only Mordecai. He also wanted to find a way to destroy all his people, the Jews, throughout Xerxes' kingdom.

⁷This was in the twelfth year of King Xerxes' rule, in the first month, the month of Nisan. To find out the best time to do what he planned, Haman ordered his servants to use something called "purim", that is, lots. The lots showed that the best time to do what he planned would be in the twelfth month, the month of Adar. ⁸So then Haman went to King Xerxes and said, "There is a certain group of people scattered through all the territories of your kingdom who keep themselves separate from everyone else. Their customs are different from those of all the other people, and they don't obey the king's laws. So it is not good for you to keep letting them live in your kingdom.

⁹"If it pleases the king, I have a suggestion: give a command to destroy these people. If you will do this, I can promise you that those who take care of your business will receive 340,000 kilogrammes^f of silver for the king's treasury."

¹⁰So the king took the official ring off his finger and gave it to this enemy of the Jews, Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite. ¹¹The king said to Haman, "Do what you want with these people. And you can keep the money you take from them."

¹²So on the thirteenth day of the first month, Haman called together the king's secretaries. He told them to write down his orders and send them in letters to the regional rulers, the governors of all the territories and the leaders of the differ-

ent groups of people. They wrote in all the different languages of the people and in the form of writing used in each territory. They sent these letters in the name of King Xerxes himself and sealed them using the king's own ring.

¹³Messengers carried the letters to all the king's territories. The letters gave the order to kill, to destroy and to completely wipe out all Jews, young and old, including women and children. This was to be done in a single day, the thirteenth day of Adar, the twelfth month. The order also said to take everything the Jews owned.

¹⁴A copy of the letters with the order was to be sent to every territory. The order was to become law and be announced to the people of every nation living in the kingdom. Then everyone would be ready for that day. ¹⁵At the king's command the messengers hurried off with the letters. The order was also announced in the palace area of Susa. Then the king and Haman sat down to drink together. But the people in the city were confused by the order they had heard.

Mordecai Persuades Esther to Help

4 When Mordecai heard about all that had been done, he was deeply troubled. He tore his clothes off and put on rags. He put dirt on his head[§] and went out into the city crying loudly. ²But Mordecai went only as far as the king's gate. No one was allowed to enter the gate dressed in rags. ³In every territory where the king's command had gone, there was great sorrow among the Jews. They were fasting and crying loudly.

^f3:9 340,000 kilogrammes Literally, "10,000 talents".

[§]4:1 tore ... head These were common ways for people in ancient times to show strong feelings such as sorrow or anger. Also in verse 3.

Many of them put dirt on their heads and were lying on the ground wearing rags.

⁴Esther's slave women and men servants came to her and told her about Mordecai. This made Queen Esther very sad and upset. She sent clothes for Mordecai to put on instead of the rags, but he would not accept them. ⁵Then Esther called Hathach, one of the king's servants who had been chosen to serve her. She told him to find out what was bothering Mordecai and why he refused the clothes. ⁶So Hathach went out to where Mordecai was in the city square in front of the king's gate. ⁷Mordecai told Hathach everything that had happened to him. Mordecai told him about the amount of money Haman had promised to put into the king's treasury for killing all the Jews. ⁸Mordecai also gave Hathach a copy of the king's order to kill the Jews. The order had been sent out all over the city of Susa. He wanted Hathach to show it to Esther and tell her everything. And he told him to encourage Esther to go to the king and beg him for mercy for Mordecai and her people.

⁹Hathach went back to Esther and told her everything Mordecai had said.

¹⁰Then Esther told Hathach to go back to Mordecai and give him this message: ¹¹"The king has one rule about meeting with him, and his officials and all the people of the territories know it. The rule is that any man or woman who goes to the king without being invited must be put to death, unless the king holds out his gold sceptre to spare them. And the last time I was called in to see the king was 30 days ago."

¹²When Mordecai received this message from Esther, ¹³he sent her this answer: "Don't think that just because you live in the king's palace you will be the only Jew to escape. ¹⁴If you keep quiet now, help and freedom for the Jews will

come from another place. But you and your father's family will all die. And who knows, maybe you have been chosen to be the queen for such a time as this."

¹⁵⁻¹⁶Then Esther sent this answer to Mordecai: "Mordecai, go and get all the Jews in Susa together, and fast for me. Don't eat or drink for three days and nights. My servant girls and I will fast too. Then I will go to see the king, even knowing it is against the law. If I die, I die."

¹⁷So Mordecai went away and did everything Esther told him to do.

