



BIBLE Is ABOUT

The book of Esther PART 1



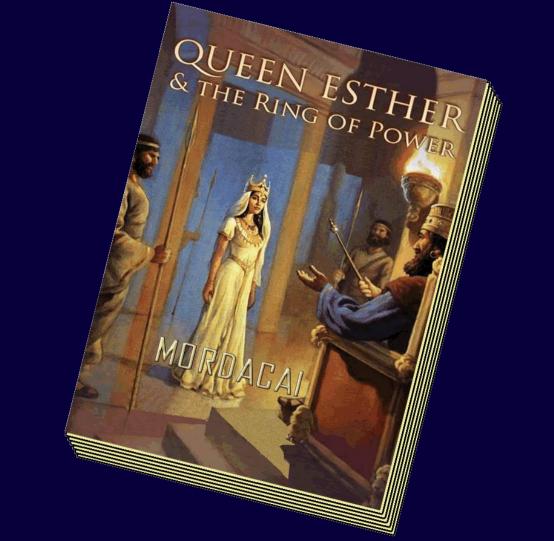
Esther takes place during the reign of King Xerxes I, the fourth King of Kings of the Achaemenid (Persian) Empire, who ruled from 486 to 465 BC.



He is called by his title Ahasuerus in English bibles, taken from the Hebrew אָתַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ ('Achashverowsh).

Introduction

- One of only two Bible books named for women, many including Luther and Calvin have questioned why this book is in the Bible. After all:
 - It doesn't mention God;
 - It doesn't predict the Messiah;
 - It doesn't mention faith or worship;
 - It doesn't mention anything "religious";
 - There's no uplifting "moral of the story";
 - Is it merely a love story wrapped inside a palace intrigue set in ancient times, with murder thrown in, something for Barbara Cartland fans?



Cast of Characters





A young Jewish virgin A poor orpnan giri raised by her cousin Mordecai, willing to risk her own life to save her people. A Jewess of the Tribe of Benjamin.





King of Persia 486-465 BC

Mighty king ruling the Persian Empire that included almost all of the known world (darn those nasty Greeks).



Grand Vizier (P.M.)

An Amalekite who is the ruthless and powerful grand vizier of Persia; seeks more wealth and power and loathes Mordecai with ancient hated.





Local Jewish leader and public servant

Mid-range but influential public servant in Persia; cousin and legal guardian of Esther. A Jew of the Tribe of Benjamin.

Cast of Characters



Queen of Persia

Favoured wife and Queen of Xerxes, willing to risk her own life to save her people. A Jewess of the Tribe of Benjamin.





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Mighty king ruling the Persian Empire that included almost all of the known world (darn those nasty Greeks).



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Plot Summary

- Babylon falls to the Medes and Persians and the Exile is over, but few Jews want the hard yakka of a return to Jerusalem.
- Persian ruler (Ahasuerus) Xerxes plans to conquer Greece. To show his greatness, he asks Queen Vashti to dance for his drunk generals, but she tweets #metoo, so he sacks her.
- Years later, the desperate king holds a beauty contest is held to replace Vashti, and a young woman hiding her Jewish background miraculously wins and becomes the No. 1 wife and queen.
- P.M. Haman (boo) orders all to bow to him; Esther's guardian Mordecai refuses. Evil Haman devises a plan to kill all Jews.
- Mordecai learns of the plot and informs Esther.
- Esther outwits Haman and informs the king.
- Outraged, the king executes Haman but rules are rules, he can't undo his order to kill all Jews. So sorry.
- But all is not lost; through her cleverness the Jews are saved.

Is Esther even a true story?

What we know

- Fact. Babylon fell to the Medo-Persians in 539 βc.
- Fact. Ahasuerus Xerxes ruled Persia from 485-465 βc.
- Fact. Historian Herodotus (486-425BC) wrote Xerxes planned to invade Europe (*The History, Bk VII, sec. 8*).
- Fact. The Persians were hard drinkers and often drank to excess (Herodotus (1:133); Xenophon 'Cyrop.,' 8:8, § 11).
- Fact. Xerxes was a showoff. (Herodotus, many references).
- **Fact.** Invasion of 481 BC was defeated in 479 BC.
- Fact. Shushan was a major palace of Persian kings.
- Fact. Shushan's ruins were found in 1836; excavation begun by French archaeologists in 1851 continue.

