

WOMEN IN THE
BIBLE
RUTH &
ESTHER

2020
SESSION
6

WOMEN IN THE
BIBLE
RUTH &
ESTHER

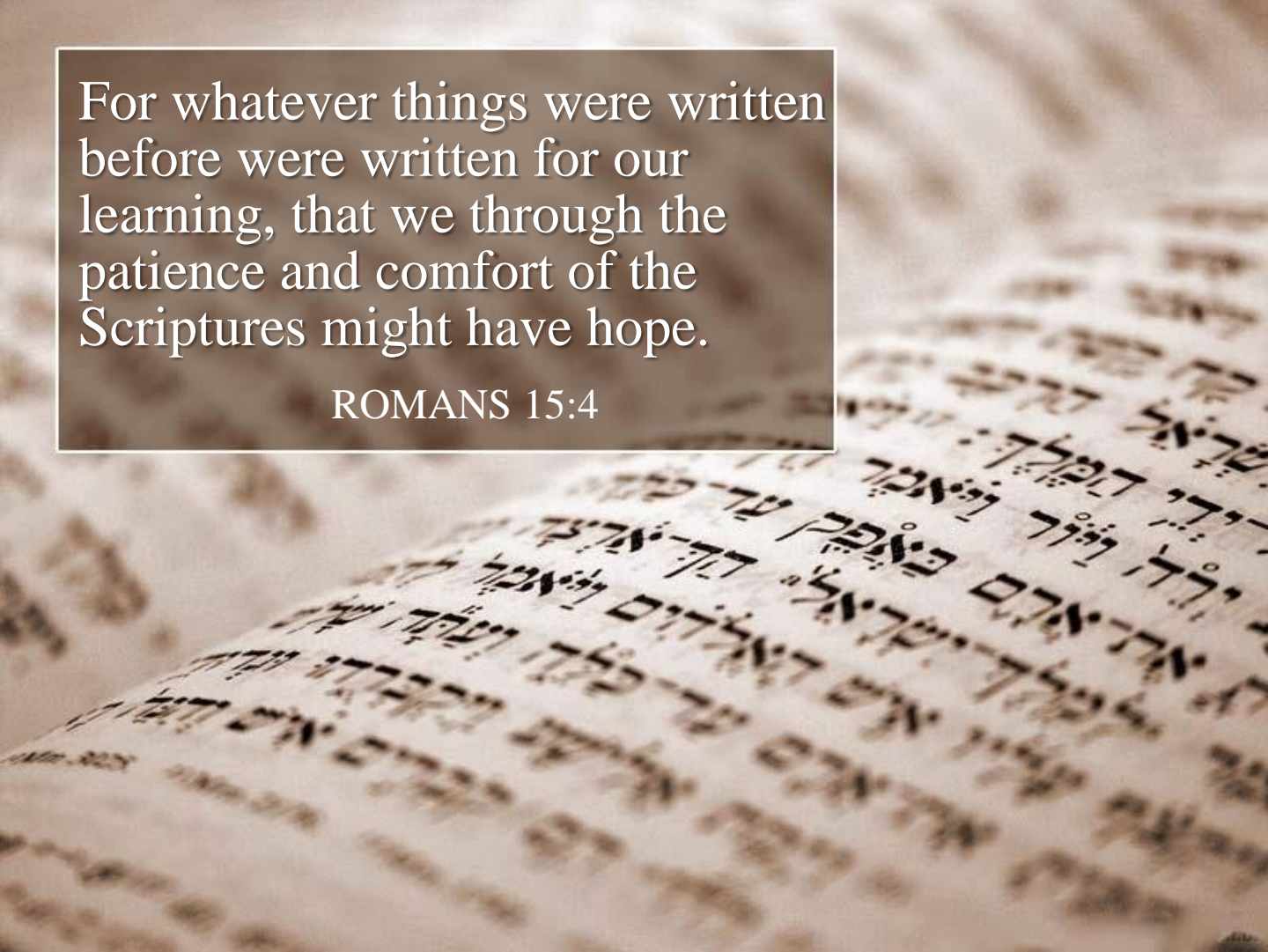
PART 3

The book of
Esther



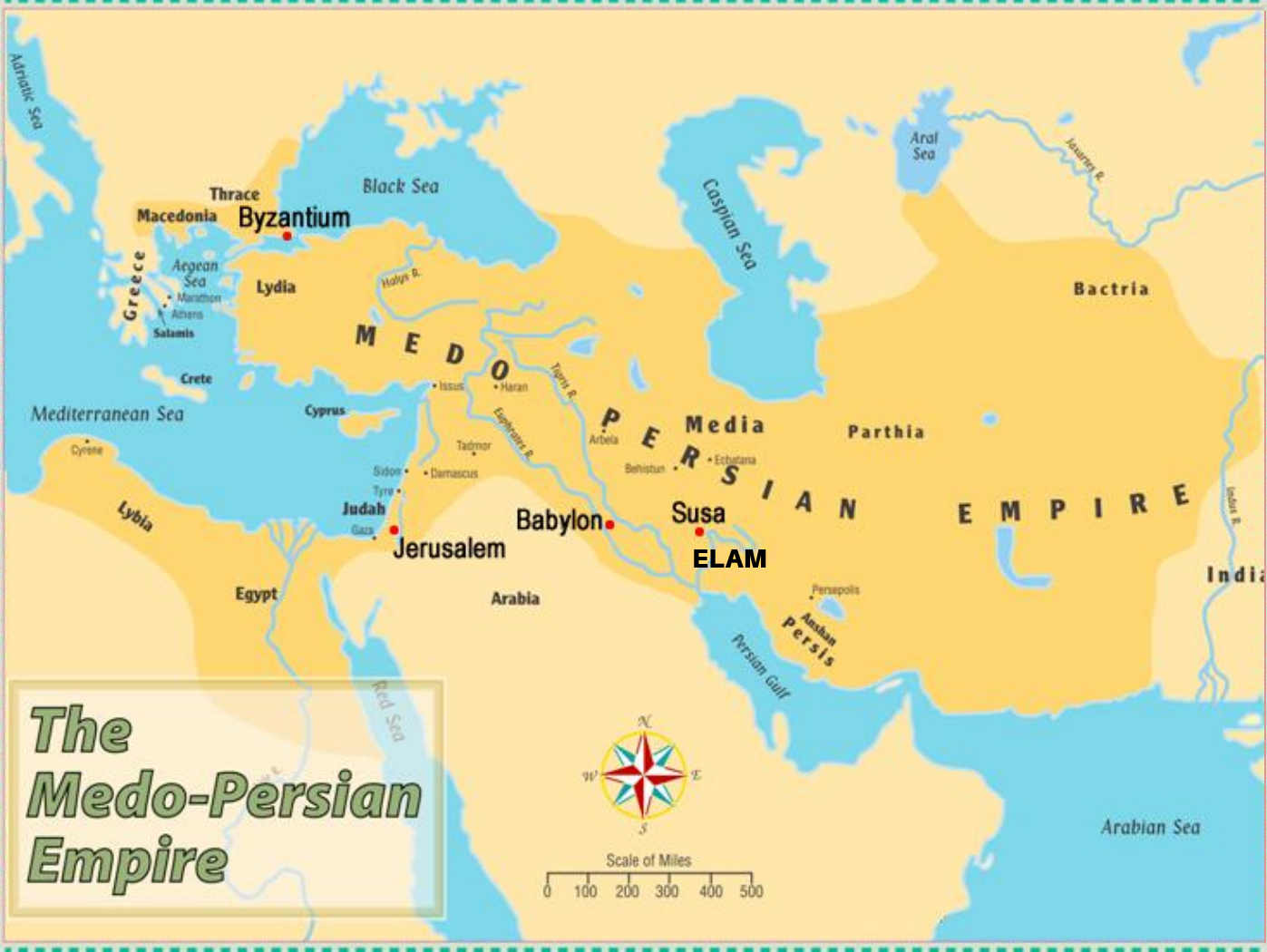
For whatever things were written
before were written for our
learning, that we through the
patience and comfort of the
Scriptures might have hope.

