

Esther's Choice

By David Feddes

The book of Esther is kind of a strange book in some ways. It's especially a strange book to look at during the time of Advent, of celebrating Jesus' coming. Esther is a book that doesn't mention Jesus. It doesn't mention God. What's it doing in the Bible? We will read the book of Esther, and maybe we'll find out a little bit more why it's in the Bible and what it has to do with Christmas.

Timeline

586 BC Jerusalem and temple destroyed

516 BC New temple completed

478 BC Esther made queen of Persia

458 BC Priest Ezra arrives in Jerusalem

445 BC Jerusalem's walls rebuilt

The book of Esther takes place in the 470s before Christ. And just to give you a quick timeline of where it fits: a little more than a hundred years before that, the Jerusalem temple had been destroyed, but then it had been rebuilt. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell how worship is restored and the walls of Jerusalem are rebuilt. The book of Esther takes place after the new temple has been built, but before Ezra and Nehemiah do their thing.

Even though in the Bible it's after Ezra and Nehemiah, the book of Esther takes place before that, and it tells us what's going on back in the great capital of the Persian Empire, Susa. The Medo-Persian Empire is the largest empire in the history of the world up to that point, and Susa is where King Xerxes reigns. It's an empire that extends all the way from parts of Africa to India throughout a vast realm.

New queen

King Xerxes has a huge feast for all of his big shots. From history, we suspect that he's trying to get them all in a good mood to prepare them for his planned invasion of Greece. The Bible also calls him King Ahasuerus, but history knows him better by his Greek name, Xerxes. He has this huge feast for his nobles, and his wife Vashti has a feast for the women.

During that feast, after about a week of drinking, Xerxes sends for Vashti. He thinks, "It would be really cool if all the nobles could see what a babe my wife is." So he summons Vashti to come and display her beauty to all the nobles. But she says no. That's a problem. Kings don't like anybody saying no to them, not even the queen. So Vashti is deposed as queen. She's never allowed to come into the king's presence again.

After a bit, the king decides, "We need a new queen." So there is a great scouting expedition throughout the Persian Empire. He sends servants here, there, and everywhere to try to find the loveliest knockout in the empire. They bring in a bunch of different women and give them all beauty treatments for a year. Then they take turns going to the king.

One young woman named Hadassah is a Jewish orphan. Her parents have died, and she's being raised by her older relative Mordecai, who is still her guardian. When the beauty scouts come upon Esther, they figure, "Now here is a great prospect." So they bring her in to get the beauty treatments. To make a long story short, she's the one that King Xerxes chooses. She is crowned as the new queen of the Persian Empire. They have found Miss Universe, and she is now the queen.

Meanwhile, Mordecai has always told her, "Don't tell anybody you're a Jew." He knows there's bias and prejudice against Jews, and whatever his other reasons might be, he says, "Don't tell anybody." So nobody knows what people Esther actually comes from.

Mordecai, the guardian and older relative who brought her up, hangs around at the king's gate. Maybe he's even one of the king's officials. While he's there at the king's gate, he hears a couple of the king's bodyguards talking. They are planning to kill the king. Mordecai doesn't have direct access to the king, but he gives a message to Queen Esther that these two guys are out to assassinate the king. They are arrested and executed, and the king's life is saved.

Haman's plot

King Xerxes promotes somebody to be his chief official, his favorite noble of them all—a man named Haman. Haman is a very powerful man, and the king gives an order that everybody in his realm is to bow when Haman walks by. Jewish people aren't good at bowing, especially Mordecai. When Haman walks by, Mordecai just stands there. He won't bow down. This makes Haman furious. He's a very powerful man, and he wants to kill Mordecai. But he is not happy killing just Mordecai, so he decides he's going to kill all the Jews. "Mordecai is a Jew. I don't like him. I don't like Jews. I'm going to kill them all."

Haman goes to the king and tells him, "There is a people in your realm who are nothing but trouble. They are known to be troublemakers. They don't go along with the king's laws. We would be better off in this empire if none of them existed. I will give you 10,000 talents of silver [which was a ridiculous amount of money]. I'll put it into the treasury myself if you'll just authorize me to go and take care of the problem."

