



# Enter the Story

## ***The Queen***

A narrative about how God works behind the scenes for the good of those who love him.

## ***THE BIBLE***

Esther 1-8

*Prepare for the Story*

## **ICEBREAKER**

What makes you angry or furious? Have you ever done something in anger that you regretted later? What did you do?

*Rewind the Story*

Can someone highlight what has happened in the story so far ...

- Exile – The people of Jerusalem taken to Babylon
- King of Babylon – Nebuchadnezzar's wild pride
- The Fall of Judah – Jeremiah & King Zedekiah
- Daniel – Advisor to Kings & Lion Tamer

*Hear the Story*

### **Scene One: The Search for a New Queen**

It was during the time that the Israelites were exiled in Persia that King Xerxes decided to throw a banquet. The banquet involved all of the nobles of Persia and was set to last seven days.

On the seventh day, when the King was in high spirits from all the celebrating he had done, he sent his servants to bring Queen Vashti to him, wearing her royal crown. He wanted to display her beauty before all the people and nobles in attendance because she was extremely beautiful. But the servants returned to the King and told him that Queen Vashti refused to come. Then, the King became furious and burned with anger.

He was so angry he gathered his advisors and experts in the law and consulted them, saying, *"According to the law, what must be done to Queen Vashti?"* One of the experts explained that because of her actions, the Queen hadn't just wronged the king; she had wronged the entire empire. Because of her actions, women all over the empire would rebel against their husbands; there would be no end to their disrespect and rebellion. So he suggested that the king remove Vashti of her title and royal position. The King agreed and sent notice to every part of his kingdom, proclaiming that every man should be ruler over his own household.

This message also called for all the beautiful young unmarried women to be brought to the capital. There would be a new Queen over the Empire, and King Xerxes would pick one of these women to become his new queen. The girls who were selected were then summoned by the king, and their families had no choice but to send their daughters to the palace.

### **Scene Two: Esther, Queen of Persia**

During this time, there was a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin named Mordecai, and he was living in the capital city of Susa. Mordecai had a cousin named Esther, whose parents had died, and he became like a father to her. Esther was extremely beautiful, and when the king's order had been proclaimed, she was taken to the king's palace. She won favor with one of the king's officials, and he provided her with special beauty treatments and healthy food. Despite this royal treatment, Esther kept a secret to herself. She didn't reveal that she was a Jew because Mordecai had warned her not to. Every day, Mordecai walked back and forth near the courtyard of the palace to check on Esther and see how she was doing.

Each woman who had been selected had to undergo months of preparations before the king would call them in. The only way these women could see the king was if he called for them. Eventually, when Esther was summoned, she impressed everyone in the palace, especially the king.

Xerxes was immediately attracted to Esther, more than any of the other women he had spent time with. So, she won the king's favor and approval. In short time, King Xerxes put a royal crown on her head, and he made Esther the new Queen of Persia. Upon doing this, the king threw a great banquet just for her! He invited his nobles and officials and proclaimed a new holiday throughout his kingdom; he was so thrilled to have Esther as his wife and Queen that he generously gave out gifts to all of his guests!

### **Scene Three: Mordecai and Haman**

During the early days of Esther's time as Queen, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate where he overheard two of the king's officers secretly conspiring to assassinate the King. Hearing this, he took this information to Queen Esther, who reported it to the king, giving Mordecai the credit for reporting the traitors. When the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were immediately executed.

In part because of this threat, King Xerxes promoted and honored a man named Haman. He elevated his role and responsibility, giving him a place in his administration higher than any of the other nobles. In this new role, all of the royal officers and people would kneel before Haman at the king's to pay him special honor. But Mordecai refused to bow. When Haman discovered that there was one man who refused to give him the honor he believed he deserved, he became furious! He inquired about the man and discovered that Mordecai was one of the exiled Jews, and because he was so angry, he decided that because of Mordecai's blatant disrespect, he would use his power to punish all of the Jewish people.

### **Scene Four: Haman's Request**

Haman took his time plotting how he would punish the Jewish people, and in the 12<sup>th</sup> year of King Xerxes' reign, he approached the king with a proposition saying, *"There are a group of people dispersed throughout your entire kingdom who keep themselves separate. Their customs are different, and they do not obey your laws. It's not in the King's best interest to tolerate these people. I recommend that you issue a decree to destroy them. If you do this, I will commit 10,000 talents of silver to the royal treasury."* In response to Haman's request, the King issued the decree and said, *"Keep the money and do with the people as you please."* So the decree was issued, and a day was set aside and made known to everyone in the kingdom that on that day, every single Jew – young and old – men, women, and children would be destroyed.