- Purim is declared in the book of Esther.
- "Pur" is Persian for "lot"; "purim" is the Hebrew word for "lots".
- It celebrates the failure of Haman's genocidal plot on the 14th day of the Jewish month of Adar.

Pur of Iahali, high official of Shalmanesser III r. 858-823 BC

It's 1 of 2 Jewish holy days related to casting lots.



Two opposite Jewish holy days. (Yom Kippur = fast and pray. Purim = party.)



- Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement)
- The most solemn day of the year.
- A day of fasting and prayer.
- A focus on God's power and justice.
- Lots were cast to determine fate of sacrificial goat and scapegoat.

• Purim

- The most physical day of the year.
- A day of feasting and drinking.
- A focus on God's grace and mercy.
- Lot was cast by Haman to determine when to annihilate all Jews.



Yet they are complementary.



G-D's power G-D's grace Perfect balance and justice and mercy of His Majesty

Tikkunei Zohar (Tikkun 21, page 57b) states: "Purim is named after Yom Kippur, because in the future, the Jews will delight in [Yom Kippur] and it will change from [a day of] affliction [by fasting] to [a day of] pleasure."



- Westerners throwing dice call on "Lady Luck."
- The Israelites believed that God controls the outcome when lots or dice are cast:

The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD. (Pro. 16:33)

Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat. (Leviticus 16:8)

And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:26)

What does



Persian name used by Hadassah, probably means "Star" but could be derived from Ishtar (an ancient goddess).

Let's examine this name closer.

The name(s) of Esther

- Esther's Hebrew name was Hadassah ("myrtle"), a plant with tiny flowers like stars in the night sky.
- Her Persian name Esther ("star") is a variant of setarah (star) and close to the Median word astra (myrtle).
- The name Esther is very close to Ishtar (Babylon's primary female deity), aka Ashtoreth in Hebrew.

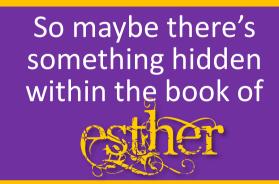
But wait, there's more!

Esther in Hebrew is a compound of אסון (*'ason;* evil or harm) and תר (*tor*; tie or bind; dove), from the root (tur, to explore), so it translates She Searches Out Evil.

But wait, there's more!

"Something Hidden"

- The root סתר (satar, hide or conceal) and its derivatives סתר (seter), מסתר (sitra), and מסתר (mistar) all mean "hiding place".
- So the foreign name Esther would have sounded in Hebrew like "I Am A Hiding Place" or "I Am Hidden".
- In fact, five Bible verses use the Hebrew form つつつ to mean something hidden:
 - Genesis 4:14,
 - Job 13:20,
 - Psalm 55:12, and
 - Ezekiel 39:23 and 39:24.



Mordecai Bilshan (Hebrew) Marduk Belshunu (Babylonian) 米ミーイ・米 真 研 (Akkadian)



- Mordecai's Hebrew name is close to that of the Babylonian chief god Marduk, probably deliberately.
- Several inscriptions from Akkadian tablets (above) found in Persopolis list a man named Marduk as "Prime Minister".

The Law of the Medes and the Persians

"Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which does not alter." Daniel 6:8

A Royal Decree once issued cannot be altered, even by the ruler who issued it.



Shushan (aka Susa)

