

Hello everyone,

PERCENT OF BIBLE COMPLETED: 67.3%

Weekly Readings will cover:

Sunday: Esther 2

Monday: Esther 3

Tuesday: Esther 4

Wednesday: Esther 5

Thursday: Esther 6

Friday: Esther 7

Saturday: Esther 8

Current # of email addresses in the group: 627

Happy Sabbath. I failed to point out that last week we began our final 3<sup>rd</sup> of the Bible. We are now over two-thirds of the way through the entire Bible chronologically!

This week will be exclusively in the book of Esther.

Have a great week!

Current and archive of this reading program is available at:

<https://www.ucg.org/congregations/san-francisco-bay-area-ca/announcements/audio-links-re-three-year-chronological-deep>

The audio archive information is also available on our UCG Bay Area YouTube page here:

[https://youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792?si=EA\\_tacLBfv1XR3jH](https://youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792?si=EA_tacLBfv1XR3jH)

You may actually prefer accessing it directly from this Playlist tab:

<https://www.youtube.com/@ucgbayarea5792/playlists>

### **3-YEAR CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY: Week 104**

Read the following passages & the Daily Deep Dive on the daily reading.

**Day 701 – SUNDAY: July 20<sup>th</sup>**

Esther 2

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "Chapter 2 begins with a search for a replacement for Vashti as chief wife. The king's harem is said to be under the custody of Hegai (verse 3). "The eunuch's name [in Hebrew]

is spelled...*Hege*...in v. 3 but...*Hegay*...in vv. 8, 15. Herodotus (9.33) mentioned a eunuch of Xerxes with a similar name" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, footnote on verse 3).

The whole process of finding and adding women, including Esther, to the harem evidently took a few years, as the later elevation of Esther in verse 16 to the position of chief wife does not occur until the winter of the seventh year of the king's reign (479 B.C.)—around four years after the deposing of Vashti in 483 or 482. There is most likely a historical reason for the delay. Indeed, this skip forward in the time frame actually helps to confirm the identification of Ahasuerus as Xerxes. For it was during this very period, from 481-479, that Xerxes the Great launched his monumental campaign against Greece—as had been prophesied in [Daniel 11:2](#).

"Like his father, Xerxes seemed irresistibly drawn to the west and the conquest of Greece, so after reorganizing his armies and navies he moved west in 481 [with one of the largest assembled forces in ancient history—a million or more men]. The badly divided Greek states were unable to achieve an effective coalition and at first were badly mauled by the superior Persian forces. Even the redoubtable Spartans were defeated at [the famous battle of] Thermopylae though they fought to the last man. At [the naval battle of] Salamis [in 480], however, Xerxes underestimated their almost fanatical courage and as a result lost more than two hundred Persian ships.... Xerxes then left for Persia, having placed his general Mardonius in command of the Persian troops still remaining in Greece.... Mardonius suffered one setback after another until he lost his life in the battle of Plataea [in 479]. The final blow ending Xerxes' aspirations to conquer Greece was administered at Mycale in 479. The Greeks had now destroyed two of the Persian armies and forced a third to return to Asia" (Eugene Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, pp. 498-499). After Xerxes' return to Susa, Herodotus says that he consoled himself over his defeat by sensual indulgences with his

harem. This fits exactly with the time that he went and selected Esther from his harem to replace Vashti.

In verses 5-7 of chapter 2 we are first introduced to Mordecai and Esther. Their presence at Susa "suggests both the wide distribution of the Jewish Diaspora a century after the fall of Jerusalem and the fact...that the majority of the exiled Jews remained in lands of their captivity even when they had opportunity to leave [and return to the Promised Land]. Their assimilation into their new world is also clear from the very names of the principal protagonists in the story.

'Mordecai' is a Hebrew transliteration of the Babylonian divine name *Marduk*.... His cousin's name is similarly pagan in its overtones. 'Esther' is a form of Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess of love and war" (p. 501). Some explain the name *Esther* as coming from the word for "star," but it should be realized that the name *Ishtar* shares the same derivation—referring specifically to the planet Venus (the goddess Venus and the goddess Ishtar in fact being one and the same).