Esther Speaks to the King

5 On the third day of fasting, Esther put on her royal robes. She went and stood in the inside area of the king's palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his throne in the hall, facing the entrance. ²When the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was very pleased. He held out his gold sceptre to her. So Esther went in and touched the end of the sceptre.

³The king asked, "What can I do for you, Queen Esther? Tell me what you want. I will give you anything you ask for, even half my kingdom."

⁴Esther said, "My king, I have prepared a banquet for you and for Haman. If it pleases you, would you come today and be my guests?"

⁵Then the king said to his servants, "Bring Haman here right away so we can do what Esther asks."

So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared for them. ⁶While they were drinking wine, the king said to Esther, "Now, what is it you want? I will give it to you. Just tell me what it is, and it will be yours, up to half my kingdom."

⁷Esther answered, "I do have something I want to ask for. ⁸If my king

is pleased with me and thinks it good to give me what I ask for, please come again tomorrow with Haman to the banquet I will prepare for you. Then, my king, I will explain to you what I want.”

Haman's Anger at Mordecai

⁹Haman left the king's palace that day very happy and in a good mood. But when he saw Mordecai at the king's gate, he became very angry because Mordecai did not show any sign of respect when Haman walked by—he did not tremble in fear. ¹⁰But Haman controlled his anger and went home. Then he called together his friends and his wife Zeresh. ¹¹Haman started talking about how rich he was and how many sons he had. He told them about all the ways the king had honoured him and how the king had promoted him higher than all the king's other leaders and officials. ¹²“And that's not all,” Haman added. “I'm the only one Queen Esther invited to be with the king at the banquet she gave. And she has invited me to come with the king again tomorrow. ¹³But I cannot feel good about any of this as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate.”

¹⁴Then Haman's wife Zeresh and all his friends had an idea. They said, “Tell someone to build a high platform 22 metres** tall. In the morning, ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on it. Then you will feel better about going to the banquet with the king.”

Haman liked this idea, so he ordered someone to build the platform.

Mordecai Is Honoured

6 That same night, the king could not sleep. So he told a servant to bring the official book of records and read to him about the things that had happened

during his reign. ²One part he read told about how Mordecai had stopped a plan to kill King Xerxes. Two of the king's officers, Bigthana and Teresh, who guarded the king's doorway, were planning to kill him. But Mordecai heard what they had planned and told someone about it.

³The king asked, “What honour and reward did Mordecai receive for this?”

The servants answered the king, “Nothing has been done for him.”

⁴Now Haman had just entered the outer area of the king's palace. He had come to ask the king to hang Mordecai on the platform he had ordered to be built. The king said, “Who is that outside the entrance?” ⁵His servants said, “That is Haman standing out there.”

The king said, “Tell him to come in.”

⁶When Haman came in, the king asked him, “What should I do for a man I want to honour?”

Haman thought to himself, “He must be talking about me! Who else would the king want to honour?”

⁷So Haman answered the king, “This is what the king should do for the man he wants to honour: ⁸Have the servants bring a special robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden. On the horse's head should be a royal crown. ⁹Then put one of the king's most important officials in charge of the robe and the horse. This official should put the robe on the man the king wants to honour. And he should lead him on the horse through the city streets. As he leads him, let him announce, ‘This is what the king does for the man he wants to honour!’”

¹⁰“Go quickly,” the king commanded Haman. “Get the robe and the horse and do what you suggested. Don't leave anything out. Do it all for Mordecai the Jew. He is sitting near the king's gate.”

**5:14 22 metres Literally, “50 cubits”. Also in 7:9.

¹¹ So Haman got the robe and the horse. He put the robe on Mordecai and led him on horseback through the city streets. Haman went ahead of Mordecai and shouted, “This is what the king does for the man he wants to honour!”

¹² After that, Mordecai went back to the palace entrance. But Haman hurried home, covering his face in shame. ¹³ He told his wife Zeresh and all his friends what had happened. His wife and these friends who gave him advice said, “If it is true that Mordecai is a descendant of the Jews, you cannot win. This defeat was just the beginning. You will end up losing everything to him!”

¹⁴ While they were still talking to Haman, the king’s officers came to his house. They took Haman and rushed to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

Haman Is Hanged

7 So the king and Haman went to eat with Queen Esther. ² As they were drinking wine on the second day of the banquet, the king again asked Esther, “Now, Queen Esther, what is it you want? I will give it to you. Just tell me what it is, and it will be yours, up to half my kingdom.”

