

Esther

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Summary: *King Ahasuerus hosts a lavish banquet lasting 180 days in Susa, followed by a seven-day feast for the entire citadel. Queen Vashti refuses his summons to display herself before the drunken court. Humiliated, the king consults his advisors, who warn that Vashti's defiance will embolden women across the empire. The king issues an irrevocable decree deposing Vashti and commanding that every man rule his own household.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Esther opens not with Israel, not with a prophet, and not with God — it opens with a pagan king throwing a party. The entire narrative machinery of the book is set in motion by a drunk king's wounded ego. The Persian court's absurd overreaction to a domestic dispute — issuing an empire-wide decree about marital authority — establishes the book's characteristic tone: deadly serious events driven by characters who are often ridiculous. The 180-day display of wealth followed by a seven-day drinking feast is excess on a scale that invites the reader to see this empire as both powerful and deeply foolish.*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew *mishteh* ('feast, drinking-feast') appears twenty times in Esther — more than in any other biblical book. We render it 'feast' or 'banquet' depending on context, but the root *shatah* ('to drink') is always present. In verse 10 *ketov lev ha-melekh bayyayin* ('when the king's heart was merry with wine') is a Hebrew idiom for being drunk — we render 'when the king was in high spirits from wine' to preserve the idiom's force without clinical language. Verse 22 specifies that the decree went out *ke-leshon ammo* ('according to the language of his people') — the Persian bureaucratic apparatus of translation is a real historical detail that foreshadows the later decrees.*

Connections: *The book of Esther is unique in the Hebrew Bible: it never mentions God by name. No prayer is explicitly recorded, no covenant is invoked, no prophet speaks. Yet the narrative is saturated with 'coincidences' that the reader is meant to recognize as providential — the king's insomnia in chapter 6, Esther's position in the court, the timing of Mordecai's unrewarded service. The Persian imperial setting connects to Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, all of which navigate Jewish identity within foreign power structures. Vashti's deposition in chapter 1 creates the vacancy that places Esther in position — what looks like court intrigue is the hidden preparation for Israel's deliverance.*

¹In the days of Ahasuerus — the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Cush over one hundred twenty-seven provinces — ²in those days, when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in the citadel of Susa — ³in the third year of his reign, he held a

feast for all his officials and servants. The military force of Persia and Media, the nobility, and the provincial governors were before him. ⁴He displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor of his magnificent greatness for many days — one hundred eighty days. ⁵When those days were completed, the king held a seven-day feast for all the people present in the citadel of Susa, from the greatest to the least, in the courtyard of the garden of the king's pavilion. ⁶White cotton curtains and violet hangings were fastened with cords of fine linen and purple cloth to silver rods on marble columns. Couches of gold and silver rested on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and colored stone. ⁷Drinks were served in golden vessels, each vessel different from the next, and royal wine flowed abundantly, befitting the king's generosity. ⁸The drinking was by rule: no one was compelled. The king had instructed every steward of his household to serve each person according to his own desire. ⁹Queen Vashti also held a feast for the women in the royal palace of King Ahasuerus. ¹⁰On the seventh day, when the king was in high spirits from wine, he ordered Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas — the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus — ¹¹to bring Queen Vashti before the king wearing the royal crown, to display her beauty to the peoples and the officials, for she was stunning in appearance. ¹²But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. The king was furious, and his rage burned within him. ¹³The king consulted the wise men who understood the times — for this was the king's practice with all who knew law and judgment. ¹⁴Those closest to him were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan — the seven officials of Persia and Media who had access to the king's presence and held the highest rank in the kingdom. ¹⁵"According to the law, what is to be done with Queen Vashti, since she has not obeyed the command of King Ahasuerus delivered through the eunuchs?" ¹⁶Memucan declared before the king and the officials, "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but all the officials and all the peoples in every province of King Ahasuerus. ¹⁷For the queen's behavior will become known to all women, causing them to look on their husbands with contempt, saying, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come!' ¹⁸This very day, the noblewomen of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's behavior will say the same to all the king's officials — and there will be no end of contempt and anger." ¹⁹If it pleases the king, let a royal decree go out from him, and let it be written into the laws of Persia and Media so that it cannot be revoked: Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus, and the king will give her royal position to another who is better than she is. ²⁰When the king's edict is proclaimed throughout his entire kingdom — for it is vast — all women will give honor to their husbands, from the greatest to the least." ²¹The proposal pleased the king and the officials, and the king acted on Memucan's recommendation. ²²He sent letters to every royal province — to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language — declaring that every man should be master in his own household and speak the language of his own people.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The opening *vayyehi bimei* ('and it was in the days of') is a formulaic narrative opener shared with Ruth 1:1 and other stories set in a specific historical period. The parenthetical identification — *hu' Achashverosh* ('this is the Ahasuerus') — distinguishes this king from others of the same name. The name *Achashverosh* is generally identified with the Persian king Xerxes I (486-465 BCE). The domain 'from India to Cush' (*me-Hoddu ve-ad Kush*) describes the full extent of the Achaemenid Empire, from the Indus Valley to Upper Egypt/Nubia.
2. The phrase *kissei malkhuto* ('throne of his kingdom') emphasizes established rule — Ahasuerus is seated, secure, at the height of his power. *Shushan ha-birah* ('Susa the citadel') refers to the fortified royal complex within the larger city of Susa. The word *birah* ('citadel, fortress, capital') appears frequently in *Esther* and will become the setting for most of the book's action.
3. The *misteh* ('feast, banquet') is the first of many in the book — the word appears twenty times in *Esther*. The guest list is a descending hierarchy: *sarav* ('his officials'), *avadav* ('his servants' — royal functionaries), *cheil Paras u-Madai* ('the army of Persia and Media'), *ha-partemim* ('the nobles' — a Persian loanword for aristocrats), and *sarei ha-medinot* ('governors of the provinces'). This is not a dinner party but a political assembly cloaked in festivity.
4. The accumulation of near-synonyms — *osher kevod malkhuto* ('the riches of the glory of his kingdom') and *yeqar tif'eret gedulato* ('the honor of the splendor of his greatness') — piles up excess in the language itself. The Hebrew mirrors what it describes: opulence to the point of absurdity. One hundred eighty days is six months of display — this is not hospitality but propaganda, a show of imperial power designed to overawe.

5. After the six-month display for the elite, a second seven-day feast extends to all the people (*kol ha-am*) in the citadel — *lemigadol ve-ad qatan* ('from great to small') indicates social inclusiveness within the palace complex. The location — *chatsar ginnat bitan ha-melekh* ('the courtyard of the garden of the king's pavilion') — is a specific architectural space: an outdoor court within the royal garden, adjacent to the palace pavilion (*bitan*, a Persian loanword).
6. This verse is a catalog of luxury. The Hebrew piles up rare or borrowed words for fabrics and stones: *chur* ('white cotton' or 'white linen'), *karpas* ('fine cotton' — a Persian or Sanskrit loanword), *tekhelet* ('violet-blue' — the famous blue dye), *butz* ('fine linen'), *argaman* ('purple' — Tyrian purple). The pavement materials — *bahat* ('porphyry' or 'alabaster'), *shesh* ('marble'), *dar* ('mother-of-pearl'), and *socharet* ('dark stone' or 'mosaic tile') — include terms that appear only here in the Hebrew Bible. The accumulation of foreign loanwords mirrors the cosmopolitan extravagance of the Persian court.
7. The phrase *kelim mi-kelim shonim* ('vessels differing from vessels') emphasizes that no two cups were alike — individualized luxury rather than mass production. The wine is *yein malkhut rav* ('royal wine in abundance'), and the phrase *ke-yad ha-melekh* ('according to the hand of the king') means 'in keeping with the king's means' or 'befitting royal liberality.' We render this as 'befitting the king's generosity' to capture the idiom.
8. The phrase *ha-shetiyyah kha-dat ein ones* ('the drinking was according to the law; no one was forced') refers to a Persian custom where guests were sometimes obligated to match the king's drinking. Here the king suspends the rule — each man drinks *ki-retson ish va-ish* ('according to the desire of each and every man'). The irony is potent: the king proclaims freedom in drinking but will soon demand total compliance in everything else.
9. *Vashti's* separate *mishteh nashim* ('feast for women') reflects the social segregation of the Persian court. She is introduced as *Vashti ha-malkah* ('*Vashti* the queen') — she holds the title, the authority, and her own sphere of hospitality. The detail that her feast takes place in *beit ha-malkhut* ('the royal house') belonging to *Ahasuerus* foreshadows the coming conflict: *Vashti* exercises queenly prerogative in the king's own house.
10. The idiom *ke-tov lev ha-melekh bayyayin* ('when the king's heart was good with wine') means he was drunk. The narrator does not soften this — the decision that follows is made under the influence of alcohol. The seven *sarisim* ('eunuchs' — court officials, possibly castrated) have Persian names and serve as intermediaries between the king and the women's quarters. The number seven is recurring in this chapter: seven days, seven eunuchs, seven advisors.
11. The command to bring *Vashti be-kheter malkhut* ('wearing the royal crown') to *lehar'ot* ('to display, to show off') her beauty reduces the queen to an exhibit. The verb *har'ah* is the same used in verse 4 for the king displaying his wealth — *Vashti* is being added to the catalog of royal possessions. The phrase *ki tovat mar'eh hi* ('for she was good of appearance') explains the king's motive but also underscores the dehumanization: she is summoned not as queen but as spectacle.
12. The verb *tema'en* ('she refused') is stark and unqualified — no explanation, no negotiation, no counter-message. The text gives no reason for *Vashti's* refusal, and the silence is deliberate. Readers have speculated endlessly (dignity, modesty, counter-protest), but the narrator lets the refusal stand without motivation. The king's response — *vayyiqtsot me'od va-chamato ba'arah vo* ('he was extremely angry and his wrath burned in him') — uses two expressions for rage, doubling the intensity. A drunk king denied a spectacle is a dangerous situation.
13. The *chakhamim yode'ei ha-ittim* ('wise men who knew the times') were court advisors skilled in interpreting omens, precedent, and political timing. The phrase *yode'ei dat va-din* ('those who knew law and judgment') describes a specific class of legal experts. The king's reliance on advisors for what is essentially a personal domestic matter elevates *Vashti's* refusal into a constitutional crisis — exactly the escalation the advisors will exploit.
14. The phrase *ro'ei penei ha-melekh* ('those who see the king's face') is a technical term for officials with direct access to the king — a privilege in Persian court protocol where the king was normally screened from view. The seven *sarei Paras u-Madai* ('officials of Persia and Media') parallel the seven eunuchs of verse 10 — the number seven structures the chapter. *Ha-yoshevim ri'shonah ba-malkhut* ('who sit first in the kingdom') indicates highest rank. All seven have Persian names.
15. The king frames the question as a legal matter — *ke-dat mah la'asot* ('according to the law, what is to be done?') — rather than a personal grievance. This juridical framing transforms a domestic dispute into a matter of state. The phrase *lo asatah et ma'amar* ('she did not perform the command') uses *ma'amar*, a word for royal decree, making *Vashti's* refusal sound like treason rather than marital disagreement.
16. *Memucan's* response is a masterpiece of political escalation. He takes a personal affront — a wife's refusal to appear — and inflates it into an empire-wide crisis: *lo al ha-melekh levaddo avatah* ('not against the king alone has she offended') but against *kol ha-sarim ve-al kol ha-ammim* ('all the officials and all the peoples'). The verb *avatah* ('she has done wrong, she has offended') frames *Vashti's* act as a crime against the state. The absurdity is evident, but the political logic is real: advisors derive power from crises they help solve.
17. *Memucan's* reasoning — *ki yetse devar ha-malkah al kol ha-nashim* ('for the word of the queen will go out to all the women') — argues contagion: one woman's defiance will embolden every woman in the empire. The verb *lehavzot* ('to despise, to regard with contempt') describes the feared result: wives despising (*bavzot*) their husbands *be-eineihen* ('in their eyes'). The fear is not just disobedience but loss of male honor — a wife's contempt made visible.
18. *Memucan* heightens the urgency: *ha-yom ha-zeh* ('this very day') — the crisis is immediate. The *sarot Paras u-Madai* ('noblewomen of Persia and Media') are the wives of the very officials in the room, making the threat personal. The phrase *u-khedai bizzayon va-qatsef* ('and enough contempt and wrath') is terse — 'there will be sufficient contempt and anger' to destabilize households across the empire. The logic is circular: *Vashti's* defiance produces contempt, which produces anger, which produces more defiance.
19. The formula *im al ha-melekh tov* ('if it is good to the king' — 'if it pleases the king') is standard Persian court protocol for making proposals. *Memucan's* recommendation has three elements: (1) a royal decree (*devar malkhut*), (2) written into irrevocable law (*datei Paras u-Madai*), (3)

permanent banishment of Vashti with her position given to *li-re'utah ha-tovah mimmenah* ('to her companion who is better than she'). The word *re'utah* ('her companion, her fellow') is ironic — the replacement is described as a peer, but Vashti herself had no say in the matter.

