

OpenTheo

Esther 1 - 6



Esther - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the book of Esther and its historical significance in the Jewish celebration of the Feast of Purim. He highlights the story of how God works invisibly and behind the scenes through the characters of Esther and Mordecai. Gregg notes that while the book does not contain much theology, it provides a basis for the annual Purim celebration among Jews. The talk also delves into the story of Queen Vashti's disfavor and how she was spared from execution by King Xerxes.

Transcript

Okay, today we're taking the book of Esther, which is a book that does not require a lot of theological exposition. In fact, it's the most secular book in the Bible. Secular in that it doesn't mention God or prayer or any religious information at all.

We think of it as a religious book because, of course, it's about Israel and also because we do see the providence of God in the book, which is probably, there's probably no book that has more visible tokens of God's overriding providence than the book of Esther has. In fact, so many things in it seem extremely coincidental that it would almost be impossible to imagine the story being true unless God is bringing it to pass. Nonetheless, the book never mentions God.

The reasons for this have been guessed at. It was actually, at one time, thought by the Jews that it should not be in the Bible because it is such a secular book. However, it does contain the history behind the Jewish celebration of the Feast of Purim, which the Jews celebrate to this day.

In fact, they read the entire book of Esther at their feast, and it is a helpful book in that respect. Luther didn't like the book. He wished it had never existed, he said, but Luther had many unguarded moments of speaking hastily about things.

He thought James was a terrible epistle, too. He thought it was an epistle of straw. There are certain things that Luther did not like in our Bible, but some have said that the book of Esther may have omitted the name of God because it was written also for Persian readers, not just for Jewish readers.

And yet, there's probably a more important reason why God is not mentioned in the book, and that is the book may very well intend to convey the notion that God works invisibly behind all things. There are no actual miracles in the book. There are no supernatural events, as we would think of supernatural events, but there are providential events.

And nobody can read this book, nobody that is who knows the Jews' religion, nobody who knows of Yahweh, can read this book without seeing God in it, but they have to see God behind the scenes. And it would seem that maybe the omission of any reference to God is deliberate in order to convey the idea that many times God is not visible and not spoken of, but he is actively involved in events. And that would be obvious in this story probably more than almost any other in the Bible.

Even without supernatural occurrences, there are such timely coincidences that it just, you see the hand of God in it all. Now, I say timely coincidences, someone might say everything is much too coincidental to have taken place in reality. But actually, many times, many very important things in each of our lives can be seen to have happened because of chance meetings with persons that we did not intend to meet, unexpected coming together of events that were not planned, and yet something very important came about.

And we can look back in retrospect and say that was very timely, that was very important. If I'd simply made this other decision to go this direction instead of that direction at that moment, I would have never had this particular connection take place, and yet how it has changed everything. And we can see, in Esther, also in real life, that many times some of the most important turns in history occur through the strangest coincidences.

And yet, are they coincidences? I believe the book of Esther would make it obvious that these coincidences are so numerous in this book and so much conspired together to bring about a result that God would want that we are to assume that God is throughout the whole story. And by leaving out any mention of him, it is a way of the author saying, you see, even when God is not calling attention to himself, he is actively working in the lives of his people. We don't know who wrote the book of Esther, although Mordecai, one of the main characters, did write some things down near the end of the book.

It says he wrote some things down, and he may well have written the whole book. There are five main characters of the book. There is the king, Ahasuerus, who is actually known to be Xerxes, the son of Darius, the king Xerxes is his Greek name.

But of course, he's a Persian king, and his Persian name is Ahasuerus. For a long time, that was not known to be the case. The name Ahasuerus was only known from the Bible itself, and all secular records mention him as Xerxes.

And the idea that this was the same man was not something that scholars were willing to simply accept until they came across archaeological finds where Ahasuerus was identified with Xerxes. And so now it is known that this is that king. This is, of course, the king that lived before Arctic Xerxes.

Now, when we were studying Nehemiah and even Ezra, we found that Ezra and Nehemiah served under Arctic Xerxes, the son of this man, the son of Xerxes. And he's the king throughout this narrative. Another character in the book that disappears early on is his first wife Vashti.

Now, whether she was his first wife, I don't know, but she's the first wife we are introduced to in the book. Vashti is his wife at the time the book opens. She falls into disfavor, and she is put away from him.

And then that sets the stage for the introduction of two very important other characters, Mordecai and Esther. Esther is a woman who is selected from among the ladies of Persia to be the new queen. Mordecai is either her cousin or her uncle, an older relative of hers who raises her because she's an orphan.

So we've got Ahasuerus and Vashti. We've got Mordecai and Esther. Then there's this other person, Haman, who is sort of like an Adolf Hitler type.

He hates the Jews. He wants to exterminate every last Jew. In Israel's history, they remember him as sort of an Adolf Hitler type because Adolf Hitler sought to exterminate the Jews, and so did Haman.

