

2020
6
SESSION

WHAT THE
BIBLE
Is ABOUT

The book of

Esther PART 2

The book of

Esther

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 אֲחַשְׁוֵרֹשׁ ('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

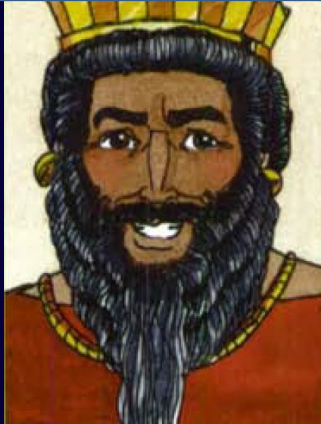
ESTHER



A young Jewish virgin

A poor orphan girl raised by her cousin Mordecai, willing to risk her own life to save her people. A Jewess of the Tribe of Benjamin.

XERXES



**King of Persia
486-465 BC**

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

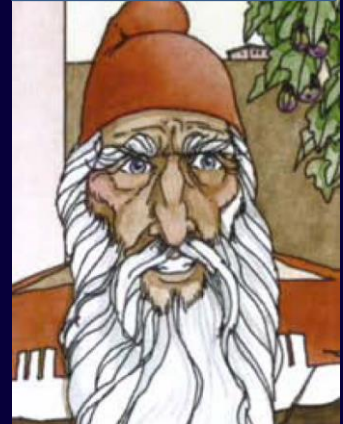
HAMAN



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 hatred.

MORDECAI



**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.

Lots



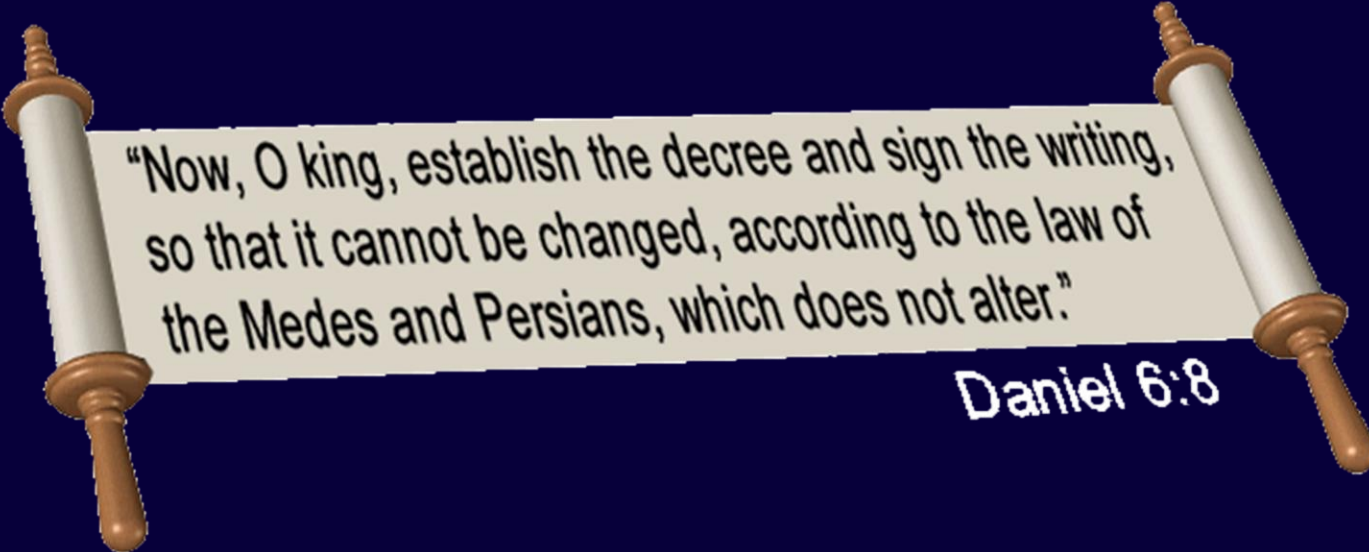
- Westerners throwing dice call on “Lady Luck.”
- The Israelites believed that God controls the outcome when lots *or* dice are cast:

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)

The Law of the Medes and the Persians

A scroll with a light beige background and a dark blue border, unrolled to reveal text. The scroll is held by two wooden rollers with a turned design. The text is written in a black, serif font.

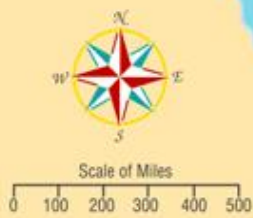
"Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing,
so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of
the Medes and Persians, which does not alter."

Daniel 6:8

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



The Medo-Persian Empire



Shushan (aka Susa)

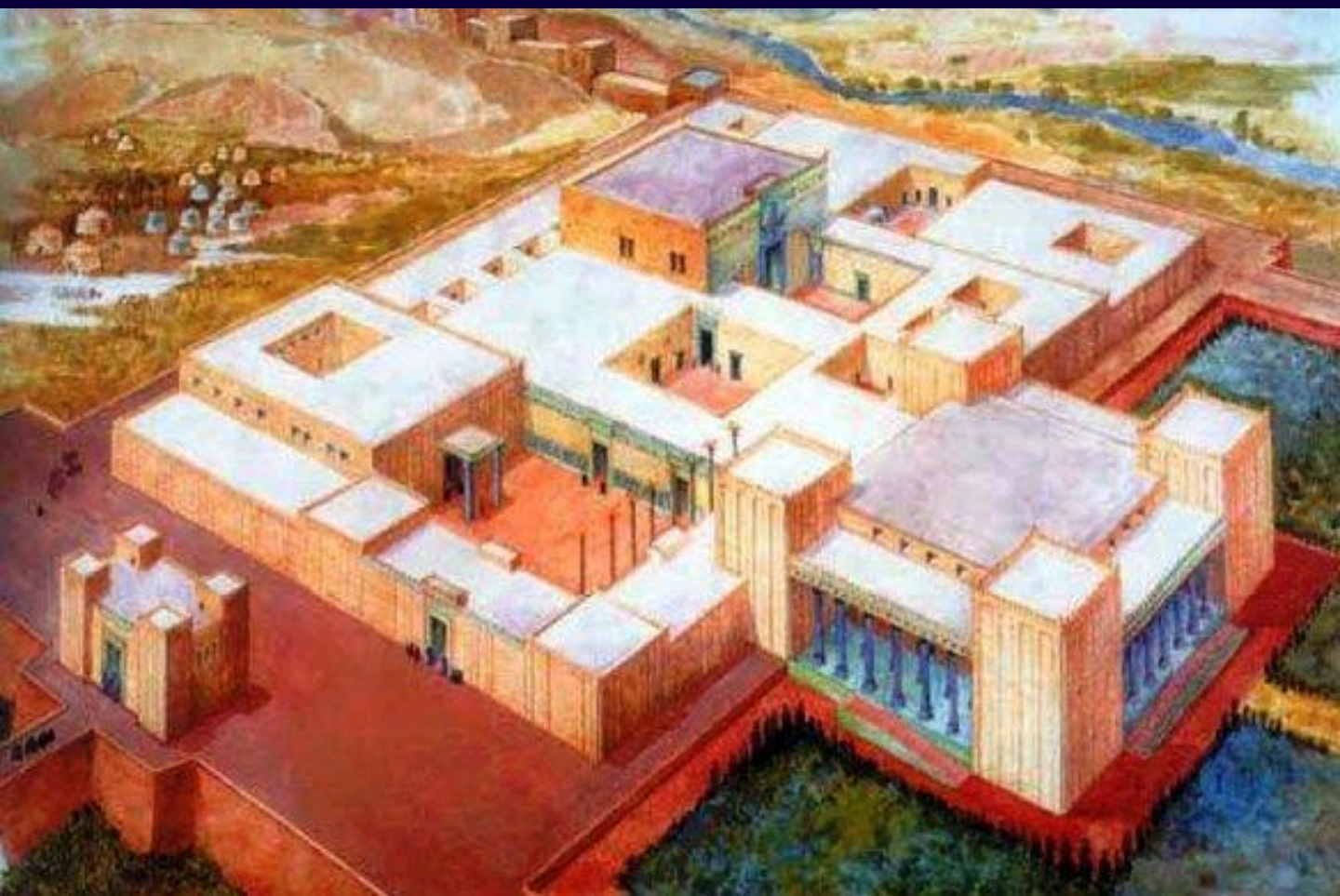


Audience Hall in Esther's Day



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

The Royal Palace



DARIUS
THE MEDE;
CYRUS THE
GREAT



CYRUS

DARIUS II

ESTHER

XERXES

ARTAXERXES



CAMBYSES

Hey, they
can't do
that!

*projectus
interruptus*



Haggai Zechariah

ZERUBBABEL

Ezra 1-6

537 BC

ESTHER

Esther 1-12

483-471

EZRA

Ezra 7-10

458 BC

foreign
wives



Death
to Jews!



NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah 1-13

444 BC

The literary structure

Part 1

- Prologue (situation)
- 2-3 Xerxes' first decree

Part 2

DANGER
(1-5)

DELIVERANCE
(6-10)

- 4-5 Haman's exasperation with Mordecai
- Xerxes insomnia
- 6-7 Mordecai's exaltation over Haman
- 8-9 Xerxes second decree
- 10 Epilogue (celebration)

The book of Esther

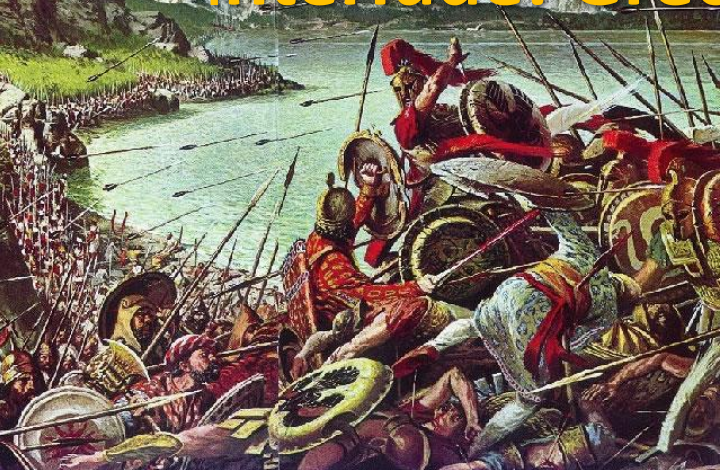


1 King Ahasuerus gave a feast for all his generals and officials. He ordered Queen Vashti to show off her beauty, but she refused, so his counselors advised him to replace her.

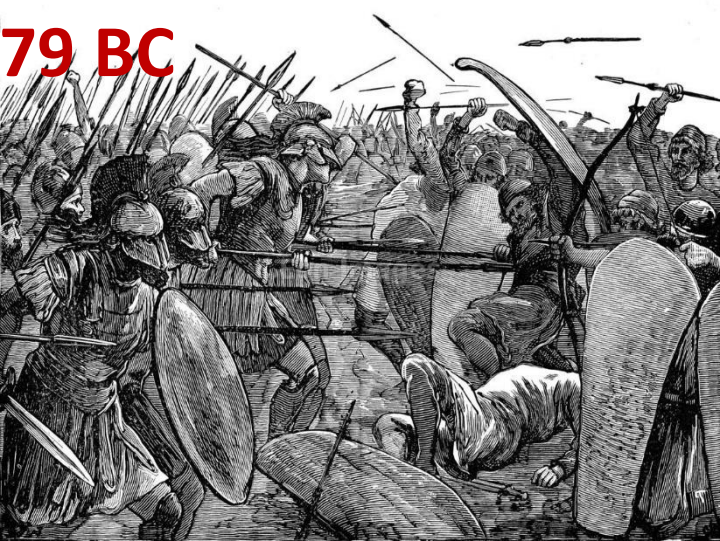


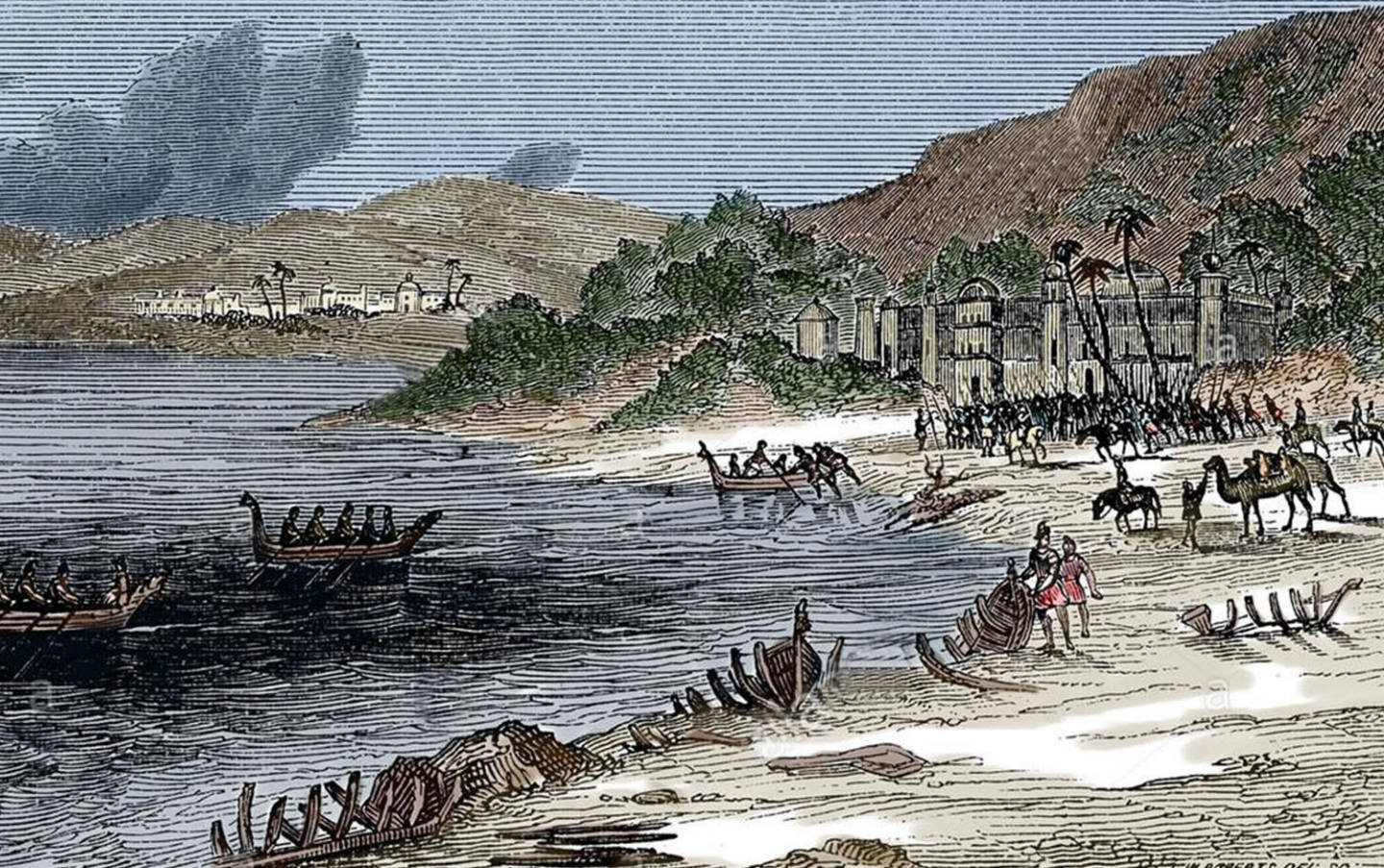
"Queen Vashti deposed" by Ernest Normand, 1890.

Interlude: Greco-Persian War



481-479 BC





2

Mordecai raised Esther. She was taken into the king's harem and was chosen as queen. Mordecai told Esther of a plot against the king.





