

## **Why Has Your Past Prepared For This Time**

### **Esther 3:1—4:17**

Here is the Story of the Book of Esther in a nutshell. Esther and her cousin Mordecai are Jews, who reside in Persia, which is modern Iran. She is beautiful.

Without learning she is a Jew, the Persian king Xerxes falls in love with her and crowns her as his queen. While Esther is queen, Mordecai creates an enemy inside the government. This enemy is one of the nation's most powerful individuals, and his name is Haman. Haman intends to assassinate Mordecai and wipe out all Jews throughout the empire's provinces because Mordecai will not bow and honor him. Nonetheless, Mordecai keeps in touch frequently with the queen, his cousin.

Esther risks her life because Mordecai encourages her to. She enters the king's presence on her initiative, you should only enter the king's presence when you are summoned. Xerxes mercifully

spares her and requests what she would like. Esther responds by inviting the king to dinner with her along with Haman as their special guest.

After dinner, Haman is thrilled with his good fortune and returns home. He decides to construct terrifying gallows to hang Mordecai. While going through his reign's archives during a restless night, the king is reminded of a favor he owes Mordecai.

The king consults Haman about the most incredible way to honor a guy. Haman, who believes this celebration is for him, orders a parade befitting a prince, only to find that he must make all the arrangements for Mordecai! At a subsequent meal, Esther implores the king to spare her life and stop the planned massacre of the Jews. The monarch is indignant that such an atrocity was planned and demands to know who was responsible. Haman, who is seated next to them, is revealed by Esther to be the bad guy.

Haman is now revealed to be a bully and a coward. He begs for his life and then appears to attack the queen, sealing his fate.

King Xerxes has Haman executed on the same gallows that he had built built for Mordecai.

Esther can finally explain to the king how she and Mordecai are related. The king gives Mordecai Haman's ring and Esther his estate. Therefore, how can the destruction of the Jews be stopped?

Every province in the empire received a royal order to execute all Jews on a specific day—the 13th day of the month of Adar. Haman selected the day by drawing lots or casting the pur. We would say in today's verbiage, he rolled the dice.

Although the king's order must stand, Esther and Mordecai, convince him to issue another directive. The scribes and translators send orders allowing the Jews to defend themselves

under Mordecai's direction. They have the right to put any assailant to death.

The Jews successfully defended themselves on the thirteenth day of Adar and settled numerous scores with long-standing foes.

Future generations will remember this day as the Purim Feast, the last Jewish holiday of the year.

What is interesting about the book of Esther is that it never mentions God directly, nor does anyone pray.

What Does The Bible Say?

Some time later King Xerxes promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite over all the other nobles, making him the most powerful official in the empire. 2 All the king's officials would bow down before Haman to show him respect whenever he passed by, for so the king had commanded. But Mordecai refused to bow down or show him respect. (Esther 3:1–2 NLT)

We do not know why Mordecai would not honor Haman.

3 Then the palace officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why are you disobeying the king's command?" 4 They spoke to him day after day, but still he refused to comply with the order. So they spoke to Haman about this to see if he would tolerate Mordecai's conduct, since Mordecai had told them he was a Jew. (Esther 3:3–4 NLT)

However, Mordecai used his nationality as an excuse.

The palace officials told Haman about Mordecai's lack of respect.

5 When Haman saw that Mordecai would not bow down or show him respect, he was filled with rage. 6 He had learned of

Mordecai's nationality, so he decided it was not enough to lay hands on Mordecai alone. Instead, he looked for a way to destroy all the Jews throughout the entire empire of Xerxes. (Esther 3:3–6 NLT)

This transfer of hate is called transference. So, for example, Haman's anger towards one Jewish guy triggered his racist actions.

8 Then Haman approached King Xerxes and said, "There is a certain race of people scattered through all the provinces of your empire who keep themselves separate from everyone else. Their laws are different from those of any other people, and they refuse to obey the laws of the king. So it is not in the king's interest to let them live. 9 If it please the king, issue a decree that they be destroyed, and I will give 10,000 large sacks of silver to

the government administrators to be deposited in the royal treasury.” (Esther 3:8–9 NLT)

Haman slanted the truth and offered a \_\_bribe\_\_ to get what he wanted.

4 This is what the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says to all the captives he has exiled to Babylon from Jerusalem:  
5 “Build homes, and plan to stay. Plant gardens, and eat the food they produce. 6 Marry and have children. Then find spouses for them so that you may have many grandchildren. Multiply! Do not dwindle away! 7 And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare.” (Jeremiah 29:4–7 NLT)

The Prophet Jeremiah had instructed the Jews of the Exile to behave as good citizens and cooperate with their captors.

