

Esther

Timeline:

536	49,897 return from Bablyon
536	7 th Month built altar– offered sacrifice
535	Work on Temple begun
520	Work renewed by Haggai, Zechariah
516	Temple Completed
478	Esther Becomes Queen
457	Ezra goes to Jerusalem
444	Nehemiah rebuilds the Wall
432	Nehemiah returns a second time (Halley's Bible Handbook 229-230)

Cyrus II "the Great"	550-529 BC
Cambyses II	529-522 BC
Darius I	522-486 BC
Xerxes I	486-465 BC
Artaxerxes I	465-425 BC
Xerxes II	425-424 BC
Darius II	423-404 BC
Artaxerxes II	404-359 BC
Artaxerxes III	359-338 BC
Arses	338-336 BC
Darius III	336-330 BC

Introduction:

The book of Esther has been the brunt of many attacks. Because God is not mentioned in the book, along with other issues, many have rejected it as a book that should be in the Bible. Luther said:

"I am so great an enemy to the second book of the Maccabees, and to Esther, that I wish they had not come to us at all, for they have too many heathen unnaturalities. The Jews much more esteemed the book of Esther than any of the prophets; though they were forbidden to read it before they had attained the age of thirty, by reason of the mystic matters it contains.

It was not found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, and there are few mentions of it in historical books. The one argument in its favor that removes all doubt for most is that Jesus never condemned it when He used the Old Testament Scriptures. He certainly had the opportunity to comment on it and seek its removal if He thought it necessary. The rest of the arguments for and against seem small when compared to this fact. The Dead Sea Scrolls were written by a sect of the Jews even more strict than the Pharisees and so it is not surprising they had no reason to keep it among their writings. Josephus mentions it as part of the Scriptures.

The time of writing is placed somewhere between 483 and 473.

Although there are some difficulties and perplexities in this book, it follows the same path as Joseph. God is working through Mordicai and Esther in much the same way as He did Joseph. The dilemmas of Joseph as he is sold into slavery, in the house of Potiphar and in the jail all come together in his conversation with his brothers.

5 But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. ... 7 And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. 8 So now it was not you who sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Gen. 45:5-8

Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. 21 Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. Gen. 50:19-21

Note the similarities in Mordecai's words to Esther. *And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. 14 For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a*

time as this?" Est. 4:13-14

Historical Background

We get a small glimpse into the workings of a king's court in Persia. The kings held power over a vast empire. It seems from the manner in which they are spending money that this was a very prosperous time in their history. This display was possibly done in a way similar to our museums.

Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this was the Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia), 2 in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the citadel, 3 that in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants — the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces being before him — 4 when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days in all. Est. 1:1-4



The Request of the King

As the days when the glory of the kingdom were displayed came to an end, a final seven days were given to all the residents of the capital city. Once again the splendor was revealed, but this time in the furnishings, the utensils and the quality of the royal wine that was available. Along with this was the edict that no one was compelled to drink and no limitation to the wine was given.

5 And when these days were completed, the king made a feast lasting seven days for all the people who were present in Shushan the citadel, from great to small, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. 6 There were white and blue linen curtains fastened with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars; and the couches were of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of alabaster, turquoise, and white and black marble. 7 And they served drinks in golden vessels, each vessel being different from the other, with royal wine in abundance, according to the generosity of the king. 8 In accordance with the law, the drinking was not compulsory; for so the king had ordered all the officers of his household, that they should do according to each man's pleasure. Est. 1:5-8

Along with the king the queen was also having a banquet. The king became “merry with wine.” This term doesn’t infer drunkenness although it implies it. Some would have the king so drunk he can’t understand the impropriety of his actions. This is certainly possible, but not certain. As he had shown the people his prosperity in material possessions, he also wanted to show the people the beauty of his queen.

Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women in the royal palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus. 10 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, 11 to bring Queen Vashti before the king, wearing her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials, for she was beautiful to behold. Est. 1:9-12

Without knowing the customs of the Persians or the attitude of the people toward such a request, it is difficult to pass judgment on this event. Some would have the king making an unfair request of the queen and the queen within her rights to refuse to come. Some want the king to be asking the queen to be immodest or to do something unbecoming, but there is nothing in the text to base this upon.

The Dilemma Created by Queen Vashti's Refusal

Why the queen refused his request is only important for our inquisitiveness. God doesn't give us enough information to decide the question. She may have been in the right in her objection of the reason, but whether she could refuse the direct command of a king and a husband is another matter. While we might want to feel sympathy for this beautiful queen, there just isn't enough information to condemn her or the king.

But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command brought by his eunuchs; therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him. Est. 1:12

The king doesn't act on his anger, but instead calls a counsel to discuss the issue. The problem with this event was not simple because not only was it public, but it was public when multitudes were present to observe it. They did not question the rightness of the king's request, or the fitness of her answer. It was a matter of Law. The king had given a command that the queen did not obey it. Nothing else matters here in this inquiry. As a servant to the king and a wife to her husband, the queen had created a great difficulty for these men.

Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times (for this was the king's manner toward all who knew law and justice, ... 14 the seven princes of Persia and Media, who had access to the king's presence, and who ranked highest in the kingdom): 15 "What shall we do to Queen Vashti, according to law, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus brought to her by the eunuchs?" Est. 1:13-15

They clearly saw the consequences. Right or wrong receded into the background that the affects of this event are weighed. This would create a great problem to all the husbands and wives across the land. Multitudes wouldn't care about the truth, only that the king and husband had given a command and the queen and wife had refused it. This would allow insubordination to grow rampant and would damage the stability of the homes throughout the land.

"Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also all the princes, and all the people who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. 17 For the queen's behavior will become known to all women, so that they will despise their husbands in their eyes, when they report, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in before him, but she did not come.' 18 This very day the noble ladies of Persia and Media will say to all the king's officials that they have heard of the behavior of the queen. Thus there will be excessive contempt and wrath. Est 1:16-19

There is little doubt that this is exactly what would happen. Evil companionship will indeed corrupt good morals. The wives in the land of Persia would be corrupted by these events.

If it pleases the king, let a royal decree go out from him, and let it be recorded in the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it will not be altered, that Vashti shall come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. 20 When the king's decree which he will make is proclaimed throughout all his empire (for it is great), all wives will honor their husbands, both great and small." Est. 1:19-20

The punishment seems excessive and perhaps evil from our perspective, but in the times of a harem, things are not the same as they are today. What we must remember here as we do in the book of Job is that the Holy Spirit records the words and the events, but this doesn't mean they are right. We just don't have enough knowledge to know. It doesn't say he divorced her, only that she was not to come into his presence again. It only says that her royal position was given to another. In their eyes this would solve the problem.

God's providence often works with what exists. He doesn't force people to do evil, but if they choose to do it, He will use it for His own purposes. All this reveals to us is that these are the events that occurred to open the door for God to bring about His purposes.

The solution pleased all these counselors. It was not a vindictive thing, only the best means to solve a crisis made either by the king's request and queen's refusal, or just the queen's refusal. A letter was sent to all the provinces in the land, in all languages. It was to accomplish one goal. Each man

must be master in his own home.

And the reply pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan. 22 Then he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province in its own script, and to every people in their own language, that each man should be master in his own house, and speak in the language of his own people. Est. 1:21-22

Esther 2

Review:

What we know about the life of Esther occurred sometime between 483 and 478 which places it about 60 years after the return of Judah to their land. It is striking that the final three historical books (Ezra, Nehemiah, & Esther) follow the same path as the life of Joseph. Outside of the dreams that he had and that he interpreted, there is no record of God speaking to him. The record we have of his life was lived wholly within the realm of providence. So also with Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. They all follow the same course. First, they use their understanding of God's will based on previous revelation to live their faithful life. Second, they pray and fast, and accept what occurs as the providence of God.

Although we have moved from the head of gold to the chest and arms of silver (Dan 2:31-45), this king was ruler over a vast empire with great resources giving him both ease and prosperity. He has absolute rule, and from the details of the first few chapters, he was a man with a vast harem and the opportunity to have a different girl every night. The cruelty of the laws there regarding this young women taken from their homes, seen for one night and left in obscurity for the rest of their lives is obvious.

The request to and response of the queen remain a mystery. Did he ask something unfair and immodest? Was she right in her refusal? No matter what the answer to this question, the events stand as historical facts. The concern of the wise men seems to be fair and logical. Her refusal did set a precedent that would have undermined the authority of the men. Their solution is not in harmony with the Scriptures, but again, this man is not under the law and we are only getting the facts as they occurred.

A New Queen is to be Chosen

The first verse of the Second Chapter is open to three views. Either the king feels remorse for wronging the queen because of his foolish request, or he feels remorse that he took such a harsh stand against her, or he is now lonely and needs another companion.

After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus subsided, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what had been decreed against her. Est. 2:1-2

His emotional state led to a suggestion to the king which he accepted. The criteria for a new queen is given and the king agrees to it.

Then the king's servants who attended him said: "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king; 3 and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan the citadel, into the women's quarters, under the custody of Hegai the king's eunuch, custodian of the women. And let beauty preparations be given them. 4 Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti. This thing pleased the king, and he did so. Est. 2:2-4

The cruelty of this decree is evident in several points. First, this is not a voluntary opportunity presented to these young women. Officials were appointed to go out into all the provinces of the kingdom and compel these women to come. Regardless of their plans, their hopes and dreams and their love of another, they are taken and brought into the women's quarters (harem).

Our Introduction to Mordecai and Esther

The main characters of our account are here introduced with the information God wanted us to know about their situation. They both lived in the capital. Mordicai's uncle and his wife had died and he was raising their daughter Esther. His genealogy comes through Benjamin and it is stated that he was taken from Jerusalem at the time of Jeconiah (second captivity - 596).

Mordecai is raising his uncle's daughter whose mother and father had died and left her an orphan. So her life of hardship and sorrow over the loss of her parents will now be compounded by the decree of the king. The love of Mordecai for his niece led him to raise her as his own daughter.

In Shushan the citadel there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite. 6 Kish had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been captured with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. 7 And Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman was lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter. Est 2:5-7

Esther was taken! She did not seek this out. Along with the rest her own hopes and desires were not taken into consideration. One day she was free with her own life to live and the next day she was captured and carried to the king's harem.