³ Queen Esther answered, “My king, if you are pleased with me and think it good to give me what I ask for, my wish is that you let me live and that you also let my people live. ⁴ I ask this because someone has offered money for my people and me to be destroyed, to be killed and wiped out completely. If we had just been sold as slaves, I would have kept quiet and not bothered the king with such a small problem as that.”

⁵ King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, “Who did this? Where is the person who dared to do such a thing?”

⁶ Esther said, “Our enemy, the one who is working against us, is this evil

man here, Haman.” Haman was filled with terror as he stood there before the king and queen. ⁷ The king was very angry. He got up, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. Haman could see that the king had already decided to kill him. So he stayed inside to beg Queen Esther for his life. ⁸ He threw himself down on the couch where Esther was to beg for mercy. At that moment, the king came back into the room from the garden and saw Haman there on the couch by Esther. The king shouted, “Will this man attack the queen right here in front of me, in my own house?”

As soon as the king had said this, his servants came in and covered Haman’s face. ⁹ Then Harbona, one of the king’s personal servants, said, “A platform 22 metres tall has been built near Haman’s house. Haman had it made so that he could hang Mordecai on it. Mordecai is the man who saved your life by making known the plan to kill you.”

The king said, “Hang Haman there!”

¹⁰ So they hanged Haman on the platform he had built for Mordecai. Then the king stopped being angry.

The King’s Order to Help the Jews

8 That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther everything that belonged to Haman, the enemy of the Jews. Esther told the king that Mordecai was her cousin. Then Mordecai was allowed to appear before the king. ² The king took off his royal ring that he had taken back from Haman, and he gave it to Mordecai. And Esther put Mordecai in charge of everything that Haman had owned.

³ Then Esther spoke to the king again. She bowed down at the king’s feet and began crying. She begged the king to cancel the evil plan Haman had made against the Jews.

⁴The king held out the gold sceptre to Esther. So she got up and stood before him. ⁵She said, "My king, if you are pleased with me, and if it pleases you to do something for me, I have a request. If you think it is the right thing to do, and if you are happy with me, please write a command that would stop the order Haman sent out. Haman the Agagite made a plan to destroy the Jews in all the king's territories, and he sent out orders for this to happen. ⁶It is too much for me to see these terrible things happen to my people. I cannot stand to see my family destroyed."

⁷King Xerxes answered Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, "Because Haman was against the Jews, I have given his property to Esther. And my servants have already hanged him on the platform he built. ⁸Now you can write with my authority whatever order you think will be helpful to the Jews. Seal it with the king's special ring. Keep in mind that an order written by the authority of the king and sealed with the king's ring cannot be cancelled."

⁹So on that same day, the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan, the king's secretaries were called. They wrote out all of Mordecai's orders to be sent to the Jews and to the regional rulers and the governors and leaders of the 127 territories. These territories reached from India to Ethiopia. The orders were written in all the different languages of the people and in the form of writing used in each territory. The orders were also sent to the Jews in their own language and form of writing. ¹⁰Mordecai wrote the orders with the authority of King Xerxes. Then he sealed the letters with the king's ring and sent them by messengers, who rode fast horses raised especially for the king.

¹¹These orders from the king gave the Jews in every city the right to gather together to defend themselves. If an army of any nation or territory attacked them, they would have the right to kill and completely destroy that army, as well as their women and children. And they would have the right to take everything that belonged to their enemies. ¹²The day set for this to happen was the thirteenth of Adar, the twelfth month. This authority was given to the Jews in all the territories belonging to King Xerxes. ¹³A copy of the letter with the king's orders was to be sent out and made law in every territory. And it was to be made known to all the people living in these territories. The king ordered this so that the Jews would be ready on that day to strike back against anyone who attacked them.

¹⁴As soon as the messengers received these orders from the king, they rode away swiftly on the special horses that had been raised for the king. And the king's orders were also made known as law in the palace area of Susa.

¹⁵When Mordecai left the palace, he was dressed like a king. He had on a royal blue and white robe, a large gold crown and a purple outer robe made of fine linen. And the whole city was cheering and celebrating. ¹⁶It was an especially happy day for the Jews, a day for them to enjoy the great honour they had received.

¹⁷In every territory and city where the king's order was made known, there was joy and celebration among the Jews. It was like a holiday, with parties and feasts everywhere. And many of the people from other groups decided to become Jews because now they were afraid of them.