And the story of how Haman's plot was thwarted by divine overriding of his plans, overruling of his plans, I guess we could say, is what the book of Esther is about and provides the basis for the annual celebration of on the part of the Jews today. Not much more needs to be said except that this story occurs in the interval between Ezra chapter 6 and Ezra chapter 7. At least that's how it's understood by most scholars. And you know Ezra chapters 1 through 6 told about the return of the exiles from Persia under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua and their rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem.

That was Ezra chapters 1 through 6. Then Ezra chapters 7 through 10 told about Ezra's return from Persia under Artaxerxes decree. But in between those two is a period of almost 60 years and during that time this story occurred. Now Ahasuerus ruled for about 20 years from 486 to 465 BC, we could say 21 years.

And the events of this story span about 10 or more of those years. And so we'll get to the story directly. It says, now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus, this was the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces.

In those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the citadel, that in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials

and servants, the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles and the princes of the provinces being before him. When he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty for many days, 180 days in all. Now Shushan we have seen is also known as Susa.

It was one of the four capitals of the Persian Empire. And it was the summer capital, excuse me, the winter capital, it was in a warmer region, the summer capital was Ekbetana. But Susa was the winter capital of the Persian Empire.

And the king had a great feast. It's not told what it was he was celebrating, but it extended over a hundred and eighty days or six months. Now of course it should not be thought this was an just continuous feasting for six months.

These important people and officials who came there would have to obviously do the king's business and so would the king, have to do the king's business, couldn't just take six months off the party and have no administration of the kingdom going on. But apparently there was some kind of an ongoing celebration that was punctuated by festivals and feasting for over a period of six months. And it says in verse 5, when these days were completed the king made a feast lasting seven days for all the people who were present in Shushan, the citadel, from great to small in the court of the garden of the king's palace.

There were white and blue linen curtains fastened in cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars and the couches were of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of alabaster turquoise and white and black marble. And they served drinks in the golden vessels, each vessel being different from the other, with royal wine in abundance according to the generosity of the king. Now this is obviously some detail about how opulent the feast was and it seems to have the touches of an eyewitness.

Mordecai, who is a character in the drama that has not appeared yet, was a government official in the Treasury and so he may have been one of the guests at this feast and could remember, if he is the writer of the book, the details of the colors of the curtains and all that. The fact that the gold cups were not cast from some mold but they're all individually crafted cups. A very expensive way to furnish a table.

And it says, in accordance with the law the drinking was not compulsory. Wouldn't that be nice if that was true in modern parties? You didn't have to drink. It seems like if you don't drink at a modern party people want to pressure you and think there's something wrong.

Or if you don't want to smoke marijuana. The Persians at least did not make it compulsory to drink. For so the king had ordered all the officers of his household that they should do according to each man's pleasure.

Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women in the royal palace which belonged to King Hasuerus. On the seventh day when the heart of the king was merry with wine he commanded Mahuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Karkas, seven eunuchs who served in the presence of a king of Hasuerus to bring Queen Vashti before the king wearing her royal crown in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials for she was beautiful to behold. Just in passing I'd mentioned these seven officials although we don't have record of their names and secular records we do have confirmation from Herodotus the ancient Greek historian that the Persian king did have seven counselors and actually there's mention of them also in Ezra chapter 7 not these same seven but of the fact that the king of Persia had seven counselors in Ezra 7 14 it says in a letter written by Artaxerxes to Ezra it says and whereas you are being sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem etc etc so Artaxerxes mentions himself the king and his seven counselors here we have them mentioned again and as I say there is secular confirmation that the Persian king had seven counselors on his cabinet now he told these seven counselors to go and bring Queen Vashti because he was interested in showing his friends what a beautiful Queen he had but Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command brought by his eunuchs therefore the king was furious and his anger burned within him then the king said to the wise men who understood the times for this was the king's manner toward all who knew law and justice those closest to him being Karshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Merez, Marsena and Mimukin the seven princes of Persian media who had access to the king's presence and who ranked highest in the kingdom what shall we do to Queen Vashti according to the law because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus brought to her by the eunuchs and Mimukin answered before the king and the princes Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king but also all the princes and all the people who are in the provinces of King Ahasuerus for the Queen's behavior will become known to all women so that they will despise their husbands in their eyes and they when they report King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him but she did not come this very day the noble ladies of Persia and media will say to all the king's officials that they have heard of the behavior of the Queen thus there will be excessive contempt and wrath now here we they see a social problem being caused by the example set by the Queen if the Queen can defy the king then what woman cannot defy her husband will be the reasoning and I mean if the king himself his orders to his wife can be just ignored by her then any wife might say well then apparently wives are not required to obey their husbands because my husband is not even the king why should I obey him and that's what these counselors are concerned about now of course in this whole story our sentiments are probably tend to be with Vashti because the king was a drunk with his drunk friends wanting to just bring her out and parade her before his friends many women today would consider that to be undignified demeaning you know just using them as a eye candy or you know object of sexual interest or whatever and of course because of our modern times especially feminism has caused women to resent this kind of treatment by men I don't know that women always resented this treatment by men