ROMANS 15:4

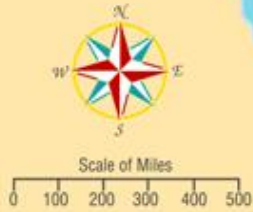


esther

- 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"



The Medo-Persian Empire



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

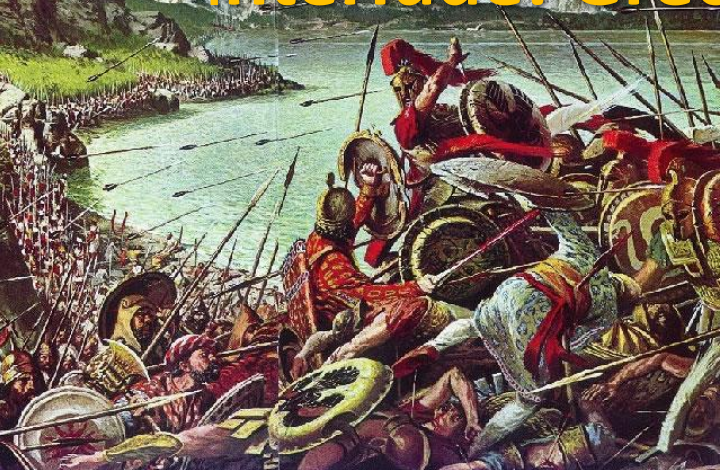


1 King Ahasuerus gave a feast for all his generals and officials. He ordered Queen Vashti to show off her beauty, but she refused, so his counselors advised him to replace her.

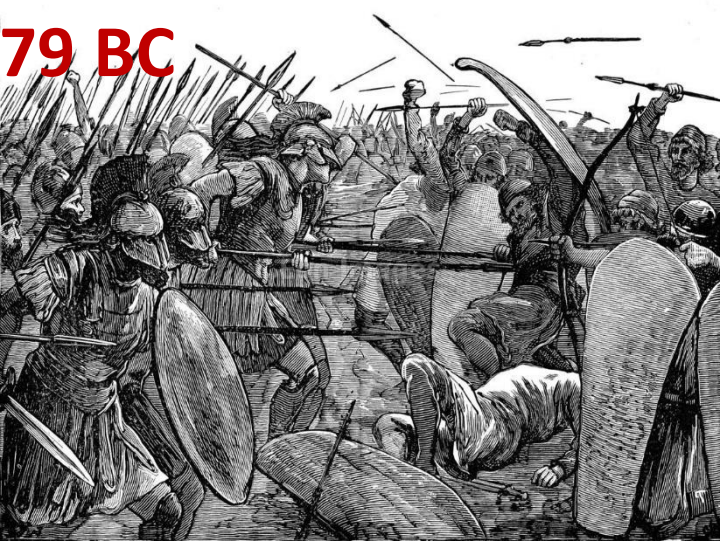


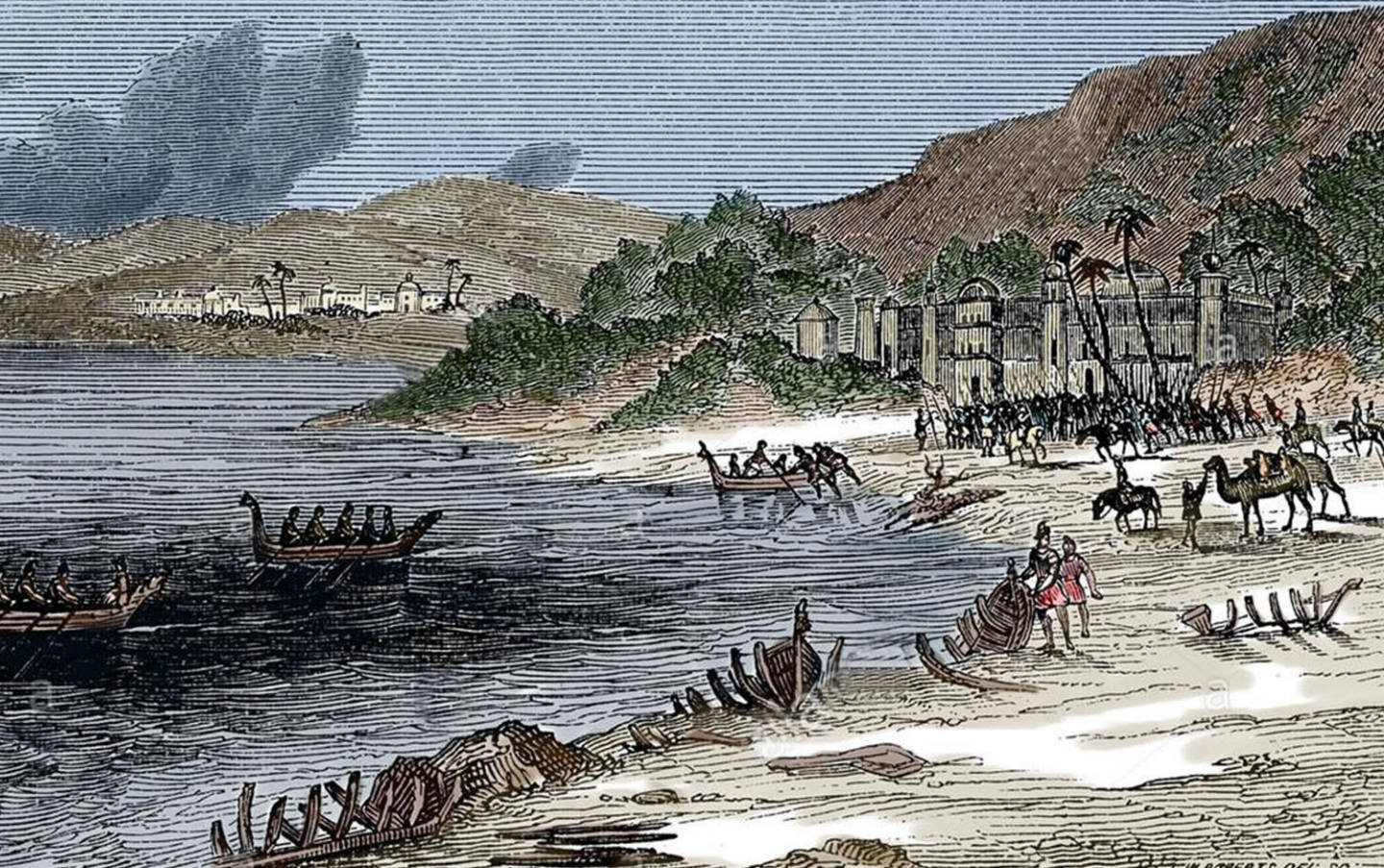
"Queen Vashti deposed" by Ernest Normand, 1890.

