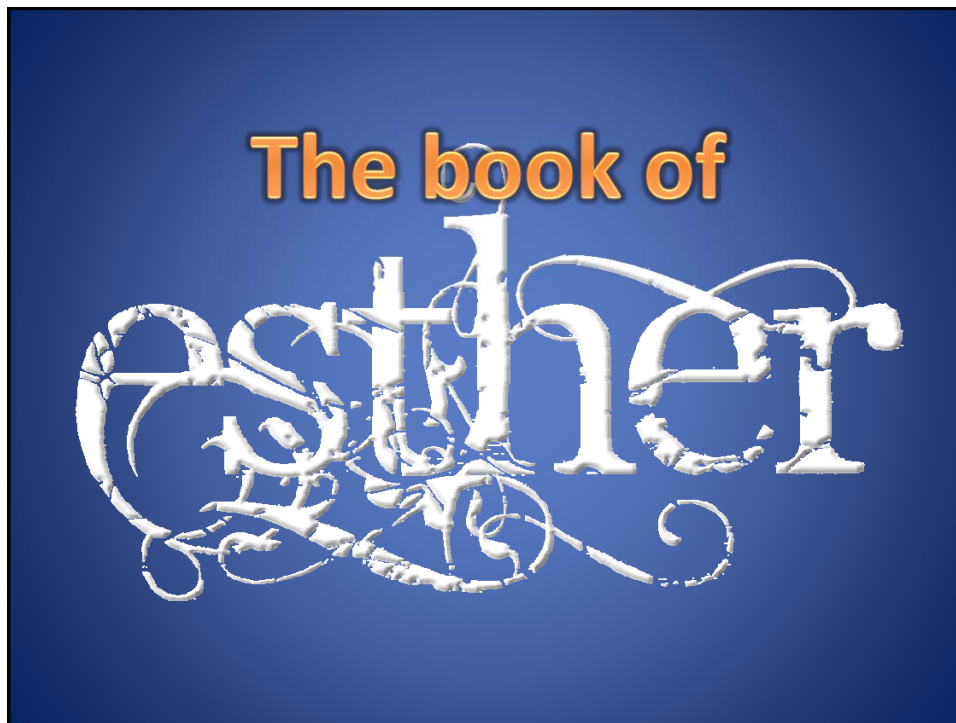


WHAT THE  
**B**IBLE  
Is ABOUT





WHAT THE  
**B**IBLE  
Is ABOUT





**6** SESSION SIX



### Introduction

- One of two Bible books named for women, many have questioned why this book is in the Bible, including Luther and Calvin. After all:
  - It doesn't mention God or the Messiah;
  - It doesn't mention faith or worship;
  - It doesn't mention anything "religious";
  - There's no uplifting "moral of the story";
  - It's just a love story wrapped inside a palace intrigue set in ancient times, something for Barbara Cartland fans.

Cast of Characters			
ESTHER	XERXES	HAMAN	MORDECAI
			
<b>A young Jewish virgin</b>	<b>King of Persia 485-465 BC</b>	<b>Grand Vizier (P.M.)</b>	<b>Local Jewish leader and public servant</b>
A poor orphan girl raised by her cousin Mordecai, willing to risk her own life to save her people. A Jewess of the Tribe of Benjamin.	Mighty king ruling the Persian Empire that included almost all of the known world (darn those nasty Greeks).	An Amalekite who is the ruthless and powerful grand vizier of Persia; seeks more wealth and power and loathes Mordecai with ancient hatred.	Mid-range but influential public servant in Persia; cousin and legal guardian of Esther. A Jew of the Tribe of Benjamin.

Cast of Characters			
ESTHER	XERXES	HAMAN	MORDECAI
			
<b>Queen of Persia</b>	<b>King of Persia 485-465 BC</b>	<b>Grand Vizier (P.M.)</b>	<b>Local Jewish leader and public servant</b>
Favoured wife and Queen of Xerxes, willing to risk her own life to save her people. A Jewess of the Tribe of Benjamin.	Mighty king ruling the Persian Empire that included almost all of the known world (darn those nasty Greeks).	An Amalekite who is the ruthless and powerful grand vizier of Persia; seeks more wealth and power and loathes Mordecai with ancient hatred.	Mid-range but influential public servant in Persia; cousin and legal guardian of Esther. A Jew of the Tribe of Benjamin.

