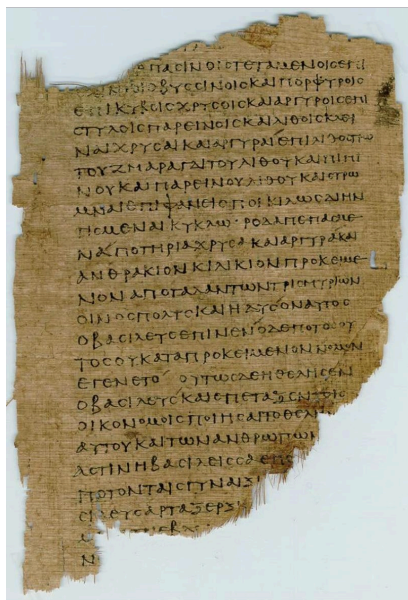


ESTHER

For Such a Time as This

AUTHOR	Not named. The Talmud says the Men of the Great Assembly, Jewish leaders after the exile, wrote it down. Some think Mordecai wrote part of it, since he recorded these events, 9:20.
EVENTS TOOK PLACE	From Xerxes' party in his third year, about 483 BC, to the first Purim in his twelfth year, about 473 BC.
DATE	Many think it was written not long after the events, in the 400s BC. Others think it was written in the 300s BC or later.
WRITTEN TO	Jews scattered all over the Persian empire, far from Jerusalem.
KEY VERSE	Esther 4:14. And who knows if perhaps you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?



THE OLDEST COPY OF ESTHER

A page of Papyrus 967, copied in Greek about 200 AD or a little later and now in Cologne, Germany. It holds Esther 1:6 to 10: you can read the gold and silver couches of the king's party, and near the bottom the Greek calls the king Artaxerxes.

Esther is the only book of the Hebrew Bible missing from the Dead Sea Scrolls. The oldest copies are in Greek: this papyrus, then Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus from the 300s AD. The Aleppo Codex, a Hebrew Bible from about 930 AD, lost its Esther pages in the 1900s, so the oldest complete Hebrew copy is the Leningrad Codex, 1008 AD. Photo University of Cologne, Papyrus Collection.

Historical Setting

The citadel of Susa, a royal city of the Persian kings in what is now Iran. It happens between Ezra 6 and Ezra 7: the temple in Jerusalem was rebuilt, but most Jews never went home. They lived all over an empire of 127 provinces, from India to Cush.

What Was Going Wrong

A KING RULED BY MOODS. Xerxes threw out his queen while drunk, 1:10 to 22, and signed away a whole people without asking who they were, 3:10 to 11.

HATE WITH A PLAN. Haman wanted every Jew dead, young and old, women and children, on one day, 3:6 and 3:13.

HIDING. Esther kept her people secret, 2:10. Being a Jew could cost your life.

The Idiot Proof Summary

A Persian king throws out his queen and holds a beauty search. A Jewish orphan named Esther becomes queen, while her cousin Mordecai quietly saves the king's life. Then the king's top man, Haman, gets angry that Mordecai will not bow and plots to wipe out every Jew in the empire. Esther risks her life to go to the king uninvited. A sleepless night, a forgotten good deed and two dinners turn everything around: Haman is hanged on his own gallows, the Jews are allowed to fight back, and their worst day becomes the holiday of Purim. God is never named, but nothing in this story is an accident.

Esther at a Glance

CH 1	THE QUEEN WHO SAID NO Vashti is out.
CH 2	A NEW QUEEN An orphan wins the crown.
CH 3	HAMAN'S PLOT One man's pride, one day of death.
CH 4	SUCH A TIME AS THIS If I perish, I perish.
CH 5 to 7	TWO DINNERS AND A TWIST A sleepless king; Haman hangs.
CH 8 to 9:19	THE TABLES TURN The Jews fight back and win.
CH 9:20 to 10	PURIM A party every year.

Where Jesus Shows Up

ESTHER 4:16 Esther risked her life to stand between her people and death. Jesus did more: He gave His life for us while we were still sinners, Romans 5:8.

ESTHER 4:11 AND 5:2 No one could come to the Persian king without being called. Because of Jesus, we can come boldly to God's throne of grace, Hebrews 4:16.

ESTHER 7:10 Haman's plan to kill turned back on him. At the cross, the enemy's worst plan became his own defeat, Colossians 2:15.

GOD'S NAMES IN ESTHER

None. The Hebrew book of Esther never names God, not even once. The Greek Esther

adds prayers that name Him more than 50 times. See the Big Questions Where Is God in Esther? and The Greek Esther.

What to Watch for in Esther

PROPHECIES FULFILLED IN SCRIPTURE	6:13, 7:10
THE HEART	5:9, 6:6
ARCHAEOLOGY	1:2, 2:5, 3:7, 3:13
NOTABLE	4:14, 4:16, 6:1
GOD SPEAKING	Words in red are God speaking. Only the words He actually said are red.

Cool Stuff Most People Miss

NO RED LETTERS

The Hebrew book of Esther never names God, and no one quotes Him, so there are no red letters in this book. Yet His hand is everywhere. See Where Is God in Esther?

NOT IN THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS

Esther is the only book of the Hebrew Bible with no copy among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

STILL CELEBRATED

Jews still keep Purim every year, 9:26 to 28, about 2,500 years later.

How Did It Turn Out?

The Jews lived, Haman's family fell, and Mordecai became second to the king. Purim became a yearly party. About 15 years later, in 458 BC, Ezra led another group home to Jerusalem, Ezra 7.

ARCHAEOLOGY

1

CHAPTER 1 IN 30 SECONDS

King Xerxes throws a party that lasts six months, then a seven day one with free drinks. On day seven he is drunk and orders Queen Vashti to come and show off her beauty. She says no. His advisers panic that every wife in the empire will copy her, so Vashti is out.

XERXES' ROYAL FEAST

¹This is what happened in the days of Xerxes, who reigned over 127 provinces from India to Cush. ²In those days King Xerxes sat on his royal throne in the citadel of Susa.

³In the third year of his reign, Xerxes held a feast for all his officials and servants. The military leaders of Persia and Media were there, along with the nobles and princes of the provinces. ⁴And for a full 180 days he displayed the glorious riches of his kingdom and the magnificent splendor of his greatness.

⁵At the end of this time, in the garden court of the royal palace, the king held a seven-day feast for all the people in the citadel of Susa, from the least to the greatest. ⁶Hangings of white and blue linen were fastened with cords of fine white and purple material to silver rings on the marble pillars. Gold and silver couches were arranged on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and other costly stones.

