

Esther's Story: How Purim Began

This book consists of 11 sermon summaries that collectively cover the Old Testament book of Esther. It was preached during the late winter/early spring of 2026 at both Red Springs Baptist Church and Calvary Baptist Church.

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Queen Vashti Is Dethroned

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You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery”; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. - Matthew 5:27-28

This week we are launching a new sermon series on the book of Esther titled “Esther’s Story: How Purim Began”. Over the next 3 months leading up to Easter we are going to study this amazing story of courage and faith. Before we begin, here are a few fun facts about this book.

The author (or co-authors) of Esther are unknown. Some of the most likely candidates are Nehemiah, Ezra, Mordecai, and/or Esther herself.

The book of Esther never uses the word “God”. However, the absence of His name beautifully demonstrates how He works invisibly behind the scenes to providentially orchestrate events. Though not mentioned directly, God’s presence is clearly seen throughout the story.

The book of Esther is different in Protestant and Catholic Bibles. Catholic Bibles include additional chapters taken from the Apocrypha that provide more details to the story.

The book of Esther is widely regarded as the last book to be canonized or accepted as a part of the Old Testament. It was likely written during the Intertestamental Period.

I. THE STORY’S SETTING (v1-4)

The Medo-Persian Empire, ruled by Cyrus the Great, defeated the Babylonians in 539 BC and subsequently freed the Jewish exiles who had been living in Babylonian captivity for around 70 years. A group of Jews led by Zerubbabel returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the Jewish temple. However, most of the Jewish exiles remained in Babylon and the surrounding areas, which were now part of the Persian Empire, as they had never lived in or even been to Israel, their ancestral homeland. The story of Esther took place some 60 years after the rise of the Persian Empire.

King Ahasuerus is widely identified by historians as Xerxes I, who reigned over Persia from 486-465 BC. He is remembered for his lavish lifestyle and impulsive decision making. During his reign, the Persian Empire was divided into 127 provinces stretching from India in the east to Ethiopia in the west. The events detailed in the book of Esther took place in Susa where there was a citadel that served as the winter residence of the kings of Persia. Susa is located in modern-day Iran, about 150 north of the Persian Gulf and west of the Tigris River.

During the 3rd year of his reign, in a grand show of pomp and pageantry, King Ahasuerus displayed all of “the riches of his glory and splendor of his majesty” for 180 days (6 months). He concluded this magnificent spectacle with a great feast. Among those who were invited to this feast were his own royal princes and servants, the military officers of Persia and Media, and the

nobles and princes of the numerous provinces within the Empire. It is rather obvious that King Ahasuerus was a prideful, boastful man who revelled in his power and abundance.

II. THE ROYAL FEASTS (v5-9)

King Ahasuerus hosted a feast lasting 7 days in the court of the garden in the royal palace. Many people were present. There were fine linen hangings hung on silver rings from marble pillars. There were golden and silver couches on mosaic pavement made from precious stones. These furnishings were meant to highlight the king's immense wealth and splendor. Drinks were served in golden vessels and the wine was plentiful. The king did not compel anyone to drink, however he also placed no limitation of the amount each person could drink. Thus, those in attendance could have as much wine as they wished.

Queen Vashti also hosted a feast especially suited for the women. It took place concurrently with the king's feast, which was primarily intended for the men. Her feast was held inside the royal house.

III. THE QUEEN'S REFUSAL (v10-12)

On the final day of the feast, while heavily intoxicated, King Ahasuerus ordered his eunuchs to bring Queen Vashti before the people - primarily the princes, officers, nobles, and other men who were in attendance. By this point, they too would have been quite inebriated, making the whole group a drunken hoard. She was to wear her royal crown and display her beauty before them. However, the queen refused to go with the eunuchs or to comply with the king's order. He became furious.

While the text doesn't say it, Jewish tradition holds that King Ahasuerus ordered Vashti to appear before the people nude, wearing nothing but her crown. At the very least, the context implies that she was summoned to entertain the lewd men by putting her beauty on display. To her credit, Vashti refused to be objectified and humiliated in this way. She was not a believer or follower of God, but at least she had the modesty, dignity, and courage not to be mistreated like this. Her sense of self-respect is an example to women everywhere.

IV. THE ADVISORS' RECOMMENDATION (v13-20)

King Ahasuerus asked his legal advisers what should be done with Queen Vashti for refusing to comply with his declaration. One of them, Memucan, commented that her disobedience was not just a violation against the king, but against the whole empire. He feared that reports of the queen's defiance would inspire other Persian women to disrespect their own husbands and to exhibit disdain toward the king, his princes, and administration. In light of these concerns, Memucan advised Ahasuerus to ban Vashti from his presence, remove her as queen, and replace her with someone "better". He suggested that these actions not only be made by royal decree, but also codified in the law so they could not be repealed. He reasoned that this

sentence would send a strong and clear message to women throughout the empire to obey and respect their husbands.

V. THE KING'S DECREE (v21-22)

King Ahasuerus agreed with and followed the recommendation of Memucan and his legal advisors. He removed Queen Vashti from her royal position and sent a letter throughout the empire which was written in the appropriate language of each province. It stated that "every man shall be the ruler in his own house and the one who speaks in the tongue of his own people". This decree intended to mute women's voices and to quell any disobedience or disrespect wives might have for their husbands.

The Bible teaches that God has, by design, established a proper order for the home. Husbands are to be the leaders and wives are to submit to their leadership. That said, husbands are commanded to exhibit selfless, Christlike love for their wives. They are not to domineer over them, abuse them, or devalue them in any way. Just as Jesus cherished the church and gave Himself sacrificially for her, so also husbands are to love their wives. King Ahasuerus' behavior toward Vashti was not and is not a proper expression of God's design. A Christian husband should never treat his wife this way, and if he does, she should not comply with his illegitimate and sinful command.

The secular culture frequently smears Christianity for advocating "male authority". It accuses Christians of viewing women as inferior to men. While it is foolish to deny obvious physical and emotional differences between the 2 sexes, the fact is that both men and women are created in the image of God and have equal value in His eyes. Both have particular strengths and weaknesses. The Bible encourages husbands and wives to joyfully accept and fulfill the roles to which they have been assigned in order that the family, church, and society at large might function as the LORD intends. It has nothing to do with superiority.

CONCLUSION

Queen Vashti's removal left a vacancy in the royal palace. In next week's message, we will read about the search for a new queen and the unlikely candidate who was chosen to fill the void. Until then, husbands, love and cherish your wives, and wives, love and respect your husbands. Above all, remember that both men and women are precious to God, and neither should be devalued, abused, or shamed (either by themselves or others).

Esther Becomes Queen

Originally Preached on 2/1/2026

Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go, and from now on sin no more." - John 8:10-11

2 Sundays ago we began a new sermon series titled "Esther's Story: How Purim Began". We read that Queen Vashti was removed from her royal position after refusing to comply with King Ahasuerus' shameful declaration to "display" herself before the guests at his banquet. After her dismissal, the Persian king began searching for a new queen to take her place.

This morning, in the 2nd message of this series, we will discuss the procedure used to replace Vashti and find out who was ultimately chosen. We will also discover some interesting things about the new queen, including a secret that will come into play later in the story. The name of today's sermon is, "Esther Becomes Queen".

I. A PLAN TO REPLACE THE QUEEN (v1-4)

Some time later (perhaps a year or more), after King Ahasuerus had sobered up and calmed down, he remembered what Vashti had done and how he'd banished her. His young advisors suggested that he begin a search for a new queen. They recommended that young, beautiful virgins be gathered from provinces throughout the empire and sent to Susa. Hegai, the king's eunuch, would keep charge of this harem and give cosmetics to those who'd been selected. The king would choose from among them a young lady to replace Vashti. King Ahasuerus liked this plan and gave his approval.

Do you like to watch reality TV? Have you ever seen "The Bachelor" or its counterpart "The Bachelorette"? Did you know that both of these shows have been around for over 20 years, have been wildly successful, and have led to numerous spin-offs. Perhaps they were inspired by King Ahasuerus? Along with social media, these shows have greatly influenced the way young people date today. Rather than following Biblical principles in seeking a life-long spouse, many approach dating as a competition and prioritize beauty, sexual chemistry, and other such attractions. This approach isn't very affirming or successful, as only 25% of the couples from "The Bachelor" and "The Bachelorette" are still married today.