Are we acting like Mordecai and withholding honor from anyone to whom it is due?

Are we acting like Haman and seeking our honor over God's?

Are we seeking our honor to the detriment of those around us?

Are we more offended when our honor is challenged than God's?



Have you ever thought about why you are where you are in life?

How has your experience prepared you for where you are now?

What Does The Bible Say?

When Mordecai learned about all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on burlap and ashes, and went out into the city, crying with a loud and bitter wail. (Esther 4:1 NLT)

4 When Queen Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, she was deeply distressed. She sent clothing to him to replace the burlap, but he refused it. 5 Then Esther sent for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs who had been appointed as her attendant. She ordered him to go to Mordecai and find out what was troubling him and why he was in mourning. 6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the square in front of the palace gate. (Esther 4:4–6 NLT)

There is no evidence that Mordecai felt terrible about his refusal to submit to Haman; therefore, his behavior wasn't motivated by religious beliefs. Instead, he was saddened by the impending doom of his people.

8 Mordecai gave Hathach a copy of the decree issued in Susa that called for the death of all Jews. He asked Hathach to show it

to Esther and explain the situation to her. He also asked Hathach to direct her to go to the king to beg for mercy and plead for her people. (Esther 4:7–8 NLT)

Esther is afraid to approach the king on her own.

13 Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: “Don’t think for a moment that because you’re in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. 14 If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this? (Esther 4:13–14 NLT)

Maybe God has allowed you to be in such a position for a higher purpose.

## How Can You Obey?

Pray for the discernment of the Lord.

1. Pray for the discernment of the Lord.
2. Become aware of how the gospel can help your situation.
3. Assess how you or someone else can influence the situation for the Kingdom of God.
4. Do what you can in the name of the Lord.

**\*\*Additional Notes:\*\***

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at [www.crosswaveschurch.com/host](http://www.crosswaveschurch.com/host). Cross Waves has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

**Additional Notes:**

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at [www.crosswaveschurch.com/host](http://www.crosswaveschurch.com/host). Cross Waves has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

**Explore:**

**KEY TRUTHS:**

- 1. God Works His Sovereign Plan No Matter the Opposition (Esther 3:1-15)**
- 2. Believers Do What is Right Even When It May Cost Them (Esther 4:1-17)**

**HOW IT FITS: Where This Lesson Fits in the Story of the**

**Bible:** The events written about in Esther took place between 483 BC and 473 BC during the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes I) who reigned in Persia from 485-464 BC. Some of the Jews had been allowed to return to Jerusalem (see Ezra and Nehemiah), but others such as Esther and Mordecai remained in captivity

under the Persians who had defeated the Babylonians.

**Explore:**

The story of Esther reminds us that the Jews have suffered hatred and persecution throughout their history, not least in the pogroms and death camps of the 20th century. The Feast of Purim is a celebration of their deliverance, and of the God who keeps his promise to protect them.

Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide*, 1st Augsburg books ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001), 214.

**Explore:**

In chapters 1 and 2 of Esther, we are told how the queen of Persia, Queen Vashti, fell out of favor with Ahasuerus the king by refusing his order to show off her beauty for all the king's

officials and servants. In his anger, Ahasuerus accepted the advice of one of his officials to replace the queen with a young, beautiful woman of his choice. Through God's providence, the king, not knowing she was a Jew, chose Esther from among the many young virgins brought before him. Unknown to the king, Esther was being raised by a Jew named Mordecai, her cousin, after the death of her parents. Again, through God's providence, Mordecai learned of a plot to kill the king and sent warning through Esther, saving the king. This would become crucial in the events of chapters 3 and 4, the text for this week's study. God had promised to bless all peoples through a Savior who would come through His chosen people, the Jews. Satan would seek to kill every Jew, but God would use Esther and Mordecai to thwart his plans.

**God Works His Sovereign Plan No Matter the Opposition**

**(Esther 3:1-15)**



After the events of chapters 1 and 2, the king promoted a man named Haman to the second highest office of the empire, under the king. Haman expected the normal bowing and prostrating that people showed toward officials in that kingdom. Mordecai, a Jew, refused to bow down to him. Other officials counseled Mordecai and urged him to comply, but he did not. Haman raged with anger against this insult and began to prepare his revenge. He wanted a vengeance that reflected the status of his office. Did Mordecai the Jew refuse to show honor to Haman? Then Haman would destroy not just Mordecai, but all the Jews (verses 1-6).