- 20.** The word *pitgam* ('edict, decree, sentence') is another Persian loanword — the book of Esther deploys Persian administrative vocabulary with precision. *Memucan* promises that the decree will produce universal wifely obedience: *kol ha-nashim yittenu yeqar le-va'aleihen* ('all the women will give honor to their husbands'). The phrase *lemigadol ve-ad qatan* ('from great to small') appeared in verse 5 describing the feast's inclusiveness — now the same totality applies to the enforced social order. The narrator presents this logic without comment, but the disproportion speaks for itself: an empire-wide decree to solve one marriage.
- 21.** The phrase *vayyitav ha-davar be-einei ha-melekh* ('the matter was good in the eyes of the king') is the standard formula for royal approval. That a drunk king accepts counsel to issue an irrevocable empire-wide decree about domestic authority — and does so on the same evening — is presented without irony by the narrator, but the reader supplies it. The king who proclaimed freedom of drinking (verse 8) now legislates the opposite of freedom in every household.
- 22.** The distribution formula — *el medinah u-medinah ki-khtavah ve-el am va-am ki-leshono* ('to each province in its script and to each people in its language') — will recur in 3:12 and 8:9 for the genocide decree and its counter-decree. The multilingual bureaucracy of the Persian Empire is a historical reality that the narrator uses as a literary device: the same administrative machinery that distributes a petty decree about household authority will later distribute a death sentence against the Jews.
- 22.** The final clause — *u-medabber ki-leshon ammo* ('and speaking the language of his own people') — is puzzling. It may mean that the husband's language should prevail in mixed-language households, or it may be a garbled addition. The text is difficult and commentators disagree.

2

Summary: *After the king's anger subsides, his attendants propose a search for beautiful young women throughout the empire to replace Vashti. Mordecai, a Benjaminite exile living in Susa, has raised his orphaned cousin Hadassah — also called Esther. She is taken into the king's harem, where she wins favor from Hegai the custodian, who gives her preferential treatment. On Mordecai's instruction, Esther conceals her Jewish identity. After twelve months of cosmetic preparation, each young woman goes to the king for one night. When Esther's turn comes, she asks for nothing beyond what Hegai advises, and she wins the king's favor above all others. Ahasuerus sets the royal crown on her head and makes her queen in Vashti's place, then hosts a great feast in her honor. Meanwhile, Mordecai sits at the king's gate and uncovers an assassination plot by two royal eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh. Mordecai reports it to Esther, who tells the king in Mordecai's name. The conspirators are executed, and the matter is recorded in the royal chronicles.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The chapter operates on two tracks simultaneously. On the surface, it reads as a Persian court romance — a beautiful woman rises from obscurity to become queen. Beneath that surface, the machinery of future deliverance is being assembled piece by piece: Esther is placed in the palace, her identity is hidden, Mordecai takes up a position at the gate, and an unrewarded act of loyalty is written into the official record. None of these elements appears significant at the moment they occur. Their meaning will only become visible in chapters 5 through 7. The twelve-month beauty treatment is not incidental detail — it reveals the dehumanizing scale of the process. These women are not being courted; they are being prepared for a single night with a man who may never call for them again.*

Translation Friction: *The Hebrew text does not condemn what is effectively a royal harem system in which young women are gathered — the verb implies compulsion — for the king's selection. Modern readers will note that Esther's agency is ambiguous throughout: she is 'taken' (*laqach*) to the palace, not shown choosing to go. Mordecai's instruction to conceal her identity raises questions about deception and survival. The chapter also presents Esther winning favor (*chen*) from everyone she meets, which echoes Joseph in Egypt — but unlike Joseph, Esther is navigating sexual politics, not administrative ones. The text's restraint in not evaluating any of this is characteristic of Esther's literary style.*

Connections: *Mordecai's genealogy (verse 5) traces back to Kish the Benjaminite, connecting him to the family line of King Saul — the same Saul who failed to destroy the Amalekite king Agag in 1 Samuel 15. Haman will be identified as an Agagite in chapter 3, setting up an ancient enmity between these two lineages. Esther's concealment of identity parallels other biblical figures who operate in disguise within foreign courts: Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 41), Daniel in Babylon (Daniel 1). The detail of Mordecai sitting at the king's gate places him among those who conduct business and adjudicate disputes — a position of civic function, not servitude.*

¹After these events, when the fury of King Ahasuerus had cooled, he remembered Vashti — what she had done, and what had been decreed against her. ²The king's young attendants who served him said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king. ³Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his kingdom to gather every beautiful young virgin to the citadel of Susa, to the house of the women, under the care of Hegai the king's eunuch who guards the women. Let their cosmetic treatments be provided. ⁴The young woman who pleases the king will become queen in place of Vashti." The proposal pleased the king, and he acted on it. ⁵There was a Jewish man in the citadel of Susa whose name was Mordecai son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite. ⁶He had been exiled from Jerusalem with the group of exiles deported along with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried into exile. ⁷He was raising Hadassah — that is, Esther — his uncle's daughter, because she had no father or mother. The young woman was shapely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter. ⁸When the king's order and his edict were proclaimed, and many young women were gathered to the citadel of Susa under Hegai's supervision, Esther too was taken to the king's house, into the care of Hegai the guardian of the women. ⁹The young woman pleased him and won his favor. He quickly provided her cosmetic treatments and her portions of food, assigned her seven attendants selected from the king's house, and moved her and her attendants to the best quarters in the house of the women. ¹⁰Esther did not reveal her people or her ancestry, because Mordecai had instructed her not to disclose it. ¹¹Every day Mordecai walked back and forth in front of the courtyard of the house of the women to learn how Esther was and what was being done with her. ¹²When each young woman's turn came to go to King Ahasuerus — after completing twelve months of treatment as prescribed for the women, since their preparation period was filled as follows: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and cosmetic treatments for women — ¹³When each young woman went to the king, whatever she requested was given to her to take along from the house of the women to the king's house. ¹⁴In the evening she would go in, and in the morning she would return to the second house of the women, under the care of Shaashgaz the king's eunuch who guarded the concubines. She would not go to the king again unless the king desired her and she was summoned by name. ¹⁵When Esther's turn came — Esther daughter of Abihail, the uncle of Mordecai who had adopted her — to go to the king, she asked for nothing beyond what Hegai the king's eunuch, guardian of the women, recommended. And Esther won the admiration of everyone who saw her. ¹⁶Esther was brought to King Ahasuerus in his royal palace in the tenth month — the month of Tebeth — in the seventh year of his reign. ¹⁷The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she won his grace and devotion more than all the other virgins. He placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti. ¹⁸The king held a great feast for all his officials and servants — the feast of Esther. He granted a tax remission to the provinces and distributed gifts with royal generosity. ¹⁹When virgins were gathered a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. ²⁰Esther still had not revealed her ancestry or her people, as Mordecai had instructed her. Esther continued to follow Mordecai's direction, just as she had when he was raising her. ²¹In those days, while Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh — two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the threshold — became angry and plotted to assassinate King Ahasuerus. ²²The plot became known to Mordecai, and he reported it to Queen Esther. Esther informed the king, crediting Mordecai by name. ²³The matter was investigated and confirmed, and both men were impaled on a stake. It was recorded in the book of the chronicles in the king's presence.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb *shakhakh* ('to subside, to cool') describes the king's anger abating — the same word used for floodwaters receding (Genesis 8:1). The triple 'what' structure — *et Vashti, et asher asatah, et asher nigzar aleiha* — shows the king replaying three things: the woman, her defiance, and his irreversible decree. The verb *zakhar* ('he remembered') may carry regret: the law he cannot undo has removed a queen he now misses.
2. The *na'arei ha-melekh mesharetav* ('the king's young men, his attendants') are royal courtiers — not senior advisors like those in chapter 1, but younger functionaries. Their proposal — *veyaqshu la-melekh ne'arot betulot tovot mar'eh* ('let them seek for the king young women, virgins, good of appearance') — uses three qualifiers: youth, virginity, and beauty. The language is transactional: women are described as objects to be sought and evaluated.
3. The verb *yiqbetsu* ('let them gather') implies organized, systematic collection across *kol medinot malkhuto* ('every province of his kingdom'). The infrastructure described is specific: *beit ha-nashim* ('the house of the women') is a separate quarter within the royal complex, supervised by Hegai (also spelled Hege), a *saris* ('eunuch') whose role is *shomer ha-nashim* ('guardian of the women'). The *tamruqeihen* ('their cosmetic preparations') will

be detailed in verse 12 — a twelve-month regimen.

4. The verb *timlokh* ('she will reign, she will become queen') grants the winner royal status — not merely concubine but *malkah*. The phrase *vayyitav ha-davar be-einei ha-melekh* ('the matter was good in the king's eyes') is a standard Hebrew approval formula. The king whose irrevocable decree removed one queen now sets a process in motion to find another — the empire-wide search for a wife is as excessive as the decree that created the vacancy.
5. The introduction *ish Yehudi* ('a Jewish man') marks the first appearance of a Jewish character in the book. Mordecai's genealogy — *ben Ya'ir ben Shim'i ben Qish* — traces his ancestry through Benjaminite lineage. *Kish* is the name of Saul's father (1 Samuel 9:1), and *Shimei* is the name of the Benjaminite who cursed David (2 Samuel 16:5). Whether these are the same individuals or later namesakes, the genealogy anchors Mordecai in the tribe of Benjamin and specifically in the line of Israel's first king. The designation *ish Yemini* ('a man of the right hand' — a Benjaminite) will prove significant when Mordecai confronts Haman the Agagite.
6. The threefold repetition of the root *galah* ('to exile, to uncover') — *hoglah, ha-golah, hogletah* — hammers the theme of displacement. Mordecai's family was swept up in the deportation of 597 BCE under Jeconiah (also called Jehoiachin). This verse places the Jewish community of Susa within the larger narrative of Babylonian exile and Persian succession. Mordecai is not a voluntary immigrant; he and his family are the displaced remnant of a conquered kingdom, now living under the empire that inherited Babylon's subjects.
7. *Hadassah* (from *hadass*, 'myrtle') is her Hebrew name; *Esther* is her Persian name (possibly from the Persian *stara*, 'star,' or connected to the Babylonian goddess *Ishtar*). The dual name signals dual identity — a theme the chapter will develop through the concealment of her Jewishness. The phrase *yefat to'ar ve-tovat mar'eh* ('beautiful of form and good of appearance') is the same description used for *Rachel* (Genesis 29:17) and *Joseph* (Genesis 39:6). Mordecai's act — *leqachah lo le-vat* ('he took her as his daughter') — is legal adoption, not mere guardianship.
8. The passive verb *vattillaqach* ('she was taken') is significant — *Esther* does not go voluntarily. The same verb (*laqach* in the passive) describes how women are taken into royal harems throughout the Hebrew Bible. Whether *Esther* had any choice in the matter is left unaddressed; the grammar suggests she did not. The phrase *ne'arot rabbot* ('many young women') underscores the scale of the operation — this is an empire-wide conscription of young women for the king's selection.
9. The verb *vattissa chesed* ('she carried away *chesed*') is unusual — *nasa* with *chesed* means to 'lift up' or 'carry away' loyal favor, as if *Esther* drew it out of him. *Hegai's* response is immediate: *vayevahel* ('he hurried, he hastened') her *tamruqim* ('cosmetic treatments') and *manot* ('food portions'). The seven *ne'arot* ('attendants') from the king's house and the upgrade to the best location in the harem show *Hegai* going well beyond standard procedure.
9. Register departure: *chesed* rendered as 'favor' rather than default 'faithful love' because *Hegai's* response to *Esther* occurs in a pagan court with no covenant framework. The word here describes personal preference, not covenantal loyalty.
10. The verb *higgidah* ('she told, she disclosed') in the negative — *lo higgidah* — establishes *Esther's* concealment as an act of obedience to Mordecai. The two things hidden are *ammah* ('her people' — ethnic identity) and *moladtah* ('her birth, her ancestry' — family lineage). Mordecai's reasoning is not given. Whether the concealment is motivated by fear of antisemitism, strategic calculation, or simple caution, the text does not say. This silence allows the reader to feel the weight of the decision without being told how to evaluate it.
11. The daily vigil — *bekhol yom va-yom* ('every single day') — shows Mordecai's relentless concern. The verb *mithalekh* ('walking about') suggests pacing, not casual strolling. He wants to know *et shelom Esther* ('the welfare of *Esther*') — *shelom* here means her well-being, her condition, her safety. The phrase *u-mah ye'aseh bah* ('and what would be done with her') carries anxiety — Mordecai cannot control what happens to her inside the harem.
12. The *tor na'arah ve-na'arah* ('the turn of each young woman') establishes a rotation system. The twelve-month preparation — *shenim asar chodesh* ('twelve months') — is divided into two phases: *shemen ha-mor* ('oil of myrrh') for six months and *besamim* ('perfumes, spices') for the remaining six. This is not mere grooming but a transformation protocol. The clinical detail underscores the institutional scale of the process and the degree to which each woman's body was reshaped for a single audience with the king.
13. The phrase *et kol asher tomar yinnaten lah* ('whatever she says will be given to her') allowed each woman to choose jewelry, clothing, or accessories for her night with the king. This small grant of agency — choosing her own adornment — is the only choice the text records these women making in the entire process. The detail will prove significant when *Esther*, in contrast to the others, requests nothing beyond what *Hegai* advises.
14. The brutal efficiency of the system is laid bare: *ba-erev hi va'ah u-va-boqer hi shavah* ('in the evening she went in, and in the morning she returned') — one night, then back to a different house. The transfer from *beit ha-nashim* ('the house of the women' — virgins) to *beit ha-nashim sheni* ('the second house of the women' — concubines) under a different eunuch, *Shaashgaz*, marks a permanent change in status. Unless specifically called by name (*niqre'ah ve-shem*), she would never see the king again — consigned to a life of seclusion without a husband, without children, without a future.
15. The contrast with verse 13 is deliberate: every other woman asked for whatever she wanted, but *Esther lo viqshah davar ki im et asher yomar Hegai* ('did not request a thing except what *Hegai* said'). Her restraint is strategic — she trusts the judgment of the man who knows the king's preferences rather than relying on her own calculation. The result: *vattehi Esther noset chen be-einei kol ro'eiha* ('*Esther* was carrying grace in the eyes of all who saw her'). The word *chen* ('grace, charm, favor') appears here rather than *chesed* — this is the natural attractiveness that draws people to her.

