



The Book of Esther

Original Hebrew and English translation
with insights from the teachings of Malbim

*Dedicated to Jews under the gun in
the Holy Land and around the world.
May we see a salvation reminiscent of Purim,
when those who sought to destroy us suffered that
very fate. Bring the hostages home now!*

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Introduction

THE HOLIDAY OF PURIM

Purim commemorates the Jewish people's deliverance from annihilation in the Persian Empire, around 2500 years ago. The day is observed through a festive meal (that includes wine or other intoxicating beverages), exchanging gifts of food, giving charity (to at least two needy people), and reading the Book of Esther (both on the eve of Purim and again the following day). The Book of Esther, known as Megillat Esther in Hebrew, vividly recounts the events leading up to this miraculous salvation.

THE BOOK OF ESTHER

Set in the Persian Empire under King Ahashverosh, typically identified as Xerxes, the Book of Esther is a complex narrative of palace intrigue, a reaffirmation of the Jewish faith, and divine intervention.

The story begins with the king's quest for absolute authority, followed by the rise of the wicked Haman, and his genocidal decree against the Jewish people. In response, Queen Esther and her cousin, Mordecai, orchestrate a counter-plot to save their people, rooted in faith, wisdom and political acumen.

The story is driven by the hidden hand of God, guiding events and turning the tables on the enemies of the Jewish people. Their survival and flourishing marks a triumph of faith and resilience that is celebrated annually on Purim.

AUTHORSHIP

The Book of Esther references its own authorship, which is initially ascribed to Mordecai: "Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent dispatches to all the Jews" (Esther 9:20). But Esther's collaboration is suggested by the later verse: "Then Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, wrote a second letter of Purim for the purpose of confirming with full authority the aforementioned letter of Mordecai the Jew" (9:29). The Talmud elaborates that the final, sacred form of the Book of Esther was written by the Men of the Great Assembly, a group of 120 sages and prophets, who rewrote it with Divine inspiration in the Holy Land (Bava Batra 15a).

PURIM OF THE FUTURE ERA

Purim's themes of redemption and divine providence resonate with the hope for a future when good overcomes evil, and the spiritual triumphs over the physical. In Jewish thought, Purim is considered a holiday that will continue to be celebrated even in the Messianic era, a future time of universal peace and divine revelation. In that time, all the other festivals will shine, but like a candle in broad daylight, whereas the powerful light of Purim will stand out in its brilliance forever.

The merit the Jewish people achieved in maintaining their faith throughout the year of the crisis was sufficient to not only miraculously save the Jewish people of that time, but to be celebrated and relived forever. Purim is a day that sets the Jewish people apart as God's precious nation, which will be fully realized with the imminent redemption. Happy Purim!

MALBIM

The Book of Esther tells a fascinating but complex story, often sufficing with tiny hints to move the plot or to characterize the motivations of its heroes and villains. To bring out its powerful and profound meaning, this edition features an interpretation infused with the fascinating insights of Malbim. His perspective sheds new light on the entire work, making it more accessible and inviting to all.



Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Michel Weiser, also known as Malbim (1809-1879), is a renowned Jewish scholar and commentator who has greatly influenced the field of Biblical interpretation. Malbim sheds light on the literal dimension of the Book of Esther as the palace drama unfolds, often exploring its underlying motivations.

Although never explicitly mentioned in the Book of Esther by name, God's invisible hand conducts every detail and nuance. Malbim's precise interpretation unveils the story's depth and the presence of the divine throughout its many shifts of fortune and acute transformations.

In order to make Malbim's teachings on the Book of Esther more accessible, this edition incorporates his insights into the story. Background and context is seamlessly woven into the commentary, resulting in an engaging style that reads like a narrative.

Let the inspiring words of the Book of Esther provide us with wisdom, insight, and bountiful joy, to help us fully celebrate the Festival of Purim, the happiest days of the year.



Blessings

before reading the Book of Esther on Purim



ON PURIM, BEFORE THE BOOK OF ESTHER IS READ, THE READER RECITES THE FOLLOWING THREE BLESSINGS. ALL THOSE PRESENT ANSWER "AMEN" AFTER EACH BLESSING:

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded us concerning the reading of the Megillah.

(Amen)

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who performed miracles for our forefathers in those days, at this time.

(Amen)

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.

(Amen)

קורא המגילה מברך:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ עַל מִקְרָא מְגִלָּה.
(אמן)

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁעָשָׂה נִסִּים לְאַבֹּתֵינוּ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם בְּזִמְנֵי הַזֶּה.
(אמן)

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁהִחְיֵינוּ וְקִיָּמָנוּ וְהִגִּיעָנוּ לְזִמְנֵי הַזֶּה.
(אמן)

Chapter 1

THE PERSIAN KING AHASHVEROSH, RULING OVER 127 PROVINCES, SHOWCASES HIS WEALTH IN SHUSHAN WITH A GRAND FEAST. QUEEN VASHTI REFUSES TO APPEAR BEFORE HIM.

It happened in the days of Ahashverosh – that Ahashverosh who reigned over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia.

In those days, when King Ahashverosh occupied the royal throne in the capital city, Shushan,

In the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all the officials and courtiers – the administration of Persia and Media, the nobles and the governors of the provinces in his service.

For no fewer than a hundred and eighty days he displayed the vast riches of his kingdom and the splendid glory of his majesty.

At the end of this period, the king gave a banquet for seven days in the court of the king's palace garden for all the people who lived in the capital city, Shushan, high and low alike.

[There were hangings of] white cotton and blue wool, held up by cords of fine linen and purple wool to silver rods and alabaster columns; and there were couches of gold and silver on a pavement of marble, alabaster, mother-of-pearl, and mosaics.

Royal wine was served in abundance, as befits a king, in golden beakers, beakers of varied design.

And the rule for the drinking was, “No restrictions!” For the king had given orders to every palace steward to comply with each man's wishes.

In addition, Queen Vashti gave a banquet for women, in the royal palace of King Ahashverosh.

On the seventh day, when the king was merry with wine, he ordered Mehuman, Bizzetha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven eunuchs in attendance on King Ahashverosh,

**וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים אֲחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ הוּא אֲחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ הַמֶּלֶךְ מֵהַדּוּ
וְעַד־כּוּשׁ שֶׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה:**

בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם כְּשֶׁבֶת אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ עַל כִּסֵּא מַלְכוּתוֹ אֲשֶׁר בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה:

**בְּשָׁנָת שְׁלוֹשׁ לְמָלְכוֹ עָשָׂה מִשְׁתֵּה לְכָל־שָׂרָיו וְעַבְדָּיו חֵיל א
פָּרָס וּמְדֵי הַפְּרָתִמִּים וְשָׂרֵי הַמְּדִינּוֹת לִפְנָיו:**

**בַּהֲרָאתוֹ אֶת־עֹשֶׁר כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ וְאֶת־יָקָר תַּפְאָרָת
גְּדוּלָּתוֹ יָמִים רַבִּים שְׂמוּנִים וּמֵאֵת יוֹם:**

**וּבְמִלּוּאֵת אֵלֵּים הָאֵלֶּה עָשָׂה הַמֶּלֶךְ לְכָל־הָעָם הַנִּמְצְאִים בְּשׁוּשַׁן
הַבִּירָה לְמַגְדֹּל וְעַד־קֶטָן מִשְׁתֵּה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים בַּחֲצַר גִּנַּת בֵּיתוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ:**

**חֹזֵר אֶל כִּרְפָס וּתְכֵלֶת אַחֲוִיז בַּחֲבִל־בּוּץ וְאַרְגָּמָן עַל־גְּלִילִי כֶסֶף וְעַמּוּדֵי
שֵׁשׁ מִטּוֹת אֶזְבֵּב וְכֶסֶף עַל רִצְפֹת בַּהֲט־וְשֵׁשׁ וְזָר וְסֻחָרֹת:**

וְהַשְׁקוֹת בְּכָל־זָהָב וְכֵלִים מִכֵּלִים שׁוֹנִים וְיֵין מַלְכוּת רַב כִּיד הַמֶּלֶךְ:

**וְהַשְׁתִּיָּה כְדַת אֵין אִגָּס כִּי־כֵן אֶל יֶסֶד הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל כָּל־
רַב בֵּיתוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּרִצּוֹן אִישׁ־וְאִישׁ:**

**גַּם וְשִׁתִּי הַמִּלְכָּה עָשָׂתָה מִשְׁתֵּה נָשִׁים בֵּית
{הַמַּלְכוּת אֲשֶׁר לְמֶלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ: }ס**

**בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי כְּטוֹב לִב־הַמֶּלֶךְ בִּגְיוֹן אֲמָר לְמַהוּמָן בְּזֵאת חֲרִבוּנָא בְּגִתָּא
וְאַבְגָּתָא זֶתֶר וְכַרְכָּס שִׁבְעַת הַסְּרִיסִים הַמְּשָׁרְתִּים אֶת־פְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ:**

**לְהֵבִיא אֶת־וְשִׁתִּי הַמִּלְכָּה לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּבִתֵּר מַלְכוּת לְהִרְאוֹת
הָעַמִּים וְהַשָּׂרִים אֶת־יָפוּיָה כִּי־טוֹבַת מֵרָאָה הִיא:**

**וְתַמְאֵן הַמִּלְכָּה וְשִׁתִּי לְבּוֹא בְּדָבָר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר בִּיד
הַסְּרִיסִים וַיִּקְצֹף הַמֶּלֶךְ מְאֹד וַחֲמָתוֹ בָּעֲרָה בּוֹ:**

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לַחֲכָמִים יִדְעִי הָעֵתִים כִּי־כֵן דָּבָר הַמֶּלֶךְ לִפְנֵי כָל־יִדְעִי דַּת וְדִין:

**וְהִקְרַב אֵלָיו כְּרִשְׁנָא שֶׁתֶּר אֲדָמְתָא תְּרִשִׁישׁ מֶרְס מֶרְסָנָא מְמוּבָן
שִׁבְעַת שָׂרֵי אֶל פָּרָס וּמְדֵי רֵאִי פְּנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ הַיִּשְׁבִּים רֵאשֻׁנָה בְּמַלְכוּת:**

**כְּדַת מַה־לַּעֲשׂוֹת בְּמַלְכָּה וְשִׁתִּי עַל אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָשָׂתָה
{אֶת־מֵאֵמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ בִּיד הַסְּרִיסִים: }פ**

**וַיֹּאמֶר (מוֹמְכֵן) [מְמוּכָן] לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַשָּׂרִים לֹא עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לְבַדּוֹ עֹתָה וְשִׁתִּי
הַמִּלְכָּה כִּי עַל־כָּל־הַשָּׂרִים וְעַל־כָּל־הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְדִינּוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ:**

**כִּי־יֵצֵא דְבַר־הַמִּלְכָּה עַל־כָּל־הַנָּשִׁים לְהַבְזוֹת בַּעֲלֵיהֶן בַּעֲיֵינֵיהֶן בְּאַמְרֵם
הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֶרֶשׁ אֲמָר לְהֵבִיא אֶת־וְשִׁתִּי הַמִּלְכָּה לִפְנָיו וְלֹא־בָאָה:**

וְהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה תֵּאֲמַרְנָה אֶל שְׁנוֹת פָּרְס־וּמְדֵי אֲשֶׁר שָׁמְעוּ

To bring Queen Vashti before the king wearing a royal diadem, to display her beauty to the peoples and the officials; for she was a beautiful woman.

But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command conveyed by the eunuchs. The king was greatly incensed, and his fury burned within him.

Then the king consulted the sages learned in procedure. For it was the royal practice [to turn] to all who were versed in law and precedent.

His closest advisers were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven ministers of Persia and Media who had access to the royal presence and occupied the first place in the kingdom.

"What," [he asked,] "shall be done, according to law, to Queen Vashti for failing to obey the command of King Ahashverosh conveyed by the eunuchs?"

Thereupon Memucan declared in the presence of the king and the ministers: "Queen Vashti has committed an offense not only against Your Majesty but also against all the officials and against all the peoples in all the provinces of King Ahashverosh.

For the queen's behavior will make all wives despise their husbands, as they reflect that King Ahashverosh himself ordered Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.

This very day the ladies of Persia and Media, who have heard of the queen's behavior, will cite it to all Your Majesty's officials, and there will be no end of scorn and provocation!

In a time long ago, Ahashverosh, a man of common lineage, rose to unprecedented power, ruling over 127 provinces that spanned from India to Ethiopia. Unlike traditional rulers who inherited their thrones or expanded their kingdoms over time, Ahashverosh seized control through swift and aggressive

את־דָּבַר הַמֶּלֶכָה לְכָל שָׂרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְיָדֵי בְּדִיּוֹן וְהֶצֱפוּ:

אִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב יֵצֵא דְבַר־מַלְכוּת מִלְּפָנָיו וְיִכְתֹּב בְּדַתִּי פָּרֶס־וּמָדִי וְלֹא יַעֲבֹר אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִבְּאֹא וְשָׂתִי לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֵׁרוֹשׁ וּמַלְכוּתָהּ יִתֵּן הַמֶּלֶךְ לְרַעוּתָהּ הַטּוֹבָה מִמֶּנָּה:

וְנִשְׁמַע פִּתְגָם הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה בְּכָל־מַלְכוּתוֹ כִּי רָבָה הָיָא וְכָל־הַנָּשִׁים יִתְּנוּ יָקָר לְבַעֲלֵיהֶן לְמַגְדֹּל וְעַד־קֶטָן:

וַיִּטֵּב הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַשָּׂרִים וַיַּעַשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ כְּדִבְרֵי מִמוּכָן:

וַיִּשְׁלַח סָפְרִים אֶל־כָּל־מְדִינוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה כְּכַתְּבָהּ וְאֶל־עַם (וְעַם בְּלִשׁוֹנָהּ לְהִיּוֹת כָּל־אִישׁ שִׁגְרָר בְּבֵיתוֹ וּמִדְּבַר בְּלִשׁוֹן עַמּוֹ: }פ

"If it please Your Majesty, let a royal edict be issued by you, and let it be written into the laws of Persia and Media, so that it cannot be abrogated, that Vashti shall never enter the presence of King Ahashverosh. And let Your Majesty bestow her royal state upon another who is more worthy than she.

Then will the judgment executed by Your Majesty resound throughout your realm, vast though it is; and all wives will treat their husbands with respect, high and low alike."

The proposal was approved by the king and the ministers, and the king did as Memucan proposed.

Dispatches were sent to all the provinces of the king, to every province in its own script and to every nation in its own language, that every man should wield authority in his home and speak the language of his own people.

military conquest. His humble origins were quickly forgotten as his reign extended over a vast empire.

By marrying Vashti, the Babylonian princess and descendant of Nebuchadnezzar, Ahashverosh solidified his claim to the throne, though it cast ambiguity on the nature of his reign. As

a conqueror, Ahashverosh strived for unlimited power, but as a husband of the heir to the throne, his power was limited to the precedent set by prior kings.

While most monarchs of his time followed traditional protocols of sovereignty, requiring for example, the approval of ministers for major decisions, King Ahashverosh pursued absolute authority. He controlled the national treasury, made unilateral decisions, and was not bound by religious or legal constraints. He modeled his rule after emperors like Sancherib and Nebuchadnezzar, who reigned with unhindered authority.

In order to establish himself as an absolute monarch, Ahashverosh made the strategic decision to move his palace from Babylon to Shushan, in Persia. By selecting Shushan as his capital, Ahashverosh defied tradition, declaring his independence from customary norms of royal succession and authority.

With this bold move, Ahashverosh sent a powerful message about his intentions: his reign would not be restricted by the past nor would he seek legitimacy through traditional means. His power was self-made through conquest and fueled by personal ambition, rather than through royal lineage. Sitting on his new throne, Ahashverosh cemented himself as a formidable ruler unbound by the constraints of history.

These monumental changes occurred not after years of consolidation and acceptance, but from the very outset of his reign. In the third year of his reign, Ahashverosh held a grand banquet in an extravagant and unprecedented display of wealth and power. The banquet continued for a grand total of 180 days, where he showcased the incredible splendor and riches of his kingdom.

The seating was carefully arranged as a display of power, with the king's own officials and army seated at the forefront, followed by the governors and officials of Persia and Media.

By prioritizing provincial leaders beneath his own servants, Ahashverosh emphasized his own supremacy and diminished their status. This calculated move helped establish a new order in the empire, where loyalty and service to Ahashverosh were valued above any previous regional prominence.

In a monarchy where the king is considered a custodian rather than the owner of the national treasury, such an extravagant banquet went against tradition. This grandiose display was not simply a show of opulence, but a demonstration of ultimate power over everything in his realm.

After close to half a year of celebrating, King Ahashverosh made an unprecedented move. In contrast to the usual exclusive royal banquets attended by high-ranking officials and nobility, he hosted a second feast for all residents of Shushan, irrespective of social standing. The invitation read that all should attend "from the least to the greatest," sending the clear message that in his kingdom, all were equal subjects under his authority. The subversion of social hierarchies was a ploy intended to solidify his reign and reinforce his power over every individual, from the lowest peasant to the highest noble.

King Ahashverosh held this banquet in the royal courtyard, against Persian tradition, as this was a place reserved only for the elite. This brash move allowed all residents of Shushan to attend, blurring the lines between social classes. By doing so, Ahashverosh demonstrated his belief that everyone was subservient to him, regardless of their personal status. The location of the feast also held significance, reinforcing his selection of Shushan as the capital city.

King Ahashverosh hosted the extravagant feast in the palace courtyard, free of the enclosure of walls or ceilings but overflowing with magnificence. Elegantly crafted pavilions adorned the courtyard, made of white cotton and blue wool, their beauty further enhanced by cords of fine linen and purple wool. The columns of these tents were crafted from alabaster,



a material highly valued for its beauty and rarity, and were supported by rods of silver. The seating arrangements were no less luxurious. Guests reclined on couches of gold and silver. The floor itself was a masterpiece, composed of marble, alabaster, mother-of-pearl, and detailed mosaics.

Each guest was treated to wine fit for a king, poured liberally from golden jugs adorned with intricate, unique designs. Decanters and goblets were provided to each guest, so no one had to pass or share. Unlike other feasts where limited vessels forced hasty consumption, each guest had their own golden vessel, allowing them to savor the wine. King Ahashverosh's banquet broke from tradition, as there were no restrictions on drinking. The copious flow of fine wine enticed the guests to celebrate, enhancing the king's reputation as a generous and beloved ruler.

The king's nontraditional approach to the banquet was a deliberate departure from Persian customs, where the most distinguished guests received preferential treatment. In contrast, at this feast, all were equal in their freedom to drink as they wished, disregarding hierarchical protocols. This egalitarian gesture could have been viewed as disrespectful towards the higher-ranking guests. So to avoid any perceived offense, King Ahashverosh issued a directive to prioritize each individual's preferences over traditional honor and rank. By doing so, he ensured that his relaxed attitude toward drinking would not be viewed as an attempt to diminish the esteemed guests' honor, but to promote inclusivity and personal choice.

At the lavish banquet, King Ahashverosh's power and wealth were on full display. Meanwhile, Queen Vashti held a separate feast for women. Despite being a crucial figure in securing Ahashverosh's claim to the throne through her royal heritage, Vashti was limited to entertaining female guests and was confined indoors to the king's palace.

On the seventh day of the lavish banquet, King Ahashverosh,

under the influence of wine and in a state of reckless abandon, sent out an order that would put to test the true power dynamics within the court. He commanded Queen Vashti to appear before the gathering of various nations and peoples, with an implied demand for her to be unclothed. Not only was this a display of poor judgment, but it was also a calculated move to assert his authority and reduce Vashti to nothing more than an object on display.

The king's eunuchs executed this command. It was customary for all high-ranking officials to escort a queen, but here the king chose to use his seven personal attendants. Instead of receiving the respect she was due as queen and heir to the throne, Vashti was summoned like a commoner. This action greatly diminished her role and underscored the king's power over her. The summons was thus cast in a light that Vashti held no real authority as a co-regent. Rather, she was merely at the mercy of the king's whims, more akin to a concubine than a true queen.

Queen Vashti was summoned by the king to display her beauty before the people and officials, wearing her royal diadem. This request revealed that her authority as queen was granted by the king, as she was only to put on the crown in his presence.

But Vashti boldly refused to obey King Ahashverosh's command, sparking significant consequences in the kingdom. As a descendant of royalty, she asserted her right to rule alongside the king. Ahashverosh was infuriated by her refusal, not only on a personal level but also because it thwarted his attempts to secure absolute power. The king displayed outward fury towards her disobedience, but also harbored inner rage caused by her defiance, for this was a hidden ambition that he could not openly acknowledge.

Distraught, King Ahashverosh sought advice from his advisors. Disciplining the queen required careful consideration of the laws, traditions, and circumstances surrounding her actions.



Consulting the advisors demonstrated Ahashverosh's desire for a just ruling, weighing the cultural importance of female modesty against the legal considerations involved in forcing the queen to obey his command.

The counsel was comprised of his seven top advisers, carefully chosen for their knowledge of court life and their loyalty to the king. These were high-ranking ministers who held the king's trust and were intimately familiar with his disposition. By involving them in this matter, the king aimed to keep the matter within a small, elite circle to avoid public scrutiny. Their presence signaled the importance and confidentiality of the issue at hand, allowing the king to maintain control over the crisis and minimize any political fallout.

Through their close relationship with the king, these advisers were adept at deciphering his body language and interpreting his true intentions. Despite his display of anger, they knew he may be considering reconciliation or justification for Vashti's actions, which would greatly impact their recommendations.

The king wanted to consider both the legal and moral implications of her refusal, so he asked for the situation to be judged within the context of the law, distinguishing it from typical responses to rebellious commoners, where such legal considerations were ignored.

It was deemed disrespectful for Queen Vashti to be summoned by the king's eunuchs, providing justification for her reluctance. The king cleverly incorporated this detail into the inquiry, offering a plausible explanation for Vashti's refusal, as a reaction to an affront to her dignity as queen, rather than a direct act of rebellion against his orders.

