

## Is This the Moment You Were Created For? Inspiration from the Story of Queen Esther

**Esther 4:14:** (The Living Bible) *If you keep quiet at a time like this, God will deliver the Jews from some other source, but you and your relatives will die; what's more, who can say but that God has brought you into the palace for just such a time as this?*



On March 20, 2019, Jewish people will celebrate the annual festival of Purim. This festival commemorates the defeat of Haman's plot to massacre the Jews as recorded in the book of Esther. This book reads like a movie script - we have a beautiful, courageous heroine that was way outside of her comfort zone (Esther), a fearless hero (Mordecai), and of course, the dastardly villain (Haman). It is a story of faith, bravery, suspense, betrayal and palace intrigue. We read about a forgotten good deed, a dazzling reward, the perfect timing from God and a just punishment for the evildoer, setting up a satisfying ending. For us today, the lessons of Esther should give us comfort that God is in control of history and what might seem unanswerable now will make sense in God's timing and in God's way.

### Introduction, *Read Scripture: Esther, The Bible Project*

- *The book of Esther. It's one of the more exciting and curious books in the Bible. The story is set over 100 years after the Babylonian exile of the Israelites from their land. And while some Jews did return to Jerusalem (remember Ezra and Nehemiah), many did not. And so, the book of Esther is about a Jewish community living in Susa, the capital city of the ancient Persian Empire. The main characters in this story are two Jews - Mordecai and his niece, Esther. Then there's the king of Persia, who is something of a drunken pushover in this story. Then there's the Persian official, Haman, the cunning villain. This is a curious book in the Bible, mainly for the fact that God is never even mentioned. Not once. Which might strike you as kind of odd - I mean, isn't the Bible about God? But this is a brilliant technique by the author, who is anonymous, by the way. It's an invitation to read this story looking for God's activity. And there are signs of it everywhere. The story is full of very odd "coincidences," and ironic reversals, and it all forces you to see God's purpose at work, but behind the scenes.*



Special guests: Julie and Laurie. Julie has joined us several times on Christian Questions. She is the CQ Rewind creator and manages several things for Christian Questions.

Julie's comments are in purple and Laurie's comments are in pink.

Julie: I was talking with my sister, Laurie, about CQ's upcoming topics of women in the Bible. Laurie suggested we do a podcast on Esther.

Laurie: I am Julie's sister and a CQ volunteer contributor. I am a proofreader for the CQ Rewind Show Notes, and I also work on the team that produces our CQ Kids animated videos. You can find them on our website and our YouTube channel, [christianquestions.com/youtube](http://christianquestions.com/youtube).



Laurie is the voice of the CQ Kids videos and also does some other voiceovers for our podcasts.

I chose Esther because this is one of my favorite Bible stories and I have always been inspired by her courage and fascinated by the reversals of fate of the main characters.

As we tell the story, we are going to give you several “treasure maps” to find a particular theme we found running through the story. The first theme is BANQUETS - there are 10 banquets in Esther in pairs. Watch for these because they help advance the story.



Brief background: The events of Esther take place around 483 BC, 103 years after Nebuchadnezzar had taken the Jews into captivity. The empire of the Medes and Persians ruled the world under King Ahasuerus - (His secular name was King Xerxes.) Esther 1:1 tells us he reigned over 127 provinces, stretching from Ethiopia to India. This would include modern-day Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon and Israel, as well as sections of Egypt, Sudan, Libya and Saudi Arabia. He was very powerful. During this time, there was the first remnant of Jews who had returned to Judah in Israel. But Esther and Mordecai were still in Persia. As per usual with ancient heathen kings, Xerxes was an absolute monocrat - what he said went. His word was law. The power of life and death was in his hands. He sat on a magnificent throne in a palace called Shushan.

Shushan, also called Susa, is in western Iran and was excavated from 1884-1979. Archeologists uncovered the palace foundations matching exactly as the Bible describes. This story is another example of archeology proving the Bible. **Please see Bonus Material.**



## THE STORY – CHAPTER ONE



Let's start with the first of the three banquets. King Xerxes hosted a six-month long banquet for his military officers and dignitaries to show off his spoils of war and to plan the battle strategy for invading

Greece in the near future. Persian kings often held banquets before going to war in order to show that they had the wealth to carry out a campaign. After that was over, he held a special seven-day banquet for the palace servants and the people of the city of Shushan. On the last day of this seven-day banquet, the king - who was drunk - called for his wife, Vashti, to come to him wearing her royal crown to show off her beauty. She was hosting a separate banquet of her own at the time.

**Esther 1:12:** (NASB) *But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. Then the king became very angry and his wrath burned within him.*

The Bible does not say why she refused. It seems like a reasonable request especially when dealing with a formal government event like this. Commentaries suggest perhaps she was pregnant and did not want to be viewed in that state, or that she did not want to be paraded around like a possession in front of a group of drunken men, or that it was the Persian custom to not be shown in public.

When she refuses, the king becomes angry and consults with his seven closest advisors to decide what should happen to a queen who would not obey orders. They said what she wronged the king and even all of the princes in the province, because after what Vashti did, wives would get the idea they could refuse their husbands. They recommended Vashti be banished from the kingdom and a new wife chosen, and in **Esther 1:20** it says, "Then all women will give honor to their husbands, great and small." Later, the king regrets his decision, but according to law, the word of a Persian king was irrevocable, so she could not be restored as queen. This is similar to what happened with King Darius when he gave an irreversible edict which had Daniel thrown into the lion's den. When they made a law, they could not change it.

## THE STORY – CHAPTER TWO

There was a search for the most beautiful virgins to present before the king. Esther was one of them. She was a beautiful Jewess, and the cousin of Mordechai; a man who worked at the palace. Some accounts say she was his niece. He adopted Esther and raised her when her parents died.

The Jewish historian, Josephus, states that 400 women filled the harem as candidates to be the new queen. In **Esther 2:1-4** Esther was chosen to be one of them. It is important to note the historical context of the treatment of women. The Scripture says she was taken. Esther, like the other women of her time, did not have a choice in the matter.

(Source: Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers) Esther 2:3 - The whole verse shows...in how degrading an aspect Eastern women were, as a whole, viewed. It was reserved for Christianity to indicate the true position of women, not man's plaything, but the helpmeet (helpmate) for him.