II. INTRODUCING MORDECAI AND ESTHER (v5-7)

Mordecai was a servant of King Ahasuerus in the citadel at Susa. He was of Jewish descent, from the tribe of Benjamin. His great grandfather Kish had been carried away from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, taken into Babylonian exile in 597 BC during the same deportation as Judah's King Jeconiah and many others (2 Chronicles 36:10). Mordecai was the 4th generation of his family to live outside of Israel.

Mordecai was raising Esther, whose Hebrew name was Haddassah. She was his first cousin, the daughter of his uncle. Both of her parents were deceased, so Mordecai (who was older than Esther) took her in as his own daughter. Esther was a young woman who was beautiful in form and appearance, just the type of woman that the king was looking for.

III. ESTHER IS TAKEN (v8-11)

In accordance with the king's plan, many young women were gathered from the various Persian provinces and sent to Susa. Among them was Esther. They were taken to the king's house and placed under the charge of Hegai. Esther was kind and thoughtful. Hegai liked her, gave her preferential treatment, and transferred her to the best place in the harem. All the while, Esther did not tell anyone that she was a Jew. Her cousin Mordecai had commanded her not to divulge her ethnicity. Mordecai was concerned for her and came to the court of the harem every day to see how Esther was doing.

IV. ESTHER APPEARS BEFORE THE KING (v12-16)

The young women were prepared with cosmetic treatments for 12 months before being brought to the king. When their turn arrived, each was taken 1 by 1 to the king's house. They were allowed to bring and wear whatever they wished from the harem, were taken to the king in the evening, and returned to a second harem overseen by Shaashgaz in the morning. This strongly implies that they were required to sleep with the king overnight - not surprising given the king's lustful reputation. The women did not return unless he specifically requested to see them again.

When it was Esther's turn to appear before the king she followed the wise advice that Hegai had given to her about the king's preferences in order to make a good impression. By this point, she had gained favor with everyone who'd seen her. Esther was brought to King Ahasuerus during the 7th year of his reign, somewhere between 3 and 4 years after Queen Vashti's removal.

Throughout this entire process, which lasted over a year, Esther had conducted herself with tremendous grace and humble character. She could have easily been bitter and upset, yet she trusted in God's presence and plan. She chose to make the best of her less than ideal circumstances, much like Joseph had done during his imprisonment in the days of the patriarchs (Genesis 39:20-23).

V. ESTHER IS CHOSEN (v17-20)

After the lengthy competition was complete, King Ahasuerus chose Esther to be his new queen. He delighted in her more than all of the other women who'd been brought to him. He placed the royal crown upon her head and held a great feast to celebrate the occasion. In addition, he also implemented a remission of taxes throughout the empire and gave out gifts.

Esther had not revealed that she was a Jew to any of the virgins she'd met (nor anyone else for that matter). She kept it a secret, just as Mordecai had directed her. Not even King Ahasuerus

knew her heritage. As Christians, we are not supposed to hide our faith, but rather to let our light shine so that others may see it and be pointed to Jesus. However, Esther's situation was unique and her silence likely contributed to selection as queen.

CONCLUSION

Most theologians agree that Esther had sex with King Ahasuerus before they were married. She may have felt like she had no other choice. Nevertheless, if she consented her actions were sinful. Still, before we throw stones or cast judgment on her, let's ask ourselves what we would have done in the same position? Remember that God used Rahab the harlot to hide the Hebrew spies. In fact, Rahab is listed in the genealogy of Jesus and is heralded by the writer of Hebrews for her courageous faith. Rahab's occupation was having sex with men outside of marriage... voluntarily. In comparison, Esther's behavior seems fairly benign. Here's the bottom line... God uses imperfect people to accomplish His purposes. He can forgive and redeem anyone.

I am not a counselor and don't pretend to be one. That said, if you've been placed in an impossible situation like Esther was, don't blame yourself. You did what you felt you had to do, despite not wanting to do it. Ask the LORD for forgiveness, forgive yourself, and move on in His strength. You are beautiful in God's eyes and He loves you unconditionally. Place your faith in Jesus and receive the salvation He freely offers... then walk in it.

In next week's message, we will meet Haman, the king's chief minister. We will read about his evil, sinister plot against the people of God. This story is about to heat up! Until then, may the LORD bless and keep you.

Haman's Plot Against the Jews

Originally Preached on 2/8/2026

They [the enemies of God] have said, "Come, and let us wipe them out as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more." - Psalm 83:4

I hope you have been enjoying our latest sermon series through the book of Esther. In last week's message, Esther was chosen to replace Vashti and was crowned the new queen of Persia. However, she had a secret that only she and her cousin Mordecai (the man who was raising her as his own daughter) knew... they were Jewish.

Before we launch into the main portion of today's message, I want to quickly touch on a few verses at the end of chapter 2 which we didn't cover last Sunday (v21-23). In these 3 verses, a seemingly insignificant incident occurs that comes into play later in the story. We usually don't get into the Biblical text during the introduction of the message, but today we are going to make an exception.

Not long after Esther took office, Mordecai, who was a servant of the king, discovered that 2 of the royal doorkeepers had become furious with the king and were planning to harm him. Mordecai hurriedly reported the news to Queen Esther, who relayed the warning to King Ahasuerus in Mordecai's name. A brief investigation followed which found the plot to be true. The 2 doorkeepers were hanged for their evil intentions and the incident was recorded in the book of the king's chronicles.

This morning's message covers Esther chapter 3. In this chapter we will meet Haman, the villain of this story. We will read of his evil, murderous plans and how they brought fear and confusion throughout the Persian empire. I've titled this message, the 3rd of this series, "Haman's Plot Against the Jews".

I. HAMAN DEVISES A PLAN (v1-6)

King Ahasuerus promoted a man named Haman to be his chief or prime minister, setting him above all of the princes and others in his administration. Haman was 2nd in command, answering only to the king. Ahasuerus commanded all of his servants to bow down before Haman, but Mordecai refused to do so, even though his fellow servants urged him to obey the king's order. Now Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew, and apparently they told Haman. Haman became furious not only because Mordecai refused to bow down to him, but also because of his deep seeded hatred for the Jewish people. Haman began to formulate a plan to not only destroy Mordecai but all of the Jews living throughout the Persian empire.

Why did Haman hate the Jews so bitterly? Notice that Haman was an Agagite... that is a descendant of Agag, who had once served as a king of the Amalekites. Agag was a descendant of Amalek, who was a grandson of Esau (Genesis 36:12). Last week we read that Mordecai was

a Jew, from the tribe of Benjamin, the son of Jacob. The animosity between Esau and Jacob had lasted for centuries... in fact, it still exists today. But why?

During the exodus, the Amalekites ambushed the Hebrew children with a seemingly unprovoked attack that was fueled simply by hatred (Exodus 17:8-13). Under the leadership of Moses and Joshua the children of Israel prevailed in the battle, but God was so angered with the Amalekites that, centuries later, he commanded King Saul, who was a Benjaminite (1 Samuel 9:21), to completely annihilate them. While King Saul and the armies of Israel struck King Agag and Amalekites extensively, they did not completely destroy them as God had commanded (1 Samuel 15:1-9). Because of Saul's disobedience, a remnant of the Amalekites (ie, the Agagites) survived. Later, King Hezekiah of Judah struck the Amalekites again (1 Chronicles 4:41-43) yet some still persisted... eventually leading to Haman.

The Bible describes a long, bitter relationship between the descendants of Jacob and Esau. Haman's hatred of Mordecai and the Jewish people as a whole was rooted in this history. Many Bible scholars view the animosity between Haman and Mordecai as an extension of that between Agag and Saul. The book of Esther details another chapter in this ongoing family feud.

