

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

Ezra 4:6

6 At the beginning of the reign of Ahasuerus they [*the local residents*] filed 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 The following events happened in the days of Ahasuerus. (I am referring to that Ahasuerus who used to rule over a hundred and twenty-seven provinces extending all the way from India to Ethiopia.)
 2 In those days, as King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa the citadel,
 3 in the third year of his reign he provided a banquet for all his officials and his servants. The army of Persia and Media was present, as well as the nobles and the officials of the provinces.
 4 He displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his majestic greatness for a lengthy period of time—a hundred and eighty days, to be exact!

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

Esther 1:5–9

5 When those days were completed, the king then provided a seven-day banquet for all the people who were present in Susa the citadel, for those of highest standing to the most lowly. It was held in the court located in the garden of the royal palace.
 6 The furnishings included linen and purple curtains hung by cords of the finest linen and purple wool on silver rings, alabaster columns, gold and silver couches displayed on a floor made of valuable stones of alabaster, mother-of-pearl, and mineral stone.
 7 Drinks were served in golden containers, all of which differed from one another. Royal wine was available in abundance at the king's expense.
 8 There were no restrictions on the drinking, for the king had instructed all of his supervisors that they should do as everyone so desired.
 9 Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in King Ahasuerus' royal palace.

Vashti Defies Ahasuerus (April 9, 482 BC)

Esther 1:10–22

10 On the seventh day, as King Ahasuerus was feeling the effects of the wine, he ordered Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven eunuchs who attended him,
 11 to bring Queen Vashti into the king's presence wearing her royal high turban. He wanted to show the people and the officials her beauty, for she was very attractive.
 12 But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's bidding conveyed through the eunuchs. Then the king became extremely angry, and his rage consumed him.
 13 The king then inquired of the wise men who were discerners of the times—for it was the royal custom to confer with all those who were proficient in laws and legalities.
 14 Those who were closest to him were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan. These men were the seven officials of Persia and Media who saw the king on a regular basis and had the most prominent offices in the kingdom.
 15 The king asked, "By law, what should be done to Queen Vashti in light of the fact that she has not obeyed the instructions of King Ahasuerus conveyed through the eunuchs?"
 16 Memucan then replied to the king and the officials, "The wrong of Queen Vashti is not against the king alone, but against all the officials and all the people who are throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.
 17 For the matter concerning the queen will spread to all the women, leading them to treat their husbands with contempt, saying, 'When King Ahasuerus gave orders to bring Queen Vashti into his presence, she would not come.'
 18 And this very day the noble ladies of Persia and Media who have heard the matter concerning the queen will respond in the same way to all the royal officials, and there will be more than enough contempt and anger!
 19 If the king is so inclined, let a royal edict go forth from him, and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media that cannot be repealed, that Vashti may not come into the presence of King Ahasuerus, and let the king convey her royalty to another who is more deserving than she.
 20 And let the king's decision which he will enact be disseminated throughout all his kingdom, vast though it is. Then all the women will give honor to their husbands, from the most prominent to the lowly."
 21 The matter seemed appropriate to the king and the officials. So the king acted on the advice of Memucan.
 22 He sent letters throughout all the royal provinces, to each province according to its own script and to each people according to its

own language, that every man should be ruling his family and should be speaking the language of his own people.

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

Esther 2:1–9

- 1 When these things had been accomplished and the rage of King Ahasuerus had diminished, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decided against her.
- 2 The king's servants who attended him said, "Let a search be conducted in the king's behalf for attractive young women.
- 3 And let the king appoint officers throughout all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the attractive young women to Susa the citadel, to the harem under the authority of Hegai, the king's eunuch who oversees the women, and let him provide whatever cosmetics they desire.
- 4 Let the young woman whom the king finds most attractive become queen in place of Vashti." This seemed like a good idea to the king, so he acted accordingly.
- 5 Now there happened to be a Jewish man in Susa the citadel whose name was Mordecai. He was the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjaminite,
- 6 who had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the captives who had been carried into exile with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken into exile.
- 7 Now he was acting as the guardian of Hadassah (that is, Esther), the daughter of his uncle, for neither her father nor her mother was alive. This young woman was very attractive and had a beautiful figure. When her father and mother died, Mordecai had raised her as if she were his own daughter.
- 8 It so happened that when the king's edict and his law became known many young women were taken to Susa the citadel to be placed under the authority of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the royal palace to be under the authority of Hegai, who was overseeing the women.
- 9 This young woman pleased him, and she found favor with him. He quickly provided her with her cosmetics and her rations; he also provided her with the seven specially chosen young women who were from the palace. He then transferred her and her young women to the best quarters in the harem.

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

Esther 2:10–14

- 10 Now Esther had not disclosed her people or her lineage, for Mordecai had instructed her not to do so.
- 11 And day after day Mordecai used to walk back and forth in front of the court of the harem in order to learn how Esther was doing and what might happen to her.
- 12 At the end of the twelve months that were required for the women, when the turn of each young woman arrived to go to King Ahasuerus—for in this way they had to fulfill their time of cosmetic treatment: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfume and various ointments used by women—
- 13 the woman would go to the king in the following way: Whatever she asked for would be provided for her to take with her from the harem to the royal palace.
- 14 In the evening she went, and in the morning she returned to a separate part of the harem, to the authority of Shaashgaz the king's eunuch who was overseeing the concubines. She would not go back to the king unless the king was pleased with her and she was requested by name.