I like this next part, because it shows that Esther's demeanor was special. Something besides her beauty impressed her handler, Hegai. Was it grace? Humility?

**Esther 2:9:** (NASB) *Now the young lady pleased him and found favor with him. So, he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and food, gave her seven choice maids from the king's palace and transferred her and her maids to the best place in the harem.*



The theme of **TWO** - A detail mentioned twice, an event happens twice, or an event will occur that is parallel to another event. **Please see Bonus Material.** So far, the account provided:

- **TWO** lists of the names of the king's servants and advisors: (Esther 1:10,14)
- **TWO** houses for the women (divided by virgin and concubine): (Esther 2:8,19)
- **TWO** reports that Esther concealed her identity.

We want to point out one more theme on our treasure map.





**Esther 2:10,12:** (NASB) <sup>10</sup>*Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make them known...* <sup>12</sup>*Now when the turn of each young lady came to go in to King Ahasuerus, after the end of her twelve months under the regulations for the women—for the days of their beautification were completed as follows: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and the cosmetics for women.*

Did you catch the theme of things being hidden? Esther is hiding her nationality. It will be revealed dramatically later. After one year of beauty treatments, the young woman finally would go to see the king. She was permitted to wear whatever she wanted as far as clothes and jewelry. When it was Esther's turn, she listened to Hegai's advice and only wore what he suggested.

She did not put on makeup or jewelry to accentuate what she considered beautiful about herself. She sought out not her own will but what the king wanted. She understood Hegai knew what the king liked and disliked in a woman.

**This is good for the Christian to remember:**

**1 Peter 3:3, 4:** (NASB): <sup>3</sup>*Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses;* <sup>4</sup>*but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.*

Esther showed *humility* and a willingness to step back and let someone else who knew better make the decisions. Sometimes we think we know how best to handle a situation, and instead of asking others for advice who have more experience than we do, we plow ahead, and that is usually when things come crashing down on us.

The king chooses Esther to be the new queen in Esther 2:17.



Sometime later, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate and overhears two of the king's eunuchs plotting to assassinate the king and reports it to Esther who tells the king. (*Mordecai reveals the plot to kill the king.*) Mordecai is not rewarded for this act. (Esther 2:21-23) This will become important later as part of God's perfect timing.

**So far it seems that the good guys are in a good place.  
Who are the bad guys and why are they bad?**

Even though there is a plot against the king, the two who are conspiring are not the real "bad guys" here. Their evil is uncovered and swiftly dealt with. The real darkness in the story of Esther comes from a man who has great power, influence and an ego that continually seeks to be elevated.

## THE STORY - CHAPTER THREE

Proverbs 16:18: (KJV) *Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*

Every story has a villain. The king, unaware of his wickedness, appointed an evil man named Haman to be his right-hand. Haman loved his high position, and especially loved it when the people bowed down to him. But day after



day, Mordecai refused to bow down to him, which enraged Haman. An insatiable desire for prestige and power is destructive.

**Esther 3:5:** (NASB) *<sup>5</sup>When Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage to him, Haman was filled with rage. <sup>6</sup>But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him who the people of Mordecai were; therefore, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.*

Should Mordecai have simply bowed down to Haman just to keep the peace? He must have known he would be stirring up trouble by not doing it - couldn't he have just outwardly bowed out of a general respect, knowing in his heart it was just an insincere action anyway, so why did it matter? Since the king had commanded the officials do this - wasn't Mordecai disobeying a direct order?

In **Esther 3:4**, the only reason Mordecai would give for disobeying the order was because he was Jewish. That presumably meant he would only bow to God. The Hebrew says, "But Mordecai did not bow down or give obeisance or pay honor to the king."

That Hebrew word for "obeisance" is supposed to be to God only - **Psalms 95:6**, **2 Chronicles 7:3** and **29:29**. To pay honor to Haman would be an expression of idolatry and Mordecai could not do that. This is similar to the story of the three Hebrews under King Nebuchadnezzar. They could not bow down to the image because they would not put anyone or anything before God.

The fact he gave being Jewish as the answer could also hint at the ethnic war between the Amalekites and the Israelites - more on this later.

**Esther 3:7:** (NASB) *In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, Pur, that is the lot, was cast before Haman from day to day and from month to month, until the twelfth month, that is the month Adar.*

Haman "cast lots" to determine the best day and month to carry out this plan (to not only kill Mordecai, but to kill all the Jews). This day was almost a year away giving Esther time to make her plea to the king - this was God's providence at work - He picked the date. The Persian word for "lots" was "purim," which became the name of the holiday celebrated by the Jews because they were delivered, not killed, on the day that Haman appointed.

**Notice he does not tell the king the cause of this request nor even the identity of the people:**

**Esther 3:8-11:** (NASB) *<sup>8</sup>Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of all other people and they do not observe the king's laws, so it is not in the king's interest to let them remain...*

He singled out ALL Jews because he was disrespected by ONE Jewish man. No other nation was as scattered yet remained so unified.

**This symbol of Jewish strength did not sit well with Haman:**

*<sup>9</sup>If it is pleasing to the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who carry on the king's business, to put into the king's treasuries. <sup>10</sup>Then the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. <sup>11</sup>The king said to Haman, The silver is yours, and the people also, to do with them as you please.*





Haman was extremely devious.

The edict went out to “destroy, kill and annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day.” It had a strong incentive program - you get to keep the possessions of any Jew killed.

We backtrack roughly 1,000 years to see how we got to this point - the story of Amalek. Haman was a direct descendent of Amalek, the grandson of Jacob’s brother, Esau. He was an actual person who later became the leader of a clan, which became a nation of the same name. Jewish tradition has it that he was raised in the tents of Esau, listening to his grandfather complain about how Jacob had stolen his birthright in Genesis 25. Amalek absorbed Esau’s hatred of the children of Jacob, and it later became the nature of the nation of Amalek to hate the Jews.

We talked briefly about Amalek on [CQ Episode #1052 “Is It God’s Fault We Have Evil in this World?”](#) In Exodus 17:8-16, just after crossing the Red Sea when Israel was wandering defenseless in the wilderness, the tribe of Amalek mauled and killed the oldest and weakest who were straggling at the rear. A good lesson to remember is “COMPLETE OBEDIENCE TO GOD SAVES LATER REGRET.”