⁷Beverages were served in an array of goblets of gold, each with a different design, and the royal wine flowed freely, according to the king's bounty. ⁸By order of the king, no limit was placed on the drinking, and every official of his household was to serve each man whatever he desired.

■ **EST 1:1 [NOTE] XERXES.** The Hebrew calls him Ahasuerus. He ruled Persia from 486 to 465 BC. His empire reached from India, what is now Pakistan, to Cush, what is now Sudan.

■ **EST 1:1 [FIELD NOTES]** See the Xerxes Field Notes page in Ezra, p. -.

■ **EST 1:2 [ARCHAEOLOGY]** The palace of Darius and Xerxes at Susa was dug up by French teams, with its glazed brick archers now in the Louvre, see The Palace at Susa Field Notes page → FIELD NOTES p.6

■ **EST 1:3 [NOTE] THE THIRD YEAR.** About 483 BC. Some think this long feast was also a war council, because Xerxes was getting ready to invade Greece.

QUEEN VASHTI'S REFUSAL

⁹Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes.

¹⁰On the seventh day, when the king's heart was merry with wine, he ordered the seven eunuchs who served him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carkas—¹¹to bring Queen Vashti before him, wearing her royal crown, to display her beauty to the people and officials. For she was beautiful to behold.

¹²Queen Vashti, however, refused to come at the king's command brought by his eunuchs. And the king became furious, and his anger burned within him.

DEBATED THE BIG QUESTION

IS ESTHER HISTORY?

What Fits and What Puzzles

ESTHER 1:1 TO 3 · 2:16 · 2:23 · 10:2

WHAT FITS

Xerxes was real, and his palace at Susa was real. The book knows Persian words, Persian customs, the royal post and the king's record of men who helped him, which Herodotus also mentions. Its dates fit Xerxes' reign, with a four year gap while he was at war with Greece.

A NAME ON A TABLET

A clay tablet names Marduka, an official in Persian times, and some link him to Mordecai. See the Field Notes page Mordecai on a Tablet?

THE PUZZLES

Herodotus names Xerxes' queen Amestris, not Vashti or Esther. He also says Persian kings married only from seven noble families. No Persian record mentions Haman or a law that could never be undone. No record outside the Bible tells of the fighting in chapter 9.

MORDECAI'S AGE

2:6 can sound like Mordecai himself went into exile in 597 BC, which would make him over 100. Many read it as being about his great grandfather.

■ **EST 1:10 [NOTE] MERRY WITH WINE.** The Greek writer Herodotus says Persians talked over big decisions while drunk, then checked them again the next day sober.

■ **EST 1:12 [NOTE] WHY VASHTI SAID NO.** The book does not say. Many think she would not be shown off in front of a room of drunk men.

Every View

ESTHER 9:20 TO 32 • 2 MACCABEES 15:36

VIEW 1: TRUE HISTORY

Jews and Christians through the centuries, and the writer Josephus about 93 AD, read it as history. Many scholars today agree. They say Herodotus did not know everything, Persian kings had many wives, and some think Vashti is Amestris under another name, though that is hard to prove.

VIEW 2: TRUE, TOLD WITH STYLE

Others think the main events really happened, but the story is told with a storyteller's flair, like the big numbers and the perfectly timed twists.

VIEW 3: A STORY BEHIND A HOLIDAY

Many scholars think it is a historical novel, written to explain why Jews keep Purim, set in a real time and place.

PURIM IS OLD

Whatever the view, Purim was kept long ago. 2 Maccabees 15:36, written about 100 BC, calls Purim Mordecai's Day.

WHAT ALL SIDES AGREE ON

Most agree the writer knew a lot about the Persian court, and the book has given hope to Jews facing hate for more than 2,000 years.

QUEEN VASHTI DEPOSED

¹³ Then the king consulted the wise men who knew the times, for it was customary for him to confer with the experts in law and justice. ¹⁴ His closest advisors were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media who had personal access to the king and ranked highest in the kingdom.

¹⁵ "According to law," he asked, "what should be done with Queen Vashti, since she refused to obey the command of King Xerxes delivered by the eunuchs?"

¹⁶ And in the presence of the king and his princes, Memucan replied, "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king, but all the princes and the peoples in all the provinces of King Xerxes. ¹⁷ For the conduct of the queen will become known to all women, causing them to despise their husbands and say, 'King Xerxes ordered

Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she did not come.'

¹⁸ This very day the noble women of Persia and Media who have heard about the queen's conduct will say the same thing to all the king's officials, resulting in much contempt and wrath.

¹⁹ So if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree, and let it be recorded in the laws of Persia and Media so that it cannot be repealed, that Vashti shall never again enter the presence of King Xerxes, and that her royal position shall be given to a woman better than she. ²⁰ The edict the king issues will be heard throughout his vast kingdom—and so all women, from the least to the greatest, will honor their husbands."

²¹ The king and his princes were pleased with this counsel; so the king did as Memucan advised. ²² He sent letters to all the provinces of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in their own language, proclaiming that every man should be master of his own household.

2

CHAPTER 2 IN 30 SECONDS

The king holds a royal beauty search. A Jewish orphan named Esther, raised by her cousin Mordecai, is taken to the palace. She keeps her family secret, wins everyone over and becomes queen. Mordecai overhears two guards plotting to kill the king and saves his life. It gets written down and forgotten.

SEEKING VASHTI'S SUCCESSOR

¹ Some time later, when the anger of King Xerxes had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done, and what had been decreed against her.

² Then the king's attendants proposed, "Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king, ³ and let the king appoint commissioners in each province of his kingdom to assemble all the beautiful young women into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under

■ **EST 1:19 [NOTE] CANNOT BE REPEALED.** A law of the Persians and Medes could not be undone, Daniel 6:8. That becomes the big problem in chapter 8.

FIELD NOTES · ARCHAEOLOGY · CONFIDENCE: HIGH

THE PALACE AT SUSA

ESTHER 1:2 · 1:5 TO 6 · 2:3 · 4:11 · 5:1 · NEHEMIAH 1:1 · DANIEL 8:2



Two archers of the king's guard in glazed brick, from the palace of Darius at Susa, about 510 BC. Louvre Museum, Paris. Public domain.

WHAT IT IS

The ruins of the royal city of Susa, in southwest Iran. Darius the Great built a huge palace on its high mound, and his son Xerxes, the king in Esther, lived there. The Bible calls it the citadel of Susa, 1:2.

