

SESSION 3

The Book of Esther

I. PRAYER

II. CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING

538-515 BC		483-473 BC		457 BC		444-425 BC
Zerubbabel		Esther		Ezra		Nehemiah
Ezra 1-6		Book of Esther		Ezra 7-10		Book of Nehemiah
First Return		In Persia		Second Return		Third Return

Haggai (520 BC)

Zechariah (520^{ff} BC)

Malachi (ca 433-31 BC)

III. PANORAMA MOVEMENT 9: BIBLICAL BOOKS

The “Return from Exile” period of Jewish history is described in six canonical books of the Old Testament. Note the following chart.

RETURN FROM EXILE		
Book	Genre	Basic Theme
Ezra	Narrative	Return to Rebuild the Temple
Nehemiah	Narrative	Return to Rebuild the Walls
Esther	Narrative	Deliverance and Feast of Purim
Haggai	Prophetic	Exhortation: Rebuild the Temple
Zechariah	Prophetic	Temple and Future Messianic Times
Malachi	Prophetic	Covenant Renewal and Elijah Figure

IV. BOOK OF ESTHER

A. Author

The writer of Esther is anonymous. That the person was well acquainted with Persian culture is evident in 2:23 (“book of the annals,” a Persian source) and 10:2 (“book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia”). The author clearly was a Jew with Jewish nationalism and establishment of a Jewish feast prominent. It would be unlikely for a woman to have authored the book in the cultural milieu of the day, thus Esther would certainly not be a reasonable candidate. The writer distinguishes himself from Mordecai (9:20, 23), thus Mordecai can also be eliminated. Therefore, the best that can be said was that the author was an anonymous, Spirit-inspired (cf. 2 Pet 1:20-21) writer.

B. Theme

The book has two primary themes. First, it records God’s providential hand in sparing His covenant people from a diabolical plot to exterminate them throughout the kingdom of Persia (the modern reader can relate and apply this attempt at genocide to the “final solution” devised by Nazi Germany in the Second World War).

Second, the Book of Esther provides the historical details that led to the establishment of the Feast of Purim, an annual religious holiday celebrated to this day by modern Jews.

C. Historical Dates Related to Esther

Note the following chart by T. Constable (*Notes on Esther*, 3). These dates (BC) correlate to key events in the Book of Esther. Also, note that “Ahasuerus” is the Hebrew name for Xerxes.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF ESTHER	
483	Ahasuerus’ military planning session in Susa
482	The deposition of Vashti
481	The beginning of Ahasuerus’ unsuccessful expedition against Greece
480	Esther’s arrival in Susa
479	Ahasuerus’ return to Susa Esther’s coronation
478	
477	
476	
475	
474	The issuing of Ahasuerus’ decrees affecting the Jews
473	The Jew’s defense of themselves The establishment of the Feast of Purim

D. Distinctives

1. The name of God is not found within the ten chapters of this book (similar to the Song of Solomon where it occurs only once—SS 8:6).
2. The book is never quoted even once in the New Testament.
3. The book was not found at the ancient ruins of the Qumran community where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found.
4. The book (like that of Ruth) is one of two Biblical books that bear the name of a woman as its title. One writer has noted, “Ruth was Gentile woman who married a Jew, Esther was Jewish woman who married a Gentile” (J. Phillips as quoted by I. Jensen, *JSOT*, 242).
5. The book does not contain a single recorded prayer though fasting is described (cf. 4:1-3).
6. The major Jewish personalities (Mordecai and Esther) do not overtly evidence any sense of spiritual awareness (though Mordecai will later tear his clothing, wail, and fast).
7. The book does not appeal to God’s “hesed” (loving-kindness or loyalty-love), compassion, or forgiveness. Spiritual issues appear to be beneath the surface as the external, public, deadly persecution takes center stage.
8. Key words in the book are “banquet” (or feast) which occurs about 11 times and “Jews” which occurs over 50 times.

