

Opposition to the Remnant During Ahasuerus' [Xerxes] Reign (c. 486/485 BC)

Ezra 4:6

6 In the reign of Ahasuerus, at the beginning of his reign, they [*the local residents*] wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.

Ahasuerus Displays His Power and Glory for 180 Days (October 4, 483–April 2, 482 BC)

Esther 1:1–4

1 And it happened in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Cush—*over* one hundred and twenty-seven provinces.
 2 In those days as King Ahasuerus was sitting on the throne of his kingdom, which *was* in the citadel of Susa,
 3 he gave a banquet in the third year of his reign for all his officials and servants. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and officials of the provinces were in his presence
 4 as he displayed the wealth of the glory of his kingdom and the glorious splendor of his greatness *for* many days, one hundred and eighty days.

The Seven Day Banquet in Susa (April 3–9, 482 BC)

Esther 1:5–9

5 And when those days were completed, the king gave for all the people that were present at the citadel of Susa, both great and small, a banquet in the courtyard of the king's palace garden that lasted seven days.
 6 There were curtains of finely woven linen and blue cloth tied with cords of fine white linen and purple cloth to silver curtain rings and pillars of alabaster, *and* couches of gold and silver on a paved floor of alabaster, precious stone, mother-of-pearl, and costly stones.
 7 Drinks were served in goblets of gold and goblets of different kinds, and *there was* plentiful royal wine according to the bounty of the king.
 8 There were no restrictions on the drinking, for the king had instructed every official of his palace to do as each one pleased.
 9 Furthermore, Queen Vashti gave a banquet for the women *in* the palace that belonged to King Ahasuerus.

Vashti Defies Ahasuerus (April 9, 482 BC)

Esther 1:10–22

10 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he said to Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, seven of the eunuchs attending King Ahasuerus,
 11 to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown to show the people and the officials her beauty, for she was very attractive.
 12 But Queen Vashti refused to come at the word of the king that *was* conveyed by the eunuchs. And the king became very angry, and his anger burned in him.
 13 And the king said to the wise men, the ones who know the times—for it *was* the procedure of the king before all those who knew law and rights;
 14 and those next to him were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, Memucan, the seven officials of Persia and Media who had access to the king and sat first in the kingdom—
 15 “According to *the* law, what is to be done with Queen Vashti, because she has not done the command of King Ahasuerus conveyed by the eunuchs?
 16 And Memucan said before the king and the officials, “Not only has Queen Vashti done wrong to the king, but to all the officials and all of the people who *are* in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.
 17 For this deed of the queen will be known to all the women, causing them to look with contempt on their husbands, as they will say, ‘King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him but she did not come!’
 18 This day the women of nobility from Persia and Media will respond to all the officials of the king and there will be no end to contempt and anger.
 19 If it pleases the king, let a royal edict go out from him, and let it be written among the laws of Persia and Media so that it will not be altered, that Vashti cannot come before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to her neighbor who *is* better than she.
 20 And let the king's decree that he will make be proclaimed in all his kingdom, because it *is* vast and all the women will honor their husbands, great and small.”
 21 This advice pleased the king and the officials, and the king acted according to the word of Memucan.
 22 And he sent letters to all the provinces of the king, to each province according to its own script, and to every people in their own

language, that every man should be the master of his house and who speaks in the language of his people.

Ahasuerus Searches for a New Queen (c. 482–480 BC)

