



Archdiocese of St. Louis
Office of Sacred Worship
Lectio Divina Bible
The Book of Esther

The book may be divided as follows:

- I. Prologue (A:1–17)
- II. Esther Becomes Queen (1:1–2:23)
- III. Haman’s Plot against the Jews (3:1–13; B:1–7; 3:14–15)
- IV. Esther and Mordecai Plead for Help (4:1–16; C:1–D:16; 5:1–5)
- V. Haman’s Downfall (5:6–8:2)
- VI. The Jewish Victory and the Feast of Purim (8:3–12; E:1–24; 8:13–9:23)
- VII. Epilogue: The Rise of Mordecai (9:24–10:3; F:1–11)

The order of the Vulgate text in relation to the order of the Greek text is as follows:

Vulg. 11:2–12:6	= A:1–17 at the beginning of the book.
13:1–7	= B:1–7 after 3:13.
13:8—15:3–19	= C:1–D:16 after 4:16.
15:1–2	= B:8, 9 after 4:8.
16:1–24	= E:1–24 after 8:12.
10:4–13	= F:1–10 after 10:3.



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**I. Prologue
Esther, chapter 1
CHAPTER A**

Dream of Mordecai.

In the second year of the reign of Ahasuerus the great, on the first day of Nisan, Mordecai, son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, had a dream. He was a Jew residing in the city of Susa, a prominent man who served at the king's court, and one of the captives whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had taken from Jerusalem with Jeconiah, king of Judah.

This was his dream. There was noise and tumult, thunder and earthquake—confusion upon the earth. Two great dragons advanced, both poised for combat. They uttered a mighty cry, and at their cry every nation prepared for war, to fight against the nation of the just. It was a dark and gloomy day. Tribulation and distress, evil and great confusion, lay upon the earth. The whole nation of the just was shaken with fear at the evils to come upon them, and they expected to perish. Then they cried out to God, and from their crying there arose, as though from a tiny spring, a mighty river, a flood of water. The light of the sun broke forth; the lowly were exalted and they devoured the boastful. Having seen this dream and what God intended to do, Mordecai awoke. He kept it in mind, and tried in every way, until night, to understand its meaning.

Mordecai Thwarts an Assassination.

Mordecai lodged in the courtyard with Bigthan and Teresh, two eunuchs of the king who guarded the courtyard. He overheard them plotting, investigated their plans, and discovered that they were preparing to assassinate King Ahasuerus. So he informed the king about them. The king had the two eunuchs questioned and, upon their confession, put to death. Then the king had these things recorded; Mordecai, too, put them into writing. The king also appointed Mordecai to serve at the court, and rewarded him for his actions.



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Haman, however, son of Hammedatha, a Bougean, who was held in high honor by the king, sought to harm Mordecai and his people because of the two eunuchs of the king.

II. Esther Becomes Queen

The Banquet of Ahasuerus.

During the reign of Ahasuerus—the same Ahasuerus who ruled over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia—while he was occupying the royal throne in the royal precinct of Susa, in the third year of his reign, he gave a feast for all his officials and ministers: the Persian and Median army officers, the nobles, and the governors of the provinces. For as many as a hundred and eighty days, he displayed the glorious riches of his kingdom and the resplendent wealth of his royal estate.

At the end of this time the king gave a feast of seven days in the garden court of the royal palace for all the people, great and small, who were in the royal precinct of Susa. There were white cotton draperies and violet hangings, held by cords of fine crimson linen from silver rings on marble pillars. Gold and silver couches were on a mosaic pavement, which was of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and colored stones. Drinks were served in a variety of golden cups, and the royal wine flowed freely, as befitted the king's liberality. By ordinance of the king the drinking was unstinted, for he had instructed all the stewards of his household to comply with the good pleasure of everyone.

Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women in the royal palace of King Ahasuerus.

Refusal of Vashti.

On the seventh day, when the king was merry with wine, he instructed Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who attended King Ahasuerus, to bring Queen Vashti into his presence wearing the royal crown, that he might display her beauty to the populace and the officials, for she was lovely to behold. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the royal order issued through the eunuchs. At this the king's wrath flared up, and he burned with fury. He conferred with the sages who understood the times, because the king's business was conducted in general consultation with lawyers and jurists. He summoned Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven Persian and Median officials who were in the king's personal service and held first rank in the realm, and asked them, "What is to be done by law with Queen Vashti for disobeying the order of King Ahasuerus issued through the eunuchs?"