When Mordecai heard this, he began to mourn, tearing his clothes and covering himself in sackcloth and ash. He went into the city, wailing and weeping bitterly. But he only went as far as the king's fate. The reaction across the kingdom was the same: Jews everywhere mourned and fasted, and they cried out to God in their pain.

### **Scene Five: For Such a Time as This**

When Esther's attendants told her about how Mordecai was, she was extremely worried; she thought he was losing his mind. So she sent clothes for him to wear, but he refused. Instead, he delivered the news that she had yet to hear – about the scheduled annihilation of her people – and he asked Esther to go into the King's presence and beg for mercy for her people.

When she finally heard what was happening, she desperately wanted to go to the King, but it was extremely dangerous to show up in the king's presence if he had not asked to see you. If you showed up unannounced, you could be put to death unless the king extended his gold scepter to spare your life. To make matters worse, it had been thirty days since Esther had been requested to be with the King, and she was worried she had lost favor with him.

So Esther sent a message back to Mordecai, sharing her concerns and her hesitation to do what he asked. Mordecai responded, saying, *“Do not think that because you are in the king's house, you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will come from another place, but you and your father's family will die. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this.”*

His response convicted her, so Esther sent a reply saying, *“Gather all the Jews in the city and fast for me. Do this and pray for me for three days. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if the king is not pleased to see me, then I will accept my fate.”* So Mordecai did as Esther requested; he gathered the people, and they fasted and prayed for three days.

### **Scene Five: Dinner with the King and Queen**

After three days, Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace; when the king saw her, he held out his gold scepter.

Esther approached him, and the king asked, *“What is your request? Even up to half of the kingdom, it will be given to you.”* *“If it pleases you, my king, let me prepare a banquet for you and your top official, Haman.”* The King agreed and sent word for Haman to join the royal couple for dinner that evening.

During the meal, the king said, *“My Queen, this banquet is lovely, but what is it you really want? Whatever it is, it will be yours!”* And although it was a strange request, Esther asked the king and Haman to join them for another banquet the next evening, where she promised she would answer the king’s question. So they made plans for another banquet together.

Haman left the banquet in high spirits. But as he walked through the king’s gate, he saw Mordecai again. As before, Mordecai didn’t bow before him, and he became filled with rage. Haman should have left his evening honored to spend more time with the King and Queen, but instead, he was deeply disturbed by Mordecai. So he spoke with his advisors and decided to have a pole set up, and at the banquet the following day, he would ask the King to have Mordecai impaled on it.

### **Scene Six: Someone the King Wants to Honor**

That night in the royal palace, the king could not sleep, so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. Listening to the stories, he was reminded that there was a man named Mordecai who had exposed an assassination plot and saved his life. So in the morning, he asked one of his attendants, *“What did we do to honor and recognize Mordecai for saving my life?”* The attendant informed the king that nothing had been done for him.

When Haman arrived at the palace, the king called for him, and the King asked him, *“What should be done for the man who the king wants to truly honor?”* Secretly, Haman thought that the King was referring to him, so he said, *“You should bring a royal robe that you’ve previously worn and your personal horse. You should have your officials robe this man and lead him through the city streets proclaiming to everyone, “This is what the King does to honor those who are truly special in his kingdom.”* The King liked Haman's idea, so he gave him instructions, *“Go get the robe and the horse and do everything you’ve just suggested – don’t leave anything out. Do this for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king’s gate.”* In spite of Haman’s hatred for Mordecai, he had no choice but to do what the King had instructed him to do.

## **Scene Seven: The Final Banquet**

After Haman finished his task, it was time for another meal with the King and Queen. As they ate, the King once again asked his Queen, *“Alright, my dear, what is it that you want to discuss? I promise you whatever it is that you desire – again, up to half of my kingdom – I will give you anything you ask.”*

Finally, Esther made her request to the King. She said, *“If I have found favor with you, my king, and if it pleases you, I have one simple request . . . please let me live. This is all I ask. Please spare my people. We are about to be killed and destroyed, utterly wiped off the face of the earth. If we had just been sold into slavery, I wouldn’t even bother you with this, but all I ask is that you give us a chance to live.”*

The King was shocked, *“Who is threatening you? Who is trying to destroy your people? Who is the monster who would try to take you from me?”* Esther replied, *“He is an enemy, our adversary . . . and he’s sitting with us in this very room. Haman is the man who will stop at nothing to destroy me and my people.”* At that moment, Haman’s heart sank, and he was terrified. The king got up from the table in a rage and stormed out of the room, and Haman begged the Queen to spare his life.