HOW OLD IT IS

Susa is one of the oldest cities in the world, lived in for thousands of years. Darius built his palace there soon after he became king in 522 BC. The brick archers are from about 510 BC.

WHERE AND WHEN FOUND

William Loftus first dug there in 1851. Marcel and Jane Dieulafoy, a French husband and wife, dug in the 1880s and shipped the glazed brick archers to the Louvre in Paris. French teams kept digging until 1979.

THE ARCHERS

Life size soldiers in colored glazed brick march along the walls, each with a spear, a bow and a quiver. Many think they show the king's own guard.

BUILT BY THE WHOLE EMPIRE

Darius had a list carved in stone of what built his palace: cedar from Lebanon,

gold from Sardis and Bactria, silver and ebony from Egypt, ivory from Cush and India, and workers from many nations.

THE GREAT HALL

The king's audience hall had 36 stone columns about 65 feet tall. A later king wrote that it burned in the days of Artaxerxes I and that he rebuilt it. At the site, mostly the column bases are left.

THE KING'S FEAST

Esther 1:6 tells of couches of gold and silver. Herodotus says that when the Greeks won in 479 BC, they found couches of gold and silver in the tent of his general Mardonius, filled with things Xerxes had left him.

WHERE THE STORY HAPPENED

The book knows the place: the king's gate, the inner court, the garden and the women's houses, 2:3, 2:14, 2:19, 5:1 and 7:7. Nehemiah served in the same palace, Nehemiah 1:1, and Daniel saw himself at Susa in a vision, Daniel 8:2.

SUSA TODAY

It is the town of Shush, Iran. Since 2015 it is a World Heritage Site.

WHAT IT DOES NOT PROVE

The palace is real, and so is Xerxes. No find at Susa names Esther or Mordecai.

ARCHAEOLOGY

the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch in charge of the women, and let them be given beauty treatments. ⁴ Then let the young woman who pleases the king become queen in place of Vashti."

This suggestion pleased the king, and he acted accordingly.

ESTHER FINDS FAVOR

⁵ Now there was at the citadel of Susa a Jewish man from the tribe of Benjamin named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish. ⁶ He had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon among those taken captive with Jeconiah king of Judah.

⁷ And Mordecai had brought up Hadassah (that is, Esther), the daughter of his uncle, because she did not have a father or mother. The young woman was lovely in form and appearance, and when her father and mother had died, Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter.

⁸ When the king's command and edict had been proclaimed, many young women gathered at the citadel of Susa under the care of Hegai. Esther was also taken to the palace and placed under the care of Hegai, the custodian of the women. ⁹ And the young woman pleased him and obtained his favor, so he quickly provided her with beauty treatments and the special diet. He assigned to her seven select maidservants from the palace and transferred her with them to the best place in the harem.

■ **EST 2:5 [ARCHAEOLOGY]** A clay tablet names Marduka, an official in the days of Darius or Xerxes, see the Mordecai on a Tablet? Field Notes page → FIELD NOTES p.9

■ **EST 2:5 [NOTE] MORDECAI.** His name comes from Marduk, the chief god of Babylon. Jews in exile often had a local name. He was from Benjamin, the tribe of King Saul, whose father was also named Kish.

■ **EST 2:6 [NOTE] CARRIED INTO EXILE.** This was 597 BC, with King Jeconiah, 2 Kings 24:12 to 15. If it means Mordecai himself, he would be over 100 here, so many read it as his great grandfather Kish. See The Jehoiachin Ration Tablets in 2 Kings, p.--.

■ **EST 2:7 [NOTE] HADASSAH AND ESTHER.** Hadassah means myrtle, a sweet smelling bush. Esther may come from the Persian word for star.

■ **EST 2:8 [NOTE] TAKEN.** The word means she was taken. A young woman likely had no choice when the king's men came.

¹⁰ Esther did not reveal her people or her lineage, because Mordecai had instructed her not to do so. ¹¹ And every day Mordecai would walk back and forth in front of the court of the harem to learn about Esther's welfare and what was happening to her.

¹² In the twelve months before her turn to go to King Xerxes, the harem regulation required each young woman to receive beauty treatments with oil of myrrh for six months, and then with perfumes and cosmetics for another six months. ¹³ When the young woman would go to the king, she was given whatever she requested to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. ¹⁴ She would go there in the evening, and in the morning she would return to a second harem under the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch in charge of the concubines. She would not return to the king unless he delighted in her and summoned her by name.

¹⁵ Now Esther was the daughter of Abihail, the uncle from whom Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter. And when it was her turn to go to the king, she did not ask for anything except what Hegai, the king's trusted official in charge of the harem, had advised. And Esther found favor in the eyes of everyone who saw her.

¹⁶ She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal palace in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

ESTHER BECOMES QUEEN

¹⁷ And the king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she found grace and favor in his sight more than all of the other virgins. So he placed the royal crown upon her head and made her queen in place of Vashti.

¹⁸ Then the king held a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his officials and servants. He proclaimed a tax holiday in the provinces and gave gifts worthy of the king's bounty.

■ **EST 2:16 [NOTE] THE SEVENTH YEAR.** The month of Tebeth was about January 478 BC, four years after Vashti fell. In between, Xerxes invaded Greece and lost a great sea battle at Salamis in 480 BC.

ARCHAEOLOGY

¹⁹ When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. ²⁰ Esther still had not revealed her lineage or her people, just as Mordecai had instructed. She obeyed Mordecai's command, as she had done under his care.

MORDECAI UNCOVERS A CONSPIRACY

²¹ In those days, while Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the entrance, grew angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes.

²² When Mordecai learned of the plot, he reported it to Queen Esther, and she informed the king on Mordecai's behalf.

²³ After the report had been investigated and verified, both officials were hanged on the gallows. And all this was recorded in the Book of the Chronicles in the presence of the king.

3

CHAPTER 3 IN 30 SECONDS

The king promotes Haman to the top job, and everyone must bow to him. Mordecai will not. Haman is so angry that he plots to kill every Jew in the empire. He casts lots to pick the day, offers the king a mountain of silver, and the order goes out. Then he and the king sit down for a drink.

HAMAN'S PLOT AGAINST THE JEWS

¹ After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him to a position above all the princes who were with him. ² All the royal servants at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, because the king had commanded that this be done for him. But Mordecai would not bow down or pay homage.