In blatant disregard for the king's agenda, one of his advisors, Memucan, portrayed it as a personal insult to Ahashverosh. In addition, he argued, Vashti's disobedience set a dangerous precedent for the kingdom. Her actions could be seen as a

challenge to the established order of governance. By framing her refusal as an act of treason, Memucan effectively elevated the issue from a domestic dispute to a concern of the state.

Stressing its immediate and widespread impact on domestic and public affairs, Memucan warned of dire consequences resulting from Vashti's defiance. Her disobedience could incite a rebellion among wives across the kingdom, setting a precedent to reject their husbands' authority. Vashti's influence could destabilize not just the royal household, but all families throughout the empire. Memucan suggested that Ahashverosh punish her or risk abandoning his own political ambitions.

Memucan warned of the dangers of "scorn and provocation," both of which could have dire consequences for the kingdom. "Scorn" means that wives would emulate Vashti's rebellion, undermining the social fabric in each household, whereas "provocation" refers to the impact on the officials if the queen's disobedience went unpunished, a sign of weakness in the king's power.

Memucan presented a solution to King Ahashverosh, namely, an edict that addressed Vashti's disobedience and amended the legal system. The new law would solidify the king's direct control over rulings and make his decrees permanent in Persia and Media. The king's authority would be strengthened by this change, ensuring every judgment remains a lasting part of the kingdom's legal framework.

To prevent any future reconciliation with Vashti, the king would issue a permanent decree forbidding her to appear before him. This move would support the notion that it was the king who rejected her, not the other way around.

As for finding a replacement, the king would bestow Vashti's royal position upon someone more deserving, thereby reinforcing his authority and deterring future queens from disobeying



him. This also would set a precedent that queenship depends on the king's favor rather than lineage or heritage.

In order to rectify the recent distortions in the kingdom, a new authority would be established as law. Any royal decree would now be issued directly from the king without requiring counsel from his ministers. This edict would grant King Ahashverosh unlimited power over the entire kingdom and make his decrees unassailable. Secondly, by enacting a judgment on Vashti, all women would be compelled to respect the authority of their husbands, irrespective of whether the husband is of greater or lesser pedigree. In fact, a law would be issued to reinforce the husbands' authority in the household.

Memucan's proposals pleased King Ahashverosh, but in order to attain the unlimited power he desired, he needed the consent of the ministers. Surprisingly the ministers agreed, despite the fact that they stood to lose power, leaving the governance of law solely to the king. The king acted according to Memucan's advice, and his absolute authority became law.

Dispatches were sent throughout the empire, to every province in its own script and to every nation in its own language, that every man should wield authority in his home and speak the language of his own people.

There was wisdom behind responding to the crisis with Vashti by instituting these two enactments. Regarding speaking the native language: Originally, proclamations issued from the king, as well as letters sent to the king from all nations under Persian rule, were required to be in the Persian language. But now that Ahashverosh insisted that he was the supreme ruler and not Persia, there was no difference between Persia and other places under his rule; all were subjugated under Ahashverosh and served him equally. Therefore, there was no advantage to the Persian script and language over other languages. For this reason, the decrees were written to every nation in their own language.

Regarding the decree that every man should be master in his own house: Until then, under Persian law, the woman had to submit to her husband only to honor him. But now, Ahashverosh gave the decree that men should rule over their wives and govern them like a master over his maidservant, governing them as one would a material possession.

These two new decrees were intended to appease the subjects of the Persian empire, softening the impact of Memucan's aspirations for the king. To address the concern for the move to absolute authority, the decree was given that all languages should be equal, seemingly raising the stature of the individual nations and creeds to the same height as the Persian language. Similarly, every man now became a veritable master in his own home, diminishing the impact of Ahashverosh' rise to absolutism by sharing power with all men in domestic matters.

Curiously, the first chapter of Megillat Esther does not mention the story's heroes, Esther and Mordecai. However, it is precisely this initial scenario that sets the stage for the miraculous salvation of the Jewish people from the wicked decree of Haman, who plotted their annihilation. That is, had the king not exerted himself to become a ruler with absolute authority, it would not have been possible for him to take Esther, whose land of origin and pedigree were not known, as his bride, and thereby place her in position to save her nation. Typically kings chose queens for political gain by marrying into royal families. The plan for the king to choose a maiden who was not distinguished by her royal pedigree, especially one whose people and birthplace were not even known, would never have happened without these preliminary steps.

Additionally, the later rise of Haman would never have taken place without the ministers' permission, let alone the decrees that would determine the fate of the entire Jewish people. And so, if not for the first proclamations granting the king absolute power, the later edicts against the Jewish people as well as the decree enabling their salvation through their right to



self-defense, would not have been fulfilled.

Esther's ability to sway the king's decision is not inherently miraculous when considered in isolation. It is not unusual for a queen, described as the kingdom's most beautiful woman, to have influence over her husband, even if he is the king. The true wonder lies in the specific context of who King Ahashverosh was and the nature of his reign.

Therefore, the Megillah first highlights several key aspects of King Ahashverosh's rule. He ruled over 127 provinces, indicating a vast and diverse empire. He conquered these provinces swiftly, indicating his power and effectiveness as a ruler. The lavish banquet he held demonstrated his immense wealth. His skillful navigation of political intrigues enabled him to secure

full control over his subjects and their leaders. Finally, despite his deep affection for Queen Vashti, Ahashverosh chose to replace her. Esther's influence over such a powerful and strategically minded ruler is therefore understood as nothing less than an act of divine intervention. It wasn't just the charm or beauty of Esther that swayed the king; it was a manifestation of divine will.

The Megillah suggests that God worked through the agency of Esther to change the course of events, turning the king's heart away from Haman's malicious, destructive plan. This divine providence, happening within the complex and seemingly rigid structures of Ahashverosh's kingdom, is what elevates the story from a tale of court intrigue to one of the miraculous deliverance of the Jewish people.

Chapter 2

KING AHASHVEROSH' ADVISORS SUGGEST FINDING A NEW QUEEN. ESTHER IS CROWNED QUEEN, AND MORDECAI UNCOVERS A PLOT AGAINST THE KING.

Some time afterward, when the anger of King Ahashverosh subsided, he thought of Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her.

The king's servants who attended him said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for Your Majesty.

Let Your Majesty appoint officers in every province of your realm to assemble all the beautiful young virgins at the captial city Shushan, in the harem under the supervision of Hege, the king's eunuch, guardian of the women. Let them be provided with their cosmetics.

And let the maiden who pleases Your Majesty be queen instead of Vashti." The proposal pleased the king, and he acted upon it.

אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה כָּשָׁף חֲמַת הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֵׁרוֹשׁ זָכַר אֶת־
וַשְׁתִּי וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־עָשְׂתָהּ וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־נִגְזַר עָלֶיהָ:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ בְּעֵי־הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁרָתָיו יִבְקְשׁוּ לַמֶּלֶךְ נַעֲרוֹת בְּתוּלוֹת טוֹבוֹת מְרָאָה:

וַיִּפְקֹד הַמֶּלֶךְ פְּקִידִים בְּכָל־מְדִינֹת מַלְכוּתוֹ וַיִּקְבְּצוּ אֶת־כָּל־
נַעֲרֵה־בְּתוּלָה טוֹבֹת מְרָאָה אֶל־שׁוּשָׁן הַבִּירָה אֶל־בֵּית הַנָּשִׁים
אֶל־יַד הַגָּא סָרִיס הַמֶּלֶךְ שֶׁמֶר הַנָּשִׁים וְנָתַן תַּמְרָקִיהָ:

וְהַנַּעֲרָה אֲשֶׁר תֵּיטֵב בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ תַּחַת וַשְׁתִּי
{וַיֵּיטֵב הַדָּבָר בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיַּעַשׂ כֵּן: } פ

אִישׁ יְהוּדִי הָיָה בְּשׁוּשָׁן הַבִּירָה וּשְׁמוֹ מֶרְדֳּכָי כִּן
יָאִיר בֶּן־שִׁמְעִי בֶן־הִישׁ אִישׁ יְמִינִי:

אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָה מִיְּרוּשָׁלַיִם עִם־הַגָּלָה אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָתָה עִם יִכְנִיָּה
מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה אֲשֶׁר הִגְלָה נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל:

וַיְהִי אֲמֹן אֶת־הַדֹּסָה הִיא אֶסְתֵּר בַּת־דָּדּוּ כִּי אֵין לָהּ אָב וְהַנַּעֲרָה
יַת־תָּאֵר וְטוֹבֶת מְרָאָה וּבְמֹת אֲבִיהָ וְאִמָּהּ לְקַחָהּ מֶרְדֳּכָי לֹלָבֶת:

וַיְהִי בַּהֲשָׁמַע דְּבַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָלּוּ וְבָהֻבְּלָץ נַעֲרוֹת רַבּוֹת אֶל־שׁוּשָׁן הַבִּירָה

In the captial city Shushan lived a Jew by the name of Mordecai, son of Jair son of Shimei son of Kish, a Benjaminite.

[Kish] had been exiled from Jerusalem in the group that was carried into exile along with King Jeconiah of Judah, which had been driven into exile by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

He was foster father to Hadassah – that is, Esther – his uncle’s daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The maiden was shapely and beautiful; and when her father and mother died, Mordecai adopted her as his own daughter.

When the king’s order and edict was proclaimed, and when many girls were assembled in the captial city Shushan under the supervision of Hegai, Esther too was taken into the king’s palace under the supervision of Hegai, guardian of the women.

The girl pleased him and won his favor, and he hastened to furnish her with her cosmetics and her rations, as well as with the seven maids who were her due from the king’s palace; and he treated her and her maids with special kindness in the harem.

Esther did not reveal her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had told her not to reveal it.

Every single day Mordecai would walk about in front of the court of the harem, to learn how Esther was faring and what was happening to her.

When each girl’s turn came to go to King Ahashverosh at the end of the twelve months’ treatment prescribed for women (for that was the period spent on beautifying them: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and women’s cosmetics,

and it was after that that the girl would go to the king), whatever she asked for would be given her to take with her from the harem to the king’s palace.

She would go in the evening and leave in the morning

אֶל־יָד הַגִּי וּתְלַקַּח אֶסְתֵּר אֶל־בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־יָד הַגִּי שְׁמֵר הַנָּשִׁים:

וּתִיטֵב הַנַּעֲרָה בְּעֵינֶיהָ וּתַשָּׂא תְּסֻד לִפְנֵיהָ וַיְבַהֵל אֶת־תַּמְרוּקֶיהָ וְאֶת־מְנוּחָהּ לְתֵת לָהּ וְאֵת שִׁבְעַת הַנָּעֲרוֹת הָרָאיוֹת לְתֵת־לָהּ מִבֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּשְׁנֶנָּה וְאֶת־נַעֲרוֹתֶיהָ לְטֹב בֵּית הַנָּשִׁים:

לֹא־הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר אֶת־עַמָּהּ וְאֶת־מוֹלְדֹתָהּ כִּי {מְרַדְּכִי אָנָּה עָלֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תִגִּיד: }ס

וּבְכָל־יוֹם וַיּוֹם מְרַדְּכִי מִתְהַלֵּךְ לִפְנֵי חֲצַר בֵּית־הַנָּשִׁים לְדַעַת אֶת־שְׁלוֹם אֶסְתֵּר וּמֵה־יַעֲשֶׂה בָּהּ:

וּבַהֲגִיעַ תֹּרְ נַעֲרָה וְנַעֲרָה לְבֹא | אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֵׁרוֹשׁ מִקֶּץ הַיּוֹת לָהּ כְּדַת הַנָּשִׁים שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר חֹדֶשׁ כִּי כֵן יִמְלֹאוּ יְמֵי מְרוּקֶיהָן שְׁשָׁה חֳדָשִׁים בְּשִׁמּוֹן הַמֶּלֶךְ וְשְׁשָׁה חֳדָשִׁים בְּבִשְׁמִים וּבִתְמָרוֹת הַנָּשִׁים:

וּבִיָּה הַנַּעֲרָה בָּאָה אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אִתָּהּ כָּל־אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר וַיָּבִתָּ לָהּ לְבֹא עִמָּה מִבֵּית הַנָּשִׁים עַד־בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ:

בְּעֶרְבָא | הִיא בָּאָה וְלִבְדָּקָר הִיא שָׂבָה אֶל־בֵּית הַנָּשִׁים שְׁנֵי אֶל־יָד שֶׁעֲשָׂה סְרִיס הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁמֵר הַפִּילִגְשִׁים לֹא־תִבֹּא עוֹד אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי אִם־חֲפֹץ בָּהּ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְנִקְרָאָה בְּשֵׁם:

וּבַהֲגִיעַ תֹּר־אֶסְתֵּר בֵּת־אֲבִיתָהּ יָד מְרַדְּכִי אֲשֶׁר לְקַח־לוֹ לְבֵת לְבֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לֹא בִקְשָׁה דָּבָר כִּי אִם אֶת־אֲשֶׁר יֹאמַר הַגִּי סְרִיס־הַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁמֵר הַנָּשִׁים וְתִהְיֶה אֶסְתֵּר נִשְׂאֵת חֵן בְּעֵינֵי כָל־רָאִיָּה:

וּתְלַקַּח אֶסְתֵּר אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֵׁרוֹשׁ אֶל־בֵּית מַלְכוּתוֹ בַּחֲדָשׁ הָעֲשִׁירִי הוּא־חֲדָשׁ טֹבַת בְּשַׁבַּת־שִׁבְעַת לְמַלְכוּתוֹ:

וַיֵּאָהֱבָה הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־אֶסְתֵּר מִכָּל־הַנָּשִׁים וּתַשָּׂא־תָן וְתְּסֻד לִפְנֵיהּ מִכָּל־הַבְּתוּלוֹת וַיִּשָּׂם כְּתֹר־מַלְכוּת בְּרֹאשָׁהּ וַיִּמְלִיכָהּ תַּחַת וְשִׁמְתִּי:

וַיַּעַשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁתֵּה גָדוֹל לְכָל־שָׂרָיו וְעַבְדָּיו אֶת מִשְׁתֵּה אֶסְתֵּר וְהַנְּחָה לְמַדִּינוֹת עֲשֶׂה וַיִּתֵּן מִשְׁאֵת כֶּיֶד הַמֶּלֶךְ:

וּבַהֲקִבֹץ בְּתוּלוֹת שָׁנִית וּמְרַדְּכִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ:

אֵין אֶסְתֵּר מִגְדַּת מוֹלְדֹתָהּ וְאֶת־עַמָּהּ כְּאֲשֶׁר אָנָּה עָלֶיהָ מְרַדְּכִי וְאֶת־{מֹאמַר מְרַדְּכִי אֶסְתֵּר עֲשֶׂה כְּאֲשֶׁר הִיתָה בְּאֻמָּנָה אִתּוֹ: }ס

בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם וּמְרַדְּכִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ קִצְף בְּגָלוֹ וְחָרַשׁ שְׁנֵי־סְרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁמָרֵי הַסֵּף וַיִּבְקֶשׁוּ לְשַׁלַּח יָד בַּמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֵׁרוֹשׁ:

וַיַּזְדַּע הַדָּבָר לְמְרַדְּכִי וַיַּגֵּד לְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה וּתֹאמַר אֶסְתֵּר לְמֶלֶךְ בְּשֵׁם מְרַדְּכִי:

וַיִּבְקֶשׁ הַדָּבָר וַיִּמְצָא וַיִּתְּלוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם עַל־עֵץ וַיִּכְתֹּב {בְּסֵפֶר דָּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ: }פ

for a second harem in charge of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, guardian of the concubines. She would not go again to the king unless the king wanted her, when she would be summoned by name.

When the turn came for Esther daughter of Abihail – the uncle of Mordecai, who had adopted her as his own daughter – to go to the king, she did not ask for anything but what Hegai, the king's eunuch, guardian of the women, advised. Yet Esther won the admiration of all who saw her.

Esther was taken to King Ahashverosh, in his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she won his grace and favor more than all the virgins. So he set a royal diadem on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

The king gave a great banquet for all his officials

and courtiers, "the banquet of Esther." He proclaimed a remission of taxes for the provinces and distributed gifts as befits a king.

When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai sat in the palace gate.

But Esther still did not reveal her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had instructed her; for Esther obeyed Mordecai's bidding, as she had done when she was under his care.

At that time, when Mordecai was sitting in the palace gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the threshold, became angry, and plotted to do away with King Ahashverosh.

Mordecai learned of it and told it to Queen Esther, and Esther reported it to the king in Mordecai's name.

The matter was investigated and found to be so, and the two were hanged on the gallows. This was recorded in the book of chronicles in the presence of the king.

*K*ing Ahashverosh's temper subsided, leaving him in a reflective state of mind. He couldn't help but ponder the fate of Vashti and the decree of exile he had passed against her. Memories of her beauty, noble heritage, and virtues flooded his thoughts, stirring a sense of longing and regret for overlooking these qualities in his anger. It was now clear to the king that finding someone suitable to replace Vashti would be a daunting task.

The king grappled with his conflicting emotions as he remembered Queen Vashti's defiance. On the one hand, her disobedience warranted punishment, but on the other, he feared the consequences of exiling such a noble and beautiful queen. He worried about the challenges that may arise in finding a worthy successor, someone who could match Vashti's stature and respect without rocking the stability of his reign. The

banishment was meant to serve as a warning to others, yet it also carried the risk of deterring excellent candidates from stepping forward.

The king's dismissal of Queen Vashti had left a void, not just in the palace but in the very heart of the monarchy. Sensing his discomfort, the king's servants came forward with a proposal. "Your Majesty," they began cautiously, "it may be wise to seek out beautiful young maidens for you. Let them be chosen for their appearance, not their lineage or status." Lineage is immaterial for a ruler as exalted as Ahashverosh, they reasoned.

Initially the approach was to attract willing candidates, showcasing the opportunity to become part of the royal household. But although the process began with a voluntary search, it eventually culminated in gathering candidates in a manner that left no room for refusal.



In the court of King Ahashverosh, the matter of finding a new queen was being handled with the utmost precision and strategy. The king's advisors, having proposed a search for beautiful young virgins, were now laying out the specifics of their plan, ensuring every detail was carefully considered to avoid any mishaps like the one with Vashti.

The advisors suggested that the king appoint officers across his vast realm to gather all the beautiful young virgins and bring them to the capital city of Shushan. There they would be placed under the supervision of Hegai, one of the king's eunuchs and trusted guardian of his harem. This was a deliberate move to ensure that the women, once chosen, would be under the control of a reliable and trusted royal servant, avoiding any chance of insubordination or defiance that might arise under less stringent supervision.

The king's goal was to find a queen who was not only beautiful, but also well-suited to the royal court. The advisors understood the need for harmony within the palace and carefully crafted a plan that included a rigorous selection process and strict rules for the women. This ensured an environment of compliance and prevented any potential rebellion.

Despite the strict protocols, the final decision was left to King Ahashverosh's personal preference. This shift emphasized the king's power and highlighted his absolute authority in both state affairs and personal matters, with the queen's lineage and background becoming secondary factors in her selection.

In the capital city of Shushan, there lived a Jew from an illustrious background named Mordecai. Mordecai had assumed the role of foster parent to Esther, his cousin, who was affectionately known as Hadassah for her good deeds and qualities. As he had taken her in after her parents' death, Mordecai held significant influence and responsibility over the young lady. He protected and guided her like a father.

Mordecai's preeminence is emphasized by his name, lineage, and tribal affiliation: the son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a man from the tribe of Benjamin. Descending from the royal line of Saul, the first king of Israel, Mordecai commanded respect and recognition.

In a society where familial lineage and guardianship carried great weight, Mordecai's role as foster parent was both familial and legally binding – he had sole responsibility for Esther and could not deflect it onto others. With self-sacrifice, Mordecai concealed the beautiful young lady from the imperial search for a queen.

Living in Shushan, the king's capital, put Mordecai at great risk. He was blatantly disobeying the order to bring forth beautiful maidens. Had he lived elsewhere, he could plead ignorance. But in Shushan, where the king's decrees were well-known, that excuse was implausible.

Esther was beautiful of form and appearance, further increasing the peril of concealing her from the royal search. If it were discovered that Mordecai had hidden such a beautiful maiden, the consequences would be severe, and there would be no excuse or atonement for his actions.

His decision to not present Esther to the king was significant, as lower status fathers may have had the excuse of being reluctant to present their daughters to the king out of shame. However, Kish, an ancestor of Mordecai, was exiled from Jerusalem alongside King Jeconiah of Judah under King Nebuchadnezzar's rule. As an exile and outsider, Mordecai faced harsher consequences for breaking the king's law compared to a native. Despite his family history, he could not use exile as an excuse for not presenting Esther to the king. This group of exiles was highly respected, which only added to the high expectations placed on Mordecai and Esther.

Here the story highlights the righteousness of Mordecai and



Esther, his cousin, in three crucial moments: when she was discovered and forcibly taken from her home, during her year under Hegai's supervision, and finally when she was brought to the king's palace.

After King Ahashverosh's decree to find a queen was announced, many young women were assembled in Shushan. Esther was taken along with the others to the king's palace.

Initially, the command was to seek young women suitable for the king and who voluntarily accepted the invitation to join the royal harem, a decree that would have been perceived as being less alarming. However, the situation escalated with a second decree, mandating the forceful gathering of young women. This second decree carried a serious penalty for non-compliance, signifying a drastic shift from a voluntary process to a compulsory one.

The presence of so many maidens in Shushan highlights the gravity and urgency of the king's decree, as anyone who concealed a woman, especially one as beautiful as Esther, faced grave consequences. Despite this, the righteous Mordecai and Esther did not willingly participate in the process. Esther's inclusion in the king's palace was not a result of Mordecai's approval; it was a consequence of the king's forceful edict.

Under the authority of the royal edict, Esther was taken to the king's palace and placed under Hegai's supervision. Despite the forceful circumstances of her arrival, Hegai recognized Esther's potential for the monarchy, inclining him to forgive her reluctance.

Realizing the real possibility of Esther becoming the future queen, Hegai took exceptional steps for her. Unlike other women, she received cosmetics immediately, accelerating the usual twelve-month preparation process before meeting the king. This strategic move aimed to have Esther meet the king first.