The king says, "That sounds good to me. Here's my signet ring. You can use my ring to seal any orders you want, and you can have them killed."

Haman believes in getting the best luck possible, so he rolls his dice or his lots, also called *purim*. The lots settle on the 15th day of the 12th month. That's the day for the massacre, when he kills all the Jews. Haman has authorization for genocide, and he's got a few months to prepare for the massacre.

Mordecai's message

Mordecai hears the decree. When he hears that decree, he wears ragged clothes, and he wails and weeps and makes a huge scene right in front of the palace. Queen Esther knows that making a

scene in front of the palace is probably not going to be very good for his health, so she sends a messenger out to talk to Mordecai—a man named Hathach.

"Mordecai told Hathach all that had happened to him and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her and command her to go to the king to beg his favor and plead with him on behalf of her people. And Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. Then Esther spoke to Hathach and commanded him to go to Mordecai and say, 'All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law: to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter so that he may live. But as for me, I haven't been called to come into the king these thirty days'" (Esther 4:7–11). It's been more than a month that she's seen the king, and it's death to go to him if you're not invited.

They told Mordecai what Esther had said. Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther: "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:12–14)

Esther's feasts

Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, although it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." (Esther 4:15–16) Mordecai then went away and did everything that Esther had ordered him (Esther 4:17).

Esther goes into the presence of the king, and the king holds out his golden scepter. He welcomes her into his presence. He's not going to kill her after all. He says, "Well, Queen Esther, what is it you want? I'll give you anything, even up to half the kingdom" (Esther 5:1–3). She says, "What I'd really like is for you to come to a feast tomorrow." The king says, "A feast! No problem." She says, "And I'd like you to bring Haman along" (Esther 5:4–5).

The king and Haman go to the feast. The king says to Esther, "Honey, now what is it that you really wanted?" She replies, "You know what? I'd like you to come to another feast tomorrow with Haman." So the king agrees to go to another feast (Esther 5:6–8).

Haman is as happy as he can be. He leaves the palace from that feast, anticipating another one. He's the special favorite who was just there with the king and the queen. But then Haman sees Mordecai standing there, unbowed. Haman says, "You know what? I'm the top guy in the empire, except for the king. I am so rich you can't believe it. I've got everything. But as long as Mordecai stands there, I find that life isn't really worth living" (Esther 5:9–13).

He goes home and tells his wife and his buddies how rich he is and how successful he is, how he's the king's favorite, and he's the only one invited to the dinner with the queen and the king. He says, "Yet life is barely worth living because of that Mordecai who won't bow down to me."

They say, "Here's an idea for you, Haman. Aren't you powerful? Build a gallows 75 feet high, and then go to the king tomorrow and ask that Mordecai be hanged on that gallows. That'll make your life happy."

Haman says, "I like it." He gives orders that the gallows be built (Esther 5:14).

The king has a restless night. He can't sleep and asks for the court records to be read to him. They read the scroll and just happen to open to the part about Mordecai revealing the assassination plot and saving the king's life. The king says, "Did we ever reward Mordecai?" They answer, "Nothing was done for him" (Esther 6:1–3).

Haman comes in early to ask the king to execute Mordecai, but before he can speak, the king asks, "What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?" Haman, thinking it's himself, replies, "Let him be robed in the king's own robe, put on the king's horse, and paraded through the city by a high official" (Esther 6:4–9). The king says, "Great idea! Go do that for Mordecai the Jew" (Esther 6:10–11).

Haman carries it out, utterly humiliated, and goes home in grief. His wife Zeresh says, "If this is how things are starting to go, you're doomed" (Esther 6:12–13).

Just then, the king's servants arrive to take Haman to the second banquet (Esther 6:14). At the banquet, the king again asks Esther for her request. She says, "Spare my life and the life of my people. We have been sold for destruction" (Esther 7:1–4). The king asks, "Who did this?" She says, "This vile Haman!" (Esther 7:5–6)

The king storms out in rage. Haman begs for his life, falling on Esther's couch. The king returns and says, "Will he even assault the queen while I am in the house?" (Esther 7:7–8). One of the attendants says, "Haman built a 75-foot gallows to hang Mordecai—the man who saved your life." The king commands, "Hang Haman on it!" (Esther 7:9–10) And that is the end of Haman.

