

Esther

King Xerxes hosted a banquet for the people of Susa. At the same time Queen Vashti hosted a banquet in the royal palace for the women.

On the seventh day, King Xerxes, sated with wine, gave a command that Queen Vashti was to come to his banquet wearing nothing more than her royal crown that he might show off her great beauty to the nobles. Queen Vashti refused. For her disobedience she was banished from the kingdom, and the king began a search for a new queen.

Virgins from throughout the kingdom came in hopes of being selected as the next queen. Mordecai, a Jewish man, brought his niece Esther to the palace. When she was brought before the king, he chose her over all the other women to be the new queen. Mordecai advised Esther to keep her Jewish heritage a secret from the king.

One day, shortly after this, Mordecai overheard a plot to kill the king. He shared this information with Esther who told the King of the plot. The officials planning the assassination were killed and placed on poles where all the people could see what happens to traitors. All of this was written in the official records.

At this time, Haman was second in power to only the king. To honor Haman the king sent out an order that everyone was to bow to Haman as he walked past them. Only Mordecai refused. This made Haman burn with anger.

When Haman learned that Mordecai was a Jew, he decided that not only would Mordecai be put to death, but all Jews were to be killed. So, he went to the king and said, “There are a people in the kingdom who don’t obey your laws. They have different customs and should not be tolerated. If it pleases you, I will give the order for them to be destroyed.”

The king agreed and placed the royal seal upon the edict, saying to Haman, “Do with them whatever you will.”

Haman sent out the order that all Jews - young, old, women, children – were to be killed. When Mordecai learned of this order, he tore his clothes and sat down in the ashes, sobbing aloud and crying bitter tears. He then sent a message to Esther and asked her to go to the king and beg for mercy.

Esther reminded her uncle of the law – that anyone who approached the king without being asked, could be put to death. She added that the king had not sent for her in over 30 days, so to go uninvited could mean certain death for Esther.

Mordecai responded, “Do not think that because you live in the king’s palace that you will be the only Jew to be spared from his edict. The time has come for you to reveal your heritage. Perhaps you have come to your royal position for just such a time as this.”

Esther agreed and sent this message to her uncle. Have all of the Jews throughout the land eat nothing for three days and nights; my attendants and I will also fast. And then, I will go to the king. And if I die, I die.”

On the third day, Esther entered the inner courtyard to stand before the king. When he saw her, he was greatly pleased and extended the gold scepter toward her to save her life. She approached the king and placed her hand upon the scepter.

The king asked, “What is it that my queen wants?”

Esther replied, “If it pleases my king, I would like to invite you to a banquet that I have prepared for you. And please bring Haman with you.”

That evening the king and Haman went to Esther’s quarters to enjoy wine and the banquet. Again, the king asked, “What is it that the queen wants from me? Ask and it will be yours.”

And Esther replied, “If it pleases the king, I would like once more for you and Haman to come and enjoy a banquet with me tomorrow night. Then I will give you my request.”

Haman left the palace, certain that he had found favor with Queen Esther. But as he left the palace, he passed by Mordecai who once again refused to show any respect for Haman.

Upon reaching his home, Haman bragged to everyone about his powerful position with the king. “And now even Queen Esther has invited the king and only me to a special banquet. But what good is all of this honor if I must suffer the disrespect of the Jew Mordecai?”

Haman’s wife and neighbors advised him, “In the morning, go to the king and have him issue an edict that Mordecai is to be hanged. Build a gallows 75 feet tall that

all might see what happens to anyone who disrespects you. Then go to the banquet and enjoy yourself knowing that this disrespect will be ended.” Haman delighted in this suggestion and commanded immediately that the gallows be built.

That night King Xerxes couldn't sleep, so he ordered someone to bring the official record and read to him that it might lull him to sleep. The story of Mordecai revealing the plot to kill the king was read. The King asked, “What great honor did Mordecai receive for saving my life?” And they responded that nothing had been done for him. At this very moment, Haman entered the inner courtyard, and the king asked that he be brought to him.

The king asked Haman, “What should be done for a man that I have chosen to honor?”

Haman was certain that the king wanted to honor him. So, he responded, “Dress the man in one of your royal robes. Place him upon one of your best horses. Lead him through the streets of the city with a servant calling out his praise for all to hear.”

King Xerxes liked what he heard and he said to Haman, “Yes, see to it that all of this is done, just have you have said, for Mordecai.”

The time now came for Haman, and the king to join Esther at the second banquet.

Esther said, “King Xerxes, I hope that you will show me great favor and be pleased to let me live. My appeal is that you will let my people live. They have been ordered to be destroyed – young, old, women, and children – all to be killed.”

Shocked, the king asked, “Who has issued such a command? Where is he?”

And Esther pointed to Haman and said, “It is the evil Haman who hates my people.”

The king stormed from the room in a rage but Haman stayed behind to plea for his life. As the king returned to the room, Haman had fallen onto the couch where the queen was lying. The king shouted, “Will this evil man be so bold as to rape my queen, with me standing here in the palace.”

He ordered that Haman's face be covered, that he be bound and carried away. Haman and his ten sons were hanged upon the gallows that had been built for Mordecai, and Esther's people were saved.