



DAILY  
B I B L E   G U I D E

# The Book of Esther

*Days 154-155 of a Yearly Bible Reading Program*

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## Daily Bible Reading Plan

<b>Day</b>	<b>Passage</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Day 154	Esther 1-5	<input type="checkbox"/>
Day 155	Esther 6-10	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Welcome to the Book of Esther!

The Book of Esther is the remarkable story of God’s providence in delivering the Jews from destruction. While you cannot possibly read this story without witnessing the hand of God at work, the name of God is never mentioned. There is some debate about the exact time when this story occurs. It is certainly during the days of the Persian Empire. The name of the king, Ahasuerus, is a title meaning roughly “chief king”. I believe this is Xerxes I and will point out my reasons as we go through the book.

A few quick facts about Esther:

- The author is unknown, but Ezra or Mordecai are sometimes identified.
- This book covers events beginning in the third year of Xerxes I’s reign in 483 B.C. and for ten years beyond. Chronologically it would fit between Ezra 6 and 7.
- The key verse is 4:14: “For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”
- A brief outline:
  - The Rise of Esther – Chapters 1-2
  - The Plot of Haman – Chapter 3
  - The Counter Plot – Chapter 4-8
  - Beginning of Purim and Afterwards – Chapters 9-10
- Key events:
  - The Undoing of Haman’s Plot – Chapter 7

## Chapter 1 Notes

In this chapter the king, angered at his queen's actions, seeks a new queen.

vs. 1-4 – The description of the king fits Xerxes I. His father Darius the Great had expanded the empire into India. One of the first actions Xerxes took as king was to quell a rebellion in Egypt, which is north of Ethiopia (Kush). We do not have sufficient records to know about the 126 provinces, but the vast administrative bureaucracy of the Persians makes that plausible. The scene opens in the third year of his reign with a 180-day celebration throughout his empire. The purpose of this is not stated, but according to history this would be in conjunction with preparations for the famous invasion of Greece.

vs. 5-9 – This 7-day celebration followed the 180-day feast but was local to the capital at Shushan. The descriptions of its opulence are surprising. It is marked by freely flowing wine and drunkenness. Xerxes's queen Vashti held a corresponding celebration for the women. Such precautions were in place to protect the queen and his other wives from the drunk men at the palace.

vs. 10-12 – Near the close of the revelry, Xerxes makes an impertinent request. He summoned Vashti to come to the palace so that he could show off her beauty. Such a thing was extraordinary in these Eastern cultures, where wives were protected and hidden away from the gaze of men. Vashti refuses to answer the summons and frankly is probably right for doing so.

vs. 13-22 – Xerxes is infuriated and takes Vashti's actions as an insult. He asks his advisors what should be done to her. It is suggested that she set a bad example for all women in the empire and should she should be removed from being queen. Xerxes follows this advice and also sends out a decree reasserting male domination over the women of the empire.

## Chapter 2 Notes

In this chapter Esther is made queen and Mordecai saves the king.

vs. 1-4 – Whether days or years have passed is difficult to say. It is likely that this occurs after Xerxes's return from his ill-fated expedition against Greece. This would make it 479 B.C. when the plan is made to hold a beauty contest to find the next queen.

vs. 5-7 – We meet our heroes. Mordecai (not a Hebrew name, likely based on the name of the Babylonian god Marduk) was an elderly Jew who had raised his orphan niece Hadassah (“myrtle tree”). That is her Hebrew name. Her Persian name is Esther (“a star”). She is probably a teenager since she is yet unmarried.

vs. 8-11 – Esther is rounded up by the Persian officials seeking the most beautiful women in the empire. Mordecai warned her not to reveal her nationality, fearing it would bring danger to her. Her beauty and behavior immediately make her one of the favorites.