and I don't know if Vashti even ordinarily would it's it's not as if he was asking her to come out and do a striptease he just asked her to come out and appear he had a beautiful wife and he wanted his friends to see her we don't know that he had anything lewd or inappropriate in mind many men or women might want their friends to meet their spouse if they're proud of them if they think that they have married somebody impressive and they want to their friends to meet them it's not really anything specifically inappropriate that the king is asking and why Vashti did not agree we don't know it may be because she knew he was drunk and his friends were drunk and it would be a scene that she wouldn't appreciate it maybe she was a little drunk she was having a feast with her ladies too maybe they've been drinking a bit too it's hard to know exactly what motivated Vashti but those who heard of it would if she got away with this it would undermine the patriarchal leadership of the families and the homes and the society in general at least that was the fear and so it says in verse 19 if it pleased the king let a royal decree go out from him and let it be recorded in the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it will not be altered now the laws of the Medes and the Persians could not be altered once the king made a law it couldn't be altered at all we find this to be consistently true not only in the Bible but in secular records but in the Bible we find it in the fact that Darius made a decree that no one should pray to anyone but him for 30 days and when Daniel violated that Darius wanted to spare Daniel the lion's den but he couldn't because he couldn't alter the laws that he himself had made there is a certain assumption I guess that this gave a high level of dignity to the Persian law that it couldn't be altered itself so perhaps that was in order that the laws would not be made hastily because once you've made it you've you're stuck with it but in any case that was known to be true and so let there be a law of the Persians and Medes that cannot be altered that Vashti shall not shall come no more before King Ahasuerus and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she when the king's decree which he will make is proclaimed throughout the empire for it is great all wives will honor their husbands both great and small and the reply pleases the king and the princes and the king did according to the word of Mimouken then he sent letters to all the king's provinces to each province in its own script and to every people in their own language that each man should be master of his own house and speak in the language of his own people now what we have here is they were facing a possible social upheaval maybe the danger was not as great as they feared but it was a realistic concern that if the Queen set a public example of define a request from her husband and gave no reason for defiant just decide I don't want to then this would of course undermine the whole idea that husbands should be honored by their wives which is of course even a biblical concept that a wife should submit to her husband but this was a cultural thing among the Persians and all societies it's only our society that has come up with the idea that this is not a good thing it's also our society has decided people the same sex should be able to marry there's a lot of things our society has come up with they've overthrown the social understanding of relationships that has been universal throughout history in all cultures including biblical but we somehow feel that our generation is the wisest of all

generations and have we see things much more clear than all people who live before us and therefore we have the great wisdom to know how to readjust social norms and to overthrow things that all peoples have thought were wise including God and you know what it turns out that the way our society doesn't look like we're that much wiser than the other people just more arrogant but in that time they understood even the pagans understood that it was a disastrous thing if wives began to despise their husband's authority the authority structure of the home would be dissolved and there'd be no order in the home or in society so they made an actual law that wives should respect their husbands and Vashti would be made an example of now she wasn't killed at least and it is known that Xerxes has aware us was known to kill people on a whim you know he's made out to be a reasonably nice guy once Esther is in his life in this book he's pretty favorable toward her and eventually toward Mordecai very agreeable with what they suggest and all that he seems to be a very reasonable King near the end of the book but in his lifetime he did impulsive things and he he killed people for just because they just pleased him and so Vashti is very fortunate not to have been killed because she did publicly humiliate the king and he killed many people for less offenses than that chapter 2 after these things when the wrath of the king of Hasra subsided he remembered Vashti what she had done and and what had been decreed against her then the king's servants who attended him said let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king and let the king appoint of officers in all the provinces of his kingdom that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan the citadel into the woman's quarters under the custody of Hagi the king's eunuch custodian of the women and beauty preparations be given them then let the young woman who pleased the king be Queen instead of Vashti this thing pleased the king and he did so now apparently after Vashti was gone for a while King began to miss her and she was a beautiful woman we don't know how long they'd been married or how close they had been at previous times but he began to be feel lonely and so his servants not wishing for him to take Vashti back actually I don't think he could because the law was made that she couldn't come back they said okay we better find somebody to replace her so a search went out throughout the Empire for the most beautiful young available women and they were all to be brought to the citadel and he could have his pick from among them now it says in verse 5 now in Shushan the citadel there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai the son of Jair the son of Shimei the son of Kish a Benjamite now what's one thing that's very interesting about this story is that the main conflict is between this man Mordecai and a man named Haman Mordecai like King Saul was descended from Kish a Benjamite Haman as it turns out is an agagite a descendant of Agag now you may remember from first saying in chapter 15 Agag was the king of the Amalekites and Saul had been told by Samuel to go and exterminate the Amalekites but he had a left King Agag alive now Samuel killed Agag but apparently some of his descendants survived somewhere and the man who's the the nasty guy in this story is Haman an agagite a descendant of Agag and the man that he wants to kill and exterminate his people is descended from Kish like Saul Saul was the son of Kish a Benjamite so Mordecai has a lineage going back to the same family

