

YOUTH



LEVEL 7

BIBLE

LESSONS



LESSON 7



Esther—A Brave and Courageous Woman

ESTHER — A BRAVE AND COURAGEOUS WOMAN

When the nation of Judah was conquered by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the Babylonian Empire was the greatest and most powerful kingdom on earth.

During Nebuchadnezzar's reign, God revealed that the Babylonian Empire was the first of a series of empires that would rule over many nations and peoples. These world-ruling empires were pictured by a great image that appeared to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream. (For a detailed description of the image and its meaning, be sure to review Lesson 5 and read Daniel 2.)

The Persian Empire (pictured by the image's breast and arms of silver) succeeded the Babylonian Empire (the head of gold). It was during the reign of Cyrus, king of Persia, that a royal decree was issued. It permitted the Jews, many of whom were living in Babylon, to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. The decree was issued seventy years after the Jews had been taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar. Some families, however, chose to remain in Babylon and in other parts of the empire.

In this lesson, we will learn about a young Jewish girl named Esther. Her story, which is recorded in the book of Esther, takes place during the time of the Persian Empire. We will learn how she became queen and later, through her courage, loyalty and trust in God, helped save her people from a plot to destroy them.

ABOUT OUR COVER . . .

After thousands of years, all that remains of ancient Shushan, a capital city of the Persian Empire, is a large mound of rubble.

Photo Courtesy E. F. Schmidt

A ROYAL BANQUET

King Ahasuerus, ruler of the Persian Empire during the days of Esther, lived about 500 years before Christ. His kingdom stretched from India to Ethiopia and included 127 provinces. His magnificent palace was in the city of Shushan.

In the third year of his reign, Ahasuerus decided to give a special feast for the high-ranking officials in his kingdom. It was to last seven days, and would be the culmination of a six-month's exhibition of the king's fabulous wealth.

For seven days the assembled guests feasted with wine in the spacious courtyard of the palace, overlooking the royal gardens. The courtyard was lavishly decorated. There were white and blue linen curtains fastened with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars. The guests sat on gold and silver couches, and drank from golden goblets. Each goblet was specially decorated, and no two were the same.

While the feasting continued in the king's palace, the queen, whose name was Vashti, held a separate feast for the wives. It was a custom that men and women of the court did not eat together in public feasts. They did eat together in private banquets, however.

After seven days of feasting and drinking, the king commanded his servants to bring Queen Vashti to him so that he might show the people and princes her extraordinary beauty. However, Vashti defied his order and refused to come. Ahasuerus became furious.

THE QUEEN IS DETHRONED

Outraged at Vashti's refusal to obey him, the king called his wise men together for advice on how to handle the matter. "What shall I do with Vashti?" the king inquired.

Memucan, one of the king's seven top advisors, answered, "Vashti the queen has wronged not only the king, but also the princes and all the people in the provinces. If it please the king, let him put Vashti away and give her royal position to another."

Memucan reasoned that when other women in the provinces heard what Vashti had done, they might feel free to treat their husbands disrespectfully also. "If the king will publish a decree that Vashti will no longer be queen," advised Memucan, "all the wives would be certain to honor their husbands."

Memucan's words pleased the king and the princes. So the king had a decree written and sent to all the provinces, informing them that Vashti had been dethroned. The decree also stated that every man should rule his own house.

In time, when his anger had subsided, Ahasuerus remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what had been decreed against her. He had no queen, and perhaps was now feeling lonely.

The king's servants went to him with a plan they hoped would please him. "Appoint officers in every province to gather together the most beautiful young virgins," they advised. "Have them sent to your palace in Shushan and then choose as the new queen the one who pleases you most." Ahasuerus liked the idea, and went ahead with the plan.

ESTHER BECOMES THE NEW QUEEN

Living in the city of Shushan was a Jewish man named Mordecai. His great-grandfather, Kish, was one of the many captives Nebuchadnezzar had carried away when he conquered Jerusalem.

When his uncle died, Mordecai took the

dead uncle's daughter and reared her as his own. This young girl's name was Hadassah (her Hebrew name). She was also called Esther.

Esther grew up to be a beautiful and gracious young woman. She eventually was taken by the king's officers to the palace at Shushan with the other beautiful young women. Before she left, Mordecai warned her not to reveal her nationality to anyone.

When she arrived at the palace, Esther was put under the care of Hegai, who took custody of all the women. Hegai especially liked Esther, and put seven maids at her service. He also gave her the best apartment in the women's quarters.