[Please see more on this in the Bonus Material](#) - It is important at this point in the story to know that Amalek was known for their love of self and reliance on violence to prove its superiority. Their ideology was “might makes right.” They insisted God was absent in the world and everything happened by chance. This is CONTRARY to what the Jews believe and what the book of Esther teaches - the many “coincidences” and reversals in the book were overruled by God. Haman is called an Agagite. Agag was the name of a specific king that the prophet Samuel killed. It also refers to the title of the Amalekite kings, so Haman comes from this royal line. We do not know who the descendants of Amalek are today, but “fighting Amalek” means battling our own desires and remembering God instead of our own power. Metaphorically we have Amalek in us, to the extent we doubt the existence of God and His overruling, think everything is random and what we have is because of our own efforts and might. We do not want to have the Amalek spirit in us.

There were generations of animosity. The Amalekites were enemies of Israel. King Saul was commanded to destroy the Amalekites, but he did not. Because he did not destroy them, Haman lived to try to destroy the Jewish nation. “COMPLETE OBEDIENCE TO GOD SAVES LATER REGRET.”

**Haman’s evil comes from a generationally-fed disdain for God’s people.  
Where does this leave Esther?**

We are always noticing how evil begets evil and it is the same with prejudice. The subtlety with which a prejudice can be planted into a heart and mind is a fearful thing and the end results of these things are never good. Fortunately, God’s providence was to protect His people and as we shall see, He did that in a powerful way.

We have another theme to watch for on our treasure map:



...the reversal of destiny through a sudden and unexpected turn of events. In literature, this is called peripety. (Pronounced "per-RIP-e-tee.") The Jews seem destined to be destroyed but instead are saved.

## THE STORY – CHAPTER FOUR

Mordecai is in mourning, because he understands the Jewish people are in desperate need of deliverance and they are all fasting. He sends along a copy of the edict to Esther, in the hopes she will go to the king and plead on behalf of their people. But Esther sends a message back to Mordecai.

Esther 4:11,13-14: (NASB)<sup>11</sup>All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days.

Esther has heard the warning but is not yet ready to act. Fear for one's life is a BIG obstacle.

Hidden Things  
REVEALED

<sup>13</sup>Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. <sup>14</sup>For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place (a veiled reference to God's protection and providence) and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?

The story of Esther is inspiring to us today.

(Source: <https://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2018/february/queen-esther-speak-up-larry-nassar-abuse-victim.html> - summarized) Larissa Boyce, one of hundreds of Larry Nassar's victims of abuse against elite gymnasts, wanted to demonstrate the importance of standing up for truth to her four children, ages two through ten at the time. She looked to the biblical account of Queen Esther to inspire her to stand against her enemy. One of Boyce's sisters exhorted her to model Esther's courage - "And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this." Boyce heard these words as a direct message. "I felt that if my story could help at least one other person," Boyce said, "then it would be worth it."

The story of Esther can be applied to any circumstance in our lives where there is hardship and injustice. We see how Esther learned to stand up even though it was not natural for her. She was only about 15 or 18 years old at the time.





**Esther 4:15,16:** (NASB) <sup>15</sup>Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, <sup>16</sup>Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus, I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish. (Esther faced her fear of death) So, Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him.



Why does God care whether or not Esther and the people eat? What did this accomplish? And how important is fasting for us today? Is this something we as Christians should be doing before making important decisions?

The idea of fasting in the Jewish tradition is to put all your focus on God.

The Jews today fast before Purim in commemoration. This is one of the places where God is here in the book but hidden.

- Fasting was in stark contrast to the feasting going on.
- It was not to Esther's advantage to see the king after not eating for three days, but she fasted anyway.

There were TWO fasts in the story:



There was national collective fasting when the people found out about Haman's plot to kill them all - but Esther did not participate in this because she was in the palace not knowing what was going on.

**Esther 4:1-3:** (NASB) <sup>1</sup>When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly. <sup>2</sup>He went as far as the king's gate, for no one was to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth. <sup>3</sup>In each and every province where the command and decree of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing; and many lay on sackcloth and ashes.

In **Esther 4:15-16**, Esther declared her own fast - *it was her moment of transformation.*



Another reversal was that she would not remain separate from her people anymore. Until this moment, the fast was only taking place outside the palace. Now she brought it inside her chamber. If she would perish, it would be with her people and for her people, not separately.

Esther's fast was more than a show of solidarity. In this moment she chose to take on the burdens of her people. Her life was hanging in the balance too, and her salvation would be that of her peoples'. *This time of fast would be to*

*focus on God's mercy.* Throughout the Bible, fasting is tied to petitioning and subservience to God.

For more on this topic, please search our archives for Episode #826 "Why Focus on Fasting and Prayer?"

The Jewish people fasted for three more days. The second fast, Esther's fast, transformed their mourning into a rallying cry full of hope. It was a rallying cry for Esther's salvation, and by extension, their own. The decree still loomed but the seed of redemption had already been planted.



Romans 15:13: (NIV) *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

 **Courage, [What is the Origin of Esther's Fast, Alephbeta.Org/Purim](https://alephbeta.org/Purim)**

- *...Although that first fast was important and it showed the peoples' total dependence on God, it didn't carry this lesson we needed to remember. What we need to preserve and remember to this day is Esther's willingness to take a stand and put herself on the line for her people. It's very nice to get all religious during a time of need and say with full conviction, "I BELIEVE that God will figure this one out," but it's something else entirely to take a risk and make myself God's partner in that moment. Esther showed us that there are times we must choose our conscience over comfort. Times when we are called upon to fill a role no one else can. God may hold the power to bring salvation, but we are tasked with being His partners in it.*

We partner with God when we follow His ways.

- God was working in Esther's life before she could realize it.
- She was being prepared to be the conduit to save His nation of Israel.
- This called for great commitment. "If I perish, I perish, but I know that I perished for the cause of God."

There was great heroism in this brave young woman.



*Even when it looks  
as though the world is in  
the hands of evil people,  
God has control and  
protects those that are His.*

(Source: [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2239](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2239)) At probably only 20 years old she is tasked with out maneuvering the king's most trusted advisor and playing a central role in stopping Haman. It would have been very easy for her to say no, that is too dangerous, too hard, I'm too young or I'm a woman. Instead she takes on these challenges and sees God's leading. She sees that she is in this place for a reason. The lesson for us is that so many times we may feel like asking God "why me" or if only this or that didn't happen then "xyz" would be easier. Certainly, Esther would not have chosen to be an orphan or probably even to marry this king, but that wasn't the path that her life had gone. That wasn't the way that God had led her, so instead of complaining and questioning, she looked at the tasks that were laid before her and saw the amount of responsibility placed on her shoulders and trusted God. She was accepting of whatever His will might be in doing the next most difficult thing in front of her.