16. Again the passive vattillaqach ('she was taken') — Esther is brought, not described as going. The precise date — chodesh ha-asiri hu chodesh Tevet ('the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth') — places Esther's audience in December-January by the Babylonian calendar. The seventh year of Ahasuerus would be approximately 479 BCE. Four years have passed since Vashti's removal in the third year (1:3) — the beauty search and preparation period consumed years of these women's lives.
17. The verb vayyehav ('he loved') is the only time love is attributed to the king in the entire book. The combination chen va-chesed ('grace and loyal devotion') elevates Esther above all competitors on two levels: personal attractiveness and the depth of response she generates. The crowning — vayyasem keter malkhut be-roshah ('he set the royal crown on her head') — echoes the crown Vashti was ordered to wear in 1:11. The same crown, a different queen.
18. The mishteh gadol ('great feast') is named mishteh Esther ('the feast of Esther') — she has become important enough to name a royal celebration after. The hanachah la-medinot ('a rest for the provinces') likely refers to a tax reduction or remission — the word hanachah means 'rest, relief, relaxation.' The mas'et ke-yad ha-melekh ('gifts according to the king's hand') indicates largesse befitting royal means. Esther's elevation is celebrated with the same excess that characterized chapter 1.
19. The phrase be-hiqqvets betulot shenit ('when virgins were gathered a second time') is puzzling — the reason for a second gathering is never explained. Some scholars suggest it was an additional search; others argue it is a narrative marker transitioning to the next scene. Mordecai yoshev be-sha'ar ha-melekh ('sitting at the king's gate') places him in the administrative center of the citadel. The gate was where legal matters were decided, business was transacted, and official conversations occurred. This is a position of public access, not royal authority.
20. The narrator reinforces the concealment: ein Esther maggedet ('Esther was not telling'). The present tense indicates ongoing secrecy, not a one-time decision. The final clause — ka'asher hayetah be-omnah itto ('as when she was in his care') — uses omnah ('upbringing, nurture'), from the same root as omen in verse 7. Even as queen, Esther maintains the filial obedience of her years under Mordecai's guardianship. The ma'amar Mordekhai ('Mordecai's instruction') echoes the same word used for the king's command in 1:15 — in Esther's life, Mordecai's word carries the weight of royal decree.
21. The phrase qatsaf Bigtan va-Teresh ('Bigthan and Teresh became angry') provides the motive — rage — but not the cause. These shomerei ha-saf ('guardians of the threshold') held sensitive security positions, guarding the doors to the king's private chambers. The phrase lishlo'ach yad ('to send a hand') is a Hebrew idiom for violence against a person. Mordecai's position at the gate puts him in the information flow where he can overhear or learn of the conspiracy. This seemingly minor episode will become the fulcrum of the entire book in chapter 6.
22. The chain of communication — Mordecai to Esther to the king — establishes a conduit that will be used again in the crisis of chapters 4-5. The critical detail is be-shem Mordekhai ('in Mordecai's name') — Esther does not claim the intelligence for herself but credits her cousin. This ensures Mordecai's name enters the royal record, which will prove decisive when the king cannot sleep in chapter 6.
23. The verb vayyittallu ('they were hung, they were impaled') uses the root talah ('to hang'). The ets ('wood, tree, pole') likely refers to impalement on a stake — a standard Persian method of execution, not hanging by the neck. The same word will appear for the gallows Haman builds in chapter 5 and on which he himself is impaled in chapter 7. The final clause — vayyikkatev be-sefer divrei ha-yamim lifnei ha-melekh ('it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king') — deposits the record that will be retrieved at the critical moment in chapter 6. The king-facing phrase lifnei ha-melekh ('before the king') indicates an official royal record.

3

Summary: *King Ahasuerus promotes Haman the Agagite above all the other officials and commands everyone at the king's gate to bow before him. Mordecai alone refuses. When Haman learns that Mordecai is Jewish, his fury expands beyond one man — he resolves to destroy all the Jews throughout the empire. Haman casts pur (lots) to determine the date for the massacre, then approaches the king with a proposal: there is a scattered people whose laws differ from every other nation, and they do not observe the king's laws. Haman offers ten thousand talents of silver to fund their annihilation. The king gives Haman his signet ring and tells him to do with the people as he sees fit. Decrees are drafted in every language and script of the empire, sealed with the king's ring, and dispatched by couriers to every province: on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, Adar, all Jews — young and old, women and children — are to be killed, and their property plundered. The decree is published in Susa, and the city is thrown into confusion.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The chapter introduces Haman with the most loaded ethnic identifier in the Hebrew Bible: ha-Agagi ('the Agagite'). Agag was king of the Amalekites, the ancestral enemy of Israel whom Saul was commanded to destroy and failed to (1 Samuel 15). The conflict between Mordecai the Benjaminite descendant of Kish and Haman the descendant of Agag is not a personal grudge — it is an ancient war resumed. The casting of lots (pur) to determine the date of genocide is chilling in its calculated patience: Haman is willing to wait eleven months for the cosmically 'right' day to*

exterminate a people. The entire mechanism of Persian irrevocable law, introduced in chapter 1 for a domestic dispute, now becomes the instrument of genocide. What was absurd is now lethal.

Translation Friction: *Mordecai's refusal to bow is never fully explained. The text says the king's servants ask him 'why do you transgress the king's command?' (verse 3), and that he told them he was a Jew (verse 4), but it does not explicitly state whether his refusal was religious, ethnic, or personal. The Hebrew does not indicate that bowing to a human official was inherently prohibited — the patriarchs bowed to others routinely. The connection to Haman's Agagite lineage suggests the refusal may be rooted in tribal memory rather than theology. Haman's speech to the king (verse 8) is a masterclass in antisemitic rhetoric: he describes the Jews without naming them, emphasizes their difference, and frames their existence as a threat to royal order. The king's willingness to hand over an entire people without even asking who they are is one of the most damning portraits of royal indifference in Scripture.*

Connections: *The Saul-Agag conflict (1 Samuel 15) provides the deep background: Saul's failure to completely destroy the Amalekites now bears fruit in Haman's rise. The pur (lot) that gives the book its name (Purim) connects to the biblical understanding of lot-casting as revealing hidden divine determination (Proverbs 16:33: 'The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD'). Haman's offer of ten thousand talents of silver echoes and vastly exceeds the temple treasures that have been plundered throughout Kings and Chronicles — this is blood money on an imperial scale. The decree structure — written, sealed, irrevocable — mirrors the decree that deposed Vashti (1:19) and will be countered by the decree of chapter 8.*

¹After these events, King Ahasuerus promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, elevating him and placing his seat above all the other officials who served with him. ²All the king's servants at the king's gate would kneel and bow down to Haman, for the king had commanded this regarding him. But Mordecai would not kneel and would not bow down. ³The king's servants at the gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you disobey the king's command?" ⁴When they had spoken to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they reported it to Haman to see whether Mordecai's position would hold, since he had told them he was a Jew. ⁵When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel or bow to him, Haman was filled with rage. ⁶But he considered it beneath him to strike at Mordecai alone, since they had told him Mordecai's people. So Haman sought to destroy all the Jews throughout the entire kingdom of Ahasuerus — the people of Mordecai. ⁷In the first month — the month of Nisan — in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, the pur (that is, the lot) was cast before Haman, from day to day and from month to month, until the twelfth month — the month of Adar. ⁸Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the peoples in every province of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not observe the king's laws. It is not in the king's interest to tolerate them. ⁹If it pleases the king, let a decree be written for their destruction. I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who carry out the work, to be deposited in the king's treasuries." ¹⁰The king removed his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. ¹¹The king said to Haman, "The silver is yours, and the people too — do with them whatever seems right to you." ¹²The king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and a decree was written exactly as Haman dictated — to the king's satraps, to the governors over each province, and to the officials of each people, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring. ¹³Letters were sent by couriers to every province of the king: to annihilate, kill, and destroy all Jews — young and old, children and women — on a single day, the thirteenth of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions. ¹⁴A copy of the edict was to be issued as law in every province and published to all peoples, so that they would be ready for that day. ¹⁵The couriers went out in urgent haste by the king's command, and the decree was issued in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa was in turmoil.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb *giddal* ('he made great, he promoted') and *vaynasse'ehu* ('he lifted him up') are a double elevation — Haman is both promoted in rank and exalted in honor. The identification *ha-Agagi* ('the Agagite') links Haman to Agag, the Amalekite king spared by Saul in 1 Samuel 15. For a Hebrew audience, this genealogical tag transforms a court appointment into the reactivation of an existential threat. The phrase *me'al kol ha-sarim* ('above all the officials') gives Haman supreme authority under the king.

2. The two verbs *kor'im u-mishtachavim* ('kneeling and bowing down') describe full prostration — not a casual nod but complete physical submission. The double negative applied to Mordecai — *lo yikhra ve-lo yishtachaveh* ('he would not kneel and would not bow') — mirrors the double action of compliance with a double refusal. The imperfect tense indicates habitual action: this was not a single incident but a daily, visible act of defiance.
3. The verb *over* ('to cross over, to transgress') frames Mordecai's refusal as a legal violation: *maddu'a attah over et mitsvat ha-melekh* ('why are you crossing over the king's command?'). The servants see a man publicly defying a royal decree — a dangerous act in any absolute monarchy. Their question implies both concern and accusation.
4. The phrase *yom va-yom* ('day and day' — daily) shows persistent pressure, and *lo shama aleihem* ('he did not listen to them') shows immovable resistance. The servants report to Haman *lir'ot ha-ya'amdu divrei Mordekhai* ('to see whether Mordecai's words would stand') — they want to test whether his claim justifies his defiance. The critical revelation: *ki higgid lahem asher hu Yehudi* ('because he had told them that he was a Jew'). Mordecai's Jewish identity is now the stated basis for his refusal.
5. The verb *vayyimmale* ('he was filled') with *chemah* ('fury, venom, heat') describes a consuming anger — Haman is not annoyed but saturated with wrath. The verb *male* implies there is no room for anything else: fury has displaced every other consideration. This is the emotional trigger for the genocide plot — one man's wounded pride expanding into a plan to destroy an entire people.
6. The verb *vayyivez* ('he despised, he considered contemptible') reveals Haman's megalomania: killing one man is too small a response for his wounded ego. The phrase *lishlo'ach yad be-Mordekhai levaddo* ('to lay hands on Mordecai alone') uses the same idiom for violence seen in 2:21 (the assassination plot). Haman's ambition leaps from one man to *kol ha-Yehudim asher be-khol malkhut Achashverosh* ('all the Jews in the entire kingdom of Ahasuerus'). The repetition *am Mordekhai* ('the people of Mordecai') frames the Jews as Mordecai's people — guilty by ethnic association.
7. The word *pur* is a Persian loanword (from Akkadian *puru*) meaning 'lot' — the narrator translates it for Hebrew readers: *pur hu ha-goral* ('pur, that is, the lot'). Lots were cast to determine the most auspicious date for the planned massacre. The process runs from Nisan (March-April) through the entire calendar to Adar (February-March) — nearly a full year. The festival of Purim takes its name from this word. The lot falls on the last month of the year, which will give the Jews maximum time to prepare once the counter-decree is issued in chapter 8.
8. Haman's speech is a carefully constructed act of persuasion that never names its target. The phrase *yeshno am echad* ('there exists one people') keeps the Jews anonymous — the king will never ask who they are. The pair *mefuzzar u-meforad* ('scattered and dispersed') emphasizes their vulnerability: they are everywhere but concentrated nowhere. The three accusations build in severity: (1) their laws are different (*dateihem shonot mi-kol am*), (2) they do not keep the king's laws (*ve-et datei ha-melekh einam osim*), and (3) it is not worth it for the king to leave them alone (*la-melekh ein shoveh lehaniccham*). The third point reframes genocide as fiscal policy.
9. The sum — *aseret alafim kikkar kesef* ('ten thousand talents of silver') — is staggering. Herodotus reports the total annual tribute of the Persian Empire at about 14,560 talents; Haman is offering two-thirds of the empire's annual revenue. Whether the sum is literal or hyperbolic, it signals both Haman's enormous wealth and the scale of his obsession. The verb *eshoqol* ('I will weigh out') is the language of commercial transaction — genocide presented as a business deal. The phrase *osei ha-melakhah* ('those who do the work') is a chillingly bureaucratic term for executioners.
10. The *taba'at* ('signet ring') is the instrument of royal authority — documents sealed with it carry the force of the king's own word. By giving Haman the ring, Ahasuerus delegates absolute power over an unnamed people. The narrator now adds a title the king does not use: *tsorer ha-Yehudim* ('the adversary of the Jews'). This is editorial commentary — the narrator names what the king ignores. The Agagite identification and the 'enemy' label appear together, linking Haman's personal malice to the ancient enmity between Amalek and Israel.
11. The king's response is terrifyingly casual: *ha-kesef natun lakh* ('the silver is given to you') — the bribe is waved away or accepted as a gift — *ve-ha-am* ('and the people') — an entire nation is handed over in three words — *la'asot bo ka-tov be-einekha* ('to do with them as is good in your eyes'). The king does not ask which people, how many, or why. He grants Haman both the money and the people as if disposing of surplus inventory. The phrase *ka-tov be-einekha* ('as seems good in your eyes') gives Haman total discretion.
12. The date — the thirteenth of Nisan — is one day before Passover, the festival celebrating Israel's deliverance from Egypt. The irony may be intentional: a decree of destruction is drafted on the eve of the commemoration of liberation. The bureaucratic machinery is described in exhaustive detail: *achashdarpnei ha-melekh* ('the king's satraps' — a Persian loanword), *pachot* ('governors'), *sarei am va-am* ('officials of each people'). The decree goes out *medinah u-medinah ki-khetavah ve-am va-am ki-leshono* ('to every province in its script and every people in its language') — the same multilingual apparatus that sent the Vashti decree.
13. The three verbs *lehashmid laharog ule'abbed* ('to annihilate, to kill, and to destroy') are not synonyms used for emphasis — each specifies a different aspect of total destruction. The targets are comprehensive: *mi-na'ar ve-ad zaqen taf ve-nashim* ('from youth to elder, children and women') — no exception by age or sex. The phrase *be-yom echad* ('on a single day') requires coordinated, simultaneous violence across 127 provinces. The final clause — *u-shelalam lavoz* ('and their plunder for spoil') — adds an economic incentive: the killers may keep whatever the victims own.
14. The *patshegen ha-ketav* ('copy of the document') is the official text distributed to every province. The word *galui* ('open, revealed, public') means the decree is not secret — it is posted for all to see. The phrase *lihyot atidim la-yom ha-zeh* ('to be ready for that day') instructs the populace to prepare for organized violence. The Jews will read their own death sentence posted in public. This public proclamation is what triggers Mordecai's mourning in chapter 4.
15. The final verse delivers its verdict through juxtaposition: *ve-ha-melekh ve-Haman yashvu lishtot* ('the king and Haman sat down to drink') — while *ve-ha-ir Shushan navokha* ('the city of Susa was thrown into confusion'). The word *navokha* means 'bewildered, perplexed, in an uproar' — the entire city, not only the Jews, is disturbed by the decree. The contrast between the two men drinking and the population reeling is the chapter's closing