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

Esther 2:15–18

- 15 When it became the turn of Esther daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai (who had raised her as if she were his own daughter) to go to the king, she did not request anything except what Hegai the king's eunuch, who was overseer of the women, had recommended. Yet Esther met with the approval of all who saw her.
- 16 Then Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus at his royal residence in the tenth month (that is, the month of Tebeth) in the seventh year of his reign.
- 17 And the king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she met with his loving approval more than all the other young women. So he placed the royal high turban on her head and appointed her queen in place of Vashti.
- 18 Then the king prepared a large banquet for all his officials and his servants—it was actually Esther's banquet. He also set aside a holiday for the provinces, and he provided for offerings at the king's expense.

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

Esther 2:19–23

19 Now when the young women were being gathered again, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate.
 20 Esther was still not divulging her lineage or her people, just as Mordecai had instructed her. Esther continued to do whatever Mordecai said, just as she had done when he was raising her.
 21 In those days while Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who protected the entrance, became angry and plotted to assassinate King Ahasuerus.
 22 When Mordecai learned of the conspiracy, he informed Queen Esther, and Esther told the king in Mordecai's behalf.
 23 The king then had the matter investigated and, finding it to be so, had the two conspirators hanged on a gallows. It was then recorded in the daily chronicles in the king's presence.

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

Esther 3:1–11

1 Some time later King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, exalting him and setting his position above that of all the officials who were with him.
 2 As a result, all the king's servants who were at the king's gate were bowing and paying homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded. However, Mordecai did not bow, nor did he pay him homage.
 3 Then the servants of the king who were at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why are you violating the king's commandment?"
 4 And after they had spoken to him day after day without his paying any attention to them, they informed Haman to see whether this attitude on Mordecai's part would be permitted. Furthermore, he had disclosed to them that he was a Jew.
 5 When Haman saw that Mordecai was not bowing or paying homage to him, he was filled with rage.
 6 But the thought of striking out against Mordecai alone was repugnant to him, for he had been informed of the identity of Mordecai's people. So Haman sought to destroy all the Jews (that is, the people of Mordecai) who were in all the kingdom of Ahasuerus.
 7 In the first month (that is, the month of Nisan), in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus' reign, pur (that is, the lot) was cast before Haman in order to determine a day and a month. It turned out to be the twelfth month (that is, the month of Adar).
 8 Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a particular people that is dispersed and spread among the inhabitants throughout all the provinces of your kingdom whose laws differ from those of all other peoples. Furthermore, they do not observe the king's laws. It is not appropriate for the king to provide a haven for them.
 9 If the king is so inclined, let an edict be issued to destroy them. I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to be conveyed to the king's treasuries for the officials who carry out this business."
 10 So the king removed his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, who was hostile toward the Jews.
 11 The king replied to Haman, "Keep your money, and do with those people whatever you wish."

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

Esther 3:12–15

12 So the royal scribes were summoned in the first month, on the thirteenth day of the month. Everything Haman commanded was written to the king's satraps and governors who were in every province and to the officials of every people, province by province according to its script and people by people according to its language. In the name of King Ahasuerus it was written and sealed with the king's signet ring.
 13 Letters were sent by the runners to all the king's provinces stating that they should destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jews, from youth to elderly, both women and children, on a particular day, namely the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month of Adar), and to loot and plunder their possessions.
 14 A copy of this edict was to be presented as law throughout every province; it was to be made known to all the inhabitants, so that they would be prepared for this day.
 15 The messengers scurried forth with the king's order. The edict was issued in Susa the citadel. While the king and Haman sat down to drink, the city of Susa was in an uproar!

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

Esther 4:1–14

1 Now when Mordecai became aware of all that had been done, he tore his garments and put on sackcloth and ashes. He went out into the city, crying out in a loud and bitter voice.
 2 But he went no further than the king's gate, for no one was permitted to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth.

3 Throughout each and every province where the king's edict and law were announced there was considerable mourning among the Jews, along with fasting, weeping, and sorrow. Sackcloth and ashes were characteristic of many.

4 When Esther's female attendants and her eunuchs came and informed her about Mordecai's behavior, the queen was overcome with anguish. Although she sent garments for Mordecai to put on so that he could remove his sackcloth, he would not accept them.

5 So Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs who had been placed at her service, and instructed him to find out the cause and reason for Mordecai's behavior.

6 So Hathach went to Mordecai at the plaza of the city in front of the king's gate.

7 Then Mordecai related to him everything that had happened to him, even the specific amount of money that Haman had offered to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews to be destroyed.

8 He also gave him a written copy of the law that had been disseminated in Susa for their destruction so that he could show it to Esther and talk to her about it. He also gave instructions that she should go to the king to implore him and petition him on behalf of her people.

9 So Hathach returned and related Mordecai's instructions to Esther.

10 Then Esther replied to Hathach with instructions for Mordecai:

11 "All the servants of the king and the people of the king's provinces know that there is only one law applicable to any man or woman who comes uninvited to the king in the inner court—that person will be put to death, unless the king extends to him the gold scepter, permitting him to be spared. Now I have not been invited to come to the king for some thirty days!"

12 When Esther's reply was conveyed to Mordecai,

13 he said to take back this answer to Esther:

14 "Don't imagine that because you are part of the king's household you will be the one Jew who will escape. If you keep quiet at this time, liberation and protection for the Jews will appear from another source, while you and your father's household perish. It may very well be that you have achieved royal status 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 sent this reply to Mordecai:

16 "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa and fast in my behalf. Don't eat and don't drink for three days, night or day. My female attendants and I will also fast in the same way. Afterward I will go to the king, even though it violates the law. If I perish, I perish!"

17 So Mordecai set out to do everything that Esther had instructed 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

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) 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
- (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).

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.