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 plotters were executed and the incident forgotten.

The book of

Esther

Chapter 3

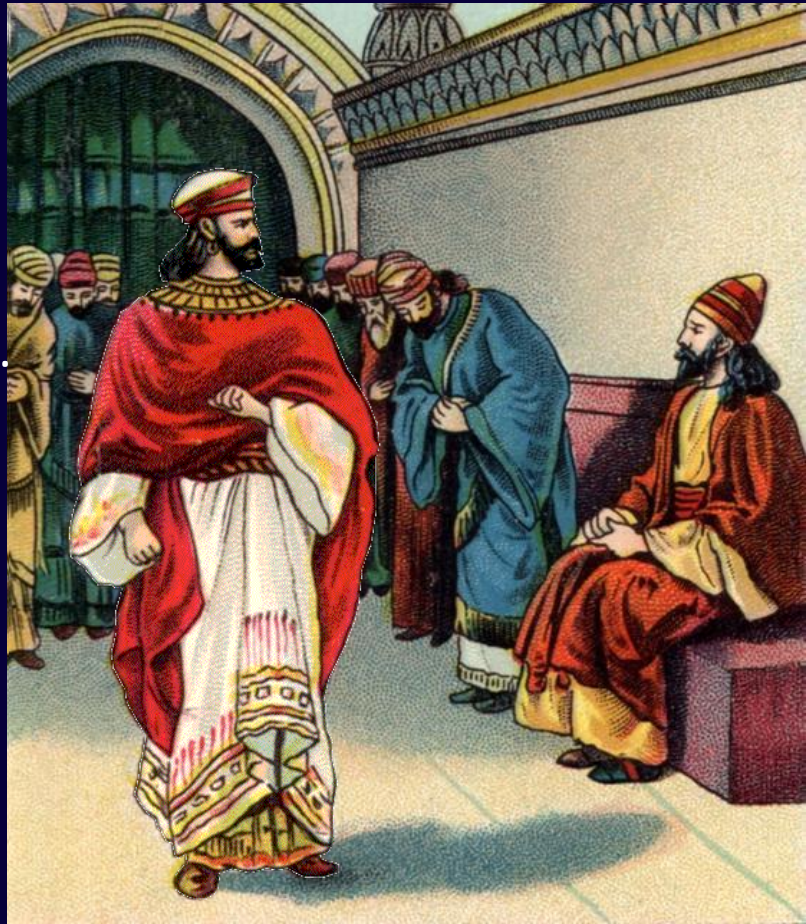
**TWO
YEARS
LATER**

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.**



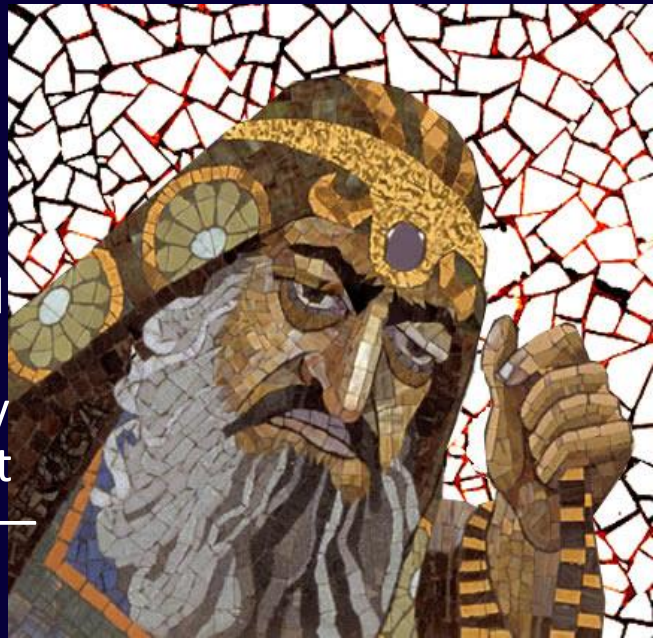
³ Then the king's servants who *were* within the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?"

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.

Grand Vizier Haman the Agagite

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
the
Jews?**

Twin Sons of Isaac and Rebecca - Jacob and Esau -



The LORD said, “*Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.*”
[Romans 9:13 quoting Malachi 1:2-3]

Abraham

Sarah

Hagar

Keturah

Isaac

Ishmael

Zimran

12 Tribes of Israel

Esau

Jacob

Reuben
Simeon
Levi
Judah
Dan
Naphtali
Gad
Issachar
Asher
Zebulan
Joseph*
Benjamin

*(Ephraim & Manasseh)

