

A scroll of the Book of Esther, partially unrolled, with Hebrew text visible. The scroll is set against a dark background, and a wooden handle is visible on the left side. The text on the scroll is in Hebrew, and the title "The Book of Esther" is overlaid in large yellow letters.

The Book of Esther



The Book of Esther

Chapter 1

The scene is set...

1 Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus, (this is Ahasuerus which reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces:)

2 That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace,

Esther 1:1-2

3 In the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him:

4 When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred and fourscore days.

Esther 1:3-4

5 And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace;

6 Where were white, green, and blue, hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble: the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black, marble.

7 And they gave them drink in vessels of gold, (the vessels being diverse one from another,) and royal wine in abundance, according to the state of the king.

8 And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure.

Esther 1:7-8

The Persian Empire



- Ahasuerus sought to impress the heads of state in his realm to gain their support against Greece

History of the Times

- The background for the book of Esther sees one of the most significant battles in history
 - **The Battle of Salamis 480 B.C.**
- The Greek city-states of Athens and Eretria had supported the unsuccessful Ionian revolt against the Persian Empire of Darius I in 499-494 BC
- This revolt threatened the integrity of his empire, and Darius vowed to punish those involved
 - **Darius also saw this as an opportunity to expand his empire into the divided Greece**
- After a successful mission in 492 B.C. the following year Darius sent emissaries to all the Greek city-states, asking for a gift of 'earth and water'

History of the Times

- Having experienced a demonstration of his power the previous year, the majority of Greek cities capitulated.
- In Athens, however, his ambassadors were put on trial, then executed; in Sparta, they were thrown down a well.
- Sparta & Athens were now at war with Persia
- In 490 B.C. Darius attacked Naxos, Eretria, et al
- Finally, he moved against Athens, landing at the bay of Marathon,
- Although heavily outnumbered the Athenians won a remarkable victory, which resulted in the withdrawal of the Persian army to Asia

History of the Times

- Darius, enraged, began raising a huge new army with which he meant to completely subjugate Greece
- However, in 486 BC, his Egypt also revolted bringing to a temporary halt his plans for Greece
- Darius then died whilst preparing to march on Egypt, and the throne of Persia passed to his son
- Enter Xerxes I.
- Xerxes crushed the Egyptian revolt, and very quickly restarted the preparations for the invasion of Greece. Since this was to be a full scale invasion, it required long-term planning, stock-piling and conscription.

9 Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to king Ahasuerus.

10 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king,

11 To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on.

12 But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him.

13 Then the king said to the wise men, which knew the times, (for so was the king's manner toward all that knew law and judgment.

Esther 1:12-13

14 And the next unto him was Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, which saw the king's face, and which sat the first in the kingdom;)

15 What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law, because she hath not performed the commandment of the king Ahasuerus by the chamberlains?

Esther 1:14-15

16 And Memucan answered before the king and the princes, Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people that are in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus.

17 For this deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported, The king Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not.

18 Likewise shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king's princes, which have heard of the deed of the queen. Thus shall there arise too much contempt and wrath.

Esther 1:18

Royal Humiliation

- Vashti is banished:

19 If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, That Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she

Esther 1:19

- Then begins the search for a new queen

20 And when the king's decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all his empire, (for it is great,) all the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small.

21 And the saying pleased the king and the princes; and the king did according to the word of Memucan:

Esther 1:20-21

22 For he sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man should bear rule in his own house, and that it should be published according to the language of every people.

Esther 1:22

History of the Times

- By early 480 BC, the preparations were complete, and Xerxes' army marched towards Europe
- The Athenian-led Greeks had also been preparing for war
 - under the guidance of the Athenian politician Themistocles
- Themistocles spread the rumour that the Greeks were disbanding and lured the Persians into narrow water between Salamis & the mainland
- History records 378 Greek ships vs 1207 Persian
 - Conservative scholars suggest 600-800 Persian
- Greece was outnumbered at least 2:1
- Yet wins a decisive victory

History of the Times



The Greek World during the Persian Wars (500-479 BC)

- ★ Ionian revolt
- ✕ Main battle
- Greek opponents of Persia
- Greek neutral states
- Persian empire
- Persian vassal states
- Ionian rebels (498 BC)
- Mardonius (492 BC)
- Artaphernes/Datis (490 BC)
- Xerxes/Mardonius (480 BC)

0 30 100 km

History of the Times



Egyptian contingent sails to block west channel to Salamis.