image: those who issued the decree are at ease; those who must live under it are in chaos.

4

Summary: *When Mordecai learns of the decree, he tears his clothes, puts on sackcloth and ashes, and goes into the city wailing bitterly. Throughout every province, Jews mourn, fast, weep, and lie in sackcloth and ashes. Esther's attendants tell her about Mordecai's condition. She sends him clothing, but he refuses it. She dispatches Hathach, one of her eunuchs, to find out what has happened. Mordecai gives Hathach a full account of Haman's plot, including the exact sum of money Haman promised to pay, and sends a copy of the decree itself. He charges Esther to go to the king and plead for her people. Esther sends back a warning: anyone who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned faces death unless the king extends his golden scepter — and she has not been called for thirty days. Mordecai's reply is the chapter's turning point: if she remains silent, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but she and her father's house will perish. Then comes the question: who knows whether she has come to her royal position for such a time as this? Esther accepts the risk. She instructs Mordecai to gather every Jew in Susa for a three-day fast, and she and her attendants will fast as well. Then she will go to the king uninvited. Her final words: if I perish, I perish.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter contains the theological center of the book of Esther, yet it does so without ever naming the theological source. Mordecai's statement in verse 14 — 'relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place' — is the closest the book comes to acknowledging providential care, but it stubbornly refuses to say the word. The phrase *mi-maqom acher* ('from another place') has generated centuries of debate: Is 'another place' a veiled reference to heaven? To divine intervention? The text will not say. This is not theological absence but theological restraint — the reader is invited to see what the characters will not name. Esther's transformation in this chapter is complete: she enters as a queen concerned about protocol and exits as a leader willing to die. The three-day fast she commands is the closest thing to prayer in the book, yet no prayer is recorded.*

Translation Friction: *Mordecai's statement contains a threat alongside its famous question: 'you and your father's house will perish' (verse 14). This is not gentle encouragement — it is a warning that silence will not protect her. The Hebrew *mi-maqom acher* ('from another place') is deliberately ambiguous. Some read it as confidence in divine deliverance regardless of Esther's choice; others read it as a rebuke — help will come, but not through you if you fail. Esther's thirty-day absence from the king's presence raises questions about the state of the royal marriage. The three-day total fast (no food or water, day or night) is extreme and dangerous — it signals desperation, not routine piety. The chapter's silence about prayer is the loudest silence in the Hebrew Bible: an entire people fasts, and the text records no words directed to heaven.*

Connections: *The sackcloth and ashes mourning ritual connects to Job's response to catastrophe (Job 2:12), David's mourning for Abner (2 Samuel 3:31), and the Ninevites' response to Jonah's warning (Jonah 3:5-6). Esther's risk in approaching the king uninvited echoes other moments of dangerous petition: Bathsheba before David (1 Kings 1:15-21), the woman of Tekoa before David (2 Samuel 14). The three-day fast recalls Jonah's three days in the fish (Jonah 1:17) and anticipates Jesus' three days in the tomb — in each case, a period of darkness precedes an act of deliverance. Mordecai's 'for such a time as this' introduces the concept of *kairos* — the appointed moment — that runs through prophetic literature: there are moments when a person's position and history converge with a crisis that demands action.*

¹When Mordecai learned everything that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, went out into the middle of the city, and cried out with a loud and bitter wail. ²He came as far as the front of the king's gate, since no one was permitted to enter the king's gate wearing sackcloth. ³In every province, wherever the king's command and his decree reached, there was deep mourning among the Jews — fasting, weeping, and lamentation. Many spread out sackcloth and ashes as their bed. ⁴Esther's young women and her eunuchs came and told her, and the queen was deeply distressed. She sent garments for Mordecai to put on and remove his sackcloth, but he refused them. ⁵Esther summoned Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs who had been assigned to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to find out what was happening

and why. ⁶Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city, in front of the king's gate. ⁷Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of silver that Haman had promised to deposit in the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸He also gave him a copy of the written decree that had been issued in Susa for their destruction, to show Esther and explain it to her, and to instruct her to go to the king, plead with him for mercy, and petition him on behalf of her people. ⁹Hathach returned and reported Mordecai's words to Esther. ¹⁰Esther spoke to Hathach and instructed him to relay a message to Mordecai: ¹¹"All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned, there is one law: death — unless the king extends the golden scepter and spares their life. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for thirty days." ¹²Esther's words were reported to Mordecai. ¹³Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: "Do not imagine that because you are in the king's palace you will escape any more than the rest of the Jews. ¹⁴If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows — perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this." ¹⁵Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶"Go, gather all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast on my behalf. Do not eat and do not drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast in the same way. Then I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." ¹⁷ Mordecai left and did everything Esther had commanded him.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb *yada* ('he knew') indicates comprehensive knowledge — *et kol asher na'asah* ('everything that had been done') includes the decree, the amount of money, and the timeline. Mordecai's response follows the full mourning protocol: tearing garments (*vayyiqra begadav*), wearing *saq va-efer* ('sackcloth and ashes'), public lamentation. The *ze'aqah gedolah u-marah* ('a great and bitter cry') uses the same phrase describing Esau's cry when he discovers his stolen blessing (Genesis 27:34) — a cry for something that may be irrevocable.
2. The detail *ad lifnei sha'ar ha-melekh* ('up to the front of the king's gate') marks a boundary: Mordecai's grief brings him to the threshold of royal space but cannot cross it. The prohibition — *ein lavo el sha'ar ha-melekh bilvush saq* ('no entering the king's gate in sackcloth') — reflects the Persian court's insistence on maintaining an appearance of order and prosperity. Suffering is not permitted to enter the king's presence. The physical barrier mirrors the informational barrier: Esther is inside, unaware; Mordecai is outside, unable to reach her.
3. The scope is empire-wide: *bekhol medinah u-medinah* ('in every single province'). The mourning vocabulary accumulates: *evel gadol* ('great mourning'), *tsom* ('fasting'), *bekhi* ('weeping'), *misped* ('lamentation, wailing'). The final image — *saq va-efer yussa la-rabbim* ('sackcloth and ashes were spread out for many') — describes people lying on the ground in sackcloth and ashes, not merely wearing it. This is total, prostrate grief. The absence of any recorded prayer in this list is conspicuous: the Jews fast, weep, and mourn, but the narrator does not report their words.
4. The verb *vattitchalchal* ('she writhed, she was in anguish') is intense — the root describes physical agitation, a trembling of the body. Esther's distress is visceral before it is rational; she does not yet know the cause. Her first instinct is practical: send clothing to restore Mordecai's dignity and, implicitly, to stop the public display that could draw attention. His refusal — *ve-lo qibbel* ('he did not accept') — signals that this is not a problem that new clothes can solve.
5. Hathach serves as the intermediary because Esther cannot leave the palace and Mordecai cannot enter it. The double question — *mah zeh ve-al mah zeh* ('what is this and on account of what is this') — asks both what is wrong and what caused it. Esther moves from emotional reaction (verse 4) to information-gathering — the first step in what will become a strategic response.
6. The *rechov ha-ir* ('the open square of the city') is a public space — Mordecai's mourning is not private but deliberately visible. The meeting takes place *lifnei sha'ar ha-melekh* ('before the king's gate') — the same location that was the site of Mordecai's daily vigil and his refusal to bow. This space is becoming the axis of the story.
7. Mordecai's report is comprehensive: *et kol asher qarahu* ('everything that happened to him') and the *parashat ha-kesef* ('the account of the silver') — the specific financial details of Haman's offer. The word *parashah* ('account, specification, declaration') indicates a precise figure, not a vague reference. Mordecai wants Esther to know the scale of the bribery — this is genocide purchased with silver.
8. Mordecai provides physical evidence: *patshegen ketav ha-dat* ('a copy of the written decree'). This is not hearsay but documentation. The chain of verbs builds in intensity: *lehar'ot* ('to show'), *lehagid* ('to explain'), *letsavot* ('to instruct, to command'). Mordecai is not requesting — he is commanding Esther to *lavo el ha-melekh* ('go to the king'), *lehitchannen lo* ('to plead for grace before him'), and *levaqesh milefanav* ('to petition him'). The phrase *al ammah* ('on behalf of her people') forces Esther's hidden identity into the equation: to plead for the Jews, she must reveal that she is one of them.
9. The verse is deliberately brief: the narrator does not repeat the content because the reader already knows it. The focus is on the communication chain — Mordecai to Hathach to Esther — which mirrors the chain in 2:22 (Mordecai to Esther to the king). The same conduit that saved the king's life is now being used to attempt the saving of the Jewish people.

10. The verb *vatetsavvehu* ('she commanded him') uses the same verb of authority (*tsavah*) that Mordecai used in verse 8. Esther is not passively receiving instructions — she is issuing her own commands. The shuttle diplomacy through Hathach underscores the physical separation between Esther in the palace and Mordecai at the gate.
11. Esther's response details the protocol: anyone entering *ha-chatser ha-penimit* ('the inner court') *asher lo yiqqare* ('who is not called') faces *achat dato lehamit* ('one law: to be put to death'). The only exception is the king's voluntary extension of *sharvit ha-zahav* ('the golden scepter'). Esther's final statement — *va-ani lo niqre'ti lavo el ha-melekh zeh sheloshim yom* ('I have not been called to come to the king for thirty days') — conveys both practical danger and possible marital distance. She is not refused; she is simply not summoned.
12. Another minimal transition verse — the narrator trusts the reader to feel the weight of what has been communicated without elaboration. Mordecai now knows that Esther has identified a potentially fatal obstacle.
13. Mordecai's tone shifts sharply: *al tedammi be-nafshekh* ('do not imagine in your soul') is a direct, almost harsh address. The verb *damah* ('to think, to suppose, to imagine') warns against self-deception. His argument is strategic: *lehimmalet beit ha-melekh mi-kol ha-Yehudim* ('to escape in the king's house from all the Jews') — the palace will not protect you. If the decree stands, being queen will not exempt Esther from the fate of her people.
14. The infinitive absolute construction *hacharesh tacharishi* ('being silent you will be silent') intensifies the condition: if you choose total silence. The phrase *revach ve-hatsalah* ('relief and deliverance') pairs a word for breathing room (*revach*, from *ravach*, 'to be wide, spacious') with a word for rescue (*hatsalah*). The verb *ya'amod* ('will stand, will arise') treats deliverance as something with agency — it will rise and take a stand. The phrase *mi-maqom acher* ('from another place') is the most debated expression in the book: does 'another place' mean heaven? Another human agent? The text is deliberately open. The closing question — *im le-et ka-zot higga'at la-malkhut* ('if for a time like this you have arrived at royalty') — uses the verb *higi'a* ('to reach, to arrive at') as if Esther's queenship is a destination she has been traveling toward without knowing it.
15. The formula *vatomer Esther lehashiv el Mordekhai* ('Esther said to send back to Mordecai') marks the turning point. From this verse forward, Esther gives the commands and Mordecai obeys. The power dynamic has shifted — the adopted orphan is now directing the man who raised her.
16. Esther's instructions are commanding and precise. The verb *kenoss* ('gather') mobilizes the entire Jewish community of Susa. The fast — *al tokhelu ve-al tishetu sheloshet yamim lailah va-yom* ('do not eat and do not drink for three days, night and day') — is absolute: no food, no water, no interruption. This is not dietary restriction but crisis fasting, a total bodily commitment that signals desperation. The phrase *asher lo kha-dat* ('which is not according to the law') acknowledges she is breaking the law — the same word *dat* used for Haman's genocide decree. The closing declaration — *ve-kha'asher avadeti avadeti* ('and as I have perished, I have perished') — uses the perfect tense as if the death has already occurred. Esther speaks of her potential death as accomplished fact. The doubling of the verb (*avadeti avadeti*) is not emphasis but resignation: she has already accepted the cost.
17. The verb *vayya'avur* ('he crossed over, he passed on, he departed') signals Mordecai leaving the gate to carry out Esther's orders. The phrase *kekhoh asher tsivvetah alav Esther* ('according to all that Esther had commanded him') uses the same language of authoritative command (*tsavah*) previously used for Mordecai's instructions to Esther (2:10, 2:20) and the king's commands. The roles have reversed: Mordecai now obeys Esther. The orphan girl he raised has become the one giving orders in a moment of existential crisis.