In the presence of the king and of the officials, Memucan answered: "Queen Vashti has not wronged the king alone, but all the officials and the populace throughout the provinces of King Ahasuerus. For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women, and they will look with disdain upon their husbands when it is reported, 'King Ahasuerus commanded that Queen Vashti be ushered into his presence, but she would not come.' This very day the Persian and Median noblewomen who hear of the queen's conduct will recount it to all the royal officials, and disdain and rancor will abound.

If it please the king, let an irrevocable royal decree be issued by him and inscribed among the laws of the Persians and Medes, forbidding Vashti to come into the presence of King Ahasuerus and authorizing the king to give her royal dignity to one more worthy than she. Thus, when the decree that the king will issue is published throughout his realm, vast as it is, all wives will honor their husbands, from the greatest to the least."



Archdiocese of St. Louis
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This proposal pleased the king and the officials, and the king acted on the advice of Memucan. He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language, to the effect that every man should be lord in his own home.



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Esther, chapter 2

The Search for a New Queen.

After this, when King Ahasuerus' wrath had cooled, he thought over what Vashti had done and what had been decreed against her. Then the king's personal attendants suggested: "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king. Let the king appoint emissaries in all the provinces of his realm to gather all beautiful young virgins into the harem in the royal precinct of Susa. Under the care of the royal eunuch Hegai, guardian of the women, let cosmetics be given them. Then the young woman who pleases the king shall reign in place of Vashti." This suggestion pleased the king, and he acted accordingly.

There was in the royal precinct of Susa a certain Jew named Mordecai, son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite, who had been exiled from Jerusalem with the captives taken with Jeconiah, king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had deported. He became foster father to his cousin Hadassah, that is, Esther, when she lost both father and mother. The young woman was beautifully formed and lovely to behold. On the death of her father and mother, Mordecai adopted her as his own daughter.

When the king's order and decree had been proclaimed and many young women brought together to the royal precinct of Susa under the care of Hegai, Esther also was brought in to the royal palace under the care of Hegai, guardian of the women.

The young woman pleased him and won his favor. So he promptly furnished her with cosmetics and provisions. Then choosing seven maids for her from the royal palace, he transferred both her and her maids to the best place in the harem. Esther did not reveal her nationality or family, for Mordecai had commanded her not to do so.



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Lectio Divina Bible
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Day by day Mordecai would walk about in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was faring and what was to become of her.

After the twelve months' preparation decreed for the women, each one went in turn to visit King Ahasuerus. During this period of beautifying treatment, six months were spent with oil of myrrh, and the other six months with perfumes and cosmetics. Then, when each one was to visit the king, she was allowed to take with her from the harem to the royal palace whatever she chose. She would go in the evening and return in the morning to a second harem under the care of the royal eunuch Shaashgaz, guardian of the concubines. She could not return to the king unless he was pleased with her and had her summoned by name.

As for Esther, daughter of Abihail and adopted daughter of his nephew Mordecai, when her turn came to visit the king, she did not ask for anything but what the royal eunuch Hegai, guardian of the women, suggested. And she won the admiration of all who saw her.

Ahasuerus Chooses Esther.

Esther was led to King Ahasuerus in his palace in the tenth month, Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. The king loved Esther more than all other women, and of all the virgins she won his favor and good will. So he placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti. Then the king gave a great feast in honor of Esther to all his officials and servants, granting a holiday to the provinces and bestowing gifts with royal generosity.

Mordecai Thwarts an Assassination.

As was said, from the time the virgins had been brought together, and while Mordecai was passing his time at the king's gate, Esther had not revealed her family or nationality, because Mordecai had told her not to; and Esther continued to follow Mordecai's instructions, just as she had when she was being brought up by him. During the time that Mordecai spent at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the royal eunuchs who guarded the entrance, became angry and plotted to assassinate King Ahasuerus. When the plot became known to Mordecai, he told Queen Esther, who in turn informed the king in Mordecai's name. The matter was investigated and verified, and both of them were impaled on stakes. This was written in the annals in the king's presence.