Once again we see the similarities to Joseph. Although not sold into slavery by her brothers, her bondage was every bit as bitter as his. **It is important for us to understand that this was not something Esther sought out, but something she was compelled to do.** So this is a story of a woman taken into captivity who did not give up and become bitter, but continued to serve her God and do her best under a terrible set of circumstances.

Her demeanor of a worthy woman soon brought her to the attention of the official that was responsible for the harem. She had that meek and quiet spirit that was not only of great price in the eyes of God, but of men. As in so many similar situations, God was able to give her favor in the eyes of Hegai. He went above and beyond what he had done with the other women to help her. He then appointed seven of the best maid servants from the palace to were given to her and she was moved to the best place in the house of the women.

So it was, when the king's command and decree were heard, and when many young women were gathered at Shushan the citadel, under the custody of Hegai, that Esther also was taken to the king's palace, into the care of Hegai the custodian of the women. 9 Now the young woman pleased him, and she obtained his favor; so he readily gave beauty preparations to her, besides her allowance. Then seven choice maidservants were provided for her from the king's palace, and he moved her and her maidservants to the best place in the house of the women. Est. 2:8-9

After seeing how Haman used his information regarding the Jews, it is clear why Mordecai wanted her to hide her people and family. It was dangerous information could have brought harm upon her. Whether this was a good thing or not is not revealed. But when the time came for Esther to reveal that she was of the nation of Israel she was more than willing to do so, so it was not an act of cowardice, but of caution.

Mordecai was deeply concerned for Esther and was every day at the court of hear about Esther.

Esther had not revealed her people or family, for Mordecai had charged her not to reveal it. 11 And every day Mordecai paced in front of the court of the women's quarters, to learn of Esther's welfare and what was happening to her. Est. 2:10-11

The Details of the Selection Process

God wanted us to know exactly how they went about this process. It doesn't give credit to the king or the country that they would defile all these women one after another, but so it was. The sore travail and sorrow of this process is terrible to think about. A woman taken from her friends, family and home, setting aside all her plans brought into the palace to wait a full year for one night with the king. Six months day after day being prepared with oil and myrrh and another six months with

perfumes and preparations. Then one day to enter into the king's presence. After that one night if the king found nothing to draw him to her, she was not allowed to go home and resume her life, but doomed to live a life of boredom with all the other women who had been rejected.

Each young woman's turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after she had completed twelve months' preparation, according to the regulations for the women, for thus were the days of their preparation apportioned: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women. 13 Thus prepared, each young woman went to the king, and she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace. 14 In the evening she went, and in the morning she returned to the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who kept the concubines. She would not go in to the king again unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name. Est. 2:12-14

The true signs of a worthy and wise woman of a meek and quiet spirit is clearly on display. She relies completely on the wisdom and discretion of Hegai. Because of both her attitude and her demeanor along with God's help in key moments, she obtained favor from everyone who saw her. We see the humility and submissive nature of Esther. While it was the third year of his reign when the events leading to Vahsti's banishment occurred (*that in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants*" Est 1:3). So it is now four years later in the seventh year of his reign that these events occurred.

Now when the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter, to go in to the king, she requested nothing but what Hegai the king's eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her. 16 So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. Est. 2:15-16

Due to her own wisdom and submission, and God's providence bringing her into the position where she could thwart the wicked devices of Haman, she wins the favor of the king. All those who had previously caught his attention are seen to be under her to the degree that he set the crown on her head and made her queen, giving to her the position from which Vahsti had been removed.

A new feast is proclaimed given the name "*the feast of Esther.*" He then proclaims a holiday and gave gifts.

The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. 18 Then the king made a great feast, the Feast of Esther, for all his officials and servants; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces and gave gifts according to the generosity of a king. Est. 2:17-18

Mordecai is also given Favor through God's Providence

The events of the next portion pose some difficulties to understand. Evidently after Esther's selection, the harem is still growing and there is a second gathering of these women. The life of this queen must have been difficult with these hundreds of women coming and going. But so it was in the days of Solomon also.

Why did Mordecai sit in the king's gate. This is always a sign that he was in some official position. Whether this position came through Esther, or was already his before these events occurred is not revealed. Another wonderful attribute that is also inferred in the qualifications of elders is that Esther continued to obey and respect Mordecai even after becoming queen. Such was her humility and submission.

When virgins were gathered together a second time, Mordecai sat within the king's gate. 20 Now Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him. Est. 2:19-23

An event that might have passed over into obscurity becomes a critical part of the story. Again, through God's providence Mordecai overhears or is told of the terrible act of vengeance planned by two of the king's doorkeepers. The clear communication between Mordecai and Esther is now

revealed. It was easy for messages to pass between them. Esther then informs the king and the plot is revealed and the punishment of hanging decreed. Of great importance are the final words of the passage. The deed of Mordecai was recorded in the chronicles that were written of the events that occurred in the presence of the king.

