

# Esther

- "for such a time  
as this"

**-part two**

Ladies' Bible Study  
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It's time for a history lesson. Remember the story in Exodus when Israel was fighting a battle and Moses held up his staff... As long as Moses did that, the battle went well. When Moses rested his arms down, the battle went against the children of Israel. So Aaron and Hur would hold Moses' arms up so they could prevail. This battle was against the Amalekites. God promised Moses that He would completely erase the memory of the Amalekites from under heaven and would be at war with them from generation to generation. **Whenever the Amalekites are mentioned in Scripture, they are the enemies of Israel.**

Our next character in Esther is Haman the Agagite. Agag was the King of the Amalekites that King Saul had **spared** in 1 Samuel **against the command of God.** Because of Saul's disobedience, the Amalekites were still the enemies of the Jews, as we will see in...

*Esther*, part two



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# Esther 3:1-6

**1** After all this took place, King Ahasuerus honored Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite. He promoted him in rank and gave him a higher position than all the other officials.

**2** The entire royal staff at the King's Gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, because the king had commanded this to be done for him. But Mordecai would not bow down or pay homage.

**3** The members of the royal staff at the King's Gate asked Mordecai, "Why are you disobeying the king's command?"

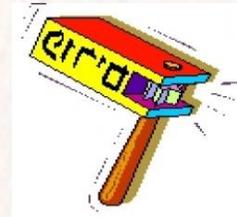
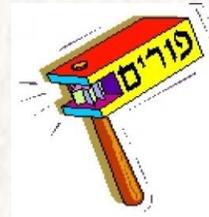
**4** When they had warned him day after day and he still would not listen to them, they told Haman to see if Mordecai's actions would be tolerated, since he had told them he was a Jew.

**5** When Haman saw that Mordecai was not bowing down or paying him homage, he was filled with rage.

**6** And when he learned of Mordecai's ethnic identity, Haman decided not to do away with Mordecai alone. He planned to destroy all of Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout Ahasuerus's kingdom.

**Esther has been queen for five years** and we now meet our villain – Haman. He has been promoted by King Ahasuerus to “second-in-command” – why this has happened, we are not told. In the Hebrew Bible, the Jews would have immediately recognized that Haman, identified as an Agagite, is the enemy of the Jews.

The book of Esther holds a special place in Jewish culture and is still read aloud every year at the feast of Purim. Whenever Haman's name is mentioned, the congregation will “boo” and “hiss” and shake their noise makers! That sounds like great fun!



The conflict is introduced in verse 2-3 when Mordecai refuses to bow down or pay homage to Haman. We are not told why Mordecai refuses, but his Jewishness is mentioned and we are left to make the connection. The wording in verse 4 is literally that Mordecai **had set his mind to not listen to them**.

As expected, Haman is filled with rage. The Hebrew word is “**hamah**” which means “**inner, emotional heat which rises to a burning, consuming wrath**”. Haman's anger is not only directed at Mordecai, but to all the Jews. He plans to destroy them – the word means **extermination!**

# Esther 3:7-11

**7** In the first month, the month of Nisan, in King Ahasuerus's twelfth year, Pur (that is, the lot) was cast before Haman for each day in each month, and it fell on the twelfth month, the month Adar.

**8** Then Haman informed King Ahasuerus, "There is one ethnic group, scattered throughout the peoples in every province of your kingdom, yet living in isolation. Their laws are different from everyone else's and they do not obey the king's laws. It is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them.

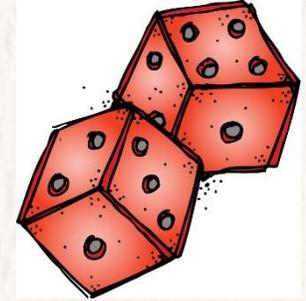
**9** If the king approves, let an order be drawn up authorizing their destruction, and I will pay 375 tons of silver to the accountants for deposit in the royal treasury."

**10** The king removed his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jewish people.

**11** Then the king told Haman, "The money and people are given to you to do with as you see fit."

Haman carefully plans his revenge. He cast lots, called **pur**, to determine the month and then the day for his attack. He then approached King Ahasuerus and cleverly described these undesirable people:

- **ethnic group – they are different from us**
- **scattered in every province**
- **living in isolation**
- **their laws are different from ours**
- **they do not obey our laws**



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Haman tells the King that it is not in his best interests to tolerate them. The Hebrew word for "**tolerate**" carries the meaning of "**giving them no rest or respite, do not leave them alone**". He promises a fantastic amount of silver to the king, possibly to be taken from the spoils.

King Ahasuereus gives his signet ring to Haman in a complete abdication of his power in this situation.