as Saul and Haman has lineage going back to the Amalekites whom Saul was supposed to exterminate but in this story that the roles are reversed because the agagite is in power and takes measures to exterminate the Jews so it's kind of a an ironic reversal of the situation by the way a man named Mordecai the name is known from the Persian records the accounting records he was apparently a financial officer in the court of Xerxes now this Mordecai might not be the same Mordecai who's mentioned in those secular Persian records but there's no reason to doubt that it is necessarily I mean this is an important man as we shall see he says Kish had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been captured with Jeconiah king of Judah whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away I should point out this Kish of course is a different Kish than the one who is the father of Saul but both Saul and Mordecai had a father named Kish and were Benjamites that's that's really the point I should have made as I should have made it it says and Mordecai had brought up Hadassah that is Esther Hadassah is her Hebrew name and she's never called by that again in this story and she is always called Esther Esther is thought perhaps to be a form of the name Ishtar which was a pagan goddess also the our word Easter comes from that word Ishtar apparently and some believe that Esther is a form of Ishtar others believe that Esther is simply the Persian word for star and so there's different opinions about the etymology of this name but it's her Persian name whereas Hadassah is her Hebrew name says Mordecai had brought up Hadassah that is Esther his uncle's daughter so they were really cousins but he's a much older cousin for she had neither father nor mother the young woman was lovely and beautiful when her father and mother died Mordecai took her as his own daughter so it was when the king's command and decree were heard and when many young women were gathered at Shushan the citadel under the custody of Haggai that Esther also was taken to the king's palace into the care of Haggai the custodian of the women now the young woman pleased him and she obtained his favor so he readily gave beauty preparations to her besides her allowance then seven choice maidservants were provided for her from the king's palace and he moved her and her maidservants to the best place in the house of the women now there are apparently a lot of virgins that were being prepared extensively for a time for the king to evaluate them now his evaluation of them was actually to spend the night with them each of them individually had their one night that they got to spend with the king and whichever one pleased him best would become the queen in the place of Vashti whichever ones were not chosen remained concubines of his so it's not like he slept with them and then threw him back on the street they remained in his house of concubines but only one of them would be chosen to be Queen now it says Esther had not revealed her people or kindred for Mordecai had charged her not to reveal it that becomes important to the story later on that her racial identity is not known even to the king and every day Mordecai paced in front of the court of the woman's quarters to learn of Esther's welfare and what was happening to her so it was like his own daughter he always wondered how she was faring and each young woman's turn came to go into King Ahasuerus after she had completed 12 months of preparation according to the regulations for the women for thus

were the days of their preparation apportioned six months with the oil of myrrh six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women so I guess they had to prepare their skin with oil of myrrh for six months I'm not sure you know I mean it's hard to know that really whether six months of that would be any different than six weeks of that but they that's just how they did it that must be how the king liked his women really soft and smelly and greasy this was the Middle East verse 13 thus prepared each young woman went to the king and she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace so when she had her night she got to take I guess their gifts or food items or snacks or something that she got to take with her for that night to do her best to make to become the king's favorite to show him a good time in the evening she went and in the morning she returned that's what this is generic each woman to the second house of the women to the custody of Shazgaz the king's eunuch who kept the concubines she would not go into the king again unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name now when the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abahail the uncle of Mordecai who had taken her as his daughter to go into the king she requested nothing but what Haggai the king's eunuch the custodian of the women advised and Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her she apparently was the most beautiful of the women but also she is a very she's a very submissive woman and that that's something that of course contrasted with Vashti Vashti was a little more headstrong Esther was very submissive one thing you'll find as you read through the book is how frequently Esther uses the phrase if it pleased the king if it pleased the king it's really a refreshing line to read in view of the the stubbornness of Vashti to to see a queen who's that submissive to her husband because he is the king now we don't have kings it might seem like nobody should be able to command anyone even his wife to come on do a command performance in front of his friends but when the person is the king it makes a big difference people just we don't have kings we don't understand Kings when you have a king when the king calls for you you come whether you're his wife or anybody else he's the king and Esther understood that this was the king and throughout the story we find her whenever she has a request she says if it pleased the king a preacher I once heard many years ago back in the 70s underscored the frequency with which she used that phrase and was giving that as an example of how our attitude toward God ought to be you know if it pleased the king we should always make our requests to God with that caveat if it is your will but Esther was we see her non assertiveness as an individual by the fact that it says that when she her night came to go into the king she didn't have any thoughts of her own about what to take in just whatever the man who was taking care of her suggested she just went with what his suggestions were and she pleased everyone who saw her so Esther was taken to the king and has to wear us into his royal palace in the tenth month which is the month of Tebeth in the seventh year of his reign the king loved Esther more than all the other women and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her the queen instead of Vashti then the king made a great feast the feast of Esther for all his officials and servants and he proclaimed