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III. Haman's Plot against the Jews Esther, chapter 3

Mordecai Refuses to Honor Haman.

After these events King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite, to high rank, seating him above all his fellow officials. All the king's servants who were at the royal gate would kneel and bow down to Haman, for that is what the king had ordered in his regard. Mordecai, however, would not kneel and bow down. The king's servants who were at the royal gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's order?" When they had reminded him day after day and he would not listen to them, they informed Haman, to see whether Mordecai's explanation would prevail, since he had told them that he was a Jew.

Haman's Reprisal.

When Haman observed that Mordecai would not kneel and bow down to him, he was filled with anger. But he thought it was beneath him to attack only Mordecai. Since they had told Haman of Mordecai's nationality, he sought to destroy all the Jews, Mordecai's people, throughout the realm of King Ahasuerus. In the first month, Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, the pur, or lot, was cast in Haman's presence to determine the day and the month for the destruction of Mordecai's people on a single day, and the lot fell on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar.

Decree Against the Jews.

Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus: "Dispersed among the nations throughout the provinces of your kingdom, there is a certain people living apart. Their laws differ from those of every other people and they do not obey the laws of the king; so it is not proper for the king to tolerate them. If it please the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them; and I will deliver to the procurators ten thousand silver talents for deposit in the royal treasury." The king took the signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, son of Hammedatha



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the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. The king said to Haman, “The silver is yours, as well as the people, to do with as you please.”

So the royal scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and they wrote, at the dictation of Haman, an order to the royal satraps, the governors of every province, and the officials of every people, to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the royal signet ring. Letters were sent by couriers to all the royal provinces, to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, including women and children in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar, and to seize their goods as spoil.

CHAPTER B

This is a copy of the letter: “The great King Ahasuerus writes to the satraps of the hundred and twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia, and the governors subordinate to them, as follows: When I came to rule many peoples and to hold sway over the whole world, not being carried away by a sense of my own authority but always acting fairly and with mildness, I determined to provide for my subjects a life of lasting tranquility; and, by making my kingdom civilized and safe for travel to its farthest borders, to restore the peace desired by all people.

When I consulted my counselors as to how this might be accomplished, Haman, who excels among us in discretion, who is outstanding for constant good will and steadfast loyalty, and who has gained a place in the kingdom second only to me, brought it to our attention that, mixed among all the nations throughout the world, there is one people of ill will, which by its laws is opposed to every other people and continually disregards the decrees of kings, so that the unity of empire blamelessly designed by us cannot be established.

“Having noted, therefore, that this nation, and it alone, is continually at variance with all people, lives by divergent and alien laws, is inimical to our government, and does all the harm it can to undermine the stability of the kingdom, we hereby decree that all those who are indicated to you in the letters of Haman, who is in charge of the administration and is a second father to us, shall, together with their wives and children, be utterly destroyed by the swords of their enemies, without any pity or mercy, on the fourteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar, of the current year; so that when these people, whose present ill will is of long standing, have gone down into Hades by a violent death on a single day, they may leave our government completely stable and undisturbed for the future.”

A copy of the decree to be promulgated as law in every province was published to all the peoples, that they might be prepared for that day. The couriers set out in haste at the king’s command; meanwhile, the decree was promulgated in the royal precinct of Susa. The king and Haman then sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was thrown into confusion.



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Esther, chapter 4

Mordecai Exhorts Esther.

When Mordecai learned all that was happening, he tore his garments, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went through the city crying out loudly and bitterly, till he came before the royal gate, which no one clothed in sackcloth might enter. Likewise in each of the provinces, wherever the king's decree and law reached, the Jews went into deep mourning, with fasting, weeping, and lament; most of them lay on sackcloth and ashes.

Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her. Overwhelmed with anguish, the queen sent garments for Mordecai to put on, so that he might take off his sackcloth; but he refused. Esther then summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs whom he had placed at her service, and commanded him to find out what this action of Mordecai meant and the reason for it. So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the public square in front of the royal gate, and Mordecai recounted all that had happened to him, as well as the exact amount of silver Haman had promised to pay to the royal treasury for the slaughter of the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction that had been promulgated in Susa, to show and explain to Esther. Hathach was to instruct her to go to the king and to plead and intercede with him on behalf of her people.