As the king was storming furiously through the palace, one of his attendants informed him of Haman’s plan to use the pole outside of his home to have Mordecai impaled on it. Hearing this, the king replied, *“Oh, that’s not going to happen; instead, impale Haman on it!”* So they did what the king ordered, and the pole that was set up for Mordecai became the very place where Haman lost his life.

## **Scene Eight: The King’s Final Decree**

The King took all that belonged to Haman and gave it to Esther, and after Esther explained that Mordecai was her family and like a father to her, the King took his signet ring and gave it to Mordecai. Together the King and Queen gave Mordecai control of Haman’s estate.

Esther then pleaded with the king, *“How can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? Please cancel the plans that are in place to have my people destroyed.”* The King heard Esther’s request and said, *“Write another decree in my name on behalf of your people – whatever seems best to you, and seal it with my ring.”*

The King's new decree granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and protect themselves and to deal with anyone in any province of the kingdom who might attack them.

When Mordecai left the king's presence, he was no longer wearing sackcloth; he was wearing royal garments of blue and white. On his head was a large crown of gold, and over his shoulders was a purple robe made from the finest linen.

The city of Susa held a joyous celebration. For the Jews, it was a time of happiness and joy, gladness and honor. In every province and in every city to which the king's decree came, they feasted and celebrated ... and many people from other nationalities decided to become Jews, learning their customs and ways and worshipping God ... because it was no longer dangerous to be known as a Jew.

### *Retell the Story*

- What happened to Queen Vashti? Who was brought in after her?
- What impression did Esther make? What did the King do for Esther?
- What did Mordecai overhear, and what did he do about it?
- How was Haman first honored? How was he then dishonored?
- What does Haman decide to do because of Mordecai's rebellion?
- How does Esther approach the king?
- How does Xerxes Punish Haman?
- How does God deliver the Jews in this story?

### *Discuss the Story*

- What is your first reaction to this story? How did this story make you feel?
- What stood out to you from this story? What did you notice for the first time?
- What from this story made you wonder?

- What are your first impressions of King Xerxes? Would you have wanted to be summoned to the palace? Why or why not?
- When Mordecai overheard the assassination plot, he could have let the king, who had summoned his 'daughter', be attacked. Why do you think he chose to warn the king?
- Haman was a highly honored official recognized by the king. Why do you think he was bothered so much by what one exiled Jew thought or did?
- Esther took a huge risk by approaching the king without being summoned. What did you think about her plan? What were some of the wise things you think she did?
- What do you think the phrase "For such a time as this" meant for Esther, and what implications does it have for us today?
- Esther is the only book in the Bible where God is not named or mentioned, why do you think the author did this? Was it on purpose or by accident? If on purpose, what's the point?
- Did you hear anything that reminded you of **other** stories?
- From this story, what did you notice about humans?
- What do you notice from this story about God's character or qualities?



### 1) ESTHER: FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

In our story, God has put Esther in a position of influence, as Mordecai mentions, “for such a time as this”. What do we learn from Esther’s story about God’s purposes for humans? Are we pre-destined? Or does God have a preferred path we can choose or not choose? Or does God even care about our ‘destiny’? Explain your position.

### 2) MORDECAI: LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

Mordecai is an exiled Jew in a foreign nation, where the pagan King has taken his ‘daughter’; there seems to be no good motivation for him to warn the king about the assassination plot. How can Mordecai’s actions inform our understanding of God’s kingdom values? Read Luke 6:27-28. Why do you think this is the standard in God’s kingdom? What good can come of it?

### 3) HAMAN: THE PATH OF SIN

Take a close look at the thoughts and actions of Haman in this story. List out his sins, large and small. What could he have done to change his circumstances? What does his life show you about the nature of sin and how it works? Was there any point where Haman could have chosen a different path? What might that mean for us?

### Pray

God,

*Give us courage like Esther to do what you require, no matter the consequences or the challenges we might face. In difficult seasons, we pray for wisdom and strength. Give us clarity to know when to be patient and when we could be courageous. We thank You God, that you go before us and prepare the way. We know that we can trust that You are always working for the good of those who love You. Amen.*