The first month in question was the Jewish first month, around Passover (verse 7). Pagan Haman asked for a casting of lots, repeatedly, to determine the most auspicious time to make his request to the king and to strike the Jews. Nearly a year later, the lots indicated a fortuitous time. The result of the lots gave Haman enough confidence to approach the king. He never mentioned Mordecai by name but spoke only in general terms of

a people (the Jews) whose continued existence posed problems for the good functioning of the empire (verse 8). To sweeten the request, Haman offered a substantial amount of money to the royal treasury (verse 9). Rulers and administrations always “need” more money, and Haman knew how to leverage that need. The king gave Haman authority to do as he saw fit and told him to use the money as he saw fit as well (verses 10- 11). Some scholars believe that the king’s refusal was merely a polite custom, with the understanding that he would indeed accept the money eventually.

The administrative machinery went right to work. First, translators put the decree into all the languages spoken in the empire. Then, couriers distributed it to every territory. The essence of the decree was simple, and deadly: On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, all who wanted could rise up against the Jews, kill them, and take their belongings. Age and sex were irrelevant. Location was irrelevant. The decree ordered that all

the Jews—everywhere in the kingdom—be exterminated, including those re- building the walls in Jerusalem (verses 12-14).

It is worthwhile for us to note that this represents just one of many attempts to wipe out the Jews. His- tory is full of them. Unregenerate people who reject God will also reject any nation that claims to belong to Him.

So how did people react? The king and Haman, those least affected by the decree, kicked back and relaxed with a drink. The citizens of the capital, who were the first to learn of the decree and who undoubtedly understood the horror for which it called, were confused, to say the least. This indicates a major social disconnect between the powerful at the top and those who would experience the policies emanating from it (verse 15).

Not everyone hated the Jews. This is important to keep in mind. While there were many throughout the empire who did, Susa the

capital also contained a number of people who understood what a catastrophe the decree would bring.

## **Explore:**

### **Believers Do What is Right Even When It May Cost Them**

#### **(Esther 4:1-17)**

If the general population was confused, the Jews were horror stricken. Mourning, fasting, and weeping overtook them.

Mordecai left his place at the king's gate, put on sackcloth, the cloth of mourning, and wailed in the center of the city. Esther learned of his behavior but did not know its source. He refused her offer of more appropriate clothing so that he could again approach the king's gate. Finally, she sent one of the eunuchs in her service to find out what was going on. Mordecai explained the situation. He provided a copy of the decree and indicated exactly how much money was in play. He requested that Esther intervene with the king about the decree (4:1-8).

Esther was reluctant to intervene, and with good reason: going into the king's presence uninvited (even for the queen) risked death. Mordecai's response addressed the greater risk of inaction. We see in Mordecai a deep faith that God would somehow deliver His chosen people, even if he and Esther perished. Perhaps he had in mind God's promise to bless all people through Abraham's descendants (Genesis 12:1-3). Mordecai felt that if Esther did not risk going before the king, the Jews would be delivered in some other way (referring to God, but without naming Him). Living in the palace would not protect Esther from such a decree. He understood that without intervention, they both would die from Haman's rage. Mordecai perceived a purpose behind all that had occurred with Esther. That purpose gave him courage and resolve. Perhaps Esther's very presence in the palace was to intervene in such a way (4:12-14).

Esther understood that God had placed her there as queen for a reason. She agreed to go before the king after three days of fasting. She courageously recognized the risk and said, If I perish, I perish (4:15-17). We look to God, not our circumstances for the courage to act. He is never limited by what is happening around us. Courage does not mean noisy bravado. It does not mean thinking we are invincible. It means acting in spite of knowing how vulnerable we are. It means acting for something that we accept as greater than ourselves.

Our strength is not sufficient to the task. We are weak, yet God supplies courage for us to act when the time comes. Esther's faith did not evaporate her difficulties. Rather, it enabled her to do the right thing, even at the risk of death. Trusting that God is master beyond this life is what brings about this kind of courage—a courage available to us as well. We must not focus on our limitations. Instead, we must act in accordance with God's might.

The remaining chapters of Esther reveal that she did risk going before the king without being summoned. God gave her favor with the king and the king heard and granted her requests.

Haman ended up having to honor Mordecai with the very honor he desired for himself. Then his plans to hang Mordecai were made known to the king just after the king had been reminded how Mordecai had saved the king's life by reporting a plot to kill him. Haman was hanged on the very gallows he had built to hang Mordecai on.