New decree

They still have a problem, though, because the decree to kill all the Jews is still there. You can't reverse or annul a decree that's made by the Persian king. That's just the way it was. Once the king issues the decree, it's got to be carried out. That's the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be changed (Esther 8:8).

But the king says, "I'll give you my signet ring, Mordecai. I'll make you the chief official. Let's think about what we can do." In the earlier decree, the lot had chosen the 15th day of the 12th month to kill all the Jews (Esther 3:7). They come up with a plan: "We can't cancel the previous decree, but we could issue another decree. Let's issue a decree that on the 13th day of the 12th month, the Jews can kill anybody who wants to kill them" (Esther 8:11–12).

That decree is sent throughout the whole empire. On the 13th and on the 14th day, all the people who were plotting to kill the Jews are themselves killed. All of Haman's forces and all of those who were going to wipe out God's people are themselves removed from the scene (Esther 9:1–5). Haman's chosen day, the 15th day of the 12th month, was supposed to be the day when all the Jews died, but instead it became the day when the Jews celebrate being spared. It's called Purim because it's the day that was chosen by the purim, the lots, that Haman rolled (Esther 9:24–26). And so the people of God are saved.

Now, as I said, the book of Esther does not mention the word “God.” It doesn't mention the word “Jesus.” But the book of Esther is in the Bible—the book of God, the Word of God—and it's there for a reason. There are times when God doesn't seem obvious and isn't even mentioned, but is up to something very, very important.

Deadly plots

- Cain
- Pharaoh
- Athaliah
- Haman
- Herod

In Esther's life, there is this deadly plot against God's people, and throughout history, there have been deadly plots to wipe out God's people. But in the midst of all that, there has been a secret divine plan in which God is carrying out his purposes and protecting his people.

Back in the Garden of Eden, right after Adam and Eve were lured into sin by the serpent, God says to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15). This is not just a dislike of women for snakes or snakes for women. There is going to be enmity between the human race and that great serpent, the devil. That sets the agenda for the entire Old Testament.

If you go from the first book of the Bible to the last book of the Bible, Revelation, there is a vision of that great serpent, the devil. He is pictured as a seven-headed red dragon, and he's looming large over a pregnant woman who is going to give birth. He wants to destroy the child of that woman the moment it's born (Revelation 12:1–4). When you read the Old Testament, looming over all of it is that Word of God in Genesis 3—of the enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent—and that vision in Revelation 12 of the great and terrible dragon trying to devour the woman's child.

In the vision of Revelation 12, the woman doesn't represent any one particular woman. It represents the people of God wanting to give birth to the promised Savior. Still, in the course of history, it does involve a lot of particular women.

When there are two sons born to Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Cain murders his righteous brother Abel, and it looks like the seed has already been destroyed (Genesis 4:8). But then Eve gives birth to another—to Seth (Genesis 4:25).

During the time of the Pharaohs of Egypt and of the Israelites being in captivity in Egypt, Pharaoh gives an order that all the Israelite baby boys be murdered (Exodus 1:15–16). That's not just a nasty decree of an Egyptian king. That is also the serpent trying to destroy and wipe out God's people.

After God has given a promise to the line of David that the deliverer is going to come from David's line, what happens? The wicked queen Athaliah comes to power in Judah, and she tries to wipe out the entire royal family, including probably her own grandchildren. She is vicious and murderous and kills them all, except one baby (2 Kings 11:1–2).

Then we have this story of Haman wanting to wipe out all the people of God. The Bible says that Haman was an Agagite (Esther 3:1). You may not know who Agagites are, but Agag was a king hundreds of years earlier who was an Amalekite king, an ancient and vicious enemy of God's people (1 Samuel 15:8). Haman comes from that line. He wants to wipe out all the Jews, but it's not just personal hatred or a tribal feud. Behind it, there is that seven-headed dragon—the devil—wanting to wipe out God's people.

When Jesus is born, evil king Herod hears that a promised child has been born. Herod sends his troops to Bethlehem to kill all the baby boys of Bethlehem, just to make sure that they get rid of the promised one (Matthew 2:16).