5

Summary: *On the third day, Esther puts on her royal robes and stands in the inner court of the palace, facing the king's hall. The king sees her, extends his golden scepter, and asks what she wants — offering up to half the kingdom. Esther makes a modest request: let the king and Haman come to a banquet she has prepared. They come, and at the banquet the king again asks what Esther's petition is, offering up to half the kingdom. Esther delays: if it pleases the king, let them come to another banquet tomorrow, and then she will answer. Haman leaves in high spirits, but his elation collapses the moment he sees Mordecai at the king's gate, still refusing to stand or tremble before him. Haman restrains himself, goes home, and gathers his wife Zeresh and his friends. He recounts his wealth, his many sons, his promotion above all other officials, and his exclusive invitation to Esther's banquet. But none of it satisfies him as long as Mordecai the Jew sits at the king's gate. Zeresh and his advisors propose a solution: build a stake seventy-five feet high, and in the morning ask the king for permission to impale Mordecai on it. Then go to the banquet in good spirits. The advice pleases Haman, and he has the stake constructed.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *Esther's strategy is a masterclass in timing. She has risked her life to reach the king, he has offered her anything, and she asks for — a dinner party. Then at the dinner she delays again, requesting a second banquet. Commentators have debated why: Is she testing the king's mood? Building suspense? Creating a sense of obligation through hospitality? The text does not explain, and the silence is part of the art. The delay, which seems unnecessary, creates the overnight interval that allows the king's insomnia in chapter 6, which leads to Mordecai's honoring, which*

reverses everything. Esther's patience is the pivot on which the plot turns. The other half of the chapter reveals Haman's psychology in devastating detail: he catalogs every marker of his success, yet a single seated Jew unmakes all of it.

Translation Friction: *Haman's monologue (verses 11-12) is the book's clearest psychological portrait: a man whose self-worth depends entirely on the deference of others. His enormous wealth, his ten sons, his political supremacy, his private audience with the queen — none of it registers as sufficient because one man refuses to acknowledge him. The Hebrew *ve-khol zeh einennu shoveh li* ('all this is worth nothing to me') is a startling confession: Haman cannot enjoy what he has while Mordecai exists. Zeresh's counsel to build the stake is presented without moral commentary — the narrator lets the reader feel the horror of a wife and friends advising murder as a solution to wounded pride.*

Connections: *Esther's approach to the king echoes other dangerous royal petitions in the Hebrew Bible: Bathsheba before David (1 Kings 1:15-21), the Shunammite woman before Elisha (2 Kings 4:27-28). The banquet strategy connects to Jael's hospitality before killing Sisera (Judges 4:18-21) and Absalom's feast before killing Amnon (2 Samuel 13:23-29) — in the world of Esther, hospitality is a weapon. The seventy-five-foot stake (fifty cubits) is architecturally absurd — its height is meant to make Mordecai's execution a public spectacle visible across Susa. The same stake will receive Haman himself in chapter 7, completing one of the Bible's most precise reversals.*

1On the third day, Esther dressed in royal garments and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, facing the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room, facing the entrance. 2When the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won his favor. The king extended the golden scepter in his hand toward Esther. She approached and touched the tip of the scepter. 3The king said to her, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom — it will be given to you." 4Esther said, "If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet I have prepared for him." 5The king said, "Bring Haman quickly, so that we may do what Esther has asked." The king and Haman came to the banquet Esther had prepared. 6At the wine banquet the king said to Esther, "What is your petition? It will be granted. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom — it will be done." 7Esther answered, "My petition and my request: 8If I have found favor in the king's eyes, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request — let the king and Haman come to the banquet I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will answer as the king has asked." 9Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai at the king's gate — and Mordecai neither stood nor so much as flinched before him — Haman was filled with fury toward Mordecai. 10Haman restrained himself, went home, and sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh. 11Haman recounted to them the splendor of his wealth, the number of his sons, everything the king had done to promote him, and how he had elevated him above the other officials and servants of the king. 12Haman added, "What is more, Queen Esther invited no one but me to come with the king to the banquet she prepared. And tomorrow too I am invited by her, along with the king." 13But all of this is worthless to me every time I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." 14His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Have a stake made, seventy-five feet high. In the morning, ask the king to have Mordecai impaled on it. Then go to the banquet with the king in good spirits." The idea pleased Haman, and he had the stake constructed.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Hebrew *vattilbash Esther malkhut* ('Esther put on royalty') does not say 'royal robes' — it says she put on royalty itself. The word *malkhut* is abstract: queenship, sovereignty, royal identity. After three days of fasting, she clothes herself in authority. The spatial description is precise: she stands in *ha-chatser ha-penimit* ('the inner court'), the space where unauthorized entry means death (4:11). The king sits *nokhach petach ha-bayit* ('facing the entrance') — he will see her the moment she appears.
2. The phrase *nas'ah chen be-einav* ('she carried grace in his eyes') repeats the language from 2:15 — Esther's ability to evoke favor is consistent and instinctive. The extension of *sharvit ha-zahav* ('the golden scepter') is the life-or-death moment: the king chooses to receive her rather than enforce the death penalty. Esther's touch on *rosh ha-sharvit* ('the top of the scepter') is a gesture of acknowledgment and submission — she accepts the king's mercy before speaking.
3. The formula *mah lakh* ('what is with you?' — 'what do you want?') followed by *mah baqqashatekh* ('what is your request?') and the offer *ad chatsi ha-malkhut* ('up to half the kingdom') is royal generosity language — likely a conventional expression rather than a literal offer, though its extravagance signals the king's favorable disposition. The same offer will be repeated at both banquets (5:6, 7:2), creating a pattern of three.

4. Esther's request is deliberately anticlimactic: after risking her life, she asks for a dinner party. The formula *im al ha-melekh tov* ('if it pleases the king') is the standard petition language used throughout the book. By inviting Haman, Esther ensures her enemy will be present when she reveals the threat — she is constructing a trap, not hosting a social event. The phrase *asher asiti lo* ('which I have prepared for him') can refer to the king or to Haman — the ambiguity is productive.
5. The verb *maharu* ('hurry!') shows the king's eagerness — he wants the banquet and whatever lies behind Esther's request. The phrase *la'asot et devar Esther* ('to do the word of Esther') elevates her request to the status of a command that the king himself moves to fulfill. Haman, summoned at the queen's request and rushed by royal order, has no idea he is walking into the architecture of his own undoing.
6. The setting is *be-mishteh ha-yayin* ('at the feast of wine') — the drinking portion of the meal, when inhibitions are lower and generosity flows more easily. The king's offer now uses two verbs: *yinnaten* ('it will be given') for the petition and *te'as* ('it will be done') for the request. The doubling intensifies the promise. Esther has created exactly the conditions she needs: the king is in a generous mood, Haman is present, and the offer is on the table.
7. Esther uses the king's own words back to him: *she'elati u-vaqqashati* ('my petition and my request') mirrors his *mah she'elatekh and mah baqqashatekh* from verse 6. By echoing his language, she frames her response as a direct answer to his offer.
8. Esther's second delay is wrapped in elaborate deference: *im matsati chen* ('if I have found favor'), *im al ha-melekh tov* ('if it pleases the king'). The conditional phrasing masks the fact that she is postponing her answer a second time. The promise *u-machar e'eseh kidvar ha-melekh* ('tomorrow I will do according to the king's word') commits her to speak at the next banquet. The delay creates the overnight interval — the single night that will transform the entire story in chapter 6.
9. The contrast is instant: *sameach ve-tov lev* ('happy and good of heart') collapses the moment Haman sees Mordecai. The two negatives — *lo qam ve-lo za mimmennu* ('he did not rise and did not tremble from him') — describe not just the absence of bowing but the absence of any physical reaction. Mordecai does not even flinch (*za*, 'to tremble, to move'). The verb *vayyimmale* ('he was filled') with *chemah* ('fury') repeats exactly from 3:5 — the same consuming rage that launched the genocide plot is reignited by the same stimulus.
10. The verb *vayyit'appaq* ('he restrained himself, he held himself in') implies barely contained rage — the same word used for Joseph holding back tears before his brothers (Genesis 43:31, 45:1). Haman's self-control is not dignity but calculation: he will not make a scene at the gate. He summons *ohavav* ('his friends, his loved ones') and *Zeresh* his wife — assembling an audience for the monologue that follows.
11. Haman's self-catalog covers four domains: *kevod oshro* ('the glory of his wealth'), *rov banav* ('the abundance of his sons' — many sons were a mark of divine blessing and social status), *kol asher giddele ha-melekh* ('everything by which the king had promoted him'), and his elevation *al ha-sarim* ('above the officials'). The Hebrew piles up possessions and honors without a single expression of gratitude — this is boasting, not testimony. The list functions as setup for the devastating admission in verse 13.
12. The emphatic *af* ('moreover, indeed') introduces what Haman considers his crowning achievement: exclusive social access to the queen. The phrase *ki im oti* ('except me') — only me — is spoken with pride but is unwittingly ironic: Esther has invited him not to honor him but to expose him. His excitement about the second invitation — *gam lemachar ani qaru'a lah* ('also tomorrow I am called by her') — deepens the irony: he is eager for the event that will destroy him.
13. The confession *ve-khol zeh einennu shoveh li* ('all of this is not equal to anything for me') is psychologically devastating. The word *shoveh* ('worth, equal, sufficient') negates every item in the preceding catalog: wealth, sons, promotion, royal favor, the queen's exclusive attention — none of it registers as valuable. The trigger is specific: *bekhol et asher ani ro'eh et Mordekhai* ('every time I see Mordecai'). Not Mordecai's actions but his mere existence, his sitting (*yoshev*), his visibility. Haman's misery is self-inflicted: his entire sense of worth depends on universal submission, and one man's refusal collapses the structure.
14. The *ets gavoha chamishim ammah* ('a stake fifty cubits high') is roughly seventy-five feet — a structure visible across the city, designed for public spectacle rather than mere execution. The verb *yitlu* ('let them hang, let them impale') uses the same root as 2:23 (the execution of the conspirators). *Zeresh's* advice is chilling in its simplicity: kill Mordecai before breakfast, then enjoy the banquet. The phrase *uvo im ha-melekh el ha-mishteh sameach* ('go with the king to the banquet happy') promises that murder will restore the joy that Mordecai's existence has stolen. The narrator's final note — *vayyitav ha-davar lifnei Haman vayya'as ha-ets* ('the idea pleased Haman and he made the stake') — shows immediate action: between evening and morning, the instrument of execution is built. What Haman does not know is that the same night will change everything.