In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, doorkeepers, became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. 22 So the matter became known to Mordecai, who told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name. 23 And when an inquiry was made into the matter, it was confirmed, and both were hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king. Est. 2:19-23

The Introduction of Haman

Though his own wisdom and good fortune, Haman is promoted to the highest position in the kingdom for the Medo Persians. Although his nationality is given and some trace him back to the Amalekites, there is real way to prove it and so we don't really know much about him. After his promotion, the king himself commands that everyone bow to Haman. While Mordecai refused to let Esther's nationality be known, it is clearly not out of fear since this is a very dangerous thing to do.

After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him. 2 And all the king's servants who were within the king's gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage. 3 Then the king's servants who were within the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?" Est. 3:1-4

After some days, those who had watched Mordecai's disobedience decided to take the matter to Haman to see if He would be exonerated or punished for this disobedience. Mordecai told them that he could not bow down because he was a Jew. What portion of the Law was his concern is not stated as others had bowed down to men in the past. Some has proposed that there was some form of idolatry in this bowing, but although there was something that led Morecai to refuse, we are not told what it was.

Such was his pride and arrogance that Haman is filled with wrath at the thought that someone would refuse to bow to him for religious reasons. But his wrath cannot be removed just by killing one man, but everyone from the nation that would not bow down to him because of faith in their God must also be destroyed.

Now it happened, when they spoke to him daily and he would not listen to them, that they told it to Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand; for Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew. 5 When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath. 6 But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus — the people of Mordecai. Est 3:4-6

It was in the first month that these events occurred, and after casting lots, nearly an entire year must pass before it would be done.

In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, the lot), before Haman to determine the day and the month, until it fell on the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. Est. 3:7

The cruelty and selfishness of Haman and the king are on display. While Haman is guilty for conceiving the wicked plan of annihilating a nation, the king doesn't try to reign in his servants wrath, or even find out the reason for it. The charge is well laid. First he accuses the Jews of having different laws and not keeping the kings laws. This was a slander and false charge. It was only Mordecai who had refused these things. Perhaps Haman knows more about the Jews and this was only a pretense to destroy those whom he already hated and persecuted. From later events in which Haman's sons sought to destroy the Jews, it gives credibility to this possibility.

Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the

people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people's, and they do not keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain. 9 If it pleases the king, let a decree be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring it into the king's treasuries." Est. 3:8-9

Though Haman thought he needed to bribe the king, the king decides to give him this request as a favor.

So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. 11 And the king said to Haman, "The money and the people are given to you, to do with them as seems good to you." Est. 3:10-11

Haman had moved very quickly on this plan. The idea and the lots had been cast and now it is only the thirteenth day of the month and the scribes have been called, the decree written and the seal placed.

Then the king's scribes were called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and a decree was written according to all that Haman commanded — to the king's satraps, to the governors who were over each province, to the officials of all people, to every province according to its script, and to every people in their language. In the name of King Ahasuerus it was written, and sealed with the king's signet ring. Est. 3:12-13

Then the decrees are sent out by the king's couriers to all the provinces. The command is vicious and terrible: *"to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month."* Because of God's promises to Israel this command cannot stand and God will find a way to remove it. But though such a terrible decree has been issued, the king has no care or concern for these people and the misery it would cause. Instead they sit down to eat and drink.

But unlike the king and Haman, the rest of the city is deeply disturbed and perplexed by it.

And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions. 14 A copy of the document was to be issued as law in every province, being published for all people, that they should be ready for that day. 15 The couriers went out, hastened by the king's command; and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan the citadel. So the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Shushan was perplexed. Est. 3:13-15

Esther 3

Review:

God's providence and the answering of prayer are the most prominent part, not only of Esther but also of Ezra and Nehemiah. The selfish cruelty of this king of Medo-Persia are mute by the beauty and humility of Esther. Her placement in the king's household has even moved Mordecai to speculate that this might be the case. And that is the mark of all providential events. Since God did not send us a letter, we always have to preface these things with maybe or might. After the unlikely selection process brought Esther to the throne in part because she pleased Hegai the king's custodian of the women, this problem arises over Israel through the same household that Esther is a member being the cousin of Mordecai.

Mordecai Hears about the Plan to Destroy Israel

It was in *"the thirteenth day of the first month,"* that *"a decree was written according to all that Haman commanded (Est. 3:12).* When they cast lots to determine the day, it came to the furthest possible moment: *"they cast Pur (that is, the lot), before Haman to determine the day and the month, until it fell on the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. (Est 3:7).* Enough time has passed for this decree to reach *"every province"* and for all the Jews to become aware of it.

A typical response for the Jews was a combination of fasting, weeping, wailing and laying in

sackcloth” each person choosing the manner in which they manifested their grief to God and made their requests known to him.

When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry. 2 He went as far as the front of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. 3 And in every province where the king's command and decree arrived, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. Esther 4:1-3

Fasting

Although vague in its initial observance, it is clear to most that fasting began with the day of atonement.