E. Chiastic Structure of “Esther”

- A Prologue and Introduction (1)
- B King’s First Decree (2-3)
 - C Clash of Haman and Mordecai (4-5)
 - D King Could Not Sleep (6:1)
 - C’ Triumph of Mordecai over Haman (6-7)
- B’ King’s Second Decree (8-9)
- A’ Epilogue and Conclusion (10)

F. Chart of “Esther”

Note the following chart (adapted from Cupp, *Panorama of the Bible*, 2011 edition, 202).

ESTHER			
Drama and Crisis		Deliverance and Conclusion	
1	Divorce and Discovery (Vashti and Esther) 2	6	Destiny of Haman 7
3	Decree of Haman	8	Decree of the King
4	Decision of Mordecai	9	Destruction of Enemies
5	Dinner with the King (Esther vs Haman)	10	Details about Mordecai
Chapters 1-5		Chapters 6-10	

This chart will provide the structural arrangement of the next section, V. Biblical Development.

V. BIBLICAL DEVELOPMENT

A. Drama and Crisis (1:1-5:14)

The Book of Esther relates the story of the Jews living in Persia who chose not to return from the seventy-year exile. It is a tale of high drama, intrigue, plotting, and counter plotting. The story highlights what today we would call anti-Semitism. S. Ellison (114) notes, “Anti-Semitism is a form of prejudice against Jews, ranging from antipathy to violent hatred... Being anti-Semitic differs from being anti-Jewish in that it (anti-Semitism) is an irrational prejudice against the race, not just against what they do (anti-Jewish).”

The Biblical story of Esther initially involves a story of two queens.

1. Divorce and Discovery (Vashti and Esther) (1:1-2:23)
 - a. Vashti deposed: no longer queen (1:1-22)
 - (1) Setting: the King's banquet (1:1-8)

Esther 1:1-4

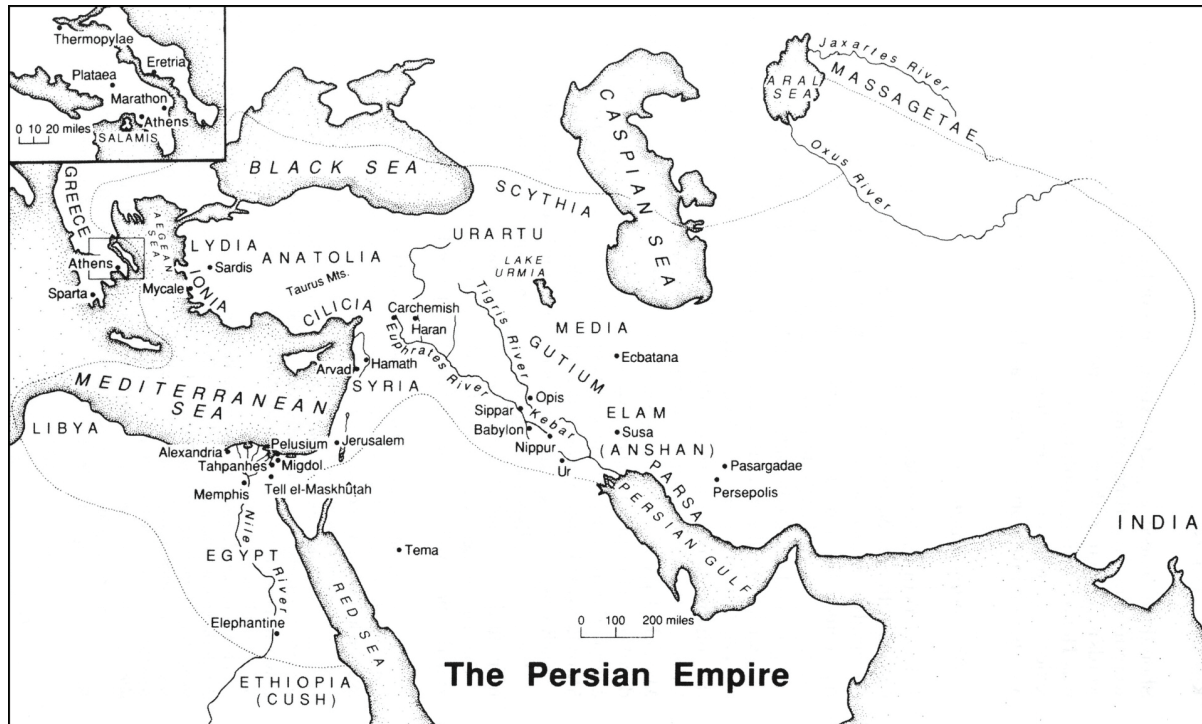
This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush: ² At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, ³ and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present. ⁴ For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty.