■ **EST 2:23 [NOTE]** WRITTEN DOWN. Herodotus says Persian kings had the names of men who helped them written down as the king's benefactors. This record comes back in 6:1.

■ **EST 3:1 [NOTE]** HAMAN THE AGAGITE. Agag was the king of Amalek whom King Saul spared, 1 Samuel 15. Mordecai was from Benjamin, Saul's tribe, and had a forefather named Kish, the same name as Saul's father. Many see an old feud here. See The Amalekites in 1 Samuel, p. 7.

■ **EST 3:2 [NOTE]** WHY WOULD HE NOT BOW? The book does not say. Jews bowed to kings, 2 Samuel 14:4, so many think it was because Haman was an Amalekite. In the Greek Esther, Mordecai prays that he would not bow

³ Then the royal servants at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the command of the king?"

⁴ Day after day they warned him, but he would not comply. So they reported it to Haman to see whether Mordecai's behavior would be tolerated, since he had told them he was a Jew.

⁵ When Haman saw that Mordecai would not bow down or pay him homage, he was filled with rage. ⁶ And when he learned the identity of Mordecai's people, he scorned the notion of laying hands on Mordecai alone. Instead, he sought to destroy all of Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the kingdom of Xerxes.

⁷ In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, the Pur (that is, the lot) was cast before Haman to determine a day and month. And the lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar.

⁸ Then Haman informed King Xerxes, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples of every province of your kingdom. Their laws are different from everyone else's, and they do not obey the king's laws. So it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. ⁹ If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will deposit 375 tons of silver into the royal treasury to pay those who carry it out."

¹⁰ So the king removed the signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. ¹¹ "Keep your money," said the king to Haman. "These people are given to you to do with them as you please."

to anyone but God, Addition C, Esther 13:12 to 14 in some Bibles.

■ **EST 3:7 [ARCHAEOLOGY]** An Assyrian clay cube from 833 BC calls itself a puru, a lot, the same word as Haman's Pur, see The Pur Field Notes box → FIELD NOTES p.10

■ **EST 3:7 [NOTE]** THE PUR. Haman cast lots to pick the day, and the lot fell almost a year away, on the month of Adar. That gave time for the rescue. The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from Yahweh, Proverbs 16:33.

■ **EST 3:9 [NOTE]** 375 TONS OF SILVER. A huge fortune. In the Hebrew, the number here is 10,000. Many think Haman planned to pay it from the Jews' stolen goods, 3:13.

DEBATED · FIELD NOTES · ARCHAEOLOGY · CONFIDENCE: DEBATED · IS THIS MORDECAI?

MORDECAI ON A TABLET?

ESTHER 2:5 · 2:19 · 2:21 · 3:2 · 10:3



Clay tablets from the royal records of Persepolis, in a study box at the Oriental Institute, Chicago. The Marduka tablet itself is not shown. Photo Pfa16, CC BY SA 4.0.

WHAT IT IS

A small clay tablet written in Babylonian. It lists payments of silver and goods to Persian officials. One of them is Marduka, a scribe or accountant who worked for Ushtannu, the Persian governor over Babylon and the lands west of the Euphrates.

HOW OLD IT IS

The tablet has no date. Arthur Ungnad, who first studied it, put it late in the reign of Darius I or early in the reign of Xerxes, the king in Esther. Others point out that Ushtannu is known as governor about 521 to 516 BC, which would be earlier.

WHERE AND WHEN FOUND

It was in the collection of Lord Amherst in England by 1904, and later went to a museum in Berlin. Where it was dug up is not known. Ungnad wrote about it in 1940 and 1941.

WHY PEOPLE GOT EXCITED

Ungnad said this Marduka made a trip to Susa, and he thought he could be Esther's cousin. It would be the first time

Mordecai's name showed up outside the Bible.

THE OTHER SIDE

The scholar David Clines checked the tablet's words. It does say some silver came from Susa, but he says nothing shows Marduka ever went there. Marduka worked for the governor near Babylon, not at the palace in Susa. Marduka was a common name, from the god Marduk, so it could be a different man.

MORE MARDUKAS

Clay tablets from Persepolis, the Persian capital, name an official called Marduka about 30 times. They may be up to four different men, working for the king in the days of Darius and Xerxes. The photo shows tablets from that same archive.

AT THE KING'S GATE

In Esther, Mordecai sat at the king's gate, 2:19 and 2:21. Many think that means he was a royal official, the very kind of man these tablets name.

WHAT IT DOES NOT PROVE

No tablet says Marduka was a Jew or that he raised a queen. It shows that men named Marduka really served the Persian kings, at the right time and in the right kind of job.

ARCHAEOLOGY

FIELD NOTES • ARCHAEOLOGY • CONFIDENCE: HIGH

THE PUR

ESTHER 3:7 • 9:24 • 9:26 • PROVERBS 16:33



Four sides of the clay cube of lahali, from Assur, about 833 BC. Each side is about an inch across. Yale Babylonian Collection, YBC 7058. Photo Yale Peabody Museum, CC0.

WHAT IT IS

A small clay cube with writing on four of its sides. In it, the cube calls itself a puru, an old word for a lot used in Assyria and Babylon. That is the same word as the Pur in Esther 3:7.

HOW OLD IT IS

It belonged to lahali, the top official of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III. His name was given to the year 833 BC, more than 350 years before Haman.

WHAT IT SAYS

It asks the gods Assur and Adad to let his lot fall, so that his year will be a good one and the harvest of Assyria will grow.

HOW IT WAS USED

Each year the Assyrians picked a top official to give his name to the year. Some scholars think this cube was shaken out of a jar one at a time, not rolled like a die.

PURIM

Esther explains the strange word for Hebrew readers: Pur, that is, the lot, 3:7. The holiday Purim is named after it, 9:26.

WHAT IT DOES NOT PROVE

This cube is much older than Esther and has nothing to do with Haman. It shows that pur really meant a lot in the lands where Esther lived.

¹² On the thirteenth day of the first month, the royal scribes were summoned and the order was written exactly as Haman commanded the royal satraps, the governors of each province, and the officials of each people, in the script of each province and the language of every people. It was written in the name of King Xerxes and sealed with the royal signet ring.

¹³ And the letters were sent by couriers to each of the royal provinces with the order to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jews—young and old, women and children—and to plunder their possessions on a single day, the thirteenth day of Adar, the twelfth month.

¹⁴ A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued in every province and published to all the people, so that they would be ready on that day. ¹⁵ The couriers left, spurred on by the king's command, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. Then the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was in confusion.

