

ONE NIGHT WITH THE KING
BACKGROUND
THE STORY OF ESTHER

The life of Esther is one of the most inspiring Biblical accounts found in the Old Testament. Much beloved by Jews, Christians and Persians alike, Esther is the story of deliverance for the Jewish people. The events surrounding Esther's story form the basis for the Jewish holiday of Purim, celebrated by millions of Jews each year.

The story takes place during the era of the Persian Empire, when many of the Jewish people were scattered outside the promised land of Israel. Most lived in urban population centers such as Babylon.

Esther, an orphan, lived with her relative Mordecai, an official in the Persian court of Ahasuerus, generally believed to be Xerxes I. After his wife Vashti fell out of favor, Ahasuerus chose Esther to be his wife and queen.

Esther did not reveal to Ahasuerus that she was a Jew because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. In fact, Esther was born with the name Hadassah, but Mordecai felt it so obviously Jewish that he changed her name to Esther. Shortly after Esther became queen, Mordecai offended the king's prime minister, Haman, by refusing to bow down to him. Infuriated with Mordecai, Haman secured the king's permission to kill all the Jews in the Persian empire.

Esther, devoted to her heritage and Mordecai, faced the decision of whether or not to reveal the secret of her roots to the king. In those days, people who approached the king without permission, including the queen, did so at the risk of their lives. Because Esther chose her devotion to her people over royal protocol, Mordecai tells Esther in one of the Bible's most widely quoted passages, "who can say but that God has brought you into the palace for just such a time as this?"

Esther appealed to Ahasuerus on behalf of herself and her people, and the king found favor with her, sparing her life. The king, unable to countermand his original order, gave the Jews license to defend themselves against the enemy. The king also ordered Haman and his 10 sons to be hanged on the gallows Haman had originally planned and built specifically for Mordecai.

Thousands lost their lives on both sides, but the Jewish people survived.