In all of that, you have these deadly plots of the devil to wipe out that promised child who's going to be his undoing. And in all those plots, you find that God's plan is never destroyed.

Divine plan

- Eve gives birth to Seth.
- Shiphrah, Puah, Jochebed, Miriam, and princess rescue baby boys.
- Jehosheba rescues baby Joash.
- Esther and Mordecai rescue Jews.
- Mary and Joseph rescue Jesus.
- Jesus rescues all God's people.

Abel is murdered, but then Eve gives birth to Seth, and from Seth come people who worship the Lord (Genesis 4:25–26).

There is that order from Pharaoh to kill all the baby boys in Egypt, but a couple of midwives named Shiphrah and Puah won't do it. They spare the babies that are born, and God blesses them with children of their own (Exodus 1:17–21). Then a godly woman named Jochebed has a baby. She looks at that baby and says, "This is no ordinary baby." So she keeps him in her home for a while until he's just getting too noisy and too hard to manage. Then she sends the little boy's older sister Miriam with a basket—a waterproof basket that they've made—and hides that baby

in the bulrushes along the Nile River. The princess of Egypt goes down there and comes upon the baby. The princess's heart melts, and baby Moses is rescued and spared. Eventually Moses becomes the undoing of Pharaoh's power over the Israelites, and he leads his people to freedom (Exodus 2:1–10).

When all the babies are murdered by the wicked queen Athaliah, there is a godly woman named Jehosheba. She happens to be the wife of a godly high priest of Judah, and Jehosheba rescues that baby Joash. Eventually Joash becomes king, so the line of David still survives despite all the attempts to massacre them (2 Kings 11:2–3).

When Haman tries to wipe out the Jews, Esther and Mordecai are there to rescue the Jewish people (Esther 4–9).

When Herod gives the order to kill the baby boys of Bethlehem, an angel warns Joseph. Mary and Joseph flee with the child to Egypt, and Jesus is not killed by Herod's troops (Matthew 2:13–15).

Then comes the greatest rescue of all. Jesus Christ grows to manhood, lives a perfect life, dies on the cross, rises again, and rescues all of God's people.

Revelation 12 pictures that by saying the seven-headed dragon was trying to destroy the child, but the child was born and was caught up to God and to his throne (Revelation 12:4–5). Almost all of Old Testament history is summarized in just a couple of lines from that vision: the child was born, and he was caught up to heaven. It happened just as God had planned. He was going to send that child and then bring him to heaven to reign over all things.

Satan's targets

- **Jews** mothered the Messiah
- **Babies** resemble baby Messiah
- **Christians** stand with Messiah

This terrible conflict has been going on throughout history. We need to see our lives still in terms of the fact there is a dragon who goes around looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). We need to know that he hates all of humanity, but also that he does single out special targets.

Satan hates **Jews**. You'll see throughout history a strong hatred of Jewish people that rises in various nations. That's not just being politically incorrect or ethnic dislike. Hatred of Jews is motivated by the evil one. Satan especially hates the Jews because the Jews mothered the Messiah.

Satan hates **babies**. He wants to kill babies before they can even become somebody in the world, because babies resemble that baby Messiah.

Satan hates **Christians**. The Bible says that after the child is caught up to heaven, the dragon goes off to make war against the rest of the woman's descendants—that is, all who believe in the

Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation 12:17). So when you see attacks on Christian people, on churches, on Christian families, that's not just psychological maladjustment or things that have gone wrong here or there. Those are attacks of Satan the dragon, the ancient serpent, who harbors a special hatred for those who stand with Jesus Christ the Messiah.

We need to understand the big picture. Each of us has our own life and situation that God has put us in to live, but that smaller situation is part of the big one. In the big situation, we understand that the child has triumphed and is victorious, and the devil is filled with fury because he knows that his time is short (Revelation 12:12). So he's going to inflict as much pain and as much damage in the time he has left, but he has been defeated. Then each of us needs to live out our own place in that story in the way that God has called us, for his purpose and for his plan.