II. THE KING APPROVES (v7-11)

In the first month of the year, Nissan, during the 12th year of King Ahasuerus' reign (some 4-5 years after Esther became queen), Haman cast Pur (or the lot) to determine the exact day and month that the Jews would be massacred. Based on the results, a target date was set in Adar, the 12th month of the year - about 11 months away. Then Haman approached the king and told him that "there was a certain people" who were scattered throughout the Persian empire who were rebellious and needed to be destroyed. Haman requested that a law be written and stamped with the king's signet ring that provided for their extermination. This task would be funded with 10,000 talents of silver that would be used to pay those who carried it out. Not fully realizing the consequences of what he was agreeing to, King Ahasuerus approved Haman's murderous plan.

Haman used Pur, which are like dice, in hopes of determining a "lucky day" upon which his evil scheme would most likely be successful. He believed that his pagan gods would guide the Pur to reveal this day. It is noteworthy that they landed on the 12th month of the year, which was still 11 months out. This long gap gave Haman plenty of time to prepare, but more importantly, it also provided ample time for Mordecai and Esther to intervene. Perhaps Someone was guiding the Pur after all?

Did you notice that Haman never specifically named the Jews in his conversation with the king? He was being intentionally deceptive and manipulative. Although Ahasuerus was a vile, disgusting man in many ways, he didn't hate the Jews like Haman did nor did he desire their total destruction. Most commentators believe that if King Ahasuerus had known that Haman was targeting the Jews he wouldn't have given his approval, yet he never even asked. In other words, Haman is the real villain while the king is just his useful idiot.

III. THE DECREE GOES FORTH (v12-15)

The king delegated the process of writing and implementing this new law to Haman, who then summoned the scribes and directed them to draft letters to each of the provinces throughout Persia. These letters were written in the native language of each province and sent by courier to the various governors. They stated by the king's decree that all of the Jews were to be killed, both young and old, on the 13th day of Adar. In the meantime, the provinces were to make all necessary preparations to ensure that this law could be fully carried on that single day. As you can imagine, this created a great sense of uneasiness and confusion in the city of Susa and throughout the kingdom. However, Ahasuerus remained oblivious to it all.

There are a couple of practical lessons I would like to point out from this passage. First, be careful who you trust. Haman took advantage of King Ahasuerus. Second, before you put your name on something, be sure you know what it says. Don't sign anything blindly or allow someone else to sign it for you. It could lead to trouble...

CONCLUSION

Let's close by reviewing the main point. Haman hated Mordecai. More broadly speaking, the Amalekites hated the Jews. While the Amalekites no longer exist today as a distinguishable people group, the Amalekite sentiment remains. The hatred of the Jewish people (and Christians) is alive and well. Although many reasons are given to explain this contempt, scripture gets down to the root of the matter. Ultimately this world hates the people of God (those they associate with Him, not necessarily believers) because they hate God Himself (John 15:18).

Here's the amazing thing... even though the world hates God, God loves the world... so much so that He sent His only begotten Son to make redemption possible for all who would believe in Him. If you have never accepted Jesus as your Savior and Lord, would you do so today?

Mordecai Urges Esther to Act

Originally Preached on 2/15/2026

The mind of a person plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps. - Proverbs 16:9

Esther was the queen of Persia. She replaced Vashti, who was banished for disobeying the king's declaration. Esther's cousin Mordecai, the man who raised her, was a royal servant. Both he and Esther were Jewish, descendants of the tribe of Benjamin. Everyone knew that Mordecai was a Jew, but no one knew that Esther was also.

Ahasuerus was the king of Persia. Haman served as his prime minister, second in command. Haman was an Agagite, a descendant of the Amalekites. He hated Mordecai and all of the Jewish people. Haman drafted a law, in the king's name, to kill all of the Jews living in Persia. The target date for this massacre was less than a year away.

This morning, we will continue our journey through the book of Esther. We will be in chapter 4. What will happen to the Jews living in the Persian Empire? Can anything be done to save them before it's too late? I've titled the following message "Mordecai Urges Esther to Act".

I. THE JEWS' ANGUISH (v1-4)

When Mordecai learned about the new law calling for the eradication of the Jewish people, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, left the citadel, went into the city, and mourned bitterly. Such behavior was not permitted within the king's gate. As word spread throughout the provinces, Jews throughout Persia responded with the same anguish. There was weeping, wailing, and fasting, and many made their beds in sackcloth and ashes. When Esther heard that Mordecai was mourning, she also became sad and sent him some clothes to change into which he refused to accept.

Sackcloth was a type of coarse fabric made from black goat's or camel's hair. It was quite uncomfortable. It symbolized intense sorrow and pain. Ashes would be rubbed on the body to represent desolation and ruin. The Persian Jews were in misery because their destruction was imminent. However, they didn't flee, perhaps because travel in those days was difficult and impractical or they weren't allowed to.

II. MORDECAI'S APPEAL (v5-8)

Esther sent Hathach, 1 of her attendants, to Mordecai to ask him why he was grieving. Hathach found Mordecai in the city square. Mordecai described Haman's hatred for him and the Jews, the law that had been passed, and how it would be funded. He even gave Hathach a copy of the king's edict that had been dispersed throughout Susa for Queen Esther to read. Mordecai urged Esther to go to the king and make an appeal to him on behalf of the Jews.

Esther did not immediately know about the new law. She was sad because Mordecai was sad, though she didn't understand the reason and wanted to find out. This says something about her character. The Bible teaches us as Christians to mourn with those who mourn (Romans 12:15). Esther was a sympathetic person. When Mordecai explained what was going on, Esther must have realized the sweeping gravity of the situation. This was a much bigger issue than she had originally anticipated.

III. ESTHER'S APPREHENSION (v9-12)

Hathach returned to Esther and told her all that Mordecai had said. Esther sent word back to him stating that she couldn't simply approach the king and make an appeal to him. The law stated that no one - including the queen - could enter the king's inner court to converse with him unless they were summoned to do so. Those who attempted to would be put to death, unless he held out his golden scepter to spare their life. Furthermore, Esther had not been summoned to see the king for 30 days.

Esther's first response to Mordecai was apprehensive. She knew that if she did what he asked, her life would be at risk. She explained that people just didn't go see the king uninvited and stated that even she hadn't seen him for a month. Perhaps Mordecai thought that Esther spoke with him everyday, but she didn't. This was going to be more difficult than he expected.

IV. MORDECAI'S ADMONITION (v13-14)

When Hathach came to Mordecai and expressed Esther's concerns, he answered that inevitably she'd been found out to be Jewish and would be killed just like the rest. He warned her not to be naive in thinking she'd escape just because she was the queen. Mordecai was confident that deliverance would come for the Jews, even if Esther remained silent, but he warned her that if she didn't act, she and her father's house would surely perish. Mordecai challenged Esther to consider if, perhaps, she had become queen for this very reason.

Mordecai's response was, in essence, "True, if you intervene you'll be risking your life, but if you don't at least try you'll lose it for sure." At some point the king would find out that she was Jewish - she couldn't hide it forever. I am struck by Mordecai's faith that God would save His people somehow, even if not through Esther. It reminds me of Abraham's faith that God would provide, even as he prepared to sacrifice his own son Isaac (Genesis 22:8). Even still, he urged Esther to act. She was in a unique position to make a difference.

V. ESTHER'S ACCEPTANCE (v15-17)

So Hathach came back to Esther again and told her what Mordecai had said. She considered his wisdom and sent instructions for Mordecai to gather up all the Jews living in Susa. She asked them to fast (and pray) on her behalf for 3 days. Esther and her young maidens would do likewise. Afterward she resolved to go speak to the king, even if not summoned to do so, and if

she were to be killed for breaking the law, so be it. Upon receiving Esther's request, Mordecai did just as she'd instructed.

Upon reflection, Esther knew what she had to do. God had raised her up to be queen. This was her moment to stand, but the task wouldn't be easy. She was nervous and afraid. So she asked for prayer. She needed courage and strength to approach the king. Beloved, when we are faced with daunting challenges and obstacles in our lives, we should ask others to pray for us as we also pray for them (1 Thessalonians 5:25). Praying for one another is an important part of the Christian life.

CONCLUSION

Mordecai's question in Esther 4:14 is perhaps the most well-known sentence in this entire book. "Who knows whether you have reached royalty for such a time as this?" He believed that God had placed Esther there to intervene on behalf of the Jews, and wanted her to believe it too.