THE BATTLE OF SALAMIS,

480 B.C.

SCALE OF MILES



SARONIC GULF

History of the Times

- A significant number of historians have stated that Salamis is one of the most significant battles in human history as it paved the way for the rise of Greece
 - Which in turn led to a universal language
 - Suitable for the spread of the gospel!
- Xerxes is ultimately forced to return to Persia Humiliated and despondent



The Book of Esther

Chapter 2
The Royal Bride

A Despondent King

- Not only had the king lost the battle...
- He had also lost his bride
- His servants suggest a plan
- They would search his realm for the most beautiful women
- Whomever would please him most would be his queen

- 1 After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her.
- 2 Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king:

Esther 2:1-2

3 And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the palace, to the house of the women unto the custody of Hege the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women; and let their things for purification be given them:

4 And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so.

Esther 2:3-4

5 Now in Shushan the *palace*...

Esther 2:5

Shushan (Susa)



Part of the remains of Susa. The Susa inscription from King Darius states *"This palace which I built at Susa"* - Louvre Museum

Shushan (Susa)



Shushan (Susa)

Glazed brick guardsman

This was part of a frieze depicting rows of guards. The vivid colours show how the carved stone sculptures would have looked when they were painted. The guards are thought to be members of the 1000 special royal guards. They were said to have formed part of the royal army known as the 'Immortals' because their strength was always apparently maintained at this level.

521–500 BC

East gate of palace, Susa, Iran

132525 Permanent loan from the Musée du Louvre, Sb 4001



Shushan (Susa)



5 Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite;

6 Who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away.

7 And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter.

Mordecai

- David declined to take vengeance on Shimei 2 Sam 16:5-13; 19:16-23

Mordecai

- David declined to take vengeance on Shimei 2 Sam 16:5-13; 19:16-23
- Mordecai was a descendant of Shimei, of the House of Kish, the father of King Saul, a product of David's grace

Mordecai

- David declined to take vengeance on Shimei 2 Sam 16:5-13; 19:16-23
- Mordecai was a descendant of Shimei, of the House of Kish, the father of King Saul, a product of David's grace
- He will ultimately confront Haman, the result of Saul's failure to follow God's instructions

Mordecai

- David declined to take vengeance on Shimei 2 Sam 16:5-13; 19:16-23
- Mordecai was a descendant of Shimei, of the House of Kish, the father of King Saul, a product of David's grace
- He will ultimately confront Haman, the result of Saul's failure to follow God's instructions
- He refuses to do obeisance to Haman...

8 So it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was brought also unto the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women.

9 And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, which were meet to be given her, out of the king's house: and he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the house of the women.

10 Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew it.

11 And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her.

12 Now when every maid's turn was come to go in to king Ahasuerus, after that she had been twelve months, according to the manner of the women, (for so were the days of their purifications accomplished, to wit, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odours, and with other things for the purifying of the women;)

13 Then thus came every maiden unto the king; whatsoever she desired was given her to go with her out of the house of the women unto the king's house.

14 In the evening she went, and on the morrow she returned into the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's chamberlain, which kept the concubines: she came in unto the king no more, except the king delighted in her, and that she were called by name.

Esther 2:13-14

15 Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her.

16 So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus into his house royal in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

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

18 Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast; and he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts, according to the state of the king.

Esther 2:17-18

19 And when the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai sat in the king's gate.

20 Esther had not yet shewed her kindred nor her people; as Mordecai had charged her: for Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him.

Esther 2:5-7

21 In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those which kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus.

22 And the thing was known to Mordecai, who told it unto Esther the queen; and Esther certified the king thereof in Mordecai's name.

23 And when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out; therefore they were both hanged on a tree: and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.

The New Queen

- Esther is chosen as queen
- But Mordecai counsels *not* to reveal her nationality



The Book of Esther

Chapter 3
Attempted Genocide

1 After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him.

2 And all the king's servants, that were in the king's gate, bowed, and revered Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence.

Esther 3:1-2

3 Then the king's servants, which were in the king's gate, said unto Mordecai, Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?

4 Now it came to pass, when they spake daily unto him, and he hearkened not unto them, that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand: for he had told them that he was a Jew.

5 And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath.

The Plot of Haman

- *“Haman was full of wrath”* ^{v5}
- He then sought to kill Mordecai...
- ...And all the Jews in the realm!
- Haman seeks an audience with the king
- ...speaks ill of the Jews
- ...and advises that the king agree to have all the Jews killed
- Haman even offers to bankroll the project
- The king is coerced and gives Haman his ring as a sign of his authority
- Letters are then sent setting the day