The book of

Esther

Chapter 3

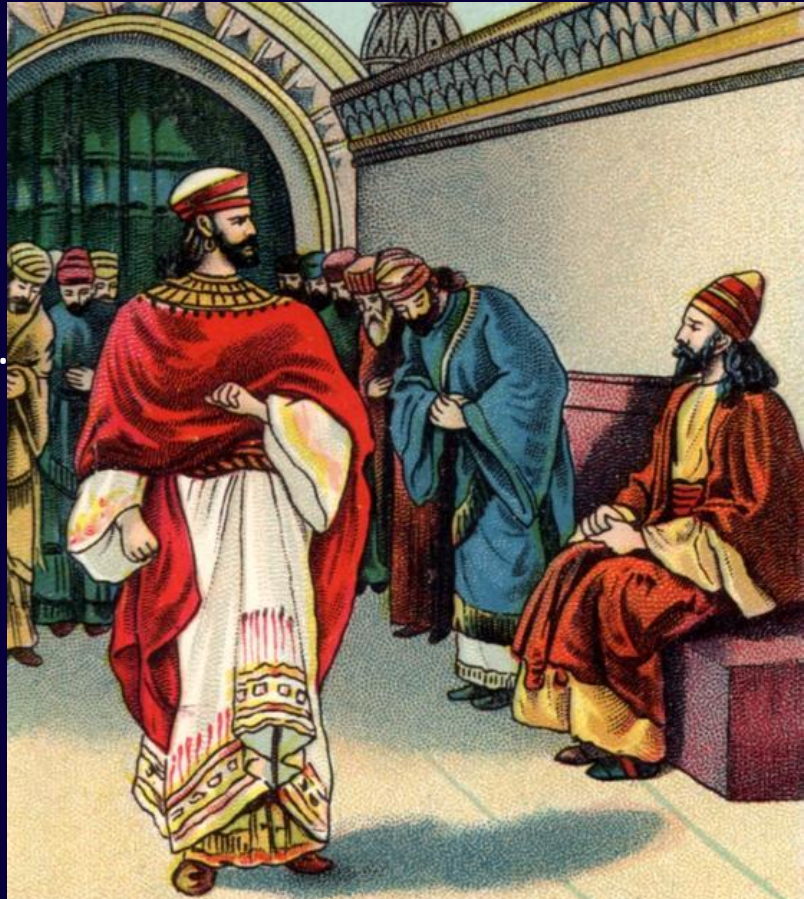
**TWO
YEARS
LATER**

OR SO

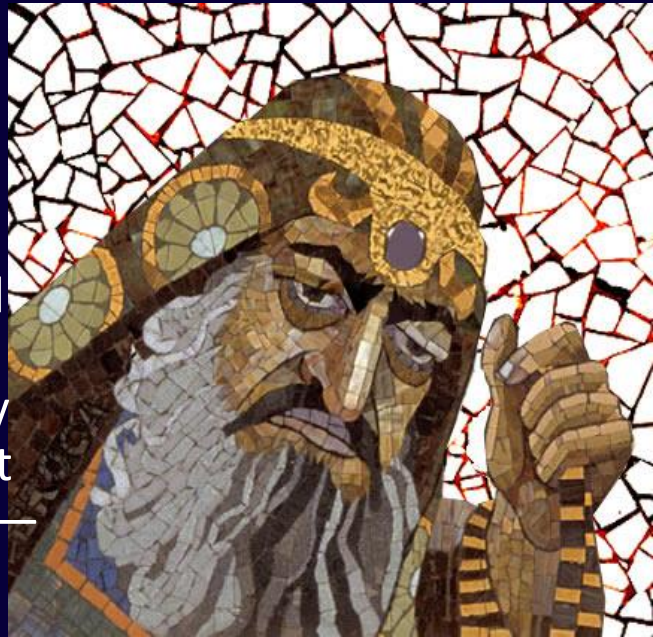
Esther 3 – Haman's Conspiracy

¹ After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who *were* with him.

² And all the king's servants who *were* within the king's gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage.



- ³ Then the king's servants who *were* within the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?"
- ⁴ Now it happened, when they spoke to him daily and he would not listen to them, that they told *it* to Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand; for *Mordecai* had told them that he *was* a Jew.
- ⁵ When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath.
- ⁶ But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who *were* throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus—the people of Mordecai.



Why did Haman hate Jews?

- During Israel's Exodus from Egypt, the Amalekites attacked people in the rear ranks (Deut 25:17-19). God declared war.
- Samuel told Saul to "go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not." (1 Sam 15:1)
- Saul spared a captured Amalekite leader named Agag, and so God took the kingdom from Saul (1 Sam 15:7-28).
- An angry Samuel then showed Agag no mercy; but some of his children escaped. One actually hoped to curry favor with David by claiming to have killed Saul in battle (2 Sam 1:1–10).
- 600 years later, a royal Amalekite named Haman would plot to destroy every living Jew!
- **Saul's sparing of Agag resulted in Haman.**

⁷ In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that *is*, the lot), before Haman to determine the day and the month, until *it fell on the twelfth month*, which *is* the month of Adar.



- The court diary of Persia was drawn up on the first day of the first month of each year with the help of *pur* (“lot”, “dice”) to indicated the propitious dates for various events. One such *pur* (shown above) from the reign of Shalmaneser III of Assyria (858–824 BC), confirms verse 7.
- In this case, the *pur* coincidentally fell on the very last month in the year as the date to kill all Jews.

⁸ Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, “There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws *are* different from all *other* people’s, and they do not keep the king’s laws. Therefore it *is* not fitting for the king to let them remain [suffer them to live].

⁹ If it pleases the king, let *a decree* be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay **ten thousand talents of silver** into the hands of those who do the work, to bring *it* into the king’s treasuries.”



10,000 talents of Silver

340 tonnes or 70 elephants

340,194 kg



A\$1,263.62/kg

Australian Silver Market
10 August 2020

10,000 talents =

A\$429,876,000

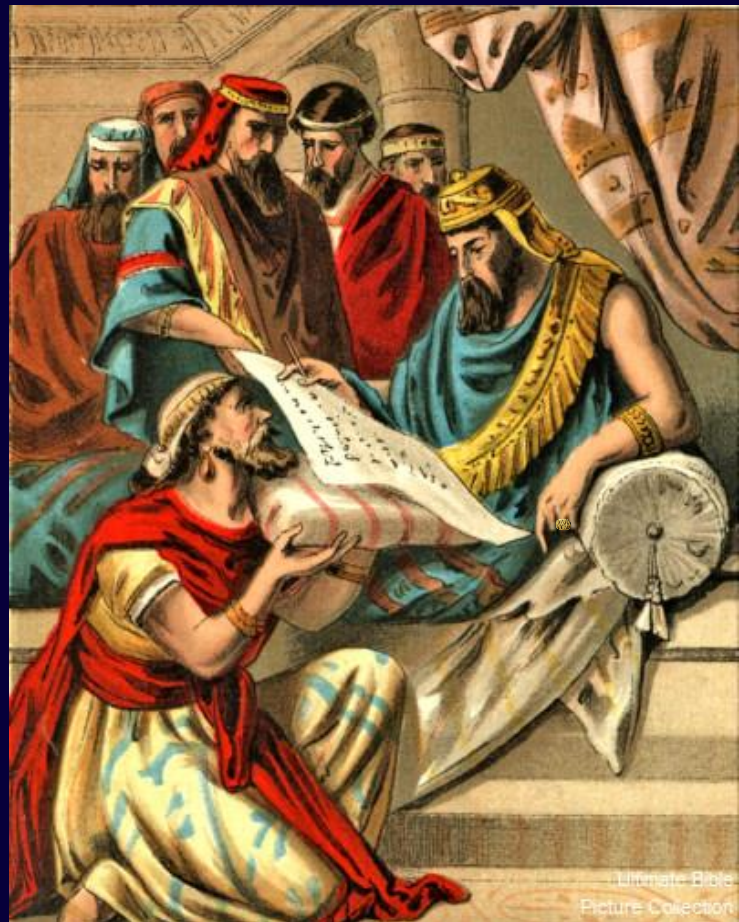


¹⁰ So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. ¹¹ And the king said to Haman, “The money and the people *are* given to you, to do with them as seems good to you.”



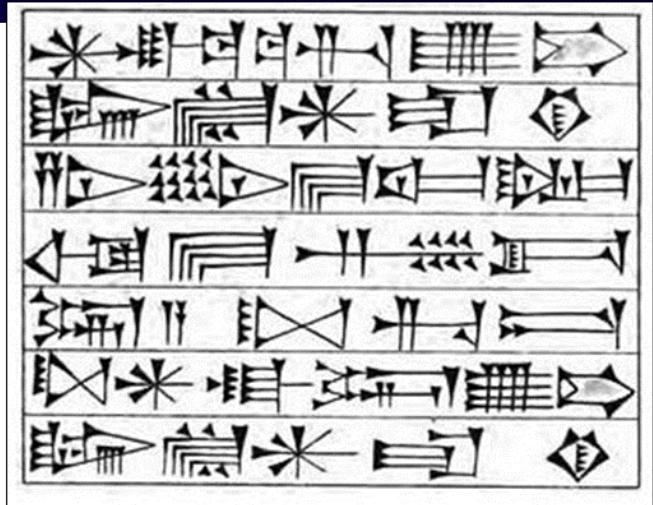
“The Banquet of Ahasuerus” by Aert de Gelder, c. 1685.

12 Then the king's scribes were called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and *a decree* was written according to all that Haman commanded—to the king's satraps, to the governors who *were* over each province, to the officials of all people, to every province according to its script, and to every people in their language. In the name of King Ahasuerus it was written, and sealed with the king's signet ring.

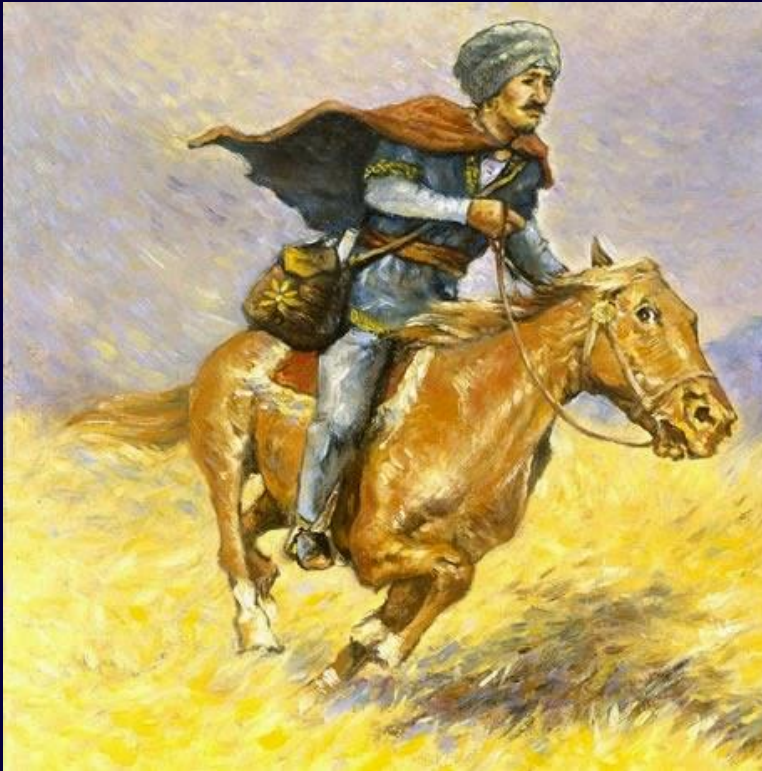


13 And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth month, which *is* the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions.