Esther was given special provisions, including seven maidens as attendants, a service typically provided only for the queen. Also, Hegai enhanced the living conditions for Esther and her maidens in the harem. They were allocated more spacious rooms and provided with superior food and amenities. This special treatment was a testament to Hegai's perception of Esther's unique status and potential in the palace. Nevertheless, despite the special treatment and honor she received, Esther's heart was not swayed, and she had no desire to partake in the forced marriage.

Esther, under the guidance of Mordecai, chose not to reveal her people or her kindred. He hoped to save Esther by her being rejected by the king as someone of uncertain or common birth, rendering her unfit for queenship. Mordecai thought that as a result, the king would expel her from his palace, for he would not take a woman without any acknowledgment of her pedigree. It would be like taking as his queen one who was abandoned at birth and left in the marketplace.

Mordecai, driven by his deep concern for Esther's well-being, would walk in front of the court of the harem every day to learn how Esther was faring. He clearly understood the risks and dangers of Esther being in the harem, especially given her concealed identity and the unpredictable nature of the royal court.

Every woman underwent a year-long beautification process. This was not just for the sake of their physical appearance, but also to test their overall health and detect any hidden illnesses that may arise in different seasons. By testing them throughout the four seasons, they could ensure their beauty was not just skin-deep, but also a reflection of good internal health. The six winter months were spent being anointed with myrrh oil, which warms the limbs, and in the summer months, they were accustomed with perfumes and spices for a pleasant fragrance.

This lengthy and elaborate process reflects the opulence



and extravagance of the royal court, where appearances and aesthetics were of paramount importance. This meticulous approach to beauty and health highlights the especial care and attention to detail that was expected in the preparation of potential queens.

After completing the lengthy beautification process, each young lady was granted the privilege to request anything she desired to take with her to the king's palace. This served to give each maiden a semblance of agency in a situation where she had little control. It was an opportunity for them to express their desires, and perhaps subtly reveal their personalities.

The process involved spending a night with the king, then moving to a second harem overseen by Shaashgaz, the eunuch in charge of royal concubines. After the initial encounter with the king, the young lady would not return to him unless he specifically desired her presence and called for her by name.

When Esther, the daughter of Abihail, who was the uncle of Mordecai, was chosen to go before King Ahashverosh, her approach was unlike any of the other maidens. She possessed not only beauty and vibrance, but also dignity and honor, as the daughter of Abihail. These traits were imparted to her by her righteous father, along with a well educated mind and purity of character.

Esther chose to ask for nothing to take with her to the king except what Hegai, the king's eunuch, advised. This decision contrasts with the lavish, personal requests of the others, in desperate attempt to impress the king.

Esther was taken to King Ahashverosh, in his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. Despite the grandeur and prestige associated with being taken to the royal chamber, Esther felt nothing but forced. Even during her final approach to the king's royal chamber, she was taken under duress.

When the king met Esther, he loved her more than all the others, and she won his highest grace and favor. His affection was so great that it compelled him to personally place the crown on her head, a gesture signifying her immediate elevation to queen.

The king hosted a grand banquet for all his officials and courtiers, and called it "the banquet of Esther." This was not merely a celebration of her ascension to the throne but a strategic maneuver. Despite her new status as queen, Esther's national and familial origins remained a mystery to the king. To uncover these details, he employed three subtle yet calculated strategies.

Firstly, he focused on honor. By naming the banquet in her honor and ensuring its splendor, he aimed to kindle Esther's pride and sense of dignity. Amidst the gathering of nobility and officials, it was speculated that Esther might feel a compelling urge to disclose her lineage. This would have been keenly pertinent given the potential for embarrassment or awkwardness arising from her unknown origins in such a prestigious office.

Next, the king issued a decree to alleviate taxes throughout his provinces. The plan was deliberate, for surely Esther's hometown would be included in the tax relief. The king expected Esther to feel indebted to the benefit to her people and reveal her background. Perhaps in this way, Queen Esther could encourage even more favor and benevolence towards her people and their land.

Finally, following a similar direction, the king distributed gifts, lavishly as befits a king. His generosity was designed to encourage Esther to reveal her birthplace, suggesting that her nation should receive special gifts and favors from the king.

After Esther's coronation as queen, the remaining maidens were assembled a second time, but only to be sent back to their homes. The dismissal of the maidens was meant to



reassure Esther that she would not be replaced by another and to convince her of the permanence of her position. Surely now the king would accept her heritage, even if it was not illustrious. Perhaps this would ease her reservations and prompt her to reveal her true background. But despite the king's calculated moves, Esther remained true to Mordecai's instructions and kept her origins a secret.

Meanwhile, Mordecai was appointed to sit at the king's gate as one of the ministers of justice, an honor granted to him because the beautiful Esther had been discovered in his house. Thus, Esther would have trusted that they would do even greater honor and glory for him if they knew that she was his cousin. Yet her true identity and relationship with Mordecai were not disclosed.

In those days, before Haman's decree to annihilate the entire Jewish people, a cure was provided before the wound, to show that the wound was not for the sake of harm but only for the sake of healing. Thus, God arranged to heal His people by first placing Esther in the king's palace as queen. Then, God brought merit to Mordecai by establishing his kindness towards the king by saving his life.

At that time, when Mordecai was sitting at the palace gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who served as guards of the threshold, became disenfranchised with the king, and plotted to do away with him.

At that time, there were two divine purposes in Mordecai taking office at the king's gate. One, Mordecai's presence aroused the gatekeepers' jealousy, being keenly aware that Mordecai sat in greatness and honor while they stood on their

feet as guards. And two, God caused Mordecai to sit at the palace gate so that he would witness the eunuchs' vengeful plot. Thus, Mordecai's sitting at the palace gate was a cause for Israel's distress, the "wound," provoking Haman (in the beginning of the next chapter) to rage against Mordecai and his people. Yet, being at the palace gate was itself a cause for their redemption, the cure.

Mordecai learned of the assassination attempt and told Queen Esther. Mordecai did not explicitly instruct Esther to report this to the king in his name. Yet Esther, showing her deep respect and adherence to Mordecai, chose to relate that information to the king, explicitly crediting Mordecai with acquiring the vital information that saved his life.

And the plot to kill the king was investigated and found to be true. That is, the poison intended to kill the king had been discovered. The fact that the poison was found was a stroke of good fortune, as it must have been very well hidden.

Mordecai's act of loyalty to the king was not immediately rewarded, but noted in the official chronicles. These records were kept under the king's supervision to prevent any tampering or erasure by individuals with ulterior motives. This was another instance of divine providence, for had it been written in the general archives, which were controlled by Haman, he would have surely erased it. Instead, it was documented in the king's special chronicles, inaccessible to Haman. Additionally, this recording took place in the presence of the king, ensuring its accuracy and preventing any falsification by the scribe.

And the rebellious eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, were hanged on a gallows.



Chapter 3

HAMAN CONNIVES HIS WAY TO THE HIGHEST OFFICE IN PERSIA. MORDECAI'S REFUSAL TO BOW TO HIM SPARKS HAMAN'S HATRED AND HIS SUBSEQUENT PLOT AGAINST THE JEWISH PEOPLE.

Some time afterward, King Ahashverosh promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite; he advanced him and seated him higher than any of his fellow officials.

All the king's courtiers in the palace gate knelt and bowed low to Haman, for such was the king's order concerning him; but Mordecai would not kneel or bow low.

Then the king's courtiers who were in the palace gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?"

When they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's resolve would prevail; for he had explained to them that he was a Jew.

When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel or bow low to him, Haman was filled with rage.

But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone; having been told who Mordecai's people were, Haman plotted to do away with all the Jews, Mordecai's people, throughout the kingdom of Ahashverosh.

In the first month, that is, the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahashverosh, pur – which means "the lot" – was cast before Haman concerning every day and every month, [until it fell on] the twelfth month, that is, the month of Adar.

Haman then said to King Ahashverosh, "There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces of your realm, whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king's laws; and it is not in Your Majesty's interest to tolerate them.

If it please Your Majesty, let an edict be drawn for their destruction, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the stewards for deposit in the royal treasury."

אחר | הדברים האלה גדל המלך אחשוורוש את־המן בן־המדתא האגגי | וינשאהו וישם את־כסאו מעל כל־השרים אשר אתו:

וכל־עבדי המלך אשר־בשער המלך כרעים ומשתחוים להמן כי־כן צוה־לו המלך ומרדכי לא יכרע ולא ישתחוה:

ויאמרו עבדי המלך אשר־בשער המלך למרדכי מדוע אתה עובר את מצות המלך:

ויהי (באמרם) [באמרם] אליו יום ויום ולא שמע אליהם ויגידו להמן לראות היעמדו דברי מרדכי כי־הגיד להם אשר־הוא יהודי:

וירא המן כי־אין מרדכי כרע ומשתחוה לו וימלא המן חמה:

ויבז בעיניו לשלח יד במרדכי לבזו כי־הגידו לו את־עם מרדכי ויבקש המן להשמיד את־כל־היהודים אשר בכל־מלכות אחשוורוש עם מרדכי:

בחדש הראשון הוא־חדש ניסן בשנת שתיים עשרה למלך אחשוורוש הפיל פול הוא הגולל לפני המן מיום | ליום {ומחדש לחדש שנים־עשר הוא־חדש אדר: }ס

ויאמר המן למלך אחשוורוש ישנו עם־אחד מפזר ומפזר בין העמים בכל מדינות מלכותך ודתייהם שנות מכל־עם וא־ת־דתי המלך אינם עושים ולמלך אין־שנה להניחם:

אם־על־המלך טוב יכתב לאבדם ועשרת אלפים כפר־כסף אשקול על־ידי עמי המלאכה להביא אל־גבני המלך:

ויסר המלך את־טבעתו מעל ידו | ויתנה להמן בן־המדתא האגגי צרר היהודים:

ויאמר המלך להמן הכסף נתון לך והעם לעשות בו כטוב בעיניך:

ויקראו ספרי המלך בחדש הראשון בשלושה עשר יום בו ויכתב בכל־אשר־צוה המן אל אחשדרפני־המלך ואל־הפחות אשר | על־מדינה ומדינה ואל־שרי עם ועם מדינה ומדינה ככתבה ועם ועם כלשונן בשם המלך אחשוורוש נכתב ונחתם בטבעת המלך:

ונשלוח ספרים ביד הרצים אל־כל־מדינות המלך להשמיד להרג ולאבד את־כל־היהודים מנער ועד־זקן טף ונשים ביום אחד בשלושה עשר לחדש שנים־עשר הוא־חדש אדר ושללם לבז:

פתשגן הכתב להגות דת בכל־מדינה ומדינה גלוי לכל־העמים להיות עתדים ליום הזה:

הרצים יצאו דחופים בדבר המלך והדת נתנה בשושן הבירה {והמלך והמן ישבו לשותות והעיר שושן נבוכה: }ס

Thereupon the king removed his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the foe of the Jews.

And the king said, "The money and the people are yours to do with as you see fit."

On the thirteenth day of the first month, the king's scribes were summoned and a decree was issued, as Haman directed, to the king's satraps, to the governors of every province, and to the officials of every people, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language. The orders were issued in the name of King Ahashverosh and sealed with the king's signet.

Accordingly, written instructions were dispatched

by couriers to all the king's provinces to destroy, massacre, and exterminate all the Jews, young and old, children and women, on a single day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month – that is, the month of Adar – and to plunder their possessions.

The content of the document was to the effect that a law should be proclaimed in every single province; it was to be publicly displayed to all the peoples, so that they might be ready for that day.

The couriers went out posthaste on the royal mission, and the decree was proclaimed in the capitol city Shushan. The king and Haman sat down to feast, but the city of Shushan was dumfounded.

After the assassination plot was foiled, King Ahashverosh forgot about Mordecai's role in saving his life. Out of misplaced gratitude, and in failing to determine how to reward Esther for bringing the matter to his attention and thereby saving his life, Ahashverosh sought to reward those responsible for advising the search for the new queen. The one who first introduced the idea was the eunuch, Mehuman. As a result, King Ahashverosh promoted him, but soon forgot what he had done to earn it.

Amidst the confusion, it was easy for the shrewd and opportunistic Haman to step in. Through crafty manipulations, Haman intimated to the king that it was he who had saved his life. Haman's plan worked and the king elevated him to greatness, dressing him in noble garments that were not rightfully his.

The honor, of course, belonged to Mordecai. But the king's error was orchestrated from On High. Glory happened to fall on the head of the wicked temporarily, just until the time came to return the crown to its rightful owner.

Though Haman eventually reached the highest position in the kingdom, it was not an immediate ascent. He initially served as a minister – and gradually rose through the ranks until he became the head of all ministers, the king's right hand.

Ahashverosh bestowed another honor upon Haman – all courtiers in the palace who held positions at the king's gate were required to bow and prostrate themselves before him. This was a great privilege, as typically such honor is reserved solely for the king, not one of his servants. But Ahashverosh waived this tradition and commanded that even at the king's gate, Haman should be shown this sign of respect and reverence.

Had it been just Haman's honor at stake when it came to Mordecai bowing to him, Haman technically could have waived the requirement, especially as he was not ordered to enforce it. But it was the king's decree to bow to Haman, so there was no way around it. Nevertheless, Mordecai staunchly refused to bow.

The reason why Mordecai was so determined not to kneel or bow is because this act of prostration was intended to be

idolatrous, as ancient pagan cultures attributed divinity to anyone who possessed extraordinary wisdom, strength, or wealth, claiming that he was touched by the gods or that a star or higher power was influencing him. Being a Jew and therefore committed to monotheism, Mordecai refrained from bowing to avoid any association with idolatrous practices.

Secondly, the king's decree only applied to those who met two conditions: being a servant of the king and holding office at the king's gate. Even though Mordecai met the condition of having a position at the king's gate, he was technically not a servant of the king. That is, according to Persian law at the time, Jews were not accepted as servants of the king.

But upon witnessing Mordecai's refusal to bow, the king's courtiers at the palace gate asked him, "Why do you disobey the king's command?" The servants did not betray Mordecai out of spite; they were commanded to report any disobedience to the king. They warned Mordecai repeatedly, day after day, before finally informing Haman that Mordecai would not bow to him due to his Jewish faith.

The king's servants considered whether it was indeed justifiable for Mordecai to refrain from bowing to Haman when he was at a distance or out of sight, as it would appear to be serving Haman's self-declared divinity, forbidden by the Jewish faith. But when in Haman's immediate presence, they presumed that bowing would be an appropriate display of honor and respect, not idolatry. In that case, refusing to bow to Haman could not be perceived as a refusal on account of his Jewish faith, but because he was rebelling against the king's law.

They advised Haman to watch Mordecai closely, as they wished to test their claim that he did not bow because of his Jewish faith. If Mordecai were to bow in Haman's immediate presence, it would affirm that his refusal to bow from a distance was purely a matter of religious observance and not a direct act of rebellion. But if Mordecai persisted in his refusal even in

Haman's presence, it would suggest a challenge to the king's authority, framing Mordecai's actions as rebellious rather than religiously motivated.

When the time came and Mordecai approached Haman, Mordecai stood before him and refused to bow. This clear defiance, observed firsthand by Haman, ignited his rage. Haman felt that Mordecai's lack of deference was a direct challenge to his own status and power. Clearly this disobedience was intended as a personal affront, Haman thought, unexcused by the observance of a religious or faith-based taboo.

Nevertheless, Haman's malevolence and pride led him to expand his anger beyond Mordecai. The very mention of connecting Mordecai's stubbornness with a religious imperative, although it had been disproven, ignited hatred in Haman towards all Jews and their faith. He sought to eradicate all Jews because they were Mordecai's people and shared his religion, and he wanted to do away with the entire religion by annihilating its adherents.

Driven by vengeance towards Mordecai and to the Jewish faith, during the twelfth year of King Ahashverosh's reign, Haman began formulating his plan of genocide. It was the first month, Nisan, when Haman cast a certain kind of lot, called pur (from which the name of the holiday Purim is derived, being the plural form of the word "pur,"), to determine which date would be most auspicious to seal the fate of the Jewish people throughout the kingdom.

The lot was cast on the thirteenth of Nisan, and undoubtedly Haman's intention was to take immediate revenge on the people of God the very next day, the fourteenth of Nisan, but that day came up in the lot as unpropitious. He cast lots for the fifteenth and sixteenth of Nisan, but the lot kept on dismissing each day, until Haman reached the end of the month.

So Haman started from the first day of the following month,



Iyar, but again the lot rejected each day until the last possible day. That is, Haman started with the 14th of Nisan, then tried each day until he reached the 30th of Nisan, then he started from the 1st of Iyar and continued until he came to the thirteenth of Iyar, the last day it could have come out on, as one day of a month must be selected according to the system. The suggestion was that Haman would have to wait an entire year, until the next year on the thirteenth of Nisan, to proceed with his diabolical plan.

So Haman thought that perhaps it is the month that was inopportune. So he began casting lots for the months, starting with Nisan, but the lot negated that suggestion. "Not this month at all?" Haman sighed. But maybe he would not have had to wait so long after all, Haman wondered. Maybe the lot would fall out on the following month, Iyar. But again the lot rejected the idea, postponing the date from month to month until the final month of the year, which is Adar.

Haman did not cast lots for the days of the month again, as the thirteenth day had already been selected in the first casting. Thus, the lot fell on the thirteenth of Adar, eleven months away.

If he had first cast lots for the months, by divine providence, the process would have again selected Adar, being the latest month, furthest away. And if Haman had then cast lots for the days, the lot would have fallen on the last day of Adar (i.e., not on the thirteenth of Adar but just over two weeks later). But since he had cast lots for the days first, starting with the fourteenth day (and it was not his original intention to cast lots for the months at all), it fell on the furthest day, the thirteenth. The lot first postponed his plans from day to day, to the last possible outcome, and then from month to month, until the most distant month.

In any event, from the uncanny results of the lot casting, Haman should have recognized God's hand at work, setting

everything in motion in a way that would provide time for the salvation of the Jewish people. Therefore, the Book of Esther refers to "the lot before Haman," as this lot had been prepared in advance from On High for the sake of Haman's downfall.

Haman proposed his plan of genocide to King Ahashverosh but deceived him by withholding crucial information. If the king had known that the people he was being persuaded to harm were the Jews, known for their wisdom and distinction, he would not have consented. Even if it were an inferior or despised people, Haman's plan of annihilation would not have swayed the king. But Haman shrewdly skirted around their identity, referring to them as a vague and unknown group. He falsely accused the Jewish people of causing harm to all peoples, in matters of faith and politics.

When a distinct people live in their own country, they typically do not pose a threat to other nations. Similarly, if they are scattered among different countries, as long as they have separate cities in each one, their presence is deemed harmless and does not warrant destruction.

In this case, Haman declared the Jewish people to be dispersed and spread out, suggesting they do not have a specific country, and they reside in various neighborhoods rather than designated cities. Furthermore, their presence extends beyond a few countries; they encompass all provinces of the empire. This dispersion allows their influence to permeate every community, causing widespread harm, Haman argued.

Their unique laws and customs, Haman explained to the king, setting them apart from all other religions, with a multitude of diverse commandments that make their religion seem like many religions in one. Not only is their law different, but also their way of life, including food, clothing, and behavior, making them a potential source of discord within the empire.

Haman also accused them of not obeying the king's laws. This



accusation was particularly manipulative, suggesting that their religious laws led them to disregard even the king's non-religious decrees, potentially inciting rebellion among other peoples. Haman's cunning lies insinuated that any leniency or tolerance shown to the Jews would be detrimental to the king's interest and the kingdom's stability. He contended that there was no benefit in tolerating them that could possibly outweigh the harm they purportedly caused.

Haman said to King Ahashverosh, "If it pleases Your Majesty, let an edict be drawn for their destruction, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the stewards for deposit in the royal treasury." Haman, in his cunning and manipulative approach to King Ahashverosh, proposed a deceptively clever plan under the guise of statecraft. He did not outright reveal his intention to exterminate the Jewish people physically, but instead used language that suggested a desire to "destroy" them, ambiguously implying the eradication of their distinct identity and religious practices. This subtle use of language masked his true intent, which was far more sinister.

Haman's suggestion to the king cleverly avoided the impression of a direct financial burden on the royal treasury. He presented his scheme as one that would not only be self-funding but would also generate a considerable sum for the royal coffers. Haman claimed that those who would carry out his plan would do so with such enthusiasm and commitment to the cause that they would willingly contribute money to the royal treasury. This suggestion of a potential financial gain was designed to appeal to the king's interests, making the proposal seem more advantageous and acceptable.

King Ahashverosh, misled by Haman's deceit, unwittingly facilitated Haman's plot against the Jews. In this sense, the king's action was not out of malice but due to Haman's manipulation, casting Haman as the sole architect and instigator of the plot against the Jews.

Not fully aware of Haman's true intentions, the king handed over his signet ring to Haman. This act of trust essentially gave Haman the power to seal documents in the king's name. Exploiting this trust, Haman authored edicts for the extermination of the Jews.

The mention of Haman's lineage as an Agagite serves to emphasize the deep-seated animosity that stems from his ancestry. By specifically highlighting his lineage and characterizing him as a "foe of the Jews," the Book of Esther emphasizes the longstanding and historical nature of his hatred towards them.

The king gave permission for Haman's plot of genocide, stating that both the funds and the people were at Haman's disposal in order that no one would think that he did it for the money. Ahashverosh told Haman that he would provide him with the funds for his expenditures from the royal treasury.

The text reveals the king's ignorance of Haman's true intentions, believing that Haman was engaged in improving the kingdom by addressing what he sees as the need to bring a reckoning upon the Jewish people by wiping out their religious beliefs and practices. The king placed the money and manpower in Haman's hands to do what seemed right in his eyes, for the presumed betterment of the empire.

On the thirteenth day of the first month, the king's scribes were summoned and a decree was issued, as Haman directed. Fearing that King Ahashverosh might eventually learn the truth about the Jews and reconsider his decision, Haman quickly ordered the royal scribes to draft letters on that very day. These letters were not based on the king's specific instructions but on Haman's dictation. Yet the orders were issued in the name of King Ahashverosh and sealed with the royal signet ring.