Hathach returned to Esther and told her what Mordecai had said. Then Esther replied to Hathach and gave him this message for Mordecai: "All the servants of the king and the people of his provinces know that any man or woman who goes to the king in the inner court without being summoned is subject to the same law—death. Only if the king extends the golden scepter will such a person live. Now as for me, I have not been summoned to the king for thirty days."

When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he had this reply brought to her: "Do not imagine that you are safe in the king's palace, you alone of all the Jews. Even if you now remain silent, relief and deliverance



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will come to the Jews from another source; but you and your father's house will perish. Who knows—perhaps it was for a time like this that you became queen?"

Esther sent back to Mordecai the response: "Go and assemble all the Jews who are in Susa; fast on my behalf, all of you, not eating or drinking night or day for three days. I and my maids will also fast in the same way. Thus prepared, I will go to the king, contrary to the law. If I perish, I perish!" Mordecai went away and did exactly as Esther had commanded.

CHAPTER C

Prayer of Mordecai.

Recalling all that the Lord had done, Mordecai prayed to the Lord and said: "Lord, Lord, King and Ruler of all, everything is in your power, and there is no one to oppose you when it is your will to save Israel. You made heaven and earth and every wonderful thing under heaven. You are Lord of all, and there is no one who can resist you, the Lord. You know all things. You know, Lord, that it was not out of insolence or arrogance or desire for glory that I acted thus in not bowing down to the arrogant Haman. I would have gladly kissed the soles of his feet for the salvation of Israel. But I acted as I did so as not to place the honor of a mortal above that of God. I will not bow down to anyone but you, my Lord. It is not out of arrogance that I am acting thus. And now, Lord God, King, God of Abraham, spare your people, for our enemies regard us with deadly envy and are bent upon destroying the inheritance that was yours from the beginning. Do not spurn your portion, which you redeemed for yourself out of the land of Egypt. Hear my prayer; have pity on your inheritance and turn our mourning into feasting, that we may live to sing praise to your name, Lord. Do not silence the mouths of those who praise you."

All Israel, too, cried out with all their strength, for death was staring them in the face.

Prayer of Esther.

Queen Esther, seized with mortal anguish, fled to the Lord for refuge. Taking off her splendid garments, she put on garments of distress and mourning. In place of her precious ointments she covered her head with dung and ashes. She afflicted her body severely and in place of her festive adornments, her tangled hair covered her.

Then she prayed to the Lord, the God of Israel, saying: "My Lord, you alone are our King. Help me, who am alone and have no help but you, for I am taking my life in my hand. From birth, I have heard among my people that you, Lord, chose Israel from among all nations, and our ancestors from among all their forebears, as a lasting inheritance, and that you fulfilled all your promises to them. But now we have sinned in your sight, and you have delivered us into the hands of our enemies, because we worshiped their gods. You are just, O Lord. But now they are not satisfied with our bitter servitude, but have sworn an oath to their idols, to do away with the decree you have pronounced, to destroy your inheritance, to close the mouths of those who praise you, to extinguish the glory of your house and your altar, to open the mouths of the nations to acclaim their worthless gods, and to extol a mortal king forever.

"Lord, do not relinquish your scepter to those who are nothing. Do not let our foes gloat over our ruin, but turn their own counsel against them and make an example of the one who began this against us. Be mindful of us, Lord. Make yourself known in the time of our distress and give me courage, King of gods and Ruler of every power. Put in my mouth persuasive words in the presence of the lion, and turn his heart to hatred for



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our enemy, so that he and his co-conspirators may perish. Save us by your power, and help me, who am alone and have no one but you, Lord.

“You know all things. You know that I hate the pomp of the lawless, and abhor the bed of the uncircumcised or of any foreigner. You know that I am under constraint, that I abhor the sign of grandeur that rests on my head when I appear in public. I abhor it like a polluted rag, and do not wear it in private. I, your servant, have never eaten at the table of Haman, nor have I graced the banquet of the king or drunk the wine of libations. From the day I was brought here till now, your servant has had no joy except in you, Lord, God of Abraham. O God, whose power is over all, hear the voice of those in despair. Save us from the power of the wicked, and deliver me from my fear.”