Esther also bore a Hebrew name, *Hadassah*, meaning "Myrtle." This is the name by which she was probably known to the Jewish community. If Mordecai had a Jewish name, it is not recorded. "Jewish people in antiquity customarily had two names when they lived in regions distant from Israel. One would be their secular name, a name understandable in their adopted culture, and the other would be their sacred name given in Hebrew" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 7). Yet why the secular names borne in the case of Mordecai and Esther are overtly pagan has been a source of controversy. Some fault the protagonists themselves in this matter. Yet it could have been their parents who chose these names. Moreover, the names may have been viewed as merely common or secular and not really considered as pagan. Consider that parents today may name a daughter *Diana* without any thought to that being the name of a pagan goddess—though that would seem to be less likely in a society more seriously attentive to

such deities. Another possibility is that the king is the one who later gave the protagonists the particular names at issue—and that they are referred to by these names where they are introduced in the account even though they did not actually come by them until later. Recall that Daniel and his three friends were given pagan names by Nebuchadnezzar.

In the case of Esther, though, some have pointed out that the Jews would have understood this name as sounding like the Hebrew for "Hidden." It is possible that this was a clever subterfuge—bearing a name familiar among the Babylonians yet having a Jewish meaning, indeed one that pointed to her "hiding" her identity. Still, this would not have been a typical Jewish name—particularly as it was the name of the chief Babylonian goddess, which the Jews would have well known.

Whatever the reason for bearing them, we might wonder why the gentile names are the ones used almost exclusively throughout the account. Here again is a reason some fault Mordecai and Esther and view the book of Esther negatively. Yet as noted in the Beyond Today Bible Commentary introductory comments on Esther, it could well be that the book was written as a Persian state chronicle. This would adequately explain the use of the non-Hebrew names. Still, we should bear in mind the stated fact that Mordecai charged Esther not to reveal her Jewish identity (verse 10). That instruction, however, was specifically for her life in the harem and at court rather than in interaction with the Jewish people. Mordecai may have felt that with revelation of Esther's true identity she would risk discrimination and possibly physical harm. Nevertheless, this has also been a source of criticism—along with Esther's consent to marry a pagan gentile king. It seems apparent that Esther was somewhat neutral about the possibility of being the king's wife, being resigned to leave matters in God's hands. She neither tried to escape the process nor aggressively sought extra

measures to impress the king. We should consider that women in that age and culture of arranged marriages rarely had much of a say as to whom they married. And in this case Esther was under compulsion to marry the absolute ruler of the Persian Empire.

Of course, it is not necessary to justify everything that Mordecai and Esther decided or did. Having lived so long in a foreign culture, more than a century at this point, it is likely that the Jewish people had lost some of their moorings with regard to the Mosaic religion. Mordecai and Esther's understanding of the truth, along with that of most of the exiles, was probably somewhat deficient. We can look to the right choices that they later made as giving us more of the lessons of the story. Interestingly, Mordecai would later openly declare himself as a Jew. And in acting to save her people, it was necessary for Esther (Hadassah) to at last reveal herself as a Jewess, as we will later see. Both of them will grow in a spiritual sense over the course of the story.

More important, though, is to realize that God is able to use circumstances to bring about His intended outcome. Esther was certainly a beautiful young woman (verse 7). But that alone did not make her queen of the realm. We are probably quite safe in assuming that it was God who guided the king to select her as his principal wife. Interestingly, some who maintain that Esther means "Hidden" point to this name, being the biblical book's title, as denoting how God is present throughout the story though not explicitly mentioned.

Mordecai remained constantly concerned over Esther's welfare—and she continued to follow his instructions and may have given him an official position. *Expositor's* notes on verses 19-20: "Mordecai's position at the gate was not that of an 'idler' but represented some kind of duty or official position he occupied. He may have been appointed to this position by Esther to give him easier access to the royal quarters.... Men who 'sat at the gate' were frequently elders and leading, respected citizens who settled disputes that were brought to them."

While he was going about his duties, Mordecai either overheard or was informed of a plot to assassinate Xerxes. The conspirators "were eunuchs, guards of the door—i.e., men who protected the king's private apartment—who had become angry with Xerxes. The cause of their anger with the king is not stated. Mordecai got word to Esther about the plot; and she relayed the information to the king, giving credit to Mordecai, without mentioning their relationship. Plots against Persian monarchs were not uncommon. Xerxes was in fact assassinated [years later] in his bedroom in a similar situation in 465 B.C. in a conspiracy" (note on verses 21-22).