To effectively communicate with all the provinces of the



empire, Haman wrote to every province and people in their language and script, accounting for the diverse languages and scripts used in different regions.

The royal edict was dispatched immediately on that day by couriers. This swift action was a strategic move to prevent any possibility of the king retracting the decree, as once a royal edict written in the king's name is issued, it cannot be revoked.

The letters were delivered by couriers to all the king's provinces to destroy, massacre, and exterminate all the Jews, young and old, children and women, on a single day. It was to be on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month – that is, the month of Adar – and to plunder their possessions. Haman chose for the general destruction to happen in all provinces on the same day to ensure that there would be nowhere for survivors to seek refuge.

Haman deliberately avoids mentioning in his letters that the decree applies to all provinces. This was an intentional omission in order to lead each governor and satrap to believe that the edict is specific to their province. This was to reduce the guilt of partaking in such a largescale genocide while simultaneously increasing their compliance and fear of deviating from an order targeting their province specifically.

The document sent to the provincial leaders was sealed with the king's signet, marked on the outside not to be opened

until the 13th of Adar. Along with these sealed letters, open letters were sent, displayed to all peoples, readying them for an attack on the 13th of Adar. But only on that day would the sealed letters be opened and the targeted group would be named there.

This secrecy prevented the Jews from seeking help or intervention at the king's court, and ensured they wouldn't flee or hide, as they wouldn't know that they were to be the victims of the impending threat. Once the letters were opened, the local populations would rise up against the Jews, who would be caught unprepared when the true nature of the decree is revealed.

After the decree was sent out, Haman and the king sat down to feast in celebration. This is further evidence that Ahashverosh was unaware of Haman's secret plan to annihilate all the Jewish people, for had he been aware of issuing a decree to destroy an entire nation, how could he sit down to feast? Among judges, it is customary not to drink wine on the day a death sentence is pronounced for even one individual. Certainly, when an entire nation was sold out for destruction, how could the king feast?

The people of Shushan were perplexed by the sealed documents, allowing in their ignorance the devious plan to proceed. However, God thwarted this plan through Mordecai, as will be explained.



Chapter 4

AWARE OF HAMAN'S PLOT AGAINST THE JEWS, MORDECAI PUBLICLY MOURNS, PROMPTING WIDESPREAD FASTING. HE URGES QUEEN ESTHER TO INTERCEDE WITH KING AHASHVEROSH DESPITE THE RISK

When Mordecai learned all that had happened, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes. He went through the city, crying out loudly and bitterly,

until he came in front of the palace gate; for one could not enter the palace gate wearing sackcloth. –

Also, in every province that the king's command and decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing, and everybody lay in sackcloth and ashes. –

When Esther's maidens and eunuchs came and informed her, the queen was greatly agitated. She sent clothing for Mordecai to wear, so that he might take off his sackcloth; but he refused.

Thereupon Esther summoned Hathach, one of the eunuchs whom the king had appointed to serve her, and sent him to Mordecai to learn the why and wherefore of it all.

Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square in front of the palace gate;

and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and all about the money that Haman had offered to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews.

He also gave him the written text of the law that had been proclaimed in Shushan for their destruction. [He bade him] show it to Esther and inform her, and charge her to go to the king and to appeal to him and to plead with him for her people.

When Hathach came and delivered Mordecai's message to Esther,

Esther told Hathach to take back to Mordecai the following reply:

"All the king's courtiers and the people of the king's provinces know that if any person, man or woman,

וּמֶרְדֵּכַי יָדַע אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה וַיִּקְרַע מֶרְדֵּכַי אֶת־בְּגָדָיו וַיִּלְבָּשׁ שָׂק וַאֲפֹר וַיֵּצֵא בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר וַיִּזְעַק זַעֲקָה גְדוֹלָה וּמָרָה:

וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי אֵין לָבוֹא אֶל־שַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ בִּלְבוּשׁ שָׂק:

וּבְכָל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ וּדְתוּ מִיָּעֶ אֲבָל גְּדוֹלֵי־הַיְּהוּדִים וְצוּם וּבְכִי וּמִסָּפַד שָׂק וַאֲפֹר יָצַע לְרַבִּים:

וּתְבוּאִינָה (וְתָבוּאָנָה) נַעֲרוֹת אֶסְתֵּר וְסָרִיסֶיהָ וַיִּגִּידוּ לָהּ וּתְחַלְחַל הַמֶּלֶכָה (מֵאֵד וּתְשַׁלַּח בְּגָדִים לְהַלְבִּישׁ אֶת־מֶרְדֵּכַי וּלְהַסִּיר שָׂקוֹ מֵעָלָיו וְלֹא קִבֹּל:

וּתְקַרָּא אֶסְתֵּר לְהִתָּךְ מִסָּרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר הָעֶמִיד לִפְנֵיהָ וּתַצִּוָּהָ עַל־מֶרְדֵּכַי לְדַעַת מַה־זֶּה וְעַל־מַה־זֶּה:

וַיֵּצֵא הַתֶּךְ אֶל־מֶרְדֵּכַי אֶל־רְחוֹב הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי שַׁעַר־הַמֶּלֶךְ:

וַיַּגִּדֵּל מֶרְדֵּכַי אֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר קָרָהוּ וְאֵת אֶפְרַשֶׁת הַכֶּסֶף אֲשֶׁר אָמַר הֶמֶן לְשָׁקוֹל עַל־גִּבֵּי הַמֶּלֶךְ (בִּיהוּדִים) [בִּיהוּדִים] לְאַבְדָּם:

וְאֶת־פִּתְשָׁנָה כְּתֹב־הָדָת אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן בְּשׁוּשָׁן לְהַשְׁמִידם בְּתוֹם לֹא לְהַרְאוֹת אֶת־אֶסְתֵּר וּלְהַגִּיד לָהּ וּלְצַוֹת עָלֶיהָ לָבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהִתְחַנֵּן־לּוֹ וּלְבַקֵּשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי עַל־עַמָּה:

וַיָּבֹאוּ הַתֶּךְ וַיַּגִּד לְאֶסְתֵּר אֶת דְּבָרֵי מֶרְדֵּכַי:

וּתְאָמַר אֶסְתֵּר לְהִתָּךְ וּתַצִּוָּהָ אֶל־מֶרְדֵּכַי:

כָּל־עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְעַם־מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ יָדְעִים אֲשֶׁר כָּל־אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר יָבוֹא־אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־הַחֹצֵר הַפְּנִימִית אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִקְרָא אַחֲרָיו דְּתוֹ לְהַמִּית לָבֶד מֵאֲשֶׁר יוֹשִׁיט־לּוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־שַׁרְבִיט הַזֶּה וְחִיָּה וְאִי לֹא יִקְרָאֵתִי לָבוֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ זֶה שְׁלוֹשִׁים יוֹם:

{וַיִּגִּידוּ לְמֶרְדֵּכַי אֶת דְּבָרֵי אֶסְתֵּר: } פ

וַיֹּאמֶר מֶרְדֵּכַי לְהָשִׁיב אֶל־אֶסְתֵּר אֶת־דִּמִּי בְּנַפְשׁוֹ לְהַמְלֹךְ בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ מִכָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים:

כִּי אִם־הִחַרְשׁ תַּחֲרִישִׁי בַּעַת הַזֹּאת רָחוּם וְהַצִּלָּה יַעֲמֹד לַיהוּדִים מִמְּקוֹם אַחֲרֵי וְאֵת וּבֵית־אֲבִיךָ תֹּאבְדוּ וּמִי יוֹדֵעַ אִם־לָעַת כְּזֹאת הִנָּגַעַת לְמַלְכוּת:

וּתְאָמַר אֶסְתֵּר לְהָשִׁיב אֶל־מֶרְדֵּכַי:

לָךְ כְּנוֹס אֶת־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים הַנִּמְצָאִים בְּשׁוּשָׁן וְצוּמוּ עָלַי וְאֶת־תְּאֵכְלוֹ וְאֶת־שִׁתּוֹ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים לַיְלָה וְיוֹם גַּם־אֲנִי וְנִעְרָתִי אֲצוּם בָּן וּבָתָן אָבֹא אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־כָדָת וְכֹאֲשֶׁר אֲבָדְתִּי אֲבָדְתִּי:


{וַיַּעֲבֵר מֶרְדֵּכַי וַיַּעַשׂ כְּכָל אֲשֶׁר־צִוְּתָהּ עָלָיו אֶסְתֵּר: } ס

enters the king's presence in the inner court without having been summoned, there is but one law for him – that he be put to death. Only if the king extends the golden scepter to him may he live. Now I have not been summoned to visit the king for the last thirty days."

When Mordecai was told what Esther had said,

Mordecai had this message delivered to Esther: "Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king's palace.

On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from

espite Haman's attempts to keep the plan a secret, everything was revealed to Mordecai through divine oversight. Mordecai was aware of all the dealings between Haman and the king, how Haman had deceived the king, and all aspects of his wicked plot.

This knowledge led Mordecai to prepare in two ways. Mordecai mournfully tore his clothes and dressed in sackcloth and ashes. These acts of repentance and prayer were intended to appeal directly to God, for it is He who controls the hearts of kings.

And in his efforts to overturn the decree through natural means, Mordecai planned to make the situation known to all nations and the king himself in order to rally support for the plight of the Jewish people, reaching out to advocates to overturn the decree. To do so, Mordecai took to the streets, dressed in sackcloth and ashes, and publicly mourned, crying out loudly and bitterly.

Mordecai took his vigil as far as the palace gate, a deliberate and conspicuous act aimed at attracting the attention of the royal court, whether to Esther or to the king himself. Adhering to the rule against entering the palace gate in mourning attire,

another quarter, while you and your father's house will perish. And who knows, perhaps you have attained this royal position for just such a crisis."

Then Esther sent back this answer to Mordecai:

"Go, assemble all the Jews who live in Shushan, and fast on my behalf; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens will observe the same fast. Then I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law; and if I am to perish, I shall perish!"

So Mordecai went about [the city] and did just as Esther had commanded him.

Mordecai went no further than the gate. But this unusual act of wearing sackcloth near the palace was intended to make a statement.

Mordecai's public outcry was the catalyst for spreading this devastating news, as the nature of the decree was initially unknown to the public due to the sealed letters. The news, therefore, was not known in all cities and towns, but it reached certain regions in each province where King Ahashverosh's command and decree reached. Upon hearing about the crisis, Jews experienced profound grief. They immediately took to fasting, weeping, and wailing, and everybody wore sackcloth and ashes.

Queen Esther's maidens and eunuchs informed her of Mordecai's mournful behavior and attire. This deeply troubled her and prompted her to send a messenger to hear from Mordecai himself. Along with the messenger, she sent clothes for him to appear presentable enough to enter the king's gate. He could even wear the clothes over the sackcloth at least to gain entry. However, Mordecai refused the clothing, not wanting to rely on human contrivance in any way that would detract from his direct appeal to God.

Realizing that Mordecai was keeping a secret, Esther sent her trusted confidant, Hathach, a discreet eunuch appointed by the king to serve her. Since she did not know if Mordecai would trust Hathach, she commanded Hathach to discreetly investigate the cause of the matter. She also instructed him to explore “the why and wherefore of it all.” This is akin to a skilled doctor who examines both the nature of the illness and its cause, for it is impossible to cure the symptoms without eliminating the root cause.

Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square, which was located in front of the palace gate. Mordecai informed the messenger of the events that had befallen him, starting with the reason behind it all, which was his refusal to bow down to Haman.

He also divulged the details about the money involved, the hefty sum offered by Haman to finance the extermination of the Jews. In front of King Ahashverosh, Haman had claimed that those involved in carrying out the task would happily contribute ten thousand talents of silver to show their eagerness and loyalty to the king. But in reality, Haman planned to collect this amount through taxes on the spoils and plunder obtained from wiping out the Jews, thus deceiving Ahashverosh.

Mordecai handed Hathach a copy of the public notice, which references the future date when the sealed document would be opened and made known to all. This second letter, kept in the possession of the governor of Shushan remained sealed, it held the fate of the Jewish people and the call for their extermination.

Mordecai asked Hathach to show the public notice to Esther, suggesting that their people were in grave danger. Mordecai added the instruction, “and inform her,” hinting that there was something else in store for the Jewish people to be revealed at the future date, and there was a need to prepare for battle on the fixed date in the future. The intent here was to draw

Esther’s attention to the edict that would be revealed at the future date, suggesting that the anti-Semites were preparing to annihilate them.

In this way, Mordecai urged Esther to go to the king and to appeal to him and to plead with him for her people, to save their exiled nation from the hands of their enemies.

Hathach returned to Queen Esther and delivered Mordecai’s message to her. In reply, Esther, cautious about Hathach being recognized by Haman’s men for frequently relaying messages between her and Mordecai, instructed Hathach to deliver her response to Mordecai through a different messenger.

Esther’s message in reply to Mordecai was: “All the king’s courtiers and the people of the king’s provinces know that if any person, man or woman, enters the king’s presence in the inner court without having been summoned, there is but one law for that person – the death sentence. Only if the king extends the golden scepter to the uninvited visitor may he or she live. Now I have not been summoned to visit the king for the last thirty days.”

Esther’s message was meant to communicate her two main concerns: Firstly, entering without being summoned poses a risk of death, and even if the king chooses to spare her, it would be seen as an act of grace rather than justice. This would limit her ability to advocate or plead on behalf of her people effectively.

Secondly, she suggests that a safer, more opportune moment for her to approach the king is likely to arise soon, given that she is usually called upon regularly. Hence, it would be more prudent to wait for a formal summons than to risk death and the loss of any chance to help her people.

Mordecai replied with this message to Esther: “Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in



the king's palace." Here Mordecai is guiding Esther on a very risky, self-sacrificial path. There are several ideas he draws to Esther's attention in enlisting her commitment to saving her people.

Firstly, whenever we encounter events that deviate from the norm, it is incumbent upon us to recognize that they may be orchestrated by God for a specific purpose. Esther's ascent from her humble origins to the palace was extraordinary and seemed to be part of God's plan. Given the concurrent crisis facing the Jewish people, it appeared that Esther's elevation was divinely intended to offer a means of salvation for her people's suffering.

Mordecai also conveyed to Esther that every tribulation that befalls the Jewish people is destined for a certain time, along with a predetermined auspicious moment for salvation, prepared and determined by divine orchestration.

Esther's presence in the palace was solely to facilitate the salvation of Israel. This did not mean that the entire salvation depended solely on her. If she were to fail, other means of deliverance would undoubtedly arise. Therefore, Mordecai told her, "If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place." And consequently, "you and your father's house will perish," as her title and position would not save her.

Mordecai elaborated further, "And who knows, perhaps you have attained royalty for just such a time as this." This means to say that Esther should not assume she would be of help to them after some days when she might be called by the king.

It is possible that God appointed her for this specific time, for their deliverance from this crisis today. If she waited until tomorrow, her time would have passed, as God would have arranged other means for tomorrow. Esther's position would thus become redundant, and she would "perish along with her father's house." That is, her elevated status would no longer serve its purpose.

After Mordecai assured Esther that the Jews would ultimately be saved by God, regardless of her actions, and that her involvement would merely expedite their deliverance, she resolved to proceed, trusting that even if she were to be executed, it would not spell the end of hope; salvation for the Jews would still arise through other means.

Then Esther sent back this answer to Mordecai: "Go, assemble all the Jews who live in Shushan, and fast on my behalf; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens will observe the same fast. Then I shall go to the king, though it is contrary to the law; and if I am to perish, I shall perish!"

Mordecai's advice emboldened Esther to approach the king at the earliest possible opportunity, even against the royal law. "And if I perish, I perish," Esther says, acknowledging that if the king executed her for disobeying his commands, the harm would befall her alone, and not the entire Jewish people. Deliverance and relief for the Jews would come from another place.

So Mordecai went about all the Jewish neighborhoods in Shushan and did as Esther had commanded him.



Chapter 5

ESTHER APPROACHES KING AHASHVEROSH, GAINING HIS FAVOR. HAMAN RAGES AT MORDECAI'S REFUSAL TO BOW TO HIM, LEADING HIM TO CONSTRUCT A GALLOWS FOR MORDECAI'S EXECUTION.

On the third day, Esther put on royal apparel and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, facing the king's palace, while the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room facing the entrance of the palace.

As soon as the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won his favor. The king extended to Esther the golden scepter which he had in his hand, and Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.

"What troubles you, Queen Esther?" the king asked her. "And what is your request? Even to half the kingdom, it shall be granted to you."

"If it please Your Majesty," Esther replied, "let Your Majesty and Haman come today to the feast that I have prepared for him."

The king commanded, "Tell Haman to hurry and do Esther's bidding." So the king and Haman came to the feast that Esther had prepared.

At the wine feast, the king asked Esther, "What is your wish? It shall be granted to you. And what is your request? Even to half the kingdom, it shall be fulfilled."

"My wish," replied Esther, "my request –

if Your Majesty will do me the favor, if it please Your Majesty to grant my wish and accede to my request – let Your Majesty and Haman come to the feast which I will prepare for them; and tomorrow I will do Your Majesty's bidding."

That day Haman went out happy and lighthearted. But when Haman saw Mordecai in the palace gate, and Mordecai did not rise or even stir on his account, Haman was filled with rage at him.

Nevertheless, Haman controlled himself and went home. He sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh,

**וַיְהִי אִּבְיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי וַתִּלְבָּשׁ אֶסְתֵּר מְלָכוּת וַתַּעֲמֹד בַּחֲצַר בֵּית־הַמֶּלֶךְ הַפְּנִימִית
נִכְּחַ בַּיִת הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמֶּלֶךְ יוֹשֵׁב עַל־כִּסֵּא מְלָכוּתוֹ בְּבֵית הַמְּלָכוּת נִכְּחַ פֶּתַח הַבַּיִת:**

**וַיְהִי כִּרְאוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־אֶסְתֵּר הַמְּלָכָה עֹמֶדֶת בַּחֲצַר נִשְׁאָה
חֹן בְּעֵינָיו וַיִּנָּשֵׁט הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאֶסְתֵּר אֶת־שַׁרְבִיט הַזָּהָב אֲשֶׁר
(בְּיָדוֹ וַתִּקְרַב אֶסְתֵּר וַתִּגַּע בְּרֹאשׁ הַשַּׁרְבִיט: }ס**

**וַיֹּאמֶר לָהּ הַמֶּלֶךְ מַה־לָּךְ אֶסְתֵּר הַמְּלָכָה וּמַה־
בְּקִשְׁתְּךָ עַד־חֲצִי הַמְּלָכוּת וַיַּגִּתָּן לָךְ:**

**וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר אֶם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב יָבוֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָמָן
הַיּוֹם אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתֶּה אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתִי לוֹ:**

**וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ מַה־רוֹ מִהֲרוֹ אֶת־הָמָן לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־דְּבַר אֶסְתֵּר וַיָּבֹא
הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָמָן אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתֶּה אֲשֶׁר־עָשְׂתָה אֶסְתֵּר:**

**וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאֶסְתֵּר בְּמִשְׁתֶּה הַזֶּה מַה־שְּׂאֵלְתְּךָ וַיַּגִּתָּן
לָךְ וּמַה־בְּקִשְׁתְּךָ עַד־חֲצִי הַמְּלָכוּת וַתַּעֲשׂ:**

וַתַּעַן אֶסְתֵּר וַתֹּאמֶר שְׂאֵלְתִּי וּבְקִשְׁתִּי:

**אֶם־מִצְאִיתִי חֹן בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֶם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב לִתֵּת אֶת־
שְׂאֵלְתִּי וְלַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־בְּקִשְׁתִּי יָבוֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָמָן אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתֶּה
אֲשֶׁר אֶעֱשֶׂה לָהֶם וּמִחֵר אֶעֱשֶׂה כְּדִבְרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ:**

**וַיֵּצֵא הָמָן בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא שְׂמֵחַ וְטוֹב לֵב וּכְרָאוֹת הָמָן אֶת־מֶרְדֳּכָי בִּשְׁעַר
הַמֶּלֶךְ וְלֹא־הָם וְלֹא־עַ מִמֶּנּוּ וַיִּמְלֵא הָמָן עַל־מֶרְדֳּכָי חֲמָה:**

וַיִּתְאַפֵּק הָמָן וַיָּבֹא אֶל־בֵּיתוֹ וַיִּשְׁלַח וַיִּבֵּא אֶת־אֲהֲבָיו וְאֶת־זָרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ:

**וַיְסַפֵּר לָהֶם הָמָן אֶת־כְּבוֹד עֹשָׁרוֹ וְרֹב בָּגָיו וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר גָּדְלוֹ
הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר נִשְׂאוֹ עַל־הַשָּׂרִים וְעַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ:**

**וַיֹּאמֶר הָמָן אֶף לֹא־הִבִּיְאָה אֶסְתֵּר הַמְּלָכָה עִם־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמִּשְׁתֶּה
אֲשֶׁר־עָשְׂתָה כִּי אֶם־אוֹתִי וְגַם־לְמִחֵר אֲנִי קְרוֹאֶלָה עִם־הַמֶּלֶךְ:**

**וְכָל־זֶה אֵינְנוּ שׂוֹהֵ לִי בְּכָל־עַת אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי רֹאֶה אֶת־
מֶרְדֳּכָי הַיְּהוּדִי יוֹשֵׁב בִּשְׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ:**

**וַתֹּאמֶר לוֹ זָרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ וְכָל־אֲהֲבָיו יַעֲשׂוּ־עִץ גָּבֹה חֲמִשִּׁים אַמָּה
וּבִבְקָר אֶמְר לַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּתְּלוּ אֶת־מֶרְדֳּכָי עָלָיו וּבֹא־עִם־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־
(הַמִּשְׁתֶּה שְׂמֵחַ וַיִּיטֹב הַדָּבָר לִפְנֵי הָמָן וַיַּעַשׂ הַעֵץ: }ס**

**and Haman told them about his great wealth
and his many sons, and all about how the king
had promoted him and advanced him above**

the officials and the king's courtiers.

"What is more," said Haman, "Queen Esther held a feast, and besides the king she did not invite anyone but me. And tomorrow as well I am invited by her along with the king.