## Plot Summary

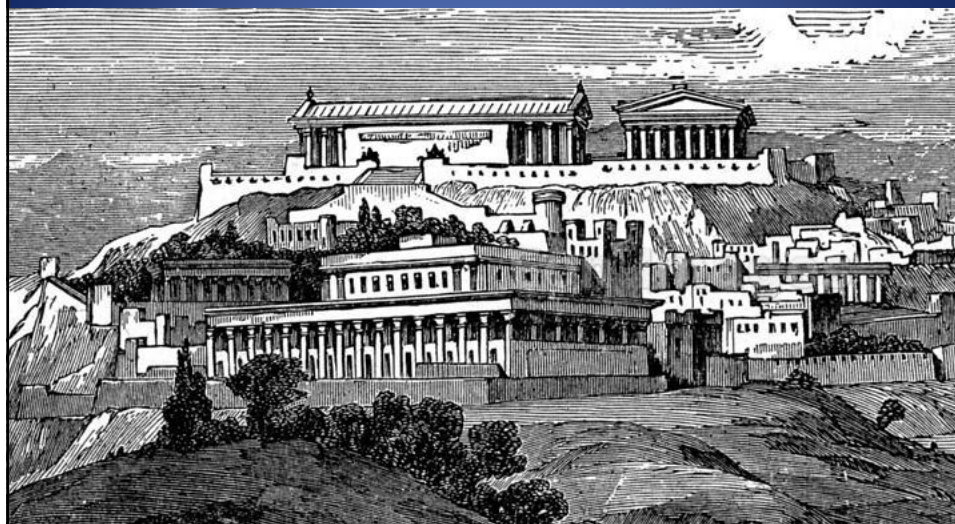
- Babylon falls to the Medes and Persians and the Exile is over, but few Jews want the hard yakka of a return to Jerusalem.
- Persian ruler (Ahasuerus) Xerxes plans to conquer Greece. To show his greatness, he asks Queen Vashti to dance for his drunk generals, but she tweets #metoo, so he sacks her.
- Years later, a beauty contest is held to replace Vashti, and a young woman hiding her Jewish background miraculously wins and becomes the No. 1 wife (queen).
- P.M. Haman (boo) orders all to bow to him; Esther's guardian Mordecai refuses. Evil Haman devises a plan to kill all Jews.
- Mordecai learns of the plot and informs Esther.
- Esther outwits Haman and informs the king.
- Outraged, the king executes Haman but rules are rules, he can't undo his order to kill all Jews. So sorry.
- But all is not lost; through her cleverness the Jews are saved.