Eliphaz

Amalek

Edomite

Amalekite

Arab

Nebajoth
Kedar
Adbeel
Mibsam
Mishma
Dumah
Massa
Hadar
Tema
Jetur
Naphish
Kedemah

Saudi Arab

Jokshan
Sheba
Dedan

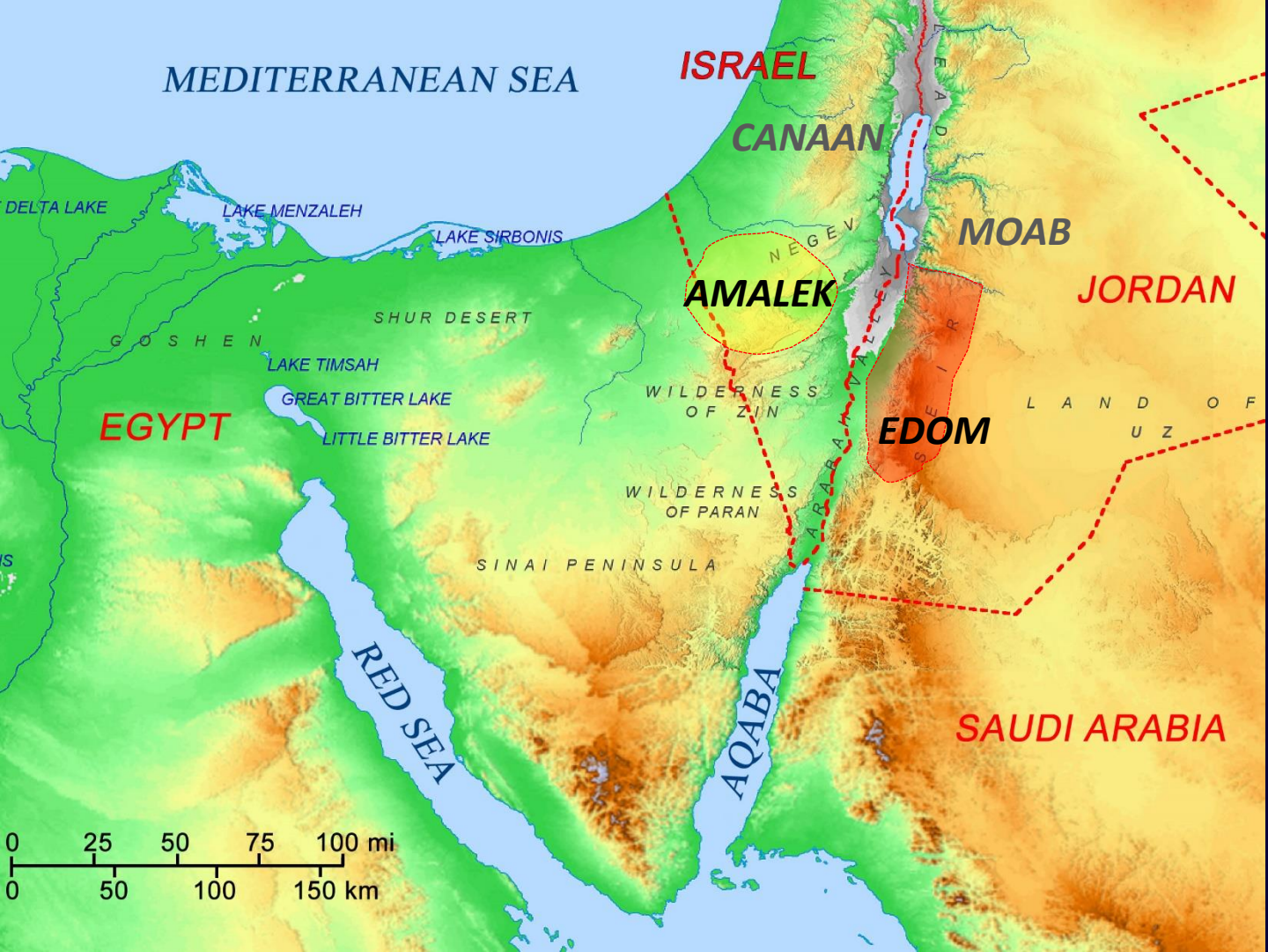
Medan

Bedouin

Midian
Ephah
Epher
Hanoch
Abidah
Eldaah

Ishbak

Shuah



MEDITERRANEAN SEA

ISRAEL

CANAAN

MOAB

JORDAN

EGYPT


AMALEK

EDOM

LAND OF
UZ

SAUDI ARABIA

0 25 50 75 100 mi
0 50 100 150 km

The painting depicts a chaotic battle scene. In the foreground, a muscular, shirtless Israelite warrior with a white loincloth is shown in profile, aiming a bow with intense focus. He holds a shield with a blue and gold geometric pattern. Behind him, another warrior in a green tunic and helmet also aims a bow. To the left, a third warrior in a red tunic is partially visible. In the background, a large red banner is held aloft by a soldier. The scene is filled with other combatants, some on horseback, engaged in various stages of battle. The ground is littered with fallen soldiers and armor. The overall style is classical, with strong contrasts of light and shadow, emphasizing the physicality and heroism of the warriors. The sky is a pale, hazy blue.

During Israel's Exodus from Egypt, the Amalekites attacked people in the rear ranks (Deut 25). God declared war on them.

'The Battle of the Israelites and Amelekites' by Nicolas Poussin, 1624-24.



'Saul Reproved by Samuel' by unknown, 1798.



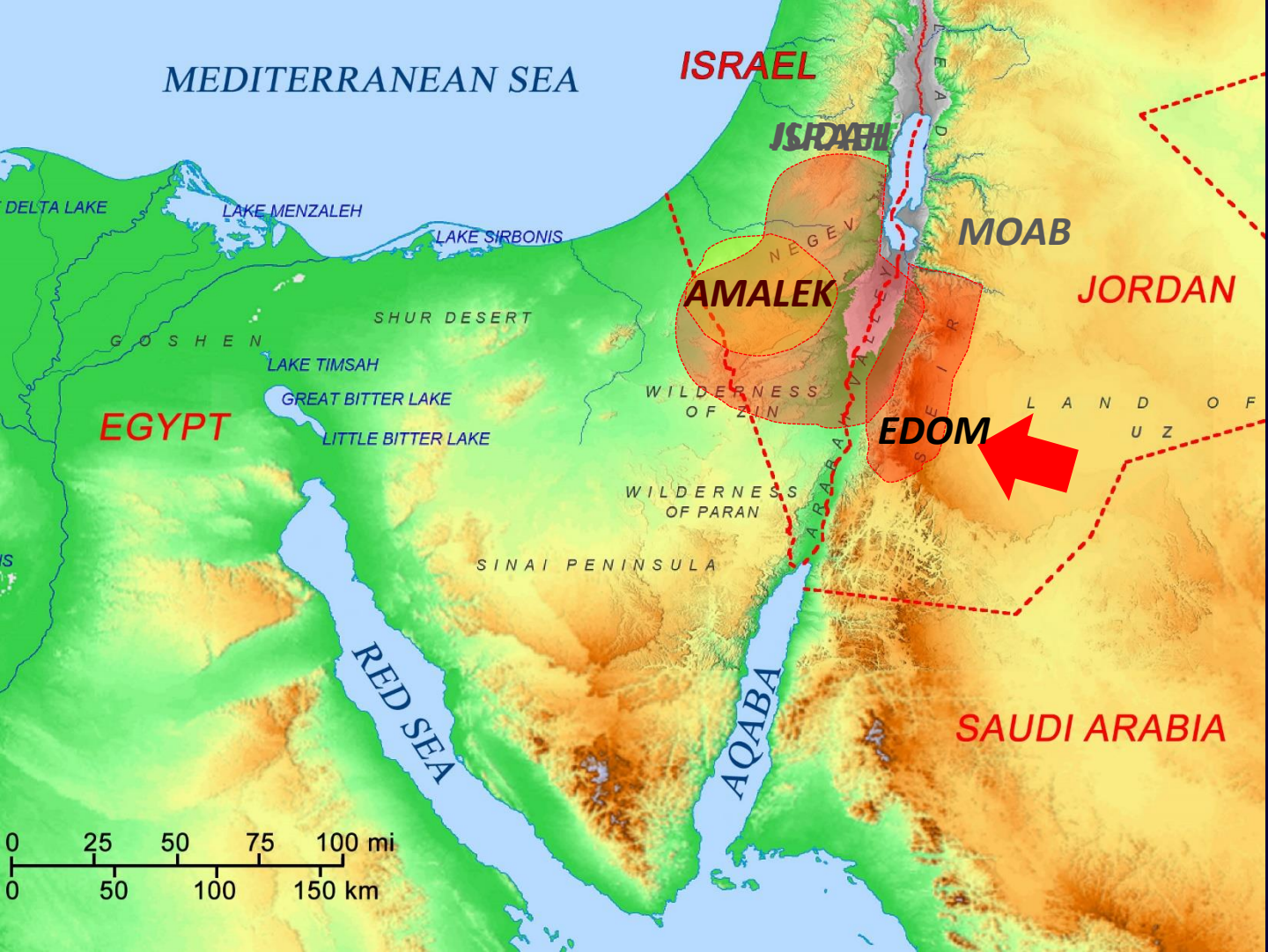
- An angry Samuel then showed Agag no mercy; but some of Agag's children escaped.
- One actually hoped to curry favor with David by claiming to have killed Saul in battle and bringing Saul's crown to David (2 Sam 1:1–10).