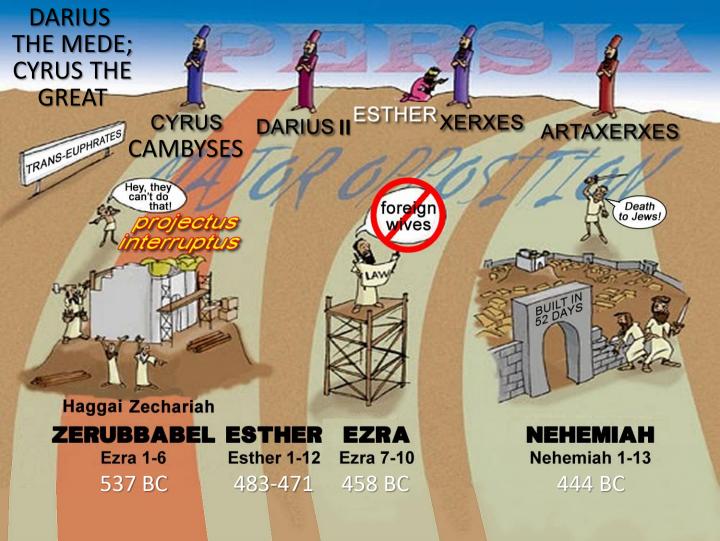


Audience Hall in Esther's Day

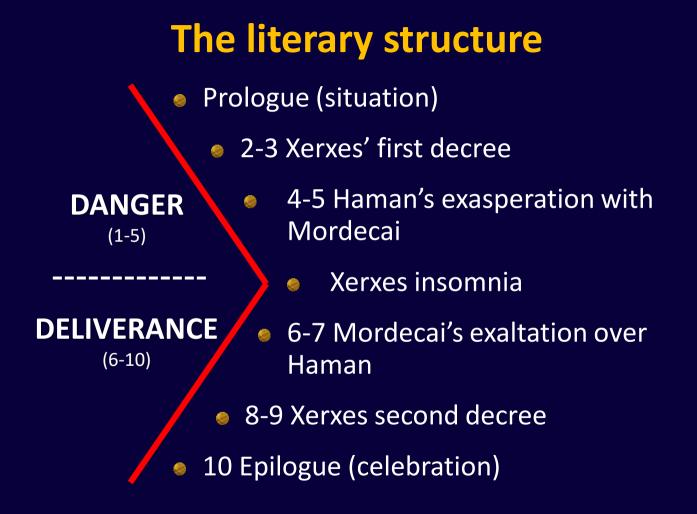


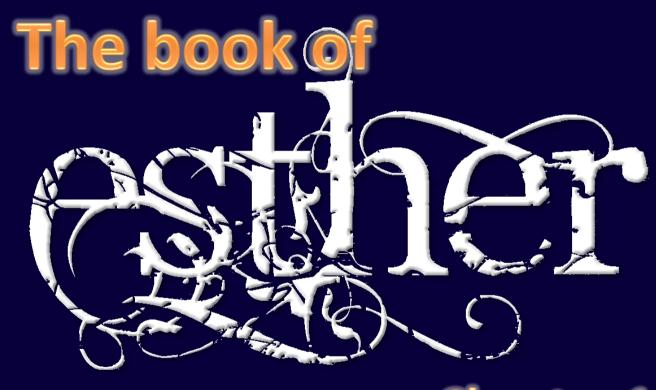
this hypostyle hall with its porticoes featured 72 columns, each 65 feet high and weighing more than 25 tons.





Part of Nehemiah's Wall







¹ Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this was the Ahasueru no reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia),

"King Ahasuerus," James C. Lewis, 2014.

² in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the citadel,

³ that in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants—the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces *being* before him¹ when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendour of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days in all.

⁵ And when these days were completed,

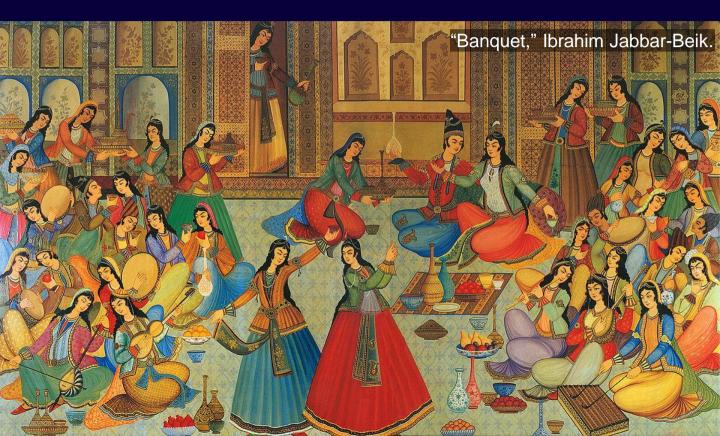
the king made a feast lasting seven days for all the people who were present in Shushan the citadel, from great to small, in the court of the garden of the king's palace.

⁶ There were white and blue linen curtains fastened with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars; and the couches were of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of alabaster, turquoise, and white and black marble.

- ⁷ And they served drinks in golden vessels, each vessel being different from the other, with royal wine in abundance, according to the generosity of the king.
- ⁸ In accordance with the law, the drinking was not compulsory; for so the king had ordered all the officers of his household, that they should do according to each man's pleasure.



⁹ Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women *in* the royal palace which *belonged* to King Ahasuerus.



¹⁰ On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine,

he commanded

- Mehuman ("faithful"),
- Biztha ("booty"),
- Harbona ("ass-driver"),
- Bigtha ("in the wine-press),
- Abagtha (God-given"),
- Zethar ("star"), and
- Carcas ("severe"),

We seem to be missing some of our members!