Is Esther  
even a  
**true story?**

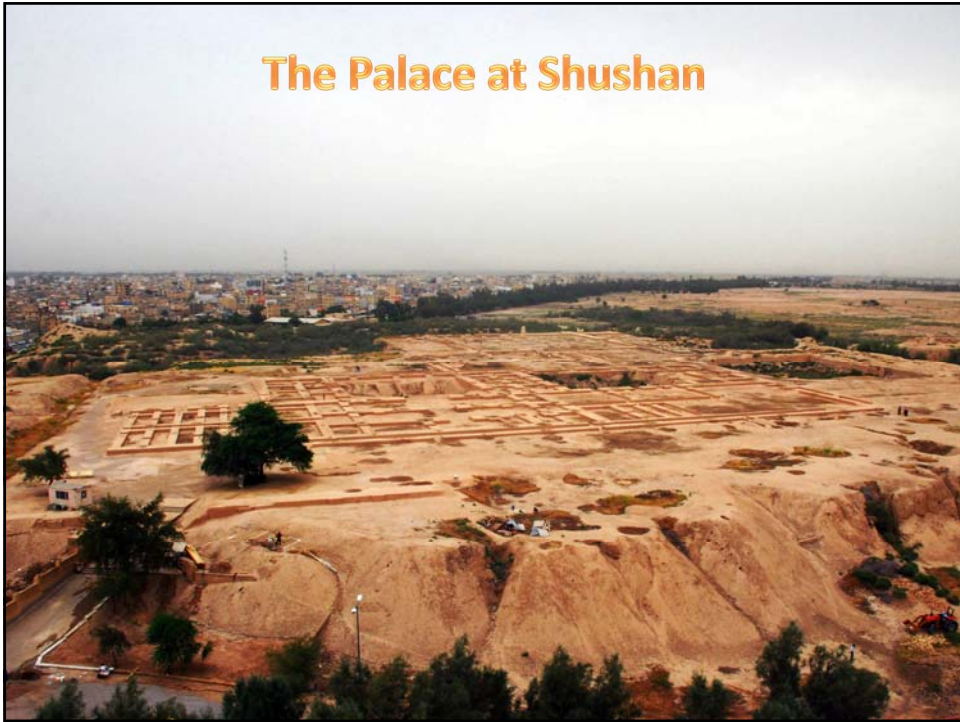
## What we know

- **Fact.** Babylon fell to the Medo-Persians in 539BC.
- **Fact.** Ahasuerus Xerxes ruled Persia from 485-465BC.
- **Fact.** Historian Herodotus (485-425BC) wrote Xerxes planned to invade Europe (*The History*, Bk VII, sec. 8).
- **Fact.** The Persians were hard drinkers and often drank to excess (*Herodotus* (1:133); *Xenophon 'Cyrop.'*, 8:8, § 11).
- **Fact.** Xerxes was a showoff. (*Herodotus*, many references).
- **Fact.** Invasion of 481BC was defeated in 479BC.
- **Fact.** Shushan was a major palace of Persian kings.
- **Fact.** Shushan's ruins were found in 1836; excavation begun by French archaeologists in 1851 continue.

## Shushan



## The Palace at Shushan





Fact: Jews celebrate survival with an annual feast.

# PURIM

Celebrating G-d's deliverance!

- This holiday is declared in the book of Esther.
- "Purim" is the Hebrew word for "lots".
- The 14<sup>th</sup> day of the Jewish month of Adar.
- It celebrates the failure of Haman's genocidal plot.

TRANS-EUPHRATES

CYRUS DARIUS ESTHER XERXES ARTAXERXES

Hey, they can't do that!

*projectus interruptus*

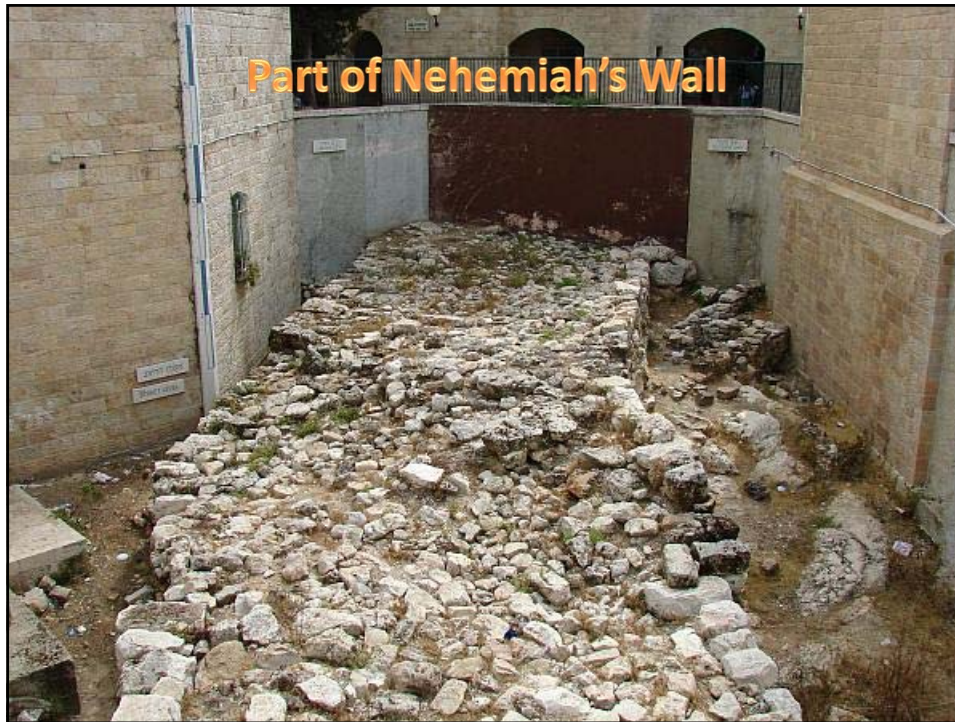
foreign wives

Death to Jews!

