

**RECAP**
**This week's focus: Each of us is an instrument in the hands of God.**

King Xerxes of Persia came to power in 486 B.C. and ruled an empire. He once hosted a six-month party for all his leaders at his palace in Susa. When his trophy wife, Queen Vashti, was summoned for all to see, she refused to appear. His advisers told him to strip her of her crown in case her "bad example" would lead to a women's liberation movement.

Without a queen, the king commissioned a kingdom-wide beauty pageant. Young women from every province were taken to a six-month beauty treatment at the royal spa. One of those was a Jewish girl named Esther. She lived in the capital city of Susa, where she had been raised by her cousin Mordecai. Esther won the contest but kept her ethnicity a secret. Not much later, Mordecai learned of a plot to kill the king and passed the news to his cousin. The king was rescued, and the annals recorded Mordecai as his rescuer.

King Xerxes appointed a man named Haman to the highest position possible. It was clear that the power had gotten to his head when he grew infuriated over Mordecai's refusal to pay him homage. To exact his revenge, Haman deceived the king into issuing a decree to exterminate Mordecai and the entire Jewish population of Persia. He cast a lot, or "pur", to choose a single day of unfettered violence against the Jews. Mordecai sent word to Esther to beg the king for mercy. Queen Esther feared for her own life because no one could legally approach the king without an official invitation. Mordecai persuaded her when he said, **"Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"** She courageously responded, **"If I perish, I perish."**

After she and all the Jews in Susa fasted for three days, she approached the king. He graciously received her and offered to grant her any desire. She requested he and Haman join her for a banquet. She also invited them both to a second fancy but fatal feast the next evening. Haman was ecstatic to be the exclusive guest at these private parties, but he could not get past his rage over Mordecai's insolence. His friends suggested he erect a pole on which to impale Mordecai. Delighted, he had it done right away.

Through providential insomnia that night, while reading through the royal records, the king realized that Mordecai had never been recognized for thwarting the assassination attempt. When he asked Haman for advice on how to reward his favorite person, Haman made the false assumption that the reward was for him. Moments later, much to his annoyance, he was giving his nemesis fancy clothes, leading him through the streets, telling everyone how wonderful Mordecai was. At the next banquet, Esther revealed Haman's plot to destroy her people, the king left the room furious. Haman fell upon her as he begged for mercy, and the King returned just in time to assume Haman was now after the Queen. He ordered that Haman be impaled on the very pole prepared for Mordecai.

The laws of the land kept the king from repealing his original edict. Instead, he allowed Mordecai to issue a counter-edict so that the Jews could defend themselves. The day of destruction became a day of deliverance for the Jews and is still celebrated today during the Feast of Purim.

Though the lot was cast, God is the author of the story. Even while living in exile, God was looking out for His people. In Esther's rescue of her people from a great injustice, we see God's heart for saving us all, and the assurance that in God's timing, true justice will prevail.

**SHARE (5-10 min)**

Icebreaker Question: What's the biggest, most lavish party you have attended?

**STUDY (about 30 min) Read Esther 1-10**

1. Reflect on last week's reading and the sermon. Is there any truth that stands out as being particularly helpful, insightful, or difficult to grasp?
2. The book of Esther has been called the "godless book" because God's name is never mentioned. Prayer, the Law, sacrifices, and temple worship are also conspicuously absent. Where can you find God's supernatural blessings in the story anyway?
3. Look up Isaiah 48:20, Jeremiah 29:10, 50:8, & 51:6. What do these verses say about the Jews like Mordecai and Esther who stayed behind? What do you learn about God through His providential care of the Jews outside of the Promised Land?
4. What practical life lessons does Haman teach us about pride, self-centeredness, and hatred?
5. Review the correspondence between Mordecai and Esther concerning an appeal to the king. What is the relationship between God's providence and our responsibility?
6. What risk was Queen Esther taking by approaching the king and how did she prepare for it? What factors do you suppose could account for Esther finding favor in the eyes of the king?
7. Queen Esther was willing to risk her life to save her people. Can you share a time when you took a risk to do what was right?
8. God in His providence has placed you in the lives of others "for such a time as this". What does it mean for you to be His instrument to bring salvation to the world around you?

**SUPPORT (15 min)**

Pray that God would help you see His hand at work in your circumstances. Pray that you would be courageous and faithful in being His instrument to bring salvation to the world.