vs. 12-18 – The women that were gathered all go through a year-long beauty treatment before seeing the king. They are presented in turn to the king each night. The king would consummate their relationship, and the woman would be placed among his many concubines. It was out of their control if they ever saw the king again as he would have to summon them. It is very probably that most of these women lived out their days in luxury among the concubines and never interacted with the king again. It is the tenth month (Tebeth, our December-January) in the seventh year of his reign (478 B.C.) when Esther is presented to him. God grants Esther favor yet again and the king selects her as the new queen.

vs. 19-23 – It appears the Xerxes enjoyed the first round up of women so much that he did it again. Such is the morality of the Eastern despot. It is during this time that Mordecai learns of an assassination plot against the king. He reports it to Esther who warns the king. It is quite revealing of Esther's character that she, as queen of the empire, still respected the counsel of her adoptive father. I would also like to think that this further solidified Xerxes's trust in her.

## Chapter 3 Notes

In this chapter Haman tricks the king into authorizing his evil scheme.

vs. 1-6 – We meet Haman (“magnificent”), He is described as an “Agagite”, which is believed to mean that he is descended from king Agag of the Amalekites who Saul refused to kill in I Samuel 15:3. Haman is raised to a very high position in the court. His pride is hurt when Mordecai refuses to bow to him. That spark of anger leads to a desire to kill all the Jews.

vs. 7-11 – It is now the 12<sup>th</sup> year of Xerxes’ reign (474 B.C.). Haman is determined to destroy the Jews. He casts lots, in this case a form of divination, to determine the best time for the attack. The lot falls on Adar, our March-April. Haman spins a story about a conspiracy against the king from an enemy within the empire. He offers 10,000 talents of silver (\$930,000,000) to help finance the eradication of this enemy. The king refuses the money but authorizes Haman to enact his evil plot.

vs. 12-15 – Haman’s plot is made law. Copies are sent throughout the empire. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of Adar the Jews were to be destroyed and their possessions taken as spoil. The people were greatly confused by this command.

## Chapter 4 Notes

In this chapter Esther and Mordecai react to Haman's plot.

vs. 1-3 – The reaction of the Jews is despair. Mordecai very publicly goes about mourning and crying out to God. They could not understand why the decree was made or what they could do about it.

vs. 4-9 – Esther finds out about the decree. She immediately tries to contact Mordecai. Unfortunately, he was still mourning in sackcloth and was not allowed to enter the palace. He refused her offer of clothes and stayed in mourning. A servant is sent to speak to Mordecai, who reports to Esther of the situation. He tells her she needs to reveal her true identity to the king to try to stop these evil machinations.

vs. 10-12 – Esther explains her situation. She has not seen the king in the last month. She cannot approach the king without risking her life. Only those the king summoned were allowed to enter safely. If someone showed up unexpectedly, they could be killed for their impudence. Only the king's favor could save them.

vs. 13-14 – Mordecai's beautiful response is that it was up to Esther to act and that God had put her where she is for a purpose. That purpose was to save the Jews from Haman's plot.

vs. 15-17 – Esther calls for a three-day fast in which prayers would be lifted up on her behalf. She would go see the king, even if it meant her death.

## Chapter 5 Notes

In this chapter Esther approaches the king and Haman plots Mordecai's death.

vs. 1-8 – Esther makes her appearance in the throne room. She was not summoned, and the king could have her killed for her impudence. But she finds favor in the eyes of the king. He extends his scepter, the symbol of his power, and Esther touches it. She is signaling that she is requesting something in his power to do. The king offers her up to half the kingdom. She puts off giving her request, and for the time being asks that the king and Haman attend a banquet she has prepared. At that time, she would reveal her request. The king and Haman attend the first day of the feast but Esther did not reveal her request yet.

vs. 9-14 – Haman wrongly believed that his summons to dine with the king and queen and is elated. That is, until again Mordecai refused to bow to him. There is an echo here of the pouting Ahab, pining for Naboth's vineyard, and Jezebel suggesting a murderous solution. Here Haman is pouting and his wife Zeresh ("gold") and their friends suggest that he look forward to murdering Mordecai. They tell him to build a gallows 50 cubits (75 feet) high upon which to hang Mordecai.

