

# *People of the Bible*

## Esther

Esther is the heroine of the biblical book that bears her name. Her Jewish name was Hadassah, which means "myrtle." Her beauty, charm, and courage served her well as queen to King Ahasuerus, a Persian. The Jews had been deported there.

King Ahasuerus held a 180-day feast in Susa. While in "high spirits" from the wine, he ordered his queen, Vashti, to appear before him and his guests to display her beauty. She refused to come. Furious at her refusal to obey, the king deposed her.

To find a new queen suitable to the King, it was decreed that beautiful young virgins be gathered to the palace from every province of his kingdom. For his queen, the King chose Esther, an orphan raised by her cousin, Mordecai, to replace the recalcitrant Queen Vashti.

The King Ahasuerus granted Haman one of the most prominent princes of the realm, special honors. All the people were to bow down to Haman when he rode his horse through the streets. All complied except for Mordecai, a Jew, who would bow to no one but his God. This enraged Haman and he plotted against the Jews, making a plan to kill and extirpate all Jews throughout the Persian Empire. After laying charges of sedition against the Jews, Haman gained the king's approval to write a decree for their destruction; offering ten thousand silver talents to the king for approval of this plan (Esther 3:9-11).

Mordecai urged Esther to go to the king and appeal to him, and to make a request before him for her people. Esther replied that there was a law that anyone who came to the king uncalled by him should be put to death. She had not been called in thirty days. Esther was terrified for her life but urged Mordecai to gather all the Jews that are present to fast and pray for her for three days. She and her maids would do the same and then she would go and see the king

At the end of the three days, Esther dressed in her royal apparel (Esther 5:1) and bravely went before the king, standing in the inner court where he sat upon his throne. When the king saw her he was pleased with her and held out his scepter to her, thus saving her from death (Esth. 4:11) and indicating that he accepted her visit. The king then asked Esther her will, and what her petition and request of him was, promising to grant even up to half his kingdom should she ask it.

In that role, she was able to save her people from the mass extermination that Haman, the king's chief advisor, had planned (Esther 2:19-4:17).

Esther's efforts to uncover the plot resulted in the hanging of Haman on the very same gallows that he had built for Mordecai, her uncle and guardian. Following this, the king named Mordecai minister of state in Haman's place.

This story is an example of how God intervenes on behalf of His people to deliver them from evil, as here through Esther He preserved the Old Testament people through whom the Messiah would come.