The plotters of chapter 2 were put to death and the whole account written in the imperial annals in the presence of the king (verse 23). It is remarkable that Mordecai was not rewarded for his actions at this time. Perhaps the king was distracted. In any event, it appears that divine providence was setting the stage for the king to realize the need to reward Mordecai at a more opportune moment, as we will later see." [END]

### Day 702 – MONDAY: July 21<sup>st</sup>

Esther 3

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "In chapter 3 we are first introduced to the villain of the story—Haman. A few years have gone by since the events of our previous reading. The date of Haman's promotion is not given but his casting of lots soon afterward to determine when to destroy the Jews occurred in the first month of the 12th year of Xerxes (verse 7)—that is, in the spring of 474 B.C.

Haman is referred to as the son of Hammedatha the Agagite (verse 1). Some link the term Agagite with a district of the empire. "An inscription of Sargon mentions Agag as a district in Persia" (*Expositor's Bible Dictionary*, footnote on verse 1). Many others see Agagite as meaning a

descendant of King Agag of the Amalekites in the days of Saul (see 1 Samuel 15). Josephus refers to Haman as being "by birth an Amalekite" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 11, chap. 6, sec. 5). And Jewish tradition agrees. The Amalekites, a branch of the Edomites, were ancient enemies of the Israelites (see [Exodus 17:8](#)). God had ordered Saul to wipe them out but he did not comply, sparing Agag whom the prophet Samuel then put to death. The name Agag, seeming to denote "prime ruler," could have been a title borne by all Amalekite kings. As is explained in the Beyond Today Bible Commentary on Obadiah, it is likely that the Edomites ranged widely over the ancient Middle East. It even appears that some of the Amalekites eventually settled in Central Asia, so it could well be that the Persian province of Agag was made up of Amalekites.

Haman's identity as an Amalekite would explain Mordecai's refusal as a Jew to bow to him (see [Esther 3:2-4](#)). It was not wrong to bow to human leaders (compare [Genesis 23:7](#); [Genesis 27:29](#); [1 Samuel 24:8](#); [2 Samuel 14:4](#); [1 Kings 1:16](#)). Some, though, believe that what Xerxes expected with regard to people bowing to Haman was tantamount to worship. That could be, but the fact of Haman being an ancestral enemy—belonging to a people that God Himself had ordered utterly destroyed—would be reason enough. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states, "The most probable reason was, as a Targum suggests, Mordecai's pride; no self-respecting Benjaminite would bow before a descendant of the ancient Amalekite enemy of the Jews" (note on [Esther 3:2-4](#)).

Haman's reaction of hatefully desiring to exterminate the entire Jewish race (verses 5-6) also seems best explained by his Amalekite heritage. Josephus says that Haman determined to abolish the whole nation "for he was naturally an enemy to the Jews, because the nation of the Amalekites, of which he was, had been destroyed by them" (sec. 5). This would make the issue one of revenge—not just personal revenge

against Mordecai but national revenge for the loss suffered so long before by Haman's own people. Indeed, the ancient animosity and envy over Israel's blessings goes all the way back to the conflict between Jacob (ancestor of the Israelites) and Esau (from whom the Edomites and Amalekites were descended). In the Middle East, as is still the case today, old antagonisms die hard.

In verse 7, "the non-Hebraic word *pur* (probably the Akkad[ian] word *puru* {'die' or 'lot'}, which is explained by the Hebrew *goral* {'lot'}) anticipates the institution of Purim (i.e., 'lots') in chapter 9" (*Expositor's*, note on 3:7). The Jews had at times cast lots to determine God's will—as even the apostles would later do to replace Judas Iscariot (see [Acts 1:23-26](#)). But Haman's use of lots, besides his evil intent, was occultist and pagan. "The fact that the lot was cast at the beginning of the year to determine the best time to destroy the Jewish people fits with the culture of the day. The Babylonian religion maintained that the gods gathered at the beginning of each year to establish the destiny of human beings" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 7).