CHAPTER D

Esther Goes to Ahasuerus.

On the third day, ending her prayers, she took off her prayer garments and arrayed herself in her splendid attire. In making her appearance, after invoking the all-seeing God and savior, she took with her two maids; on the one she leaned gently for support, while the other followed her, bearing her train. She glowed with perfect beauty and her face was as joyous as it was lovely, though her heart was pounding with fear. She passed through all the portals till she stood before the king, who was seated on his royal throne, clothed in full robes of state, and covered with gold and precious stones, so that he inspired great awe. As he looked up in extreme anger, his features fiery and majestic, the queen staggered, turned pale and fainted, collapsing against the maid in front of her. But God changed the king’s anger to gentleness. In great anxiety he sprang from his throne, held her in his arms until she recovered, and comforted her with reassuring words. “What is it, Esther?” he said to her. “I am your brother. Take courage! You shall not die; this order of ours applies only to our subjects. Come near!” Raising the golden scepter, he touched her neck with it, embraced her, and said, “Speak to me.”

She replied: “I saw you, my lord, as an angel of God, and my heart was shaken by fear of your majesty. For you are awesome, my lord, though your countenance is full of mercy.” As she said this, she fainted. The king was shaken and all his attendants tried to revive her.



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Esther, chapter 5

[Now on the third day, Esther put on her royal garments and stood in the inner courtyard, looking toward the royal palace, while the king was seated on his royal throne in the audience chamber, facing the palace doorway. When he saw Queen Esther standing in the courtyard, she won his favor and he extended toward her the golden scepter he held. She came up to him, and touched the top of the scepter.]

Then the king said to her, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even if it is half of my kingdom, it shall be granted you." Esther replied, "If it please your majesty, come today with Haman to a banquet I have prepared." The king ordered, "Have Haman make haste to fulfill the wish of Esther."

First Banquet of Esther.

So the king went with Haman to the banquet Esther had prepared. During the drinking of the wine, the king said to Esther, "Whatever you ask for shall be granted, and whatever request you make shall be honored, even if it is for half my kingdom." Esther replied: "This is my petition and request: if I have found favor with the king and if it pleases your majesty to grant my petition and honor my request, let the king come with Haman tomorrow to a banquet I will prepare; and tomorrow I will do as the king asks."

IV. Haman's Downfall

Haman's Plot Against Mordecai.

That day Haman left happy and in good spirits. But when he saw that Mordecai at the royal gate did not rise, and showed no fear of him, he was filled with anger toward him. Haman restrained himself, however, and went home, where he summoned his friends and his wife Zeresh. He recounted the greatness of his riches, the large number of his sons, and how the king had promoted him and placed him above the officials and royal servants. "Moreover," Haman added, "Queen Esther invited no one but me to come with the king to the banquet she prepared; again tomorrow I am to be her guest with the king. Yet none of this satisfies me as



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long as I continue to see the Jew Mordecai sitting at the royal gate.” His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, “Have a stake set up, fifty cubits in height, and in the morning ask the king to have Mordecai impaled on it. Then go to the banquet with the king in good spirits.” This suggestion pleased Haman, and he had the stake erected.



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**V. Esther and Mordecai Plead for Help
Esther, chapter 6**

Mordecai's Reward from the King.

That night the king, unable to sleep, asked that the chronicle of notable events be brought in. While this was being read to him, the passage occurred in which Mordecai reported Bigthan and Teresh, two of the royal eunuchs who guarded the entrance, for seeking to assassinate King Ahasuerus. The king asked, "What was done to honor and exalt Mordecai for this?" The king's attendants replied, "Nothing was done for him."

"Who is in the court?" the king asked. Now Haman had entered the outer court of the king's palace to suggest to the king that Mordecai should be impaled on the stake he had raised for him. The king's attendants answered him, "Haman is waiting in the court." The king said, "Let him come in." When Haman entered, the king said to him, "What should be done for the man whom the king wishes to reward?" Now Haman thought to himself, "Whom would the king wish to honor more than me?" So he replied to the king: "For the man whom the king wishes to honor there should be brought the royal robe the king wore and the horse the king rode with the royal crest placed on its head.