**Esther came to the point of stepping out against evil.  
What did she do to ensure it was enough?**

For Esther, the guidance of Mordecai and her personal preparation of fasting and praying gave her a solid foundation on which to stand. She would now have to actually do the work necessary to save her people. That work would require grace, wisdom and a whole lot of bravery, without any guarantees of success.

## THE STORY – CHAPTER FIVE

**By God's grace, the king holds out his scepter and Esther is safe:**

**Esther 5:1,2:** (NASB) <sup>1</sup>Now it came about on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace in front of the king's rooms, and the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room, opposite the entrance to the palace. <sup>2</sup>When the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, she obtained favor in his sight; and the king extended to Esther the golden scepter which was in his hand. So, Esther came near and touched the top of the scepter.

*Whatever we have, whatever positions we occupy of influence, or power,  
or wealth or confidence in the esteem of others, is a stewardship granted  
to us by the Lord. Esther did not come to  
a place of honor and privilege by accident –  
the Lord overruled the matter. Whatever  
we have is because of God. Use it faithfully and as wisely as possible.*



Whatever we have and whatever our position in life, is the stewardship granted to us by the Lord. That makes me think of you, Rick and Jonathan. You had the opportunity, a microphone, the time and the willingness, and could have had a talk show on politics, or on how to make cabinets or anything else of interest to you. Instead, you dedicated your entire lives to taking the stewardship you were given and turning it back over to God to bring glory to Him. We all have our proverbial microphone and can do something within our spiritual influence to use it for the privilege of speaking about God's word.

We all have something - use it to the glory of God.

The king asks Esther what her request is. He even promises her up to half of the kingdom! Instead of getting right into the decree that will kill all of the Jews, she asks the king if she can prepare a banquet for him and Haman. (Notice Mordecai only asked her to entreat the king.) She came up with the strategy of a banquet.



So, they have the banquet. The king asks again about Esther's request. But instead of telling him, she says she wants to have a second banquet, and Haman is invited again. At the next banquet, she will finally tell the king her request.

WHY DID ESTHER GIVE TWO BANQUETS? Perhaps this is a lesson in being thorough and complete.

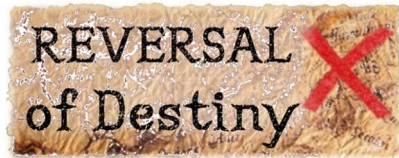


The Bible does not specifically say, but it seems apparent God was guiding her. Maybe she sensed the king's mood was not quite right at the first banquet, or something was just "off." We will see it was providential that she waited.

On his way out of Esther's first banquet, Esther 5:9 says Haman was happy and in high spirits. BUT...then he sees Mordecai at the gate who does not bow down to show him respect, and Haman is filled with rage. He gets home and brags to his wife and his friends about how wealthy he is, how many sons he has and how the king specifically honored him. Then he tells them there is another banquet being given tomorrow by the queen that he will be attending. But then he says that he has no satisfaction in any of this as long as he has to see Mordecai sitting at the gate. His wife has an idea...

Esther 5:14: (NASB) *Then Zeresh his wife and all his friends said to him, Have a gallows fifty cubits high made and in the morning ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on it; then go joyfully with the king to the banquet. And the advice pleased Haman, so he had the gallows made.*

So, was it actually gallows or a pole? NIV says, "Have a pole set up, reaching to a height of fifty cubits, and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai impaled on it." Please see more in Bonus Material of the Rewind Show Notes. Based on testimony from the Greek historian, Herodotus, impalement was the typical Persian punishment. One article I read said it was possible he was impaled first and then hung up on gallows for everybody to see.



Haman was hanged from the very gallows he had built for Mordecai.

## THE STORY – CHAPTER SIX

That night, the king could not sleep and ordered the records of his reign to be read to him. In Esther 6:2, the account of how Mordecai saved his life is recounted.

Remember what God had set up previously? Mordecai saved the life of the king, but “oddly” enough, he was not rewarded at that time.

It is like God planted a seed back in chapter 2, and now that seed has bloomed, and all the conditions are absolutely perfect for the rest of the plan to be set in motion. Sometimes, in my life, I feel like God is “playing the long game.” Sometimes I do not understand why something happened in my life until years later. I look back and say, “Ohhhh...so that is why that happened. I can see the fruitage now.”

Sometimes positive and negative things happen to us that God allows because He knows the experience will be crucial in our future. **Please see the Bonus Material for more on “coincidences” that happen in the book of Esther.** If we are a footstep follower of Jesus, things that happen to us are not coincidence but an overruling of God.

Proverbs 16:18: (NASB) *Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling.*

**Here’s a bit of irony. It seems that Haman is there at that moment to ask the king if he can kill Mordecai, but the king has a question for HIM:**

Esther 6:6: (NASB) *So Haman came in and the king said to him, What is to be done for the man whom the king desires to honor? And Haman said to himself, Whom would the king desire to honor more than me?*

**Haman’s ego is too much. He goes all out with his suggestion:**

Esther 6:7-9: (NASB) *<sup>7</sup>Then Haman said to the king, For the man whom the king desires to honor, <sup>8</sup>let them bring a royal robe which the king has worn, and the horse on which the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown has been placed; <sup>9</sup>and let the robe and the horse be handed over to one of the king’s most noble princes and let them array the man whom the king desires to honor and lead him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him, Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor.*



Haman is setting up how he wants to be treated. Much to Haman’s humiliation, the king tells him that the intended man of honor *is Mordecai*, and Haman is to be the one to carry out the suggestion he intended for himself.

He follows the king’s orders and goes home very upset. His wife warns him that since Mordecai is Jewish, Haman would not be able to stand against him, and he will come to ruin. The eunuchs come to take him to the second banquet.



# THE STORY – CHAPTER SEVEN

The king once again asks Esther (at the second banquet) what she wants and promises her half the kingdom. This reminds us of Satan tempting Jesus in the wilderness in Matthew 4:8-10. This could have been a temptation for this young girl. Esther could have pushed for position and power and let things happen the way they would. But she valued her people and resisted taking the wrong path.