6

Summary: *That night the king cannot sleep. He orders the royal chronicles to be read to him, and the reader comes to the account of Mordecai exposing the assassination plot of Bigthan and Teresh. The king asks what honor has been given to Mordecai for this. The answer: nothing has been done. The king asks who is in the court. Haman has just arrived — early in the morning, to ask permission to impale Mordecai. The king summons him and asks: what should be done for the man the king wishes to honor? Haman, certain the king means him, designs an extravagant public tribute: royal robes the king himself has worn, a horse the king has ridden, a royal crown on the horse's head, and a nobleman leading the honoree through the city square proclaiming his honor. The king says: do exactly that for Mordecai the Jew. Haman carries out the order, leading Mordecai through the city. Afterward, Mordecai returns to the king's gate while Haman rushes home in humiliation, his head covered. His wife Zeresh and his advisors deliver a grim verdict: if Mordecai is of Jewish descent, Haman will not prevail against him but will surely fall. While they are still speaking, the king's eunuchs arrive to rush Haman to Esther's second banquet.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The chapter is built on a single sleepless night — and that insomnia sets in motion the total reversal of Haman's plan. The king's inability to sleep is reported without explanation: the Hebrew says *naddedah shenat ha-melekh* ('the king's sleep fled') as if sleep itself were an agent that chose to leave. The reader is invited to see design where the text reports accident. Everything in this chapter runs on irony so precise it borders on comedy: Haman arrives to request a man's execution and is asked to design that man's parade of honor; he describes his own fantasy of royal recognition only to be told to perform it for his worst enemy; the stake he built overnight to kill Mordecai stands unused while he leads Mordecai through the streets. The literary architecture is flawless — every detail from chapters 2, 3, and 5 converges in this single night and morning.*

Translation Friction: *The chapter never states why the king cannot sleep or why the chronicles happen to open to the record of Mordecai's service. The Hebrew text presents these as coincidences. Whether the reader understands this as providential direction or narrative convention is left to the reader — the book maintains its characteristic refusal to name the force behind events. Zeresh's prophecy in verse 13 — 'if Mordecai is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him; you will surely fall before him' — is a striking statement from a non-Jewish character. It suggests that even those outside the covenant community recognize something about the Jewish people's relationship to a power that protects them, though neither Zeresh nor the narrator names that power.*

Connections: *The reversal pattern — the trap meant for one person catching the one who set it — appears throughout the Hebrew Bible: the pit dug for Joseph becomes his path to power (Genesis 37-41), the furnace meant to kill Daniel's friends becomes their testimony (Daniel 3), the lions' den meant for Daniel receives his accusers (Daniel 6). Proverbs states the principle directly: 'Whoever digs a pit will fall into it' (Proverbs 26:27). The king's insomnia connects to other pivotal biblical nights: Jacob wrestling at Jabbok (Genesis 32), the Passover night in Egypt (Exodus 12), Daniel's night with the lions (Daniel 6). The Hebrew wisdom tradition holds that 'the king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases' (Proverbs 21:1) — the Esther narrator never quotes this proverb but enacts it.*

¹That night, sleep fled from the king. He ordered the book of records, the royal chronicles, to be brought, and they were read aloud before him. ²It was found recorded that Mordecai had reported on Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs from the threshold guards, who had plotted to assassinate King Ahasuerus. ³The king asked, "What honor or recognition has been given to Mordecai for this?" The king's attendants who served him answered, "Nothing has been done for him." ⁴The king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to ask the king to have Mordecai impaled on the stake he had prepared for him. ⁵The king's attendants said to him, "Haman is standing in the court." The king said, "Let him come in." ⁶Haman entered, and the king asked him, "What should be done for the man the king wishes to honor?" Haman thought to himself, "Whom would the king wish to honor more than me?" ⁷Haman said to the king, "For the man the king wishes to honor: ⁸let them bring a royal robe that the king himself has worn, and a horse that the king himself has ridden, with a royal crown placed on its head. ⁹Let the robe and the horse be entrusted to one of the

king's most noble officials. Let them dress the man the king wishes to honor, lead him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him: 'This is what is done for the man the king wishes to honor!'" ¹⁰The king said to Haman, "Hurry! Take the robe and the horse, just as you have described, and do this for Mordecai the Jew who sits at the king's gate. Do not leave out a single detail of what you have proposed." ¹¹Haman took the robe and the horse, dressed Mordecai, led him on horseback through the city square, and proclaimed before him, "This is what is done for the man the king wishes to honor!" ¹²Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman rushed home, mourning, his head covered. ¹³Haman recounted to his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him. His advisors and his wife Zeresh said to him, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him. You will surely fall before him." ¹⁴ While they were still speaking with him, the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried Haman off to the banquet Esther had prepared.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The Hebrew *naddedah shenat ha-melekh* ('the king's sleep wandered away, fled') personifies sleep as something that actively departed — not 'the king could not sleep' but 'sleep fled from the king.' The verb *nadad* means to wander, to flee, to be restless. The king's remedy is bureaucratic: *sefer ha-zikronot divrei ha-yamim* ('the book of memorials, the chronicles of days') — the official court record. The passive *vayyihyu niqra'im* ('they were being read') indicates a reader going through the entries, arriving at Mordecai's record by what appears to be chance.
2. The passive *vayyimmatse katuv* ('it was found written') implies discovery — the reader happened upon this entry. The account matches 2:21-23 exactly: Mordecai's report of the conspiracy by Bigthana and Teresh, *shomerei ha-saf* ('the threshold guards'). The phrase *lishlo'ach yad* ('to send a hand') is the same assassination idiom from 2:21. The critical detail from 2:23 — that the matter was written in the chronicles — now pays off. A bureaucratic record from years earlier becomes the catalyst for reversal.
3. The king's question — *mah na'asah yeqar u-gedulah le-Mordekhai* ('what has been done of honor and greatness for Mordecai?') — reveals an oversight: a man who saved the king's life received no reward. The attendants' answer is blunt: *lo na'asah immo davar* ('nothing has been done with him'). The word *davar* ('thing, anything') is comprehensive — not partial recognition, not delayed recognition, but nothing at all. This administrative failure is about to become the mechanism of Mordecai's elevation.
4. The timing is the chapter's narrative hinge: the king needs advice on honoring someone at the exact moment Haman arrives to request that same person's execution. The king's question *mi ba-chatser* ('who is in the court?') is casual — he wants whoever is available. The narrator's aside reveals Haman's purpose: *le'emor la-melekh litlot et Mordekhai al ha-ets asher hekhin lo* ('to tell the king to impale Mordecai on the stake he had prepared for him'). The stake from 5:14, built overnight, stands ready. Haman has come to use it.
5. The brevity is devastating: *hinneh Haman omed ba-chatser* ('look, Haman is standing in the court'). Haman stands in the outer court waiting to request an execution; the king summons him to design an honor. Neither knows what the other intends. The word *yavo* ('let him enter') admits Haman into a conversation he has completely misunderstood before it begins.
6. The king's question — *mah la'asot ba-ish asher ha-melekh chafets biqaro* ('what is to be done for the man in whom the king delights to do honor?') — is deliberately vague about the identity of the honoree. Haman's internal response — *vayyomer Haman belibbo* ('Haman said in his heart') — is the narrator granting the reader access to Haman's thoughts. The question *lemi yachpots ha-melekh la'asot yeqar yoter mimmenni* ('to whom would the king wish to do honor more than me?') reveals total self-absorption. It does not occur to Haman that anyone else could be in view.
7. Haman echoes the king's exact phrase — *ish asher ha-melekh chafets biqaro* — before launching into his detailed prescription. He is designing what he believes will be his own honor ceremony. Every detail in the following verses reflects Haman's personal fantasies of recognition.
8. Each element of Haman's proposal is specifically royal: *levush malkhut asher lavash bo ha-melekh* ('a royal garment that the king wore on himself') — not new robes but the king's own garments, carrying the king's identity. The *sus asher rakhav alav ha-melekh* ('a horse the king rode upon') is the royal mount. The *keter malkhut be-rosho* ('a royal crown on its head') likely refers to a decorative crown or crest on the horse, a known Persian practice marking a royal steed. Haman wants to look like the king — to wear his clothes, ride his horse, bear his insignia.
9. The ceremony Haman designs has three components: dressing (*vehilbishu*), a public procession on horseback (*vehirkhivuhu al ha-sus birchov ha-ir*), and a herald proclaiming his honor (*veqare'u lefanav*). The proclamation — *kakhah ye'aseh la-ish asher ha-melekh chafets biqaro* ('thus it shall be done for the man the king wishes to honor') — is meant to be repeated through the streets, maximizing public visibility. The phrase *ish mi-sarei ha-melekh ha-partemim* ('one of the noble officials of the king') designates a high-ranking nobleman as personal attendant — Haman is prescribing a servant for himself without realizing he is prescribing himself as the servant.
10. The command *maher* ('hurry!') mirrors the urgency in 5:5 — the king acts without hesitation. The identification *le-Mordekhai ha-Yehudi ha-yoshev be-sha'ar ha-melekh* ('for Mordecai the Jew who sits at the king's gate') is maximally specific: the king knows exactly who this man is and where he sits. The final command — *al tappel davar mi-kol asher dibbarta* ('do not let fall a single thing from all you have spoken') — is devastating: every element of Haman's fantasy must be performed in full, but for his enemy. The verb *tappel* ('to let fall, to omit, to leave out') insists on completeness — Haman cannot abbreviate, substitute, or delegate.

11. The execution matches the prescription exactly: every verb from verse 9 is performed in verse 11. The narrator's restraint is remarkable — there is no description of Haman's internal state, no record of Mordecai's reaction, no crowd response. The scene is reported with clinical precision: *vayyiqqach* ('he took'), *vayyalbesh* ('he dressed'), *vayyarkivehu* ('he led him on horseback'), *vayyiqra* ('he proclaimed'). The humiliation is conveyed entirely through the action itself. Haman, who refused to soil his dignity by striking at one man, now serves as that man's personal valet and public herald.
12. The contrast is compressed into a single verse. Mordecai *vayyashov el sha'ar ha-melek* ('returned to the king's gate') — back to his usual place, as if nothing has changed. The parade did not alter his position or behavior. Haman *nidchaf el beito* ('was pushed, rushed to his house') — the passive-reflexive *nidchaf* suggests being driven, propelled by shame rather than choosing to go. The two signs of his state — *avel* ('mourning') and *chafui rosh* ('head covered') — are the markers of grief and humiliation. The man who came to the palace at dawn expecting triumph goes home in the posture of defeat.
13. Haman's friends, previously called *ohavav* ('his friends, his loved ones' — 5:10), are now called *chakhamav* ('his wise men, his advisors') — the shift in title suggests they are now speaking in an oracular capacity rather than as sympathizers. Zeresh's prophecy is built on the condition *im mi-zera ha-Yehudim Mordekhai* ('if Mordecai is of the seed of the Jews') — the 'if' is not uncertainty about Mordecai's ethnicity (they know he is Jewish from 5:13) but a conditional sentence introducing a certainty: because he is Jewish, you are doomed. The infinitive absolute *nafol tippol* ('falling you will fall') expresses inevitability. The verb *nafal* ('to fall') echoes *hachillota linpol lefanav* ('you have begun to fall before him') — the fall is already underway, and it cannot be stopped.
14. The interruption is abrupt: *odam medabberim immo* ('while they were still speaking with him') — the prophecy of his fall is not even finished when the next stage begins. The verb *vayyavhilu* ('they hurried, they rushed') has the same root as the 'haste' that characterized Haman's approach to power throughout the book. The eunuchs come *lehavi et Haman el ha-mishteh asher asetah Esther* ('to bring Haman to the banquet Esther had prepared'). The word *mishteh* ('feast, drinking-feast') appears for the last time before the banquet of exposure in chapter 7. Haman is being rushed from the scene of his humiliation directly into the scene of his destruction, with no time to recover, strategize, or escape.

7

Summary: *Esther and King Ahasuerus sit down to their second banquet with Haman. The king again asks Esther what she wants. This time she answers: her life and the life of her people, because they have been sold for destruction. The king demands to know who is responsible. Esther points directly at Haman. Ahasuerus storms out to the palace garden in fury. Haman, terrified, throws himself on the couch where Esther is reclining to beg for his life. The king returns, sees Haman collapsed on the queen's couch, and interprets it as assault. Harbonah, one of the court eunuchs, mentions the seventy-five-foot gallows Haman built for Mordecai. The king orders Haman hanged on it. Haman is executed on his own gallows, and the king's rage subsides.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter is a masterpiece of dramatic reversal. Every weapon Haman prepared is turned against him. The gallows he built for Mordecai becomes his own execution platform. The banquet he attended as the queen's honored guest becomes the setting of his exposure. His prostration before Esther — begging for mercy — is read by the king as sexual aggression, transforming Haman from petitioner to criminal in a single moment. The Hebrew narrator builds this reversal with extraordinary restraint, never editorializing. The covering of Haman's face after the king's accusation is a Persian court practice signaling that a person is condemned — once the face is covered, the man is already dead in the eyes of the court. Harbonah's perfectly timed mention of the gallows functions as the final nail: the instrument of murder becomes the instrument of justice, without any character needing to argue for it.*

Translation Friction: *The king's reaction to seeing Haman on Esther's couch raises questions about whether Ahasuerus genuinely believed Haman was assaulting his wife or whether this was a convenient pretext to destroy a now-dangerous advisor. Some interpreters note that the king's fury in the garden may have been as much about his own complicity — he sealed the decree Haman proposed — as about Haman's crime. The text leaves this ambiguity unresolved. The phrase 'they covered Haman's face' may reflect a Persian execution custom or may be a narrative signal that Haman has crossed from the world of the living into the world of the condemned.*

Connections: *The reversal pattern in this chapter echoes Proverbs 26:27 — 'whoever digs a pit will fall into it.' The gallows-reversal specifically fulfills the narrative principle that evil plots rebound on their architects, a theme running from the story of Joseph's brothers (Genesis 37-50) through Daniel's accusers thrown into the lions' den (Daniel 6). Haman falling on the couch of the queen inverts his position at the first banquet where he sat in honor. The king's question 'Who is he and where is he?' mirrors the pattern of unmasking seen throughout*

biblical narrative where hidden identities are finally revealed at the critical moment.