The robe and the horse should be given to one of the noblest of the king's officials, who must clothe the man the king wishes to reward, have him ride on the horse in the public square of the city, and cry out before him, "This is what is done for the man whom the king wishes to honor!" Then the king said to Haman: "Hurry! Take the robe and horse as you have proposed, and do this for the Jew Mordecai, who is sitting at the royal gate. Do not omit anything you proposed." So Haman took the robe and horse, clothed Mordecai, had him ride in the public square of the city, and cried out before him, "This is what is done for the man whom the king wishes to honor!"



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Mordecai then returned to the royal gate, while Haman hurried home grieving, with his head covered. When he told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him, his advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, “If Mordecai, before whom you are beginning to fall, is of Jewish ancestry, you will not prevail against him, but will surely be defeated by him.”

Esther’s Second Banquet.

While they were speaking with him, the king’s eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman off to the banquet Esther had prepared.



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Esther, chapter 7

So the king and Haman went to the banquet with Queen Esther. Again, on this second day, as they were drinking wine, the king said to Esther, "Whatever you ask, Queen Esther, shall be granted you. Whatever request you make, even for half the kingdom, shall be honored." Queen Esther replied: "If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, I ask that my life be spared, and I beg that you spare the lives of my people. For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, killed, and annihilated. If we were only to be sold into slavery I would remain silent, for then our distress would not have been worth troubling the king." King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who and where is the man who has dared to do this?" Esther replied, "The enemy oppressing us is this wicked Haman." At this, Haman was seized with dread of the king and queen.

The king left the banquet in anger and went into the garden of the palace, but Haman stayed to beg Queen Esther for his life, since he saw that the king had decided on his doom. When the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman had thrown himself on the couch on which Esther was reclining; and the king exclaimed, "Will he also violate the queen while she is with me in my own house!" Scarcely had the king spoken when the face of Haman was covered over.

Punishment of Haman.

Harbona, one of the eunuchs who attended the king, said, "At the house of Haman stands a stake fifty cubits high. Haman made it for Mordecai, who gave the report that benefited the king." The king answered, "Impale him on it." So they impaled Haman on the stake he had set up for Mordecai, and the anger of the king abated.



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Esther, chapter 8

That day King Ahasuerus gave the house of Haman, enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther; and Mordecai was admitted to the king's presence, for Esther had revealed his relationship to her. The king removed his signet ring that he had taken away from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai; and Esther put Mordecai in charge of the house of Haman.

VI. The Jewish Victory and the Feast of Purim

The Second Royal Decree.

Esther again spoke to the king. She fell at his feet and tearfully implored him to revoke the harm done by Haman the Agagite and the plan he had devised against the Jews.

The king stretched forth the golden scepter to Esther. So she rose and, standing before him, said: "If it seems good to the king and if I have found favor with him, if the thing seems right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let a document be issued to revoke the letters that the schemer Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite, wrote for the destruction of the Jews in all the royal provinces. For how can I witness the evil that is to befall my people, and how can I behold the destruction of my kindred?"

King Ahasuerus then said to Queen Esther and to the Jew Mordecai: "Now that I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have impaled him on the stake because he was going to attack the Jews, you in turn may write in the king's name what you see fit concerning the Jews and seal the letter with the royal signet ring." For a decree written in the name of the king and sealed with the royal signet ring cannot be revoked.

At that time, on the twenty-third day of the third month, Sivan, the royal scribes were summoned. Exactly as Mordecai dictated, they wrote to the Jews and to the satraps, governors, and officials of the hundred and twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia: to each province in its own script and to each people in its



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own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language. These letters, which he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the royal signet ring, he sent by mounted couriers riding thoroughbred royal steeds.

In these letters the king authorized the Jews in each and every city to gather and defend their lives, to destroy, kill, and annihilate every armed group of any nation or province that might attack them, along with their wives and children, and to seize their goods as spoil on a single day throughout the provinces of King Ahasuerus, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar.

CHAPTER E

The following is a copy of the letter: “The great King Ahasuerus to the governors of the provinces in the hundred and twenty-seven satrapies from India to Ethiopia, and to those who are loyal to our government: Greetings!

“Many have become more ambitious the more they were showered with honors through the bountiful generosity of their patrons. Not only do they seek to do harm to our subjects but, incapable of dealing with such greatness, they even begin plotting against their own benefactors.