Verse 8 gives us Haman's accusation against the Jews, though he does not name them up front—and perhaps he never did name them. Shmuley Boteach, a Jewish rabbi, wrote the following in a recent WorldNetDaily column: "For 2,000 years, Jews have asked themselves the question an increasing number of Americans are now asking: Why do they hate us? Is it possible that the underlying causes of anti-Semitism are similar to the underlying causes of anti-Americanism? When I lived in Oxford, I heard all kinds of academic theories proffered as to the cause of anti-Semitism, but few seemed as straightforward as the reason given by the first documented, genocidal anti-Semite—the biblical Hitler—Haman. In asking King Ahasuerus for the authority to slaughter all the Jews in the ancient Persian empire, he says: 'There exists a people, dispersed and scattered among the nations, in all the provinces of your kingdom. And yet their values are entirely different

from everyone else's.' Jewish singularity, Jewish peculiarity, a refusal to blend in and be like everybody else is what foments hatred in Haman's breast. Why do you Jews hold yourselves aloof? Why don't you just become like everybody else? Do you think you're better than us? Add to this the Jewish penchant for promoting social justice and a steadfast commitment to espousing morality and you have the perfect formula for hating the foreigner who not only rejects your way of life while living in your country, but makes you feel inferior, to boot. The Talmud says that Mount Sinai (literally, 'mountain of hatred') was given its name because after the Jews [i.e., Israelites] received the Torah and committed themselves to lives of ethical virtue, the enmity of the world's inhabitants—who now stood out as immoral—descended heatedly upon them" (March 12, 2004).

Of course, virulent hatred and persecution has been directed toward true Christians for very similar reasons. Jesus said: "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" ([John 15:18-19](#)). Jesus referred to Himself and His followers as the light of the world ([John 8:12](#); [John 9:5](#); [Matthew 5:14](#)). And in [John 3:19-20](#) He explained: "This is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed." God's people are indeed peculiar and different—and their message and way of life exposes the shortcomings and outright wickedness of the society around them.

On verse 9 of Esther 3, *Expositor's* comments: "In order to obtain the king's permission to destroy the Jews, Haman appealed to the monarch's greed, offering to put ten thousand talents of silver of his own private fortune into the royal treasury to pay the men who would

carry out the pogrom.... It is impossible to determine the value of the silver in current monetary equivalents. It was a fabulous sum that is estimated to weigh approximately 375 tons. It has also been estimated to represent the equivalent of two-thirds of the annual income of the Persian Empire.... Perhaps Haman planned to acquire such a large sum by confiscating the Jews' property."

Verse 11 might seem to say that the king was giving the money to Haman—or at the very least refusing to take Haman's money. Yet [Esther 4:7](#) makes it clear that Haman promised to pay the money into the king's treasury and Esther later described her people as being "sold" ([Esther 7:4](#)). It could be, as many suggest, that the king was pretending to refuse the money in the common method of Middle East bargaining (as in [Genesis 23:7-18](#)). However, scholar Carey Moore in the Anchor Bible translates the king's response to Haman as "'Well, it's your money,' i.e., 'If you want to spend it that way, it's all right with me'" (*Expositor's*, footnote on [Esther 3:11](#)).

The giving of the king's signet ring to Haman in verse 10 seems to have effectively made him a prime minister or chief of staff. That it constituted more than a mere formality needed for issuing the immediate proclamation is evident from the fact that Haman bore the ring until his death (see [Esther 8:2](#)). Indeed, Haman at one point remarks about his position that the king "advanced him above the officials and servants of the king" ([Esther 5:11](#)).

The destruction of the Jews was to be accomplished in March of 473 B.C. (compare [Esther 3:13](#)). "Critics say Haman would not have promulgated a vindictive decree for the extermination of the Jews and then waited eleven months to carry it out, as it would have given them time to escape or to prepare for defense. [One commentator] says Haman resorted to casting the lot to determine a propitious day for carrying out his slaughter and had such confidence in the power of magical decisions that premature publication would not change the

Jews' fate. [Another] says that the Jews' flight would not have been unwelcome to Haman as he would still accomplish his purpose of confiscating their property" (*Expositor's*, introductory notes on Esther).

