

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

Ezra 4:6

6 Now in the reign of Ahasuerus, in 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 Now it took place in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces,
 2 in those days as King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne which *was* at the citadel in Susa,
 3 in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his princes and attendants, the army *officers* of Persia and Media, the nobles and the princes of his provinces being in his presence.
 4 And he displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty for many days, 180 days.

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

Esther 1:5–9

5 When these days were completed, the king gave a banquet lasting seven days for all the people who were present at the citadel in Susa, from the greatest to the least, in the court of the garden of the king's palace.
 6 *There were hangings of* fine white and violet linen held by cords of fine purple linen on silver rings and marble columns, *and* couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and precious stones.
 7 Drinks were served in golden vessels of various kinds, and the royal wine was plentiful according to the king's bounty.
 8 The drinking was *done* according to the law, there was no compulsion, for so the king had given orders to each official of his household that he should do according to the desires of each person.
 9 Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the palace which 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 commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus,
 11 to bring Queen Vashti before the king with *her* royal crown in order to display her beauty to the people and the princes, for she was beautiful.
 12 But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. Then the king became very angry and his wrath burned within him.
 13 Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times—for it was the custom of the king so *to speak* before all who knew law and justice
 14 and were close to him: Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media who had access to the king's presence and sat in the first place in the kingdom—
 15 "According to law, what is to be done with Queen Vashti, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus *delivered* by the eunuchs?"
 16 In the presence of the king and the princes, Memucan said, "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but *also* all the princes and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.
 17 For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women causing them to look with contempt on their husbands by saying, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in to his presence, but she did not come.'
 18 This day the ladies of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's conduct will speak in *the same way* to all the king's princes, and there will be plenty of contempt and anger.
 19 If it pleases the king, let a royal edict be issued by him and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media so that it cannot be repealed, that Vashti may no longer come into the presence of King Ahasuerus, and let the king give her royal position to another who is more worthy than she.
 20 When the king's edict which he will make is heard throughout all his kingdom, great as it is, then all women will give honor to their husbands, great and small."
 21 *This* word pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed.
 22 So he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province according to its script and to every people according to their language, that every man should be the master in his own house and the one who speaks in the language of his own 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 had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her.
- 2 Then the king's attendants, who served him, said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king.
- 3 Let the king appoint overseers in all the provinces of his kingdom that they may gather every beautiful young virgin to the citadel of Susa, to the harem, into the custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let their cosmetics be given *them*.
- 4 Then let the young lady who pleases the king be queen in place of Vashti." And the matter pleased the king, and he did accordingly.
- 5 *Now* there was at the citadel in Susa a Jew whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite,
- 6 who had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the captives who had been exiled with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had exiled.
- 7 He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had no father or mother. Now the young lady was beautiful of form and face, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.
- 8 So it came about when the command and decree of the king were heard and many young ladies were gathered to the citadel of Susa into the custody of Hegai, that Esther was taken to the king's palace into the custody of Hegai, who was in charge of the women.
- 9 Now the young lady pleased him and found favor with him. So he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and food, gave her seven choice maids from the king's palace and transferred her and her maids to the best place in the harem.

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

Esther 2:10–14

- 10 Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make *them* known.
- 11 Every day Mordecai walked back and forth in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and how she fared.
- 12 Now when the turn of each young lady came to go in to King Ahasuerus, after the end of her twelve months under the regulations for the women—for the days of their beautification were completed as follows: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and the cosmetics for women—
- 13 the young lady would go in to the king in this way: anything that she desired was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace.
- 14 In the evening she would go in and in the morning she would return to the second harem, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not again go in to the king unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.

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

Esther 2:15–18

- 15 Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai who had taken her as his daughter, came to go in to the king, she did not request anything except what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the women, advised. And Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her.
- 16 So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus to his royal palace in the tenth month which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.
- 17 The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found favor and kindness with him more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.
- 18 Then the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his princes and his servants; he also made a holiday for the provinces and gave gifts according to the king's bounty.

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

Esther 2:19–23

- 19 When the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate.
- 20 Esther had not yet made known her kindred or her people, even as Mordecai had commanded her; for Esther did what Mordecai told her as she had done when under his care.
- 21 In those days, while Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's officials from those who guarded the door, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.

22 But the plot became known to Mordecai and he told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name.
 23 Now when the plot was investigated and found *to be so*, they were both hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the Book of the Chronicles in the king's presence.

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

Esther 3:1–11

1 After these events King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and established his authority over all the princes who *were* with him.
 2 All the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman; for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage.
 3 Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why are you transgressing the king's command?"
 4 Now it was when they had spoken daily to him and he would not listen to them, that they told Haman to see whether Mordecai's reason would stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew.
 5 When Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage to him, Haman was filled with rage.
 6 But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him *who* the people of Mordecai *were*; therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, who *were* throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.
 7 In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, Pur, that is the lot, was cast before Haman from day to day and from month *to month*, until the twelfth month, that is the month Adar.
 8 Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from *those* of all *other* people and they do not observe the king's laws, so it is not in the king's interest to let them remain.
 9 If it is pleasing to the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who carry on the *king's* business, to put into the king's treasuries."
 10 Then the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.
 11 The king said to Haman, "The silver is yours, and the people *also*, to do with them as you please."

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

Esther 3:12–15

12 Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and it was written just as Haman commanded to the king's satraps, to the governors who were over each province and to the princes of each people, each province according to its script, each people according to its language, being written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring.
 13 Letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces to destroy, to kill and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to seize their possessions as plunder.
 14 A copy of the edict to be issued as law in every province was published to all the peoples so that they should be ready for this day.
 15 The couriers went out impelled by the king's command while the decree was issued at the citadel in Susa; and while the king and Haman sat down to drink, the city of Susa was in confusion.

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

Esther 4:1–14

1 When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly.
 2 He went as far as the king's gate, for no one was to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth.
 3 In each and every province where the command and decree of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing; and many lay on sackcloth and ashes.
 4 Then Esther's maidens and her eunuchs came and told her, and the queen writhed in great anguish. And she sent garments to clothe Mordecai that he might remove his sackcloth from him, but he did not accept *them*.
 5 Then Esther summoned Hathach from the king's eunuchs, whom the king had appointed to attend her, and ordered him *to go* to Mordecai to learn what this *was* and why it *was*.
 6 So Hathach went out to Mordecai to the city square in front of the king's gate.
 7 Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact amount of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews.

8 He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict which had been issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show Esther and inform her, and to order her to go in to the king to implore his favor and to plead with him for her people.

9 Hathach came back and related Mordecai's words to Esther.

10 Then Esther spoke to Hathach and ordered him *to reply* to Mordecai:

11 "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days."

12 They related Esther's words to Mordecai.

13 Then Mordecai told *them* to reply to Esther, "Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews.

14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?"

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

Esther 4:15–17

15 Then Esther told *them* to reply to Mordecai,

16 "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish."

17 So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had 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).

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," *AUSJ* 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.

- (11) 4:16 – Esther’s 3 day fast during the 12th year (June 22–24, 474).⁴
- (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).

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.