Beloved, God is sovereign over the events of history. He works all things together for good so that His will is accomplished. He orchestrates the days of our lives so as to achieve His divine purposes. He weaves it all together in a grand tapestry. Friends, Esther did not come to be queen by chance. It was all in accordance with God's design. He placed her there to be the deliverer of her kinsmen - His people, the Jewish people. But would she do it? Would she be brave enough to answer the calling that God had given to her?

What about you and I? God's sovereign and perfect will has brought us to this place. We are not in Seymour by accident. The people in our lives are not there randomly. And, similar to ancient Persia, there are lives and souls in danger all around us. Judgment day is coming soon. Will we have the courage to risk rejection, or perhaps even persecution, by boldly sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost? Will we seize our moment?

Esther's Feast, Haman's Fury

Originally Preached on 2/22/2026

The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He pleases. - Proverbs 21:1

When we finished last Sunday's sermon, Mordecai and the Jews living in Susa had gathered to fast and pray for Esther. In addition to them, Esther and her attendants were also fasting and praying. They were asking the LORD to give Esther the courage to appear unsummoned before the king, which was a risky proposition. They were praying that she would present her petition convincingly and that the king would grant her request. Finally, they were seeking the LORD's favor and deliverance from Haman's sinister plan.

This morning's sermon covers Esther chapter 5. We will discuss if the Jews' fasting and prayers were successful and whether or not Esther dared to appear before the king. If so, what happened? Would she be killed for breaking the law? Would King Ahasuerus be searching for yet another queen? Let's find out together...

I. NOT HERE (v1-4)

On the 3rd day of the fasting and prayers, Esther put on her royal robes and went into the king's inner court opposite the throne room. When King Ahasuerus saw her, he extended his golden scepter to her signaling that she could approach. Esther came forward and touched the top of his scepter. The king asked Esther what was troubling her and to state her request, to which she responded by inviting him to a feast that she'd prepared especially for him. She told him that he could bring Haman if he wanted to.

Esther touched the king's scepter to indicate her thankfulness to him for allowing her to address him despite not being summoned. Furthermore, it expressed recognition of and submission to his royal authority. Esther was acting with gentleness, humility, and deference, rather than being brash or presumptuous. Knowing that he enjoyed feasts, Esther invited the king to a feast she'd already prepared for him in advance.

Esther didn't want to make her petition to the king there in the throne room. Although he had just granted her permission to approach him and was speaking very kindly to her, she didn't feel like this was the right place to ask. She wanted to ingratiate herself to him a bit more and "move the playing field" so to speak, perhaps to increase her chances of success. Esther had clearly thought this over for the past few days and was acting with cunning and intentionality.

II. NOT NOW (v5-8)

The king sent word to Haman and the 2 men went together to Esther's feast. As they drank their wine, King Ahasuerus asked Esther again to share her request. He said that it would be given to her, up to half the kingdom. However, Esther still chose not to make her appeal for the

deliverance of the Jews. Instead, she invited them to join her for yet another feast that she'd prepare for them the next day.

The Bible does not say why Esther waited to make her request until the 2nd feast. As such, many different theories have been proposed. Here are 3 of the most common I've read and 1 that troubles me somewhat.

1. She lost her nerve. Perhaps she was afraid of what the king, Haman, or both of them might do or say. So she put it off until tomorrow to buy a little more time to work up her courage.
2. She wanted to create division between the king and Haman, seeing that this law was Haman's idea. She had prepared the 1st feast "for the king" and Haman was his guest. She would prepare the 2nd feast "for them both", suggesting an equal status. Perhaps this was a subtle, but strategic move to foster the king's jealousy and stoke Haman's pride. She needed the king to side with her.
3. She sensed God directing her to wait. Although she couldn't have known what would happen between the 2 feasts, God knew. Perhaps the intervening events (which we will discuss in our next sermon) factored in the outcome.

Some state that the 2nd feast was simply a literary device used to make the story more dramatic and/or engaging. This troubles me because it implies that the author was more concerned about achieving a certain effect than recording a faithful account of what actually happened. I reject this line of thinking as it undermines the truthfulness of scripture. Unless the context gives clear and compelling reason to think otherwise, every word of the Bible should be regarded as factually true. (Yes, Jonah was swallowed by a big fish!)

III. NOT HAPPY (v9-14)

Haman left Esther's feast feeling upbeat and in good spirits. On his way home, however, he encountered Mordecai who didn't stand, tremble or pay him any type of tribute. This made Haman furious, but he kept his composure until he got to his house. When he arrived, he sent for his wife Zeresh and his friends. Haman boasted to them of his wealth, his many sons, and how the king had promoted him to a place of prestige and power. He went on to say that no one other than he and the king were invited to Esther's feasts. Yet, none of these things could pacify his hatred of Mordecai. His wife and friends advised him to have gallows made and to ask the king for permission to hang Mordecai on it. Haman liked their idea and had the gallows made.

Haman had achieved great success in life. He effectively controlled the affairs of the entire Persian Empire, subject only to the king. He had acquired great riches and had fathered many sons, which was a cultural sign of prosperity. Yet, despite having all these reasons to be cheerful and content, Haman wasn't happy. He was narrowly focused on the 1 bad thing in his life... his nemesis, Mordecai. Can you identify with this discontent? All too often, rather than

counting our abundant blessings and living with joyful satisfaction, we grumble about and fixate on the handful of negatives. This shouldn't be.

CONCLUSION

The chapter we've read this morning provides a stark contrast between Esther and Haman. She was patiently waiting and seeking the opportune moment to make her petition on behalf of the Jews. Not here she thought, not now she thought... I will wait until the time is right. He, on the other hand, was impatiently preparing to kill Mordecai as soon as possible because he simply couldn't stand to wait just a few more months until his murderous law took effect.

In last week's message, we highlighted God's sovereignty over time and events. As we close today, let's consider a different, but related question. Are we patient enough to wait on God's timing or do we tend to impatiently move forward on our own? Do we tend to get ahead of God, rather than following Him? Beyond that, are we patient with one another? Beloved, aren't you grateful that Jesus is patient with us (2 Peter 3:9)?

So... when will Esther make her appeal? Will the king permit Haman to hang Mordecai on the gallows? Join us next Sunday as we continue this exciting study.

Mordecai Is Honored

Originally Preached on 3/1/2026

Now in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; and his spirit was troubled, and his sleep left him. - Daniel 2:1

Each year the Jewish people remember and commemorate the courageous actions of Queen Esther during a holiday called Purim. This year, in 2026, Purim will be observed beginning at sunset on Monday, March 2 and ending at sunset on Tuesday, March 3... tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. The story of Esther is more than a fascinating tale, but rather is an historic event that continues to shape and distinguish the Jewish culture.

This morning we will begin the second half of our series through the book of Esther. At this point, Haman has tricked King Ahasuerus into passing a law calling for the extermination of the Jewish people. Mordecai has urged Esther to make an appeal to the king pleading that the Jews be spared, but Esther hasn't yet done so. Now Haman wants to go ahead and kill Mordecai early, not content to wait until the law kicks in. Things are looking pretty bleak, but in today's message the tide will begin to shift...

I. THE KING'S INSOMNIA (v1-3)

That night, following Esther's feast, King Ahasuerus could not sleep. He ordered a servant to read to him from the book of the king's chronicles, hoping that this would make him drowsy. As it happened, the servant read about the incident during which Mordecai reported to the king that 2 of his doorkeepers were planning to harm him. King Ahasuerus asked if any honor or dignity had ever been bestowed upon Mordecai for this and they answered that none had.

The king's insomnia that night wasn't accidental. Neither was the servant's reading about how Mordecai had saved the king from harm. God providentially caused these things to happen, so as to steer King Ahasuerus' favor toward Mordecai. Once again, we see God sovereignly orchestrating events so as to bring about His desired outcomes.

II. THE KING'S DESIRE (v4-6a)

The next morning, Haman made his way to the king's palace in order to request that Mordecai be executed. The king asked his servants to bring Haman in from the outer courtyard. Before Haman could speak, King Ahasuerus asked, "What is to be done for the man whom the king desires to honor?"