- (a) **The king:** Xerxes (reigned ca. 486-465 BC); also known as Ahasuerus (Hebrew name). Like his father (Darius Hystaspes), he tried to expand the Persian empire to the west, notably to Greece. He moved westward in 481 BC, defeated the Greeks initially, but the tide turned at Salamis where 200 Persian ships were lost. The Persian armies also suffered defeat and by 479 BC the Persians retreated back to Asia.

Insight: The later life of Xerxes

Meanwhile Xerxes had become completely discredited and so turned to a life of licentious indulgence. He dallied with the most beautiful women of the court, including the wives of some of his chief officials, and thereby sowed the seeds of irreparable dissension. At last his dissipation was rewarded by assassination at the hands of a palace official or jealous husband. (E. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 499)

- (b) **The location:** Susa (or Shushan) was a winter capital (among others) for the Persian empire. Note the map which follows. Susa is located north of the mouth of the Persian gulf.



Taken from E. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 472.

(c) **The invitees:** “nobles and officials,” “military leaders,” “princes, and nobles of the provinces” were all in attendance. The gathering of this elite group occurred in Xerxes’ third year (482 BC) and lasted six months (1:4). Apparently in conjunction with the lavish feasting there was final military planning for the pending invasion of Greece (481 BC).

(d) **The second banquet:** “seven days”

Esther 1:5

When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king’s palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest who were in the citadel of Susa.

This banquet was for all people “from the least to the greatest.” It was given in a lavish setting, wine was served and the guests were to drink as little or as much as they wished.

(2) Setting: The Queen’s banquet (1:9)

Esther 1:9

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

For whatever reasons the queen also had a contemporaneous banquet for women. This would not be for the reason that Persian banquets were segregated; they were not. But why the queen acted not in concert with the king is unknown.

(3) Summons: the king’s request (1:10-12)

Esther 1:10-12

On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar

and Karkas— ¹¹ to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at. ¹² But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger.

- (a) On the seventh day of feasting and drinking the king was “in high spirits” (10).
 - (b) The trusted eunuchs were commanded to summon the queen to display her beauty before the drunken revelers (10-11).
 - (c) The queen refused; the king “became furious and burned with anger” (12).
- (4) Sequence: events unfold (1:13-22)
- (a) Counselors consulted (13-15)

Esther 1:13, 15
Since it was customary for the king to consult experts in matters of law and justice, he spoke with the wise men who understood the times... “According to law, what must be done to Queen Vashti?” he asked. “She has not obeyed the command of King Xerxes that the eunuchs have taken to her.”
 - (b) Counsel considered (16-20)

Esther 1:16-17
“Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes. ¹⁷ For the queen’s conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say, ‘King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.’”

Esther 1:19-20

“Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she.”²⁰ Then when the king’s edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest.”

(c) Command commissioned (21-22)

Esther 1:22

He sent dispatches to all parts of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in their own language, proclaiming that every man should be ruler over his own household, using his native tongue.

Insight:

Baldwin (as referenced by Breneman, *NAC: Esther*, 310) notes the subtle ironies the author communicates in this narrative. The great king of a huge empire is humiliated by his queen; in a fit of rage he is appeased by his counselors and makes a decree that makes him look like a fool.

b. Esther discovered: declared queen (2:1-18)

The search for a new queen commenced shortly later, “when the anger of King Xerxes had subsided” (1).