Not only do they drive out gratitude from among humankind but, with the arrogant boastfulness of those to whom goodness has no meaning, they suppose they will escape the stern judgment of the all-seeing God.

“Often, too, the fair speech of friends entrusted with the administration of affairs has induced many placed in authority to become accomplices in the shedding of innocent blood, and has involved them in irreparable calamities by deceiving with malicious slander the sincere good will of rulers. This can be verified in the ancient stories that have been handed down to us, but more fully when you consider the wicked deeds perpetrated in your midst by the pestilential influence of those undeserving of authority. We must provide for the future, so as to render the kingdom undisturbed and peaceful for all people, taking advantage of changing conditions and always deciding matters coming to our attention with equitable treatment.

“For instance, Haman, son of Hammedatha, a Macedonian, certainly not of Persian blood, and very different from us in generosity, was hospitably received by us. He benefited so much from the good will we have toward all peoples that he was proclaimed ‘our father,’ before whom everyone was to bow down; and he attained a position second only to the royal throne. But, unable to control his arrogance, he strove to deprive us of kingdom and of life, and by weaving intricate webs of deceit he demanded the destruction of Mordecai, our savior and constant benefactor, and of Esther, our blameless royal consort, together with their whole nation. For by such measures he hoped to catch us defenseless and to transfer the rule of the Persians to the Macedonians. But we find that the Jews, who were doomed to extinction by this archcriminal, are not evildoers, but rather are governed by very just laws and are the children of the Most High, the living God of majesty, who has maintained the kingdom in a flourishing condition for us and for our forebears.

“You will do well, then, to ignore the letter sent by Haman, son of Hammedatha, for he who composed it has been impaled, together with his entire household, before the gates of Susa. Thus swiftly has God, who governs all, brought just punishment upon him. “You shall exhibit a copy of this letter publicly in every place to certify that the Jews may follow their own laws and that you may help them on the day set for their ruin, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar, to defend themselves against those who attack them. For God, the ruler of all, has turned that day from one of destruction of the chosen people into one of joy for



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them. Therefore, you too must celebrate this memorable day among your designated feasts with all rejoicing, so that both now and in the future it may be a celebration of deliverance for us and for Persians of good will, but for those who plot against us a reminder of destruction.

“Every city and province without exception that does not observe this decree shall be ruthlessly destroyed with fire and sword, so that it will be left not merely untrodden by people, but even shunned by wild beasts and birds forever.”

A copy of the letter to be promulgated as law in each and every province was published among all the peoples, so that the Jews might be prepared on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. Couriers mounted on royal steeds sped forth in haste at the king’s order, and the decree was promulgated in the royal precinct of Susa.

Mordecai left the king’s presence clothed in a royal robe of violet and of white cotton, with a large crown of gold and a mantle of fine crimson linen. The city of Susa shouted with joy, and for the Jews there was splendor and gladness, joy and triumph. In each and every province and in each and every city, wherever the king’s order arrived, there was merriment and joy, banqueting and feasting for the Jews. And many of the peoples of the land identified themselves as Jews, for fear of the Jews fell upon them.



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Esther, chapter 9

The Massacre Reversed.

When the day arrived on which the order decreed by the king was to be carried out, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar, on which the enemies of the Jews had expected to overpower them, the situation was reversed: the Jews overpowered those who hated them. The Jews mustered in their cities throughout the provinces of King Ahasuerus to attack those who sought to do them harm, and no one could withstand them, for fear of them fell upon all the peoples. Moreover, all the officials of the provinces, the satraps, governors, and royal procurators supported the Jews out of fear of Mordecai; for Mordecai was powerful in the royal palace, and the report was spreading through all the provinces that he was continually growing in power.

The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them; they did to those who hated them as they pleased. In the royal precinct of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred people. They also killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha, the ten sons of Haman, son of Hammedatha, the foe of the Jews. However, they did not engage in plundering.