'A morte de Agag' by
Gustave Doré (1832-1883).

Everlasting Hatred - עוֹלָם אִי־בַת -



- 600 years later in Susa, a royal Amalekite named Haman and a direct descendant of King Agag, would plot to destroy every living Jew!
- Modern Middle East hostilities trace back 4,000 yrs to *olam ebah*



MEDITERRANEAN SEA

ISRAEL

ISRAEL

MOAB

JORDAN

EGYPT

AMALEK

EDOM

LAND OF
UZ

RED SEA

AQABA

SAUDI ARABIA

0 25 50 75 100 mi
0 50 100 150 km



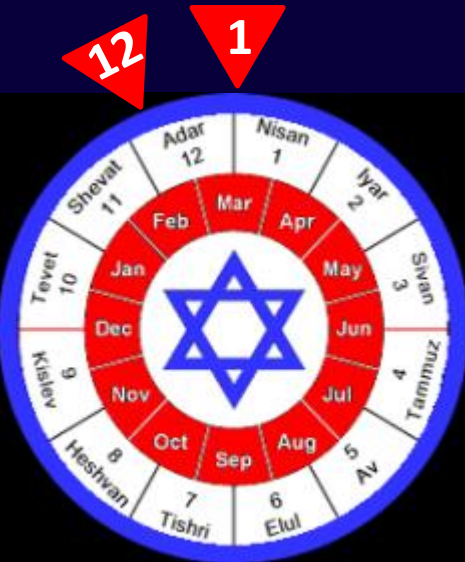


King **David** spares
Shemei,
and thus
a **Mordecai** is born.

King **Saul** spares
Agag,
and thus
a **Haman** is born.



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 with the help of *pur* ("lot", "dice") to indicate the most propitious date for each event.
- In this case, the *pur* coincidentally fell on the very last month in the year as the date to kill all Jews.

- “Pur” is Persian for “casting a lot”; “purim” is the plural.

- The picture is of an actual **pur** from the reign of Shalmaneser III of Assyria (r. 858–824 BC) in Yale’s Babylonian Collection.



Hallo, W. (1983). The First Purim. *The Biblical Archaeologist*.

- A portion of the cuneiform text reads, “lahali the grand vizier... in his year assigned to him by lot (pur) may the harvest of the land of Assyria prosper and thrive, in front of the gods Assur and Adad may his lot (pur) fall.”

The lot is cast into the lap;
but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.

Proverb 16:33

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 Asian elephants

340,194 kg



A\$1,252.23/kg

Australian Silver Market
7 November 2020

10,000 talents =

A\$426,000,000.00

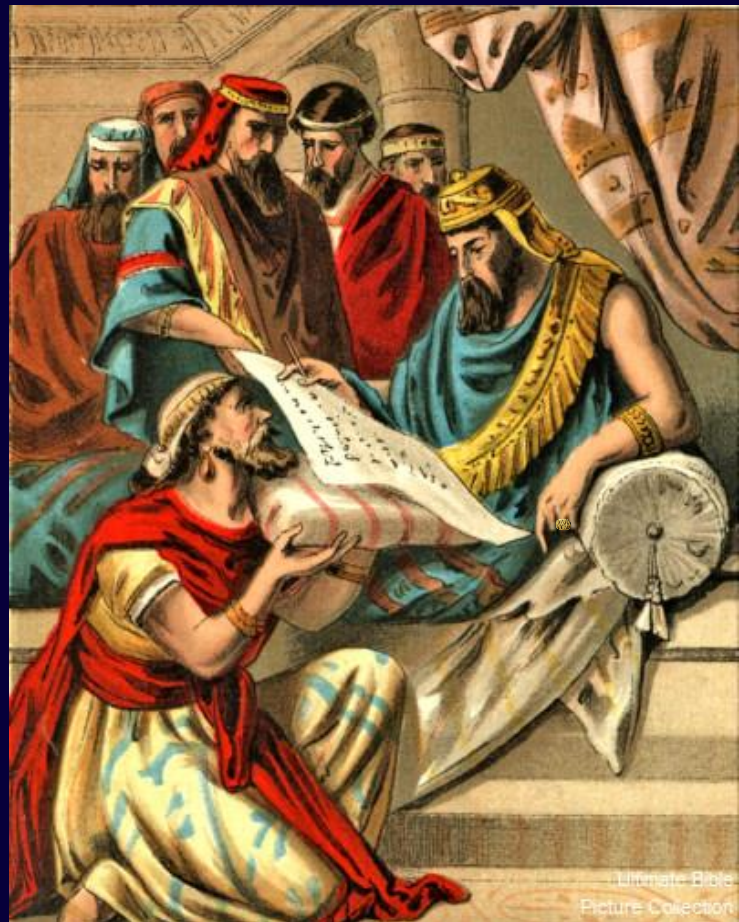


¹⁰ So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. ¹¹ And the king said to Haman, “The money and the people *are* given to you, to do with them as seems good to you.”