As the decree of mass genocide is sent out, the king and Haman contemptibly "sat down to drink" (verse 15)—perhaps toasting the action—heartless to the horrendous nature of the coming atrocity. Yet in the king's case, he may have been somewhat misled as to the wording of the decree, having placed complete trust in Haman. He may not even have realized that the Jews were the ones condemned or, if he did, that all of them were to be destroyed—especially given his later honoring of Mordecai. We do see in verse 15 that at least the people at the capital of Susa or Shushan did not relish what was happening. They were utterly bewildered at this order. It was certainly not typical of Persian rule, which was normally characterized by cultural pluralism and mild treatment of conquered peoples. Indeed, we may be sure that there were evil spiritual forces working behind the scene in an attempt to eradicate the Jewish people through whom the redemption of all mankind would eventually come. But God's great plan will not be thwarted." [END]

### Day 703 – TUESDAY: July 22<sup>nd</sup>

Esther 4

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "On hearing all that had happened, Mordecai engaged in public mourning—as did the Jews in all provinces where the new decree arrived ([Esther 4:1-3](#)). Indeed, we see in verse 3 that the mourning was accompanied by fasting—a spiritual tool linked with prayer in Scripture (see [1 Samuel 1:7-10](#); [2 Samuel 12:16-17](#); [Ezra 8:23](#) [Nehemiah 9:1](#); [Isaiah 58:2-5](#); [Jeremiah 14:12](#); [Daniel 9:3](#); [Joel 1:14](#); [Zechariah 7:3-5](#); [Acts 13:3](#)). Even though God is not directly mentioned, the clear implication is that the Jews in the Persian Empire,

threatened with imminent extermination, urgently cried out to Him as they fasted.

Encouragingly, we see signs of God's overseeing care in the very fact of what Mordecai had learned of the situation—information that would prove important to opposing the aim of the decree. "If Mordecai had not been appointed as a high official at the king's gate, it is unlikely that he would have known about Haman's bribe to the king. He was providentially placed by God in an exalted position in a foreign government, as were Joseph (see Genesis 41), Daniel (see [Daniel 2:48](#)), and Nehemiah (see [Nehemiah 1:11](#))" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on [Esther 4:7](#)).

Mordecai informed Esther of her need to plead the case of her people before the king. Yet her Jewish identity was still a secret. Given the circumstances, it no doubt seemed that revealing it at that time would have been extremely dangerous. Moreover, Esther was at first fearful to act for another serious reason. She instructed her attendant "to return to her cousin to remind him that no one could approach the king in the inner court without a royal summons. The penalty for such a transgression was death. On occasion the king had been known to extend his golden scepter to an uninvited person as a gesture of mercy. Herodotus (3.118) mentions the Persian custom that anyone who approached the king uninvited would be put to death unless pardoned by the king. Herodotus also said, however, that a person could send a letter to the king asking for an audience. Why this procedure did not occur to Esther can only be surmised. Since she had not been summoned by the king for a month, Esther did not know whether he would forgive her if she approached him without a royal summons. She may have concluded that she had lost the king's favor. It appears that initially Esther was more concerned about her own welfare than about her people" (*Expositor's*, note on verses 9-11). But that was about to change.

Mordecai responds in verses 13-14 with the central message of the entire book. His confidence that deliverance for the Jews would come from another place even if Esther refused to act is more than simple optimism. It embraced the whole of Jewish national history. There was no question as to why the Jews still existed as a people. They had been delivered, time and time again, by the God of their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Israel). Over the centuries, God had made many promises that could not be fulfilled if the race was wiped out. Mordecai knew that God would save His people even now. The statement that Esther refusing to act would lead to her and her father's house perishing was probably a warning of divine judgment, reminiscent of Christ's later remark, concerning the end time, that "whoever seeks to save his life will lose it" ([Luke 17:33](#)). And then the remarkable statement at the end of [Esther 4:14](#): "Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" The obvious suggestion is that it was no mere coincidence that the young Jewish woman Hadassah had become queen of the Persian Empire at this very time in history. It was the work of God. Of course, the all-powerful God clearly did not *need* her. But He had placed her in her current position to *use* her if she were willing. And if she were *not* willing, then He would reject her and work out the deliverance of His people another way.