4

CHAPTER 4 IN 30 SECONDS

The Jews mourn in sackcloth. Mordecai asks Esther to beg the king for help, but anyone who walks in uninvited can be put to death. Mordecai says, Who knows if you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this? Esther says, Fast for me three days. If I perish, I perish.

MORDECAI APPEALS TO ESTHER

¹When Mordecai learned of all that had happened, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into

■ **EST 3:13 [ARCHAEOLOGY]** Herodotus and clay tablets from Persepolis describe the Persian royal post riders, see The King's Couriers Field Notes box → FIELD NOTES p.11

■ **EST 3:13 [NOTE] THE ORDER.** Kill every Jew, young and old, on one day, the 13th of Adar, about March 473 BC.

the middle of the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. ² But he went only as far as the king's gate, because the law prohibited anyone wearing sackcloth from entering that gate.

³ In every province to which the king's command and edict came, there was great mourning among the Jews. They fasted, wept, and lamented, and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

FIELD NOTES · ARCHAEOLOGY · CONFIDENCE: HIGH

THE KING'S COURIERS

ESTHER 3:13 TO 15 · 8:10 · 8:14



A clay tablet in Elamite from Persepolis, Persepolis Museum, Iran. Thousands like it record food given to workers and travelers. Photo Pentocelo, public domain.

WHAT IT IS

Persia had a royal post. Riders on fast horses carried the king's letters from station to station across the empire, just like the couriers in Esther 3:13 and 8:10.

HOW OLD IT IS

The Greek writers Herodotus, about 430 BC, and Xenophon describe it. Xenophon says Cyrus the Great set it up.

WHAT HERODOTUS SAYS

Men and horses waited a day's ride apart. Each rider handed the message to the next, like runners passing a torch, and nothing stopped them, not snow, rain, heat or the dark of night. His words are carved on a post office in New York City.

THE ROYAL ROAD

Herodotus counts 111 stations on the road from Sardis in what is now Turkey to Susa, about 90 days on foot. The riders were much faster.

TRAVEL TABLETS

Thousands of clay tablets from Persepolis, from about 509 to 493 BC, list food handed out to messengers and other travelers at stations along the roads.

WHAT IT DOES NOT PROVE

No record mentions the letters of Haman or Mordecai. It shows that the king's post worked much like Esther describes it.

⁴ When Esther's maidens and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, the queen was overcome with distress. She sent clothes for Mordecai to wear instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them.

⁵ Then Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs appointed to her, and she dispatched him to Mordecai to learn what was troubling him and why. ⁶ So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square in front of the king's gate, ⁷ and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money that Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury in order to destroy the Jews.

⁸ Mordecai also gave Hathach a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for the destruction of the Jews, to show and explain to Esther, urging her to approach the king, implore his favor, and plead before him for her people.

⁹ So Hathach went back and relayed Mordecai's response to Esther.

¹⁰ Then Esther spoke to Hathach and instructed him to tell Mordecai, ¹¹ "All the royal officials and the people of the king's provinces know that one law applies to every man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned—that he be put to death. Only if the king extends the gold scepter may that person live. But I have not been summoned to appear before the king for the past thirty days."

■ **EST 4:1 [NOTE] SACKCLOTH AND ASHES.** Rough clothes made of goat hair, with ashes on the head. People wore them to show deep grief.

■ **EST 4:11 [NOTE] UNINVITED.** Persian kings were guarded closely. Herodotus says only the king's seven top nobles could walk in without sending word first, and

NOTABLE

¹² When Esther's words were relayed to Mordecai, ¹³ he sent back to her this reply: "Do not imagine that because you are in the king's palace you alone will escape the fate of all the Jews. ¹⁴ For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows if perhaps you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

¹⁵ Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶ "Go and assemble all the Jews who can be found in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day, and I and my maidens will fast as you do. After that, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish!"

¹⁷ So Mordecai went and did all that Esther had instructed him.

THE BIG QUESTION

WHERE IS GOD IN ESTHER?

Never Named

ESTHER 4:14 TO 16 · 6:1 · PROVERBS 16:33

NEVER NAMED

The Hebrew book of Esther never says God, Lord or Yahweh. It does not mention prayer, the temple or the law of Moses. Along with Song of Songs, it is one of the only books of the Bible that does not clearly name God.

BUT LOOK WHAT HAPPENS

An orphan becomes queen. Mordecai happens to overhear a plot. The lot falls almost a year away. The king cannot sleep, and they read him the one page about Mordecai. Haman walks in at that very moment. That is a lot of coincidences.

FROM ANOTHER PLACE

Mordecai says help will come from an-

- even they could not if the king was with a woman. Everyone else had to send a message.
- **EST 4:14 [NOTABLE]** Where you are right now may be exactly where God wants you, for a reason you cannot see yet.
 - **EST 4:14 [NOTE] FROM ANOTHER PLACE.** Many read this as a quiet hint of God, who is never named in this book. See the Big Question Where Is God in Esther?
 - **EST 4:16 [NOTABLE]** Esther fasted first, then did the right thing even though it could cost her life.
 - **EST 4:16 [NOTE] FAST FOR ME.** In the Bible, fasting nearly always goes with prayer, even though prayer is not mentioned here.

other place if Esther stays silent, 4:14. Many think that is a quiet way of saying God.

FASTING

Esther asks all the Jews in Susa to fast for three days, 4:16. In the Bible, fasting goes with crying out to God.

Hidden, Not Gone

GENESIS 50:20 · ROMANS 8:28 · ISAIAH 45:15

WHY HIDE HIS NAME?

Many think the writer wanted readers to see God working behind the scenes, through normal life. Others think it was written for life in a foreign land, or for a party holiday where God's name might be treated lightly.

A HIDDEN NAME?

Old Jewish writers noticed that in four verses the first or last letters of four words in a row spell the name Yahweh in Hebrew, 1:20, 5:4, 5:13 and 7:7. Some Hebrew copies mark those letters. It is a tradition, not proof.

THE GREEK VERSION

The Greek version adds prayers of Mordecai and Esther that name God many times. See the last Big Question in this book.

YOU MEANT IT FOR EVIL

Joseph said, You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, Genesis 50:20. Esther is the same kind of story.

FOR TODAY

You may not see God's name on your bad week, but He is still at work. We know that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him, Romans 8:28.