**Notice in verse 10 that Haman is given the added description of "the enemy of the Jewish people".**

## Esther 3:12-15

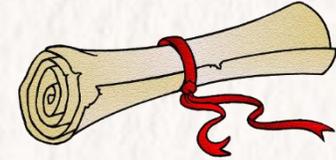
**12** The royal scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and the order was written exactly as Haman commanded. It was intended for the royal satraps, the governors of each of the provinces, and the officials of each ethnic group and written for each province in its own script and to each ethnic group in its own language. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the royal signet ring.

**13** Letters were sent by couriers to each of the royal provinces telling the officials to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jewish people—young and old, women and children—and plunder their possessions on a single day, the thirteenth day of Adar, the twelfth month.

**14** A copy of the text, issued as law throughout every province, was distributed to all the peoples so that they might get ready for that day.

**15** The couriers left, spurred on by royal command, and the law was issued in the fortress of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, while the city of Susa was in confusion.

The Persian royal mail was amazing! Well organized to deliver decrees and notices throughout the empire quickly and efficiently – much like the Pony Express. Decrees would be written in all the languages spoken throughout the empire.



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The decree gave the command to **destroy, kill, and annihilate all Jewish people – young and old, women and children – and plunder their possessions on a single day!**

**For the Jews, this meant living for eleven months with the fear and dread of death hanging over them! The decree was issued on the day before the Jewish Passover. Undoubtedly there were some Jews who still kept the remembrance of the Passover. Was any of this accidental? We will see that God was in absolute control all along!**

**The word “annihilation” in Hebrew was “abad”. We see the same word used in Revelation 9:11, “They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.”**

Verse 15 tells us that the city was in “**confusion**” – the same words as used in Exodus 14 when the Jews wandered in the Wilderness, agitated and bewildered, with no help.

# Esther 4:1-6

- 1** When Mordecai learned all that had occurred, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, went into the middle of the city, and cried loudly and bitterly.
- 2** He only went as far as the King's Gate, since the law prohibited anyone wearing sackcloth from entering the King's Gate.
- 3** There was great mourning among the Jewish people in every province where the king's command and edict came. They fasted, wept, and lamented, and many lay on sackcloth and ashes.
- 4** Esther's female servants and her eunuchs came and reported the news to her, and the queen was overcome with fear. She sent clothes for Mordecai to wear so he could take off his sackcloth, but he did not accept them.
- 5** Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to her, and dispatched him to Mordecai to learn what he was doing and why.
- 6** So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square in front of the King's Gate.

Esther had had no direct contact with Mordecai since she became Queen five years earlier. However, it seems that Hathach, faithful servant to Esther, may have carried messages regularly between them. Esther had no idea of the decree that had been issued. She could only imagine something horrible had caused her uncle to wear sackcloth. The Jewish Encyclopedia tells us: **Term originally denoting a coarsely woven fabric, usually made of goat's hair. It afterward came to mean also a garment made from such cloth, which was chiefly worn as a token of mourning by the Israelites. It was furthermore a sign of submission and was occasionally worn by the Prophets.**



Verse 3 says the Jewish people **“fasted, wept, and lamented”**. These same words are found in Joel 2 **““Even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with *fasting and weeping and mourning.*”**

# Esther 4:7-12

**7** Mordecai told him everything that had happened as well as the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay the royal treasury for the slaughter of the Jews.

**8** Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa ordering their destruction, so that Hathach might show it to Esther, explain it to her, and command her to approach the king, implore his favor, and plead with him personally for her people.

**9** Hathach came and repeated Mordecai's response to Esther.

**10** Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to tell Mordecai,

**11** "All the royal officials and the people of the royal provinces know that one law applies to every man or woman who approaches the king in the inner courtyard and who has not been summoned—the death penalty. Only if the king extends the gold scepter will that person live. I have not been summoned to appear before the king for the last 30 days."

**12** Esther's response was reported to Mordecai.

Everything has changed with the issuing of the decree. Instead of keeping her Jewishness a secret, Mordecai wants Esther to:

- approach the king
- implore his favor
- plead with him personally for her people

But this is impossible! The king can put to death anyone who enters his presence unsummoned!

**Just think, the evil Haman has open access to the king, but not his own Queen! Imagine Esther's dilemma. She has not been summoned by the king for a month!**



## Esther 4:13-17

**13** Mordecai told the messenger to reply to Esther, "Don't think that you will escape the fate of all the Jews because you are in the king's palace.

**14** If you keep silent at this time, liberation and deliverance will come to the Jewish people from another place, but you and your father's house will be destroyed. Who knows, perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this."

**15** Esther sent this reply to Mordecai:

**16** "Go and assemble all the Jews who can be found in Susa and fast for me. Don't eat or drink for three days, day or night. I and my female servants will also fast in the same way. After that, I will go to the king even if it is against the law. If I perish, I perish."