Victory for the Jews

9 On the thirteenth day of Adar, the twelfth month, the laws ordered by the king were scheduled to begin. This was the same day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to get power over them. But everything had changed. Now the Jews had the power to defeat their enemies. ²In all the territories of King Xerxes, the Jews gathered in the cities where they lived. They came together to attack those who wanted to destroy them. Everyone was now so afraid of the Jews that no one could stand against them. ³And the leaders of the territories, the regional rulers, the governors, and the king's officials all helped the Jews because they were afraid of Mordecai. ⁴Mordecai now had a lot of power in the king's palace. Everyone in the territories had heard about him and how important he was, and he became more and more powerful.

⁵The Jews defeated all their enemies. They attacked them with swords, killing and destroying them. They did anything they wanted to the people who hated them. ⁶In the palace area of Susa alone, they killed 500 men. ⁷⁻¹⁰But they did not take anything that belonged to those they killed. They killed all ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, enemy of the Jews. Haman's sons were Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha.

¹¹That day the king received a report of how many men had been killed in the palace area of Susa. ¹²He said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have killed 500 men in the palace area, including Haman's ten sons. I can only imagine what they have done in the other territories! Is there anything else you want? Tell me,

and I will have it done. Ask, and I will do it."

¹³Esther said, "If it pleases the king, let the Jews in Susa fight against their enemies again tomorrow, as you allowed them to do today. Also, command that the bodies of Haman's ten sons be hanged in public."

¹⁴So the king gave the command for it to be done. The order was given in Susa, and they hanged Haman's ten sons.

¹⁵The Jews in Susa came together on the fourteenth day of Adar and killed 300 more men. And again, they did not take anything that belonged to those they killed.

¹⁶⁻¹⁷The Jews living in the other territories had also come together on the thirteenth day of Adar to defend themselves. And so they freed themselves from their enemies, killing 75,000 of those who hated them. And they also did not take anything that belonged to those they killed.

Taking Time to Celebrate

The next day, the fourteenth of Adar, the Jews in the territories rested and made it a day of joyful feasting. ¹⁸The Jews in Susa had come together for battle on the thirteenth and fourteenth days of the month of Adar. They had no rest until the fifteenth day. So they made that their day to celebrate with a feast.

¹⁹That's why today only those Jews who live in the country and small villages celebrate on the fourteenth day of Adar. This is their day of joyful feasting, a holiday on which they send gifts of food to each other.

²⁰Mordecai made a record of all these things that had happened. Then he sent letters to the Jews, far and near, in all the territories belonging to King Xerxes. ²¹He told them to celebrate the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar every year

as holidays,²² because on those days the Jews freed themselves from their enemies. That month was the time when their sadness was turned into joy and their crying was changed to celebration. Mordecai told them to celebrate those days with joyful feasting and by exchanging gifts of food and giving presents to the poor.

²³ So the Jews did what Mordecai said and agreed to continue celebrating these days every year.

Purim—Remembering a Great Victory

²⁴ It was Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews, who had made an evil plan to destroy them. He planned to kill them all in a single day, and he chose the day by using lots.²⁵ But then Esther went to talk to the king. And he gave orders that caused Haman to suffer the terrible things he had planned for the Jews. He and his sons were hanged on the platform he had built.

^{26–27} At that time lots were called “purim”. So that’s why the days the Jews celebrate are called Purim. They made it a custom to celebrate these two days every year because of Mordecai’s letter and because of all that they themselves had seen and experienced. They agreed that they and their descendants and all who joined them would continue to celebrate these two days. They promised to follow Mordecai’s instructions on the same date every year.²⁸ They agreed that every family in every territory and city should remember to celebrate these days

and teach their children to do the same. They believed the Jews should never stop celebrating the days of Purim and that their descendants should always remember this festival.

²⁹ Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai, wrote a letter to give her full authority to Mordecai’s letter about Purim.³⁰ The letters were sent to the Jews in all 127 territories of King Xerxes’ kingdom. They included prayers for the peace and safety of all the Jews.³¹ These letters also gave orders for the Jews to celebrate the days of Purim each year at the time set by Mordecai and Queen Esther. They said that this festival was as important as the times of fasting and mourning that the Jews had already decided to remember.³² Esther’s letter made the rules for Purim official, and they were written down in the royal records.

Mordecai Honoured

10 King Xerxes demanded that all the people in his kingdom pay taxes, even the people in faraway cities on the seacoast.² All the great things Xerxes did that showed his power are recorded in *The Book of the History of the Kings of Media and Persia*. This includes the full story about Mordecai and the great honour the king gave him.³ Yes, Mordecai the Jew was second in importance only to King Xerxes. He was the most important leader among the Jews. His fellow Jews respected him very much, because he worked hard for the good of his people and spoke up for their future safety and success.