5

CHAPTER 5 IN 30 SECONDS

Esther walks in, and the king holds out his gold scepter. She invites the king and Haman to dinner, then to a second dinner. Haman goes home bragging, but seeing Mordecai still ruins his day. His wife says, Build a gallows 75 feet high and hang him.

ESTHER APPROACHES THE KING

¹ On the third day, Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace across from the king's quarters.

THE HEART NOTABLE

The king was sitting on his royal throne in the royal courtroom, facing the entrance.

² As soon as the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she found favor in his sight. 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 inquired. "What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it 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 the king."

⁵ "Hurry," commanded the king, "and bring Haman, so we can do as Esther has requested."

So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared. ⁶ And as they drank their wine, the king said to Esther, "What is your petition? It will be given to you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be fulfilled."

⁷ Esther replied, "This is my petition and my request: ⁸ 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, may the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king's question."

HAMAN'S PLOT AGAINST MORDECAI

⁹ That day Haman went out full of joy and glad of heart. At the king's gate, however, he saw Mordecai, who did not rise or tremble in fear at his presence. And Haman was filled with rage toward Mordecai.

¹⁰ Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home. And calling for his friends and his wife Zeresh, ¹¹ Haman recounted to them his glorious wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored and promoted him over the other officials and servants.

¹² "What is more," Haman added, "Queen Esther invited no one but me to join the king at the banquet she prepared, and I am invited back tomorrow along with the king. ¹³ Yet none of this satisfies me as long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

¹⁴ His wife Zeresh and all his friends told him, "Have them build a gallows 75 feet high, and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai hanged on it. Then go to the banquet with the king and enjoy yourself."

The advice pleased Haman, and he had the gallows constructed.

6

CHAPTER 6 IN 30 SECONDS

The king cannot sleep, so he has the royal records read to him and finds that Mordecai was never thanked. Just then Haman walks in. The king asks him how to honor a man, and Haman, sure it is him, plans a parade. Then he has to lead Mordecai through the streets himself.

MORDECAI IS HONORED

¹ That night sleep escaped the king; so he ordered the Book of Records, the Chronicles, to be brought in and read to him. ²

And there it was found recorded that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the eunuchs who guarded the king's entrance, when they had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes.

³ The king inquired, "What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this act?"

"Nothing has been done for him," replied the king's attendants.

⁴ "Who is in the court?" the king asked.

Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the palace to ask the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows he had prepared for him. ⁵ So the king's attendants an-

■ **EST 5:2 [NOTE] THE GOLD SCEPTER.** A royal staff. If the king held it out, the visitor could live, 4:11.

■ **EST 5:9 [HEART]** Haman went out glad of heart, then one man who would not bow filled him with rage. A proud heart is never satisfied, 5:13.

■ **EST 5:14 [NOTE] THE GALLOWES.** The Hebrew says a tree or a wooden pole. Persians often put their enemies to death on tall stakes, so it may have been a pole. 75 feet is about seven stories, so the whole city would see it.

■ **EST 6:1 [NOTABLE]** One sleepless night turned the whole story around. God can use the smallest things.

■ **EST 6:1 [NOTE] THE SLEEPLESS NIGHT.** The whole story turns here. Of all the pages in the royal records, the one about Mordecai is read that night.

PROPHECIES FULFILLED IN SCRIPTURE THE HEART

swered him, "Haman is there, standing in the court."

"Bring him in," ordered the king.

⁶ **Haman entered, and the king asked him, "What should be done for the man whom the king is delighted to honor?"**

Now Haman thought in his heart, "Whom would the king be delighted to honor more than me?"

⁷ And Haman told the king, "For the man whom the king is delighted to honor, ⁸ have them bring a royal robe that the king himself has worn and a horse on which the king himself has ridden—one with a royal crest placed on its head. ⁹ Let the robe and the horse be entrusted to one of the king's most noble princes. Let them array the man the king wants to honor and parade him on the horse through the city square, proclaiming before him, 'This is what is done for the man whom the king is delighted to honor!'"

¹⁰ "Hurry," said the king to Haman, "and do just as you proposed. Take the robe and the horse to Mordecai the Jew, who is sitting at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything that you have suggested."

¹¹ So Haman took the robe and the horse, arrayed Mordecai, and paraded him through the city square, crying out before him, "This is what is done for the man whom the king is delighted to honor!"

¹² Then Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief.

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, before whom your downfall has begun, is Jewish, you will not prevail against him—for surely you will fall before him."**

¹⁴ While they were still speaking with Haman, the king's eunuchs arrived and

rushed him to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

7

CHAPTER 7 IN 30 SECONDS

At the second dinner Esther tells the king that someone plans to kill her and her people. Who? This wicked Haman! The king storms out, Haman begs at the queen's couch, and the king comes back at the worst moment. Haman is hanged on the gallows he built for Mordecai.

ESTHER PLEADS FOR HER PEOPLE

¹ So the king and Haman went to dine with Esther the queen, ² and as they drank their wine on that second day, the king asked once more, "Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given to you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be fulfilled."

³ Queen Esther replied, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, grant me my life as my petition, and the lives of my people as my request.

⁴ For my people and I have been sold out to destruction, death, and annihilation. If we had merely been sold as menservants and maidservants, I would have remained silent, because no such distress would justify burdening the king."

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

⁶ Esther replied, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked man—Haman!"

And Haman stood in terror before the king and queen.

THE HANGING OF HAMAN

⁷ In his fury, the king arose from drinking his wine and went to the palace garden, while Haman stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life, for he realized that the king was planning a terrible fate for him.

⁸ Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, "Would he actually assault the queen while I am in the palace?"

■ **EST 6:6 [HEART]** Haman thought in his heart that the king could only mean him. Pride goes before destruction, Proverbs 16:18.

■ **EST 6:13 [PROPHECY]** Haman's wife and friends said he would surely fall before Mordecai → EST 7:10 · MEDIUM p. -

PROPHECIES FULFILLED IN SCRIPTURE

As soon as the words had left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.

⁹ Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said: "There is a gallows 75 feet high at Haman's house. He had it built for Mordecai, who gave the report that saved the king."

"Hang him on it!" declared the king.

¹⁰ So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the fury of the king subsided.

8

CHAPTER 8 IN 30 SECONDS

Mordecai gets Haman's job and the king's ring. Esther begs the king to stop the order, but a Persian law cannot be undone. So a new law goes out on fast horses: the Jews may fight back on that day. Mourning turns to joy.