Esther 2:1–9

1 After these things, when the anger of King Ahasuerus subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her.
 2 And the king's servants attending him said, "Let them seek attractive young virgins for the king.
 3 Let the king appoint chief officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, and let them gather every attractive young virgin to the harem in the citadel of Susa under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let him give *them* their beauty treatment.
 4 And let the young woman who is pleasing in the king's eyes become queen in place of Vashti. The thing was good in the king's eyes, and he acted accordingly.
 5 There was a Jew in the citadel of Susa whose name *was* Mordecai son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite,
 6 who was deported from Jerusalem with the exiles who were deported with Jeconiah the king of Judah, whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had deported.
 7 He was raising Hadassah, that *is* Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she did not have a father or a mother; the young woman *had* a beautiful figure and *was* very attractive. When her father and mother died, Mordecai had taken her as his daughter.
 8 And it happened, at the proclaiming of the edict of the king and his law, when many young women were being gathered to the citadel of Susa under Hegai's care, Esther was taken to the king's palace under the care of Hegai who was in charge of the women.
 9 The young woman pleased him and she won favor in his presence, and he quickly provided for her beauty treatment and her portion of food, with seven chosen maids to give to her from the king's palace, and he advanced her and her maids to the best part of the harem.

Esther's Twelve Month Beauty Treatment (February–December 479 BC)

Esther 2:10–14

10 Esther did not disclose her people and her family because Mordecai had charged her that she must not tell.
 11 And every day Mordecai would walk up and down in front of the courtyard of the harem to learn how Esther was doing.
 12 When the turn came for each girl to go to King Ahasuerus, after the end of twelve months of being under the regulations of the women—for the days of their beauty treatments had to be filled, six months with the oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and women's cosmetics—
 13 in this way, the girl goes to the king and all that she asks is given to her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace.
 14 In the evening she would go and in the morning she would return to the second harem under the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch in charge of the concubines. She would not go back to the king unless the king delighted in her and she was called by name.

Ahasuerus Chooses Esther as the New Queen of Persia (December 479/January 478 BC)

Esther 2:15–18

15 When the turn came near for Esther daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken *her* as a daughter, to go to the king, she did not ask anything except what Hegai the eunuch of the king who was in charge of the women, advised. And Esther carried favor in the eyes of everyone that saw her.
 16 Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, to his palace, in the tenth month that is Tebeth in the seventh year of his reign.
 17 And the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won his favor and loyalty more than all the virgins, so he put a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.
 18 And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his officials and servants. And he granted a tax amnesty to the provinces and he gave gifts with royal liberality.

Mordecai Discovers a Plot Against Ahasuerus (c. 478–475 BC)

Esther 2:19–23

19 When *the* virgins were gathered a second time, Mordecai *was* sitting at the gate of the king.
 20 Esther had not made known her family and her people, just as Mordecai had instructed her; for Esther did what Mordecai told her, just as when she was brought up by him.
 21 In those days Mordecai *was* sitting at the gate of the king. Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs from the keepers of the threshold, became angry and they conspired to assassinate King Ahasuerus.
 22 And the matter became known to Mordecai and he told *it* to Queen Esther, and Esther told *it* to the king in the name of

Mordecai.

23 And the matter was investigated and found *to be so*; and the two of them were hanged on *the* gallows, and it was written in the scroll of the events of the days before the presence of the king.

Haman Sets Out to Destroy the Jews (April 5, 474 BC)

Esther 3:1–11

1 After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and he exalted him and set his position above all the officials who *were* with him.
 2 And all of the king's servants who *were* at the gate of the king *were* kneeling and bowing down to Haman; for so the king had commanded concerning him, but Mordecai did not kneel and bow down.
 3 And the king's servants who *were* at the gate of the king said to Mordecai, "Why *are* you transgressing the command of the king?"
 4 They spoke to him day after day, but he did not listen to them, and they informed Haman to see if Mordecai's resolve would prevail; for he had told them that he *was* a Jew.
 5 And Haman saw that Mordecai was not kneeling and bowing down to him, and he was filled *with* anger.
 6 But he considered it beneath him to lay hands on Mordecai only, for they told him of Mordecai's people, and Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, who *were* in the kingdom of Ahasuerus.
 7 In the first month, that *is*, the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasurus, he cast pur—that *is*, the lot—before the presence of Haman for the day and for the month, until the twelfth month, that *is*, the month of Adar.
 8 And Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and separated among the peoples in all of the provinces of your kingdom; their laws *are* different from every *other* people, and they do not observe the laws of the king; it is not appropriate for the king to tolerate them.
 9 If it pleases the king, let a *decree* be issued to destroy them, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to those who do the job, to bring to the treasury of the king."
 10 So the king removed his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.
 11 And the king said to Haman, "The money *is* given to you and to the people to do with it as you see fit.