14 A copy of the document was to be issued as law in every province, being published for all people, that they should be ready for that day.



¹⁵ The couriers went out, hastened by the king's command; and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan the citadel.



Persia used mounted couriers during the Persian Wars, from 500-449 BC.

Herodotus wrote:

"Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night stays these courageous couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds."

So the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Shushan was perplexed [confused, disturbed].



The book of

Esther

Chapter 4

Esther 4 – Esther's Dilemma

¹ When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry.

² He went as far as the front of the king's gate, for no one *might* enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.

³ And in every province where the king's command and decree arrived, *there was* great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.



4 So Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, and the queen was deeply distressed. Then she sent garments to clothe Mordecai and take his sackcloth away from him, but he would not accept *them*.



"Esther" by Andrea del Castagno, d. 1450, Uffizi.

5 Then Esther called Hathach [*verily, truth*], *one* of the king's eunuchs whom he had appointed to attend her, and she gave him a command concerning Mordecai, to learn what and why this *was*.

⁶ So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square that *was* in front of the king's gate. ⁷ And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews.

⁸ He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, which was given at Shushan, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her, and that he might command her to go in to the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people.

⁹ So Hathach returned and told Esther the words of Mordecai.



¹⁰ Then Esther spoke to Hathach,
and gave him a command for
Mordecai:

¹¹ “All the king’s servants and the
people of the king’s provinces
know that any man or woman
who goes into the inner court to
the king, who has not been called,
he has but one law: put *all* to
death, except the one to whom
the king holds out the golden
scepter, that he may live. Yet I
myself have not been called to go
in to the king these thirty days.”

¹² So they told Mordecai Esther’s
words.



¹³ And Mordecai told *them* to answer Esther:

“Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews. ¹⁴ For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?”

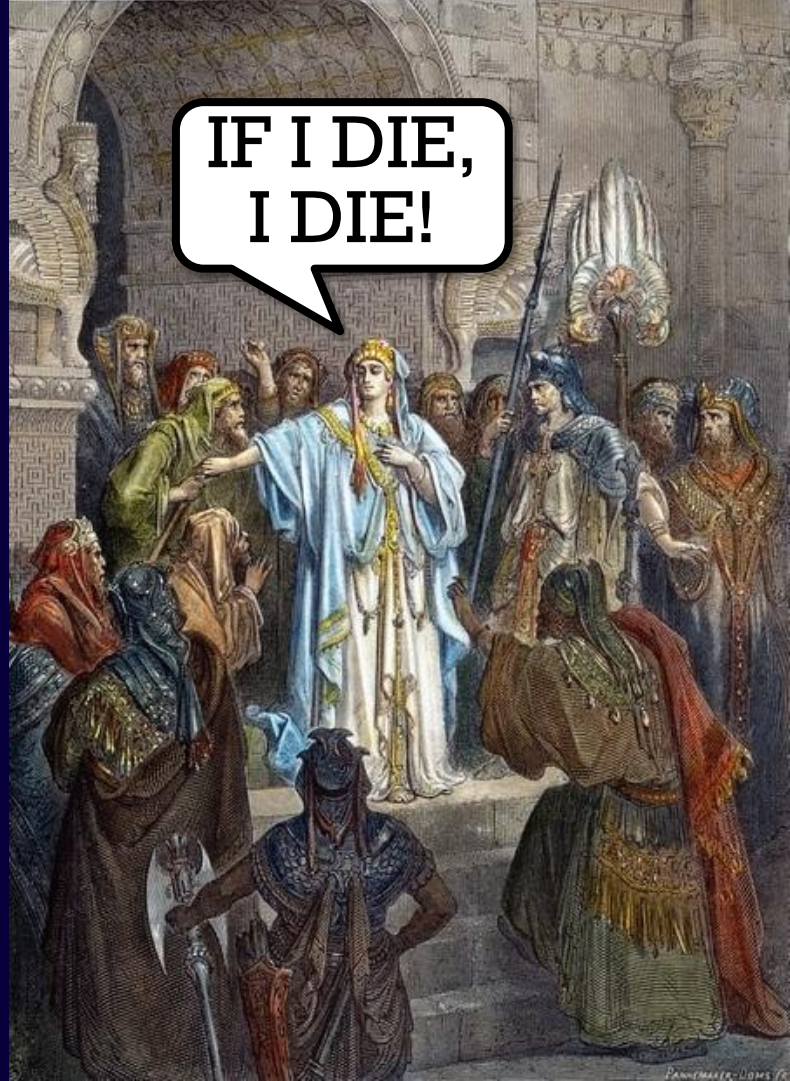


FOR SUCH A
TIME
AS THIS...

15 Then Esther told *them* to reply to Mordecai:

16 “Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which *is* against the law; and **if I perish, I perish!**”

17 So Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther commanded him.



The book of

Esther

Chapter 5

Esther 5 – Esther's Banquet

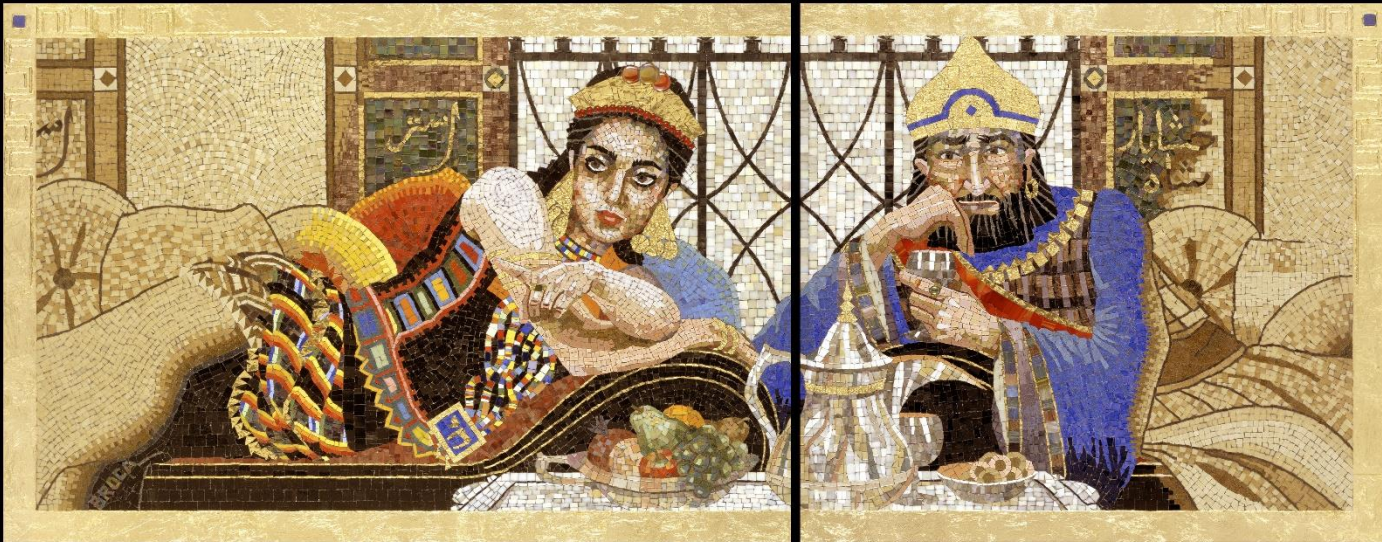
¹ Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on *her* royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, across from the king's house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house.



² So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, *that* she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that *was* in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter.



- ³ And the king said to her, “What do you wish, Queen Esther? What *is* your request? It shall be given to you—up to half the kingdom!”
- ⁴ So Esther answered, “If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him.”
- ⁵ Then the king said, “Bring Haman quickly, that he may do as Esther has said.” So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared.



⁶ At the banquet of wine the king said to Esther, “What *is* your petition? It shall be granted you. What *is* your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!”

⁷ Then Esther answered and said, “My petition and request *is this*: ⁸ If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said.”



“Esther and Mordecai”, Aelbert Jansz van der Schoor, 1643.

⁹ So Haman went out that day joyful and with a glad heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, and that he did not stand or tremble before him, he was filled with indignation against Mordecai. ¹⁰ Nevertheless Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and called for his friends and his wife Zeresh.