ESTHER APPEALS FOR THE JEWS

¹ That same day King Xerxes awarded Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai entered the king's presence because Esther had revealed his relation to her. ² The king removed the signet ring he had recovered from Haman and presented it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed Mordecai over the estate of Haman.

³ And once again, Esther addressed the king. She fell at his feet weeping and begged him to revoke the evil scheme of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews.

⁴ The king extended the gold scepter toward Esther, and she arose and stood before the king.

⁵ "If it pleases the king," she said, "and if I have found favor in his sight, and the matter seems proper to the king, and I am pleasing in his sight, may an order be written to revoke the letters that the

scheming Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces. ⁶ For how could I bear to see the disaster that would befall my people? How could I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?"

THE DECREE OF XERXES

⁷ So King Xerxes said to Esther the Queen and Mordecai the Jew, "Behold, I have given Haman's estate to Esther, and he was hanged on the gallows because he attacked the Jews. ⁸ Now you may write in the king's name as you please regarding the Jews, and seal it with the royal signet ring. For a decree that is written in the name of the king and sealed with the royal signet ring cannot be revoked."

⁹ At once the royal scribes were summoned, and on the twenty-third day of the third month (the month of Sivan), they recorded all of Mordecai's orders to the Jews and to the satraps, governors, and princes of the 127 provinces from India to Cush—writing to each province in its own script, to every people in their own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language.

¹⁰ Mordecai wrote in the name of King Xerxes and sealed it with the royal signet ring. He sent the documents by mounted couriers riding on swift horses bred from the royal mares.

¹¹ By these letters the king permitted the Jews in each and every city the right to assemble and defend themselves, to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province hostile to them, including women and children, and to plunder their possessions. ¹² The single day appointed throughout all the provinces of King Xerxes was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar.

¹³ A copy of the text of the edict was to be issued in every province and published to

■ **EST 7:8 [NOTE] THE COUCH.** Persians lay on couches to eat. They covered Haman's face. Many think that meant he was condemned.

■ **EST 7:10 [NOTABLE]** The trap Haman built for someone else caught him instead. Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, Proverbs 26:27.

■ **EST 7:10 [FULFILLS]** Haman's wife and friends said he would surely fall before Mordecai ← EST 6:13 · MEDIUM

■ **EST 7:10 [NOTE] HIS OWN GALLOWS.** Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, Proverbs 26:27.

■ **EST 8:8 [NOTE] CANNOT BE REVOKED.** The first law still stood, so a second law had to let the Jews defend themselves.

■ **EST 8:9 [NOTE] SIVAN.** About June 474 BC, about two months after Haman's order. That left about nine months to get ready.

■ **EST 8:10 [FIELD NOTES]** See The King's Couriers Field Notes box at 3:13.

all the people, so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. ¹⁴ The couriers rode out in haste on their royal horses, pressed on by the command of the king. And the edict was also issued in the citadel of Susa.

¹⁵ Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal garments of blue and white, with a large gold crown and a purple robe of fine linen. And the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced.

¹⁶ For the Jews it was a time of light and gladness, of joy and honor. ¹⁷ In every province and every city, wherever the king's edict and decree reached, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many of the people of the land themselves became Jews, because the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them.

9

CHAPTER 9 IN 30 SECONDS

On the 13th of Adar the Jews defend themselves and win, and they take no plunder. Then they rest and party. Mordecai and Esther write letters to make it a yearly holiday called Purim, after the pur, the lot Haman cast.

THE JEWS DESTROY THEIR ENEMIES

¹ On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the king's command and edict were to be executed. On this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but their plan was overturned and the Jews overpowered those who hated them. ² In each of the provinces of King Xerxes, the Jews assembled in their cities to attack those who sought to harm them. No man could withstand them, because the fear of them had fallen upon all peoples.

³ And all the officials of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and the king's administrators helped the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai had fallen upon them. ⁴

■ **EST 8:17 [NOTE] BECAME JEWS.** Many people of the land joined the Jews, or said they did, because they were afraid.

■ **EST 9:1 [NOTE] OVERTURNED.** The day planned for the Jews' death became the day of their rescue. See the Big Question The Jews Fight Back.

For Mordecai exercised great power in the palace, and his fame spread throughout the provinces as he became more and more powerful.

⁵ The Jews put all their enemies to the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did as they pleased to those who hated them. ⁶ In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men, ⁷ including Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, ⁸ Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, ⁹ Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha. ¹⁰ They killed these ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews, but they did not lay a hand on the plunder.

HAMAN'S SONS HANGED

¹¹ On that day the number of those killed in the citadel of Susa was reported to the king, ¹² who said to Queen Esther, "In the citadel of Susa the Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men, including Haman's ten sons. What have they done in the rest of the royal provinces? Now what is your petition? It will be given to you. And what further do you request? It will be fulfilled."

¹³ Esther replied, "If it pleases the king, may the Jews in Susa also have tomorrow to carry out today's edict, and may the bodies of Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows."

¹⁴ So the king commanded that this be done. An edict was issued in Susa, and they hanged the ten sons of Haman. ¹⁵ On the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, the Jews in Susa came together again and put to death three hundred men there, but they did not lay a hand on the plunder.

¹⁶ The rest of the Jews in the royal provinces also assembled to defend themselves and rid themselves of their enemies. They killed 75,000 who hated them, but they did not lay a hand on the plunder. ¹⁷ This was done on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the four-

■ **EST 9:10 [NOTE] NO PLUNDER.** The king's order let them take plunder, 8:11, but three times the book says they did not, 9:10, 15 and 16. King Saul had kept the plunder from Amalek, 1 Samuel 15:9.

■ **EST 9:16 [NOTE]** 75,000. The Greek Esther says 15,000.

teenth day they rested, making it a day of feasting and joy.

THE FEAST OF PURIM INSTITUTED

¹⁸ The Jews in Susa, however, had assembled on the thirteenth and the fourteenth days of the month. So they rested on the fifteenth day, making it a day of feasting and joy. ¹⁹ This is why the rural Jews, who live in the villages, observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a day of joy and feasting. It is a holiday for sending gifts to one another.

DEBATED THE BIG QUESTION

THE JEWS FIGHT BACK

What Happened

ESTHER 8:11 TO 13 · 9:1 TO 16 · 1 SAMUEL 15:1 TO 9

THE FIRST LAW STILL STOOD

Haman's law said anyone could attack the Jews and take their things on the 13th of Adar. A Persian law could not be undone, so the king made a second law: on that day the Jews could band together and defend themselves, 8:11.