The king wanted to bestow honor upon Mordecai for what he had done. In the same way, God sees a believer's good works and promises to reward them accordingly (Ephesians 6:8). God does not forget or overlook the good things that we do or the love that we show Him (Hebrews 6:10). We shouldn't do good works simply to receive recognition, but we can be confident that God sees and will reward our good works.

III. HAMAN'S PRESUMPTUOUS PRIDE (v6b-9)

Filled with pride, Haman presumed that he was the man who the king wished to honor. Believing this, Haman suggested that the man receiving the honor be clothed with a robe that the king himself had worn, have a turban the king had worn placed on his head, and be seated on a horse upon which the king had ridden. Then he would be led on horseback by a royal official throughout the city square who would proclaim before him, "So it shall be done for the man whom the king desires to honor."

Haman thought very highly of himself. He was filled with arrogance and pride. He wanted to wear the king's robe and turban. He wanted to ride the king's horse. Why? He believed that he should be the king! This is the same sin that Satan had exhibited. Satan exalted himself, desiring to be like God, and was cast down for it (Isaiah 14:12-15). Pride goes before a fall (Proverbs 16:18).

IV. MORDECAI'S RECOGNITION (v10-11)

The king liked Haman's suggestion and ordered him to immediately do all of these things for Mordecai, who was sitting in the king's gate. Therefore, in obedience to the king, Haman dressed Mordecai in the king's robe and turban. He seated him on the king's horse and led him through the city square proclaiming, "So it shall be done for the man whom the king desires to honor."

Mordecai's recognition was somewhat similar to Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Mordecai was led throughout the city on horseback, taking on the role of a conquering king. The honor that he received was being compared with and likened to the king. Of course, when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey just days before His crucifixion He was lauded upon and received by the people as the king of the Jews. There is no greater honor for a believer than bearing the image of our King, Jesus Christ.

V. HAMAN'S HUMILIATION (v12-14)

After Mordecai had been honored for saving the king's life, he returned to the king's gate while Haman rushed home in mourning and shame. Haman told his wife and friends all that had happened. They responded that if Mordecai was of Jewish origin, Haman would not prevail against him. While they were still talking, the king's eunuchs arrived and took Haman to the 2nd banquet which Esther had prepared.

Can you imagine the humiliation that Haman must have felt? Not only was Mordecai (the man he intensely hated) honored, but he himself was the person who gave him the honor. The Bible teaches that God will not only exalt the righteous, but will also put his enemies to shame (Psalm 6:10). This shaming of the wicked is a component of their condemnation.

CONCLUSION

In today's message we have made several connections and applications. Let's review them quickly before we close. First, as we've discussed throughout this series, God is sovereign over the events of our lives and works them together in accordance with His will. Things don't just happen by chance. Second, God sees a believer's good works and He will reward them in due time. Don't think that God has forgotten you. Third, the sin of pride will ultimately lead to a person's downfall. Fourth, there is no greater honor or recognition than being likened to Jesus. We aren't Jesus, and never will be, but we can and should aspire to be Christlike. Fifth, the enemies of the righteous will be put to shame.

Let me close by asking a final question. Are you someone whom the king would desire to honor? In other words, are you living a life that is pleasing and acceptable to God? Are you faithful to Him in all things, obedient to Him in every way, and wholeheartedly devoted to Him every moment? When you stand before Jesus, will you hear Him say "Well done, my good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21)?

Next Sunday we will read about Queen Esther's second feast. Will she finally make her request to the king? If so, how will the king respond? Will the Jews be saved? Will the king side with Haman or Esther? Oh... what suspense! I can't wait to see what will happen next.

Esther's Request, Haman's Demise

Originally Preached on 3/8/2026

Now if a person has committed a sin carrying a sentence of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body is not to be left overnight on the tree, but you shall certainly bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is cursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance. - Deuteronomy 21:22-23

Before we begin this morning's message, let's take a moment to remember what's going on. Esther still hasn't made her appeal to the king on behalf of the Jewish people. According to the law, they are still scheduled to be destroyed. She has, however, invited the king and Haman to another feast which she's prepared especially for them. Perhaps this will be the occasion she finally speaks up.

The king has just finished granting a great honor to Mordecai and doesn't show any apparent animosity toward the Jews. Meanwhile Haman, who wanted to execute Mordecai but was forced to pay tribute to him instead, is likely fuming with bitterness on the inside. The stage is set for a climactic event. Turn to Esther chapter 7 and let's get started!

I. ESTHER MAKES HER PLEA (v1-4)

The king and Haman came to Esther's 2nd feast. While he was drinking wine at the banquet, the king asked Esther to make her request. He assured her that it would be done for her - up to half the kingdom. She answered, "If it pleases the king and I have found favor in your sight, please spare the lives of me and my people (the Jews). It has been determined that we all be eliminated." She went on to say that had the Jews only been sold into slavery, she would have kept silent.

The king originally asked Esther to state her request in the throne room when she approached him, but she waited. He asked her a second time during Esther's first feast, but again she put it off. When he asked her the third time, during her second feast, Esther finally stated her request. As we've emphasized in the previous messages, she seemed to be waiting for the opportune moment, perhaps discerning the leading of God's Spirit.

Remember that Esther had, in obedience to Mordecai's command, been keeping her Jewish identity secret. When she voiced her plea she also revealed to the king and Haman that she was Jewish. While they both already knew Mordecai was a Jew, neither knew that Esther was also until she made her request. Had Haman known about this earlier, he might have approached this situation differently.

II. THE KING BECOMES ANGRY (v5-6)

King Ahasuerus became extremely upset that someone would presume to kill all of the Jews living in the Persian Empire. He asked Esther who it was that was plotting such an evil thing?

Esther answered, “A foe and an enemy is this wicked Haman!” Haman’s murderous scheme had been exposed and he became terrified before the king and queen.

The king seemed inclined to grant Esther’s request all 3 times he spoke with her about it. When she finally made it, he not only agreed with her but became angry with Haman. Haman had taken advantage of the king’s naivety and trust. Now that he knew what was actually going on, King Ahasuerus realized that he’d been duped by someone he thought was a friend. Such betrayal is difficult to get over (Psalm 41:9).

King Ahasuerus’ behavior in this chapter is starkly different from back in chapter 1 when he ordered Queen Vasthi to appear before him and his drunken buddies. I am not saying that he’s a great guy now, but he seems to have matured some. I would like to think that Esther had something to do with that. By this point, she had been his wife and queen for around 5 years. Perhaps her moral influence softened his rough edges a bit and made him more thoughtful. The Bible encourages Christian wives to remain faithful to their unbelieving husbands so that they might be won over by their godly virtue (1 Peter 3:1-2).

III. HAMAN BEGS FOR HIS LIFE (v7-8)

In his anger, the king walked out of the banquet and into the palace garden. Meanwhile Haman stayed behind to beg Esther for his life because the king was planning to do him harm. When the king returned, Haman had thrown himself on Esther’s couch. The king mistakenly thought that Haman was attempting to assault her. The king’s men immediately seized Haman and covered his face.

In last week’s message, we highlighted that the enemies of God will be shamed and humiliated. We saw this illustrated when the king ordered Haman to lead Mordecai around the city honoring him. Now we see another punishment of the wicked. They will beg the righteous for mercy, but it will not come (Jeremiah 15:11). This reminds me of the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus when the Rich Man begs for mercy (Luke 16:19-31).

IV. HAMAN IS HANGED (v9-10)

Harbonah, a eunuch of the king (mentioned previously in Esther 1:10), pointed out that Haman had commissioned the building of wooden gallows upon which to kill Mordecai, the man the king had just honored. In an epic twist, King Ahasuerus ordered that Haman be hanged on those very gallows and he immediately was. After Haman’s death, the king’s anger subsided.

There are many similarities between the story of Esther and the story of Joseph. In both cases it is evident that God is orchestrating the various events of the characters lives in order to accomplish His purposes. Through a series of unexpected and challenging circumstances, both Joseph and Esther are elevated to positions of authority where they act on behalf of God’s people. And in both cases, that which was intended for evil actually ends up working for good (Genesis 50:20).

CONCLUSION

We have made a few different observations during today's message that I'll quickly review:

When you're making a request and you're not certain how it will be answered, be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Let Him guide you in the timing and wording of your petition.