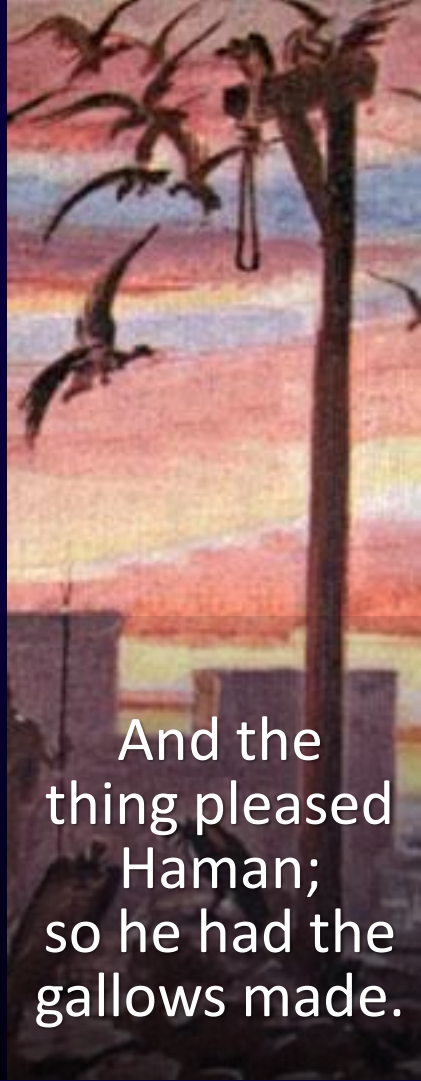
"Haman and Mordecai", Paul Alexander Leroy, 1884.

Haman's Plot Against Mordecai

¹¹ Then Haman told them of his great riches, the multitude of his children, everything in which the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and servants of the king.

¹² Moreover Haman said, "Besides, Queen Esther invited no one but me to come in with the king to the banquet that she prepared; and tomorrow I am again invited by her, along with the king. ¹³ Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."

¹⁴ Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high, and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it; then go merrily with the king to the banquet."



And the thing pleased Haman; so he had the gallows made.

The book of

Esther

Chapter 6

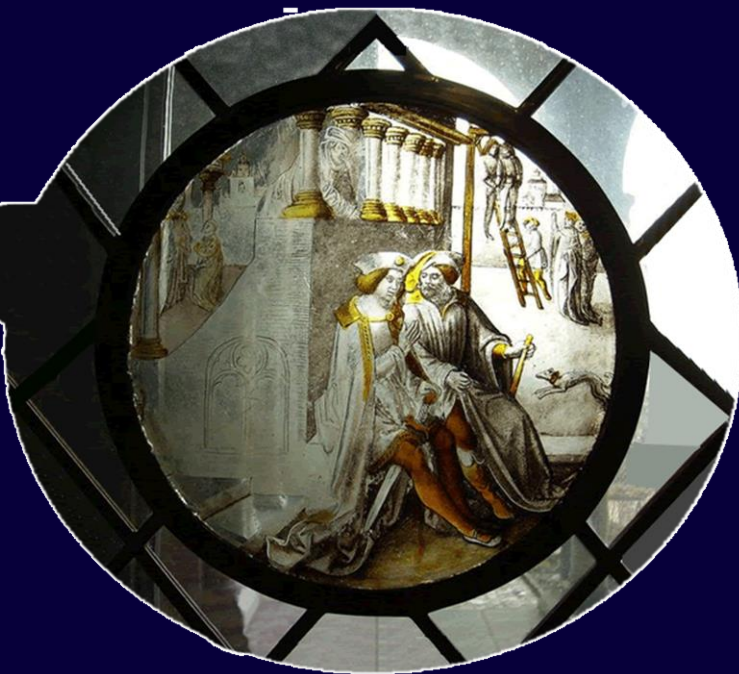
Esther 6 – Just Deserts

¹ That night the king could not sleep.



So one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king.

- ² And it was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, the doorkeepers who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.



³ Then the king said, “What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?”

And the king’s servants who attended him said, “Nothing has been done for him.”





4 So the king said, “Who *is* in the court?” Now Haman had *just* entered the outer court of the king’s palace to suggest that the king hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him.

5 The king’s servants said to him, “Haman is there, standing in the court.” And the king said, “Let him come in.”

6 So Haman came in, and the king asked him, “What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?”

Now Haman thought in his heart, “Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?”



⁷ And Haman answered the king, “*For the man whom the king delights to honor,* ⁸ let a royal robe be brought which the king has worn, and a horse on which the king has ridden, which has a royal crest placed on its head. ⁹ Then let this robe and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king’s most noble princes, that he may array the man whom the king delights to honor. Then parade him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him: ‘Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!’ ”



10 Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry, take the robe and the horse, as you have suggested, and do so for Mordecai the Jew who sits within the king's gate! Leave nothing undone of all that you have spoken."



¹¹ So Haman took the robe and the horse, arrayed Mordecai and led him on horseback through the city square, and proclaimed before him,

“Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!”



12 Afterward Mordecai went back to the king's gate. But Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered.

13 When Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him, his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him but will surely fall before him."



¹⁴ While they *were* still talking with him, the king's eunuchs came, and hastened to bring Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared.



The book of

Esther

Chapter 7

Esther 7 – Haman's Comeuppance

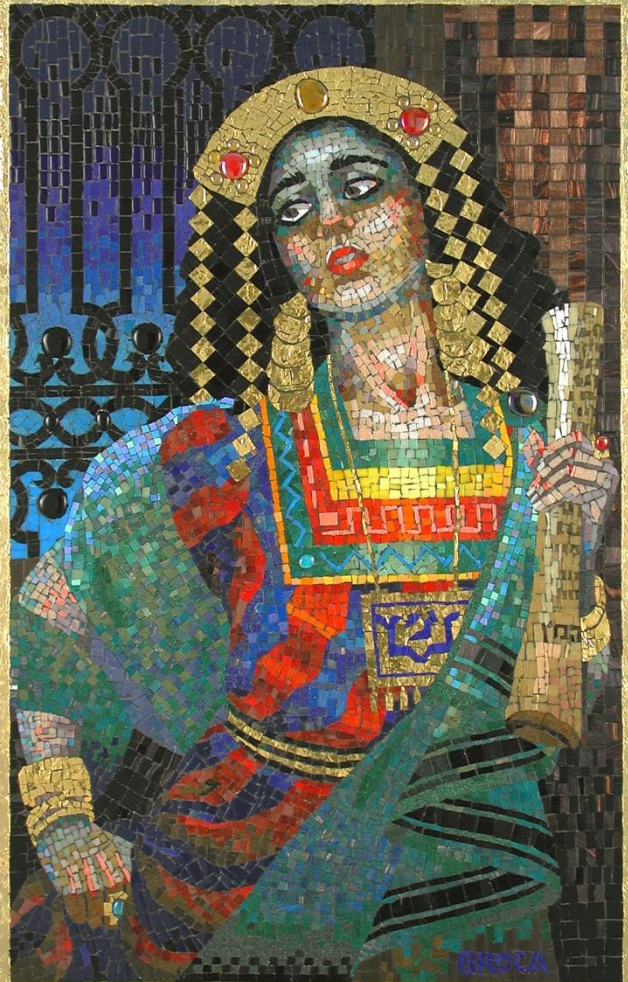


¹ So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther.

² And on the second day, at the banquet of wine, the king again said to Esther, “What *is* your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what *is* your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!”

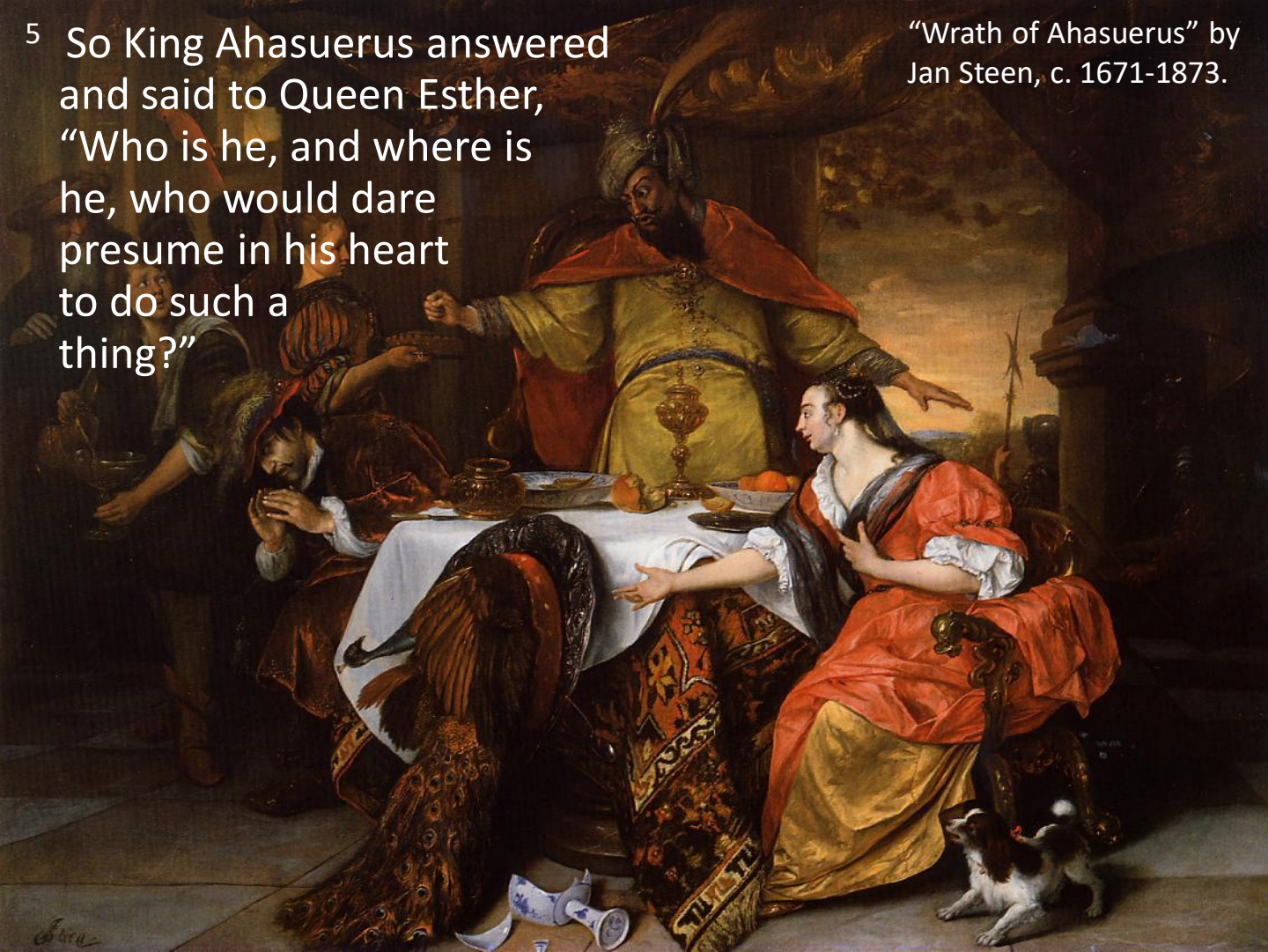
³ Then Queen Esther answered and said, “If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request.

