



Summary of *Esther*

Since Vashti, the wife of Ahasuerus, refuses to appear at a feast held by the king in his palace at Susa, she is degraded from her position of honour. To find a new wife, the king sends out officers to gather to his palace the most beautiful maidens from the whole realm, among them the Jewess Esther, the adopted daughter of one Mordecai who had been exiled in 598 with Jehoiachin by Nebudchadnezzar. It is she, the most beautiful, who becomes queen, without the king knowing anything of her Jewish blood. At about the same time as she is made queen, Mordecai rescues the king's life by the discovery of a conspiracy. The vizier Haman, who stands in high favour with the king, resolves, in order to gain revenge on Mordecai whom he hates, to destroy all the Jews who live in the Persian empire, and the day is determined by lot as the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, i.e. Adar. The king grants him the necessary power.

When Esther is informed by Mordecai of the destruction which threatens her people, Esther resolves, in spite of the risk to her life which this involves, to go unbidden into the king's presence, to request from him deliverance for her people.

The king receives his wife graciously, and at her request comes with Haman to a banquet which she arranges, and then agrees that they will both come to the banquet which the queen has planned for the following day. On his return from the first banquet, Haman is again provoked by Mordecai's refusal

to show him reverence. He therefore resolves to ask the king the next morning for the execution of Mordecai, and has gallows erected ready for this. During the night which follows, the king is reminded of the great kindness which Mordecai had shown him some time before, and so when Haman appears in the palace to make his request early the following day, the king lays on him the duty of showing to Mordecai in his name the highest honours.

On the evening of the second banquet, the queen implores the king to spare her own life and the lives of her people, and points out Haman who is also present as the originator of the scheme of destruction. While the king has gone out into the garden for a moment, Haman throws himself upon the queen's couch, imploring mercy. The king, when he comes in again and sees Haman lying before the queen, believes that he was attempting to ravish her, and as a punishment has him hanged on the gallows intended for Mordecai. Esther inherits Haman's possessions, and Mordecai his office.

At Esther's renewed request, the king has an edict put forth which permits the Jews to cut down on the thirteenth of Adar all who rise against them. On the thirteenth of Adar, the Jews kill 510 men in Susa, and 300 men on the fourteenth of Adar which at Esther's request is also granted to them for Susa itself. In the remainder of the empire, however, 75.000 were killed by the Jews on thirteenth of Adar. As a result, the fifteenth of Adar is decreed as a feast day for the Jews in Susa, and for those in provinces, the fourteenth.

Mordecai and Esther write letters to the whole of Jewry to enjoin upon them the duty of observing the feast of Purim.

Quoted from: *The History of The Formation of The Old Testament* (Ackroyd, 1974: 506-507).