BUILT IN 52 DAYS

Haggai Zechariah	<b>ZERUBBABEL</b>	<b>ESTHER</b>	<b>EZRA</b>	<b>NEHEMIAH</b>
	Ezra 1-6	Esther 1-12	Ezra 7-10	Nehemiah 1-13
	537 BC	483-471	458 BC	444 BC





What does *esther* mean?

*esther*

Persian name used by Hadassah,  
probably means "Star" but could be  
derived from Ishtar (an ancient idol).

What does **Esther** mean?

Persian name used by Hadassah, probably means “Star” but could be derived from Ishtar (an ancient idol). However, a Jewish sage noted that in Hebrew it means “**something hidden**”.

### The literary structure

- 
- Prologue (situation)
  - 2-3 Xerxes' first decree
  - 4-5 Haman's exasperation with Mordecai
  - Xerxes insomnia
  - 6-7 Mordecai's exaltation over Haman
  - 8-9 Xerxes second decree
  - 10 Epilogue (celebration)
- DANGER**  
(1-5)
- DELIVERANCE**  
(6-10)

## Esther 1 – Xerxes Dethrones Queen Vashti

<sup>1</sup> Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this *was* the Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia), <sup>2</sup> in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which *was* in Shushan the citadel, <sup>3</sup> *that* in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants—the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces *being* before him— <sup>4</sup> when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendour of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days *in all*.



<sup>5</sup> And when these days were completed, the king made a feast lasting seven days for all the people who were present in Shushan the citadel, from great to small, in the court of the garden of the king's palace.

<sup>6</sup> *There were* white and blue linen *curtains* fastened with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars; *and the couches were* of gold and silver on a *mosaic* pavement of alabaster, turquoise, and white and black marble.

<sup>7</sup> And they served drinks in golden vessels, each vessel being different from the other, with royal wine in abundance, according to the generosity of the king. <sup>8</sup> In accordance with the law, the drinking was not compulsory; for so the king had ordered all the officers of his household, that they should do according to each man's pleasure.

<sup>9</sup> Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women *in* the royal palace which *belonged* to King Ahasuerus.

<sup>10</sup> On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded

Mehuman,  
Biztha,  
Harbona,  
Bigtha,  
Abagtha,  
Zethar, and  
Carcas,



seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, <sup>11</sup> to bring Queen Vashti before the king, *wearing* her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials, for she *was* beautiful to behold. <sup>12</sup> But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command *brought* by *his* eunuchs; therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him.

<sup>13</sup> Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times (for this *was* the king's manner toward all who knew law and justice, <sup>14</sup> those closest to him *being*

Carshena,  
Shethar,  
Admatha,  
Tarshish,  
Meres,  
Marsena, and  
Memucan,



the seven princes of Persia and Media, who had access to the king's presence, *and* who ranked highest in the kingdom):

<sup>15</sup> "What *shall* we do to Queen Vashti, according to law, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus *brought* to her by the eunuchs?"

<sup>16</sup> And Memucan answered before the king and the princes: “Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also all the princes, and all the people who *are* in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. <sup>17</sup> For the queen’s behavior will become known to all women, so that they will despise their husbands in their eyes, when they report, ‘King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in before him, but she did not come.’ <sup>18</sup> This very day the *noble* ladies of Persia and Media will say to all the king’s officials that they have heard of the behavior of the queen. Thus *there will be* excessive contempt and wrath.

<sup>19</sup> If it pleases the king, let a royal decree go out from him, and let it be recorded in the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it will not be altered, that Vashti shall come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. <sup>20</sup> When the king’s decree which he will make is proclaimed throughout all his empire (for it is great), all wives will honor their husbands, both great and small.”

<sup>21</sup> And the reply pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan. <sup>22</sup> Then he sent letters to all the king’s provinces, to each province in its own script, and to every people in their own language, that each man should be master in his own house, and speak in the language of his own people.