(1) The plan: replace Vashti (1-4)

Esther 2:2-4

Then the king's personal attendants proposed, "Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. ³ Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful young women into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them. ⁴ Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it.

For historical perspective, refer back to the chart, "Chronology of the Book of Esther," page 59.

(2) The procedure: eligible girls brought to Susa (5-11).

The beautiful girls selected came from the provinces throughout the empire. For most of the girls this would be neither an honor nor pleasurable. Each would be uprooted from their homes and assigned (perhaps, "confined") to the king's harem for an indefinite period of time.

Esther 2:5-7

Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, ⁶ who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah. ⁷ Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure

and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

- (a) Note the introduction of two key protagonists in this narrative drama: Mordecai and Esther (“Haddassah”).
- (b) Mordecai (a Persian name) is mentioned some 58 times in the Book of Esther; he is referred to as a Jew 7 times (2:5; 5:13; 6:10; 8:7; 9:29, 31; 10:3).
- (c) Mordecai is Esther’s cousin and Esther is adopted, therefore under his guidance and care.

Esther 2:8-9^a

When the king’s order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king’s palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem.⁹ She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food.

- (a) “Many girls” (an indefinite number though the Jewish historian, Josephus, suggested 400) were brought to Susa.
- (b) An ancient Jewish Targum (Aramaic translations of the Old Testament with annotated notes) states that Esther was forcibly taken, though the Hebrew text is silent in that regard.
- (c) Remarkably, Esther’s beauty and countenance pleased Hegai, the official in charge of the harem.

Insight:

Hegai provided beauty treatments and “special food,” that is by Persian standards. Note the contrast between Daniel who refused the Babylonian king’s choice food (Dan 1) to Esther who apparently accepted it. The reason may be linked to her secret Jewish identity.

Esther 2:10-11

Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. ¹¹ Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her.

(3) The choice: Esther selected as queen (12-18)

(a) Preparation and waiting (12-14)

After months of beauty treatments individual girls would be summoned to the palace for one night with the king. Afterwards, the girl would be assigned to the harem where she might (or might not, a virtual widowhood) be summoned again.

The abuse of the beautiful girls and the despicable use of regal power is certainly evident by modern evaluation. King David makes an interesting observation in Psalm 37 that provides a different perspective.

Psalm 37:1-6

Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong; ² for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. ³ Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe

pasture. ⁴ Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. ⁵ Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: ⁶ He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.

(b) Presentation and selection (15-18)

Esther 2:17-18

Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

¹⁸ And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality.

c. Mordecai's discovery: a plot uncovered (2:19-23)

(1) Prelude (19-20)

Esther may have used her new found status as queen to appoint Mordecai to a minor, official position ("sitting at the king's gate"). She also continued to keep her Jewish heritage secret and followed her cousin's instructions.

(2) Plans (21-23)

Esther 2:21-23

During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. ²² But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. ²³ And when

the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were impaled on poles. All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.

2. Decree of Haman (3:1-15)

a. First: Haman receives honor (1-2)

Esther 3:1-2

*After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles. ² All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. **But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor.***

- (1) King Xerxes conferred high honor upon Haman (though no specific reason is given).
- (2) Haman was an Agagite (i.e. a distant descendant of the Amalekites, the ancient foes of the Israelites) (cf. Ex 17:5—generation to generation war; note Balaam's oracle of Num 24:7; Saul the Benjamite and the incomplete obedience of 1 Sam 15).
- (3) Mordecai was an Israelite of Benjamite heritage (Esth 2:5). These ancestral adversaries likely spurred Haman's hatred of Mordecai in particular and Israelites (Jews) generally.

b. Second: Haman plots revenge (3-15)

(1) His dangerous anger (3-6)

Esther 3:5-6

When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. ⁶ Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.

Mordecai's refusal to bow down and Haman's rage at the affront likely is a mutual antagonism borne of their ancestral conflicts. Haman's anger will be directed to (1) first, Mordecai for his perceived insult, (2) second, to the Jews within Persian rule.

(2) His devious arrangement (7-11)

Esther 3:8-9

Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain people dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different from those of all other people, and they do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. ⁹ If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king's administrators for the royal treasury."