a holiday in the provinces and gave gifts according to the generosity of the king so he was really happy with her he even named a feast after her had a big celebration because he had found a new queen and he was really taken with her as everybody else was we can see this later on even after they've been married for years she had him wrapped around her little finger but she didn't exploit that she the reason that he had so much fondness for her was no doubt her not only that she was very beautiful but she also had such a cooperative spirit which is what he found lacking in his previous wife when virgins were gathered together a second time Mordecai sat within the king's gate now Esther had not yet revealed her kindred and her people just as Mordecai had charged her for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him so even though she was now the queen she still looked to Mordecai almost like her dad he had raised her and so you know he really had influence over her and she as we shall see had influence over the king it's interesting because she did influence the king not by being bossy but by being submissive you'll find that women can often control or get what they want really in a home if they have been cooperative with their husbands because their husbands are much more likely in most cases to want to give them what they want if they feel like they're their team you know when many times husbands and wives act almost like they're adversarial they have different agendas different things they want and the husband is in the more naturally powerful position in most cases and so the woman sometimes feels that in order to get what she needs and have her interest looked out she almost has to resist him because he's going to do what you know he's got the default leadership he seems like he'll do what he wants to do and if she wants something else she's got to kind of pull for her own way and then it becomes a tug-of-war and the husband reacts by seeing her as an adversary too and then there's this power struggle and then the woman doesn't feel like it's safe to submit because he looks like he's pulling for his agenda not for hers and he doesn't find her to be someone that he loves and and wants to comply with that much because it looks like she's pulling against him all the time but you know when a husband wife see themselves in partnership and the wife is there simply to be a cooperative part of the family then the husband is not threatened by her and he often will you know he won't a man will love his wife and this is not always the case of course you shouldn't think that this that all men are reasonable or all women are there are women who can be loved by their husbands and yet they they are not responsive to their husbands there are husbands that can be submitted to by their wives but the husband still dominate the husband still are not loving but in general when people love each other when they get married they usually think they love each other if they respond to each other in the way that the Bible says it's usually a very harmonious thing and we find that she was able to turn the king's hand in many cases we shall see because she was actually a submissive wife to him and he was extremely pleased with her it says in verse 21 in those days while Mordecai sat in the gate the king's gate two of the king's eunuchs Big Than and Teresh doorkeepers became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus and we don't know what this is this is stated with utmost brevity something he did really enraged them and by the

way King Xerxes did a lot of things that might well enrage people he was not always a just and good king but to overthrow the king is a very dangerous and wrong thing to attempt to do and these two men who were apparently high-ranking officials at the gate gatekeepers were trusted bodyguards they made plans to actually overthrow King Ahasuerus to probably kill him however Mordecai became aware of it the matter became known to Mordecai who told Queen Esther and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name that is she brought the news to the king about these men and named Mordecai as her informant and that went down in the court records when an inquiry was made into the matter it was confirmed and both were hanged on the gallows and it was written in the book of the Chronicles of the presence in the presence of the king now Mordecai was never rewarded for this at this time until about five years later but it's the entrance of this information into the Chronicles is an important part of how the story later unfolds and it says these men were both hanged a lot of people are said to be hanged in this book the Persians didn't hang people by the neck with a rope the Persians hang people by impaling them on a stake like a shish kebab it is a horrendous grotesque way to kill people and people were terrified of that prospect to be impaled and whenever you read a hanging this is what Haman intended to do to Mordecai he wanted to impale him Haman himself got impaled on his own stake and so these men also were impaled when it says hanged on a gallows this is more an anglicized way of speaking it's really a stake that they were impaled upon and so it was written down and record was made of it but nothing happened immediately to Mordecai who had done the king the service of saving his life now chapter three after these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the same the son of Hamadatha the Agagite and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him we're not told why Haman was raised to power as he was whether he was perhaps one who had done military exploits or he had done something else that pleased the king particularly but he was given the highest position under the king himself in the kingdom and all the king's servants who were within the gate bowed and paid homage to Haman for so the king commanded concerning him but Mordecai would not bow or pay homage now why not you might think it's because the Jewish law required Jews not to bow down to anything but God but that was not it because the Jews really in general did not have any problem showing regular homage to kings and even bowing down was not necessarily considered to be an act of worship as worshipping a god so it was not necessarily that the law would require them not to bow down but it may be because Haman was an Agagite of the people that God had cursed the Amalekites and that Mordecai refused to bow down to one that God had pronounced a perpetual curse upon their people and that we aren't really told we're not told why Mordecai wouldn't bow down but it was probably that more than anything else because in all likelihood Mordecai would bow down to other officials as would be normal and he was in the he was in the king's government himself so he would on many occasions probably bow down to other officials but for some reason he selected Haman as someone he would not bow down to and it probably has to do with him being an Agagite then the king's servants who are within the king's gate said to Mordecai why do you