The Edict to Kill the Jews is Sent Throughout the Kingdom (April 17, 474 BC)

Esther 3:12–15

12 And the king's secretaries were called in the first month on the thirteenth day, and a *decree* was issued, according to all that Haman commanded, to the satraps of the king and to the governors who *were* over all the provinces, and to *the* officials of all the people, to each province according to *its own* script and to all people according to their own language; *it was* written in the name of King Ahasuerus and *was* sealed with the king's ring.
 13 Letters *were* sent by couriers to all the provinces of the king to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, women and children, on one day, the thirteenth day of the month, that *is* Adar, and to plunder their goods.
 14 A copy of the edict *was* presented *as* law in every province making *it* known to all the people to be ready for that day.
 15 The couriers went out quickly by order of the king, and the law was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink; and the city of Susa was bewildered.

Mordecai Tells Esther the Terrible News (April/May 474 BC)

Esther 4:1–14

1 Mordecai learned all that had been done and he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes. And he went through the middle of the city and cried out a loud and bitter cry;
 2 he went up to the entrance of the gate of the king, for he could not go to the gate of the king in sackcloth.
 3 In every province *each* place where the king's edict and his law came, there *was* great mourning for the Jews with fasting, crying, wailing, *and* sackcloth; and ashes were spread out as a bed for them.
 4 And Esther's maids and her eunuchs came and they told her, and the queen was deeply distressed; she sent garments to clothe Mordecai so that he might remove his sackcloth—but he did not accept *them*.
 5 Then Esther called Hathach from the king's eunuchs who regularly attended to her, and she ordered him *to go* to Mordecai to learn what was happening and why.
 6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai, to the public square of the city, which *was* in front of the gate of the king,
 7 and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact amount of money that Haman has promised to pay to the treasury of the king for the destruction of the Jews.
 8 And he gave him a copy of the edict of the law that had been issued in Susa for their destruction to show Esther, and to inform her, and to charge her to go to the king and make supplication to him and entreat before him for her people.

9 And Hathach went *back* and told Esther the words of Mordecai.

10 And Esther spoke to Hathach and she gave him a message for Mordecai:

11 “All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that *if* any man or woman who goes to the king to the inner courtyard, who is not called, he has one law, to be killed, except if the king extends to him the gold scepter so that he may live. I have not been called to come to the king for thirty days.”

12 And they told Mordecai the words of Esther.

13 Then Mordecai told *them* to reply to Esther: “Do not think that your life will be saved *in* the palace of the king more than all the Jews.

14 For if indeed you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, and you and the family of your father will perish. Who knows? *Perhaps* you have come to a royal position for a time such as this.”

Esther Asks for Three Days of Fasting (June 22–24, 474 BC)

Esther 4:15–17

15 Esther replied to Mordecai:

16 “Go, gather all the Jews that are found in Susa and fast for me; do not eat or drink *for* three days, both night and day. I and my young girls will fast likewise, and then I will go to the king, which *is* not according to the law; if I perish, I perish.

17 And Mordecai went away and he did everything that Esther commanded him.

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Chronological Notes

1) Temporal Notations in Esther.