Yet all this means nothing to me every time I see



On the third day, Esther put on royal garments. Esther's role as queen suited her perfectly and her appearance was so majestic that all who saw her recognized that she was fit for royalty, as if she was clothed in righteousness itself. She went and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, facing the palace, while the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room facing the entrance of the palace.

The king's palace and the royal house were two different areas. The royal house, close to the court where the king sat on his throne to judge the people, was the king's usual location for attending to the nation's affairs. The king's palace, on the other hand, contained his personal chambers where he resided when not involved in governance. Esther positioned herself in front of the king's personal chambers, but by divine providence, the king happened to be sitting in the royal house, near the courtyard. Moreover, it was arranged that his throne was set facing the entrance, enabling him to see Esther immediately.

As soon as the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won his favor. The king's affection for Esther was so great that he never considered that the rule that no one could enter the inner court of the king without permission would apply to Esther. His love for her was such that her presence in his royal house was always a joy and a privilege, and he never entertained the thought that she would need to stand in the court waiting for the scepter to be extended to her.

that Jew Mordecai sitting in the palace gate."

Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows be erected, fifty cubits high, and in the morning ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on it. Then you can go gaily with the king to the feast." The proposal pleased Haman, and he erected the gallows.

Therefore, when the king saw her humbly standing in the courtyard and not entering, even though she was his beloved queen and the decree should not have applied to her, this further gained his favor. Ahashverosh saw her unassuming presentation as a reflection of her genuine modesty. Moved by his affection, the king willingly extended to Esther the golden scepter, which he had in his hand. It was unusual for the scepter to be in the king's hand at any given moment, so this was a sign that divine providence was guiding the events.

Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. King Ahashverosh asked, "What troubles you, Queen Esther?" and "What is your request?" he understood that something of great significance had driven her to come before him. His inquiries aimed to determine whether Esther's visit was motivated by a need to avoid personal harm or to seek a notable benefit.

The king's first question, "What troubles you," sought to identify any distress or harm that Esther might be experiencing. His second question, "What is your request?" was directed at understanding if she desired to gain some advantage or profit. Initially, the king's response did not include a promise of action, indicating his readiness to fulfill her request only if it was related to her personal needs. However, Ahashverosh assures her, "Even to half the kingdom, it shall be granted to you," broadening the scope of his willingness to act to requests that involved acting on behalf of others or pertaining to matters affecting the entire kingdom.

"If it pleases Your Majesty," Esther replied, "let Your Majesty and Haman come today to the feast that I have prepared for him." By inviting Haman as well to the feast she prepared, Esther's intentions were multifaceted. She aimed to ensure King Ahashverosh did not perceive her request as a personal vendetta against Haman, but as a plea for her and her people's salvation. By inviting Haman, she showed a lack of personal enmity, concentrating solely on the broader issue of survival.

In addition, inviting Haman allowed for the opportunity to catch him off guard, depriving him of the opportunity to prepare a defense, potentially leading to the king's swift and impassioned judgment in Esther's favor during the feast.

Furthermore, Esther understood the cyclical nature of fortune, especially for the wicked. Seeing Haman's success at its peak suggested his imminent downfall. By inviting him, Esther heightened his perceived triumph, ironically setting the stage for his demise.

In this particular instance, Esther did not express a need for the king's favor, as attending a feast does not necessarily require special approval, only his agreement to attend. She emphasized the immediacy of the feast, showing everything was ready and that there is no need to delay.

The king commanded, "Tell Haman to hurry and do Esther's bidding." So the king and Haman came to the feast that Esther had prepared.

At the wine feast, the king asked Esther, "What is your wish? And it shall be granted to you. And what is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." Initially, the king offered to grant for her personal request up to half the kingdom, but now he distinguishes between her requests for herself and her wishes for others, for her people. Ahashverosh clarifies here that anything she asks for herself is a request while anything she asks for others is still a wish that requires

supplication.

Esther responded with wisdom and understanding: "My wish," replied Esther, "my request..." Initially, Esther stated that she has nothing to ask from the king, except that she may find favor in his eyes, enough that he would willingly grant her wish. At that moment, Esther understood that finding favor in the king's eyes and eliciting his generous spirit took precedence even over the wish itself.

"If Your Majesty will do me the favor, if it pleases Your Majesty to grant my wish and accede to my request..." Esther responded to King Ahashverosh by conditioning her request on two factors, reflecting her tact and diplomacy. First, she hopes to be personally pleasing to the king, ensuring her request is granted from the perspective of the king. Second, she desires that her request itself be agreeable and not contrary to the king's will, as she would not wish for anything he found displeasing.

Esther continued, "let Your Majesty and Haman come to the feast which I will prepare for them; and tomorrow I will do Your Majesty's bidding." Esther invited the king and Haman to another feast the next day, where she planned to make her request. Although she didn't consider herself important enough to ask for anything, she had been commanded by the king to do so. Thus, she would fulfill his command and his desire for her to ask a request.

Haman left the wine party feeling happy and lighthearted. Until that day, despite all his achievements, Haman had never truly been happy or content. Each time he advanced in prestige and power, he longed for what was still out of reach, diminishing the value he attributed to his previous achievements. But on that particular day, having reached the pinnacle of greatness and honor, and seemingly on par with the king, this was the first time he felt satisfied.

But Haman's joy did not last long, for as soon as he saw



Mordecai in the palace gate, his demeanor fell. Mordecai did not rise or even stir on his account, and Haman became filled with rage at him, as he felt his self-worth crumble into sorrow and despair.

Besides not standing up for him, Mordecai showed no fear or dread of him, even though he knew his life was at stake. If Mordecai refrained from bowing due to his religious beliefs, he should at least have shown fear, knowing he would be punished. Haman's rage, initially against all of Mordecai's people and their faith, now became intensely personal against Mordecai himself.

Haman wanted to immediately return to the king and accuse Mordecai and push for his execution, but he managed to control his anger and go home instead. He summoned his friends and his wife Zeresh to discuss the matter with them.

Haman bragged to them about his great wealth and his many sons, and all about how the king had promoted him and advanced him above all the other officials and courtiers. Haman's decision to recount his great wealth, numerous sons, and his high status granted by the king at this time was rooted in a problem he had due to his perception of his own greatness. Until then, Haman had refrained from acting against Mordecai alone due to the perceived indignity of having a dispute or legal action against a Jew who was, in Haman's opinion, beneath his dignity to even notice. This sense of self-importance made Mordecai's disrespect seem more egregious, but simultaneously preventing Haman from retaliating directly, as doing so would diminish his own honor. Thus, by highlighting his own wealth, the abundance of his offspring, and his exalted position given by the king, Haman underscored these as reasons for his need to consult others about his next steps.

"What is more," Haman continued, "Queen Esther held a feast, and besides the king she did not invite anyone but me. And tomorrow as well I am invited by her along with the king."

Haman noted that Queen Esther only invited him to her feast, which is significant because typically such a feast would call for all the king's officials to be present. It is unheard of to have a feast for just one or two individuals. Haman's personal invitation, therefore, implied to him that he was as significant as all the king's officials combined in the queen's eyes.

He further emphasized that he was also invited for the next day, again acknowledging his importance. Haman interpreted this as the queen recognizing his influence over the king, believing she invited him so that he might support her in her request to the king. This, in Haman's perspective, demonstrated that he held greater power than even the queen herself, as she seemed to rely on his favor.

"Yet all this means nothing to me every time I see that Jew Mordecai sitting in the palace gate," he yelled in a fury. Here, Haman reveals his inability to reconcile his immense prestige with the disdain he feels due to Mordecai.

Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows be erected, fifty cubits high, and in the morning, ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on it. Then you can go gaily with the king to the feast."

The counsel of Haman's wife and friends was shrewd, navigating a path whereby Haman could avenge Mordecai without compromising his own dignity. If Haman were to punish Mordecai solely for not bowing to him, it would be seen as a petty personal vendetta, diminishing Haman's stature. However, if the punishment is framed as a royal decree against rebellion, meant to instill fear among the people, it would not reflect poorly on Haman.

In such cases, the person chosen for punishment is typically the most despised, and the execution is done in a highly visible manner. By hanging Mordecai on a tall gallows, fifty cubits high, it would serve as a warning and spectacle, showing the



consequences of defiance.

The recommendation to execute him early in the morning aligns with the practice of making such examples at the start of the day, ensuring maximum visibility and impact, unlike a personal vendetta carried out privately and/or with less

visibility. This strategy would allow Haman to attend the feast joyously, having dealt with Mordecai not as a personal enemy but as a public example.

The proposal pleased Haman, and he erected the gallows.

Chapter 6

AHASHVEROSH DISCOVERS MORDECAI'S UNACKNOWLEDGED ACT OF SAVING HIS LIFE. WHEN HAMAN COMES TO SEEK MORDECAI'S EXECUTION, THE KING INSTEAD ORDERS HAMAN TO PUBLICLY HONOR MORDECAI.

That night, sleep deserted the king, and he ordered the book of records, the chronicles, to be brought; and it was read to the king.

There it was found written that Mordecai had denounced Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the threshold, who had plotted to do away with King Ahashverosh.

"What honor or advancement has been conferred on Mordecai for this?" the king inquired. "Nothing at all has been done for him," replied the king's servants who were in attendance on him.

"Who is in the court?" the king asked. For Haman had just entered the outer court of the royal palace, to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows he had prepared for him.

"It is Haman standing in the court," the king's servants answered him. "Let him enter," said the king.

Haman entered, and the king asked him, "What should be done for a man whom the king desires to honor?" Haman said to himself, "Whom would

בלילה ההוא נדדה שנת המלך ויאמר להביא את ספר הזכרונות דברי הימים ויהיו נקראים לפני המלך:

וימצא כתוב אשר הגיד מרדכי על-בגתנא ותרש שני סריסי המלך משמרי הסף אשר בקשו לשלח יד במלך אחשוורוש:

ויאמר המלך מה-נעשה יקר וגדולה למרדכי על-זה ויאמרו נערי המלך משרתיו לא-נעשה עמו דבר:

ויאמר המלך מי בחצר והמן בא לחצר בית-המלך החיצונה לאמר למלך לתלות את-מרדכי על-העץ אשר-הבין לו:

ויאמרו נערי המלך אליו הנה המן עמד בחצר ויאמר המלך יבוא:

ויבוא המן ויאמר לו המלך מה-לעשות באיש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו ויאמר המן בלבו למי יחפץ המלך לעשות יקר יותר ממני:

ויאמר המן אל-המלך איש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו:

ויבאו לבוש מלכות אשר לבש-בו המלך וסוס אשר רכב עליו המלך ואשר נתן בתר מלכות בראשו:

ונתון הלבוש והסוס על-יד-איש משרי המלך הפרתמים והלבישו את-האיש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו והרביבהו על-הסוס ברחוב העיר וקראו לפניו בכה יעשה לאיש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו:

ויאמר המלך להמן מה-ר קח את-הלבוש ואת-הסוס באשר דברת ועשה-כן למרדכי היהודי היושב בשער המלך אל-תפל דבר מזל אשר דברת:

ויקח המן את-הלבוש ואת-הסוס וילבש את-מרדכי וירביהו ברחוב העיר ויקרא לפניו בכה יעשה לאיש אשר המלך חפץ ביקרו:

וישב מרדכי אל-שער המלך והמן נדחף אל-ביתו אבל וחפוי ראש:

the king desire to honor more than me?”

So Haman said to the king, “For the man whom the king desires to honor,

let royal garb which the king has worn be brought, and a horse on which the king has ridden and on whose head a royal diadem has been set;

and let the attire and the horse be put in the charge of one of the king’s noble courtiers. And let the man whom the king desires to honor be attired and paraded on the horse through the city square, while they proclaim before him: This is what is done for the man whom the king desires to honor!”

“Quick, then!” said the king to Haman. “Get the garb and the horse, as you have said, and do this to Mordecai the Jew, who sits in the king’s gate. Omit nothing of all you have proposed.”

So Haman took the garb and the horse and arrayed Mordecai and paraded him through the city square; and he proclaimed before him: This is what is done

That night, sleep deserted the king, and he ordered the book of records, the chronicles, to be brought. During that sleepless night, the king realized the gravity of Esther’s request. Aware of her repeated emphasis on finding favor in his eyes, he sensed an unfulfilled obligation on his part, likely towards someone who had benefited him greatly. This led him to order the book of records to be brought before him to read the royal chronicles.

There were actually two sets of records. One, a comprehensive record of the king’s reign for posterity, was held by the second-in-command, and another, the book of records, was for the king’s personal reference.

It is plausible that the king had forgotten who informed him

וְיִסְפֹּר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְזֶרֶשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ וְלְכָל־אֶהְיָיו אֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר קָרָהוּ
וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ חֲכָמָיו וַיִּזְרַשׁ אִשְׁתּוֹ אִם מִזֶּרַע הַיְּהוּדִים מָרְדֳּכָי אִשְׁרֵי
הַחִלּוֹת לִנְפֹל לַפְּנִי לֹא־תִכָּל לוֹ כִּי־נִפְּלוּ תִפּוֹל לַפְּנִי:

עוֹדֵם מִדְּבָרִים עִמּוֹ וְסָרִיסֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ הִגִּיעוּ וַיַּבְהִילוּ לְהַבְיֵא
אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־הַמִּנְשָׁתָה אֲשֶׁר־עָשְׂתָה אֶסְתֵּר:

for the man whom the king desires to honor!

Then Mordecai returned to the king’s gate, while Haman hurried home, his head covered in mourning.

There Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had befallen him. His advisors and his wife Zeresh said to him, “If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish stock, you will not overcome him; you will fall before him to your ruin.”

While they were still speaking with him, the king’s eunuchs arrived and hurriedly brought Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared.

about Bigthan and Teresh’s assassination plot and mistakenly elevated Haman, as he may have insinuated that he was the informant. Or Haman might have even altered the public records to credit himself with saving the king’s life instead of Mordecai. However, the king’s personal records, which he ordered to be read to him that night, contained the unaltered truth, confirming that Mordecai was the real informant.

There it was found written that Mordecai had denounced Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’s eunuchs who guarded the threshold, who had plotted to do away with King Ahashverosh.

“It was found written” suggests a surprise that Mordecai’s name was not erased but indeed found recorded. The discovery revealed that it was not Haman who had informed the king

of the assassination attempt, but Mordecai. This revelation corrected the king's misconception that had led to Haman's elevation, mistakenly believing Haman was responsible for saving his life. In truth, this honor belonged to Mordecai.

This instance beautifully illustrates divine providence at work. It highlights that the recognition and reward Mordecai deserved for protecting the king were initially misattributed to Haman, but the truth comes to light in a timely and providential manner. Just as Haman was plotting to eliminate Mordecai, the king's discovery of Mordecai's past loyalty leads to a dramatic reversal of fortunes.

The wording of the king's inquiry, "What honor or advancement has been conferred on Mordecai for this?" reflects his expectation of two distinct acknowledgments for Mordecai's deed: immediate honor for the act of saving the king's life and future promotion to a higher position among the officials. The king was aware that Mordecai was already given a position at the palace gate, yet he questioned what further advancement was granted for this specific act of saving his life, understanding that Mordecai's current position was due to his role as Esther's guardian, not for his act of saving the king.

"Nothing at all has been done for him," replied the king's servants who were in attendance.

"Who is in the court?" the king asked. At that moment, Haman had just entered the outer courtyard of the royal palace, in order to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows he had prepared for him. The king's enquiring at that time about who is present in the courtyard highlights the extraordinary, divinely orchestrated timing of the events.

"It is Haman standing in the court," the king's servants responded.

"Let him enter," said the king.

Haman entered, and the king asked him, "What should be done for a man whom the king desires to honor?" The king cleverly orchestrated the scenario, knowing Haman would presume the honor was meant for himself. King Ahashverosh intended to use Haman's vanity to benefit Mordecai, who was the rightful recipient of such honor.

By inquiring specifically about the honor and not mentioning greater elevation or status, Ahashverosh subtly ensured that Haman would not realize the king's thoughts were not actually about him. Haman had already achieved the highest status among the king's officials. Thus, by focusing on honor alone, the king misled Haman to propose lavish honors, which Ahashverosh planned to bestow upon Mordecai instead. This strategy was part of the king's larger plan to transfer the high status and honors from Haman to Mordecai, who truly deserved them for his loyalty and service.

Haman thought to himself, "Whom would the king desire to honor more than me?"

Haman responded to the king's question strategically, saying, "For the man whom the king desires to honor..." Here Haman cleverly implies that the mere fact that the king wishes to honor a person is itself the highest form of tribute, surpassing any other accolades or rewards. This honor, of being personally favored by the king, is the greatest distinction one could receive, and there is no need to seek further ways to honor such an individual.

Haman then suggests that this honor be publicly announced by having the individual don royal garments, thus publicly declaring and emphasizing the king's special favor towards him: "Let royal garb which the king has worn be brought, and a horse on which the king has ridden and on whose head a royal diadem has been set."

Haman's request can be understood in two ways. One interpretation is that a royal crown was indeed placed on the head



of the horse. This act would symbolically raise the horse's status, thereby also enhancing the honor of whoever rides it. Alternatively, the phrase could mean the horse the king rode when the royal crown was placed on his head, meaning the horse the king rode on the day he was coronated. This view emphasizes the horse's importance by associating it with a critical moment in the king's life, conferring significant honor on the person chosen to ride it.

Haman continues in response to the king: "And let the attire and the horse be put in the charge of one of the king's noble courtiers. And let the man whom the king desires to honor be attired and paraded on the horse through the city square, while they proclaim before him: This is what is done for the man whom the king desires to honor!"

Haman's proposal to have the man whom the king desires to honor attired and paraded on the horse through the city square, overseen by noble courtiers, was intending to increase his own honor. He envisioned this event being conducted by several prominent officials and heralds to ensure the occasion received extensive public attention. His use of plural language in the suggestion indicates that he wanted multiple esteemed individuals to be involved in carrying out this lavish display of honor, further magnifying the significance and reach of the celebration. This approach was designed to convey the extent of the king's favor towards him in a highly public and grandiose manner.

The king, realizing that Haman's rise to greatness was undeserved and that the honor rightfully belonged to Mordecai, was struck by Haman's extreme arrogance. In his eyes this was tantamount to Haman confessing that he wanted to take the king's scepter, seeking nothing less than the kingship itself.

In a fit of rage, the king commanded Haman to hurriedly honor Mordecai just as he described. It was fitting for Haman himself to do this, as he had claimed such unwarranted greatness. It

was only right that he should run before Mordecai as a servant. "Quick, then!" said the king to Haman. "Get the garb and the horse, as you have said, and do this to Mordecai the Jew, who sits in the king's gate. Omit nothing of all you have proposed."

"Omit nothing," the king insisted, for everything should be done justly and rightfully. Therefore, the king ordered that Haman himself should carry out all tasks without assistance from other courtiers in dressing and mounting Mordecai on the horse. This is why he said, "all you have proposed," indicating that even the dressing should be done by Haman himself.

So Haman took the garb and the horse and arrayed Mordecai and paraded him through the city square; and he proclaimed before him: "This is what is done for the man whom the king desires to honor!"

Then Mordecai returned to the king's gate, while Haman hurried home, his head covered in mourning. Thus, Mordecai returned to his elevated status, while Haman descended towards his downfall, as if to proclaim, "Behold the work of the Lord, for it is awe-inspiring." The thoughts of man are fleeting, but the counsel of the one who orchestrates events will endure forever.

When he arrived at home, Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had befallen him. In recounting these events, Haman may have been concerned that his family, upon hearing about what happened, would become frightened, fearing that he had already asked the king to have Mordecai executed. Had he done that – if the king were to have discovered that Haman had falsely accused Mordecai – it could have led to his own immediate demise. Therefore, he approached them with ostensibly good news, implying that the incident was just a coincidence, and there was still hope that he might later succeed in his request to execute Mordecai, especially now that Mordecai had already been rewarded.



However, his wise men, his advisors and his wife Zeresh counseled him for his own good, warning him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish stock, you will not overcome him; you will fall before him to your ruin." Their advice was that Haman should take care not to further antagonize Mordecai or seek his life, as his plot would surely be foiled. If Mordecai was of Jewish descent, they reasoned, a people under God's special providence, then it was clear that these events were not happenstance but divine intervention. Their observation that Haman had "begun to fall" before Mordecai indicated that God was acting favorably towards the Jews, focusing on their welfare and defense.

They highlighted two aspects of Haman's downfall. Firstly, that Haman himself initiated it through his own actions of going to the king's gate and proposing the idea. Secondly, the fact that he was the first to fall, even before Mordecai did, entailed a sign that Mordecai's ongoing prayers and fasting were being

answered.

Therefore, they suggested that Haman could only succeed if he humbled himself before Mordecai, causing Mordecai to cease his prayers and repentance, thus allowing Haman to prevail. However, as long as Haman continued his aggression, Mordecai would intensify his service of God, uplifting his people, and the Israelites would prevail.

While they were still speaking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurriedly brought Haman to the banquet Esther had prepared. This too was under divine supervision. The eunuchs arrived in the middle of the conversation, hearing what was being discussed among them, including Haman's intention to further persuade the king to have Mordecai executed. It was during this revealing moment that Charbonah, one of the eunuchs present, became aware of the gallows Haman had prepared for Mordecai.

Chapter 7

UPON LEARNING OF HAMAN'S PLOT TO DESTROY ESTHER AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE, KING AHASHVEROSH ORDERS HIS EXECUTION ON THE VERY GALLOWS HAMAN HAD PREPARED FOR MORDECAI.

So the king and Haman came to feast with Queen Esther.

On the second day, the king again asked Esther at the wine feast, "What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted to you. And what is your request? Even to half the kingdom, it shall be fulfilled."

Queen Esther replied: "If Your Majesty will do me the favor, and if it pleases Your Majesty, let my life be granted me as my wish, and my people as my request.