Esther's choice

Let's focus again on the story of Esther within that bigger picture of God's plan and Satan's opposition. Esther was facing a deadly plot, but she was also part of a plan. She had a choice, and Mordecai made that choice very clear. He knew she was scared, but he warned, "Don't think that because you're in the king's house, you alone of all the Jews will escape. If you try to save your own skin, you're going to lose it." What did Jesus say? "Whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:35).

That was the case with Esther. She had to risk her life in order to save it. Mordecai said, "If you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14) God has a plan for his people. No matter what Esther does, God is going to save them. But she could miss out on it if she won't stand up when she has the opportunity to make a difference.

Esther has a choice. Who am I? Am I an orphan? Am I this gorgeous sex object who looks in the mirror every day and admires my wonderful looks and figure? Am I the queen of Persia with slaves at my command, with all the luxuries? Who am I? Do I reject my covenant identity to be the Persian queen and only the Persian queen? Or was there a secret plan all along that I would become the Persian queen to rescue God's covenant people in their time of peril? Do I reject the covenant to remain the queen, or did the position of queen become mine in order to save my people? Am I looking out for number one, or did God put me in this position so that I could carry out his purposes for his people?

Esther has a choice. She can perish in selfishness and unbelief, or she can take the risk of going to the king. She's got a clue from Mordecai what the best choice is. She knows the risk involved, but she says, "I'll go. Let's have fasting, and then I'm going to go. If I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16). I don't know exactly how this is going to turn out, but I'll do the right thing, even if it costs me my life.

Esther is a woman who's acting with a sense of purpose. She knows that all the events of her life were leading up to this moment. There comes a moment sometimes in your life that's crunch time. All the moments matter, but there's a time you know: this moment really matters. So much

hinges on the choice i make. Now I've got to do what I've got to do. In the moment of truth, Esther knows her purpose. She may not have recognized the purpose when she was part of the beauty pageant, or when she was handed over to some king she wasn't fond of. She may have wondered, "What's going on with my life?" But now she knows.

She asked for her people to fast. God's name isn't mentioned, but they weren't fasting for the sake of getting hungry. They fasted three days without food or water because Esther knew that when she went to the king, she needed help from a higher authority, the king of heaven.

With God's help, she dared to face the danger.

Once she has made her choice, she is very, very clever in how she goes about it. She goes to the king. She seeks his favor. The way to a man's heart is maybe through her gorgeous looks, maybe through his stomach. "Let's have a feast. How about another feast? Let's get the king in a good mood. Let's set Haman up for a fall, and then I will spring the trap." She cleverly figures out her plan to carry out God's plan.

Then she seizes the moment. And Haman is a goner.

Hidden hand

- Vashti's refusal of Xerxes
- Miss Universe contest
- Esther's exquisite beauty
- Guards' assassination plot
- King's sleepless night
- Haman's hateful haste

In all of this, a hidden hand is at work. God's name is not mentioned in the entire book of Esther. But God doesn't have to make lots of noise to carry out his plan.

Why did Vashti refuse when the king ordered that she come? She had her own reasons, maybe very good reasons in her own mind. But there was also a hidden hand that was arranging for somebody else to be queen at the right moment.

Why was it that Esther looked like Miss Universe? Just so she could be gorgeous and feel really good about her looks? The philosopher Blaise Pascal once said, "If Cleopatra's nose had been a half inch shorter, the face of the world would have changed." Likewise, if Esther had not been a knockout, the face of the world would have changed. But God's hidden hand gave Esther that exquisite beauty.

Why was it that when people were plotting to assassinate King Xerxes, Mordecai just happened to overhear the plot (Esther 2:21-22)?

Why was it that the king couldn't sleep the night before Haman was coming to ask for Mordecai to be hanged? When the sleepless king asked for some court records to be read, why was it that

the court attendant just happened to start reading the record that said, “Mordecai saved your life, bucko, and you didn’t pay him back”? (Esther 6:1–2)?

All the while, Haman was scheming and hurrying to carry out all his hasty plans, but they all backfired on him.

There is this great hidden hand. Sometimes the theologians call it providence. It means that God plans and appoints all things, even when we don't notice him.