*Firmly and intentionally set our priorities so when temptations come (and they will come) we choose the God-honoring path.*

**Esther 7:3-6: (NASB)** <sup>3</sup>Then Queen Esther replied, If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me as my petition, and my people as my request; <sup>4</sup>for we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed and to be annihilated. Now if we had only been sold as slaves, men and women, I would have remained silent, for the trouble would not be commensurate with the annoyance to the king. <sup>5</sup>Then King Ahasuerus asked Queen Esther, Who is he, and where is he, who would presume to do thus? <sup>6</sup>Esther said, A foe and an enemy is this wicked Haman! Then Haman became terrified before the king and queen.



**Treasure Map Theme:** Things that are hidden will be revealed - Esther reveals Haman’s hidden agenda and Esther and Mordecai’s hidden identity is revealed.

**Esther 7:7-8: (NASB)** <sup>7</sup>The king arose in his anger from drinking wine and went into the palace garden; but Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that harm had been determined against him by the king. <sup>8</sup>Now when the king returned from the palace garden into the place where they were drinking wine, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, Will he even assault the queen with me in the house? As the word went out of the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face.

Haman’s plot unraveled before the king.

One of the king’s eunuchs tells the king that Haman set up gallows to kill Mordecai, who had saved the king from assassination. The king roars, “Then hang Haman on it!”



**Treasure Map Theme:** Talk about reversal of destiny! Haman, once the most powerful man in the kingdom under the king is now begging for his life at the feet of a Jewish teenager! Mordecai is now elevated to Haman’s old position.

(Source: <https://thetorah.com/the-women-in-esther>) In the scenes in which Esther traps Haman, she is indeed indirect, self-effacing, and manipulative. Some commentators find these qualities morally unappealing or unacceptable as an image of the feminine. But how else could one behave in the Persian court—or any court? The Vashti episode demonstrated that the king may react badly to strong-willed women who do not temper their strength with subtlety. This might have been fine for Vashti, but it would have rendered Esther ineffective when efficacy was a national imperative. Also, the king has gotten himself into the fix. Can he simply remove his favorite official for an action enshrined in a royal decree? Moreover, the king might realize that he could protect his wife from the mob without sacrificing his vizier or butting up against the earlier decree. The slow-witted monarch has to be brought to the brink of action by suspense and anger, then pushed into action before he could think it through.

**Even though Haman’s dark plot has been revealed, the challenges continue. How are the Jews saved from the decree?**

It is in this part of the story that the messy details of righting wrongs in the sinful world are revealed. Coming up is death and carnage and we always look at this part and say, “Can’t we do without THAT?” No! As long as sin permeates the hearts and minds of men, this type of scenario of “victory” will always have a bittersweet taste.

## THE STORY – CHAPTER EIGHT

REVERSAL  
of Destiny 

Here is where we start to see a lot of reversals: Haman thought he was getting property of the Jews; in Esther 8:1 Queen Esther got his property. Esther appoints Mordecai to be in charge of the property. Then the king takes off his signet ring (the one originally given to Haman) and presents it to Mordecai. Esther begs the king to stop the order to kill the Jews, but instead the king tells her and Mordecai to write another decree in his name and then seal it with his ring.

TWO 

(TWO decrees.)

Again, they could not just reverse the original decree, which was part of the “law of the Medes and Persians.” Even the king could not reverse it. But a clever way to get around that was to give permission for them to come up with a new decree that would offset the first without actually cancelling it.



**Esther 8:11,17:** (NASB) *<sup>11</sup>In them the king granted the Jews who were in each and every city the right to assemble and to defend their lives, to destroy, to kill and to annihilate the entire army of any people or province which might attack them, including children and women, and to plunder their spoil...<sup>17</sup>In each and every province and in each and every city, wherever the king’s commandment and his decree arrived, there was gladness and joy for the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many among the peoples of the land became Jews, for the dread of the Jews had fallen on them.*

# THE STORY - CHAPTER NINE

Reversal - fear and sadness turned to joy in the provinces.



Esther 9:1: Now in the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar), on the thirteenth day when the king's command and edict were about to be executed, on the day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, it was turned to the contrary so that the Jews themselves gained the mastery over those who hated them.



The day came and the **TWO** decrees were put into effect. The Jews defended themselves - Esther 9:6 says they killed 500 people in the fortress of Susa. They also killed Haman's 10 sons, but they did not take any plunder. This shows us that gain or revenge was not the primary motive - they were only out to defend themselves and their families.

It is amazing to me that so many died. Knowing that the Jews could defend themselves, what was the point of attacking them? They must have wanted to take their property?

Commentaries say this is the first chapter in the Bible where anti-Semitism comes in. Jews were to be killed simply because they were Jewish.

In Esther 9:12, the king asked Esther if she wants anything else, and she says yes, she asks for another day of killing (**TWO**) - (That is why Purim is a two-day long celebration in Israel) - and the bodies of Haman's ten sons hung from the gallows. The next day, the Jews at Susa killed 300 hundred more people, again taking no plunder or treasure. Throughout the provinces, 75,000 more are killed. The following day, there is a period of rest, feasting and gladness.



This is difficult to think about - so many people are killed, but the flip side is a big celebration. How do we reconcile that in our minds?

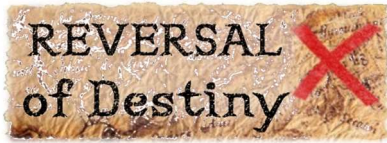
The Jews did not start the fighting. The decree said, "You can assemble to defend yourself." They were allowed to defend themselves.

The rest of Esther 9 details the establishment of the Purim holiday, (of giving gifts to each other and to the poor and rejoicing from having gained relief from their enemies), and it goes on to say how this celebration would be made into a declaration and remembered from generation to generation. Esther confirmed the practices of Purim and it was written down in the records.





## THE STORY - CHAPTER TEN



Esther 10 records the greatness of Mordecai who became the prime minister and held in high esteem. He now had the same powers Haman had. What a reversal!

Esther is the pivot point for every reversal.