Mordecai's message succeeded. Esther would go to the king about the matter even if it meant her death. But first she called for a three-day fast of all the Jews in Shushan. Again, the focus is clearly religious. What was the purpose for this fast if not for spiritual preparedness and direction and help from God? Yet again, God is not directly mentioned in the account in any way—which is most remarkable. As mentioned in the Beyond Today Bible Commentary introductory comments on Esther, even if it were written as a Persian state chronicle, we might expect the account to say something to the effect of "the Jews besought their God for help." But it does not. It may well be that the

point is to teach us to see the work of God not in explicit references but in His general providential guidance of events for our welfare. As *The Bible Reader's Companion* notes on its introduction to the book, "God, although hidden from our view, works through circumstances and human choices to accomplish His own ends. Esther teaches us to see the hidden God revealed in the ebb and flow of personal and world events and to praise Him for His continual care."

And no matter what happens, like Esther all of us have the personal responsibility to do whatever is in our power to serve God and His people—even if it means sacrificing our own comfort or, should it be necessary, even our own lives. If we are in a position to speak out for the welfare of others in dire need, then that is what we must do. If human laws forbid us from obeying God, we must decide to obey Him anyway. Our task is ever and always to do the will of God—whatever it is. When hard times come and it's difficult to make the right choice, remember this scriptural example and ask yourself, "Who knows whether you have come to your particular situation for such a time as this?" [END]

#### Day 704 – WEDNESDAY: July 23<sup>rd</sup>

Esther 5

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "When Esther goes in to see the king, he is receptive to her—she would not die. Xerxes knows that she must have some important reason for daring to approach him, and he reassures her of his favor, promising her up to half his kingdom—"probably an example of Oriental [i.e. Middle Eastern] courtesy that was not intended to be taken too literally (cf. [Mark 6:23](#))" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on [Esther 5:3](#)).

Esther's response is not to immediately plead for her people. Instead, she invites the king and Haman to a banquet she has prepared for that

day. Given the presumptuousness of her entrance, she may not have deemed it a good moment to compound the problem by possibly upsetting the volatile king in revealing that she, his wife and queen, had for all this time not disclosed her national identity to him. It could also be that she did not want to reveal this matter before all the royal officials who were probably present. But why invite Haman to the banquet? "Many suggestions have been made. To make Xerxes jealous. Perhaps so that Haman's reaction, when Esther accuses him, might reveal his guilt. Perhaps Esther acted in the best traditions of her people, to confront Haman face-to-face rather than speak behind his back" (*Bible Reader's Companion*, note on verse 4).

Xerxes realizes that Esther did not risk her life for a mere banquet. And he probably understood that she prepared the banquet so as to avoid discussing the real reason before all of his officials. At the meal, then, the king asks her for her actual petition. But she delays, asking the two back for a second banquet the next day—which, remarkably, the king does not question. "One may ask why Esther waited instead of disclosing what was on her mind. [Whatever her reason,] the delay providentially allowed time for the king's sleepless night and the events that followed (ch. 6)" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verses 6-8).

Haman's brief exultation is cut short by Mordecai's disrespect (verse 9). His vanity caused him such hatred for Mordecai that he could not enjoy how well things seemed to be going for him (verses 10-13). Of course, in this case things were not going so well as he thought. "Haman's boasting only accentuated his later humiliation and fall from favor (cf. [Prov 16:18](#))" (*Expositor's Bible Commentary*, note on [Esther 5:11-12](#)).

The "hanging" proposed for Mordecai was, as the *Word in Life Bible* points out in a note on [Esther 2:23](#), "probably not hanging as we know it. The gallows of ancient Persia was not a scaffold but a pole or stake upon which the victim was impaled. Execution by such

impalement was a common practice of the Assyrians, who killed war captives by forcing their living bodies down onto pointed stakes. The Persians continued this grim means of execution. Thus references to hanging in Esther ([Esther 5:14](#); [Esther 6:4](#); [Esther 9:14](#)) probably refer to impalement, or possibly crucifixion.]" [END]

### Day 705 – THURSDAY: July 24<sup>th</sup>

Esther 6

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "With chapter 6 we come to "the turning point in the book. Within this chapter we observe a series of events that unmistakably point to God's sovereign hand [ultimately] controlling all events. Only because of his sleepless night did the king learn of Mordecai's past bravery on his behalf.... The king might have been aware to some extent of Mordecai's deed when it originally occurred. In 2:23 the author says that the events were written down 'in the presence of the king.' Now the Lord led the king to this very text" (Nelson, notes on verses 1-3). The oversight in not having already rewarded Mordecai "must have disturbed Xerxes, as it was a reflection on him for not rewarding one of his benefactors. Herodotus indicated that it was a point of honor with Persian kings to reward promptly and generously those who had benefited them" (Expositor's, note on verses 2-3).