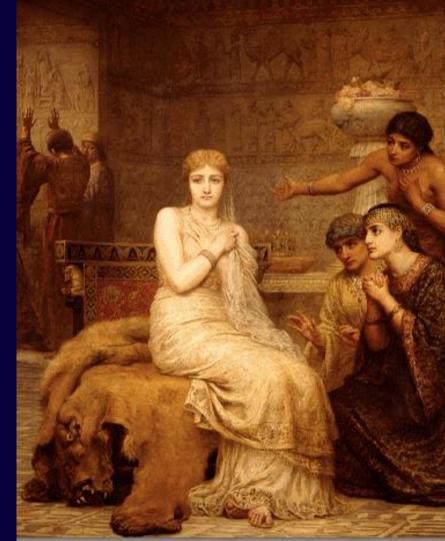
seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, ¹¹ to bring Queen Vashti before the king, *wearing* her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials,



Muriel Wilson as Queen Vashti by Henry Bullingham, photogravure by Walker & Boutall, 1897



¹² But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command *brought* by his eunuchs; therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him.



¹³ Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times (for this *was* the king's manner toward all who knew law and justice, ¹⁴ those closest to him *being*

- Carshena ("illustrious"),
- Shethar ("a star"),
- Admatha ("a testimony"),
- Tarshish ("yellow jaspar"),
- Meres ("lofty"),
- Marsena ("worthy"), and
- Memucan ("dignified"),



the seven princes of Persia and Media, who had access to the king's presence, and who ranked highest in the kingdom):

¹⁵ "What *shall we* do to Queen Vashti, according to law, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus *brought to her* by the eunuchs?"

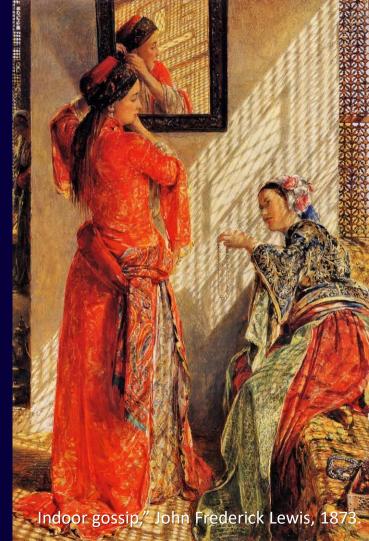
¹⁶ And Memucan answered before the king and the princes:

"Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also all the princes, and all the people who *are* in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.



¹⁷ For the queen's behavior will become known to all women, so that they will despise their husbands in their eyes, when they report, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in before him, but she did not come.'

¹⁸ This very day the *noble* ladies of Persia and Media will say to all the king's officials that they have heard of the behavior of the queen. Thus *there will be* excessive contempt and wrath.



¹⁹ If it pleases the king, let a royal decree go out from him, and let it be recorded in the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it will not be altered,

that Vashti shall come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she.

Queen Vashti deposed" by Alexandre Cabanel, 1880.

²⁰ "When the king's decree which he will make is proclaimed throughout all his empire (for it is great), all wives will honor their husbands, both great and small."

²¹ And the reply pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan. ²² Then he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province in its own script, and to every people in their own language, that each man should be master in his own house, and speak in the language of his own people.

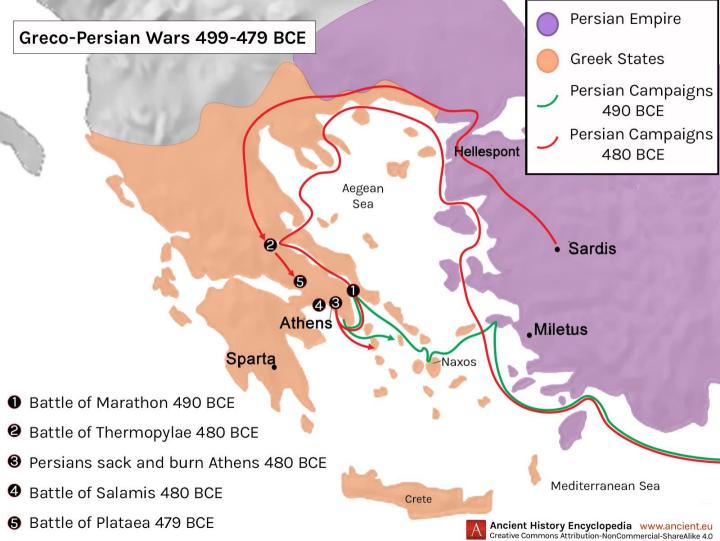
Whoever heard of a 6-month party?