 **Symmetry, Read Scripture Esther, The Bible Project**

- *Now, step back. Notice how this whole story has been designed. The story was full of moments of ironic reversal, but we can now see the whole story is structured as an ironic reversal, right down to the details. So, the king's splendor and feasts and decrees are mirrored by Mordecai's splendor and feasts and decrees at the end. Esther and Mordecai first save the king, but at the end they save all of the Jews. Then you have Haman's elevation and edict and banquet, but it gets reversed by Mordecai's elevation and edict and banquet. Then at the center you have Esther and Mordecai's planning scene and Esther's two banquets that act as a frame around the greatest moment of reversal in the whole story - Haman's humiliation and Mordecai's exultation. Beautiful!*

It is an amazing story of reversal and of God's overruling. Esther is an unlikely hero. She was orphaned, lives outside her native country, is entered into a life of servitude to the king at a young age, and yet, she was used for a great work.



**Critiques:** There are critics and much scholarly debate over the book of Esther. See more information in the Bonus Material at the end of the CQ Rewind Show Notes. We found three main issues:

1. Anti-Semitism - Because of the favor shown to the Jews, some judge Esther's actions harshly and attribute the deaths of over 75,000 to the actions of Mordecai and Esther. (Mordecai could have just bowed down, and this thing never would have happened.)
2. Anti-feminism - Feminist scholars resent that while she helped her Jewish heritage, she did nothing to further the cause of women and their constricting circumstances. She conforms to the patriarchal society and instead of being a queen, she is simply the king's wife who does not exercise political power.



Some also feel she manipulated the king and was indirect and unappealing as a female role model. After seeing what the king did to Queen Vashti, Esther did what she had to do in those circumstances.

3. Unrelatable - the circumstances are so specific to her time and place that other oppressed groups cannot use the story as a role model for emancipation, especially women.

The following is a good response to this last point:

(Source: <http://www.augsburgfortress.org/media/downloads/9781451465624Chapter1.pdf>) Esther is viewed as a symbol of powerlessness; but her low position, and ultimately her ability to succeed despite it, offers a positive model for those who are feeling disenfranchised.

We are not created specifically for a moment. It is about finding our mission and seizing the moment that begins the journey of that mission.

*While we may not always understand our purpose in the big picture, we are called to "be joyful in hope, patient in affliction and constant in prayer."*

*LESSONS FROM A QUEEN:*

*We are called to trust in Jesus even when we are unsure of his plans for our lives, because perhaps like Esther, the moment for which we were created may be right before us.*

Treasure Map Theme: Things that are hidden will be revealed - God working behind the scenes is hidden. He is evident as events "just happen" to occur leading to the exposure of Haman and the redemption of the Jewish people. God is working behind the scenes for us as well. Things do not just happen to footstep followers of Jesus. The story of Esther is worth our study.



Listen for more on the story of Esther coming up on our March 4, 2019, CQ Episode #1063: "Is This the Moment You Were Created For? (Part II)."

In Part II we hope to overlay this story of Esther onto our Christian walk. We uncovered some deep metaphors that can help us put this into a new perspective.

Step out in faith, not fear. Always trust in God's perfect timing.

Esther had to do things that were way out of her comfort zone for the sake of others. Grab hold of the heroism, of the humility of the godly approach and the desire to save others beyond her own life. Look at your own life and say, "Is this the moment that gives me the open door to the mission of my life?" Take that moment the way Esther did and make your life count. Be the hero in your life that God would have you to be. Let His providence be your guide.

*So, is this the moment you were created for?  
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!*



Join us next week for our podcast on January 28, 2019:  
Ep. #1058: "Do You Communicate or Just Talk?"



### Bonus Material!

*Any woman who is sure of her own wits, is a match, at any time, for a man who is not sure of his own temper. — Wilkie Collins, The Woman in White (1859 novel)*

*The book teaches that even a stereotypical woman in a world of laughably stereotypical males is capable of facing the ultimate national crisis and diverting the royal power to her own ends. — Michael V. Fox, Character and Ideology, page 207*

### Moral Ambiguity, Read Scripture Esther, The Bible Project

- *Another fascinating feature of this book is the moral ambiguity of the characters. There's a lot of drinking, and anger, and sex and murder, of which Mordecai and Esther are a part. Not to mention their violation of many commands in the Torah like marrying Gentiles or eating impure foods. So, the story is not putting Mordecai and Esther forward as moral examples, as if it's endorsing all of their behavior, but they are put forward as models of trust and hope when things get really bad. So, the book of Esther comes back to that question with which we began: Why God is not mentioned. The message of the book seems to be, when God seems absent, when His people are in exile, when they are unfaithful to the Torah, does this mean God is done with Israel? Has God abandoned His promises? The book of Esther says no. It invites us to see that God can and does work in the real mess and moral ambiguity of human history. And He uses the faithfulness of even morally-compromised people to accomplish His purposes.*

The author of the book of Esther was thoroughly acquainted with the Shushan fortress and all the sections of the royal compound, such as the outer courtyard, the inner courtyard, the royal palace, and the pavilion that stood on columns and was open to the inner courtyard, as excavations conducted here by the French rediscovered.

- Shushan is in Western Iran, about 150 miles north of the Persian Gulf.
- Appears 21 times in the Bible - 19 of these in Esther. The others are Nehemiah 1:1-3 and Daniel 8:1-5. Nehemiah, Esther and Daniel were situated here - they all lived outside of Israel.
- The site was first located in 1851 by a British geologist, but the French got permission for excavation rights from 1884 - 1979.
- Much of the found pottery and statues are in the Louvre Museum in Paris, but a detailed plan of the palace was created which confirms and supplements the original descriptions in the book of Esther.



Archaeologically speaking, the book of Esther is precisely accurate in its details. As John Urquhart writes:

"...the references in the book are in perfect accord with the plan of the great structure as laid bare by the recent French excavations. We read (Esther 4) that Mordecai, clad in sackcloth, walked in "the broad palace of the city, which was before the king's gate." The ruins show that the House of the Women was on the East side of the palace next to the city, and that a gate led from it into "the street of the city." In Esther 5:1, we read that Esther "stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house." "The king," we also read, "sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the entrance of the house," and that from the throne he "saw Esther the queen standing in the court." Every detail is exact. A corridor led from the House of the Women to the inner court; and at the side of the court opposite to the corridor was the hall, or throne-room of the palace. Exactly in the center of the farther wall the throne was placed and from that lofty seat the king, overlooking an intervening screen, saw the queen waiting for an audience. Other details, such as that of the king's passing from the queen's banqueting-house into the garden, show a similarly exact acquaintance with the palace as it then was."