In verses 4-5 we again see God's hand at work. Xerxes wants to set things right with regard to Mordecai and asks if some court official is around who can attend to the matter. It was at this very moment that Haman arrived to recommend to the king that Mordecai be hanged. Perhaps it was early morning by this point.

There is great irony and humor in what follows. Haman in his prideful arrogance cannot imagine who the king could wish to honor more than him, so he proposes what he believes will be the pinnacle of public

adulation showered on himself. Yet the one to be honored turns out to be none other than the hated enemy he has come to have hanged. Worse, he himself would have to stoop to leading Mordecai's horse around and publicly extolling this person against whom he burned with rage. "Haman had no choice but to carry out the king's orders. No writer, however gifted, could adequately describe the chagrin and mortification Haman must have experienced as he robed Mordecai and led him through the streets" (note on verse 11).

It is interesting that the king refers to Mordecai as "Mordecai the Jew" (verse 10)—having not long before issued an edict to eradicate the Jewish people. As mentioned previously, it may be that the king did not realize exactly whom Haman's decree was meant for. It does seem that he would have come to know it by now, but perhaps not. It could be that he thought only some of the Jews were to be killed. In any case, that the king would so greatly honor a Jew did not bode well for Haman's plan—a fact his own wife and friends recognized (verse 13). No doubt they also saw that it was no mere coincidence that Haman had been forced to honor someone he had meant to hang. They perhaps saw this as a case of supernatural forces acting against him—as indeed they should have. Furthermore, as *Expositor's* notes regarding verse 13, "Most commentators think the author was injecting into the mouths of Haman's friends the Jewish belief in the ultimate victory of the Jews over the Amalekites." Indeed, it may even point to the fact that all God's people will ultimately prevail over all their enemies—a fact prefigured in the outcome of this story." [END]

### Day 706 – FRIDAY: July 25<sup>th</sup>

Esther 7

Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "At Esther's second banquet, the king again asks her what this is really all about, promising to grant her request (verses 1-2). This time she makes her impassioned plea—for

her own life and that of her people (verses 3-4). From the king's response in verse 5, it may be that she did not yet reveal the identity of her people. For had she done so, and if he were aware that the Jews were slated for destruction—which seems likely on some level despite his honoring of Mordecai—he wouldn't have wondered who was paying for their eradication, having himself been complicit in Haman's decree.

Then, in verse 6, she lets the hammer drop—the enemy is Haman. It is this statement that actually reveals Esther as a Jew. The king is stunned and furious. He storms outside—dazed, full of emotional turmoil and trying to think. He may well have been unhappy with Esther herself for hiding her nationality from him for all this time. And had not Haman made a good case against those deserving execution? Was he not a valued, trusted adviser? Yet perhaps Haman was the evil, wicked person the queen claimed after all. And look at what he had allowed this man to talk him into. The wise and mighty Xerxes had let someone pull the wool over his eyes, making a fool of him. It was just too much to take in all at once.

The terror-stricken Haman runs over to Esther, pleading for his life. When the king returns, he finds "Haman...draped over the queen's couch in a compromising position. Presumably, he was grasping at her with a desire to implore her favor. The king, on discovering this outrageous situation, wondered aloud if Haman intended to ravage the queen. The Persians had strict rules about contact with the harem by any male other than the king. The eunuchs were the only persons who had access to the rooms of these women. Haman was in danger merely by being near her. This sight enraged the king" (*Nelson Study Bible*, note on verse 8). Perhaps the king saw Haman as attempting through such an assault to force her to retract her accusation against him. In any case, it was all over for Haman the Agagite.

As the king spoke, the account says that "they" covered Haman's face (verse 8)—evidently referring to the eunuchs mentioned in the next verse. We are not told whether they had been present the whole time or came in because of the commotion. "The king's angry words were a sentence of death. Although there is no evidence that it was a Persian custom to cover the face of a condemned criminal before he was led away to execution, that was probably its meaning here" (*Expositor's*, note on verse 8).