Each young woman spent twelve months preparing to meet with the king. Each purified herself with costly ointments. When a woman was ready to meet the king, she took with her whatever she thought might favorably impress him.

When Esther's turn came to appear before the king, she asked Hegai what he thought she should take with her. She followed his advice, and soon went in to meet the king.

A lovely and beautiful young woman, Esther obtained favor from all those who saw her, including the king. Ahasuerus loved her more than all the other women he had seen. He was delighted to crown her the new queen.

Ahasuerus celebrated his marriage to Esther and her coronation by preparing a special feast for all his princes and servants. He also gave away many royal gifts.

MORDECAI DISCOVERS A PLOT AGAINST THE KING

Esther was a beautiful and loyal queen. Even after becoming queen, she kept her nationality a secret, as Mordecai had told her to do.

As Mordecai went about his business at the king's gate, he occasionally overheard information important to the king. One day, he became aware of a plot by two men of the royal bodyguard to put the king to death.



Mordecai was deeply concerned when he heard of a plot to kill King Ahasuerus.

What would you have done if you had learned of the plot? Would you have been afraid and kept silent? After all, suppose you reported the information and no one believed you. You might lose your job. Or, the attempted assassins might want to hurt you out of revenge.

Write a short paragraph describing what you would have done in this situation. _____

Now let's read Esther 2:22 and find out what Mordecai did. "And the thing was _____ to Mordecai, who _____ it unto _____ the queen; and _____ [informed] the _____ thereof in Mordecai's name."

After an investigation was made, the conspirators were hanged. Officials recorded Mordecai's deed of saving the king in the book of the chronicles, the court diary, which was kept in the presence of the king. It did not matter that Mordecai was not rewarded for his deed, for he knew that he had done the right thing.

HAMAN PLOTS AGAINST THE JEWS

One day, King Ahasuerus promoted one of his officials, named Haman, above all the other princes of the court. The promotion was a great honor. All the king's servants bowed before Haman and revered him, except for Mordecai.

None of the servants and officials understood why Mordecai would not bow to Haman, as the king had commanded. These officials told Haman about the matter. Haman watched Mordecai to verify their report. When he found it to be true, he was furious! He asked the king's servants further questions about Mordecai, and soon learned that he was a Jew.

Haman's anger was so great that he sought to destroy Mordecai and all Jews living within the Persian Empire! He thought of a plan which he hoped Ahasuerus would approve. Haman then went in to see the king.

Very careful to avoid naming the Jews, Haman said, "There are certain people scattered throughout your provinces who have their own laws, and do not keep the king's laws. If it please you, O King, make a law to have them all killed. I will pay ten thousand talents of silver [about 20 million U.S. dollars] into your treasury."

The king agreed to the law. He told Haman

to do whatever he wished with the people and the wealth they possessed.

A decree was soon written and sealed with the king's ring to make it official. It was sent to all parts of the empire on the thirteenth day of the first month.

The decree stated that on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, all Jews were to be killed, including babies, women and the elderly. Their property would then be confiscated.

The day this was to occur had been determined by casting lots. Haman, who supervised the casting of the lots, did not realize that God was and is in charge of everything in the universe, including the casting of lots.

When the lots were cast, God made sure the day thus determined was far enough in advance so that He could work out a plan to save the Jews from destruction by their enemies.

When Mordecai and the Jews in Shushan heard of the decree, they tore their clothes and put on sackcloth with ashes, a sign of great distress. Jews throughout the empire mourned, wailed and fasted when they heard the news.

ESTHER AGREES TO INTERVENE

Esther, who was living in the palace, was unaware of the decree until she learned of it from her servants. She was exceedingly grieved. She sent one of her servants to speak with Mordecai to learn more about it.

Mordecai related the details to the servant, and gave him a copy of the decree to show Esther. Mordecai then told the servant to tell Esther that she must go before the king and plead for her life and for the lives of her people.

The servant soon returned and related what Mordecai had said. Esther then told the servant, "Go and tell Mordecai that I am afraid to go before the king. Remind him of the Persian law that is strictly enforced.

"This law states that anyone who goes before the king without being sent for will be killed

instantly unless the king holds out his golden sceptre.

"How can I go and speak with Ahasuerus? He hasn't sent for me in the last thirty days!"

Upon hearing the message, Mordecai answered sternly, "Don't think you will escape simply because you are queen." He then encouraged her by saying, "Who knows but that you have come to a royal position for such a time as this?"