WHAT HAPPENED

The Jews struck those who hated them. In Susa they killed 500 men and Haman's ten sons, and 300 more the next day. In the provinces they killed 75,000, 9:6 to 16. The Greek Esther says 15,000.

NO PLUNDER

The law let them take plunder, but three times the book says they did not, 9:10, 15 and 16. Many see a point: King Saul had kept the plunder of Amalek, 1 Samuel 15:9, and Haman was an Agagite.

WHO WAS KILLED?

The book says they killed those who hated them and wanted to harm them, 9:2 and 9:5.

Every View

ROMANS 12:19 · ROMANS 13:4 · MATTHEW 5:44

VIEW 1: SELF DEFENSE

Many say this was not revenge but defense. Their enemies still had a legal right to attack, so the Jews fought those who came against them. The officials even helped the Jews, 9:3.

VIEW 2: IT WENT TOO FAR

Others are troubled by Esther asking for a second day in Susa, 9:13, and by the high numbers. The Bible reports what happened without always saying it was right. Martin Luther once said he wished Esther and 2 Maccabees did not exist at all. He felt they were too Jewish and had too much that was pagan.

VIEW 3: STORY NUMBERS

Some think the numbers are rounded or made bigger in the telling, like the Greek and Hebrew numbers that do not match.

WHAT ABOUT CHRISTIANS?

Jesus said love your enemies, Matthew 5:44, and Paul said do not take revenge, Romans 12:19. Paul also said rulers carry the sword to stop evil, Romans 13:4.

WHAT ALL SIDES AGREE ON

In the story, a whole people was saved from being wiped out, and they did not get rich from it.

²⁰ Mordecai recorded these events and sent letters to all the Jews in all the provinces of King Xerxes, both near and far, ²¹to establish among them an annual celebration on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar ²²as the days on which the Jews gained rest from their enemies and the month in which their sorrow turned to joy and their mourning into a holiday. He wrote that these were to be days of feasting and joy, of sending gifts to one another and to the poor.

²³ So the Jews agreed to continue the custom they had started, as Mordecai had written to them. ²⁴ For Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them and had cast the Pur (that is, the lot) to crush and destroy them. ²⁵ But when it came before the king, he commanded by letter that the wicked scheme which Haman had devised against the Jews should come back upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.

²⁶ Therefore these days are called Purim, from the word Pur.

Because of all the instructions in this letter, and because of all they had seen and experienced, ²⁷ the Jews bound themselves to establish the custom that they and their descendants and all who join them should not fail to celebrate these two days at the appointed time each and every year, according to their regulation.

²⁸ These days should be remembered and celebrated by every generation, family, province, and city, so that these days of Purim should not fail to be observed among the Jews, nor should the memory of them fade from their descendants.

²⁹ So Queen Esther daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter concerning Purim. ³⁰ And Mordecai sent letters with words of peace and truth to all the Jews in the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Xerxes, ³¹ in order to confirm these days of Purim at their appointed time, just as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had established them and had committed themselves and their descendants to the times of fasting and lamentation.

³² So Esther's decree confirmed these regulations about Purim, which were written into the record.

Kings of Media and Persia? ³ For Mordecai the Jew was second only to King Xerxes, preeminent among the Jews and highly favored by his many kinsmen, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his countrymen.

10

CHAPTER 10 IN 30 SECONDS

A short ending. Mordecai is second only to the king, and he works for the good of his people and speaks peace to them all.

TRIBUTE TO XERXES AND MORDECAI

¹ Now King Xerxes imposed tribute throughout the land, even to its farthest shores.

² And all of Mordecai's powerful and magnificent accomplishments, together with the full account of the greatness to which the king had raised him, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the

■ **EST 9:26 [NOTE]** PURIM. The name means lots, from pur. Jews still keep it every year in February or March. They read the whole scroll of Esther, make noise every time Haman's name is read, send gifts of food and give to the poor. 2 Maccabees 15:36 calls it Mordecai's Day, one of the oldest mentions outside Esther.

■ **EST 9:31 [NOTE]** FASTING. Jews still keep the Fast of Esther usually on the 13th of Adar, the day before Purim.

■ **EST 10:2 [NOTE]** THE CHRONICLES OF MEDIA AND PERSIA. No copy of this record has ever been found.

■ **EST 10:3 [NOTE]** SECOND TO THE KING. Like Joseph in Egypt, Genesis 41:40, and Daniel in Babylon, Daniel 2:48, a Jew far from home ends up next to the throne.

DEBATED THE BIG QUESTION**THE GREEK ESTHER***Six Added Passages*

ESTHER 1:1 · 3:13 · 4:17 · 5:1 · 8:12 · 10:3

WHAT IT IS

The old Greek translation of Esther is longer than the Hebrew. It adds six passages, 107 verses, called Additions A to F.

WHAT THEY ADD

A: Mordecai's dream and the plot against the king, before chapter 1. B: Haman's royal letter, after 3:13. C: the prayers of Mordecai and Esther, after 4:17. D: Esther goes to the king and faints, in chapter 5. E: the king's second letter, after 8:12. F: the dream explained, at the end.

GOD IS NAMED

The Greek names God more than 50 times, and Esther and Mordecai pray long prayers. It also calls the king Artaxerxes.

WHEN

A note at the end says Lysimachus of Jerusalem translated it and that it came to Egypt in the fourth year of a King Ptolemy and Cleopatra, about 114, 78 or 48 BC.

WHY THIS BIBLE PRINTS THE HEBREW

This Bible follows the Hebrew text, like most Bibles. The added passages are cited, not printed.

WHAT ALL SIDES AGREE ON

Most agree the Hebrew book came first, and the Greek additions were written later. Both tell the same rescue.

Every View

CATHOLIC BIBLES ESTHER 10:4 TO 16:24

VIEW 1: SCRIPTURE

Catholic and Orthodox Christians count the added passages as Scripture. The Council of Trent said so in 1546. Jerome moved them to the end of Esther, so some Catholic Bibles print them as 10:4 to 16:24. Newer ones put them back in place.

VIEW 2: NOT SCRIPTURE

Jews and Protestants follow the Hebrew text, which does not have them. They see them as later additions, not part of the original Hebrew book.

DOUBTS ABOUT ESTHER ITSELF

Some early Christians left Esther off their list, like Melito of Sardis about 170 AD. Athanasius in 367 AD called it good to read but not in the list. The Talmud records a debate about it too. The New Testament never quotes Esther.