transgress the king's command now it happened when they spoke to him daily that 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 now they asked him why he wouldn't bow down and we're not told what his answer was but part of his answer was that he was a Jew now apparently him being a Jew was the reason that he didn't bow down to Haman but as I said it would not be so much that the Jews don't bow to any kings or rulers but apparently because of the the particular relationship between the Amalekites and the Jews that he would not do so so although Esther had never revealed her national identity Mordecai had revealed his and Haman was informed that this Jew would not bow down to him when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage Haman was filled with wrath 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 now he probably could not just have Mordecai arrested easily Mordecai was himself some kind of an official probably in the Treasury and there's reason to believe that he had access to financial records as we shall see shortly and so because he was no doubt a government official himself he couldn't just be easily arrested for something so small as not bowing down to another official it wasn't this kind of crime that would carry the death penalty or anything like that so Haman decided that he would try to wipe out all the Jews it was because Mordecai was a Jew that he didn't bow down so being a Jew wasn't something Haman would hold against anybody from now on and so he was plotting to get rid of all the Jews in the first month which is the month of Nisan in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus they cast purr that is the lot purr is the Persian word for lot they cast lots before Haman to determine the day and the month until it fell on the twelfth month which is in a month of Adar now he decided that he was going to make a plot to destroy all the Jews but he wanted to have no doubt the gods approval on this and so he probably saw the casting of lots as a means of involving divine guidance even as the saw casting of lots that way the Persians may have also and so a date was selected some months off almost a year off that would be the date that he would try to come up with some plan to exterminate the Jews then Haman said to King Ahasuerus there's a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom their laws are different from all other peoples and they do not keep the king's laws therefore is not fitting for the king to let them remain if it places 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 so the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the son of Hamadathah the Agagite the enemy of the Jews and the king said to Haman the money and the people are given to you to do with them as seems good to you now it's not clear exactly what this transaction with the money was going to be it sounds like he was Haman was willing to give the king this ten thousand talents of silver in order to I guess pay soldiers or pay somebody to exterminate the Jews and he would no doubt exact the money himself Haman would get it from the Jews themselves who who were exterminated then the

king's scribes were called on the 13th day of the first month and a decree was written according to all that Haman commanded to the king's satraps which were governors of different provinces to the governors who are over each province to the officials of all people to every province according to his 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 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 13th day of the 12th month which is the month of Adar and to plunder their possessions and therefore plundering their possessions was apparently the way by which the payment was to be made to those who did the work 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 the couriers went out hastened by the king's command and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan the citadel so the king and Haman sat down to drink but the city of Shushan was perplexed now this decree perplexed the citizens what in the world is this about why should we annihilate all our Jewish neighbors doesn't make sense is a little bit like what the Nazis did most German people thought you know why should we kill these Jewish merchants who live in here we've been doing business with their friends of ours and is perplexing why why is the government persecuting these people the king and Haman now the king didn't know that it was the Jews that Haman was talking about and he certainly didn't know that Esther was one of them but hey the king unknowingly had put his signet ring on a document that had condemned Esther to death of course Haman didn't know that either Haman didn't know about Esther's relationship to Mordecai and so there was a lot that was not known in this at this stage by the persons who are making the decisions which you know the fact that these things were not known is what allowed these decisions to be made as they were chapter 4 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 he went as far as the square in front of the king's gate for no one might enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth that is no one who is mourning could appear before the king at all because the king wanted to have a uplifting environment not one where the people are moping around and in every province where the king's command and decree arrived there was great mourning among the Jews with fasting weeping wailing and many lay in sackcloth and ashes now by the way Judea was one of the provinces of Persia and therefore even the Jews who had gone back to Jerusalem would be annihilated under this decree it was carried out so although we don't read about this in Ezra the Jews who had returned back to Jerusalem were as much endangered as everybody if this decree had been carried out and probably all the Jews in the world would have been exterminated and there wouldn't be any Jews today and there wouldn't have been a Jesus either and so Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her and the Queen was deeply distressed then she sent garments to clothe Mordecai that they they didn't tell her about the decree of the king she apparently didn't know about that they told her about Mordecai being outdoors in sackcloth and she thought what why why is my cousin Mordecai out there in sackcloth