## Interlude 481-479 BC – War with Greece

### Background:

- **Battle of Marathon** (490 BC) – Darius I against Athens and Eretria lost 6,400 men to 192. Xerxes wanted revenge.

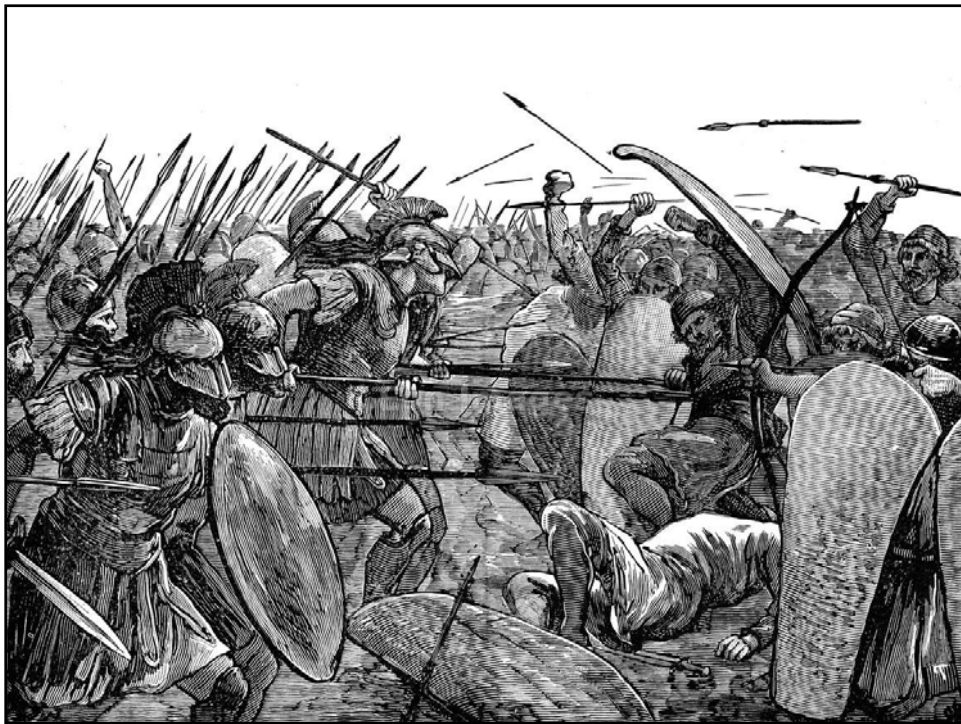
### The Greco-Persian War:

Diplomacy and threat of force won most of Greece for Xerxes, but those pesky Spartans led the resistance.

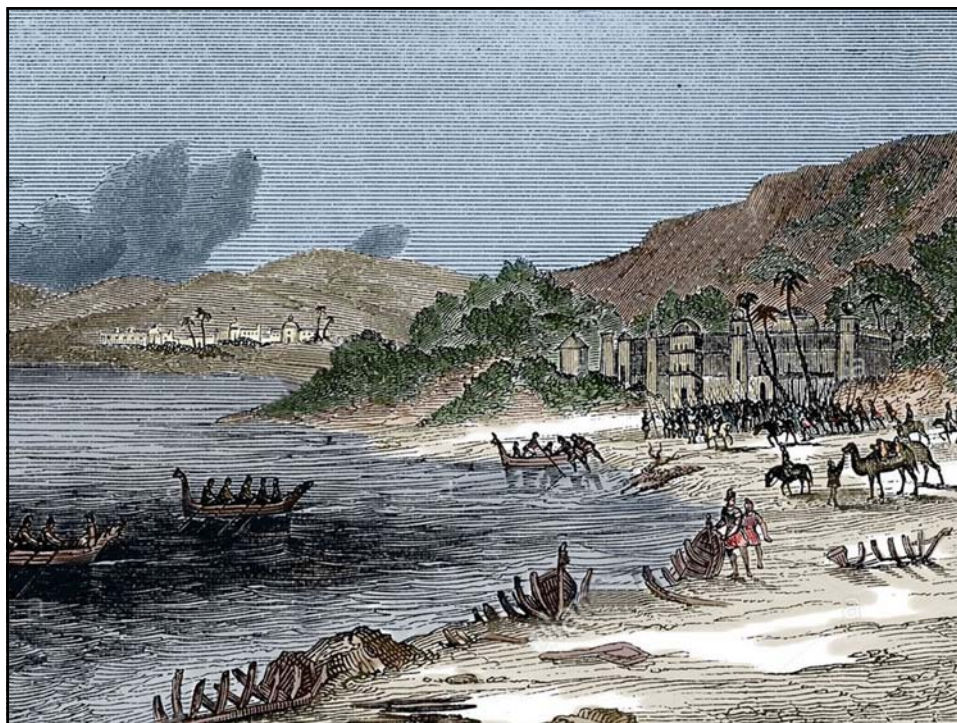
- **Battle of Thermopylae** (480 BC) – 1,400 held out against 2.6 million, but were betrayed by Ephialtes and Athens fell.
- **Battle of Salamis** (480 BC) – Greek naval victory near Athens, Xerxes lost 200 of 400 ships (against 40 of 380).
- **Battle of Plataea** (479 BC) – Final battle destroys Persian Army. Only 5,000 men return with the beaten Xerxes.