In verse 9, Harbonah, mentioned near the beginning of the book as one of the eunuchs sent to summon Queen Vashti ([Esther 1:10](#)), speaks up about Haman's just-built scaffolding meant for Mordecai, a man the king had honored the previous day for saving his life. The poetic justice demanded was all too clear. Haman was sentenced to the same grim fate he had planned for Mordecai ([Esther 7:9-10](#))."  
[END]

## Day 707 – SATURDAY: July 26<sup>th</sup>

### Esther 8

#### Daily Deep Dive:

The UCG reading plan states: "The same day as the events of the previous chapter, the king gave Haman's estate to Esther ([Esther 8:1](#)). "Persian law gave the state the power to confiscate the property of those who had been condemned as criminals (cf. Herodotus 3.128-29...)" (note on verse 1). Esther revealed her relation to Mordecai, who was then brought in and given the king's signet ring, making him the prime minister in place of Haman. Mordecai's position is later explained to be "second to King Ahasuerus" ([Esther 10:3](#)). Having just honored Mordecai for saving his life, the king probably saw this man as one he could trust. And Mordecai being the adoptive father of the queen was another reason to accord him high status. In a further example of poetic justice, Esther commits Haman's estate to Mordecai, making him very wealthy. Recall that Haman had sought to confiscate the property of the Jewish people (see [Esther 3:13](#)).

Yet there was still a major problem, which Esther brought to the king—the decree to destroy the Jews was still in effect. As other scriptures show, Persian law could not be altered (see [Daniel 6:8](#), [Daniel 6:12](#), [Daniel 6:15](#)). But depending on the wording of a decree, a second decree might be able to effectively invalidate it. This is what the king instructed Esther and Mordecai to draw up in [Esther 8:7-8](#). In verse 9 we see that it was the third month, still leaving almost nine months until the time set for the Jews' destruction in the first decree—thus allowing ample time to prepare for an attack at that time.

Verses 11-12 have led many to reject Esther as an uninspired book. The view is that Esther and Mordecai were evil in calling for such vengeance as to utterly wipe out their enemies, including women and children, when God had not ordered such a thing. Yet that is based on a misreading of these verses. If we carefully compare these verses with Haman's original decree, we can see that the original decree is actually quoted in them—so that the women and children are not those of the enemies but of the Jews. Note the wording of the original decree referred to in [Esther 3:13](#): "And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions." The counter-order in chapter 8 is to defend against anyone who would try to carry out the wording of the first decree. Notice in [Esther 8:11-12](#) that the Jews were to "protect their lives—to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, [them being the Jews, including] both [as the original decree stated, the Jews'] little children and women, and [who would assault the Jews] to plunder their possessions, on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar." That this is not talking about the Jews killing the women and children of their enemies and plundering their property in revenge should be clear from the fact

that when the Jews carried out the decree, *they killed only men* (see [Esther 9:6](#), [Esther 9:12](#), [Esther 9:15](#)) and *they did not take any plunder* (see [Esther 9:10](#), [Esther 9:15-16](#)). The point of the new decree, then, was simply for the Jews to defend themselves against those enemies who would seek to cause them harm. However, this probably did include striking preemptively against those who had already shown themselves hostile to the Jews.

When the new decree came, the mourning of the Jews was replaced with great rejoicing ([Esther 8:16](#)). No doubt news also spread of all that had transpired. This was a cause of great fear of the Jews among the people of the empire (verse 17)—no doubt due to a perceived supernatural favor that must have rested on them. Surprisingly, this sparked mass "conversions" (see same verse). The phrase "became Jews" is interesting—as it shows the name Jew as applied not in an ethnic sense but as denoting one who was part of the Jewish religious community. Motivated by fear of the Jewish people, it seems likely that most of these conversions were not genuine. Many may have merely claimed to be Jews without making any changes in their lives at all. Nevertheless, this all served to increase the acceptance of the Jews in the empire—and it enlarged their numbers to help dissuade would-be attackers. The real point here, though, is to see just how far the tables had turned. The change was so drastic that it was now deemed dangerous to *not* be a Jew." [END]