## Devotional Thoughts for Day 154

One of my favorite phrases in Scripture is from Mordecai's challenge to Esther in Chapter 4: "for such a time as this". God had providentially placed Esther where she could do what no other could do to save her people. That did not just happen by accident. I believe we all have these "such a times" in our lives where God puts us in the right place at the right time. It may not be as dramatic as saving the nation of Israel. It could be the smile of encouragement or words of comfort you give. God has prepared you for a special purpose. Let Him use you.

## Hymn for Day 154

Today's hymn was originally written in German by Wolfgang Cristoph Dessler and translated into English by John Wesley. It often appears under the heading, "The Scepter of His Love". It makes a parallel to our going before the throne of Christ to Esther approaching Xerxes.

*Jesus, whose glory's streaming rays,  
Though duteous to thy high command,  
Not seraphs view with open face,  
But veil'd before thy presence stand!*

*How shall weak eyes of flesh, weigh'd down  
With sin, and dim with error's night,  
Dare to behold thy awful throne,  
Or view thy unapproach'd light?*

*Restore my sight: let thy free grace  
An entrance to the holiest give!  
Open mine eyes of faith: - thy face  
So shall I see; yet seeing live.*

*Thy golden scepter from above  
Reach forth; lo! My whole heart I bow;  
Say to my soul; "Thou art my love;  
My chosen 'midst ten thousand, thou."*

*O Jesus, full of grace! The sighs  
Of a sick heart with pity view!  
Hark! How my silence speaks, and cries,  
“Mercy, thou God of mercy show!”*

*I know thou canst no but be good!  
How should'st thou, Lord, thy grace restrain?  
Thou, Ord, whose blood so freely flow'd,  
To save me from all guilt and pain.*

## Chapter 6 Notes

In this chapter Haman is forced to honor Mordecai.

vs. 1-3 – The king, suffering from insomnia, asks that the royal chronicles be read to him. He is reminded of the time that Mordecai reported an assassination plot and saved him from it back in Chapter 2. He is amazed to find that Mordecai had not been rewarded in some fashion.

vs. 4-11 – You cannot read this and think that God does not have a sense of humor. The king seeks for some noble to reward Mordecai, and Haman just happens to enter the palace to ask to hang Mordecai. The king asks Haman how he could pour honor on someone. Haman, no doubt assuming it was he the king was speaking about, suggests being paraded through town on the king's horse wearing the king's clothes and crown. The king likes the idea and commands Haman to do that very thing for Mordecai. Haman performed the task because he had no choice otherwise.

vs. 12-14 – Haman is distraught after having to parade Mordecai through the city. His family and friends try to console him by reminding him that in a few months Mordecai would be killed anyway. Before he could hatch another plan, he is called to attend Esther's feast.

## Chapter 7 Notes

In this chapter Esther reveals Haman's plot.

vs. 1-4 – We come now to the second day of the feast. The king asks again for Esther's request and she makes it. She asks the king to spare her and her people because of a plot to destroy them. She says that her enemy could not repay the loss the king, hinting at Haman's offer of 10,000 silver talents to help pay for the attacks against the Jews.

vs. 5-6 – Esther reveals that Haman is the mastermind behind the plot. Has anyone fallen so fast as Haman in those few moments?

vs. 7-10 – Xerxes is furious and storms out of the feast into the garden. Haman takes the opportunity to beg Esther for his life. The king returns and accuses Haman of trying to rape the queen. Haman is arrested and then hung upon the gallows intended for Mordecai. Thus the enemy was removed but the plot still remained.