King Xerxes agreed to Haman's plan (with the signifying seal of the king's signet ring). Further, the king instructed Haman:

Esther 3:10-11

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

(3) His deadly announcement (12-16)

The plans of Haman had been ratified by the king, published throughout the empire, and a specific date issued to (1) destroy the Jews and (2) plunder their goods and possessions.

Esther 3:15

The couriers went out, spurred on by the king's command, and the edict was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was bewildered.

Insight:

Constable (23) quotes Chuck Swindoll as to three lessons to be learned at this pivotal point.

“First, from Mordecai we learn: *Never forget there will always be someone who will resent your devotion to the Lord.* Second, from Haman we learn: *Never underestimate the diabolical nature of revenge...* Third, from Ahasuerus: *Never overestimate the value of your own importance.*”

3. Decision of Mordecai (4:1-17)

The outlook for the Jews (note the occurrence of “Jews” five times in the text) appears bleak and without hope. Mordecai must act on behalf of his people but will need the help of the Jewish (albeit secret) queen.

a. Mordecai’s panic (1-3)

Esther 4:1-3

When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. ² But he went only as far as the king’s gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. ³ In every province to which the edict and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing. Many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

b. Mordecai’s pain (4-8)

Mordecai’s outward mourning came to the attention of the queen. Although she tried to send fresh clothing to replace the sackcloth, he would not do so. Finally, the queen sent a messenger (Hathach) to discover the reason for Mordecai’s pain.

Esther 4:7-8

Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews.⁸ He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

- (1) Mordecai knows of the money Haman offered (7) and of the official edict soon to be enacted (8).
- (2) Mordecai urges Esther to approach the king and beg for mercy. This in effect was risky (appearing without invitation) and revealing (that Esther, too, was a Jew).

c. Mordecai's plea (9-14)

Esther's response demonstrates awareness of the risk of outright approaching the king (10-11). Mordecai responded that Esther's hidden Jewishness was not going to save her family or her people when the time came.

Esther 4:14

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

Insight:

This verse (14) may indeed be the most important in the book. It is a pivot point and revealing. Without using God's name or appealing directly to Him, Mordecai suggests that this moment may be providentially "the" moment that will ultimately save and preserve the Jewish people. Providence is "a belief that God rules in the world, even in the details of the nations and in the lives of individuals" (Breneman, 337).

d. Mordecai's plan (15-17)

Esther 4:15-17

Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶ "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." ¹⁷ So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions.

Note the courage of Queen Esther. From voicing fears to what seems to be a courageous faith, she declares, "If I perish, I perish" (16).

Individual and national lives lie in the balance. The irrational hatred of one egotistical, narcissistic official (Haman) seems to be about to come to fruition. But the story continues.

4. Dinner with the King (5:1-14)
(Esther vs Haman)

a. The first banquet: Esther's bold move (1-8)

(1) Esther approaches the king (1-2).

"On the third day" refers to the third day of fasting (4:16). Time was short, action was needed. Adorned in her royal robes the queen stood in the king's presence unannounced and unsummoned.

Providentially the king “held out to her the golden scepter” (2).

- (2) The King questioned the Queen (3).

Esther 5:3

Then the king asked, “What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you.”

- (3) The Queen replies (4).

Esther 5:4

“If it pleases the king,” replied Esther, “let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him.”

The desire of the queen was to honor the king and the king’s official, Haman, at a royal banquet. No doubt that the king knew there was a petition to the king coming. Esther, however, realized that a first banquet followed by a second would accomplish her purposes. That God is guiding the events seems evident.

- (4) The banquet (first) takes place (5-8).

Esther 5:5-8

“Bring Haman at once,” the king said, “so that we may do what Esther asks.” So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared. ⁶ As they were drinking wine, the king again asked Esther, “Now what is your petition? It will be given you. And what is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.” ⁷ Esther replied, “My petition and my request is this: ⁸ If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king’s question.”

b. The aftermath of the banquet: Haman's rage and hubris (9-14)

(1) Haman's rage (9-10^a)

Esther 5:9-10^a

Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai at the king's gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai.