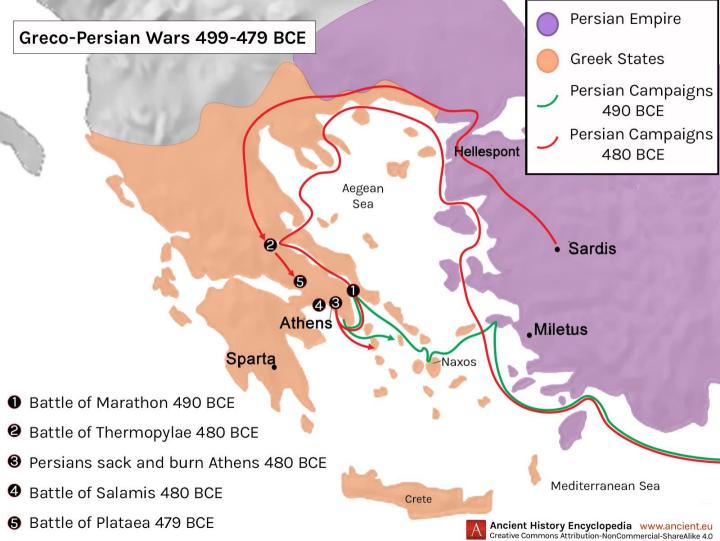
And in the Bible! What gives?

Interlude between Chaps. 1 and 2

- Remember Michael's prophecy about the fourth king, Xerxes, becoming strong through his riches and stirring up all against the kingdom of Greece?
- Xerxes wanted to avenge his daddy's Darius's defeat at Marathon in 490 BC, and invested three years in preparation. He raised an army of over 1,000,000 and a huge navy. He built a boat bridge over the Hellesport.
- The six months "party" involved detailed planning with all of his generals and senior officers.
- With that done, they let off steam for one week.
- This was all about conquering the rest of the known world!



Greek troops rushing forward at the Battle of Marathon, Georges Rochegrosse, 1859.