## Chapter 8 Notes

In this chapter the king counteracts Haman's plot.

vs. 1-2 – It just keeps getting better. Haman's palace and position are given to Esther and Mordecai. Mordecai replaces Haman in the king's court.

vs. 3-8 – Esther again enters the king's presence without a summons and again the king bids her to come to him. She begs the king to save her people. The king cannot undo the law Haman had made, so he authorizes Mordecai to send orders to counteract it.

vs. 9-14 – New orders are sent out on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of Sivan, our June-July, under the authority of the king's seal. This is rushed out through the legendary Persian postal system. The authorization to attack the Jews could not be undone, but now the Jews were told to gather and defend themselves from the attack.

vs. 15-17 – The results of the new decree are the turning of the Jews from mourning to celebration. The impact of the events led to many becoming Jewish proselytes.

## Chapter 9 Notes

In this chapter the Jews are delivered and the Feast of Purim established.

vs. 1-11 – The day finally arrived when the Jews had been determined to be eradicated by Haman. That is not how it happened, thanks to Esther and Mordecai. The Jews, now back by the might of the Persian government, defend themselves and it is their enemies who fall. 500 are killed in the palace and the ten sons of Haman are captured.

vs. 12-16 – Esther requests one more day for the Jews to defend themselves and seek out their enemies. The king grants it. The sons of Haman are hanged and 300 more were killed. In total, 75,810 are killed during these two days. The Jews are careful to exact vengeance and justice, so they forgo claiming the spoils from their fallen enemies.

vs. 17-19 – The danger passed, the Jews rest from their fighting on the day after the attacks. In Sushan this is the 15<sup>th</sup> because they fought an extra day. In the provinces it was the 14<sup>th</sup>.

vs. 20-32 – The feast of Purim is established by Mordecai. This and Hannakuh are the two major feasts that the Jews added to their calendar that were not commanded by Moses. It is called Purim because that is the name of the lots cast by Haman to his own destruction. It was to be a time of joy and giving of gifts.

## Chapter 10 Notes

In this chapter we see the exaltation of Mordecai after the Jews were delivered.

vs. 1-3 – We close the book with a brief account of the growing greatness of Xerxes and Mordecai. The purpose for the tax levied by Xerxes is not given, but history tells us that he continued to battle the Greeks of the Delian League. Not much is known about this era between the Persian invasion of 480-479 B.C. and the Peloponnesian War of 431-404 B.C. We do know that Xerxes suffered a loss at the battle of Eurymedon in 466 B.C. Perhaps he was attempting to fund yet another expeditions against the Greeks.

## Devotional Thoughts for Day 155

I am reminded of Psalm 2 as I read through Esther. In that song, the enemy rages at God. How does God respond? He laughs at them. Haman, no doubt influenced by Satan, tried to eradicate the Jews. This would of course prevented the Messiah from coming. But God turned what seemed like sure defeat into absolute victory. Only God can do that. Remember that when all hope seems lost.

## Hymn for Day 155

Our hymn today is “Almighty God! Thy Special Grace”. This was written by Penina Moise, and it was first published in the 1842 “Hymns Written For the Service of the Hebrew Congregation Beth Elohim” in Charleston, South Carolina, where it appears under the heading, “The Feast of Esther”, that is, Purim. That synagogue is claimed to be the oldest Reform synagogue in the United States.

*Almighty God! thy special grace  
In seasons of distress,  
Hath ever by the Hebrew race  
Been gratefully confest.*

*When lots were cast with evil aim  
Thy people to destroy,  
From thee the great decision came  
That turned their tears to joy.*

*Earth's mightiest at thy decree  
E'en to the frailest yield,  
And Susa's shore, and Egypt's sea,  
Proclaim thee Israel's shield.*

*The mourner at the palace gate,  
The maiden on the throne  
Were but the instruments of fate  
To make God's mercy known.*

*To thee alone the praise belongs,  
Who with a Father's hand,  
From Judah's race averts the wrongs  
By adversaries planned*

*Let proud, ungodly men elate  
With triumphs of an hour;  
Remember Heaven can frustrate  
Each dark device of pow'r.*

*Sov'reign of worlds! thou wilt extend  
Thy sceptre to the just,  
The rights of innocents defend,  
And bring their foes to dust.*