<https://www.hidabroot.com/article/192907/Archaeology-Discovers-Purim---Shushan-the-Capital-City>

#### More on Amalek:

**Exodus 17:8-16:** <sup>8</sup>Then Amalek came and fought against Israel at Rephidim. <sup>9</sup>So Moses said to Joshua, Choose men for us and go out, fight against Amalek. Tomorrow I will station myself on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand. <sup>10</sup>Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought against Amalek; and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. <sup>11</sup>So it came about when Moses held his hand up, that Israel prevailed, and when he let his hand down, Amalek prevailed. <sup>12</sup>But Moses' hands were heavy. Then they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side and one on the other. Thus his hands were steady until the sun set. <sup>13</sup>So Joshua overwhelmed Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword. <sup>14</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. <sup>15</sup>Moses built an altar and named it The LORD is My Banner; <sup>16</sup>and he said, The LORD has sworn; the LORD will have war against Amalek from generation to generation.



**Deuteronomy 25:17-19:** (NASB) <sup>17</sup>Remember what Amalek did to you along the way when you came out from Egypt, <sup>18</sup>how he *met you along the way* and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary; *and he did not fear God*. <sup>19</sup>Therefore it shall come about when the LORD your God has given you rest from all your surrounding enemies, in the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget.

*Met you along the way/elsewhere* translated - "happened upon you," from the Hebrew word "qarah" or "karcha" meaning coincidence or happenstance. He did not fear God because life is haphazard, dictated by chance, luck and fate. The Jews, on the other hand, believed God runs the world and there is an absolute standard of morality. The Jews stood for the principle of caring for the weak; Amalek attacked the weak.

At the direction of the prophet Samuel, King Saul gathered his troops to fulfill the commandment to wipe out Amalek.

**1 Samuel 15:1-3:** (NASB) <sup>1</sup>Then Samuel said to Saul...<sup>2</sup>Thus says the LORD of hosts, I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. <sup>3</sup>Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.

In **1 Samuel 15:8-9** he took the king alive and spared the cattle, and Saul and the people had pity on Agag, the king of Amalek. This was against God's specific directive, and when Samuel found out the next day, he let Saul know God was very displeased. Saul had the king killed. However, it is thought that Agag had relations with a woman that night who gave birth to a son.

When Saul died, a young man came to David to tell him - he was an Amalekite. Over a thousand years later, the Jews were faced with genocide from Haman the Agagite.

Amalek was known for its love of self and reliance on violence to prove its superiority. Their ideology was "might makes right." They insisted God was absent in the world and everything happened by chance. (It is interesting to note that both Mordecai and Esther were descendants of Saul.) We do not know who the descendants of Amalek are today, but "fighting Amalek" means battling our own desires and remembering God instead of our own power. To the extent we doubt the existence of God is the extent Amalek's philosophy of randomness is a part of us.

Is Amalek a type (picture) of the flesh? They attacked Israel at the weakest point. We are supposed to "kill" our flesh. If it is not put down, it will destroy us.

(Non) "coincidences" in contrast with the Amalekite way of thinking:

- The party led to the banishment of Vashti
- Esther selected as queen
- Mordecai's promotion to the king's advisor, putting him in the right place at the right time

- Mordecai overhears an assassination plot
- Foiled plot discovered by the sleepless king at the exact right time
- The king suspects the loyalty of Haman
- Compels him to act quickly on Esther's request, execute Haman and issue a new decree for the Jews

### Coincidences:

(Source: <https://owlcation.com/humanities/The-Book-of-Esther-Its-Canonization-Historicity-and-Relevance>) Aside from authorial intentions though, the sheer number of "coincidences" within Esther beg the reader to take notice of just how miraculous this account really is. To begin with, Vashti's sudden disobedience to her husband's request allows an opening atop the hierarchy for Esther to ascend. Soon after, Mordecai just happens to witness a plot against the king's life which in turn puts him into favor with Xerxes. Furthermore, a suspicious bout of insomnia leads Xerxes to engage in some late-night reading, reminding the forgetful king of the noble actions of Mordecai. An ironic twist in the story shows Haman ultimately deciding the honors bestowed upon Mordecai (who happened to walk in at exact moment of the king's ponderance of how to honor Mordecai), and later the king walks in to misinterpret Haman's act of pleading as an assault on the queen's life! This string of coincidences, which ultimately act to both honor Esther and Mordecai as well as to protect the Jewish people against annihilation, are good evidences of the providence and sovereignty of a loving god; a god whose plans, while mysterious, are nevertheless perfectly and wonderfully executed. It is obvious then that "the story of Esther is not a subtle communication of the message that God is at work behind the scenes."



*Coincidence or overruling?  
Do not be quick to complain because  
"all things work together for good for those  
who love the Lord and are called according  
to His purpose." Experiences and testings  
are allowed for our highest welfare.*

### Was Haman hanged or impaled?

(Source: <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/was-haman-hanged-or-impaled>) The possibilities seem to be: 1. to be suspended from a frame by a rope (modern Western hanging); 2. to be impaled upon a pole; 3. to be fastened to a pole in some fashion. Conclusion: In the work of the Greek historian Herodotus, impalement is regularly presented as a Persian punishment (see The Histories, 1.128, 3.132, 3.159, 6.30 as examples). Given the setting of Esther, it thus seems likely that the manner of punishment for Haman was in fact impalement. In other words, the fifty-cubit "tree" built by Haman was intended to display Mordecai's body impaled in such a way that no one could avoid seeing it. As it turned out, however, it was Haman, whose death (and the folly leading to it) was put on display for the entire population.

## TWO X

**TWO** in the story of Esther: A detail mentioned twice, an event happens twice, or an event will occur that is parallel to another event.