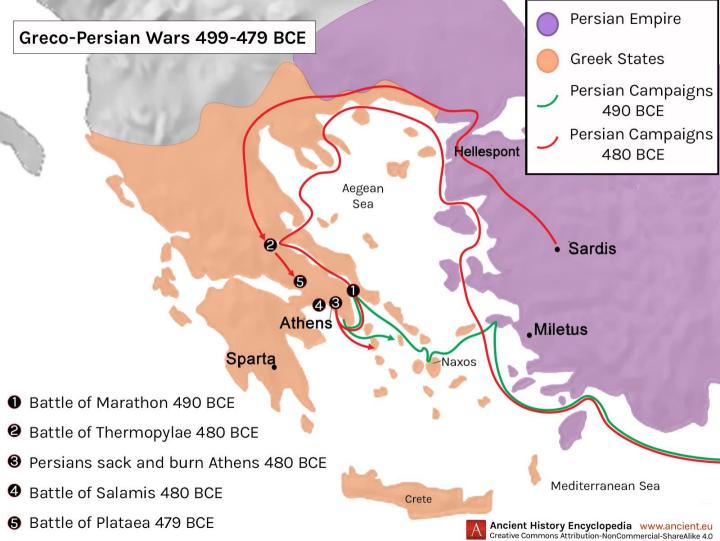




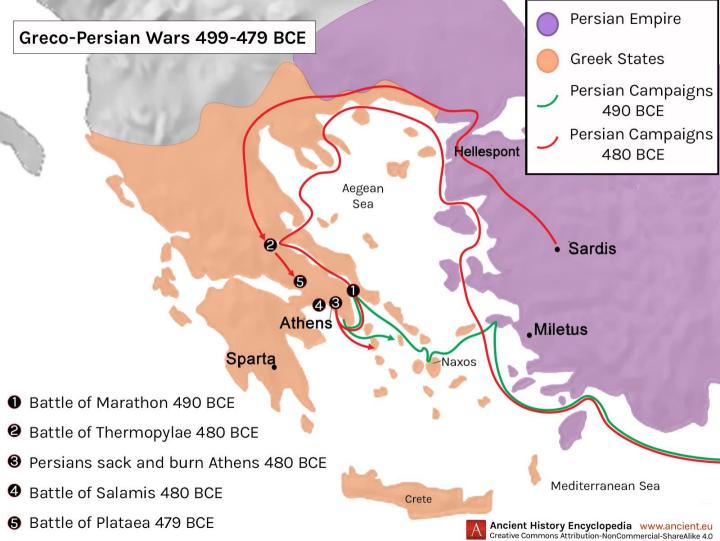








"Battle of Salamis" by Andrew Howat









Esther 2 - Esther Becomes Queen

¹ After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus subsided, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what had been decreed against her.



² Then the king's servants who attended him said:

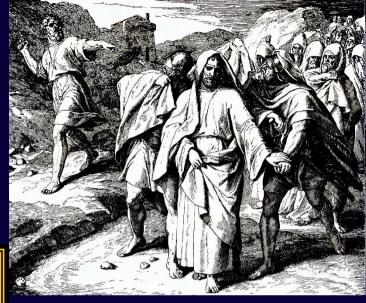
"Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king; ³ and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan the citadel, into the women's quarters, under the custody of Hegai the king's eunuch, custodian of the women. And let beauty preparations be given *them*.

⁴ Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti."

This thing pleased the king, and he did so.

⁵ In Shushan the citadel there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite.

Mordecai's lineage refers to an infamous incident covered in 2 Samuel 16:5-13; 19:18 and 1 Kings.



"Shimei curses David," Schnorr von Carolsfeld, 1860.

⁶ Kish had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been captured with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away.

Why is this story important?

- Shimei was a Benjamite. Benjamites were nearly annihilated during Israel's only civil war, and David hanged Saul's sons.
- When David, fleeing from Absalom, neared Shimei's house, Shimei ran along the ridge over against the road, cursing and throwing stones and dust at him and his mighty men. Abishai would have "taken off his head" then and there, as a "dead dog" presuming to "curse the king." But David said: "Let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him."
- Shimei wisely was later the "first of the house of Joseph" to meet David on his victorious return over Jordan, bowing and scraping and begging for mercy. Again Abishai would have killed Shimei, but David let him live.
- David sparing Shimei resulted in Mordecai.

⁷ And *Mordecai* had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman was lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.

"Esther and Mordecai" by Aert de Gelder, 1674.

The First House of the Harem

⁸ So it was, when the king's command and decree were heard, and when many young women were gathered at Shushan the citadel, *under* the custody of Hegai, that Esther also was taken to the king's palace, into the care of Hegai the custodian of the women.

"Reception" by Fabio Fabbi, 1873.

⁹ Now the young woman pleased him, and she obtained his favor; so he readily gave beauty preparations to her, besides her allowance. Then seven choice maidservants were provided for her from the king's palace, and he moved her and her maidservants to the best *place* in the house of the women.

> "The Toilette of Esther" Theodore Chasseriau, 1841.

- ¹⁰ Esther had not revealed her people or family, for Mordecai had charged her not to reveal *it*. ¹¹ And every day Mordecai paced in front of the court of the women's quarters, to learn of Esther's welfare and what was happening to her.
- ¹² Each young woman's turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after she had completed twelve months' preparation, according to the regulations for the women, for thus were the days of their preparation apportioned: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women.
- ¹³ Thus *prepared, each* young woman went to the king, and she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace.

The Second House of the Harem

¹⁴ In the evening she went, and in the morning she returned to the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who kept the concubines. She would not go in to the king again unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name.

"Reception" by John Frederick Lewis, 1873.

¹⁵ Now when the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter, to go in to the king, she requested nothing but what Hegai the king's eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her.



"Esther," Kate Gardiner Hastings, 1884.

¹⁶ So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which *is* the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

¹⁷ The king loved Esther more than all the *other* women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

"Esther" by Hermann Anschütz, c. 1840.



¹⁸ Then the king made a great feast, the Feast of Esther, for all his officials and servants; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces and gave gifts according to the generosity of a king.

¹⁹ When virgins were gathered together a second time, Mordecai sat within the king's gate.

²⁰ Now Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him.

"Esther and Mordecai" Aert de Gelderm, 1685

- ²¹ In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, doorkeepers, became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.
- ²² So the matter became know to Mordecai, who told Quee Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name
- ²³ And when an inquiry was made into the matter, it was confirmed, and both were hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.