she was distressed when she heard it and she sent garments to clothe Mordecai and to take his sackcloth away from him but he would not accept them then Esther called Hathak 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 so Hathak went out to Mordecai in the city square that was in front of the king's gate and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him and the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews now the amount of money that the king's had been offered may well have been entered on to the financial records that Mordecai as a one who worked with the king's treasuries would have been aware of he also gave a copy of the written decree for the 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 into the king to make supplication to him and to plead before him for her people so Hathak returned and told Esther the words of Mordecai then Esther spoke to Hathak and gave him a command for Mordecai 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 of 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 into the king these 30 days so they told Mordecai Esther's words now this it seems like a strange law but it's a true law Herodotus the the Greek historian also confirms that there was this law among the Persians that no one could come into the king's chambers without being bidden by him if he wanted his privacy he wanted his privacy and if you come in to disturb his privacy when he's in his inner chamber you die unless he granted instant amnesty to you by extending the scepter towards you if you walked into his presence unbidden you'd be put to death it was a capital offense to walk in there but he could grant amnesty to you by extending his scepter now she said the king hasn't called for me for 30 days I don't really you know I can't just go approach him and it'll be my death unless he extends the scepter toward me then Mordecai told them to answer Esther do not think in your heart that you will escape the king's palace anymore in the king's palace any more than all other Jews 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 now this is the closest thing to a religious statement in the book there's no mention of God but lots of implications basically he said if you will not help your people at this time there will arise help from some other quarter well by whose ordaining obviously God's ordain is what is in view here it's see this is a point at which you would expect there to be some mention of God the author goes out of his way to not mention God it's like there's a deliberate concealing of God through the whole book even later on when they call for a fast they don't say fast and pray as other books of the Bible do Nehemiah when he heard about the problems in Jerusalem and Nehemiah chapter 1 so he fasted and prayed for many days in this book they're gonna fast but there's no mention of prayer of course they prayed fasting was no doubt accompanied by prayer but for some reason the book doesn't mention that part it is like there's a studied

avoidance of the mention of God and prayer for the purpose of just showing that Providence takes place without God identifying himself sometimes and in this statement that Mordecai made it shows clearly that he believed that God would send deliverance to his people somehow if it wouldn't be Esther and she herself and her father's house would perish but God would still save the Jews and she shouldn't think she can save herself by avoiding the danger of going into the king but he says yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this I mean of course that is why she came to the kingdom the whole obvious point of the story is that she was chosen to be Queen because this emergency was going to arise and she would be the only person in the position to help and you know Mordecai statement implies purpose divine purpose even but but avoids mentioning God you'd think you'd say who knows but that God has brought you into the kingdom for such time as this and he does mention an overriding purpose in it he just doesn't state who it is who had the purpose obviously God is behind the scenes in this statement and it's in Mordecai's thought then Esther told them to return this answer to Mordecai go gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan and fast for me she doesn't say pray just fast neither eat nor drink for three days night or day now fasting sometimes the Middle East has done just in the daylight hours and usually it's just avoiding food not drink but she says I want you to not eat or drink and I want you to fast night and day you know that Ramadan the Muslim fast is 40 days long but it's only during daylight hours so many times the Muslims will simply fast during the daylight hours and then they'll gorge themselves at night and then and they'll do that through the whole 40 days that's called a 40-day fast but they're really eating every day or every night at least and that is how the Pharisees fasted too they fasted only during the daylight hours but she's saying I want you to fast day and night and not eat or drink for three days my maids and I also will fast likewise and so I will go to the king which is against the law and if I perish I perish then Mordecai went his way and did according to all that Esther commanded him so the Jews fasted for three days and she fasted for three days and at the end of that time she was going to go into the king and so chapter five 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 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 his to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand so this is all told without a lot of mystery you'd think this would all be all built up you know is he gonna kill her is he going to extend the scepter this is told rather quickly without much suspense being built up and so he extends the scepter to her then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter and the king said to her what do you wish Queen Esther what is your request it shall be given you up to half my kingdom so Esther answered if it pleases the king let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him 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 that's a modest proposal when you're offered half the kingdom you know you can write your own check up to half the kingdom

how about would you please come to a banquet I've prepared you and Haman that was an easy request to grant and so at the banquet of wine the king said to Esther what is your petition because he knew there was something more she was after it should be granted to you what is your quest up to half my kingdom it should be done then Esther answered and said my petition and request is this if I have found favor in the side 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 in other words I don't want to tell you now I won't tell you tomorrow so I'm going to prepare another banquet so if you and Haman would come to that banquet I'll tell you then what my request is 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 nevertheless Haman restrained himself and went home and he sent and called for his friends and his wife Zeresh then Haman told them of this of his great riches the multitude of the children of his children all the ways in which the king had promoted him and how he had advanced him above all the officials and servants of the king 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'm again invited by her along with the king yet all this avails me nothing so long as I see Mordecai the Jews sitting in the gate now when he called his wife and his friends together it says he told them about all his riches and how many children he had and so forth he had ten as it turns out we'll find out later and all the promotion he'd received and all the great privilege even of being alone invited with the king to come to Queen Esther's feast now why do you have to tell them that didn't his wife and friends know how many children he had how much wealth he had well that's all building up to the fact that he's he's reminding them all the ways he's been blessed we might say and yet all that counts for nothing to him as long as there's this one guy that won't bow to him I mean it just shows what a strange irrational thing an ego trip and power trip can be that you can have everything the world has to offer wealth and prestige and big family and everybody else the whole kingdom bounty but one man's not bowing it ruins your whole day it ruins your whole life it's like everything else he has he can't enjoy any of it because he's deprived this one thing it's a little bit like Adam and Eve being in the garden and having all the trees are theirs but just one is denied them there's only one fruit they can't eat from and they got to have that one too and so there's this one thing that he's not getting and he it spoils his enjoyment all the rest then his wife's Irish and all his friends had to him let it gallows be made 50 cubits high this would be of course a steak a tree or wood is literally what it says it says gallows in the King James and so the new King James follows it but the Hebrew word here is let there be a wooden stake or a tree erected about 75 feet high now this would not necessarily have to be a pole that is 75 feet long it could be a normal-sized pole for impaling a man but elevated on a platform so that its height is 75 feet and thus it becomes something visible from miles around and in the morning suggested 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 a gallows