- Two lists of the king's servants (1:10,14)
- Two reports that Esther concealed her identity (2:10,20)
- Two houses for the women (divided by virgin and concubine) (2:8,19)
- Two references to the death of Haman's sons (9:10-12)
- Two fasts - one national and one local (4:3,16)
- Two consultations of Haman with his wife and friends (5:14, 6:13)
- Two unscheduled appearances of Esther before the king (5:2, 8:3)
- Two coverings of Haman's face (6:12,7:8)
- Two royal edicts (3:12-15, 8:1-14)
- Two references to the subsiding of the king's anger (2:1; 7:10)
- Two references to the irrevocability of the Persian laws (1:19, 8:8)
- Two days for the Jews to take vengeance (9:5-12, 13-15)
- Two letters instituting the commemoration of Purim (9:20-28, 29-32)
- Two major political crises:

(Source: <http://www.augsburgfortress.org/media/downloads/9781451465624Chapter1.pdf>)  
Two major political crises described are the result of parallel situations in which a woman and a Jew come to figure their entire gender and people, respectively. Vashti's disobedience to the king's order is followed by her subsequent deposition as queen and the edict commanding all women to obey their husbands. The second follows a refusal, this time by Mordecai, who will not bow to Haman. Once again, the personal interchange results in an edict, ordering political action that implicates a much larger group, not only the individual involved.

## Banquets X

### TEN Banquets

- 1) The king's banquet to begin the 180-day display of his wealth and power.
- 2) The king's seven-day banquet at the end of the 180-day display of wealth and power.
- 3) Queen Vashti's banquet for the women.
- 4) The banquet given in honor of Esther being made queen.
- 5) The private banquet between Haman and the king at the signing of the decree to kill all the Jews.
- 6) The first banquet Esther gave for the king and Haman.
- 7) The second banquet Esther gave for the king and Haman during which she denounces Haman.
- 8) The public banquet given to elevate Mordecai to the rank of second only to the king.
- 9) The banquet celebrating Jewish victory in the provinces.
- 10) The banquet celebrating Jewish victory in Shushan.



Even the banquets come in pairs of **TWO** - notice:  
Banquets 1 and 2 exalt the king.  
Banquets 3 and 4 are for the two queens.  
Banquet 5 is Haman's when he is at the top,  
reversed by banquet 8 for Mordecai when he is at the top.  
Banquets 6 and 7 are given by Esther for the king and Haman.  
Banquets 9 and 10 are for the Jews celebrating their victory.

## Criticisms of the Book of Esther

### 1. Anti-Semitism

(Source: <https://thetorah.com/hamans-antisemitism-what-did-he-not-like-about-the-jews/>) In *Reckless Rites*, the Jewish historian Elliott Horowitz gathers together an impressive array of nineteenth and twentieth century non-Jewish writers whose nasty comments about the book of Esther show that they, like Haman, found Jews, particularly successful Jews who defeated their enemies, off-putting. The border between biblical scholarship and antisemitism was often blurred, for example in this 1908 summary of the moral teaching of the book by Lewis Bayles Patton, professor of Bible at Hartford Theological Seminary, published in the *International Critical Commentary*, the major English commentary series of this era:

There is not one noble character in this book... Esther, for the chance of winning wealth and power, takes her place in the herd of maidens who become concubines of the King... She conceals her origin, is relentless toward a fallen enemy... Mordecai sacrifices his cousin to advance his interests, advises her to conceal her religion, displays wanton insolence in his refusal to bow down to Haman... All this the author narrates with interest and approval. Morally Esther falls below the general level of the OT [Old Testament], and even of the Apocrypha.... It is never quoted by Christ, nor any of the NT [New Testament] writers. The early Christian Church made no use of it.... In significant contrast... stands the high esteem of the book in later Judaism.

### 2. Feminist scholars

(Source: Bea Wylar, "Esther: The Incomplete Emancipation of a Queen," in Brenner, *Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*, 132) Although initially reluctant, Esther does ultimately participate in the liberation of the Jewish people, but not in the liberation of women. "What she has learned about discrimination as a Jew is apparently not applicable to her situation as a woman in a male-dominated world. Her emancipation is one-sided and thus incomplete. She never escapes the confines of patriarchy, conforming perfectly to gender norms: "Queen Esther remains bound to the decrees of men, written in the script and language of her own husband the king (1.22). She has no influence to bring to bear on this state of affairs for herself or for other women, due to her blindness about her situation as a woman; at the single moment when power is concentrated in her feminine hand (8.1) she hands it all over to Mordecai (8.2) She is the wife of a king, not a woman who wields political power herself.

### 3. Unrelatable - not a good role model for emancipation?

(Source: <http://www.augsburgfortress.org/media/downloads/9781451465624Chapter1.pdf>) The story has been criticized for being of such specific time and circumstances as to be completely unrelatable to the modern ear. In defense: "Esther does serve as a role model for the values that she demonstrates, but she is not a character that ordinary people would emulate, because her actions are exceptional, brought on by extreme necessity rather than everyday situations. Esther does not subvert the status quo, but rather acts in an exceptional way in response to the particularity of her specific circumstances. Her behavior is not likely to be replicated by others: heroes are people who are admired but not imitated in everyday life." *Esther and the Politics of Negotiation*.





## A CQ Rewind First: Recipe for Hamantaschen

(Source for cookie explanation: <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/the-nosher/what-are-hamantaschen/>) The cookie itself is also highly symbolic; the most common interpretation is that they resemble the three cornered hat worn by Haman. In Hebrew the cookies are called "ozney Haman" which means "Haman's ears" and refers to the custom of cutting off a criminal's ears before his execution. Mmm, yum, cookies! A third idea suggests that each corner of a hamantaschen represents one of the "fathers" of Judaism—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—whose "power" weakened Haman and gave strength to Esther to save the Jews (incidentally, tash in Hebrew means "weaken"). One more thought is that because the German word tasche means "pouch" or "pocket," the cookies could signify Haman's pockets and the money he offered to the king for permission to kill the Jews.



Recipe for Hamantashen (Source: [Jewishboston.com](http://Jewishboston.com))

Makes about three dozen cookies.

### INGREDIENTS

4 eggs  
1 cup oil  
1 1/4 cups sugar  
2 teaspoons vanilla  
3 teaspoons baking powder  
5 1/2 to 6 cups flour  
1-2 small jars filling (apricot, prune or cherry preserves, poppy seed filling, etc.)

### DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat your oven to 350 degrees.
2. Mix together eggs, oil, sugar and vanilla.
3. Add baking powder and flour.
4. Knead until smooth.
5. Roll out very thin (1/8 inch if you can) on a floured board.
6. Cut out circles with a drinking glass.
7. Put a dollop of filling in the center of each circle.
8. Fold in three sides over the filling to make a triangle with filling showing in the center.
9. Bake at 350 degrees for 15 minutes on a greased cookie sheet.