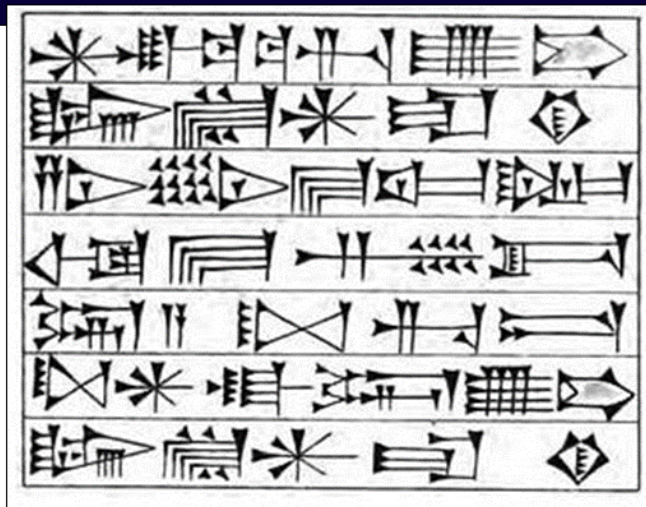
“The Banquet of Ahasuerus” by Aert de Gelder, c. 1685.

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.

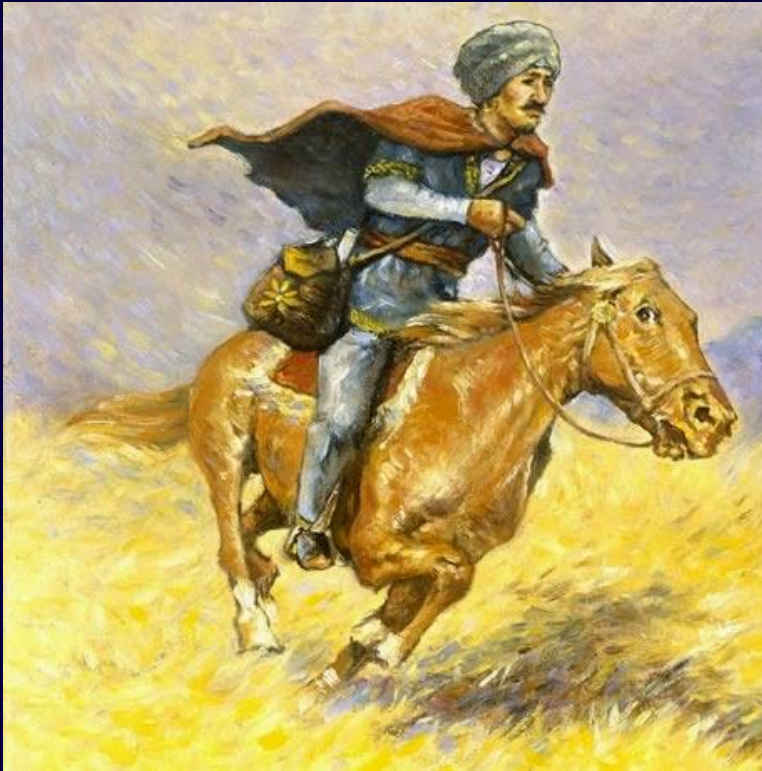


13 And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth month, which *is* the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions.

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].



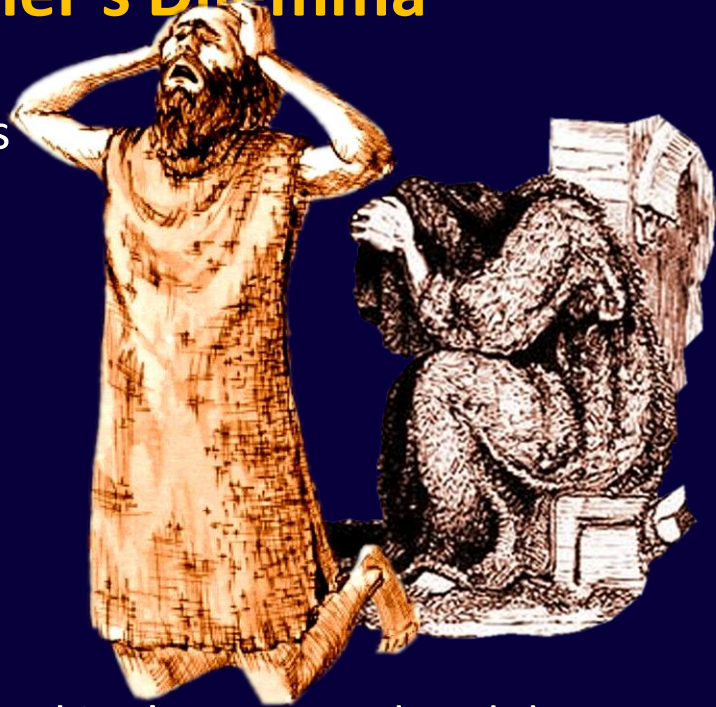
The book of

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 Edwin Long, 1878.



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.



‘Esther sends Hathach to Mordecai,’
Stained glass window at Sainte-Chapelle, Paris,
The French School, (13th century).

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:

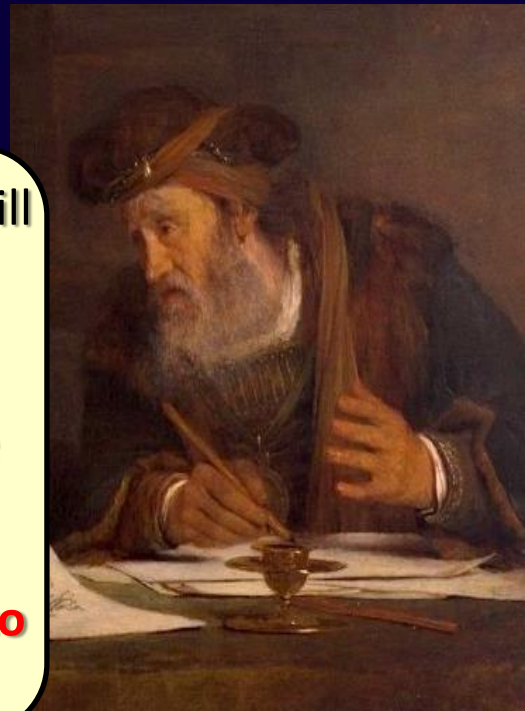
¹¹ “All the king’s servants and the
people of the king’s provinces
know that any man or woman
who goes into the inner court to
the king, who has not been called,
he has but one law: put *all* to
death, except the one to whom
the king holds out the golden
scepter, that he may live. Yet I
myself have not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