A) Ahasuerus (Xerxes I) was king of Persia from 485 BC to 465 BC. The book of Esther, which takes place during this time, dates itself in terms of the year of Ahasuerus’ reign. The following is a list of the temporal notations within the book:

- (1) 1:1–3 – the 3rd year of Ahasuerus’ reign (483).¹
- (2) 1:4 – Ahasuerus displays his power for 180 days (October 4, 483 to April 2, 482).²
- (3) 1:5 – Ahasuerus gives a 7 day feast (April 3–9, 482).
- (4) 1:10 – on the 7th day of the feast, Vashti refuses the king’s command (April 9, 482).
- (5) 2:12 – Esther begins 12 months of beauty treatments (February–December 479).³
- (6) 2:16 – Esther taken to Ahasuerus during the 10th month of the 7th year of his reign (December 479 /January 478)
- (7) 3:7 – Haman casts the lot against the Jews in the 1st month of the 12th year of Ahasuerus’ reign (April 5, 474).
- (8) 3:7 – the lot fell in the 12th month of that year.
- (9) 3:12 – Haman’s scheme made official in the 12th year, 1st month, 13th day (April 17, 474).
- (10) 3:13 – the execution day is set for the 12th year, 12th month, 13th day (April 5, 473).
- (11) 4:16 – Esther’s 3 day fast during the 12th year (June 22–24, 474).⁴

¹ All Julian dates are based on the computation of Richard A. Parker and Waldo H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.–A.D. 75*, BUS 19 (Providence: Brown University Press, 1956): 31. See also the online Babylonian Calendar Converter available at http://www.staff.science.uu.nl/~gent0113/babylon/babycal_converter.htm#converter.

² “Since inscriptions in Egypt dated to Xerxes began to appear early in 484, his suppression of the Egyptian revolt (which began during Darius I’s reign) can be dated to 485. With Egypt under control again, Xerxes was free to direct his attention to the campaign against Greece. With good reason, then, it has been suggested that the 180-day “banquet” in Xerxes’ third year was connected with laying plans for that Greek campaign. Because of the intense heat at Susa in the summer time, it is possible that this lengthy conference took place in the winter, or from the fall to the spring according to the chronology of Esther. Since it seems reasonable to conclude that these six months from Esther would have ended in the spring, the seven-day celebration that followed it could also fit well with the New Year’s festival.” For more detail, see William H. Shea, “Esther and History,” *AUSS* 14 (1976): 227–246 and Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul* (Concordia Publishing House, 2011): 192–195.

³ Since Esther was presented to Xerxes in the tenth month of the seventh year, she entered into the preparations no later than Shebat (February) of 479.

⁴ Esther’s fast took place some time between April 17, 474 and June 25, 474. I have chosen to connect the fast with the events of June 25 rather than earlier in April or May.

- (12) 5:1 – on the 3rd day of the fast, Esther approaches Ahasuerus (June 24, 474).
- (13) 5:4 – Ahasuerus and Haman are Esther’s guests on the 3rd day (June 24, 474).
- (14) 5:8 – Esther invites Haman and the king back for another feast on the 4th day (June 24, 474).
- (15) 5:9 – Haman builds Mordecai’s gallows (June 24, 474).
- (16) 6:1 – during the night (early morning of the 4th day) Ahasuerus can’t sleep (June 25, 474).
- (17) 7:2 – Esther reveals Haman’s scheme (June 25, 474).
- (18) 8:1 – Ahasuerus gives Esther Haman’s estate (June 25, 474).
- (19) 8:9 – Mordecai issues an edict on the 12th year, 3rd month, 23rd day (June 25, 474).
- (20) 9:1 – the Jews defend themselves on the 12th year, 12th month, 13th day (April 5, 473).
- (21) 9:15 – the Jews in Susa kill 300 men on the 14th day (April 6, 473).
- (22) 9:17 – Jews in the provinces fight on the 13th day and rest on the 14th day (April 5–6, 473).
- (23) 9:18 – Jews in Susa fight on the 13th and 14th day and rest on the 15th day (April 5–7, 473).
- (24) 9:19 – holiday for Jews in the provinces is on the 14th day (April 6, 473).
- (25) 9:21 – holiday officially declared for the 14th and 15th days (April 6–7, 473).