**17** So Mordecai went and did everything Esther had ordered him.

All these years, Esther has been passively obedient in her life, and now the unthinkable has come. Mordecai shatters her bubble of protection. These are the most quoted words from the book of Esther:

*"If you keep silent at this time, liberation and deliverance will come to the Jewish people from another place, but you and your father's house will be destroyed. Who knows, perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this."*

Esther has declared a fast for herself, her female servants and all the Jews in Susa. This fast would be occurring during the time usually spent in the Passover Feast for the Jews. Esther changes from a passive character to one who is very active in her circumstances.

**What choices does Esther have at this point? It seems like a no-win situation, but we will see God's providence at work!**

# Esther 5:1-8

**1** On the third day, Esther dressed up in her royal clothing and stood in the inner courtyard of the palace facing it. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the royal courtroom, facing its entrance.

**2** As soon as the king saw Queen Esther standing in the courtyard, she won his approval. The king extended the gold scepter in his hand toward Esther, and she approached and touched the tip of the scepter.

**3** "What is it, Queen Esther?" the king asked her. "Whatever you want, even to half the kingdom, will be given to you."

**4** "If it pleases the king," Esther replied, "may the king and Haman come today to the banquet I have prepared for them."

**5** The king commanded, "Hurry, and get Haman so we can do as Esther has requested." So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared.

**6** While drinking the wine, the king asked Esther, "Whatever you ask will be given to you. Whatever you want, even to half the kingdom, will be done."

**7** Esther answered, "This is my petition and my request:

**8** If the king approves of me and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and perform my request, may the king and Haman come to the banquet I will prepare for them. Tomorrow I will do what the king has asked."

Mordecai had asked Esther to plead, beg, implore the king. But how does Esther enter the royal presence? She dresses in her royal clothing and enters AS THE QUEEN.

**I can only imagine Esther's heartbeat as she approaches the throne! Was she right to enter regally, and not on her knees, begging? God had given her the method and means of winning the King's attention. God is able to do so much more than we imagine!**

The words the king used could mean, "What troubles you? What ails you?" He offers her up to half the kingdom – not literally, but it meant he was disposed to be generous in granting her request.



## Esther 5:9-14

**9** That day Haman left full of joy and in good spirits. But when Haman saw Mordecai at the King's Gate, and Mordecai didn't rise or tremble in fear at his presence, Haman was filled with rage toward Mordecai.

**10** Yet Haman controlled himself and went home. He sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh to join him.

**11** Then Haman described for them his glorious wealth and his many sons. He told them all how the king had honored him and promoted him in rank over the other officials and the royal staff.

**12** "What's more," Haman added, "Queen Esther invited no one but me to join the king at the banquet she had prepared. I am invited again tomorrow to join her with the king.

**13** Still, none of this satisfies me since I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's Gate all the time."

**14** His wife Zeresh and all his friends told him, "Have them build a gallows 75 feet high. Ask the king in the morning to hang Mordecai on it. Then go to the banquet with the king and enjoy yourself." The advice pleased Haman, so he had the gallows constructed.

Haman is elated! A personal invitation to dine with the Queen. His pride was bursting...until he saw Mordecai. Mordecai didn't even stand up, never mind bow to him, and all Haman's bitterness boiled over.

Haman rants to his wife and friends. Notice the order of his bragging: **first is his wealth**, then his many sons, next is his rank in the palace, and then the personal invitation! We see what is truly important to this man!

But none of this mattered when he sees Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's Gate.

**What do you think is going through the minds of his wife and friends? We will see that his wife, Zeresh, is just as conniving as her husband!**

A gallows 75 feet high is excessive! It shows that pride controls the emotions here. And remember the decree that went out in Chapter One that husbands were to be the master of their household? It certainly seems that Zeresh rules this household. Just another ironic twist. The book of Esther is full of irony and subtle humor!

# Esther 6:1-9

**1** That night sleep escaped the king, so he ordered the book recording daily events to be brought and read to the king.

**2** They found the written report of how Mordecai had informed on Bigthana and Teresh, two eunuchs who guarded the king's entrance, when they planned to assassinate King Ahasuerus.

**3** The king inquired, "What honor and special recognition have been given to Mordecai for this act?" The king's personal attendants replied, "Nothing has been done for him."

**4** The king asked, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman was just entering the outer court of the palace to ask the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows he had prepared for him.

**5** The king's attendants answered him, "Haman is there, standing in the court." "Have him enter," the king ordered.

**6** Haman entered, and the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king wants to honor?" Haman thought to himself, "Who is it the king would want to honor more than me?"

**7** Haman told the king, "For the man the king wants to honor:

**8** Have them bring a royal garment that the king himself has worn and a horse the king himself has ridden, which has a royal diadem on its head.