When someone you thought was a friend betrays you, it's especially hurtful.

Godly spouses can have a positive influence over their nonbelieving spouses.

The LORD's enemies will beg for mercy during the day of judgment.

God can turn that which was meant for evil into something good.

For example, the Devil and His demons thought that the crucifixion of Christ would be their ultimate victory. However, it turned out to be the means through which He forgave mankind's sin. Then, 3 days later, He was raised from the dead, conquering the penalty of death!

As we come to the end of today's sermon, Esther has finally and courageously intervened to deliver her people. The wicked Haman is dead. His scheme to destroy the Jews had been discovered. Still, the king has not yet rescinded the law calling for their destruction. Will he do that? Join us next week as we continue our study of the story of Esther. God bless you.

Mordecai's Plan to Save the Jews

Originally Preached on 3/15/2026

Then he said to them, "Go, eat of the fat, drink of the sweet, and send portions to him who has nothing prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." - Nehemiah 8:10

Most Christians who have heard the story of Esther are quite familiar with chapters 1-7. However, they may not know what happens in chapters 8-10. There is a prevailing assumption that after Haman is killed the king repeals his murderous law and the Jews are saved because of Esther's bravery. This, however, isn't actually how the story ends...

This morning we will resume our study through Esther. We will be in chapter 8. I have titled this message, "Mordecai's Plan to Save the Jews".

I. MORDECAI'S PROMOTION (v1-2)

After King Ahasuerus had Haman hanged, he gave the house of Haman to Queen Esther. She told him that Mordecai was her cousin and that he had raised her in place of her parents. The king promoted Mordecai to prime minister and gave him the signet ring which he had taken from Haman. Esther then set Mordecai over the house of Haman.

"The house of Haman" would include everything that the king had given to Haman - his house, his wealth, his property, his attendants, and everything else. All of it was given to Esther who then entrusted its management to Mordecai. Furthermore, Mordecai was named "second in command" and given the king's signet ring. Mordecai, who had already proven his loyalty to the king, effectively replaced Haman.

II. ESTHER'S PETITION (v3-6)

Esther fell weeping at the king's feet and implored him to repeal Haman's evil scheme to destroy her people the Jews. He extended his golden scepter to her and she stood to her feet saying, "If it seems good to the king and I have found favor in his sight, may letters be written and sent to all of the provinces in Persia reversing the plan devised by Haman." She asked, "How could I endure seeing my kinsmen perish?"

This was actually the 2nd time that Esther made her petition to the king. When she originally asked him during her 2nd feast, the king wanted to know whose wicked plan this was. When Esther told him that it was Haman, he became furious and ordered Haman to be hanged. Now that Haman was gone and the king had calmed down, Esther approached him again in hopes of having this law revoked. Her anguish over the prospect of watching the Jews be killed is reminiscent of Isaiah anguishing over the future destruction of Jerusalem (Isaiah 22:4).

III. THE KING'S CONSENT (v7-8)

The king said to Esther and Mordecai, "I have given the house of Haman to Esther. I have had Haman hanged on the very gallows that he's commissioned to kill Mordecai. Now I give my consent to write a decree according to what is good in your eyes and seal it with the king's signet ring. However, a law written in the name of the king and sealed with his signet ring may not be repealed.

Herein lies another complication in the story. Haman's law calling for the extermination of all the Jews living in the Persian Empire could not be revoked. Therefore, his murderous scheme couldn't be erased, but rather would have to be addressed in some other way. King Ahasuerus gave Haman permission to write and dispatch letters to all of the Jews scattered about the various Persian provinces, but what would they say?

Before moving on to our next point, let me emphasize that the gifts and promises of God are also irrevocable (Romans 11:29). Why wouldn't they be, as He is unchanging by nature (Malachi 3:6)? Thus, the requirements of the Old Testament law for the forgiveness of sin were not abolished or ignored, but rather had to be perfectly fulfilled by Christ so that He could become our substitute for salvation (Matthew 5:17).

IV. ANOTHER LAW (v9-14)

Mordecai summoned the scribes on the 23rd day of the 3rd month, about 2 months after Haman had originally begun planning his evil scheme (Esther 3:7-11). Mordecai had a decree written, sealed, and hurriedly sent to all 127 provinces in Persia. It was translated into the appropriate language of each recipient. Seeing that the original law could not be repealed, this new law gave the Jewish people the right to assemble and defend themselves against their adversaries on the 13th day of the 12th month when the Jewish slaughter was scheduled to occur. The letters were carried to the provinces by couriers riding on royal steeds and was also decimated throughout the citadel at Susa.

By the king's authority, Mordecai empowered the Jews people to stand up for themselves and fight back. They no longer were helpless victims to be led as a sheep to slaughter. They could now defend themselves against their enemies. Although Haman had been killed, there were still plenty of Persians who hated the Jews and intended to destroy them. Mordecai's law gave the Jews a fighting chance.

In His high priestly prayer, Jesus did not ask the Father to take His disciples out of the world, but rather to protect them from the evil one (John 17:15). Although God could, in His omnipotence, remove all threats against His people, He chooses not to. Rather, we as His children are called to stand up against our enemies and fight for the cause of Christ (1 Timothy 6:12). This isn't a call to physical violence, but rather a call to spiritual warfare as His soldiers adjourned in the armor of God (Ephesians 6:8-10).

V. THE JEWS CELEBRATE (15-17)

Having completed his decree and dispatching the couriers, Mordecai went out of the king's presence wearing royal robes of blue and white, a golden crown, and a purple linen cloak. The citizens of Susa saw him and were overjoyed. When the letters arrived and were announced throughout the provinces granting the Jews permission to defend themselves, they celebrated and held joyful feasts. Many Persian people converted to Judaism as the dread of the Jews fell upon them.

Earlier in this story, Mordecai had been clothed in sackcloth and ashes mourning the fate of his people. But now, in a complete reversal of fortune, he is wearing royal attire. His regal robes of blue and white match the colors of the modern Jewish flag. The entire city of Susa rejoiced that he had been chosen to replace Haman. Meanwhile, Jews across Persia celebrated - not because they had been saved, but rather because they had been given the opportunity to defend themselves. Recognizing the favor that God granted to them, many Persians became Jewish and placed their faith in Him.

CONCLUSION

So, as we conclude today's sermon, Mordecai has been promoted to the office of prime minister in place of Haman. Although he is unable to revoke the king's law calling for the destruction of the Jews, Mordecai has written another law allowing the Jews to defend themselves from upcoming massacre. Thus, a confrontation between the people of God and their enemies is set. Join us next week as we read about this looming conflict.

The Jews Strike Down Their Enemies

Originally Preached on 3/22/2026

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? - Romans 8:31

This morning's sermon is titled "The Jews Strike Down Their Enemies". It is the 9th message in our current series through the book of Esther. Before we begin this morning, let's play a little game. I am going to describe a character from the story, and you tell me who it is. Ready?

He plotted to kill the Jews, but was ultimately found out and hanged. (Haman)

She lost her position as queen after refusing to obey the king's request. (Vashti)

He saved the king's life, was honored for it, and became the new prime minister. (Mordecai)

He was king of the Persian Empire. (Ahasuerus)

She became queen, prepared 2 feasts for the king, and urged him to spare the Jews. (Esther)

Did you guess them all correctly? Great! At the close of last week's sermon, Mordecai had written and dispatched a law, authorized by the king, which allowed the Jewish people to take up arms and defend themselves from their adversaries on the day that had been set aside for their destruction.

I. THE JEWS' SUCCESS (v1-5)

In accordance with Haman's murderous law, when the 13th day of Adar (the 12th month of the year) arrived, the enemies of God attacked the Jews intent on destroying them all. However, the Jewish people had the upper hand. Jews assembled in every city throughout Persia to defend themselves and their adversaries could not stand before them. Even the provincial leaders and officers - the princes, governors, satraps, and others - favored the Jewish people, as they respected Mordecai and his great leadership. Thus, the Jews struck down their enemies.