Esther then asked the king to stop Haman's plot to kill all the Jews, who were her people. Another edict was sent allowing the Jews to defend themselves and kill those who would seek to harm them. They did so, and the Feast of Purim was inaugurated. The Jews, from that point on, would feast yearly to celebrate how God had delivered them from Haman's plot to destroy them.

In His providence, God placed Esther in the palace as queen where He used her to help save His chosen people. Mordecai was promoted to second in rank below the king. God is able to do whatever is needed in order to accomplish His will.

We can trust God and act courageously when people oppose our faith. We can have courage in any situation. No matter the strength of our foes, our God is always greater. The “weakness” of God is stronger than men (1 Corinthians 1:25) no matter who they are. God may take some time to work out His will. The story of God’s deliverance in Esther’s time stretches over a period of nearly a decade. We get impatient, but God will deliver in His own perfect timing.

**Explore:**

God had warned His people (Leviticus 26:14-39: Deuteronomy 28:15-68) of the consequences for breaking His covenant. When



they turned from God, they also turned away from His blessing and protection. They placed themselves under a curse. God even warned them that He would scatter them with violence. That curse deported many of them to Babylon and placed all of them within reach of Haman's hatred. Yet even a disobedient people remain God's people. His lovingkindness to them comes from His very own character. To Abraham He promised blessing for the whole world through the Jews. God called them forth to bless the world and serve as a channel through whom Messiah would come. Nations and groups who raise their hands against God's people raise them against God Himself. They place themselves in opposition to God, and their hatred will produce its own disastrous consequences. The Jews found themselves in Haman's power because their great-great grandfathers had forsaken God. The choices we make in our generation will shape the future situation of our offspring as well, in ways that we

cannot foresee. Let us choose what will lead to God's blessings and protection.

**Explore:**

The persecution faced by God's people demonstrates that bad things happen because the world is a sinful place.

**Explore:**

Was Mordecai a Persian official? Mordecai is the Hebrew form of a name that referred to the god Marduk. Archaeology has provided references to such an individual in the Xerxes administration, although we cannot know if it was the same individual. Multi-ethnic empires often chose administrative help from among the subjugated nations.

**Explore:**

Because Haman was an Agagite, some have supposed that he was descended from Agag, king of the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:8). However, it seems unlikely that a high-ranking Persian

official would be related to a west Semite who lived 600 years earlier. Archeologists have uncovered an inscription which indicates that Agag was also the name of a province in the Persian Empire. This probably explains why Haman was called an Agagite.

John A. Martin, “Esther,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 705.

### **Explore:**

Christianity is about more than going to church and living a good moral life. Being a Christian is about having a vibrant personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Every Sunday School teacher or Bible study leader should want to see each of his or her learners enter into this relationship—their eternal destiny

depends on it. As you work toward this goal, keep the following in mind:

Following Christ is about more than a mere decision; it is about a lifelong relationship. Jesus called us to make disciples, not mere decision-makers. Aim for long-term faith, not momentary emotion.

Salvation is a matter of grace, not works. Our works do not save us (Ephesians 2:8-9), nor do they keep us (Galatians 3:2-6).

Good works are a product of salvation, not a prerequisite to it.

Don't confuse sanctification with salvation. Holiness follows salvation; it doesn't precede it. Don't try to impose "Christian" expectations on men and women who don't know Christ.

- Keep it simple. Being born again is not complicated. Here's a

simple way to explain it:

- Acknowledge your sinfulness and your need for a Savior  
(Romans 3:10, 23).

- Trust in Christ's sacrifice for your sins and in His resurrection  
(Romans 10:9-10).

Surrender your life to God's transforming power (Romans 12:1-2).

Most of all, remember that your job is to tell the truth in a way others can understand, answer their questions, and give them an opportunity to respond. If you do that faithfully, some will respond and join the band of Christ-followers. When they do, Heaven will rejoice!

### **Question 1 of 5**

The Bible teaches animals were at first vegetarians, so how do you explain that to evolutionists?

### **Question 2 of 5**

How is Jesus's kingdom different from earthly kingdoms?

### **Question 3 of 5**

How would you explain that Jesus is the prophesied king in the Old Testament?

### **Question 4 of 5**

Why do most people not want Jesus to be the actual King of their lives?

### **Question 5 of 5**

Is faith in Jesus dependent on acceptance without evidence?

Why or why not?