Upon hearing these words, Esther decided to risk her life to save her people. She devised a clever plan. "I will go before the king," she told

(Continued on page 8)



The royal decree, written by Haman, stated that all Jews within the Persian Empire were to be killed.

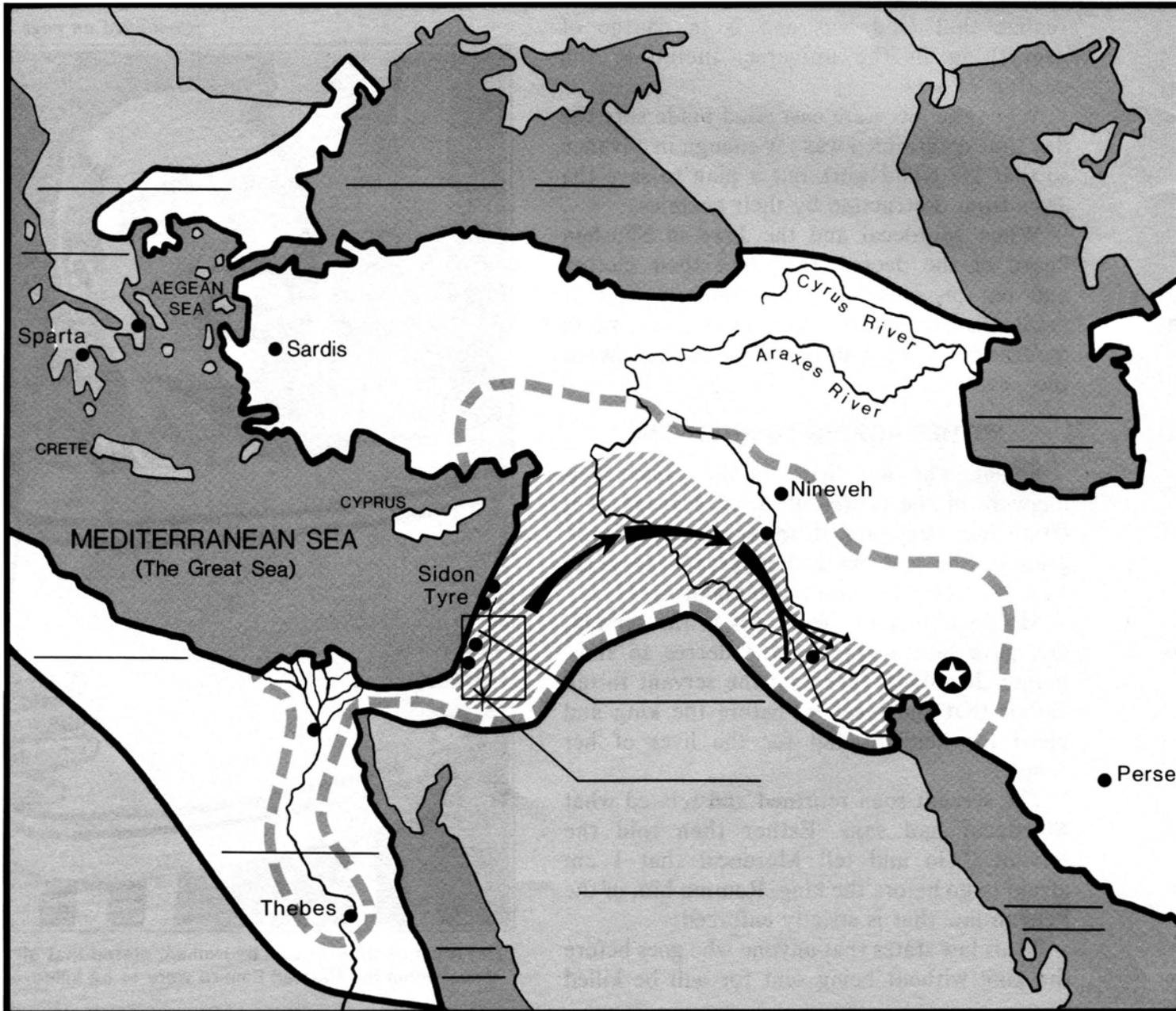
THE PERSIAN EMPIRE

The Persian Empire (558-330 B.C.), often called the Medo-Persian Empire, was the second great world empire represented in the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. This dual monarchy, composed of the Medes and Persians, was symbolized by the breast and two arms of silver (Daniel 2:32). The Persian Empire was inferior in excellence to Nebuchadnezzar's

Chaldean or Babylonian Empire (head of gold), just as silver is inferior to gold. However, it was stronger *militarily*, as silver is stronger than gold.