*"This shall be a statute forever for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, **you shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all**, whether a native of your own country or a stranger who dwells among you. Lev. 16:29-32*

*And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 27 "Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; **you shall afflict your souls**, and offer an offering made by fire to the Lord. 28 And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is **the Day of Atonement**, to make atonement for you before the Lord your God. 29 For **any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people...** 32 It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and **you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening**, you shall celebrate your sabbath. Lev. 23:26-30 See also Num 29:7*

It is the sermon against its abuses that we find the most powerful explanation regarding fasting. It was a means by which they would be seen by God and taken notice. It was designed “to make your voice heard on high” and to “afflict his soul.”

*3 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and You have not seen? **Why have we afflicted our souls**, and You take no notice?' ... 3 "In fact, **in the day of your fast you find pleasure**, And exploit all your laborers. 4 Indeed **you fast for strife and debate**, ... 4 You **will not fast as you do this day, To make your voice heard on high...** 8 **Is it a fast that I have chosen, A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, And to spread out sackcloth and ashes? **Would you call this a fast, And an acceptable day to the Lord?**** Isa. 58:3; 8*

The first time we see it used by Israel to “make their voice heard on high” was after Israel was defeated twice in his battle with Benjamin. But it was used over and over again for the same purpose.

*Then all the children of Israel, that is, all the people, went up and came to the house of God and wept. They sat there before the Lord and **fasted that day until evening**; and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. Judg 20:26*

*So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the Lord. And **they fasted that day**, and said there, "We have sinned against the Lord." And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah. 1 Sam 7:6*

*David therefore pleaded with God for the child, and **David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground**. 2 Sam 12:16*

*And he said, "While the child was alive, **I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the Lord will be gracious to me, that the child may live?'** 23 But now he is dead; **why should I fast?** Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." 2 Sam 12:22-23*

*So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that **he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning**. 28 And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 29 "**See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days**. 1 Kings 21:27-29*

21 Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions. ... 23 So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer. Ezra 8:21, 23

So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; **I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven.** Neh 1:4

Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: 16 **"Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise.** And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!" Est 4:15-16

Then the Lord said to me, "Do not pray for this people, for their good. 12 **When they fast, I will not hear their cry** Jer 14:11

Then I set my face toward the Lord God **to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.** 4 And I prayed to the Lord my God, and made confession, Dan 9:3

Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly; Gather the elders And all the inhabitants of the land Into the house of the Lord your God, And cry out to the Lord. Joel 1:14

"Now, therefore," says the Lord, **"Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."** 13 **So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the Lord your God,** For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm. 14 **Who knows if He will turn and relent, And leave a blessing behind Him** Joel 2:12-14

So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. 6 Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. 7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, 7 **Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water.** 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, **and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.** 9 **Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?** Jonah 3:5-9

Did Fasting Continue into the New Testament

This is a question oftener asked by Christians. The most Scriptural answer is that it did come into the New Testament, but not as a law or ordinance. It is an opportunity, not an obligation!

"Moreover, **when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance.** For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17 But you, **when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,** 18 so that **you do not appear to men to be fasting,** but to your Father who is in the secret place; **and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.** Matt 6:16-18

Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, **"Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?"** 15 And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But **the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.** Matt 9:14-15 (and then **they will fast in those days**). Mk. 2:20

As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." 3 **Then, having fasted and prayed,** and laid hands on them, they sent them away. Acts 13:2-3

So when they had **appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting,** they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed. Acts 14:23-24

Sackcloth

Sackcloth goes all the way back to Joseph and, unless it is accompanied with fasting, appears to have more with simple mourning. Yet a few times it was also used as a means to mourn in God's

sight in hopes of His intervention.

*And he recognized it and said, "It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him. Without doubt Joseph is torn to pieces." 34 Then **Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned** for his son many days. Gen 37:33-35*

*Then David said to Joab and to all the people who were with him, **"Tear your clothes, gird yourselves with sackcloth, and mourn for Abner."** 2 Sam 3:31*

Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the woman, that he tore his clothes; and as he passed by on the wall, the people looked, and there underneath he had sackcloth on his body 2Kings 6:30

*And so it was, when King Hezekiah heard it, **that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord.** 2 Then he sent Eliakim, who was over the household, **Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz.** 2 Kings 19:1-3*

*Then David lifted his eyes and saw the angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven, having in his hand a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem. **So David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell on their faces.** 1 Chron 21:16-17*

Ashes is not mentioned outside of sackcloth and/or fasting.

Esther and Mordecai Learn of Haman's Plan

We are not told how long Mordecai was doing this before Esther was told, but as soon as she heard about it, she sent word seeking to find out the cause. One of the eunuch's assigned to her is sent with clothing (probably so Mordecai could come and tell her himself), but he refused it. The eunuch is sent a second time to find out what had happened.

So Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, and the queen was deeply distressed. Then she sent garments to clothe Mordecai and take his sackcloth away from him, but he would not accept them. 5 Then Esther called Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs whom he had appointed to attend her, and she gave him a command concerning Mordecai, to learn what and why this was. 6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square that was in front of the king's gate. Esther 4:4-6

Mordecai begins with the events leading up to this decree. He reveals **all** that had happened. Not only does Mordecai have the details of the sum of money to destroy the Jews, but he also has a copy of the decree. He also sends the request for her to go to the king and seek to have this decree removed.