¹⁰ *Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home.*

(2) Haman's hubris (10^b-12)

Esther 5:10^b-12

Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, ¹¹ Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials. ¹² "And that's not all," Haman added. "I'm the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow."

(3) Haman's rage (13)

Esther 5:13

But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king's gate."

(4) Haman's counsel from wife and friends (14)

Esther 5:14

His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Have a pole set up, reaching to a height of fifty cubits, and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai impaled on it. Then go with the king to the banquet and enjoy yourself." This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the pole set up. This

chapter is full of fury, pride, and unbounded ego. It also strikes an ironic note. The very gallows upon which Haman hopes to hang Mordecai will ultimately be his destined end.

Breneman (342) rightly observes,

Haman did not realize he was preparing his own doom, and he was not alone in preparing his own downfall. The Bible teaches that all are guilty of the same sin: “Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed” (Rom 2:5).

B. Deliverance and Conclusion (6:1-10:3)

1. Destiny of Haman (6:1-7:10)
 - a. Mordecai’s exaltation (6:1-14)
 - (1) Insomnia and oversight (1-3): The King alone Sleepless that night the King ordered “the book of the chronicles” brought in to be read to the king. Providentially (once again the hidden hand of God) the account of Mordecai’s past exposing of an assassination attempt against Xerxes was read. When questioned if Mordecai was given “honor and recognition” for this notable act, the attendants replied, “Nothing has been done for him.”

The king must address this oversight. But what should the proper reward and recognition be? Enter Haman who has come to the palace early in order to finalize the King’s permission to hang Mordecai (cf. 3:8-9; especially 5:14).
 - (2) Advice requested and provided: The King and Haman (4-11)

Esther 6:6

When Haman entered, the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" Now Haman thought to himself, "Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?"

Thinking that the King meant to honor himself Haman suggested:

- a royal robe (to be publicly worn)
- a royal horse (to be publicly ridden)
- a choice prince (to be publicly honored)
- a royal parade (to be publicly praised)

That the King would agree to all that Haman counseled was sharply turned from joy to grief by the King's response.

Esther 6:10

"Go at once," the king commanded Haman. "Get the robe and the horse and do just as you have suggested for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Do not neglect anything you have recommended."

(3) Confusion and grief: Haman debased (12-14)

Esther 6:12-13^a

Afterward Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman rushed home, with his head covered in grief,¹³ and told Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him.

While Haman shared his shame over the rapid turnabout of events, the royal messengers arrived to escort Haman to Queen Esther's special, second banquet. Little did he realize that this banquet of expected honor would in fact turn out to be a banquet of condemnation.

b. Mordecai's exaltation (7:1-10)

(1) Esther's second banquet (1-2)

Esther 7:1-2

So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet, ² and as they were drinking wine on the second day, the king again asked, "Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted."

(2) Esther's plea (3-7)

Esther 7:3-4

Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. ⁴ For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king."

The request was two-fold: spare my life and the life of my people. The king's response was amazement. "Who is he? Where is the man who has dared such a thing?" (5)

To this point Esther has not revealed her heritage. Had she done so, the King would have reasoned out this crisis event. To answer the King, Esther replied.

Esther 7:6-7

Esther said, "An adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!" Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. ⁷ The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life.

The enraged king left the banquet only to return to see Haman “falling on the couch where Esther was reclining” (8). Xerxes thought Haman to be molesting the queen (not emotionally begging mercy).

(3) King’s command (8-10)

Esther 7:9^b-10

The king said, “Impale him on it!”¹⁰ So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai. Then the king’s fury subsided.

Insight:

M. Breneman (350) suggests,

In this verse the character of the three protagonists is brought out. Haman was a prideful man with a cowardly heart. The king was easily influenced and weak in spite of his appearance of power. Esther was courageous and steadfast. She is not to be considered hard and calloused because she would not listen to Haman’s pleas. She could not have helped even if she had wished to do so.