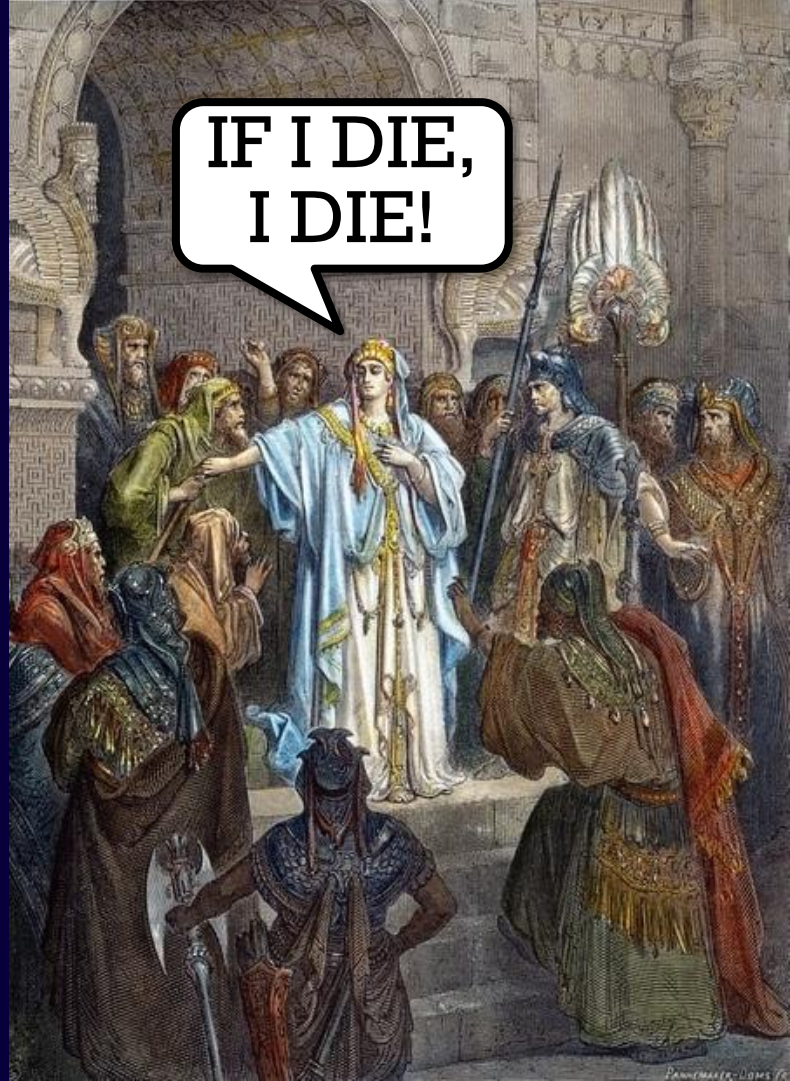


FOR SUCH A
TIME
AS THIS...

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!”

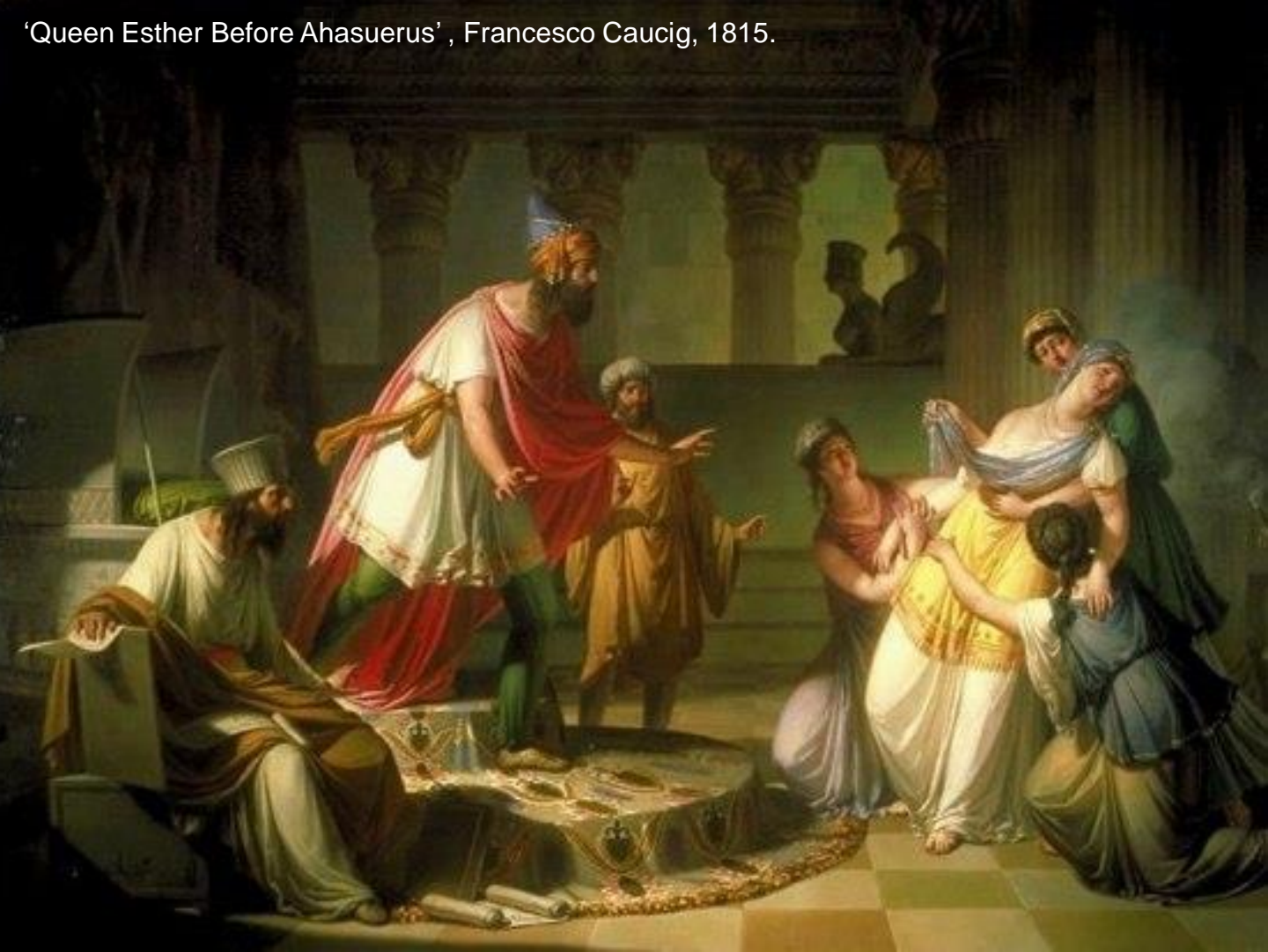


Alas, many influential groups have a problem with Xerxes simply saying “Yes.”

1. This might be a suitable ending for a boy meets girl romance, but it doesn't satisfy sophisticated Greco-Roman expectations, so Josephus and the unknown Greek author of a short version called Alpha-text added a little extra-biblical something here.
2. Their addition has been wildly inspirational for classical artists and poets. However, many feminist scholars are none too thrilled by it.

We'll examine both perspectives in due course.

'Queen Esther Before Ahasuerus', Francesco Caucig, 1815.





'The Swooning of Esther' by Antoine Coypel, c. 1704.



Esther before Ahasuerus' by Tintoretto (Jacopo Robusti), 1547-48.