And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews. 8 He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, which was given at Shushan, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her, and that he might command her to go in to the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people. 9 So Hathach returned and told Esther the words of Mordecai. Esther 4:6-9

Esther's Plan

When Esther first hears this request, her first thought is for her life. After what happened with Vashti, she has some legitimate concerns. The fact that he had not called her for that amount of time may have led her to feel concern about his state of mind toward her. The death sentence was a serious punishment for a crime that doesn't seem to fit it. This is another indication of the nature of his character that he would even allow such a law to be enforced.

Then Esther spoke to Hathach, and gave him a command for Mordecai: 11 "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, he has but one law: put all to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king

these thirty days." 12 So they told Mordecai Esther's words. Esther 4:10-12

Mordecai's answer seems centers on one thing. Her fear that she might be put to death. First, he warns her against false assurance. She will not escape this decree by keeping silent. Second, Mordecai trusts in the Lord with all his heart. Like Abraham before him he has not wavered in unbelief, he knows God will keep his promises regarding the Messiah. Israel cannot be destroyed because there are still unfulfilled prophesies. Deliverance will come, but from all the circumstances that are then in place concerning Esther's rise to become queen, Mordecai's words hold great weight. She very well could have been providentially placed in that position for just this moment and she must not fail.

And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. 14 For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Esther 4: 13-14

Mordecai's words have exactly the affect he had spoken them to gain. But she knew the above facts just as we have them today and she wanted every bit of help she could secure in getting God to act in her behalf. She wanted all the Jews in the capital to be gathered together to fast for three days. Her attitude is not one of lack of faith, but one of conviction. No one knew God's will in this matter so the likelihood of her perishing was equal to that of not perishing. She is prepared for either outcome.

Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!" 16 So Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther commanded him. Esther 4:15-16

It is interesting to consider the wording here. In their spiritual and family relationship Mordecai was the one to command and she was the one to submit. Yet the Scriptures use the term "command" for Esther's words.

tsawah command." This verb occurs only in biblical Hebrew (in all periods) and imperial Aramaic (starting from around 500 B C.). Biblical occurrences number around 485. Essentially, this verb refers to verbal communication by which a superior "orders" or "commands" a subordinate. (Vine's Expository Dictionary of OT Words, OT:6680)

It is likely that as his queen she is his superior, and since the official eunuch had brought these words, it would be a command and that is why the Scriptures word it in this way.

Esther 4

Esther Makes Her Request

After the fasting and prayers had been completed Esther prepared herself to present in the best possible way. She passed over her domain and entered the forbidden territory of the inner court where no one was allowed to be. Once again, she found favor. He knew she had risked her life to come before him, and he immediately did two things. First, he helped up the scepter which revealed his favor and allowed her to touch the top and thus be free from the law that could have brought death.

Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, across from the king's house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house. 2 So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter. Esther 5:1-2

The second things he did was to ask for the request that had brought her into such grave peril to make. By adding "up to half the kingdom" he sought to assure her that he was more than prepared to give her whatever it was that she needed. Her answer is possibly due to the people in the court and the delicacy of the request. It was putting the king in an uncomfortable position to change

something already decreed in front of all his ministers or whoever was present. It is also possible that she already had a plan that she intended to use to resolve this.

And the king said to her, "What do you wish, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given to you — up to half the kingdom!" 4 So Esther answered, "If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him." Esther 5:3-4

Esther's First Banquet

This is to be done the same day and the king summons Haman. After he arrived, they go to the place Esther has prepared for the banquet. The king presents the same offer as they are enjoying the banquet. Now it is perplexing why she gave the same answer to come to a second banquet. She obviously was not prepared to give it but why? Was it fear, wisdom, an attempt to soften him further? We will never know.

Then the king said, "Bring Haman quickly, that he may do as Esther has said." So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared. 5 At the banquet of wine the king said to Esther, "What is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!" 6 Then Esther answered and said, "My petition and request is this: 8 If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said." Esther 5:7-8

Haman Plots Mordecai's Death

That night, Haman was filled with joy and gladness. All his plans seemed to be coming to fruition. But his pride led to his downfall. Mordecai still would not place himself under the authority of Haman. This time, his anger burning, he went home to devise a plan. He called all his friends together and begins to praise himself. He speaks of his great riches, his large family, his promotions to ever higher and higher positions, and how he now towered over all of the rest of the officials and servants of the king. Everything God has warned against, Haman did in a single night. Pride goes before destruction, let another praise you and not your own lips.

So Haman went out that day joyful and with a glad heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, and that he did not stand or tremble before him, he was filled with indignation against Mordecai. 10 Nevertheless Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and called for his friends and his wife Zeresh. 11 Then Haman told them of his great riches, the multitude of his children, everything in which the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and servants of the king. Esther 5:9-11

His crowning achievement in his own eyes was the banquet he had been asked to attend. Little did he know the purpose of the banquet. Yet in his ignorance, he boasted that he was the only one who had been invited along with the king. At that moment it appeared that his future was brighter than anyone in the kingdom.

Only one thing bothered him and in his own eyes it seemed to remove all the joy of all the other accomplishments: Mordecai. He just can't be happy until that man is killed and removed from his sight. Remember earlier he had disdained to only remove Mordecai, but had determined to remove the entire nation. Yet that is not enough because this man was tormenting him just by living.