**9** Put the garment and the horse under the charge of one of the king's most noble officials. Have them clothe the man the king wants to honor, parade him on the horse through the city square, and proclaim before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king wants to honor.'"

Now we arrive at the PIVOT POINT of the entire story, a sudden turn of events that reverses the intended and expected actions! In a story, the point of highest dramatic tension is usually the climax, but here the PIVOT is an ordinary, commonplace event: **the king can't sleep!** The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible puts it this way, **"The Lord took sleep from the King that night."**

**A sleepless night is God's handiwork! This didn't occur because the king overindulged at Esther's first banquet – well, maybe a little... But this event takes the focus away from human actions to God's Providence.**

A little boring reading could help sleep – so the king asks that the book of daily events be brought and read to him. The particular reading is the report of Mordecai informing on the two guards – and nothing had been done to recognize Mordecai...

Did you notice what Haman thinks is appropriate recognition? Use of the king's personal garments and horse is **an audacious** request – it was believed that the king's personal effects had magical properties! Haman is saying – **I DESERVE TO BE KING!**

**It's interesting that the book of Esther begins with two feasts, the King's 180-day feast and Queen Vashti's feast. Now at the climax, we will have two more – Esther's two banquets.**

## Esther 6:10-14

**10** The king told Haman, "Hurry, and do just as you proposed. Take a garment and a horse for Mordecai the Jew, who is sitting at the King's Gate. Do not leave out anything you have suggested."

**11** So Haman took the garment and the horse. He clothed Mordecai and paraded him through the city square, crying out before him, "This is what is done for the man the king wants to honor."

**12** Then Mordecai returned to the King's Gate, but Haman, overwhelmed, hurried off for home with his head covered.

**13** Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened. His advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, "Since Mordecai is Jewish, and you have begun to fall before him, you won't overcome him, because your downfall is certain."

**14** While they were still speaking with him, the eunuchs of the king arrived and rushed Haman to the banquet Esther had prepared.

One commentary called this episode: "**Haman's splendid humiliation**". It was a series of coincidences, each believable in itself, yet completely out of Haman's control.

**Notice that Mordecai returned to his position at the King's Gate, seemingly no different that before, but Haman – well, Haman covers his head in shame!**

**And who does Zeresh remind you of? She is a type of "Job's Wife" – who shows no compassion**



# Esther 7:1-10

**1** The king and Haman came to feast with Esther the queen.

**2** Once again, on the second day while drinking wine, the king asked Esther, "Queen Esther, whatever you ask will be given to you. Whatever you seek, even to half the kingdom, will be done."

**3** Queen Esther answered, "If I have obtained your approval, my king, and if the king is pleased, spare my life—this is my request; and spare my people—this is my desire."

**4** For my people and I have been sold out to destruction, death, and extermination. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept silent. Indeed, the trouble wouldn't be worth burdening the king."

**5** King Ahasuerus spoke up and asked Queen Esther, "Who is this, and where is the one who would devise such a scheme?"

**6** Esther answered, "The adversary and enemy is this evil Haman."

Haman stood terrified before the king and queen.

**7** Angered by this, the king arose from where they were drinking wine and went to the palace garden. Haman remained to beg Queen Esther for his life because he realized the king was planning something terrible for him.

**8** Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the house of wine drinking, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, "Would he actually violate the queen while I am in the palace?" As soon as the statement left the king's mouth, Haman's face was covered.

**9** Harbona, one of the royal eunuchs, said: "There is a gallows 75 feet tall at Haman's house that he made for Mordecai, who gave the report that saved the king." The king commanded, "Hang him on it."

**10** They hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's anger subsided.

The second of Esther's banquets begins with the same request by the king; literally he asks her, "What is your petition? What is your request?" He asks this after he has enjoyed his meal and is drinking the wine, the last course of the banquet.

This time Esther makes her request and she makes it very personal, almost intimate! **"If I have your approval...spare my life...spare my people"**. **She makes her request using the passive tense to deflect pointing the finger of blame on the king. She is very aware of his pride and quick temper!**

As soon as she identifies herself as Jewish, her life is forfeit according to the king's decree. The King's response in the Hebrew language is very abrupt – **Who? Where?** And Esther dramatically announces, **"This adversary and enemy is this evil Haman."**

**Esther uses language that compares Haman to Satan – "Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." – 1 Peter 5:8**

When the King storms out of the room, notice that he enters the palace garden – "paradise"; Haman's only chance of survival is with Queen Esther. He falls on the couch where she is reclining – **Hebrew traditions say that the Angel Gabriel shoved Haman** – and this is how the King finds him when he returns! And Haman gets his just reward – the gallows is actually a sharp pole used to impale their victims! Very gruesome – and this one is 75 feet tall!