For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, massacred, and exterminated. Had we only been sold as bondmen and bondwomen, I would have kept silent;

וַיָּבֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָמֶן לִשְׁתּוֹת עִם־אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה:

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאֶסְתֵּר גַּם בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁנִי בְּמִשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן מִה־שָּׂאֵלְתָּךְ אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה וְתַגִּידְנִי לָךְ וּמִה־בִּקְשֶׁתְּךָ עַד־חֲצֵי הַמְּלָכוּת וְתַעֲשֶׂה:

וְתַעַן אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־מִצְאָתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ הַמֶּלֶךְ וְאִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב תִּגְדֹּלֵנִי כִּפְשִׁי בְּשִׂאלָתִי וְעַמִּי בְּבִקְשָׁתִּי:

כִּי נִמְכְּרֵנוּ אֲנִי וְעַמִּי לְהִשְׁמִיד לְהָרוֹג וּלְאַבֵּד וְאֵלֵּי לַעֲבָדִים וְלִשְׁפָחוֹת {נִמְכְּרֵנוּ הַחַיִּיִּשִׁתִּי כִּי אֵין הַצָּר שְׁוֶה בְּגִזַּק הַמֶּלֶךְ: } ס

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֹׁרֹשׁ וַיֹּאמֶר לְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה מִי הוּא זֶה וְאֵי־זֶה הוּא אֲנִשְׁר־מִלְּאֻ לָבוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן:

וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר אִישׁ צָר וְאוֹיֵב הָמֶן הָרָע הַזֶּה וְהָמֶן נִבְעֹת מִלִּפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהַמַּלְכָּה:

וְהַמֶּלֶךְ גַּם בְּחֻמָּתוֹ מִמִּשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן אֶל־גִּנַּת הַבֵּיתוֹ וְהָמֶן עֹמֵד לִבְקֹשׁ עַל־כִּפְשׁוֹ מִאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה כִּי רָאָה כִּי־כָלְתָה אֵלָיו הָרָעָה מֵאֵת הַמֶּלֶךְ:

וְהַמֶּלֶךְ שָׁבַּ מִגִּנַּת הַבֵּיתוֹ אֶל־בֵּית אִ מִשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן וְהָמֶן נִפֹּל


for the adversary is not worthy of the king's trouble."

**Thereupon King Ahashverosh demanded of Queen Esther,
"Who is he and where is he who dared to do this?"**

**"The adversary and enemy," replied Esther,
"is this evil Haman!" And Haman cringed in
terror before the king and the queen.**

**The king, in his fury, left the wine feast for
the palace garden, while Haman remained to
plead with Queen Esther for his life; for he saw
that the king had resolved to destroy him.**

**When the king returned from the palace garden
to the banquet room, Haman was lying prostrate
on the couch on which Esther reclined. "Does he
mean," cried the king, "to ravish the queen in my
own palace?" No sooner did these words leave
the king's lips than Haman's face was covered.**

he king and Haman came to feast with Queen Esther. On the second day, the king again asked Esther at the wine feast, "What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted to you. And what is your request? Even to half the kingdom, it shall be fulfilled."

Achashverosh adds the title "Queen Esther" when referring to her here, signifying the king's increased affection. The suggestion is that even if she asks for something grand, befitting her status as queen, he would grant it to her in this auspicious moment.

Queen Esther replied: "If Your Majesty will do me the favor, and if it pleases Your Majesty, let my life be granted me as my wish, and my people as my request." As explained earlier, the "wish" is what one asks for their own needs, while the "request" is for the benefit of others. Esther is saying that her personal need is nothing other than her own life. Likewise, her request

על־המִטָּה אֲשֶׁר אֶסְתֵּר עָלֶיהָ וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ הֲגַם לִכְבוֹשׁ אֶת־
{הַמַּלְכָּה עַמִּי בְּבֵית הַדָּבָר יֵצֵא מִפִּי הַמֶּלֶךְ וּפְנֵי הָמָן חָפוּ: }ס

וַיֹּאמֶר חֲרִבּוֹנָה אֶחָד מִן־הַסְּרִיסִים לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ גַּם הִנֵּה־הֵעָץ
אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה הָמָן לְמִרְדֵּכָי אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר־טוֹב עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ עִמָּד בְּבֵית
הָמָן גְּבִיהַ חֲמֻשִּׁים אָמְנָה וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ תִּלְהֹו עָלָיו:

וַיִּתְּלוּ אֶת־הָמָן עַל־הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר־הֵכִין לְמִרְדֵּכָי וַחֲמַת הַמֶּלֶךְ שָׁכְכָה: }פ

**Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs in attendance on
the king, said, "What is more, a gallows is standing
at Haman's house, fifty cubits high, which Haman
made for Mordecai – the man whose words saved
the king." "Hang him on it!" the king ordered.**

**So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had
put up for Mordecai, and the king's fury abated.**

for her people is not wealth or honor, but their salvation from annihilation.

Esther's plea implies that saving her people's lives is so paramount that she would sacrifice her own life, if necessary, to ensure their safety. Her approach to the king is framed in a personal context – her inability to endure the destruction of her people and homeland – yet the essence and ultimate purpose of her plea is the salvation of her people.

Ahashverosh might have misunderstood Esther's request for her people when she said, "How can I endure to see the evil that will come to my people?" implying the primary concern was for herself, unable to witness the destruction of her people and homeland. However, the fact is that Esther values her people's survival so highly that she would agree to perish alone as long as her people are saved. In this way, her "wish" to the king is about herself, as in "How can I endure to see," but the core of her "request" and its ultimate goal is about her people.

"For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, massacred, and exterminated." Here Esther presents two arguments: Firstly, she was the primary reason for the decree against her people. That is, Haman's main intention was to destroy her, and he found a pretext against her people so he could later claim she was doomed to death and kill her as well. Secondly, the nature of the "sale" itself was not for the purpose of enslavement but for sheer destruction and extermination.

Esther clarifies to the king how Haman deceived him in two ways: First, Haman told the king, "There is one people," implying a seemingly insignificant nation, while it was actually her people, the nation among whom she belonged, which Haman should have disclosed. Second, in saying "let it be written to destroy them," Haman misled the king to think it was just about abolishing their nation and religion, not their physical destruction, as he in fact sold them for massacre and annihilation.

Therefore, Esther continues: "Had we only been sold as bondmen and bondwomen, I would have kept silent; for the adversary is not worthy of the king's trouble." If Haman had only deceived the king in one aspect, by not revealing the identity of the people, she would have stayed silent and not revealed the deceit, considering the decree to be unintentionally issued by the king. However, since the whole disgraceful matter was based on deceit, it is appropriate that the one who deceived and slandered the king should be punished.

Countering Haman's claim that the Jews were detrimental to the king, Esther maintains that Haman does not justify the harm he inflicts upon the king's realm. In essence, Haman's existence is more damaging than the alleged harm from the Jews, making him unworthy of the king's leniency or preservation.

Thereupon King Ahashverosh demanded of Queen Esther, "Who is he and where is he who dared to do this?" In his enquiry, the king first addressed everyone present in the house, including Haman, expressing his astonishment about

the identity of the person who would commit such an atrocity.

When no one responded, he specifically asked Queen Esther to identify the man. He inquired about two things: first, the identity of the man who committed such an outrage, and second, the reason that incited him to act. This is why he says, "where is he," meaning what was the directive or motive that filled that man's heart to act in such a treasonous manner.

"The adversary and enemy," replied Esther, "is this evil Haman!" And Haman cringed in terror before the king and the queen.

Esther responds to the king's question about the motive behind the atrocious act by stating that it was because Haman is both an adversary and an enemy. She emphasizes these two terms because an adversary actively oppresses another person, while an enemy wishes ill on someone but might not act on it. An adversary actively oppresses another, while an enemy harbors ill will but may not act on it. Typically, someone excessively cruel can be an enemy before becoming an adversary, with enmity usually fading after vengeance. However, Haman's cruelty was such that he remained an enemy even after causing harm, driven by his deep-seated hatred to oppress the Israelites.

Haman's reaction of cringing in terror before the king and queen illustrates his dilemma. He could have justified his actions to the king, claiming his accusations against the Jews were factual and not borne of enmity. But this would have intensified Esther's anger. Alternatively, pleading with Esther, asserting that he was unaware of her Jewish identity, and promising to advocate for the Jews would have only increased the king's wrath. This would suggest Haman's actions were not rooted in truth but in fear of Esther's reaction, leaving Haman terrified and speechless in the presence of both the king and queen.

The king, in his fury, left the feast for the palace garden, while



Haman remained to plead with Queen Esther for his life, for he saw that the king had resolved to destroy him.

When the king left for the palace garden, Haman saw it as a favorable moment and an immediate opportunity to plead for his life directly with Esther. When the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet room, Haman was lying prostrate on the couch on which Esther reclined. The king, already suspecting that Haman intended to destroy Esther along with all the Jews, now perceived Haman's actions as an additional and immediate threat to Esther. "Does he mean," cried the king in astonishment, "to ravish the queen in my own palace?"

Here the king comes to terms with Haman's malevolence to Queen Esther herself. The king was astounded that Haman might be daring enough to attack the queen, questioning if his treachery included her as well – especially within the king's own residence!

It is known that even those condemned to death, if they flee to the king's house, are not to be killed. But here Haman was apparently assaulting the queen in the palace itself.

No sooner did these words leave the king's lips than Haman's face was covered, which was a Persian custom to cover the face of someone the king is angry with, to quell the king's wrath.

Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs in attendance, said, "What

is more, a gallows is standing at Haman's house, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai – the man whose words saved the king."

Harbonah, who had gone to call Haman to the feast and overheard Haman's plot, knew about the gallows. Haman had erected a gallows to hang Mordecai, who was found guilty of no crime. This provided additional proof of Haman meddling, for Mordecai had only brought benefit to the king, informing on the would-be assassins and saving the king's life. It was Mordecai's fortune and heroism, rather, that angered Haman, prompting his plot to have Mordecai hanged.

It is suggested here that Haman was complicit in conspiring against the king. The mention of the fifty cubit-high gallows on Haman's property suggests that it remained standing and visible to all, which would be seen as a huge insult to the king. While Mordecai was given royal clothing and praised by the king, the gallows for his execution remained on display, indicating that the very person being honored by the king is actually destined to be hanged. There could be no greater rebellion than this!

Recognizing the severity of Haman's betrayal, the king ordered Haman to be hanged on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai, symbolizing the fate of all who oppose the king. So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had put up for Mordecai, and the king's fury abated.



Chapter 8

KING AHASHVEROSH GIVES HAMAN'S PROPERTY TO QUEEN ESTHER. MORDECAI IS PUBLICLY HONORED AND ESTHER PLEADS WITH THE KING TO COUNTERMAND HAMAN'S DECREE AGAINST THE JEWS.

That very day King Ahashverosh gave the property of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther. Mordecai presented himself to the king, for Esther had revealed how he was related to her.

The king removed his ring, which he had taken back from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai; and Esther put Mordecai in charge of Haman's property.

Esther spoke to the king again, falling at his feet and weeping, and beseeching him to avert the evil plotted by Haman the Agagite against the Jews.

The king extended the golden scepter to Esther, and Esther arose and stood before the king.

"If it pleases Your Majesty," she said, "and if I have won your favor and the proposal seems right to Your Majesty, and if I am pleasing to you – let dispatches be written countermanding those which were written by Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, containing his plot to annihilate the Jews throughout the king's provinces.

For how can I bear to see the disaster which will befall my people! And how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred!"

Then King Ahashverosh said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, "I have given Haman's property to Esther, and he has been hanged on the gallows for scheming against the Jews.

And you may further write with regard to the Jews as you see fit. [Write it] in the king's name and seal it with the king's signet, for an edict that has been written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet may not be revoked."

So the king's scribes were summoned at that time, on the twenty-third day of the third month, that is, the month of Sivan; and letters were written, at Mordecai's

בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא נָתַן הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶחָשְׁוֶרֶשׁ לְאַסְתֵּר הַמִּלְכָּה אֶת־בֵּית הָמָן צֶרֶר (הַיְּהוּדִים) [וּמִרְדֵּכָי בָּא לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי־הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר מֶה הוּא־לָהּ:

וַיִּסֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־טִבְעוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר הָעֵבִיר מִהֶמְן וַיִּתְּנֶה לְמִרְדֵּכָי [וַתִּשֶׂם אֶסְתֵּר אֶת־מִרְדֵּכָי עַל־בֵּית הָמָן: }ס

וַתּוֹסֶף אֶסְתֵּר וַתְּדַבֵּר לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וַתַּפֵּל לִפְנֵי רַגְלָיו וַתַּחֲנוּן־לוֹ לְהָעֵבִיר אֶת־רַעַת הָמָן הָאֶגְלִי וְאֵת מַחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָשַׁב עַל־הַיְּהוּדִים:

וַיִּנָּשֵׂט הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאַסְתֵּר אֵת שֹׁרֶבֶט הַזָּהָב וַתִּקֶּם אֶסְתֵּר וַתַּעֲמֵד לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ:

וַתֹּאמֶר אִם־עַל־הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב וְאִם־מִצָּאִיתִי חַן לִפְנָיו וְכִשֶּׁר הַדָּבָר לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְטוֹבָה אֲנִי בְּעֵינָיו יִכְתֹּב לְהָשִׁיב אֶת־הַסְּפָרִים מִחֲשַׁבַּת הָמָן בְּן־הַמְּדֵתָא הָאֶגְלִי אֲשֶׁר כָּתַב לְאַבֵּד אֶת־הַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְדִינוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ:

כִּי אֵיכָכָה אוֹכַל וְרָאִיתִי בְּרָעָה אֲשֶׁר־יַמְצֵא אֶת־עַמִּי [וְאֵיכָכָה אוֹכַל וְרָאִיתִי בְּאַבְדֹן מוֹלֶדְתִּי: }ס

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶחָשְׁוֶרֶשׁ לְאַסְתֵּר הַמִּלְכָּה וּלְמִרְדֵּכָי הַיְּהוּדִי הִנֵּה בֵּית־הָמָן נִתְּתִי לְאַסְתֵּר וְאֵתוֹ תָּלוּ עַל־הָעֵץ עַל אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַח יָדוֹ [בַּיְּהוּדִים]:

וְאַתֶּם כְּתֹבוּ עַל־הַיְּהוּדִים כְּטוֹב בְּעֵינֵיכֶם בְּשֵׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ וַחֲתֹמוּ בְּטִבְעַת הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי־כָתַב אֲשֶׁר־נִכְתַּב בְּשֵׁם־הַמֶּלֶךְ וְנִחְתָּמוּ בְּטִבְעַת הָמָן אֵין לְהָשִׁיב:

וַיִּקְרְאוּ סִפְרֵי־הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּעֵת־הַהִיא בְּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ סִיּוֹן בְּשָׁלוּשָׁה וְעֶשְׂרִים בּוֹ וַיִּכְתֹּב בְּכָל־אֶשְׁר־צָנָה מִרְדֵּכָי אֶל־הַיְּהוּדִים וְאֵל הָאֲחֻשְׁדָּרפָּנִים וְהַפָּחוֹת וְשָׂרֵי הַמְּדִינוֹת אֲשֶׁר מֵהַדּוֹ וְעַד־כּוּשׁ שֶׁבַע וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה כְּכַתְּבָהּ וְעַם וְעַם כָּל־שָׁנָה וְאֶל־הַיְּהוּדִים כְּכַתְּבָם וְכָל־שׁוֹנָם:

וַיִּכְתֹּב בְּשֵׁם הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶחָשְׁוֶרֶשׁ וַיִּחְתָּם בְּטִבְעַת הַמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים בְּיַד הָרָצִים בְּסוּסִים רַבִּי הָרָכָשׁ הָאֲחֻשְׁתָּרְנִים בְּנֵי הָרַמְכִּים:

אֲשֶׁר נָתַן הַמֶּלֶךְ לַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־עִיר־וְעִיר לְהַקְהֵל וְלַעֲמֵד עַל־נַפְשָׁם לְהַשְׁמִיד וְלְהָרַג וּלְאַבֵּד אֶת־כָּל־חַיִּל עַם וּמְדִינָה הַצָּרִים אֹתָם טוֹף וְנָשִׁים וְשָׁלָלָם לְבוֹז:

בַּיּוֹם אֲחֵד בְּכָל־מְדִינוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶחָשְׁוֶרֶשׁ בְּשָׁלוּשָׁה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ שְׁנֵים־עָשָׂר הוּא־חֹדֶשׁ אָדָר:

פְּתִיחָן הַכְּתָב לְהַנָּתִן דָּת בְּכָל־מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה גְלוּי לְכָל־הָעַמִּים וְלַהּיוֹת (הַיְּהוּדִים) [עַתּוּדִים] [עַתִּידִים] לַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְהַנָּקָם מֵאִבְיָהֶם:

הָרָצִים רַבִּי הָרָכָשׁ הָאֲחֻשְׁתָּרְנִים יֵצְאוּ מִבְּהֵלִים וְדַחוּפִים [בְּדַבְּרֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהִדָּת נִתְּנָה בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה: }ס

וּמִרְדֵּכָי יָצָא מִלִּפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּלָבוּשׁ מַלְכוּת תְּכֵלֶת וְחֹזֶר וְעֹטְרָת זָהָב גְּדוּלָּה וְתִכְרִיף בּוּץ וְאַרְגָּמָן וְהָעִיר שׁוּשַׁן צָהֳלָה וְשִׁמְחָה:

dictation, to the Jews and to the satraps, the governors and the officials of the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces from India to Nubia: to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language.

He had them written in the name of King Ahashverosh and sealed with the king's signet. Letters were dispatched by mounted couriers, riding steeds used in the king's service, bred of the royal stud,

to this effect: The king has permitted the Jews of every city to assemble and fight for their lives; if any people or province attacks them, they may destroy, massacre, and exterminate its armed force together with women and children, and plunder their possessions –

on a single day in all the provinces of King Ahashverosh, namely, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, that is, the month of Adar.

The text of the document was to be issued as a law in every single province: it was to be publicly displayed to all the peoples, so that the Jews should be ready for that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.

That very day King Ahashverosh gave the property of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther. There was an ancient edict that the property of those executed by the king belonged to the king. However, the king wanted to demonstrate that Haman was not hanged for rebelling against him but for his actions against the queen and her nation, the Jewish people.

Therefore, the king gave Haman's house to Esther. Since he was executed on her account, his property rightfully belonged to her. Haman is, therefore, referred to here as "the enemy of the Jews," as his execution was due to his enmity towards them.

לַיהוּדִים הָיְתָה אוֹרָה וְשִׂמְחָה וְשִׁשְׁן וִיקָר:

וּבְכָל-מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה וּבְכָל-עִיר וָעִיר מִקּוֹם אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ
וְדָתוֹ מִגֵּיעַ שִׂמְחָה וְשִׁשְׁן לַיהוּדִים מִשָּׁתָה יוֹם טוֹב וְרָצִים
מֵעַמִּי הָאָרֶץ מִתִּיהָדִים כִּי-נִפְּל פַּחַד-הַיְּהוּדִים עֲלֵיהֶם:

The couriers, mounted on royal steeds, went out in urgent haste at the king's command; and the decree was proclaimed in the captial city Shushan.

Mordecai left the king's presence in royal robes of blue and white, with a magnificent crown of gold and a mantle of fine linen and purple wool. And the city of Shushan rang with joyous cries.

The Jews enjoyed light and gladness, happiness and honor.

And in every province and in every city, when the king's command and decree arrived, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many of the people of the land professed to be Jews, for the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them.

Mordecai presented himself to the king, for Esther had revealed how he was related to her. That is, Mordecai was immediately elevated by the king and given permission to present himself before the king whenever he wished, without having to wait to be summoned or for the scepter to be extended to him.

After Ahashverosh seized the ring from Haman and returned it to Mordecai, Queen Esther took action. She granted Mordecai two of Haman's most prized possessions – his wealth and the honor bestowed upon him by the king. In one swift move, Mordecai became the rightful owner of Haman's riches and reputation, as the saying goes: "The wicked plot, but the righteous are clothed with honor." With regard to Haman's honor, the king removed his ring and presented it to Mordecai, and in

terms of his wealth, Esther put Mordecai in charge of Haman's property.

Esther saw the king grant her other requests but remain silent on the main issue: the salvation of her people. Fear gripped her. She worried the king had already decided against her primary request and was deflecting with other gifts, as someone might do when reluctant to fulfill a beloved's wish. If he had intended to grant her main request, he would have first addressed it before offering other consolations. Therefore, she felt compelled to appeal more intensely and earnestly at this moment.

Esther spoke to the king again, falling at his feet and weeping, and beseeching him to avert the evil plotted by Haman the Agagite against the Jews. Esther utilized every possible means to secure her request. Sometimes, a request is granted due to the sheer persuasiveness and logic of the argument, as when "Esther spoke before the king with words of reason and understanding." Other times, it is the tears and entreaties that evoke enough compassion to act, as was the case when "she fell at his feet and wept and implored him to avert the evil of Haman."

Esther's request was for the king to immediately send messengers to retrieve the edicts and revoke the decree. Waiting until the designated time to send counter-edicts, which would also be opened at the same designated time, would mean enduring many tribulations in the meantime. Therefore, "to avert the evil of Haman" means to immediately address the present danger.

Esther knew that even if new edicts were sent, people might still follow the original ones. She raised two arguments in her plea. Knowing that the king's edicts couldn't be retracted, Esther argued that the king shouldn't worry about setting a precedent for changing his mind, as the original decrees were

not genuinely his but Haman's plot.

If the king feared his officials might rebel if he appeared to change his mind, Esther pointed out that the edicts were still sealed and their contents unknown. Therefore, she advised to recall only the sealed edicts, which had not yet been seen by anyone. If he recalls them and sends others in their place, no one will know that he retracted his command.

The king extended the golden scepter to Esther, indicating permission for Esther to rise and speak. And Esther arose and stood before the king. "If it pleases Your Majesty," she said, "and if I have won your favor and the proposal seems right to Your Majesty, and if I am pleasing to you – let dispatches be written countermanding those which were written by Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, containing his plot to annihilate the Jews throughout the king's provinces."