Generally speaking, the Jewish people do very well in battle - oftentimes despite overwhelming odds - whenever they are humble before and obedient to the LORD. In instances of rebellion or disobedience, however, such as when Achan hid plunder from Jericho (Joshua 7) or King Saul consulted a medium (1 Samuel 28-31), the Jews don't fare as well. Their success or failure in battle is dependent upon God, who fights on their behalf (Deuteronomy 20:4). This seems to be true for both Biblical Israel and modern-day Israel.

II. VICTORY IN SUSA (v6-15)

At the citadel in Susa, where the king resided, the Jews killed 500 of their enemies including the 10 sons of Haman, but did not take any plunder. When this news was reported to King Ahasuerus he asked Esther if there was anything further he might do for her. She requested that he extend the battle for an additional day and have the 10 sons of Haman hanged on the gallows. He agreed. The next day, the 14th of Adar, the bodies of Haman's son were hanged and the Jews assembled again. They killed another 300 adversaries, but still took no plunder.

As discussed earlier in this series, hanging a person's dead body was thought to bring shame, disgrace, and a curse upon them. In fact, even if the deceased had died in some other way, such as being killed in battle, their corpses might be hung publicly as a means of humiliation and taunting. The Philistines did this to King Saul by fastening his decapitated body to the wall of Beth-shan. In this instance, Queen Esther wanted the sons of Haman to be hanged.

Following the exodus, God commanded Joshua and the Israelites to completely destroy the Canaanites when they took possession of the promised land. However, Israel disobeyed and remnants of the Canaanites remained. As a result, their pagan influence and worship of false gods continually led the Israelites astray. Esther didn't want such a thing to happen again, so she requested an additional day so that the Jews could finish the job. If you allow even a little sin to remain, it can defile the whole community (Galatians 5:9)..

III. VICTORY IN THE PROVINCES (v16-17)

Outside of Susa, throughout the 127 provinces of the vast Persian Empire, Jews assembled in every city to defend themselves against their haters. Like those in the capital city, they also were quite successful. In total, the Jews killed 75,000 of their enemies, but did not take any plunder. Their resounding victory was accomplished in a single day, on the 13th of Adar. The Jews celebrated joyfully and feasted on the following day.

Just out of curiosity, I divided the numbers to discover that the Jews killed an average of 590 rivals in each province. Obviously the actual amount would be higher in the more populated provinces and lower in the less populated provinces, but the average does help us understand the scope of what happened. Haman's plan to slaughter the Jews failed, resulting instead in a great Jewish triumph over their enemies.

IV. 2 DAYS OF CELEBRATION (v18-19)

The Jews living in Susa fought against their enemies for 2 days, on both the 13th and 14th of Adar, per Esther's request. As a result, they made the 15th a day of feasting and gladness. However, the Jews in the provinces and more rural areas battled their enemies for just 1 day, the 13th of Adar. As stated in the previous point, they made the 14th a day of gladness, feasting, and sending portions of food to one another.

Thus, there were 2 days of celebration. The 1st day, which applied to the overwhelming majority of Jewish people scattered across Persia, took place on the 14th day of the month. The 2nd day, which applied specifically to the Jews residing in Susa, took place on the 15th of the month. These were times of joy set aside by the people of God to praise Him (Psalm 20:5).

CONCLUSION

In last week's message, we emphasized that God has not removed His people from the presence of their enemies. Rather, He has commanded and empowered His people to fight back. The main idea of this morning's message is very similar. As the people of God faithfully defend themselves from those who would destroy them, the LORD will fight on their behalf and will overcome their adversaries. This is true both physically and spiritually.

I am always amazed by the almighty hand of God. The Bible doesn't state how many, if any, Jews were killed during this battle. I wonder if any of them were? If you were anticipating a fierce conflict between 2 evenly matched opponents, sorry to disappoint... The same can be said of The Battle of Armageddon which will be fought when Jesus returns at the end of the age. Many people think that this will be an epic struggle between good and evil in which many casualties will be inflicted on both sides, but it appears to me that Jesus will handily destroy both the Antichrist and his followers while the armies of God won't suffer so much as a scratch (Revelation 19:11-21).

Next week, we will read about how Esther and Mordecai took steps to memorialize the events we've discussed. As you may recall, the name of this series is "Esther's Story: How Purim Began". Join us this coming Sunday as we discover how this holiday originated.

The Feast of Purim Is Established

Originally Preached on 3/29/2026

I shall remember the deeds of the Lord; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old. - Psalm 77:11

Good morning. I am so happy to see you here in the Lord's house to worship Him today. As you know, we have been studying through the book of Esther for the past few months. My prayer is that these messages have not only improved your knowledge and understanding of this book, but also challenged you - as they have me - to live more boldly for Christ!

At the conclusion of last week's sermon, the day of Haman's evil plan to slaughter the Jews finally arrived. Jews throughout Persia gathered to defend themselves and, by God's strength, they were victorious over their enemies. When the conflict ended, they celebrated their success both in the city of Susa and across the numerous provinces.

This morning's message is titled "The Feast of Purim Is Established". In it we will discover and discuss how Mordecai and Esther officially founded this holiday for the Jews. We will also consider how Jewish people celebrate Purim today.

I. THE HOLIDAY'S LENGTH (v20-22)

Mordecai wrote down the events that had taken place so that they wouldn't be forgotten. He also sent letters to all 127 provinces in the Persian Empire which instructed the Jews to recognize the 14th and 15th days of Adar as an annual holiday. Each year they were to remember and celebrate how the LORD had delivered them from Haman's wicked scheme, given them rest from their enemies, and turned their sorrow into joy. They were to feast with gladness, send portions of food to each other, and give gifts to the poor.

As stated in the opening message of this series, it is uncertain who wrote the book of Esther. However, if Mordecai was the author or coauthor, which is quite possible, his writings might be the very words we have been reading over the past several weeks. He directed this holiday to be observed for 2 days, because (as we read last Sunday) the Jews in the provinces had celebrated on the 14th while those in Susa fought an extra day and celebrated on the 15th.

II. THE HOLIDAY'S NAME (v23-28)

The Jews were delighted to comply with Mordecai's letter and make this an annual holiday. Haman had devised to completely destroy the Jews and had cast Pur, or the lot, to determine the exact date of their demise. But Haman's genocidal plan had been foiled and he and his 10 sons had been hanged on the gallows. Therefore, the Jews called this holiday Purim in recognition of the Pur that Haman had cast. They made it a permanent holiday, the 14th and 15th days of Adar, to be celebrated every year throughout the coming generations.

The name Purim is a reminder that God is sovereign over time and the events that take place. Haman had cast Pur or lots to determine which day would be best to execute his evil plan. This was an act of chance. But with God, there is no such thing as chance. He is not random, but intentional and deliberate. Everything that happens is either because God caused it or allowed it to occur. Nothing happens without His foreknowledge and permission. The name Purim highlights this irony. What Haman had planned for evil against the Jewish people, God turned into salvation!

III. THE HOLIDAY'S AFFIRMATION (v29-32)

Queen Esther, with Mordecai's assistance, wrote a 2nd letter to officially affirm and authorize the observance of Purim. Her letter was also sent to Jews living in all of the numerous provinces throughout the Persian Empire. It echoed the words of Mordecai's letter, but apparently included instructions about making fasting and prayer an essential part of the annual celebration. Esther's declaration legally established Purim and it was written in the book, perhaps referring to the royal archives or chronicles.

Whenever I think of Esther and Mordecai, it reminds me of Deborah and Barak (Judges 4). Deborah was the 4th judge of Israel. She encouraged Barak to lead the armies of Israel against the forces of Canaan. Barak was afraid, but agreed to do so with Deborah's support. Together they led the Israelites to victory over the Canaanites. Like Deborah and Barak, Esther and Mordecai were a team who worked together to accomplish the deliverance of God's people.

IV. THE HOLIDAY'S CELEBRATION

Since the days of Esther and Mordecai, the Jews have celebrated Purim every year. This tradition has endured for almost 2,500 years. The Jewish people still observe Purim to this very day. In fact, Purim is regarded by many as the most fun and joyful of all the Jewish holidays. Some liken its festive nature to Mardi Gras, although these 2 holidays have very different meanings and origins. Below are some of the ways in which Purim is celebrated today:

On the day before Purim begins (the 13th day of Adar), many Jews fast and pray to memorialize the 3 days of fasting and prayer that took place prior to Esther's appearance before the king. They also make donations to charities or give to the less fortunate, in keeping with Mordecai's command to do so.

