

Women of the Bible

Lesson Six: Esther

During the time of the Persian rule, the Jewish people were allowed to return to Palestine, rebuild the temple and restore the worship of the Lord in Jerusalem. Yet, during this same period, events unfolded which could well have annihilated the Jewish people had it not been for the courage of a young Jewish woman named Esther.



Introduction. Esther, was the Persian name given to a young Jewish exile named Hadassah, who lived in the palace city of Shushan. She had been brought up by a man named Mordecai, after her father (Mordecai's uncle) and her mother died (Esther 2:5-7).

I. The Deposition of Vashti.

- A. The story of Esther took place during the reign of Ahasuerus, believed to be the king known to history as Xerxes I (Esther 1:1-2).
 - 1. Xerxes I is famous in the histories of Herodotus for his war with the Greeks, burning Athens and the defeat of his own fleet at Salamis in 480 BC.
- B. Sometime after these events the Bible tells us that Ahasuerus, back in his citadel at Shushan, held a great feast. During the feast he commanded his wife, Vashti to present herself wearing her crown, before the people and officials. Vashti refused to do as the king commanded (Esther 1:10-12).
 - 1. Upon the advice of the princes Ahasuerus deposes Vashti and makes plans to select another Queen (Est. 1:16-20).

II. The Queenship of Esther.

- A. Many young women were brought to Shushan and brought before the king, to see if he would choose her for his wife.
 - 1. Esther was chosen over all the other women, although she had not revealed that she was a Jew (Est 2:17-20).
- B. Mordecai, while lingering near the gates out of concern for Esther, overheard a plot against the king. He informed Esther, and she told the king in Mordecai's name (Esther 2:21-22).
 - 1. Mordecai's actions were recorded in the king's chronicles (Est. 2:23).

III. Haman's Plot.

- A. After sometime, A man by the name of Haman was promoted by the king above the princes. The command was given to all to bow before Haman and give him

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homage. Mordecai would not bow before him (Esther 3:1,2).

1. Out of hatred for Mordecai Haman brought a plan before the king to kill all of the Jews (Esther 3:8-11).
- B. Mordecai, with all the Jews mourned and put on sackcloth upon the reading of the king's decree (Esther 4:1-3).

IV. Esther's Deliverance of the Jews.

- A. Word came to Esther of the plot, and she sent back word to Mordecai that she was not allowed to go to the king without being called (Esther 4:10-11).
1. Mordecai sends back word to Esther reminding her of her own danger because of the decree and suggesting to her that she might have come to her position for a time such as this (Esther 4:13-14).
 2. While Esther is the only book of the Bible that never refers to God, Mordecai's appeal to providence and Esther's response to it, shows God's hand at work.
- B. Esther goes before the king, and he extends the golden scepter towards her allowing her to come to him (Esther 5:1-2).
1. The king offers her up to half his kingdom, but she requests only that he and Haman come to a banquet she has prepared (Esther 5:3-4). During the banquet she requests they come to another banquet the next day (Esther 5:8).
 2. During the night Ahasuerus has read to him the chronicles which record Mordecai's hand in averting the plot to kill him and honors him (Esther 6:3-9).
- C. At the banquet the Esther reveals that Haman's plot would kill her too (Esther 7:3-6).
1. Haman is hung on gallows he had built to hang Mordecai (Esther 7:9-10).
 2. Although the king's decree could not be rescinded, he issued another decree granting the Jews the right to defend themselves (Esther 8:11-12).
 3. The Jews defended themselves and celebrated their deliverance the next day. This began the annual two day memorial the Jews celebrated known as Purim (Esther 9:16-17; 26-28).



Ahasuerus (Xerxes I)

Conclusion. Esther was a woman of great courage. Her devotion to God's people even at the risk of her own life serves as a wonderful example of the kind of selfless and sacrificial attitude that all followers of God should aspire towards.