In order to secure the king's agreement, Esther initially suggests that if the king finds either her (the requester) or the request itself favorable, he might be inclined to fulfill it. "If it pleases Your Majesty" implies that the request is appealing in the king's eyes, while "if I have won your favor" suggests that Esther herself is favorably regarded by the king. She also elaborates on the possibility that the king might wish to fulfill the request for his own benefit or pleasure. Therefore, "and if the proposal seems right to Your Majesty" means the king might see a benefit in the act itself, as rulers who act justly and with integrity often gain from such actions. "And if I am pleasing to you" implies the king might find benefit from her personally.

In her specific suggestion, "let dispatches be written countermanding those which were written by Haman," Esther is asking the king to send couriers to recall the sealed dispatches detailing Haman's plot. This act would avert any disgrace to the king since the ministers are not yet aware of the dispatches'



contents.

"For how can I bear to see the disaster which will befall my people! And how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred!" Esther's plea provides a rationale against writing new sealed letters to be opened at the designated time, contradicting the original letters, because of two major issues: The first, "For how can I bear to see the disaster which will befall my people" – immediately until the appointed time arrives? During this period, the Israelites would surely be subject to plunder and disgrace. But the main concern was that when the time arrived, the last letters would not be heeded: "And how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred!"

The king did not agree to Esther's suggestion to recall the sealed letters, as letters issued in the king's name are irrevocable. Instead, he advised a prudent strategy. The first letters stated to "destroy, kill, and annihilate – all the Jews." By emphasizing "Jews" in this context, it can be interpreted that the Jews would be the destroyers, not the victims. The second letters specified "the people and province that are their enemies," clarifying that the Jews will destroy these forces. These second letters, therefore, did not nullify the first edicts; they served to explain them, as they did not contradict the first ones, but simply added details. Thus, the first edicts allowed for the destruction of the Jews, while the second ones allowed the Jews to destroy their enemies, thereby permitting mutual combat.

Still, according to Ahashverosh's plan, the Jews remained in danger, as their enemies also had permission to harm them. To address this, the king first mentioned giving Haman's house to Esther and hanging him for attacking the Jews. This publicized action demonstrated that the simple understanding of the first letters, as a call for the genocide of the Jewish people, was in flagrant contempt of the king's will. Thus, on the appointed day, fearing a fate like Haman's, the ministers would likely disregard the first letters in favor of the second, and support the Jews. The people, unaware of the first letters' contents, wouldn't be informed, as the ministers would conceal them, eliminating any remaining fear or danger.

Then King Ahashverosh said to Queen Esther and Mordecai

the Jew, "I have given Haman's property to Esther, and he has been hanged on the gallows for scheming against the Jews. And you may further write with regard to the Jews as you see fit. [Write it] in the king's name and seal it with the king's signet, for an edict that has been written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet may not be revoked."

So the king's scribes were summoned at that time, on the twenty-third day of the third month, that is, the month of Sivan; and letters were written, at Mordecai's dictation, to the Jews and to the satraps, the governors and the officials of the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia: to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language.

The reason for waiting until the 23rd of Sivan to dispatch the letters is so the same messengers who had delivered Haman's edicts would also deliver these new ones, ensuring that their words would be believed. They did not return until the 23rd of Sivan, necessitating the wait.

Mordecai took the additional step of including letters specifically to the Jews, thus reinforcing the authority of these new documents, lending them credibility. For the ministers who received both sets of documents, it essentially granted them the discretion to act as they saw fit, since both orders remained effective. However, for those who only received the last letters and not the first, it revealed the intention that they were not given a choice to act as they wished. Since these individuals did not receive the first set of letters, they only had the instructions from the second set. Consequently, the second set of instructions stands and effectively nullifies the first.

Mordecai had them written in the name of King Ahashverosh and sealed with the king's signet. Letters were dispatched by mounted couriers, riding steeds used in the king's service, bred of the royal stud. The choice to send them this time by horseback was either because the messengers were weary from the journey, or because of the urgent need to bring relief to the Jews across the empire, who were in a state of great distress. The situation required prompt action, and the use of horseback couriers ensured that the letters reached their



destinations as quickly as possible, thereby providing timely aid and resolution to the Jews' predicament.

The letter proposed the new edict that the king has permitted the Jews of every city to assemble and fight for their lives; if any people or province attacks them, they may destroy, massacre, and exterminate its armed force together with women and children, and plunder their possessions. When Mordecai issued his decree, he specified that the Jews were to both destroy their enemies and seize their spoils on the same day. This contrasts with Haman's original decree, which indicated that after destroying the Jews on one specific day, their spoils could be taken.

Mordecai's intent was not for the Jews to focus on plundering; it would be dishonorable to give the impression that their primary objective was to loot. Since the new edicts were to be explicit and complete, adding to what the first ones lacked, they could not omit anything from Haman's original decrees. To adhere to this and not reduce the king's original command, Mordecai shrewdly worded the decrees to allow for destruction and plundering on the same day, the 13th, the day marked for vengeance against their enemies. This phrasing implied that the Jews should prioritize vengeance over looting. Haman, on the other hand, had planned for the plundering to happen after the Jews' destruction, knowing that people would otherwise be more focused on looting rather than carrying out the genocide. Haman therefore decreed that on the 13th day there should be killing without looting, and the plunder would follow thereafter.

On a single day, the Jewish defense was permitted in all the provinces of King Ahashverosh, namely, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, that is, the month of Adar. Mordecai made it clear in his decree that the defensive actions and the spoiling of their enemies would encompass all the provinces of the king, a point which Haman had omitted in his decree. Haman deliberately left out this detail, fearing that the ministers might be reluctant to execute such a sweeping decree, annihilating an entire nation. Haman preferred that each minister think the decree was only applicable to their own province. Mordecai's intention, however, was the opposite: to

ensure that everyone knew the situation had turned around, transforming a day of sorrow into a day of joy and celebration for the Jews throughout the kingdoms.

The text of the document was to be issued as a law in every single province: it was to be publicly displayed to all the peoples, so that the Jews should be ready for that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.

The couriers, mounted on royal steeds, went out in urgent haste at the king's command; and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan, the capital city. The messengers went out in a state of urgent haste, reflecting their confusion and lack of understanding about why they were sent out a second time.

Mordecai cleverly did not issue the decree in Shushan until the couriers had departed. This strategy mirrored the same concern that Haman had previously harbored, which was the fear that by making such announcements known to the enemies of the Jews, it might prompt them to seek advocates with the king to change the decree. Now, Mordecai was concerned that announcing the decree among the Jews' adversaries could lead them to vie for more influence and overturn their plans for defense.

Mordecai left the king's presence in royal robes of blue and white, with a magnificent crown of gold and a mantle of fine linen and purple wool. Mordecai's departure from the king's presence in royal attire symbolizes the justification of his righteousness. He did not assume any greatness until he was certain that there would be hope and salvation for his troubled brethren. Only then did he wear royal robes, not before.

Moreover, the city of Shushan rang with joyous cries. A spirit of joy filled the city of Shushan, as in the proverb, "When the righteous attain greatness, the people rejoice" (Proverbs 29:2). That is, everyone, not just the Jewish community, celebrated the elevation of the righteous Mordecai.

The Jews enjoyed light and gladness, happiness and honor. Jewish people all over were uplifted to a profound sense of joy and visible delight, along with immense honor. When the messengers arrived and the king's decree was delivered to each province and city, there was gladness and joy among the



Jews, and they celebrated by feasting. The festival caught on and made an impact on the non-Jewish residents too, many of who professed to be with the Jews, for the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them.

The phrase “in every province and in every city” signifies a notable contrast to Haman’s decree, which lacked such specificity. This distinction underscores the explicit and comprehensive nature of the king’s command concerning the Jews.

Chapter 9

EMPOWERED BY ROYAL DECREES, THE JEWS DEFEAT THEIR ENEMIES ON THE 13TH OF ADAR, REVERSING THEIR EXPECTED FATE. THE JEWS IN SHUSHAN CONTINUE THEIR DEFENSE ON THE 14TH DAY, WHILE THE OTHER JEWS REST AND CELEBRATE.

And so, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month – that is, the month of Adar – when the king’s command and decree were to be executed, the very day on which the enemies of the Jews had expected to get them in their power, the opposite happened, and the Jews got their enemies in their power.

Throughout the provinces of King Ahashverosh, the Jews gathered in their cities to attack those who sought their harm; and no one could withstand them, for the fear of them had fallen upon all the peoples.

Indeed, all the officials of the provinces – the satraps, the governors, and the king’s stewards – showed deference to the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai had fallen upon them.

For Mordecai was now powerful in the royal palace, and his fame was spreading through all the provinces; the man Mordecai was growing ever more powerful.

The Jews struck all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, with slaughter and destruction, and

While Haman’s edict was disseminated largely through rumor and hearsay, and its consequences were not well understood in the individual cities throughout the empire, this time the king’s directive was clearly articulated and its implications were understood in every individual city. There was widespread gladness and joy among the Jews, and the influence of their newfound empowerment was so significant that many non-Jews came to revere Judaism.

וּבְשָׁנִים עָשָׂר חָדָשׁ הָיָה אֲדָר בְּשָׁלוּשָׁה עָשָׂר יוֹם בּוֹ אֲשֶׁר הִגִּיעַ דְּבַר-הַמֶּלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ לְהַעֲשׂוֹת בַּיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר שָׁבְרוּ אִיְבֵי הַיְּהוּדִים לְשָׁלוֹט בָּהֶם וְנִהְפֹּךְ הוּא אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלֹטוּ הַיְּהוּדִים הַמָּה בְּשִׁנְאֵיהֶם:

נִקְהָלוּ הַיְּהוּדִים בְּעָרֵיהֶם בְּכָל-מְדִינוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחֲשֵׁירוּשׁ לְשַׁלַּח יָד בְּמִבְקָשֵׁי רָעָתָם וְאִישׁ לֹא-עָמַד לִפְנֵיהֶם כִּי-נָפַל פָּחַדָם עַל-כָּל-הָעַמִּים:

וְכָל-שָׂרֵי הַמְּדִינוֹת וְהָאֲחֻשְׁדָּרפָּנִים וְהַפָּחוֹת וְעוֹשֵׂי הַמְּלָאכָה אֲשֶׁר לְמֶלֶךְ מִנְשָׂאִים אֶת-הַיְּהוּדִים כִּי-נָפַל פָּחַד-מֶרְדֵּכִי עֲלֵיהֶם:

כִּי-גָדוֹל מֶרְדֵּכִי בְּבֵית הַמֶּלֶךְ וְשִׁמְעוֹ הוֹלָךְ בְּכָל-הַמְּדִינוֹת כִּי-הָאִישׁ מֶרְדֵּכִי הוֹלָךְ וְגָדוֹל:

וַיָּבוּ הַיְּהוּדִים בְּכָל-אִיְבֵיהֶם מִכַּת־חֶרֶב וְהָרָג וְאֲבָדָן וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְּשִׁנְאֵיהֶם כְּרָצוֹנָם:

וַיִּשְׁוֹשְׁן הַבִּיזָה הָרְגוּ הַיְּהוּדִים וְאֲבָד חֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ:

וְאֵת אֶת-פָּרָשְׁתְּתָא וְאֵת אֶת-דִּלְפּוֹן וְאֵת אֶת-אֶסְפָּתָא:

וְאֵת אֶת-פּוֹרְתָא וְאֵת אֶת-אֶדְלֵיָא וְאֵת אֶת-אֶרֶדְתָּא:

וְאֵת אֶת-פָּרְמִשְׁתָּא וְאֵת אֶת-אֶרֶסִי וְאֵת אֶת-אֶרְדִי וְאֵת אֶת-וִיזְתָּא:

עָשְׂרָת בְּנֵי הָמֶן בְּן-הַמְּדִנָּה צָרַר הַיְּהוּדִים הָרְגוּ וַיַּבְזִּיחַ לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת-יָדָם:

בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא בָּא מִסְפֵּר הַהַרְגִּים בְּשׁוֹשָׁן הַבִּיזָה לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ:

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאַסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה בְּשׁוֹשָׁן הַבִּיזָה הָרְגוּ הַיְּהוּדִים וְאֲבָד חֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ וְאֵת עָשְׂרָת בְּנֵי-הָמֶן בְּשִׁנְאֵי מְדִינוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ מִה עָשׂוֹ וּמִה-שָׁאֲלָתָּ וַיִּגְּנוּ לָךְ וּמִה-בִּקְשָׁתָּךְ עוֹד וְתַעֲשֶׂה:

וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר אֶם-עַל-הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב יִגְּנוּ גַם-מִחֹר לַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר

did as they pleased to those who hated them.

In the captial city Shushan the Jews killed a total of five hundred men.

They also killed Parshandatha,

Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha, the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the foe of the Jews. But they did not lay hands on the spoil.

When the number of those slain in the captial city Shushan was reported on that same day to the king,

the king said to Queen Esther, “In the captial city of Shushan alone the Jews have killed a total of five hundred men, as well as the ten sons of Haman. What then must they have done in the provinces of the realm! What is your wish now? It shall be granted to you. And what else is your request? It shall be fulfilled.”

“If it please Your Majesty,” Esther replied, “let the Jews in Shushan be permitted to act tomorrow also as they did today; and let Haman’s ten sons be hanged on the gallows.”

The king ordered that this should be done, and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan. Haman’s ten sons were hanged:

and the Jews in Shushan gathered again on the fourteenth day of Adar and slew three hundred men in Shushan. But they did not lay hands on the spoil.

The rest of the Jews, those in the king’s provinces, likewise gathered and fought for their lives. They disposed of their enemies, killing seventy-five thousand of their foes; but they did not lay hands on the spoil.

That was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar; and they rested on the fourteenth day and made it a day of feasting and merrymaking.

But the Jews in Shushan gathered on both the thirteenth and fourteenth days, and so rested on the fifteenth,

בְּשׁוּשָׁן לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּדַת הַיּוֹם וְאֵת עֲשֵׂרֶת בְּנֵי־הֶמֶן יָתְלוּ עַל־הָעֵץ:

וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְהַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן וַתִּתֵּן דָּת בְּשׁוּשָׁן וְאֵת עֲשֵׂרֶת בְּנֵי־הֶמֶן תָּלוּ:

וַיִּקְהֲלוּ (הַיְּהוּדִים) [הַיְּהוּדִים] אֲשֶׁר־בְּשׁוּשָׁן גַּם בְּיוֹם אַרְבַּעַת עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ אֶדָר וַיַּהַרְגוּ בְּשׁוּשָׁן שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ וּבְבִזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם:

וַשָּׂאֵר הַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּמִדְיָנוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ נִקְהֲלוּ וְעָמַד עַל־נַפְשָׁם וְנֹחַ מֵאִיְבֵיהֶם וְהָרוּג בְּשָׂאֵיהֶם חֲמִשָּׁה וּשְׁבַעִים אָלֶף וּבְבִזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם:

בְּיוֹם־שְׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ אֶדָר וְנֹחַ בְּאַרְבַּעַת עָשָׂר בֹּו וְעָשָׂה אֹתוֹ יוֹם מִשְׁתָּה וּשְׁמִיחָה:

וְהַיְּהוּדִים) [וְהַיְּהוּדִים] אֲשֶׁר־בְּשׁוּשָׁן נִקְהֲלוּ בְּשְׁלוֹשָׁה עָשָׂר בֹּו וּבְאַרְבַּעַת עָשָׂר בֹּו וְנֹחַ בְּחִמְשָׁה עָשָׂר בֹּו וְעָשָׂה אֹתוֹ יוֹם מִשְׁתָּה וּשְׁמִיחָה:

עַל־כֵּן הַיְּהוּדִים (הַפְּרוּזִים) [הַפְּרוּזִים] הַיִּשְׁבִּים בְּעָרֵי הַפְּרוּזוֹת עָשִׂים אֶת יוֹם אַרְבַּעַת עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ אֶדָר שְׁמִיחָה (וּמִשְׁתָּה וְיוֹם טוֹב וּמִשְׁלַח מְנוֹת אִישׁ לְרַעְיָהוּ: } ס

וַיִּכְתֹּב מֶרְדֳּכָי אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַיִּשְׁלַח סָפְרִים אֶל־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל־מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֶרְיָשׁ הַקְּרוֹבִים וְהָרְחוֹקִים:

לְקַיֵּם עֲלֵיהֶם לַהֲיוֹת עֹשִׂים אֶת יוֹם אַרְבַּעַת עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ אֶדָר וְאֵת יוֹם־חֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בֹּו בְּכָל־שָׁנָה וּשְׁנָה:

כַּיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר־נָחֲוּ בָהֶם הַיְּהוּדִים מֵאִיְבֵיהֶם וְהַחֹדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר נִהְפָּךְ לָהֶם מִיָּגוֹן לְשִׂמְחָה וּמֵאֲבֵל לְיוֹם טוֹב לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם יָמֵי מִשְׁתָּה וּשְׁמִיחָה וּמִשְׁלַח מְנוֹת אִישׁ לְרַעְיָהוּ וּמִתְּנוֹת לְאַבְיָרִים:

וְקָבַל הַיְּהוּדִים אֶת אֲשֶׁר־הִחֲלוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר־כָּתַב מֶרְדֳּכָי אֲלֵיהֶם:

כִּי הָלְמוּ בְּוַהֲמָתָא הָאֲגָגִי צָרַר כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים חָשֵׁב עַל־הַיְּהוּדִים לֵאבֹדָם וְהִפֵּל פֹּהַר הוּא הַגּוֹרֵל לְהִמָּם וּלְאַבֹּדָם:

וּבְבִאָהּ לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אָמַר עַם־הַסֹּפֵר יָשׁוּב מִחֲשָׁבְתוֹ הָרַעַה אֲשֶׁר־חָשַׁב עַל־הַיְּהוּדִים עַל־רָאוּשׁוֹ וְתָלוּ אוֹתוֹ וְאֶת־בָּנָיו עַל־הָעֵץ:

עַל־כֵּן קָרָא לַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה פִּזְרִים עַל־שֵׁם הַפִּזּוֹר עַל־כֵּן עַל־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי הָאֲגָרָה הַזֹּאת וּמִה־רָאוּ עַל־זָכָה וּמִה־הִיָּע אֲלֵיהֶם:

קִיָּמוּ (וְקָבַל) [וְקָבַל] הַיְּהוּדִים וְעַל־זָרְעָם וְעַל כָּל־הַנְּלִיָּם עֲלֵיהֶם וְלֹא יַעֲבֹר לַהֲיוֹת עֹשִׂים אֶת שְׁנֵי הַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה כְּכַתְּבָם וְכַזְמָנָם בְּכָל־שָׁנָה וּשְׁנָה:

וְהַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה כְּזָכְרִים וְנַעֲשִׂים בְּכָל־דֹּר וְדֹר מִשְׁפָּחָהּ וּמִשְׁפָּחָהּ מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה וְעִיר וְעִיר וַיָּמִי הַפּוֹזִרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֹא לַעֲבֹר מִתּוֹךְ הַיְּהוּדִים וְזָכְרָם לֹא־יִסּוּף מִזְרָעָם: } ס

וַתִּכְתֹּב אֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה בַּת־אֲבִיתָיִל וּמֶרְדֳּכָי הַיְּהוּדִי

and made it a day of feasting and merrymaking.

That is why village Jews, who live in unwalled towns, observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and make it a day of merrymaking and feasting, and as a holiday and an occasion for sending gifts to one another.

Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent dispatches to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Ahashverosh, near and far,

charging them to observe the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar, every year –

the same days on which the Jews enjoyed relief from their foes and the same month which had been transformed for them from one of grief and mourning to one of festive joy. They were to observe them as days of feasting and merrymaking, and as an occasion for sending gifts to one another and presents to the poor.

The Jews accordingly assumed as an obligation that which they had begun to practice and which Mordecai prescribed for them.

For Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the foe of all the Jews, had plotted to destroy the Jews, and had cast pur – that is, the lot – with intent to crush and exterminate them.

But when [Esther] came before the king, he commanded: “With the promulgation of this decree, let the evil plot, which he devised against the Jews, recoil on his own head!” So they hanged him and his sons on the gallows.

For that reason these days were named Purim, after “pur.”

In view, then, of all the instructions in the said letter and of what they had experienced in

אֶת־כָּל־תְּקוּף לְקַיֵּם אֶת אֲגֻרַת הַפָּרִים הַזֹּאת הַשְׁנִית:

וַיִּשְׁלַח סְפָרִים אֶל־כָּל־הַיְּהוּדִים אֶל־שִׁבְעַת וְעֶשְׂרִים וּמֵאָה מְדִינָה מְלָכוֹת אַחַשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ דְּבַר שְׁלוֹם וְאַמֶּת:

לְקַיֵּם אֶת־יְמֵי הַפָּרִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּזִמְנֵיהֶם בְּאִשְׁרֵי קָיָם עָלֵיהֶם מְרֹדְכַי הַיְּהוּדִי וְאַסְתֵּר הַמֶּלֶכָה וְכֹאשֶׁר קִיְּמוּ עַל־נַפְשָׁם וְעַל־זֶרְעָם דְּבַר הַצּוֹמוֹת וְזַעֲקָתָם:

{וּמֵאַמֶּר אֲסִתֹּר קָיָם דְּבַר הַפָּרִים הָאֵלֶּה וּנְכַתֵּב בְּסֵפֶר: }ס

that matter and what had befallen them,

the Jews undertook and irrevocably obligated themselves and their descendants, and all who might join them, to observe these two days in the manner prescribed and at the proper time each year.

Consequently, these days are recalled and observed in every generation: by every family, every province, and every city. And these days of Purim shall never cease among the Jews, and the memory of them shall never perish among their descendants.

Then Queen Esther daughter of Abihail wrote a second letter of Purim for the purpose of confirming with full authority the aforementioned letter of Mordecai the Jew.

Dispatches were sent to all the Jews in the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the realm of Ahashverosh with an ordinance of “equity and honesty:”

To observe these days of Purim in their proper time, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had decreed for them – and as they decreed for themselves and for their descendants – the obligation of the fasts with their lamentations.

And Esther’s ordinance validating these observances of Purim was recorded in a scroll.