On the 14th day of Adar, the story of Esther is read aloud in synagogues and homes throughout Israel. This is the main emphasis of Purim. Many Jews dress up in costumes as a way of symbolizing how Esther concealed her Jewish identity. Grand parades and street parties are held in the major cities. Bountiful feasts are conducted and portions of the food, treats, and so forth are given to family and friends. Small triangular pastries (or cookies) called Hamantaschen are an iconic holiday favorite. They are designed to resemble Haman's pointed hat.

On the 15th day of Adar, after the rest of Israel's celebration is complete, Purim is recognized in Jerusalem (and a few other walled cities). The same types of activities take place. Jerusalem conducts its festivities a day later to identify with the citizens of Susa who fought their adversaries an additional day.

CONCLUSION

Although there is no explicit mention of Purim in the New Testament, many scholars believe that the unnamed feast mentioned in John 5:1 was Purim. Following the chronology of the gospels, Jesus attended this feast in the late winter, around the time Purim takes place. It was on this occasion that Jesus healed a lame man at the Pool of Bethesda.

Purim is 1 of several major Jewish holidays. I will close today's message by naming some of these special days. Here is a partial list:

Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of First Fruits are conducted to memorialize the Angel of the LORD's "passing over" the homes of the Israelites, the hasty departure of the Hebrew children from Egypt, and to mark the beginning of grain harvest respectively.

Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks is held at the end of the wheat harvest to thank God for His provision.

Rosh Hashanah or the Feast of Trumpets marks the beginning of the Jewish New Year.

Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement is the holiest day of the year, upon which the high priest entered the Holy of Holies and offered sacrifices on behalf of the nation when the Temple was still in existence.

The Feast of Tabernacles is conducted to memorialize the shelters of the Hebrew children during the years of the exodus.

Hanukkah or the Festival of Lights commemorates the rededication of the Jewish temple by the Maccabees after the Syrians had desecrated it.

Purim celebrates God's deliverance of the Jews from the wicked scheme of Haman through the courageous acts of Mordecai and Queen Esther.

Next Sunday we will conclude our study of Esther and celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Mordecai's Greatness (Easter with Esther)

Originally Preached on 4/5/2026

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. - 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

Good morning. It is great to have you with us on this special day as we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. While Easter only comes around once each year, we as Christians remember Jesus' resurrection every week. That's why we observe our Sabbath and have church on Sunday rather than on Saturday... because Jesus rose from the dead on the 1st day of the week, not the 7th day of the week.

This year we are going to do something a bit different than in years past. We have been conducting a study through the book of Esther for the past 11 weeks and only have a few verses left. So this morning, rather than having a stand alone Easter sermon, we are going to conclude our series in Esther and connect it with the gospel message.

Don't worry... I will summarize what we've covered the last few months for our guests who may not have not heard and aren't familiar with the story of Esther. My hope is that we will recognize and understand how the story of Esther points to the finished work of Jesus. I've titled this message "Easter with Esther". Turn in your Bibles to Esther chapter 10.

I. MORDECAI'S GREATNESS (v1-3)

King Ahasuerus imposed a tax on all of the lands and coastlands throughout the Persian Empire. He was a powerful and mighty king who advanced Mordecai to a place of high honor. His acts are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia. Mordecai was 2nd in command to the king, was highly regarded, and very popular among his brethren. He spoke peace to and sought the welfare of the Jewish people.

In the years that followed the Jews' victory over their enemies and the establishment of Purim, Mordecai became increasingly great. He received a generous portion of the taxes collected by the Persian government and was given almost complete authority to manage the Empire's affairs. Typically, when a leader has this type of wealth and power they become prideful and corrupt. Mordecai, however, remained upright and committed to the good of his people.

II. A SUMMARY OF ESTHER

The story of Esther records how God delivered His chosen people from their planned destruction. When the previous queen was banished, a young Jewish girl named Esther was chosen to take her place. Esther had been raised by her cousin Mordecai who worked as a servant of the king. He advised Esther to conceal her Jewish ethnicity.

The king foolishly promoted an evil man named Haman to serve as his chief officer. Haman was of Amalekite descent and fiercely hated Mordecai and all of the Jewish people. He misled the king into passing a law that called for the complete destruction of the Jews. On a certain day all of the Jews would be rounded up and slaughtered. When Mordecai learned about this law, he urged Esther to intervene. Esther was hesitant to do so, fearing that she herself might be killed for approaching the king without an invitation. She, Mordecai, and many other Jews prayed and fasted on her behalf, that she would be courageous and successful in her appeal.

Esther prepared 2 feasts for the king and Haman. During the 2nd feast, she revealed that she was a Jew, urged the king to spare her people, and exposed Haman's murderous plan. When the king learned what Haman was planning, he had Haman killed and put Mordecai in charge. Mordecai passed a 2nd law which allowed the Jews to defend themselves from their planned destruction. Ultimately, with God's help, the Jews overcame their enemies and were saved. To memorialize their deliverance from Haman's wicked scheme, Esther and Mordecai established the holiday of Purim which is celebrated by the Jews each year.

III. HOW ESTHER FORESHADOWS CHRIST

The gospel of Jesus Christ is also a story about deliverance. In the book of Esther an evil villain named Haman sought the destruction of God's chosen people. On a larger scale, Satan seeks the death of all people and constantly works to deceive them into believing that either there is no God, they don't need God, or that they can attain His favor apart from Christ (1 Peter 5:8; John 8:44). Just as in the story of Esther, there is a day coming for all people upon which they will die. It won't all happen on the same day, but make no mistake - it will happen. Those who die having never been forgiven of their sins will face eternal condemnation (Hebrews 9:27).

Just like in the story of Esther, God sent a Deliverer at just the right time to rescue His people (Galatians 4:4-5). Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, humbled Himself, left His throne in Heaven, and came to this earth as a man to accomplish what no other person could accomplish (John 1:14). He lived a sinless life and was completely undefiled and blameless before God. Esther risked her life on behalf of her people, but Jesus gave His life sacrificially for all people. Jesus bore the sins of all humanity and endured the punishment due them on the cross of Calvary, dying as a substitute for sinners (2 Corinthians 5:21).

In the book of Esther, Haman was filled with pride and thought for certain that his evil plan would succeed. So also Satan and his demonic forces celebrated Jesus' death on the cross believing that they had won. But, just as God saved the Jews from certain death in Esther, so also He conquered death and the grave in Christ. On the 3rd day, an angel descended from Heaven and rolled the stone away. Jesus walked out of the tomb alive! He had risen from the dead. And the same power that raised Him abides in all who have received Him as Lord and Savior (Romans 6:8-10; 8:11).

40 days after His resurrection, Jesus ascended into Heaven and retook His seat at the right hand of God. The fullness and greatness of His glory was no longer concealed. Much higher

than Mordecai, Jesus was exalted and magnified (Hebrews 1:3). He had defeated the enemy and made salvation available to all who would receive it (John 3:16).

CONCLUSION

In the book of Esther, 2 laws are passed. Haman's law would result in death for the Jews, while Mordecai's law affords them with a chance to live. This exemplifies the old covenant and the new covenant. Under the Old Covenant of the law, all people are guilty of sin. None are righteous. None attain the standard of perfection that a just and holy God demands. All fall short of His glory. But under the New Covenant of grace, all people have the opportunity to receive salvation through the finished work of Jesus. Those who repent of their sins and place their faith in Jesus will be saved.

And so, just as the Jewish people set aside a day each year to recite and remember the story of Esther and how the LORD delivered them from their enemies, so also Christians celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ every day, but especially on Easter Sunday. It is the greatest holiday of them all because it memorializes the most consequential event in all of history.

The book of Esther, like all of the Bible, points to Jesus. The Old Testament anticipates and foreshadows His coming, the Gospels describe His life and ministry while He was here, and the New Testament teaches us how to live as believers now that He is gone. Jesus is the center, the focal point of God Word. He has come. He has defeated sin and death. The tomb is empty. And some day, perhaps very soon, Jesus is coming again.