



## Summary of Esther

### Introduction

Esther is the last of the historical books of the Bible, so its main character is named Esther - that is, Venus, the morning star, which sheds its light after all the other stars have ceased to shine, and while the sun still delays to rise. Thus the deeds of Queen Esther cast a ray of light forward into Israel's history from a dark time.

Esther had been raised by her cousin Mordecai as exiled Jews in the Persian Empire. When a minority of Jews had returned to Judæa they had remained. When the queen disobeyed her husband he dismissed her and married the beautiful Esther. A powerful man in the court of the Persian king called Haman wanted to destroy all the Jews but his plot was foiled because Mordecai had been faithful to the king and Esther had been courageous in approaching the king to inform him of the wickedness of Haman, who was subsequently executed. To further thwart the plans of Haman the king issued a decree saying that the Jews could defend themselves and they survived.

### Chapter One

This is a mini-story in its own right. The scene is set by a description of two banquets, hosted by the king and queen respectively. Queen Vashti's defiance of her husband King Ahasuerus and its consequences follow.

### Chapter Two

Following the counsel of his servants and God's sovereign plan, of course, King Ahasuerus gathered beautiful young virgins from his vast kingdom to be placed in his harem, so that they might have a one-night audition with the king. It is here that Mordecai, a self-identified Jew, and his orphaned cousin Esther, are introduced. Esther was chosen because she had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at. Mordecai worried about his cousin's welfare, and every day

he walked in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and what was happening to her.

To bolster his reputation and salve his wounded pride, King Ahasuerus gathers the captive girls he considers beautiful to select his new queen to replace the disgraced Vashti. In contrast, from a Jewish perspective, Esther spoils and demeans herself by acceding to the pagan king's desires, although in reality she had little choice if she wanted to live. Yet as queen, Esther will be used by God, despite her impurity and shame, to protect the lineage of God's chosen people, from whom the Messiah was yet to come.

God continues behind the scenes, as Mordecai becomes aware of a plot against Ahasuerus and communicates it to the king. Although Mordecai should have been rewarded for his allegiance, he was forgotten for the time being. However, God is ruling sovereignly and will use these events in his own time. The invisible hand of God continues to work toward his people's preservation.

### Chapter Three

Haman the Agagite was promoted to a position of prominence by the king, which meant that the people should bow before him as he passed but Mordecai would not. This infuriated Haman and when he found out that Mordecai was a Jew, rather than deal with him personally he sought permission from the king to have all the Jews killed, stating that they were the king's enemies. A date was set by lot and edicts written by Haman, sealed with the king's ring, were sent throughout the land giving instruction to annihilate the Jews throughout the Persian Empire.

### Chapter Four

When Mordecai hears of Haman's plot he goes into mourning and he also passes a message to Esther to approach the king on the matter. She had not been called into the presence of the king for a month and an unsolicited approach on her part could lead to her death. Therefore, she asks Mordecai to gather all the Jews and fast for her. She would gather her maids and do the same.

### Chapter Five

Following three days of fasting, Esther went unannounced to see the king and he welcomed her into his presence. She requested that he and Haman should attend a banquet that Esther had prepared for them and the king summoned Haman to join them. During the banquet Esther requested that the two men should join her for a further banquet the following day and the king agreed.

Haman left the banquet in high spirits but was infuriated to notice that Mordecai did not bow down as he passed. Haman continued on his journey home, called his wife and friends to him and recounted what great honour he

was held in, sharing in special banquet with the king and invited again tomorrow. His joy was only soured by the actions of Mordecai, so his wife suggested he should have a gallows built and then to suggest to the king the following day that Mordecai should be hanged.

### Chapter Six

Events now move so tellingly in favour of Esther and Mordecai that a presumption of God's providential involvement becomes unavoidable. The king was having a sleepless night and so looked through some of the royal records, coming across the account where Mordecai had foiled an assassination attempt on the king. The king wished to reward Mordecai for his faithfulness at which point Haman arrived in court. The king sought Haman's opinion without identifying who would receive the honour. In his vanity Haman immediately thought the king was referring to him and suggested high praise through public honour. The king then dispatched Haman to honour Mordecai as he had suggested, which he did but was mortified in having to do so.

### Chapter Seven

Despite his despair and humiliation Haman is summoned to attend the banquet with the king prepared for them by Esther. The king again requests that Esther make her petition and she asks him to spare the lives of her and her people from the decree made by Haman. The king was furious with Haman for threatening the life of his queen in this way and went out into the garden to calm his mood. In the meantime Haman threw himself on Esther's couch asking for her mercy. At this moment the king returned, believed that Haman was assaulting Esther and had him immediately taken out and executed on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

### Chapter Eight

With the death of Haman, the royal signet ring and the position of influence that Haman had previously held was passed on to Mordecai. However, Haman's death did not be resolved the issue of the impending genocide of the Jews for the king's edict could not be revoked by law. When Esther pleaded with her husband to save her people he gave her authority to write a new edict and this was done giving permission to the Jews to defend themselves if anyone tried to enforce the Hamanian edict. This new command gave rise to great rejoicing among the Jews and many other people professed to be Jews but only out of fear for what may happen to them when the Jews rise up to defend themselves.

## Chapters Nine and Ten

Finally the date for the Haman's edict came and the enemies of the Jews rose against them. However, the Jews were also supported by those in governance of the empire who feared the now powerful Mordecai and it was the Jews who prevailed, slaughtering seventy five thousand of their opponents but taking no plunder from them. The king gave Queen Esther permission for a second day of fighting in Susa to complete the destruction of the Jewish opponents.

Following the final victory there was a great celebration and Mordecai gave an instruction that the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar should be kept as a festival of remembrance in all the towns and villages throughout the empire. Because Haman had decided the original date by lot or Pur, this festival became known as Purim or lots. Orders to keep this festival year by year went out with the authority of the king and queen. Peace then came upon the land with Mordecai serving the king as next in rank, essentially his prime minister.