'Esther before Ahasuerus' by Peter Paul Rubens, 1620.

What about Feminist interpretation?

- The relationship between the two Persian queens is integral to understanding the Purim story.

Vashti

- Beautiful
- Willful
- Independent
- Disobedient
- Headstrong
- Throws a mean party
- Stands up to authority



Esther

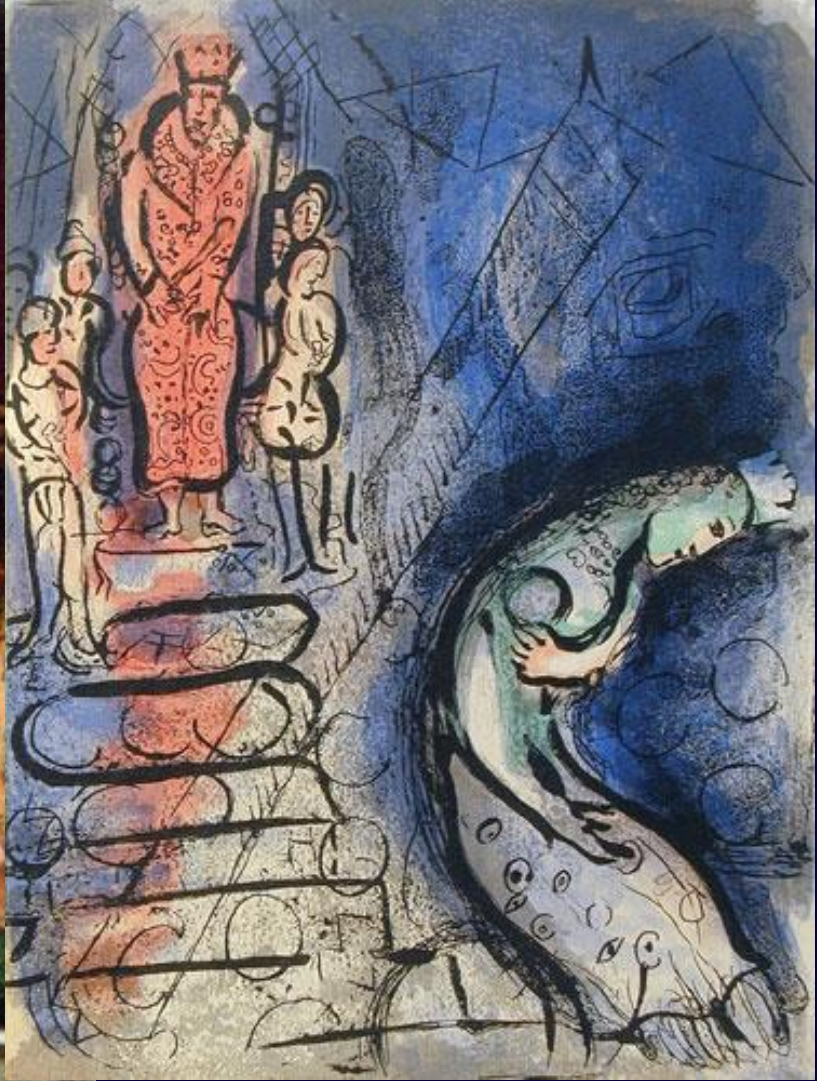
- Beautiful
- Passive
- Submissive
- Obedient
- Model of docility

Seemingly Esther is the perfect foil to Vashti.



Seemingly the message is that a woman would do well to be dutiful and promptly do whatever her Alpha male commands.

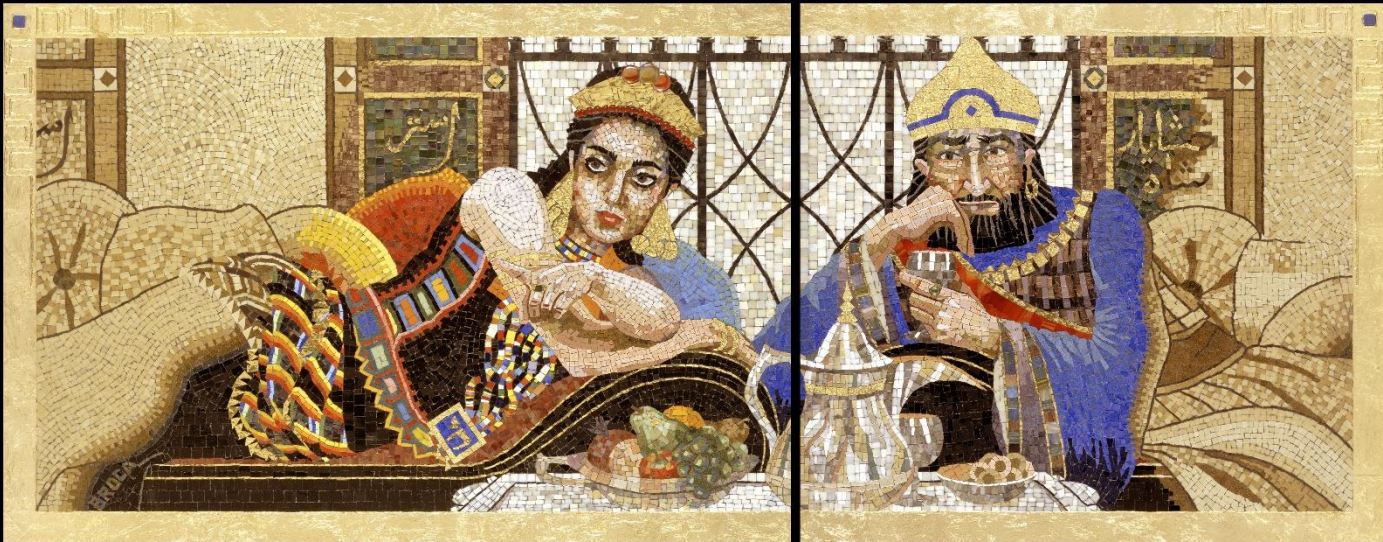
'Queen Vashti' by Alexandre Cabanel





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.



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.



“Haman and Mordecai”, Paul Alexander Leroy, 1884.

¹⁰ Nevertheless Haman restrained himself and went home, and he sent and called for his friends and his wife Zeresh (“gold”).

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."



“You must remember that Mordechai is a Jew. If you try to kill him with a sword, know that Pharaoh attempted to decapitate Moses and failed. If you wish to stone him, remember how David slew Goliath with stones. If you try to drown him, remember how G-d tore the sea before Israel. If you want to exile him to the desert, remember how Israel wandered in the desert for forty years and thrived. Joseph was released from jail and became the Viceroy. Shadrach, Meshak and Adegnego went out from a fiery furnace, and Daniel left the lion’s den. Don’t try to blind him; remember how many people Samson killed whilst sightless. There is one remaining way for you: hang Mordechai on a tree.”



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



Esther