CYRUS THE GREAT

In 549 B.C. a Persian named Cyrus the Great became king of the Persian Empire. Cyrus conquered the area known as Babylonia in 539



B.C. as prophesied by Isaiah over 150 years before (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1).

Until the reign of Cyrus, the people of Judah, who had been taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, were still in Babylonian slavery. To reduce the chances of a Jewish rebellion in Judah, Nebuchadnezzar had ordered three deportations of the Jews that began about 604 B.C. (The people of

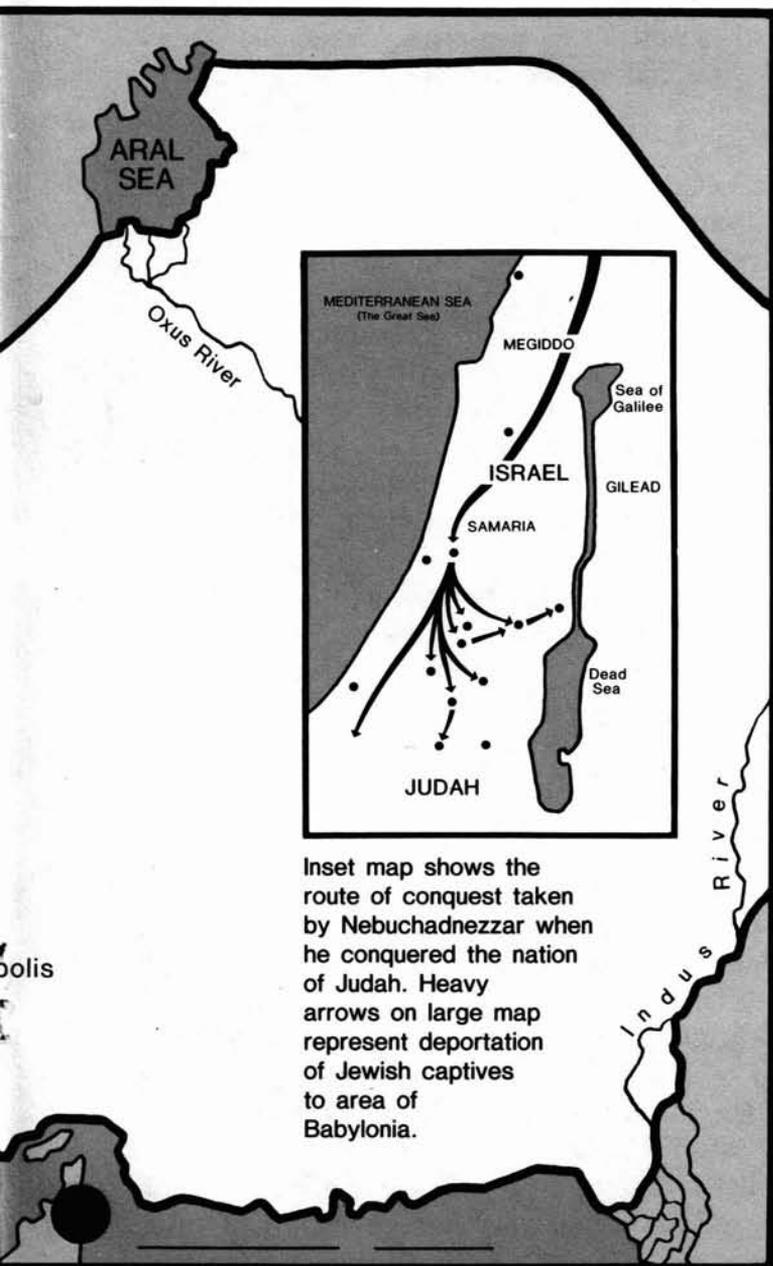
the northern kingdom of Israel had previously been taken captive by the Assyrians in 721-718 B.C.)

Then, in 538 B.C., Cyrus issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to the land of Palestine.

THE REIGN OF AHASUERUS

Following the death of Cyrus the Great, his son Cambyses ruled the empire and later died in 522 B.C. Darius I, a Mede, began his rule after the death of Cambyses. When Darius I died, his son Ahasuerus (or Xerxes) became king of the Persian Empire. His reign began in 486 B.C.

The story of Esther takes place in the time of Ahasuerus, king of Persia, whose empire extended from Ethiopia to India. During his reign, many of the Jews who did not return to Palestine lived within the 127 provinces of the Persian Empire.