2. Decree of the King (8:1-17)

With the disposal of Haman, the deliverance of Mordecai and Esther are secured. But what of the Jews throughout the Persian empire? A Persian king’s royal edict was irrevocable (8).

a. The king honors Mordecai (1-2)

Esther 8:1-2

That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came into the presence of the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her.² The king took off his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman, and presented it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed him over Haman’s estate.

b. The king receives Esther (3-6)

- (1) Esther humbly throws herself at the feet of Xerxes (3-4).
- (2) The King extends the golden scepter permitting the queen to make her impassioned plea (5-6).

Esther 8:5-6

"If it pleases the king," she said, "and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces. ⁶ For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?"

c. The King proposes a new (second) edict (7-17)

- (1) The new edict approved (7-10)

Esther 8:7-8

King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "Because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have impaled him on the pole he set up. ⁸ Now write another decree in the king's name in behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king's signet ring—for no document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked."

With these new orders in place, the palace secretaries were summoned and the new edict was published and commissioned to be sent throughout the empire (9-10).

- (2) The new edict empowers the Jews (11-13)

While the original edict masterminded by Haman could not be revoked, the new edict empowered the Jews...

- To assemble and protect themselves;
- To fight against (“destroy”) any nationality or province that attacked them;
- To plunder (thereby) the property of their enemies (when defeated).

(3) The new edict elates the Jews (14-17)

Esther 8:16-17

For the Jews it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor.¹⁷ In every province and in every city to which the edict of the king came, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people of other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them.

3. Destruction of enemies (9:1-32)

(a) The Jews defend themselves (1-4)

Esther 9:1-2

On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king was to be carried out. On this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but now the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them.² The Jews assembled in their cities in all the provinces of King Xerxes to attack those determined to destroy them. No one could stand against them, because the people of all the other nationalities were afraid of them.

(b) The Jews defeat their enemies (5-17)

(1) Enemies in Susa (5-15)

Esther 9:5-6

The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and they did what they pleased to those who hated them. ⁶ In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men.

(2) Enemies in the provinces (16-17)

Esther 9:16-17

Meanwhile, the remainder of the Jews who were in the king's provinces also assembled to protect themselves and get relief from their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of them but did not lay their hands on the plunder. ¹⁷ This happened on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy.

Constable (36) summarizes the victory of the Jews over their enemies in the following chart.

ENEMIES KILLED BY THE JEWS			
Number	Place	Date	Ref.
500 men	in the acropolis of Susa	Adar 13 (March 7)	9:6, 12
75,000 people	in other parts of the empire	Adar 13 (March 7)	9:16
300 men	in Susa	Adar 14 (March 8)	9:15

(c) The Jews establish “Purim” as a religious feast.

Proverbs 21:1

In the Lord's hand the king's heart is a stream of water that he channels toward all who please him.

B. Hubris (Pride)

The Book of Esther presents the antagonist within the drama, Haman, a high court official. He is depicted as egotistical, prideful, arrogant, ambitious and conniving.

Proverbs 11:2-3

When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. ³ The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.

Proverbs 16:8

Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice.

Haman's target for his devious schemes was Mordecai, the Jew. Throughout the book their character and responses are notable. The following proverb provides a classic summary of the differences between the two

Proverbs 18:12

Before a downfall the heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor.

C. Courage

On a number of occasions, Queen Esther's courage is tested. To take decisive actions, to approach the King unbidden, Esther often must act courageously. When Mordecai implores Esther to dangerously act on behalf of the imperiled Jews, he suggested, "And who know but that you have come to a royal position for such a time as this?" (4:14)

Esther's reply was noteworthy

Esther 4:16

*"Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. **And if I perish, I perish.**"*

D. Feast of Purim

Haman had plans to exterminate the Jews and had the lot (Heb. pur) cast to decide the day. His plans were foiled by Mordecai and Esther and later Mordecai enjoined the Jews to remember the great day of their deliverance by celebrating it annually (Est 9:20-22). This has been Jewish practice ever since.