

We have talked about the people who returned to Jerusalem. Zerubbabel led the first group. Ezra went with the second group to Jerusalem. And Nehemiah was with the third group to go. We talked about how some of the people did not want to return to Jerusalem because they had been gone for so long.

Our lesson this week is from the book of Esther. The things we read about in the book of Esther happened after Zerubbabel led the first group to Jerusalem, and before the second group with Ezra.

The king of Persia at that time was Ahasuerus. (Esther 1:2) King Ahasuerus gave a feast in Shushan that lasted for 180 days. The king was showing off all his riches to the people.

When that feast was over, he gave a special feast that lasted for 7 days. (Esther 1:5) The feast was held in the beautifully decorated court of his garden. He served drinks in golden vessels. It was a great feast.

The king's wife, Vashti, was very beautiful. During the feast, the king sent for Queen Vashti to come to the feast. He wanted everyone to see how beautiful she was. (Esther 1:11) But, she refused to go. King Ahasuerus was very angry. He removed Vashti as the queen because she did not follow his orders. (Esther 1:19)

The king was going to choose a new queen. The most beautiful girls from the entire kingdom were brought to Shushan. The king was going to choose a queen from these girls to take the place of Vashti. (Esther 2:4)

One girl was a young Hebrew girl named Esther. Esther's parents were dead and she lived with an older cousin named Mordecai. Mordecai had raised Esther as if she was his own daughter. (Esther 2:7)

All the girls stayed together . The king's servant, Hagai, took care of the girls. Hagai liked Esther more than all the other girls. He gave her extra beauty supplies. He gave her the best place in the house. It took 12 months for the girls to prepare to meet the king. (Esther 2:12)

Finally, it was time to go before the king. When King Ahasuerus saw Esther, he loved her more than all the others. (Esther 2:17) He did not realize she was a Jewish girl. King Ahasuerus made Esther the new queen.

One day, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. He overheard two of the king's servants talking. They were talking about killing the king. Mordecai told Esther what the men said. (Esther 2:22) Esther went to the king and told him. The king had the two servants hanged at the gallows. It was written in the royal records that Mordecai had saved the king's life.

There was a very powerful man who worked for King Ahasuerus. His name was Haman. Haman was second to the king. King Ahasuerus ordered all the people to bow down to Haman when they saw him. Haman liked to feel so important. But Mordecai would never bow down to Haman. That made Haman very angry. (Esther 3:5)

Haman wanted Mordecai to die because he would not bow down to him. Haman told the king there was a group of people who refused to obey the king's orders. Haman offered to pay the king if he would allow him to kill them. Haman did not want to kill only Mordecai. He wanted all the Jews to die because they were "the people of Mordecai". (Esther 3:6)

King Ahasuerus agreed without even knowing who Haman was talking about. The king took his ring off his hand and gave it to Haman. (Esther 3:10) Letters were sent to the people of Persia. The letter ordered that every Jew would be killed on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month. (Esther 3:12)

Mordecai was very upset when he heard about the decree. Esther's maids and the servants told her how upset Mordecai was. Esther sent a servant named Hathach to find Mordecai and see what was wrong. (Esther 4:5) Mordecai sent a message to Esther telling her about the orders to kill all the Jews. He also sent a copy of the decree for her to see.

Mordecai asked Esther to go to King Ahasuerus and talk to him. Esther sent a message back to Mordecai. She told him she could not do that. By law, anyone who went to the king without him asking for them to come would be killed. (Esther 4:11) Mordecai sent another message to Esther. He told her if she did not go to the king, all her family would be killed. Mordecai told Esther that maybe she was sent to the kingdom for a reason. She sent a message back to Mordecai that she would do it. She said, "If I die, I die." (Esther 4:16)

On the third day, Esther went to the king. The king raised his scepter to welcome her. Esther asked the king and Haman to a banquet she had prepared for them. King Ahasuerus sent for Haman and they went to the banquet. (Esther 5:5)

At the banquet, King Ahasuerus asked Esther to tell him what she wanted and it would be done. Esther asked the king if he and Haman would come to another feast the next day. Then she would tell him what she wanted. (Ether 5:8) Haman was very happy to be invited to the banquet.

When Haman left, he saw Mordecai at the gate. Mordecai would not bow down to Haman. (Esther 5:9) Haman was very angry. Haman told his wife about it. She suggested that Haman build a gallows to hang Mordecai. Haman went out and built the gallows.

King Ahasuerus had trouble sleeping. He asked the servant to read the royal records to him. (Esther 6:1) As the servant was reading, he read about how Mordecai had saved the king's life. King Ahasuerus asked the servant how Mordecai had been honored for saving his life. The servant told the king that Mordecai had never been given a reward for what he had done. (Esther 6:3)

Haman went to see the king. The king asked Haman for some advice. He asked Haman what he thought should be done for a man to honor him. Haman thought the king was talking about him. Haman told the king that the man should be led through the city on a horse that had been ridden by the king. He said he should be led by a most noble prince. (Esther 6:8) The king agreed with Haman. He ordered Haman to lead the horse in the parade through the city to honor Mordecai. (Esther 6:10) Haman was not happy.

After the parade, the king's servants were sent to get Haman for the banquet. (Esther 6:14) At the banquet, Esther told the king how Haman was planning to kill her people. King Ahasuerus was very angry. The king walked out. Haman fell down in front of Esther begging her to let him live. When the king returned, he thought Haman was trying to hurt Esther. He ordered his servants to hang Haman. Haman died on the gallows that he had built for the purpose of hanging Mordecai. (Esther 7:10)

The king gave the house of Haman to Esther. (Esther 8:1) Mordecai went before the king. Esther told him they were cousins. The king had taken his ring from Haman. He gave the ring to Mordecai. Esther placed Mordecai over the house of Haman.

Esther begged the king to change the law Haman had made to kill the Jews. (Esther 8:3) The laws in Persia could not be changed, but laws could be added. So a decree was written saying the Jews could fight to defend themselves if anyone tried to hurt them.

A copy of the decree was sent for all the people to read. (Esther 8:13) The Jews got weapons and were ready to defend themselves on the 13th day of the 12th month. Once again, God had protected His people.

God provided a way to save His people. Mordecai sent out an order to the Jews to hold a feast on that day to remember how God saved them. The feast was called the feast of Purim. (Esther 9:26)

Mordecai was second to King Ahasuerus. He was great among the Jews. Mordecai was respected by all the people in the province. He always did his best for all the people. (Esther 10:3)