Moreover Haman said, "Besides, Queen Esther invited no one but me to come in with the king to the banquet that she prepared; and tomorrow I am again invited by her, along with the king. 13 Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." Esther 5:12-13

This is a classic example of evil companionship corrupting good morals or flattery that brought his boldness to do what he wanted to do without holding back. He sees nothing wrong in this plan to murder. A 75' tower was a mighty undertaking and one that would be spoken of everywhere. People would ask what it was for, and the rumors would spread. It had reached the ears of the servants of the king the very next evening and what he had planned for Mordecai would be his own death.

Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high, and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it; then go merrily with the king to the banquet." 15 And the thing pleased Haman; so he had the gallows made. Esther 5:14-15

Mordecai's Honor

Another probable act of providence occurs when the king can't sleep and the book of the records is brought. How probable is it of this occurring through the normal channels of time and chance? The night before Haman is going to ask for his death, he is listening to the book and as large as those books might be, he happens on the events where Mordecai had saved his life. He is in just the right mood to want to reward this man for such a service and when he finds out nothing is done seeks to rectify it.

That night the king could not sleep. So one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. 2 And it was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, the doorkeepers who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. 3 Then the king said, "What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" And the king's servants who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him." Esther 6:1-3

This one seems to be too amazing to be anything else but providence. Haman has come to ask the king to kill Mordecai at the very moment that the king is seeking someone to reward him. While Haman is approaching the king, he is asking the servants who is in the court that could do this deed for Mordecai. So while Haman still has it in his heart to seek the death of Mordecai the king begins to question him about how he might want to be honored if he had done some great deed. Since Haman has decided that no one is greater than he and that Esther had just honored him the night before and was going to honor him again that night, thinks it must be him who is under consideration so he embellishes it to the highest degree possible.

So the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to suggest that the king hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him. 5 The king's servants said to him, "Haman is there, standing in the court." And the king said, "Let him come in." 6 So Haman came in, and the king asked him, "What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?" Now Haman thought in his heart, "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?" Esther 6:4-6

He has wealth and power, so what he wants is to be viewed by everyone in the capital to know just how great he was. A royal robe the king has worn would have a special significance of honor as would the horse that the king had ridden. Only the highest of his servants would receive such an honor. The royal crest would make more likely that those who saw this event would not have to be told later that it was the king's. Then open of the most noble of the princes whom everyone would know was to proclaim the honor the king wanted to give to this man. This was to be done through the city square where as many people as possible would witness it.

And Haman answered the king, "For the man whom the king delights to honor, 8 let a royal robe be brought which the king has worn, and a horse on which the king has ridden, which has a royal crest placed on its head. 9 Then let this robe and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that he may array the man whom the king delights to honor. Then parade him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!'" Esther 6:7-9

At the very height of his delight and great expectations, all his hopes and dreams are dashed to the ground. The very man whom he wanted to dishonor and kill is now that man that he must honor in the very manner he had described and hoped to receive himself. He can't even reduce what he had suggested in the least as the king has strictly charged him to leave nothing undone of all he had said.

Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry, take the robe and the horse, as you have suggested, and do so for Mordecai the Jew who sits within the king's gate! Leave nothing undone of all that you have spoken." Esther 6:10

Haaman Forced to Honor Morecai

Thus the greatest and most noble prince in the empire is now forced against his will to honor and bring attention to his most hated enemy Mordecai. Mordecai is returned to the city gate an honored man. But Haman sees the future problems that will occur as a result of the sudden turn of events. This is the worst time to bring up his desire to hang Mordecai, but all the city knows that is exactly what he wanted to do.

His wise men and even his wife now realize that he has picked a fight with one of God's chosen people and what had happened thus far had led to this conclusion. Daniel had been dead about 50 years, but his exploits with the dreams, the events around Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, the handwriting on the wall, and the lions den would be enough to convince them that he could not prevail.

He doesn't even have time to prepare any plans to avoid the terrible consequences that would occur if the king were to find out about these things. He is expected at the banquet and there is no way to make excuses, he had to go.

So Haman took the robe and the horse, arrayed Mordecai and led him on horseback through the city square, and proclaimed before him, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!" 12 Afterward Mordecai went back to the king's gate. But Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered. 13 When Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him, his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him but will surely fall before him." 14 While they were still talking with him, the king's eunuchs came, and hastened to bring Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared. Esther 6:11-14

Esther's Second Banquet

This second banquet followed the same pattern as the first. Both the king and his most trusted minister enter into the room and the king makes it clear that he has had no change of heart toward her, repeating the same promise for the third time. We know that Haman's heart is troubled, but her first words would have turned his concern into panic. Esther is a Jew and his request to the king would also mean she would be put to death. She quotes the decree as it had been written by Haman and sent out to all the provinces.

Her second statement shows at what point she would have chosen not to risk her life in the manner she had. If Haman had been content to only enslave the Jews, she would have held her peace and not brought this to the king's attention. In his request to destroy them, Haman had not made known who these people were. He only described them as a scattered people.