⁴ For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king’s loss.”



5 So King Ahasuerus answered
and said to Queen Esther,
“Who is he, and where is
he, who would dare
presume in his heart
to do such a
thing?”

“Wrath of Ahasuerus” by
Jan Steen, c. 1671-1873.



⁶ And Esther said, "The adversary and enemy *is* this wicked Haman!" So Haman was terrified before the king and queen.
"Esther Denouncing Haman" by Ernest Normand, 1888.



⁷ Then the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine *and went* into the palace garden; but Haman stood before Queen Esther, pleading for his life, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king.



⁸ When the king returned from the palace garden to the place of the banquet of wine, Haman had fallen across the couch where Esther *was*. Then the king said, “Will he also assault the queen while I *am* in the house?”

“The Festival of Esther” by Edward Armitage, 1865.

As the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.⁹ Now Harbonah, one of the eunuchs, said to the king, "Look! The gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai, who spoke good on the king's behalf, is standing at the house of Haman."

Then the king said,
"Hang him on it!"

¹⁰ So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath subsided.

"The Book of Esther, Szyk and Haman"
by Arthus Szyk, 1950.



A dramatic space scene featuring a bright meteor streaking across the dark sky, leaving a long, glowing trail of orange and red fire. Below the meteor, the curved horizon of the Earth is visible, showing a thin layer of white clouds and the dark blue of the planet's surface. The overall atmosphere is one of awe and cosmic scale.

There's just
one little
thing...

But, there's one minor problem...

- Haman is dead, we can breath a sigh of relief, can't we?
- But the edict to kill all Jews stands, and Xerxes cannot overturn or change it.
- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote:

*Though the mills of God grind slowly,
yet they grind exceedingly small;
Though with patience he stands waiting,
with exactness grinds He all.*

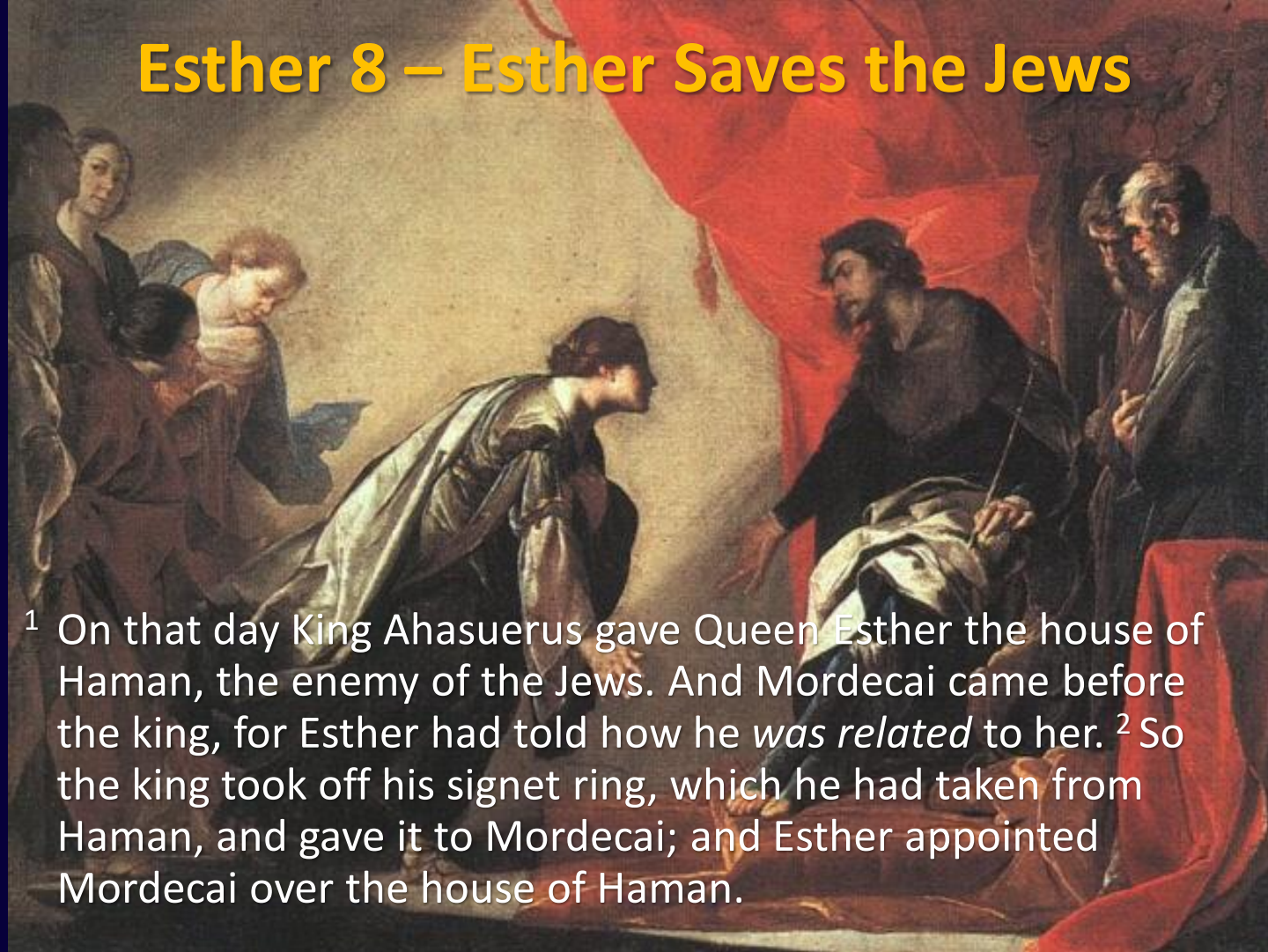
- God does not leave anything undone, and he will take care of all the details, but we will have to wait to see how this is done.