*A*nd so, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month – that is, the month of Adar – when the king’s command and decree were to be executed, the very day on which the enemies of the Jews had expected to annihilate them, the opposite happened, and the Jews vanquished their enemies.

Up until this point, the story focuses on how the Jewish people were saved from the impending threat, thanks to the later edicts, which spread fear among the nations. Mordecai’s public edict made it clear that the Jews would have the upper hand. Now, the story shifts to what happened on the actual day when both of the sealed edicts were opened. On this day, both Haman’s decree and the counter-decree came into effect, requiring action – not a passive stance. This was a day marked for Jewish survival, revealing divine providence for God’s chosen people.

According to astrological beliefs of the time, Israel’s star was at its lowest, while Amalek’s (Haman’s lineage) was at its peak, explaining Haman’s choice of this particular day. However, a remarkable reversal occurred. Not only did the adversaries of the Jews fail to overpower them, but they also fell from the height of their power to the depths, while the Jews rose from the brink of destruction to great success. This complete reversal is one of the great miracles celebrated on Purim. Furthermore, unlike typical scenarios where an unfavorable fate can be reversed by aligning with a more fortunate partner, the Jews triumphed independently without external aid, underscoring the second aspect of the miracle.

In the major fortified cities throughout the provinces of King Ahashverosh, where the king’s officials, deputies, and army were located, the Jews gathered in self-defense, to attack those who sought their harm. In fact, the king provided military protection and active official support to the Jews, to the point that their adversaries feared approaching or confronting them.

The text makes a crucial distinction between the general populace and the officials. The general populace, unaware of the sealed edicts’ contents, did not know if the king had authorized conflict with the Jews or if the original edicts were still valid. Thus, they feared the Jews themselves, who appeared empowered by the king’s decree.

However, the situation for the officials was different, as they had more insight into the king’s intentions and decrees. Indeed, all the officials of the provinces – the satraps, the governors, and the king’s stewards, who were well-informed about the sealed edicts – reacted differently than the general populace. They knew that the original decree granted them the authority to harm the Jews. Theoretically, they had the option to either assist those who were hostile towards the Jews or remain impartial, holding onto the first decree as their rationale.

But instead of neutrality or opposition, they actively supported the Jews against their enemies and chose to hide the first set of edicts. This action was not driven by fear of the Jews, but by the fear of Mordecai. Acknowledging Mordecai’s elevated status and authority, and possibly feeling apprehensive of potential retribution, they decided to support the Jews.

Now Mordecai was highly respected and feared in the royal palace. There were officials designated for various roles. Some were tasked with managing the royal palace, others with governing the state, and additional officials were charged with waging wars and the conquest of territories. Such officials, when successful, continue to grow in stature and influence, as long as they keep expanding the kingdom’s domain and achieving victories.

Mordecai’s fame was spreading throughout all the provinces; the man Mordecai was growing ever more powerful. Here we learn that Mordecai embodied all three of these prominent roles. Firstly, he held a significant position within the king’s own palace, essentially being the chief of the royal household.



Secondly, his fame spread throughout all the provinces, indicating his role as a deputy to the king, responsible for administering the provinces. Lastly, the phrase “the man Mordecai was growing ever more powerful” reflects his military successes in subjugating many regions under King Ahashverosh’s rule, as evidenced by later verses that describe his achievements in greater detail.

Jews around the world lashed out at their enemies with the stroke of the sword, asserting their will upon those who hated them. The Jews certainly did not have permission to kill anyone they chose. The authority given to them was specifically to take revenge against their tormentors. After it became apparent that no one was able to stand against them in the major cities, they only targeted known enemies whose hostility towards the Jews was widely recognized and who had taken initiative in their efforts to harm them.

The distinction between “enemies” and “those who hated them” is significant here. An enemy is one whose enmity is openly displayed, whereas a hater’s animosity is not openly revealed. Hence, the verse specifies that they acted upon their haters “as they wished,” meaning they could publicly denounce and humble them, but this did not extend to killing them as it did with their overt enemies.

In Shushan, the capital city, the Jews killed a total of five hundred men. They also killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha, the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the foe of the Jews. But they did not lay hands on the spoils.

On that day, the number of those slain in Shushan, the capital city was reported to the king. Since the Jews were only permitted to kill their outright enemies, those whose hostility towards them was well-known and publicly expressed, the large number of those killed indicated the multitude of adversaries who had risen against them. Therefore, the count of the slain was

promptly brought before the king. This was to demonstrate the vast number of adversaries arrayed against them, showing that even after the king’s decree, there were still as many as five hundred individuals who dared to stand against the Jews in Shushan and were consequently slain.

Then the king said to Queen Esther, “In the capital city of Shushan alone the Jews have killed a total of five hundred men, as well as the ten sons of Haman. What then must they have done in the provinces of the realm?!” The king, upon learning of the events in Shushan, realized the extensive number of the Jews’ adversaries and the need for additional measures to protect them. He noted that even in Shushan, the capital city where royal authority is strongest, the Jews had to defend themselves against so many adversaries, killing five hundred men, including Haman’s ten sons. This led the king to ponder the situation in other provinces, where the king’s influence might be less direct, and the Jews possibly faced even greater opposition.

Recognizing the gravity of the situation, the king assured Esther that her further requests for the safety and defense of the Jews would be granted, acknowledging the ongoing peril they faced, saying: “What is your wish now? It shall be granted to you. And what else is your request? It shall be fulfilled.”

“If it please Your Majesty,” Esther replied, “let the Jews in Shushan be permitted to act tomorrow also as they did today; and let Haman’s ten sons be hanged on the gallows.” Esther responded by requesting permission for the Jews in Shushan to act on the following day as they did on the current day. Her request was made to instill fear and dread in the enemies of the Jews, indicating that the king’s support for them was still firmly in place.

Esther specifically referred to the city as “Shushan” rather than “Shushan the capital,” because Shushan was divided into two parts: the capital area, where the king and his nobles resided,



known as “Shushan the capital,” and the broader city area simply referred to as “Shushan.” On the thirteenth day, the Jews defended themselves in the capital. Esther’s request was that they be allowed to eliminate their remaining enemies in the broader city area on the fourteenth day. Additionally, she asked for Haman’s ten sons to be hanged, to further deter any aggression towards the Jewish people.

The king ordered that this should be done, and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan. Haman’s ten sons were hanged: and the Jews in Shushan gathered again on the fourteenth day of Adar and slew three hundred men in Shushan. But they did not lay hands on the spoils.

The rest of the Jews, those in the king’s provinces, likewise gathered and fought for their lives. They disposed of their enemies, killing seventy-five thousand of their foes; but they did not lay hands on the spoils. This verse seems redundant after earlier verses already mentioned the Jews’ victory over their enemies. It even appears contradictory to a previous statement where it was said that no one could withstand them, implying that there was no actual battle. However, this verse specifically addresses the situation in unwalled cities, in contrast to the walled cities that were discussed earlier.

In walled cities, where the royal officers resided and where royal troops provided protection, the Jews did not need to actively defend themselves. In contrast, in the rural and smaller unwalled areas, the Jews faced real combat as their enemies indeed took up arms against them. The Jews in these areas had to gather and stand up for their lives, engaging in actual warfare. Hence, the verse specifies that they killed their enemies, indicating a comprehensive defeat, including those of Amalekite descent. In the walled cities, on the other hand, the phrase “they did as they pleased to their enemies” suggests a less violent resolution, as there was no actual combat.

The fighting took place on the thirteenth day of the month

of Adar, and they rested on the fourteenth day and made it a day of feasting and merrymaking. (But the Jews in Shushan gathered on both the thirteenth and fourteenth days, and so rested on the fifteenth, and made it a day of feasting and merrymaking.) That is why village Jews, who live in unwalled towns, observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and make it a day of merrymaking and feasting, and as a holiday for sending gifts to one another.

Initially, only these Jews agreed to make the fourteenth a day of feasting and joy, not those living in walled cities. The reason for this distinction is that the sealed letters sent by Haman to annihilate the Jews were not widely publicized. The rulers concealed them, and nobody knew about the permission granted to the enemies of the Jews to attack them. The Jews believed either that the initial proclamation for their destruction was entirely false, originated solely by Haman and not the king, or that it was initially true but was later revoked entirely by the king in favor of a new decree. Therefore, there was no special miracle on the fourteenth of Adar, as the king’s decree empowered them over their enemies, and they were not in danger of spontaneous attacks from the local populace.

In the walled cities, the king’s army was present to protect the Jews, so these days were not celebrated as days of feasting. However, the village Jews, who were in genuine danger from their enemies and without the king’s army’s protection, faced imminent peril. Therefore, only the village Jews observed these days as days of feasting and joy.

Mordecai recorded these events. And he sent dispatches to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Ahashverosh, near and far. That is, Mordecai, having noticed that the Jews in the walled cities had not accepted the celebration of Purim because they were unaware of the full extent of the miracle, wrote to them. They were indeed in danger on that day, as Haman’s decree was still technically in effect.



The miracle that occurred was the fear of Mordecai falling upon the officials, leading them to conceal the initial edicts. Therefore, Mordecai felt compelled to explain all these events in detail, informing them that the original edicts had not been revoked and that they, too, were in danger.

This comprehensive explanation was sent to all the Jews, both those in the walled cities and those in other areas, to make them aware of the entire situation and the significance of the events that had transpired.

The dispatches that Mordecai sent charged the Jewish people to observe both the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar, every year. Mordecai's command to observe the fourteenth and fifteenth days of Adar every year raises an intriguing question, particularly regarding the distinction between the walled cities and Shushan. It may seem odd at first why, just because the conflict in Shushan extended to the fifteenth day, it was decreed that Purim in all walled cities should be celebrated on the fifteenth. This appears unconnected to Shushan's events and seems to afford Shushan an undue honor.

To clarify, Mordecai discerned a need to differentiate between the Jews living in open towns or villages and those in walled cities. The unwalled towns would observe Purim on the fourteenth, while the walled cities would do so on the fifteenth. This distinction has a sound basis. Haman's decree to annihilate the Jews was not limited to a single day. It aimed for the complete eradication of the Jewish people across all provinces, starting from the thirteenth day of Adar. If a Jew were found after this date, he would still be at risk of being killed.

Thus, when Mordecai's counter-decrees arrived, granting Jews the right to defend themselves on the thirteenth, this permission was strictly for that day. It was not a blanket permission for ongoing defense or retaliation. This is evident from Esther's request for Jews in Shushan to be allowed to defend themselves on the fourteenth as well, requiring a new royal

decree, as the original only applied to the thirteenth.

On the fourteenth day, the Jews were in great danger because Haman's original decree remained unrevoked and permitted their enemies to attack them beyond the thirteenth. If their enemies had acted on the fourteenth, the officials would not have been able to protect the Jews or authorize them to fight back, as the mandate from the king would have expired.

It was only after the fourteenth day passed without incident, showing that the officials had completely disregarded Haman's decree, that the full extent of the miracle became apparent. Since the Jews in the walled cities did not rest from their enemies until the fifteenth of Adar, Purim was set for them on that day. In contrast, the Jews in the open towns, having no royal protection and having already triumphed over their enemies on the thirteenth, recognized their deliverance immediately on the fourteenth. Therefore, Purim was set for them on the fourteenth day of Adar.

The month of Adar was thus transformed for them from one of grief to joy, and from mourning to a festive day. To reflect this transformation, they were to celebrate these days with feasting and happiness, and as an occasion for sending gifts to one another and presents to the poor.

Mordecai could not institute it as a formal holiday for all of Israel, as it is prohibited to establish new religious holidays. Instead, he ordained marking the day with the giving of gifts to the poor. The ultimate purpose of a holiday is to withdraw from worldly concerns to focus on serving God and studying His Torah. To align with this intent, Mordecai established Purim as days of giving charity, a fundamental commandment, as a substitute for the religious observance typically associated with a holiday.

The Jews accordingly assumed as an obligation what they had begun to practice and which Mordecai had outlined for them.



The Jews accepted two separate obligations: what they had already started practicing and what Mordecai had written up and presented as instructions to them. That is, all of Israel took upon themselves both obligations: the practices that they “began on their own,” which were the villagers observing the fourteenth day that they had initiated themselves, and also what “Mordecai prescribed” to them, which was for those in the walled cities to observe the fifteenth day, a practice they had not started on their own.

For Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the foe of all the Jews, had plotted to destroy the Jews, and had cast a pur – that is, a lot – with the intent to crush and exterminate them. The reason why Mordecai wrote about Haman in such a manner, which ties back to the earlier verse about Mordecai’s writing, was to inform them about the full impact and nature of the miracle. Firstly, it was to clarify that the animosity was not merely due to Mordecai refusing to bow to Haman. Instead, it was deeply rooted in Haman’s lineage from Agag, king of the Amalekites, and his consequent enmity towards all Jews. Haman aimed to annihilate them entirely.

Secondly, it was to indicate that at that time, the astrological and cosmic alignment, represented by “pur” – the random forces of a lottery – was also against the Jews, aiding their adversaries. Initially, Haman’s plan was only to obliterate the Jewish identity and faith, as mentioned earlier. But when casting the lot, which is influenced by fate and the alignment of that specific month and day, his plan extended to physically destroying the Jews, wiping them out through slaughter and destruction. But when Esther came before the king, he commanded: “With the promulgation of this decree, let the evil plot, which Haman devised against the Jews, rebound on his own head!” So they hanged him and his sons on the gallows.

The remarkable aspect of the miracle was not just in its inherent defiance of cosmic forces, but also in its specific timing. “But when Esther came” actually refers to the moment Haman’s evil

intentions were exposed to the king. This was not literally at the point in time when Esther approached the king, but when the king realized Haman’s vile plan, initially hatched in secrecy.

The king did not revoke the original decrees but declared along “with the decree,” indicating that Haman’s plot against the Jews would backfire onto himself, symbolized by the decree itself. Unable to annul the original decree, the king left it in place and issued new ones that enhanced the understanding of the originals.

Haman’s sentence to be executed by hanging was necessary to ensure that officials would fear punishment and adhere to the new decrees. This indicated that the first set of decrees were not annulled, thus preserving the miraculous nature of the events on the 13th day of Adar.

For that reason, these days were named Purim, after “pur,” a lot, symbolizing the remembrance of the miracle’s power. “Purim” signifies the transformation of Haman’s “pur” (lot) into a triumph for the Jews, marking the reversal of their fate against adverse cosmic forces through divine intervention.

Mordecai’s letter offered an exhaustive description of the miracle, emphasizing its significance even on that specific day. Through this letter, the Jews gained a complete understanding of what they had gone through and the sequence of miraculous events that unfolded. The detailed explanation helped them grasp the underlying rationale for their experiences, highlighting the extraordinary reversal of their circumstances.

In accordance with Mordecai’s letter, all the Jews undertook, and irrevocably obligated themselves, as well as their descendants, and all who might join them, to observe these two days in the manner prescribed and at the proper time each year.

Mordecai publicized that the annihilation and plunder of the Jewish people was planned for all provinces of the king, while



Haman had concealed this fact. Haman had feared that if he would have informed the officers that it was a comprehensive decree, they might be reluctant to destroy an entire nation. Therefore, he wanted each governor to think that the decree was only in his province. Mordecai on the other hand, wanted the opposite – for everyone to know that the lot cast had turned out for the good, for joy and gladness for the Jews in all provinces throughout the empire.

These days are, therefore, recalled and observed in every generation – by every family, every province, and every city. They are remembered through the reading of the Book of Esther and observed by engaging in feasting, joy, and the exchange of gifts of food in every generation. Indeed, these days of Purim shall never cease among the Jewish people, and the memory of them shall never perish among their descendants.

To address the debate among the scholars regarding the addition of the Megillah to the sacred writings, Queen Esther daughter of Abihail wrote a second letter of Purim for the purpose of confirming with full authority the composition of Mordecai the Jew.

Initially, the sages were reluctant to establish these days of celebration as a permanent decree due to the prohibition against adding to the sacred texts or inventing new obligations. Esther's involvement, along with Mordecai, was necessary to confirm the observance of Purim with her royal authority. She sent the Megillah as it is known today, from "It happened in the days of Achashverosh" to its completion, urging the scholars to canonize it as part of the holy scriptures (the 24 books of the Bible, Tanach), thus establishing its status and ensuring its observance in future generations as a rabbinical injunction.

Dispatches were sent to all the Jews in the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the realm of Achashverosh with an

ordinance of "equity and honesty." Messages of peace and truth were sent as a means to resolve a rabbinic dispute that had arisen. These words aimed to foster harmony among the scholars and to seek the truth according to Jewish law, affirming the correctness of the arguments presented.

These days of Purim shall be observed at their proper time, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had decreed for them – and as they decreed for themselves and for their descendants – the obligation of the fasts with their lamentations.

To address the questions regarding the "fasts with their lamentations," whose specifics are not well-known, the focus is on why these additional fasts were necessary, especially considering the previous commitment to observe Purim. The key point here is the distinction between adding a festival based on Torah law, which would violate the prohibition of adding to the Torah, and accepting it as a vow or a similar commitment. Therefore, the Megillah emphasizes here that the observance of Purim, as established by Mordecai and Esther, is based on the laws of accepting a vow, rather than as a Torah law. This is further evidenced by the prior acceptance of the four fasts, which are traditional practices not mandated by the Torah, yet were accepted by all of Israel.

And Esther's ordinance validating these observances of Purim was recorded in a scroll. According to Esther's words and arguments, which she sent to the Jewish sages of the time, these practices of Purim were established. The sages agreed with her to maintain Purim as a perpetual ordinance. This was a second validation, leading to the recording of these events in a scroll. This agreement meant that the scroll of Esther would be canonized with the other sacred writings, resolving an initial dispute among the sages. They now concurred with Esther's perspective.



Chapter 10

MORDECAI, REVERED AMONG HIS PEOPLE AND SECOND ONLY TO KING AHASHVEROSH, EXPANDS THE KINGDOM'S INFLUENCE AND DEDICATES HIMSELF TO THE WELFARE OF HIS PEOPLE.

King Ahashverosh imposed tribute on the mainland and the islands.

All his mighty and powerful acts, and a full account of the greatness to which the king advanced Mordecai, are recorded in the Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia.

For Mordecai the Jew ranked next to King Ahashverosh

*K*ing Ahashverosh imposed a tribute on the mainland and the islands. Mordecai, in his administration of the kingdom, was so successful in conquering many territories with the king's army that King Ahashverosh was able to impose a tax on all the lands adjacent to his kingdom.

The strength and might achieved under Mordecai's administration led to the increased stature of King Ahashverosh, who advanced Mordecai to greatness. These events are fully explained in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia.

וַיִּשָּׂם הַמֶּלֶךְ (אחשורש) אֶחָשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ אֶת מֶסַע עַל־הָאָרֶץ וְאֵת הַיָּם:

וְכָל־מַעֲשֵׂה תִקְפוֹ וְגִבּוֹרָתוֹ וּפְרָשֵׁת גְּדֻלַּת מְרֹדֶכַי אֲשֶׁר גָּדְלוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ הַלּוֹאִיָּהֶם בְּתוֹבִים עַל־סֹפֶר דְּבָרָיו הַיָּמִים לְמַלְכִּי מְדִי וּפָרָס:

כִּי אֶמְרֹדֶכַי הַיְּהוּדִי מִשְׁנֵה לְמֶלֶךְ אֲחָשְׁוֶרוֹשׁ וְגָדוֹל לַיְּהוּדִים וְרָצוֹי לְרֹב אֲחֵיו דָּרָשׁ טוֹב לַעֲמּוֹ וְדָבַר שְׁלוֹם לְכָל־זָרְעוֹ:

and was highly regarded by the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brethren; he sought the good of his people and interceded for the welfare of all his kindred.

For Mordecai the Jew ranked second to King Ahashverosh and was highly regarded by the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brethren; he sought the good of his people and interceded for the welfare of all his kindred.

Mordecai's influence and success did not wane, and he remained powerful. This aligns with the principle that the righteous will inherit the land and dwell upon it forever. Despite his high rank, overseeing the entire province and specifically attending to the affairs of the Jewish people, Mordecai was well-regarded by many of his brethren. He consistently sought the good of his people, avoiding harsh or forceful conduct, preferring to act with peace and fairness in all his dealings.



Blessings

after reading the Book of Esther on Purim



AFTER THE READING, IF A QUORUM IS PRESENT, THE READER RECITES THE FOLLOWING AND THOSE LISTENING ANSWER "AMEN":

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who wages our battles, defends our rights, avenges the wrong done to us, punishes our oppressors on our behalf, and brings retribution upon all our mortal enemies. Blessed are You Lord, who exacts payment from all their oppressors; God who delivers. (Amen)

The rose of Jacob thrilled with joy and exulted when they beheld Mordecai garbed in royal blue. You have always been their salvation, their hope in every generation, to make known that all who place their hope in You shall not be put to shame, nor shall all those who trust in You be disgraced forever. Cursed be Haman who sought to destroy me; blessed be Mordecai the Jew. Cursed be Zeresh the wife of [Haman] who terrified me; blessed be Esther, who [interceded] on my behalf. Cursed be Haman who sought to destroy me; blessed be Mordecai the Jew. Cursed be Zeresh the wife of [Haman] who terrified me; blessed be Esther, who [interceded] on my behalf. Cursed be all the wicked; blessed be all the righteous; and may Charvonah also be remembered favorably.

אם נוכחים בקריאה מנין, הקורא אומר את הברכה הבאה:
ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו מלך העולם הרב את ריבנו והדן את דיבנו והנוקם.
את נקמתנו והנפטר לנו מצרינו והמשלם גמול לכל אויבי נפשנו
ברוך אתה יהוה הנפטר לעמו ישראל מכל צריהם האל המושיע.
(אמן)

שושנת יעקב צהלה ושמחה, בראותם יחד תכלת מרדכי. תשועתם
היית לנצח, ותקוותם בכל דור ודור, להודיע שכל קויד לא יבשו ולא
יקלמו לנצח כל החותים בה. ארור הקן אשר בקש לאבד, ברוך
מרדכי היהודי, ארורה זרש אשת מפחיד, ברוכה אסתר בעדי, ארורים
כל הרשעים, ברוכים כל הצדיקים, וגם חרבונה זכור לטוב.



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