## Esther 2 - Esther Becomes Queen

<sup>1</sup> After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus subsided, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what had been decreed against her.

<sup>2</sup> Then the king's servants who attended him said: "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king; <sup>3</sup> and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan the citadel, into the women's quarters, under the custody of Hegai the king's eunuch, custodian of the women. And let beauty preparations be given *them*. <sup>4</sup> Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti."

This thing pleased the king, and he did so.



<sup>5</sup> In Shushan the citadel there was a certain Jew whose name *was* Mordecai the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite. <sup>6</sup> *Kish* had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been captured with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. <sup>7</sup> And *Mordecai* had brought up Hadassah, that *is*, Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman *was* lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.

<sup>8</sup> So it was, when the king's command and decree were heard, and when many young women were gathered at Shushan the citadel, *under* the custody of Hegai, that Esther also was taken to the king's palace, into the care of Hegai the custodian of the women. <sup>9</sup> Now the young woman pleased him, and she obtained his favor; so he readily gave beauty preparations to her, besides her allowance. Then seven choice maidservants were provided for her from the king's palace, and he moved her and her maidservants to the best *place* in the house of the women.

<sup>10</sup> Esther had not revealed her people or family, for Mordecai had charged her not to reveal *it*. <sup>11</sup> And every day Mordecai paced in front of the court of the women's quarters, to learn of Esther's welfare and what was happening to her.

<sup>12</sup> Each young woman's turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after she had completed twelve months' preparation, according to the regulations for the women, for thus were the days of their preparation apportioned: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women.

<sup>13</sup> Thus *prepared*, *each* young woman went to the king, and she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace. <sup>14</sup> In the evening she went, and in the morning she returned to the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who kept the concubines. She would not go in to the king again unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name.

<sup>15</sup> Now when the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter, to go in to the king, she requested nothing but what Hegai the king's eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her.

<sup>16</sup> So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which *is* the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. <sup>17</sup> The king loved Esther more than all the *other* women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

<sup>18</sup> Then the king made a great feast, the Feast of Esther, for all his officials and servants; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces and gave gifts according to the generosity of a king.

### **Mordecai Discovers a Plot**

<sup>19</sup> When virgins were gathered together a second time, Mordecai sat within the king's gate. <sup>20</sup> Now Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him.

<sup>21</sup> In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, doorkeepers, became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. <sup>22</sup> So the matter became known to Mordecai, who told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name. <sup>23</sup> And when an inquiry was made into the matter, it was confirmed, and both were hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.

**TWO  
YEARS  
LATER**

OR SO

### **Esther 3 – Haman's Conspiracy**

<sup>1</sup> After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who *were* with him. <sup>2</sup> And all the king's servants who *were* within the king's gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage. <sup>3</sup> Then the king's servants who *were* within the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?"