Inset map shows the route of conquest taken by Nebuchadnezzar when he conquered the nation of Judah. Heavy arrows on large map represent deportation of Jewish captives to area of Babylonia.

Map by Bruce Hedges

PLACES IN PERSIA

DIRECTIONS

Using the list of rivers, cities, seas and regions below, write the correct name in the proper place on the map. You may use an atlas if you need help.

RIVERS	CITIES	SEAS	REGIONS
Nile River	Shushan (Susa)	Red Sea	Arabia
Tigris River	Asshur	Persian Gulf	Macedonia
Euphrates River	Babylon	Black Sea	Judah
	Jerusalem	Caspian Sea	Israel
	Memphis	Arabian Sea	Egypt
	Athens		Libya
	Samaria		Greece

KEY TO MAP

Assyrian Empire



Babylonian Empire



Persian Empire



Mordecai. "But first, I want you to gather together all the Jews in Shushan and fast three days for me. My maids and I will also fast. Then I will go before the king, which is not according to the law. And if I perish, I perish."

Esther must have greatly loved Mordecai and her people to be willing to risk her life to save them. Read what Christ said about this kind of love in John 15:13. Write out this verse on the following lines. _____

On the third day, Esther put on her royal apparel and went in to see the king. She stood in the inner court of the king's palace where Ahasuerus could see her.

When the king saw Esther standing in the court, he was very pleased. He immediately held out the golden sceptre to her. Esther was greatly relieved, for this meant that she had obtained favor in his sight.

"Esther, what is it you desire?" Ahasuerus inquired. "I will give you whatever you request — up to half my kingdom!"

Immediately putting her plan into action, Esther said, "I have prepared a banquet today for you and Haman. Please come!"

ESTHER'S ROYAL BANQUETS

Wishing to please Esther, the king agreed and quickly sent for Haman. Haman soon arrived and both went to the royal banquet Esther had prepared for them.

During the banquet, Ahasuerus again told Esther she could have whatever she desired — up to half the kingdom. She replied that she would be very happy if he and Haman would attend another private banquet the following day. "At that time I will make my request," she politely told the king.

Ahasuerus knew Esther must have wanted a special favor when she asked that he and Haman attend another banquet.

Haman was delighted at the invitation! It would be quite an honor to dine in private with the king and queen two days in a row.

That evening, following the first banquet, Haman bragged to his family and friends about how honored he was to be invited to two private royal banquets. "Yet," Haman sighed as he remembered Mordecai, "as long as he lives, I will never be truly happy." Haman was filled with intense anger and hatred against Mordecai!

Haman's wife, Zeresh, and his friends tried to console him. "Why don't you build a huge gallows and tomorrow ask the king to hang Mordecai? Then you can go merrily to the



After hearing of the decree to kill the Jews, Mordecai put on sackcloth and sat in ashes, a sign of great distress.

banquet and forget about him.”

Haman was pleased with the idea. So, through the night, his servants built the gallows in the court of his home.

THE KING HONORS MORDECAI

The same night, King Ahasuerus could not sleep. He ordered his servants to read to him from the royal diary. Eventually they came to the story of Mordecai having saved the king’s life.

“Has Mordecai been honored for this service?” asked the king the next morning.

“No, nothing has been done for Mordecai,” the servants answered.

“I would like some suggestions about what should be done for him,” the king said. “Find a prince out in the court and send him in.”

Now Haman, who had come early to request permission of the king to hang Mordecai, was in the court waiting. The servants ushered him in before the king.

Before Haman could speak of Mordecai, the king said, “What shall be done for the man whom the king wishes to honor?”

Haman, in his great conceit and pride, thought the king was speaking about him. “What man would the king delight in honoring more than me?” he thought.

“Put your royal robes and crown on the man you wish to honor and set him on your horse,” Haman eagerly advised the king. “Then have one of your most noble princes lead the man through the streets of the city, shouting to the people, ‘Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.’”

“I like your suggestion,” the king said. “Take these robes and my crown and get my personal horse. Then do as you have said to Mordecai.”

This surprising turn of events shocked Haman! He had no choice but to obey the king’s order.

The following verses, which show what happens to those who are filled with pride, were about to be fulfilled in Haman’s life. Be



Expecting himself to be led through the streets on the king’s horse, Haman was shocked when told that Mordecai would receive this honor.

sure to write out these verses on the following lines.