¹So the king and Haman came to drink with Queen Esther. ²On the second day, at the wine banquet, the king again said to Esther, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It will be given to you. And what is your request? Up to half the kingdom, and it will be done." ³Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor in your eyes, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given to me — that is my petition — and my people — that is my request." ⁴For we have been sold — I and my people — to be annihilated, slaughtered, and wiped out. If we had only been sold into slavery as men and women servants, I would have kept silent, because that trouble would not have been worth disturbing the king. ⁵King Ahasuerus spoke up and said to Queen Esther, "Who is this person? Where is he — the one whose heart has filled him with the audacity to do such a thing?" ⁶Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman." And Haman was terrified before the king and the queen. ⁷The king rose in his fury from the wine banquet and went out to the palace garden. Haman stayed behind to beg for his life from Queen Esther, because he could see that the king had resolved to destroy him. ⁸The king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, and there was Haman, collapsed on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king said, "Will he even assault the queen while I am in the house?" As soon as the words left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. ⁹Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, "There is also the pole standing at Haman's house — fifty cubits tall — which Haman made for Mordecai, the one who spoke up to save the king." The king said, "Hang him on it." ¹⁰So they hanged Haman on the pole that he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king's fury subsided.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb *lishtot* ('to drink') indicates the drinking portion of the banquet, the *mishteh*. Persian banquets followed a structured progression from eating to drinking, and it was during the drinking phase that serious conversation took place. Haman arrives as an honored guest, unaware that this banquet is his trial.
2. The double formula *she'elatekh / baqqashatekh* ('your petition / your request') distinguishes between a formal petition and a personal desire. Esther has been maneuvering through both channels — her formal petition concerns the decree, her personal request concerns her own survival. The offer of 'half the kingdom' appears in similar form in Mark 6:23 when Herod makes his reckless promise to the daughter of Herodias.
3. The word *nafshi* ('my life, my soul') is the first object of her petition — she begins with herself before expanding to her people. This ordering is strategic: the king cares about his queen's survival as a personal matter, so Esther leads with the appeal most likely to provoke his protective instinct. The revelation that 'my people' are the target of destruction is the climactic disclosure of the entire book.
4. The three infinitives *le-hashmid*, *la-harog*, *u-le-abbad* ('to annihilate, to kill, and to destroy') echo the exact language of Haman's decree in 3:13. Esther is quoting the official edict back to the king who sealed it, though she does not yet say who authored it. The conditional clause about slavery is a masterful rhetorical move: she concedes that mere enslavement would not warrant royal intervention, elevating the gravity of what was actually decreed. The phrase *ein ha-tsar shoveh be-nezeq ha-melekh* ('the adversary is not equal to the damage to the king') reframes the genocide as an injury to the crown itself — destroying the Jews would be a loss to the kingdom.
5. The phrase *asher mela'o libbo* ('whose heart has filled him') conveys arrogant presumption — the man's own heart has swelled him to action. The double question *mi hu zeh ve-ei zeh hu* ('who is this one and where is this one') suggests both demand for identity and demand for location, as though the king intends to act immediately. There is dramatic irony: the king himself authorized the decree and is now outraged by it.
6. The word *tsar* ('adversary, one who causes distress') and *oyev* ('enemy') are near-synonyms, but *tsar* emphasizes the oppression and *oyev* the hostility. Esther uses both to ensure the king understands the threat as both personal and political. The adjective *ra* ('wicked, evil') is a moral judgment delivered in the king's presence — Esther is functioning as both accuser and witness.
7. The king's departure to *ginnat ha-bitan* ('the garden of the pavilion') may be an attempt to compose himself before acting, or it may reflect the magnitude of his anger — he cannot remain in the same room. The word *chamato* ('his burning anger') describes heat-rage. Meanwhile Haman's desperation drives him to appeal to the very person he tried to exterminate. The phrase *kaletah elav ha-ra'ah* ('the evil was completed/determined against him') uses the verb *kalah*, meaning the decision is final and irreversible.
8. The word *mittah* refers to the dining couch on which Persian nobles reclined during banquets, not a bed in the sleeping sense. Haman's posture was that of a suppliant, but the optics were catastrophic. The question *ha-gam likhbosh* ('will he even subdue/assault?') uses *gam* ('even, also') to suggest escalation — as if Haman's crimes are piling up. Some scholars read the face-covering as the placement of a hood before execution.
9. Harbonah's interjection is perfectly timed and may not be accidental — court officials could read the political winds and knew which side to support. The *ets* ('wood, pole, tree') fifty cubits high (approximately seventy-five feet or twenty-three meters) was likely not a gallows in the Western sense but a tall pole for impalement or public display of a body, a common Persian punishment. The description of Mordecai as *asher dibber tov al ha-melekh* ('who spoke good concerning the king') reminds Ahasuerus that the intended victim was the man who saved his life (2:21-23). The king's three-word

command *teluhu alav* ('hang him on it') is one of the most decisive sentences in the book.

10. The verb *shakhakhah* ('subsided, abated, was calmed') is used for the settling of rage, like heat dissipating. The king's anger is satisfied only by the execution — nothing less would resolve it. The narrator's final note completes the reversal with surgical economy: the pole Haman built for Mordecai receives Haman. No moral is drawn; the reversal speaks for itself.

8

Summary: *On the same day Haman is executed, King Ahasuerus gives his estate to Queen Esther, and Esther reveals Mordecai's relationship to her. The king gives Mordecai the signet ring he had taken back from Haman, and Esther places Mordecai over Haman's estate. But the crisis is not over: Haman's decree to destroy the Jews is still in effect and cannot be revoked under Persian law. Esther falls at the king's feet weeping, begging him to reverse the damage. The king extends his gold scepter and tells her to write whatever she wishes in his name and seal it with his ring. Mordecai drafts a counter-decree granting the Jews in every province the right to assemble, defend themselves, and destroy any armed force that attacks them — including women and children — and to take plunder. The decree goes out on the twenty-third day of the third month (Sivan), carried by royal couriers on fast horses bred from the king's stables. Mordecai leaves the palace in royal blue and white robes with a great gold crown and a purple linen cloak. The city of Susa erupts in celebration. Throughout the provinces, Jews experience light, gladness, joy, and honor. Many people of the land declare themselves Jews out of fear.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *The chapter demonstrates that removing a tyrant does not automatically remove the systems the tyrant created. Haman is dead, but his decree lives on. This structural problem — that Persian law was considered irrevocable even by the king — forces the narrative into an extraordinary legal maneuver: the only way to neutralize a royal decree is to issue another royal decree that gives the victims the power to fight back. The result is not cancellation but counterbalance. Mordecai's emergence in royal garments directly reverses chapter 4, where he sat in sackcloth and ashes at the king's gate. The detail that 'many of the people of the land became Jews' (*mityahadim*) is one of the most striking lines in the book — it shows that the reversal of fortune has made Jewish identity a source of power rather than danger, prompting others to align themselves with the Jewish community.*

Translation Friction: *The counter-decree's language authorizing the Jews to destroy, kill, and annihilate attackers — including women and children — mirrors the exact language of Haman's original decree. This mirroring is deliberate and raises difficult questions: is the narrative endorsing the same violence it condemned when Haman proposed it? Most interpreters note that the decree authorizes defensive action against those who would attack the Jews, not preemptive violence. The phrase *le-hashmid ve-la-harog u-le-abbed* ('to annihilate and kill and destroy') is identical to 3:13, creating a precise literary mirror. The note that people 'became Jews' (*mityahadim*) is ambiguous — it could mean genuine conversion, political allegiance, or simply self-identification with the winning side.*

Connections: *Mordecai's elevation from sackcloth to royal robes follows the pattern of Joseph's elevation in Egypt (Genesis 41:42), where Pharaoh removes his signet ring and places it on Joseph's hand and dresses him in fine linen. The irrevocable decree problem connects to Daniel 6, where Darius cannot revoke the decree against Daniel even though he wants to. The description of the Jews experiencing 'light and gladness and joy and honor' uses language that resonates with the Psalms of deliverance. The fast horses (the *achashteranim benei ha-rammakim*) are a marker of Persian imperial communication — the system that carried the decree of death now carries the decree of deliverance.*

1On that same day, King Ahasuerus gave the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther. And Mordecai came into the king's presence, because Esther had disclosed what he was to her. 2The king removed his signet ring — the one he had taken back from Haman — and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther placed Mordecai in charge of Haman's estate. 3Esther spoke again before the king. She fell at his feet, weeping, and pleaded with him to undo the evil of Haman the Agagite and the scheme he had devised against the Jews. 4The king extended the gold scepter toward Esther, and Esther rose and stood before the king. 5She said, "If it pleases the king, and if I have found favor before him, and if the matter seems right to the

king, and if I am pleasing in his eyes — let a decree be written to revoke the documents carrying out the scheme of Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces." ⁶For how could I bear to watch the disaster that would overtake my people? How could I bear to watch the destruction of my kindred? ⁷King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, "I have already given Haman's estate to Esther, and they have hanged him on the pole because he raised his hand against the Jews." ⁸"Now you yourselves write on behalf of the Jews whatever seems right to you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring — for a document written in the king's name and sealed with the king's ring cannot be revoked." ⁹The king's scribes were summoned at that time, in the third month — the month of Sivan — on its twenty-third day. Everything Mordecai commanded was written down: to the Jews, to the satraps, the governors, and the officials of the provinces from India to Cush — one hundred twenty-seven provinces — to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language, and to the Jews in their script and their language. ¹⁰He wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed it with the king's ring, then sent documents by couriers on horseback, riding swift royal steeds bred from the king's stables. ¹¹In it the king granted the Jews in every city the right to assemble and defend their lives — to annihilate, kill, and destroy any armed force of any people or province that would attack them, along with their women and children, and to seize their property as plunder. ¹²This was to take effect on a single day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus: the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. ¹³A copy of the document was to be issued as law in every province and made public to all peoples, so that the Jews would be prepared on that day to take vengeance on their enemies. ¹⁴The couriers, riding the swift royal steeds, went out urgently, driven by the king's command. And the decree was issued in the citadel of Susa. ¹⁵Mordecai left the king's presence in royal robes of blue and white, wearing a large gold crown, with a cloak of fine linen and purple. The city of Susa burst into celebration and joy. ¹⁶For the Jews there was light and gladness, joy and honor. ¹⁷In every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his law arrived, there was gladness and joy among the Jews — feasting and celebration. And many of the peoples of the land declared themselves Jews, because dread of the Jews had fallen on them.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The phrase *tsorror ha-Yehudim* ('the one who oppresses the Jews') becomes Haman's permanent epithet in the second half of the book — even after his death he is identified by his hostility. Esther's disclosure of her relationship to Mordecai (*mah hu lah*, 'what he was to her') completes the revelation begun in chapter 7. The property transfer follows Persian custom: the estate of an executed traitor reverted to the crown, and the king could reassign it.
2. The verb *he'evir* ('he had transferred, caused to pass over') describes the earlier removal of the ring from Haman, while *vayyaser* ('he removed') describes the king taking it off his own finger now. The ring functions as a combination of authority and identity — documents sealed with it carry the force of royal law.
3. Even with Haman dead, Esther must continue to advocate — the decree remains active. The verb *va-tithannen* ('she pleaded, she begged for grace') is from the same root as *hen* ('grace, favor'), indicating she is appealing to the king's mercy. The phrase *machashavto asher chashav* ('his scheme which he schemed') uses a cognate construction to emphasize the deliberateness of Haman's plot. He is again called *ha-Agagi* ('the Agagite'), linking him to the Amalekite royal line.
4. The extension of the *sharvit ha-zahav* ('the gold scepter') repeats the gesture from 5:2 — it signals royal acceptance and permission to speak. Esther's movement from prostrate at his feet to standing before him mirrors her shift from supplicant to authorized speaker. She has been granted the floor.
5. Esther stacks four conditional clauses before her request, each one a layer of diplomatic deference: *im al ha-melekh tov* ('if it pleases the king'), *im matsati chen lefanav* ('if I have found favor before him'), *ve-khasher ha-davar* ('if the matter is fitting'), *ve-tovah ani be-einav* ('if I am good in his eyes'). This is not timidity but skilled court rhetoric — each clause acknowledges the king's absolute authority while simultaneously making refusal nearly impossible. The verb *le-hashiv* ('to return, to reverse, to bring back') indicates she wants the decree recalled.
6. The doubled question *eikhakhah ukhal* ('how could I bear?') uses the same emotional appeal twice with different objects: *ammi* ('my people') and *moladi* ('my kindred, my birth-family'). The shift from 'people' to 'kindred' moves from the national to the personal — Esther is saying that the destruction would reach her own family. The word *ovdan* ('destruction, annihilation') is from the same root as the verb *abbed* in Haman's decree, tying Esther's plea directly to the language of the genocide order.
7. The king addresses both Esther and Mordecai together for the first time, acknowledging their partnership. His statement is partly defensive — he is reminding them of what he has already done (property transfer, execution) before addressing the harder problem of the decree. The phrase *shalach yado ba-Yehudim* ('he stretched out his hand against the Jews') frames Haman's action as aggression, though in reality the king himself authorized it.