<sup>4</sup> Now it happened, when they spoke to him daily and he would not listen to them, that they told *it* to Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand; for *Mordecai* had told them that he *was* a Jew. <sup>5</sup> When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath. <sup>6</sup> But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who *were* throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus—the people of Mordecai.

<sup>7</sup> In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that *is*, the lot), before Haman to determine the day and the month, until *it fell on the twelfth month*, which *is* the month of Adar.



<sup>8</sup> Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, “There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws *are* different from all *other* people’s, and they do not keep the king’s laws. Therefore it *is* not fitting for the king to let them remain. <sup>9</sup> If it pleases the king, let *a decree* be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring *it* into the king’s treasuries.”

<sup>10</sup> So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. <sup>11</sup> And the king said to Haman, “The money and the people *are* given to you, to do with them as seems good to you.”

## 10,000 talents of Silver

340 tonnes or 70 elephants

340,194 kg



A\$757.41/kg

Australian Silver Market  
23 May 2018

10,000 talents =  
A\$257,666,000



<sup>12</sup> Then the king's scribes were called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and *a decree* was written according to all that Haman commanded—to the king's satraps, to the governors who *were* over each province, to the officials of all people, to every province according to its script, and to every people in their language. In the name of King Ahasuerus it was written, and sealed with the king's signet ring. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> A copy of the document was to be issued as law in every province, being published for all people, that they should be ready for that day. <sup>15</sup> The couriers went out, hastened by the king's command; and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan the citadel. So the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Shushan was perplexed.

### Esther 4 – Esther's Dilemma

<sup>1</sup> When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry. <sup>2</sup> He went as far as the front of the king's gate, for no one *might* enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. <sup>3</sup> And in every province where the king's command and decree arrived, *there was* great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

<sup>4</sup> So Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, and the queen was deeply distressed. Then she sent garments to clothe Mordecai and take his sackcloth away from him, but he would not accept *them*. <sup>5</sup> Then Esther called Hathach, *one* of the king's eunuchs whom he had appointed to attend her, and she gave him a command concerning Mordecai, to learn what and why *this was*.

<sup>6</sup> So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square that *was* in front of the king's gate. <sup>7</sup> And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews. <sup>8</sup> He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, which was given at Shushan, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her, and that he might command her to go in to the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people. <sup>9</sup> So Hathach returned and told Esther the words of Mordecai.

<sup>10</sup> Then Esther spoke to Hathach, and gave him a command for Mordecai: <sup>11</sup> "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, *he has* but one law: put *all* to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days." <sup>12</sup> So they told Mordecai Esther's words.

<sup>13</sup> And Mordecai told *them* to answer Esther: "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. <sup>14</sup> For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?"

<sup>15</sup> Then Esther told *them* to reply to Mordecai: <sup>16</sup> "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which *is* against the law; and if I perish, I perish!"

<sup>17</sup> So Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther commanded him.



## Esther 5 – Esther's Banquet

<sup>1</sup> Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on *her* royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, across from the king's house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house. <sup>2</sup> So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, *that* she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that *was* in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter.

<sup>3</sup> And the king said to her, "What do you wish, Queen Esther? What *is* your request? It shall be given to you—up to half the kingdom!"

<sup>4</sup> So Esther answered, "If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him."

<sup>5</sup> Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly, that he may do as Esther has said." So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

<sup>6</sup> At the banquet of wine the king said to Esther, "What *is* your petition? It shall be granted you. What *is* your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!"

<sup>7</sup> Then Esther answered and said, "My petition and request *is this*: <sup>8</sup> If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said."

<sup>9</sup> So Haman went out that day joyful and with a glad heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, and that he did not stand or tremble before him, he was filled with indignation against Mordecai. <sup>10</sup> Nevertheless Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and called for his friends and his wife Zeresh.

### **Haman's Plot Against Mordecai**

<sup>11</sup> Then Haman told them of his great riches, the multitude of his children, everything in which the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and servants of the king.

<sup>12</sup> Moreover Haman said, "Besides, Queen Esther invited no one but me to come in with the king to the banquet that she prepared; and tomorrow I am again invited by her, along with the king. <sup>13</sup> Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

<sup>14</sup> Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high, and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it; then go merrily with the king to the banquet."

And the thing pleased Haman; so he had the gallows made.