The book of

Esther

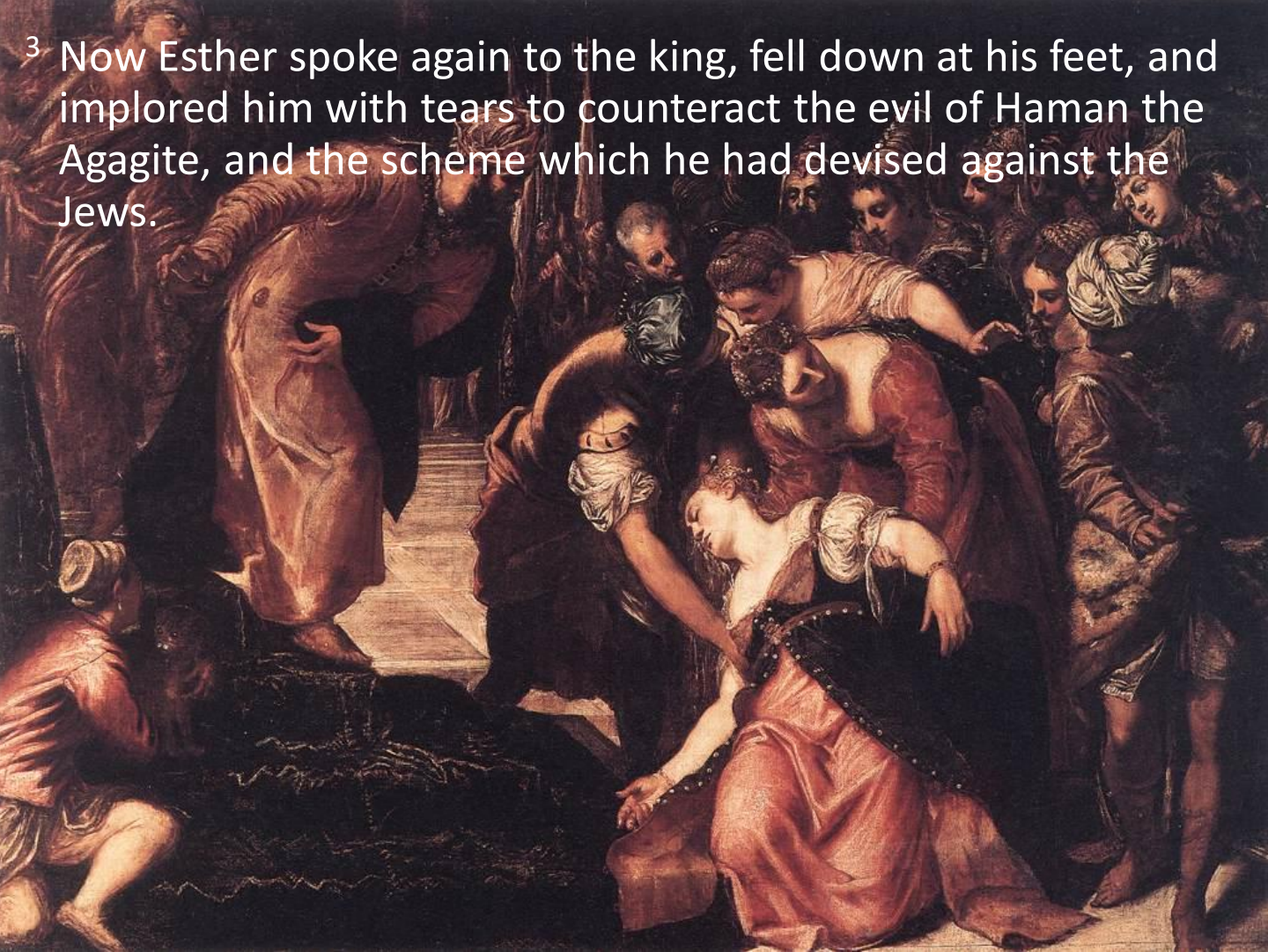
Chapter 8

Esther 8 – Esther Saves the Jews



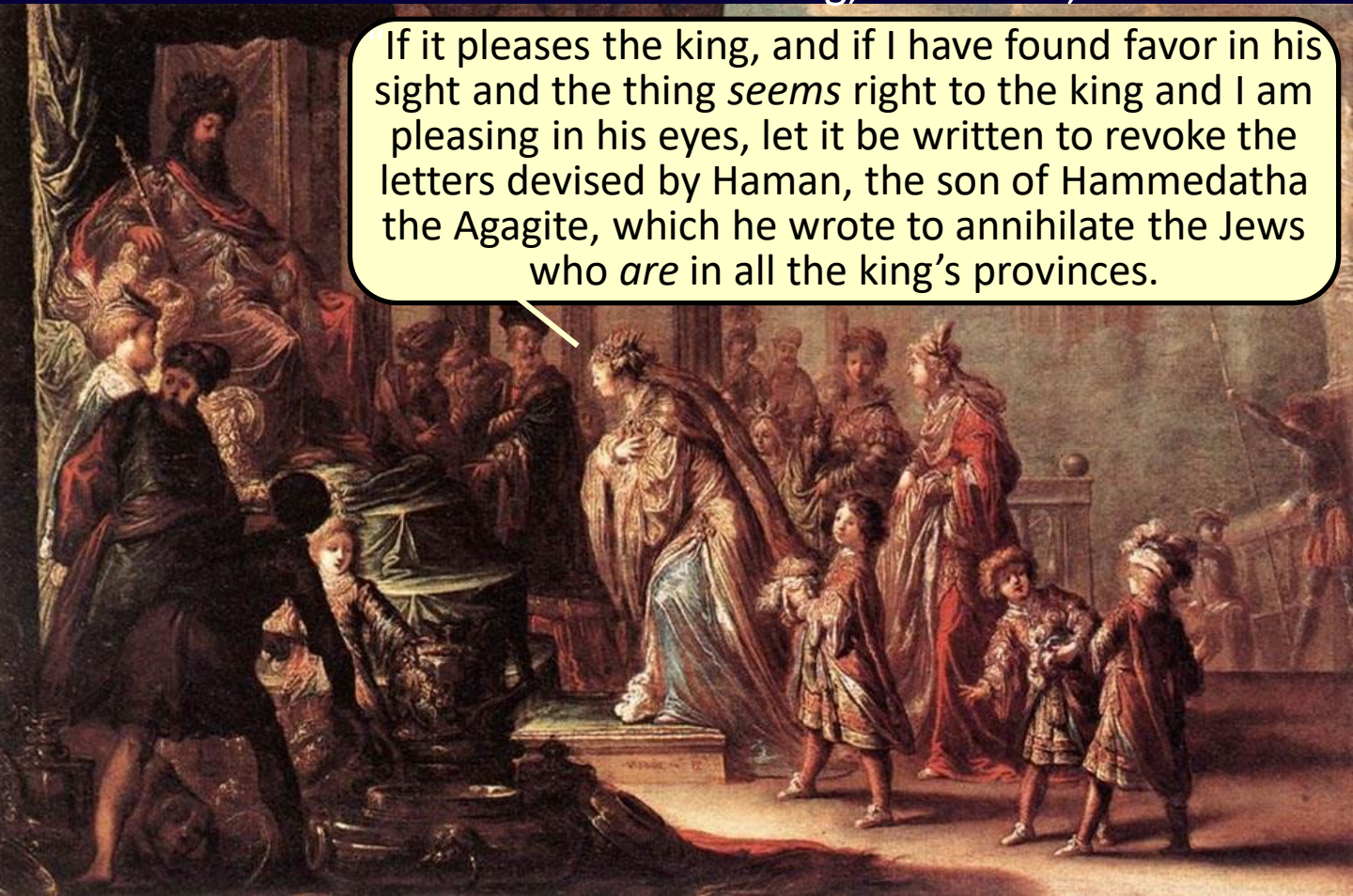
¹ On that day King Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told how he *was related* to her. ² So the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai; and Esther appointed Mordecai over the house of Haman.

³ Now Esther spoke again to the king, fell down at his feet, and implored him with tears to counteract the evil of Haman the Agagite, and the scheme which he had devised against the Jews.



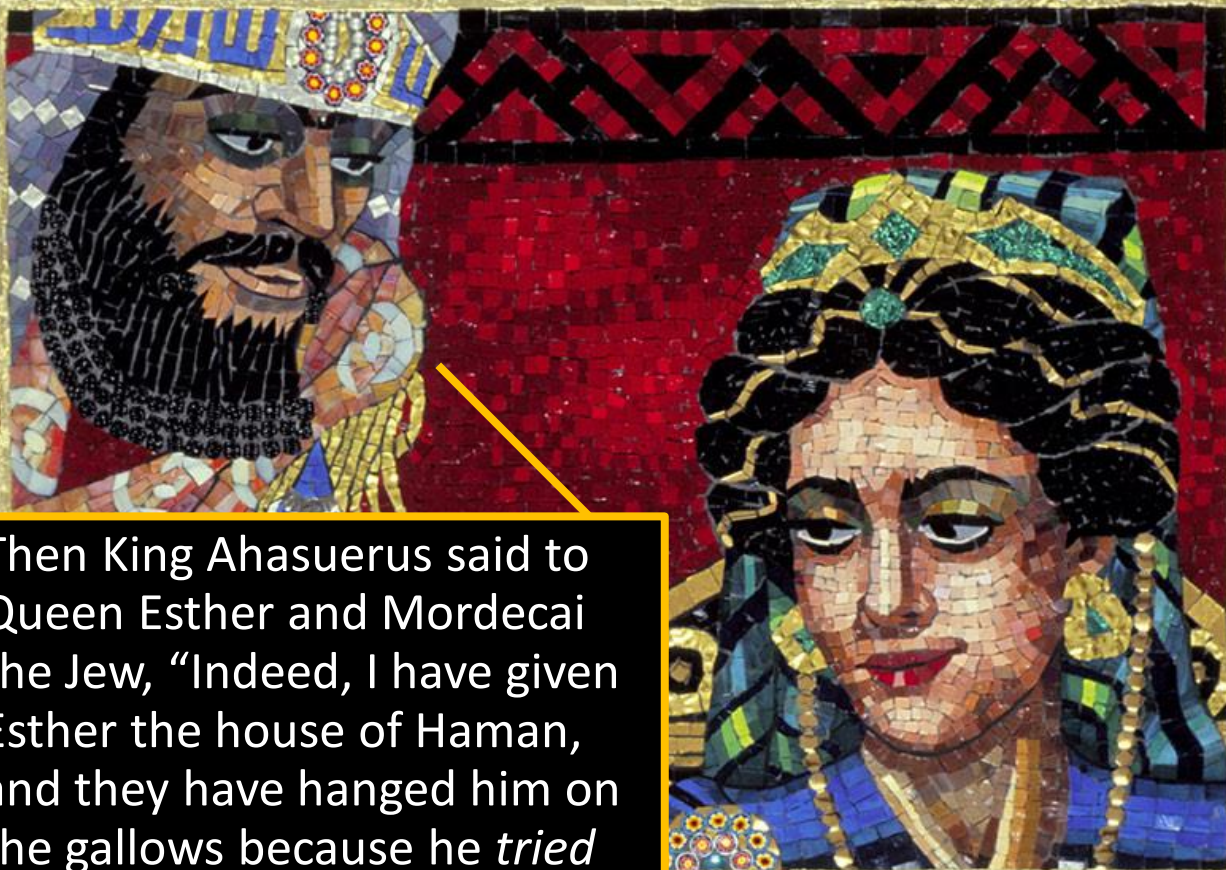
⁴ And the king held out the golden scepter toward Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the king, ⁵ and said,

If it pleases the king, and if I have found favor in his sight and the thing *seems* right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to annihilate the Jews who *are* in all the king's provinces.