So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther. 2 And on the second day, at the banquet of wine, the king again said to Esther, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!" Then Queen Esther answered and said, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. 4 For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king's loss." Esther 7:1-4

She identified Haman as the man who had done this, in powerful terms. His desire to destroy the Jews had made him an adversary, enemy and wicked man. These words had enraged the king. He goes out into the garden to ponder what should be done. He had liked and respected Haman. He had not realized the consequences of the decree he had signed. He had promised his queen to give her the request, which had turned out to be more complicated than he had thought. He too was implicated in this since he was the one who had agreed to it. So he went out to consider all the implications and how he would deal with it. Haman knew the king well enough to see that he was in grave danger. His only hope was to plead with Esther to further her request by asking the king to spare his life. When he returned to render his decision, he found Haman showing his remorse and importunity by having fallen down before her.

So King Ahasuerus answered and said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing?" 6 And Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!" So Haman was terrified before the king and queen. 7 Then the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine and went into the palace garden; but Haman stood before Queen Esther, pleading for his life, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king. Esther 7:5-7

We will never know what decision the king had come to because at his return, although Haman was only pleading for his life, he had crossed the line of decorum, and without even asking, the king chose to put the worst possible motive on what Haman had done.

8 When the king returned from the palace garden to the place of the banquet of wine, Haman had fallen across the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, "Will he also assault the queen while I am in the house?" As the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. Esther 7:8

Then the purpose of the gallows which was revealed when Haman had no fear and expected his request to be granted is now heart by the king. Mordecai's name had come up that very day in the morning so the king knew exactly who he was. You reap what you sow was then fulfilled. What Haman had plan for Mordecai came upon him.

Now Harbonah, one of the eunuchs, said to the king, "Look! The gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai, who spoke good on the king's behalf, is standing at the house of Haman." Then the king said, "Hang him on it!" 10 So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath subsided. Esther 7:9-10

As the truth continued to be revealed, the king acknowledged the relationship between Esther and Mordecai. The ring that had been taken from Haman and now given to Mordecai was the same ring used to seal the decree regarding the Jews (Esther 3:10-11). Having this ring would give to Mordecai the same authority to write law as Haman. Yet it was not just the ring. Mordecai was also given everything that Haman had possessed.

On that day King Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her. 2 So the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai; and Esther appointed Mordecai over the house of Haman. Esther 8:1-2

Although Haman has now been destroyed the plan that he had devised could not be set aside. Since she had not been given a way to resolve this problem at that time, she found herself again in the position of needing to speak to the king. So she again enters king's presence and he again raises the sceptre. She now requests the ability to counteract the ordinance that had been signed two months ago and had already been posted in all the provinces.

Now Esther spoke again to the king, fell down at his feet, and implored him with tears to counteract the evil of Haman the Agagite, and the scheme which he had devised against the Jews. 4 And the king held out the golden scepter toward Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the king, 5 and said, "If it pleases the king, and if I have found favor in his sight and the thing seems right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to annihilate the Jews who are in all the king's provinces. 6 For how can I endure to see the evil that will come to my people? Or how can I endure to see the destruction of my countrymen?" Esther 8:3-6

It is evident that Mordecai was already there among his chief advisers. The king spoke to both of them giving them the authority to write whatever decree they want, as he had Haman before them. They called the scribes and since the event is not to occur until the twelfth month there are still about eight months in which to do it all. It was a massive undertaking. It covered the lands from India all the way to Ethiopia and consisted of 127 different provinces. There were many different languages and scripts into which it had to be translated, but it was soon done and sent out.

Then King Ahasuerus **said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew**, "Indeed, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows because he tried to lay his hand on the Jews. 8 **You yourselves write a decree concerning the Jews, as you please, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring**; for whatever is written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring no one can revoke." So **the king's scribes were called at that time, in the third**

month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day; and it was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, to the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the princes of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces in all, to every province in its own script, to every people in their own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language. 10 And he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, sealed it with the king's signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horseback, riding on royal horses bred from swift steeds. Esther 8:7-10

When we compare the original decree with this one, it is evident that the new decree gives the Jews the same right to do to their enemies what Haman had given their adversaries. **(to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, ... in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions Est 3:13).**

By these letters the king permitted the Jews who were in every city to gather together and protect their lives — to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, both little children and women, and to plunder their possessions, 12 on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar. 13 A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province and published for all people, so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. 14 The couriers who rode on royal horses went out, hastened and pressed on by the king's command. And the decree was issued in Shushan the citadel. Esther 8:11-14

Mordecai is now shown to have the power by the garments and crown the king has permitted him to wear. All of this led to the Jews in Sushan to rejoice first, and then as the news went across the empire, they too began to rejoice. After this sudden turn of events, many of those who received the decree chose to take up the religion and culture of Israel.

*So Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, with a great crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad. 16 The Jews had light and gladness, joy and honor. 17 And in every province and city, wherever the king's command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. **Then many of the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them.** Esther 8:15-17*

Conclusion:

The final section of Esther reveals the details of how the Jews were able to protect themselves from their enemies and how Esther was able to create a national holiday much like our Thanksgiving. Unlike Jereboam, this was a civil holiday and not meant to replace or add to anything in worship to God.