On the same day, when the number of those killed in the royal precinct of Susa was reported to the king, he said to Queen Esther: "In the royal precinct of Susa the Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred people, as well as the ten sons of Haman. What must they have done in the other royal provinces! You shall again be granted whatever you ask, and whatever you request shall be honored." So Esther said, "If it pleases your majesty, let the Jews in Susa be permitted again tomorrow to act according to today's decree, and let the ten sons of Haman be impaled on stakes." The king then gave an order that this be done, and the decree was published in Susa. So the ten sons of Haman were impaled, and the Jews in Susa mustered again on the fourteenth of the month of Adar and killed three hundred people in Susa. However, they did not engage in plundering.



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The other Jews, who dwelt in the royal provinces, also mustered and defended themselves, and obtained rest from their enemies. They killed seventy-five thousand of those who hated them, but they did not engage in plunder. This happened on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. The Feast of Purim. On the fourteenth of the month they rested, and made it a day of feasting and rejoicing.

The Jews in Susa, however, mustered on the thirteenth and fourteenth of the month. But on the fifteenth they rested, and made it a day of joyful banqueting. That is why the rural Jews, who dwell in villages, celebrate the fourteenth of the month of Adar as a day of joyful banqueting, a holiday on which they send food to one another.

The Feast of Purim.

Mordecai recorded these events and sent letters to all the Jews, both near and far, in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. He ordered them to celebrate every year both the fourteenth and the fifteenth of the month of Adar as the days on which the Jews obtained rest from their enemies and as the month which was turned for them from sorrow into joy, from mourning into celebration. They were to observe these days with joyful banqueting, sending food to one another and gifts to the poor. The Jews adopted as a custom what they had begun doing and what Mordecai had written to them.

VII. Epilogue: The Rise of Mordecai

Summary of the Story.

Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the foe of all the Jews, had planned to destroy them and had cast the pur, or lot, for the time of their defeat and destruction. Yet, when the plot became known to the king, the king ordered in writing that the wicked plan Haman had devised against the Jews should instead be turned against Haman and that he and his sons should be impaled on stakes. And so these days have been named Purim after the word pur.

Thus, because of all that was contained in this letter, and because of what they had witnessed and experienced in this event, the Jews established and adopted as a custom for themselves, their descendants, and all who should join them, the perpetual obligation of celebrating these two days every year in the manner prescribed by this letter, and at the time appointed. These days were to be commemorated and kept in every generation, by every clan, in every province, and in every city. These days of Purim were never to be neglected among the Jews, nor forgotten by their descendants.

Esther and Mordecai Act in Concert.

Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote to confirm with full authority this second letter about Purim, and Mordecai sent documents concerning peace and security to all the Jews in the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of Ahasuerus' kingdom. Thus were established, for their appointed time, these days of Purim which Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had designated for the Jews, just as they had previously enjoined upon themselves and upon their descendants the duty of fasting and supplication. The command of Esther confirmed these prescriptions for Purim and was recorded in the book.



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Esther, chapter 10

The Rise of Mordecai Completed.

King Ahasuerus levied a tax on the land and on the islands of the sea. All the acts of his power and valor, as well as a detailed account of the greatness of Mordecai, whom the king promoted, are recorded in the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia. The Jew Mordecai was next in rank to King Ahasuerus, in high standing among the Jews, popular with many of his kindred, seeking the good of his people and speaking out on behalf of the welfare of all its descendants.

CHAPTER F

Mordecai's Dream Fulfilled.

Then Mordecai said: "This is the work of God. I recall the dream I had about these very things, and not a single detail has been left unfulfilled—the tiny spring that grew into a river, and there was light, and sun, and many waters. The river is Esther, whom the king married and made queen. The two dragons are myself and Haman. The nations are those who assembled to destroy the name of the Jews, but my people is Israel, who cried to God and was saved. "The Lord saved his people and delivered us from all these evils. God worked signs and great wonders, such as have not occurred among the nations. For this purpose, he arranged two lots: one for the people of God, the second for all the other nations. These two lots were fulfilled in the hour, the time, and the day of judgment before God and among all the nations. God remembered his people and rendered justice to his inheritance. "Gathering together with joy and happiness before God, they shall celebrate these days on the fourteenth and fifteenth of the month Adar throughout all future generations of his people Israel."

Colophon.



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In the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and Cleopatra, Dositheus, who said he was a priest and Levite, and his son Ptolemy brought the present letter of Purim, saying that it was genuine and that Lysimachus, son of Ptolemy, of the community of Jerusalem, had translated it.