Think again of Cleopatra’s nose and her beauty. Think of her affairs with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony, and the resulting clash with Octavian, later to become Caesar Augustus. If anything had been slightly different, there would never have been a Caesar Augustus, there would never have been a decree that all the world should be taxed, and there would not have been a baby Messiah born in Bethlehem, as was predicted 700 years earlier (Micah 5:2; Luke 2:1–4). Nobody can’t predict what’s going to happen in seven years, let alone 700 years, unless they know and are in charge of everything that happens in between, every detail, even what the wicked do. God can declare Jesus' birth place 700 years ahead of time because his hidden hand directs every detail, right down to the length of Cleopatra's nose.

Self destruction

Haman wanted to find out the best day for the massacre of the Jews. "What is the luckiest possible day for me to carry out my plot?" The lot was cast in Haman’s presence to select a day and a month (Esther 3:7). What does the Bible say? “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord” (Proverbs 16:33).

“There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord” (Proverbs 21:30). If you’re tempted to panic over the various plots of the evil one and what happens in the affairs of nations, just memorize that verse: “There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord.”

"They hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai" (Esther 7:10). Scripture says, “Whoever digs a pit will fall into it; if someone rolls a stone, it will roll back on them” (Proverbs 26:27). If you want to do something nasty to somebody else, look out! You might end up dangling from your own gallows. You might end up falling into your own pit. That boulder that you intended roll onto somebody else may roll back over you and crush you.

Why is that? “The Lord works out everything to its proper end—even the wicked for a day of disaster” (Proverbs 16:4). That’s a stern warning. When you choose, choose carefully. When you choose sides, there is one side where there is a great and terrible power that makes great and terrible plans. That is Satan's side. But no matter how great and terrible Satan is, on the other side there is Someone far greater, against whom no wisdom, no insight, no plan can succeed. “The Lord works out everything to its proper end—even the wicked for a day of disaster.”

Haman ends up dangling from his own gallows. Fast forward to our Lord Jesus Christ. What is Satan’s greatest weapon and his greatest day of triumph? The day of Jesus’ death is the day when

the greatest crime in the history of humanity was committed—the worst sin of them all—the condemnation of the innocent Son of God. The worst death that was ever died happened on that cross. And what do we call it? Good Friday. The day Satan selected for the destruction of all God's plans and God's people is the day when the devil was destroyed by his own weapons. The weapon of sin, the weapons of death—they come back on Satan to destroy him. Christ “disarmed the powers and authorities, and he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Colossians 2:15).

In Haman's scheming, the day of Purim was to be the day when all of God's people were wiped out, but instead it became a day of celebrating victory. The self-destruction of Haman was a preview of the dragon's own self-destruction.

Savior

- Unbowed like Mordecai
- Mediator like Esther
- Executed like Haman
- Sovereign like Xerxes
- God with us

There are four main characters in Esther, and strangely enough, all four of them hint at something about Jesus Christ.

Like Mordecai, Jesus was unbowed. The devil came to Jesus and said, “I’ve got a shortcut for you. You want to run all the kingdoms of the world? Just one little itty-bitty thing—bow down to me” (Matthew 4:8–10). Jesus said, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only’” (Matthew 4:10). He remained unbowed.

Like Esther, Jesus is a mediator. Without Esther in the throne room, there was no hope for the Jewish people. Without Jesus Christ in the throne room, there is no hope for us. “There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:5–6). Jesus, like Esther, is our great go-between, who goes to the great Sovereign of the universe and pleads our case.

Strangely enough, Jesus is even like Haman—not in his character, but like Haman Jesus gets hoisted in the sky. “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (Galatians 3:13). Jesus bears that terrible accursed death that Haman deserved and that Jesus didn’t deserve, but Jesus bore it anyway. We’d like to think, when we read the story of Esther, that we’re all Esthers, and we’re all standing up for the right side and the good team. But left to ourselves, we’re Hamans. “God made him who had no sin to be sin—to be Haman!—for us, that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus was dangling on that tree where sinners belonged. He became like Haman and was executed like him.