(Proverbs 16:5, 18) _____

(Proverbs 11:2) _____

After Mordecai was honored and returned to his duties at the king’s gate, Haman hurried home. He felt such great disgust and shame that he mourned and shaved his head.

As Haman, his wife and friends were

discussing the unexpected turn of events, the king's servants arrived to escort Haman to Esther's second banquet.

HAMAN'S PLOT BACKFIRES!

At the banquet, Ahasuerus again asked Esther, "What do you want? I will give you up to half my kingdom."

"If I have found favor in your sight, O King, and if it pleases you, give me my life and the lives of my people, for we face death," Esther pleaded.

Ahasuerus roared in anger. "Who is he who would dare think of doing such a thing?"

"The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!" Esther said. Shocked by this sudden revelation, the king rose in anger and stormed out into the palace garden to think.

Haman, fearing for his life, threw himself beside the queen and pleaded for his life.

When the king returned from the garden, Haman's closeness to Esther only made him more furious. "Do you now dare to touch the queen and dishonor me in my own house?" Ahasuerus demanded.

As the words left the king's mouth, servants immediately arrested Haman. One of them said, "There is a large gallows at Haman's house where he had planned to hang Mordecai."

"Hang Haman there," the king commanded.

Ahasuerus then commanded that Haman's house and possessions be confiscated and given to Esther, who then set Mordecai in charge of them. The king then promoted Mordecai to a very high position within the Persian Empire and gave him the royal ring. Esther then put Mordecai in charge of Haman's house.

Haman's downfall occurred largely because



To commemorate their deliverance, the Jews had a two-day celebration, called the Feast of Purim.

of his great pride and conceit. In Proverbs 15:25, God shows what happens to the house of the proud. He says, "The _____ will _____ the _____ of the _____ . . ."

THE JEWS ARE SAVED

Haman's decree against the Jews was still in force, however. Esther bowed before the king and requested him to reverse the decree.

Ahasuerus could not repeal the law because no law of the Medes and Persians could *ever* be changed. But the king did have an idea. He told Mordecai to write another law, which would permit the Jews to fight back against those who tried to harm them.

This new law, sealed with the king's ring, was drawn up on the twenty-third day of the third month, and sent to every province in the empire.

When the day Haman had chosen to kill the Jews arrived, they were armed and ready to defend themselves. They destroyed all those who tried to harm them. In Shushan alone, hundreds of their enemies, as well as the ten sons of Haman, were killed.

The wicked who plot against the lives of others often end up suffering the same fate themselves. This is shown in Psalms 9:16. "The _____ is known by the _____ which he _____; the _____ is _____ in the work of _____."

Haman, who had conspired against the Jews and sought to hang Mordecai on the gallows, ended up being hanged himself. And those who sought to slaughter the Jews were themselves killed.

THE FEAST OF PURIM

The triumph of the Jews was so great that a two-day celebration of feasting and sending gifts was proclaimed. They decided to celebrate this occasion every year to commemorate their deliverance from their enemies.

This celebration is called the Feast of Purim. Purim is derived from the Hebrew word *pur* which means "lot." This was the name chosen for the festival because Haman had cast lots to determine the day the Jews were to be killed. The Feast of Purim is still observed by many of the Jews to this day.

Do You Remember?

1. Who was the brave queen who loved her people enough to risk her own life?
_____.
2. Who was the queen who refused to obey Ahasuerus? _____.
3. What kingdom did Ahasuerus rule? _____.
4. What was so special about the laws of the Medes and Persians? _____
_____.
5. What was the law Haman persuaded the king to decree? _____
_____.
6. What does God say He will do to the house of the proud? _____
_____.
7. How did the king later honor Mordecai for reporting the information that saved his life? _____
_____.
8. What was the special request Esther made to the king during the second royal banquet? _____
_____.
9. What does the word *pur* mean?
_____.
10. What does the Feast of Purim represent?

_____.

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BIBLE MEMORY Isaiah 11:6-9

“PHONEY” PUZZLE

The numbers listed directly below in sentence form stand for the letters on a telephone, and can be decoded by substituting letters for numbers. When decoded, this sentence will reveal instructions for the second part of the puzzle. It looks easy, but remember that a number can stand for more than one letter. Example: 2229566 = B A B Y L O N.

33247437 843 365569464 5478 63 62637 636846633

46 8447 537766, 8436 97483 2 74678 782836368

22688 3224 66 2 73727283 74338 63 72737.



<u>NUMBER CODES</u>	<u>DECODED NAMES</u>
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