made he just had that pole set up that night now this is a this is a very time-sensitive thing you've got this feast that Esther wants to have Haman and the king at the next day and also the next day Haman wants to suggest killing Mordecai now why hasn't he done this earlier like I said I think Mordecai probably had a position of importance in the government and you can't just you know suggest killing somebody because he won't bow to you however Haman is starting to get a little heady starts thinking he's got a lot of power even the Queen is noticing that he is an important man and invites only him to come with the king maybe this would be a time that he could exert his authority and his prestige and his privilege to the disadvantage of Mordecai and nothing will make Haman happy with except the destruction of Mordecai well he's already had a law signed into a decree signed into law about all the Jews including Mordecai gonna be exterminated within a year but he couldn't wait that long Mordecai himself had to be done away with sooner and so Haman comforted himself with the idea that tomorrow he would impale Mordecai but between this day and the next day there was a night and a number of interesting things happened that night chapter 6 that night the king could not sleep so one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the Chronicles that should put him to sleep pull out the scroll from five years ago what you know what are the Chronicles of the Proceedings of the Courts of the Kings of Persia I can't sleep someone read that to me that'll put me down real quick and they were read before the king and it was found written that Mordecai had told big of Big Thana and Teresh two of the king's eunuchs the doorkeepers who had sought to lay hands on the king Ahasuerus 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 and so the king realized an oversight has taken place a man saved his life and was not rewarded and so better late than never 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 from now it seems strange that Haman will be coming in in the middle of the night apparently Haman couldn't sleep either he's too excited about the festival or the feast the next day and he notices probably the king's lights are on so he says well just go and talk to him about my plan to hang Mordecai so here he comes in the courtyard and he comes intending to suggest killing Mordecai and if the king had not been unable to sleep if the king had not just had those Chronicles read him at that moment he would probably have been amenable to it he had forgotten that Mordecai had saved his life once but just as God knew that Haman was coming over to make this request to kill Mordecai God had King Ahasuerus reminded of what Mordecai had done for him and and determined to do something good for him so here comes Haman and Haman came in and the king asked him what shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor of course the king's talking about Mordecai but Haman thought in his heart whom would the king delight to honor more than me he thought he's referring to himself then Haman answered in the king for the man whom the king delights to honor 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 then let this robe and horse be

delivered to the hand of the one the king's most nobles princes 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 I was reading many years ago in the works of William Law I think it was in his book Christian Perfection or else the one could have been in his book a serious call to devout holy life he was talking about the vanities of the world and he was saying just think of the emptiness of the things that matters to people in the world and he gave this as example he says you know an ambitious Haman with given you know a carte blanche to be honored in any way that the world could honor a man in this case as he thought he could think of nothing more great than to ride on the king's horse with the king's robe with someone shouting this is what will be done to the man that the king delights to honor and William Law was just saying what an empty what an empty satisfaction that would be I mean of course Haman didn't get this done for him but the things that the world seeks are such empty things compared to the things that really are of eternal value but I mean if I were asked this question I thought it was gonna be done for I could think of a lot of ways more practical and valuable ways to be honored than to just be paraded through the streets with a runner in front of me saying this is the man everyone pay attention this man I mean this man was just such an egotist he just wanted to get attention and honor and it says then the king said to Haman hasten 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 that all you have all that you have spoken so I mean think of the chagrin of Haman at this time this this must this is like a comedy in the midst of this this drama there's this drama where the Jews are threatened with their lives and and this little incident is like hilarious it's like there's a comedy inserted in the middle of it and so Haman took the robe and the horse and arrayed Mordecai and led him on horseback through the city square apparently when dawn came and proclaimed before him thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor afterward Mordecai went back to the king's gate just went back to his business and he thought what was that all about he's stirred from his bed he's dressed in the king's robe put on the king's horse paraded through the streets with this announcement and then he just goes back to his job well whatever but it was nothing to Mordecai there was something to Haman Haman hastened to his house mourning and with his head covered he didn't want anyone to recognize him he was so embarrassed 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 so these people were beginning to see the writing on the wall they were saying you know maybe these Jews maybe their God is on their side again there's no mention of God here but it's it's almost like implied I mean even the Persian saying you know the God of these Jews looks like he's against you in this and your opposition that was going to be your downfall the suggestion is that there's a God behind all of this but he's not being specifically referred to it says while they were still talking with him the king's eunuchs came and hastened to

bring Haman to the banquet that Queen Esther had prepared for him okay we'll stop there and pick it up at the banquet