⁶ For how can I endure to see the evil that will come to my people?
Or how can I endure to see the
destruction of my countrymen?"





⁷ Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew, “Indeed, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows because he *tried to lay his hand on the Jews.*”

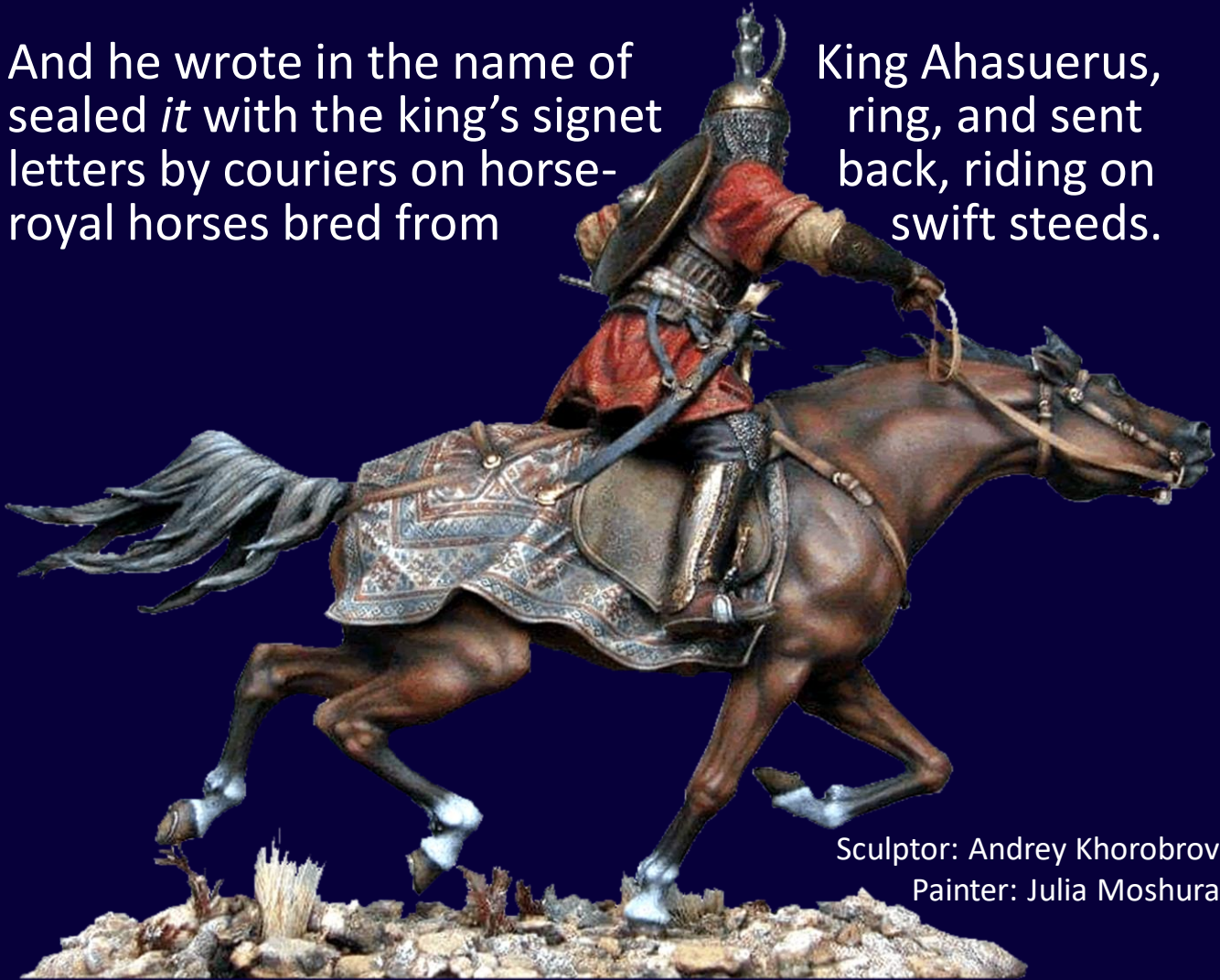
- 8 You yourselves write *a decree* concerning the Jews, as you please, in the king's name, and seal *it* with the king's signet ring; for whatever is written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring no one can revoke."



⁹ So the king's scribes were called at that time, in the third month, which *is* the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third *day*; and it was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, to the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the princes of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces *in all*, to every province in its own script, to every people in their own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language.

¹⁰ And he wrote in the name of
sealed *it* with the king's signet
letters by couriers on horse-
royal horses bred from

King Ahasuerus,
ring, and sent
back, riding on
swift steeds.



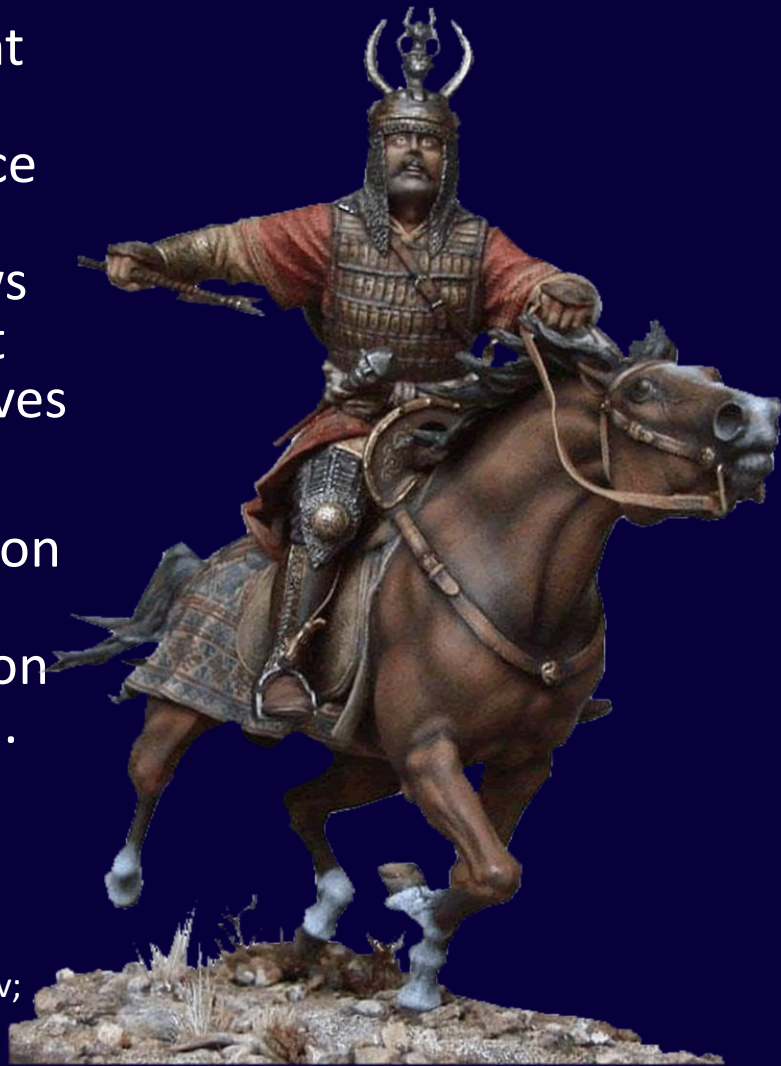
Sculptor: Andrey Khorobrov;
Painter: Julia Moshura.

¹¹ By these letters the king permitted the Jews who *were* in every city to gather together and protect their lives—to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, *both* little children and women, and to plunder their possessions, ¹² on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth month, which *is* the month of Adar.

13 A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province and published for all people, so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.

14 The couriers who rode on royal horses went out, hastened and pressed on by the king's command. And the decree was issued in Shushan the citadel.

Sculptor: Andrey Khorobrov;
Painter: Julia Moshura.





"So the posts that rode upon mules and camels went out." — *Esther* viii. 14.

15 So Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, with a great crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad.

16 The Jews had light and gladness, joy and honor.

17 And in every province and city, wherever the king's command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday.

Then many of the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them.