Like King Xerxes, Jesus is sovereign. For all the stupidity of Xerxes, there’s one thing in him that can point you to Christ. He was the king of kings—that’s what he’s called in the book of Esther (Esther 1:1). He rules over all the lesser kings of his empire. He’s sovereign over all

things. He's kind of a dummy. He gets hoodwinked here, misled there. His wives are cajoling him this way and that. His officials get him to do things. That's not how God's sovereignty works, of course. But God is the King of kings, the Lord of lords, who alone is immortal, who dwells in light unapproachable, whom no one has seen nor can see (1 Timothy 6:15–16). Like Xerxes, nobody comes into the Lord's throne room unbidden and lives to tell about it.

And yet, this king comes to live with us. We can't go waltzing into his throne room uninvited, but he comes to us as one of us. In fact, he comes as the lowliest of us, born in a manger. So we don't need to be afraid anymore. Now we can go to the throne room of God with boldness, and find grace and mercy to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16). It's not because we have the right to go to the throne room of ourselves, but because he came down here and then invites us into the throne room. The Father extends to us the golden scepter, and we live.

What a marvel it is, what Jesus Christ has accomplished for us, that he came to be God with us.

There were times in history where God seemed entirely silent and unmentioned, but he was running things the whole time. God is never powerless. God is never thwarted. The Bible says, "In the fullness of time, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under the law" (Galatians 4:4–5). In the fullness of time—for such a time as this—he came to the kingdom (Esther 4:14).

Prayer

Father, help us to always rejoice in and revel in your majesty, your power, your wisdom, your plan that carries out your saving purposes and also sends the unrepentant and wicked toward their destruction.

Thank you for the mercy and the grace that you have extended to us, your people. Many Jewish people in Esther's time were in exile because of their sins and their failings, yet you did not forsake them. Thank you that you have not forsaken us, that in our Lord Jesus Christ, you lived among us, and in the fullness of time, you saved us through him.

And now, Lord, we face the fury of that ancient dragon who is so angry because his time is short (Revelation 12:12). Help us to resist the devil, that he may flee from us (James 4:7). We pray for those who are even now facing the terror and pain of devilish attacks, and we pray that you will give them your mercy.

Help us to make the choice to live within your plan, knowing that we were appointed for this. Help us, each in our own way, in our own situation, to be part of that great plan of your wisdom revealed in Jesus Christ.

Thank you that we are united to him by the Holy Spirit. We praise you again that he was born in Bethlehem, and that he has been born in our hearts. May we always rejoice in him, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Esther's Choice

By David Feddes

Slide Contents

Timeline

586 BC Jerusalem and temple destroyed

516 BC New temple completed

478 BC Esther made queen of Persia

458 BC Priest Ezra arrives in Jerusalem

445 BC Jerusalem's walls rebuilt

Esther's Choice

- Deadly plots
- Divine plan

Offspring at War

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

Deadly plots

- Cain
- Pharaoh
- Athaliah
- Haman
- Herod

Divine plan

- Eve gives birth to Seth.
- Shiphrah, Puah, Jochebed, Miriam, and princess rescue baby boys.
- Jehosheba rescues baby Joash.
- Esther and Mordecai rescue Jews.
- Mary and Joseph rescue Jesus.
- Jesus rescues all God's people.

Satan's targets

- **Jews** mothered the Messiah
- **Babies** resemble baby Messiah
- **Christians** stand with Messiah

Esther's Choice

- Deadly plots
- Divine plan

Esther's choice

If you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this? (4:14)

I will go

Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish. (4:16)

Active faith

- Know vital purpose
- Seek higher help
- Dare face danger
- Plan with wisdom
- Seize the moment

Hidden hand

- Vashti's refusal of Xerxes
- Miss Universe contest
- Esther's exquisite beauty
- Guards' assassination plot
- King's sleepless night
- Haman's hateful haste

Haman's lucky day

The pur (lot) was cast in Haman's presence to select a day and month. (Esther 3:7)

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord. (Prov 16:33)

There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord. (Prov 21:30)^[1]_{SEP}

Self destruction

They hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. (Est 7:10)

Whoever digs a pit will fall into it; and a stone will come back on him who starts it rolling. (Proverbs 26:27)

The Lord works out everything to its proper end—even the wicked for a day of disaster. (Proverbs 16:4)

Savior

- Unbowed like Mordecai
- Mediator like Esther
- Executed like Haman
- Sovereign like Xerxes
- God with us