8. The emphatic *ve-attem* ('and you yourselves') places the responsibility for the solution squarely on Esther and Mordecai. The king provides the instrument (the ring) and the authority (his name) but leaves the content to them. The verb *le-hashiv* ('to revoke, to reverse') is the same word Esther used in verse 5, and the king is explaining why her request cannot be fulfilled literally — the old decree cannot be unmade, only counteracted.
9. The date — the twenty-third of Sivan — is exactly seventy days after Haman's decree was issued on the thirteenth of Nisan (3:12). The counter-decree mirrors the original in its administrative scope: same bureaucratic infrastructure, same multilingual distribution, same empire-wide reach. The word *achashdarfenim* ('satraps') is a Persian loanword referring to provincial governors of the highest rank. The explicit mention that the Jews received the decree in their own script and language (*kikhtvam ve-khilshonam*) ensures they can read the authorization to defend themselves.
10. The phrase *ha-achashteranim benei ha-rammakim* is one of the most debated in Esther. The words appear to be Persian loanwords describing a specific breed of fast horse used for imperial courier service. Traditional translations have offered 'mules, camels, and young dromedaries,' but the Hebrew likely describes a single category: horses bred from royal stock for speed. The Persian empire's courier system (the *angareion*) was legendary for its efficiency — Herodotus compared it to a relay race. The same postal infrastructure that distributed the decree of death now distributes the decree of deliverance.
11. The verb *le-hiqqahel* ('to assemble') is significant — it grants the Jews the right to organize collectively, which would normally be seen as insurrection. The royal decree transforms their gathering from an act of rebellion into a legally sanctioned assembly. The phrase *kol cheil am u-medinah ha-tsarim otam* ('all the armed force of any people and province that would oppress them') limits the authorized violence to those who actively attack.
12. The date — the thirteenth of Adar — is the same day Haman's decree had set for the destruction of the Jews (3:13). The counter-decree does not change the date; it changes who has the right to fight on that date. This means both sides will be armed and authorized on the same day, transforming a planned massacre into a battle.
13. The word *patshegen* ('copy, text') is a Persian loanword. The decree was to be published *galui le-khol ha-ammim* ('openly to all peoples') — the public nature of the decree was essential because it functioned as both authorization and deterrent. Anyone who attacked the Jews on the thirteenth of Adar would know in advance that the Jews had royal permission to fight back. The verb *le-hinnaqem* ('to avenge, to take vengeance') frames the defensive action as retribution for the threat itself.
14. The paired words *mevohalim u-dechufim* ('hastened and pressed, urgently driven') convey extreme speed — this is an emergency dispatch. Every day of delay leaves the Jews without legal authorization to defend themselves. The decree was simultaneously published in Susa, the administrative capital, establishing it as law at the center of the empire.
15. The *tekhelet* ('blue-violet') is the same word used for the blue thread in the priestly garments and the *tsitsit* (Numbers 15:38), though here it refers to Persian court attire. The word *takhrikh* ('wrap, cloak') appears only here in the Hebrew Bible. The contrast between Mordecai's sackcloth (4:1) and his royal robes is one of the book's defining visual moments.
16. The Talmud (Megillah 16b) interprets each noun as a symbol: *orah* is Torah, *simchah* is a festival, *sason* is circumcision, and *yeqar* is tefillin. This midrashic reading layers religious meaning onto the plain sense. In the narrative context, the four nouns describe the collective emotional and social transformation of the Jewish community from despair to celebration.
17. The verb *mityahadim* ('becoming Jews, declaring themselves Jewish') is a *hitpa'el* form — reflexive, indicating that these people actively identified themselves as Jews. The word appears only here in the Hebrew Bible and is the origin of the term 'to Judaize.' Whether this means full religious conversion or political self-identification is debated. The phrase *nafal pachad ha-Yehudim aleihem* ('the dread of the Jews fell upon them') reverses the dynamic of the entire narrative: the people who were supposed to be feared now inspire fear. The phrase *yom tov* ('a good day') becomes a technical term for a Jewish festival day.

9

Summary: The thirteenth of Adar arrives — the day Haman's decree had designated for the destruction of the Jews. Instead, the opposite happens: the Jews overpower those who hate them. Provincial officials assist the Jews because fear of Mordecai has spread throughout the empire. In Susa alone the Jews kill five hundred men, including Haman's ten sons, whose names are listed. The Jews do not touch the plunder. When the king reports the Susa death toll to Esther and asks if she has further requests, she asks for a second day of fighting in Susa and for the bodies of Haman's ten sons to be hung on poles. The king grants it. On the fourteenth of Adar, the Jews in Susa kill three hundred more, again taking no plunder. Jews in the rural provinces fight on the thirteenth and rest on the fourteenth, making it a day of feasting. Jews in Susa fight on the thirteenth and fourteenth and rest on the fifteenth. This is why rural Jews celebrate the fourteenth and city Jews celebrate the fifteenth. Mordecai records these events and sends letters to all the Jews establishing the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar as annual days of feasting, joy, sending food gifts to one another, and giving to the poor. Haman is identified as the son of Hammedatha the Agagite who cast the pur — that is, the lot — to determine the date for destroying the Jews, but

his plot was overturned. The festival is called Purim, from the word pur. The Jews commit themselves and their descendants to observe these two days every year. Queen Esther and Mordecai write a second letter confirming the observance of Purim with full authority. Letters of peace and security are sent to all the Jews in the empire.

What Makes This Remarkable: *This chapter explains the origin and rationale of the festival of Purim — the only major Jewish festival not commanded in the Torah. The narrative provides an etiology: why the festival exists, why it falls on these particular dates, why city and rural celebrations differ by a day, and why it is called Purim (from pur, the lot Haman cast). The repeated emphasis that the Jews did not touch the plunder (stated three times in verses 10, 15, and 16) is one of the chapter's most deliberate details — the counter-decree explicitly permitted them to take spoil, but they refused. This restraint may echo Saul's failure with the Amalekite spoil (1 Samuel 15), tacitly correcting the earlier king's error. The listing of Haman's ten sons by name, followed by their public display on poles, functions as the complete eradication of the Agagite threat that Saul left incomplete. The word pur itself is not Hebrew but Akkadian, and the narrator translates it for the audience: ha-pur hu ha-goral ('the pur, that is, the lot'). Chance — the casting of lots — determined the date, but the outcome was the opposite of what the lot-caster intended.*

Translation Friction: *Esther's request for a second day of fighting in Susa and for the public display of Haman's already-dead sons raises difficult moral questions. Is she acting from vengeance or from strategic necessity — ensuring that all enemies are neutralized before the celebration begins? The text does not explain her motives. The death toll figures (500 in Susa on day one, 300 on day two, 75,000 in the provinces) are large and have generated centuries of discussion about whether they are historical, symbolic, or hyperbolic. The triple statement that the Jews refused plunder may be the narrator's way of insisting that this was defensive, not predatory — they fought for survival, not profit. The establishment of Purim by human authority rather than divine command is unique among major Jewish observances and reflects the book's broader pattern of operating without explicit divine instruction.*

Connections: *The defeat of the Agagite and his sons connects to the Saul-Agag narrative in 1 Samuel 15, where Saul failed to fully execute the ban on the Amalekites. What Saul left unfinished, the events of Purim complete. The casting of lots (pur/goral) connects to the broader biblical theme of divine sovereignty operating through apparent randomness — Proverbs 16:33 states that the lot is cast into the lap but its every decision comes from the LORD, though Esther's narrator never makes this theological claim explicitly. The food-sending and gift-giving provisions (mishloach manot and mattanot la-evyonim) establish Purim as a festival defined by communal generosity rather than temple ritual. The two-letter structure (Mordecai's letter, then Esther's confirming letter) mirrors the two-decree structure of the plot and counter-plot.*

¹In the twelfth month — the month of Adar — on its thirteenth day, when the king's command and law were to be carried out, on the very day the enemies of the Jews expected to overpower them, the opposite happened: the Jews overpowered those who hated them. ²The Jews assembled in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to strike at those who sought to harm them. No one could stand against them, because dread of them had fallen on all the peoples. ³All the provincial officials, the satraps, the governors, and the king's administrators supported the Jews, because dread of Mordecai had fallen on them. ⁴For Mordecai was powerful in the king's court, and his reputation was spreading through all the provinces, because the man Mordecai kept growing greater. ⁵The Jews struck down all their enemies with the sword — slaughter and destruction — and did as they wished to those who hated them. ⁶In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. ⁷They also killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, ⁸Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, ⁹Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha — ¹⁰the ten sons of Haman son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. But they did not lay a hand on the plunder. ¹¹That same day the count of those killed in the citadel of Susa was reported to the king. ¹²The king said to Queen Esther, "In the citadel of Susa alone the Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman. What must they have done in the rest of the king's provinces! Now what is your petition? It will be granted. What further request do you have? It will be done." ¹³Esther said, "If it pleases the king, let the Jews in Susa be allowed to act tomorrow as well, under today's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hung on the poles." ¹⁴The king ordered it done. A decree was issued in Susa, and the ten sons of Haman were hung on the poles. ¹⁵The Jews in Susa assembled again on the fourteenth day of Adar and killed three hundred men in Susa, but they did not lay a hand on the plunder. ¹⁶The rest of the

Jews in the king's provinces assembled and defended their lives. They found relief from their enemies and killed seventy-five thousand of those who hated them, but they did not lay a hand on the plunder. ¹⁷This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. They rested on the fourteenth and made it a day of feasting and joy. ¹⁸But the Jews in Susa assembled on the thirteenth and the fourteenth, and rested on the fifteenth, making it a day of feasting and joy. ¹⁹That is why the Jews of the countryside — those living in unwalled towns — observe the fourteenth day of Adar as a day of joy and feasting, a holiday, and a time for sending food gifts to one another. ²⁰Mordecai recorded these events and sent letters to all the Jews throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, near and far, ²¹establishing for them the obligation to observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and the fifteenth day, every year, ²²as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and the month that was transformed for them from grief to joy and from mourning to celebration — to observe them as days of feasting and joy, sending food gifts to one another and giving gifts to the poor. ²³The Jews accepted as a permanent practice what they had already begun to do and what Mordecai had written to them. ²⁴For Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them and had cast the pur — that is, the lot — to crush and destroy them. ²⁵But when she came before the king, he ordered by written decree that Haman's wicked scheme — the one he had devised against the Jews — should come back on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hung on the poles. ²⁶That is why they called these days Purim, from the word pur. And so, because of everything written in this letter, and because of what they had witnessed and what had happened to them, ²⁷the Jews established and accepted for themselves, their descendants, and all who would join them, an obligation that would not be set aside — to observe these two days according to their written instructions and at their appointed time every year. ²⁸These days are to be remembered and observed in every generation, every family, every province, and every city. These days of Purim will never cease from among the Jews, and their memory will never fade from their descendants. ²⁹Then Queen Esther daughter of Abihail, together with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter of Purim. ³⁰He sent letters to all the Jews in the one hundred twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus — words of peace and faithfulness — ³¹to confirm these days of Purim at their appointed times, just as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had established for them, and just as they had accepted for themselves and their descendants the practices of fasting and lamentation. ³²Esther's decree confirmed these regulations of Purim, and it was written in the record.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The verb *sivru* ('they expected, they hoped') from the root *savar* carries the sense of confident expectation — the enemies believed the outcome was assured. The construction *ve-nahafokh hu* ('and it was turned — it') uses the impersonal passive, leaving the agent of reversal unnamed. This is characteristic of Esther's theology: events turn, but no one says who turns them.
2. The phrase *lishloch yad* ('to send the hand, to strike') is an idiom for taking violent action. The Jews are exercising the right granted in the counter-decree (8:11). The phrase *ish lo amad lifneihem* ('no man stood before them') echoes military language used throughout the conquest narratives. The dread (*pachdam*) falling on the peoples reprises 8:17 — the reversal of fear is complete.
3. The verb *menass'im* ('lifting up, supporting, assisting') indicates active assistance, not mere non-interference. The bureaucratic apparatus that would have carried out the genocide now assists the Jews. The dread is specifically of Mordecai — not of the Jews collectively — because Mordecai now holds the signet ring and can make or break any official's career.
4. The phrase *holekh ve-gadol* ('going and becoming great,' that is, 'growing greater and greater') uses the same progressive construction applied to Moses in Exodus 11:3 (the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt). The parallel is suggestive: like Moses, Mordecai is a Jew who rises to the second-highest position in a foreign empire and uses that position to deliver his people.
5. The phrase *makkat cherev* ('the striking of the sword') indicates armed combat. The terms *hereg va-avdan* ('killing and destruction') are near-synonyms intensifying the violence. The final clause *va-ya'asu be-son'eihem kirtsonam* ('they did to their enemies as they wished') indicates the Jews had complete military superiority on this day.
6. The narrator specifies the Susa death toll separately from the provinces, setting up Esther's request in verse 13 for a second day of fighting in the capital. The number five hundred refers to armed combatants who attacked the Jews, not to the general population.
7. The listing of Haman's ten sons begins here and continues through verse 10. All ten names are Persian in origin. In the traditional synagogue reading of Esther (the Megillah), these ten names are read in a single breath, symbolizing that they all died together. The names are written in a distinctive columnar format in the Hebrew scroll.

8. These three names continue the list. Each name is introduced with *ve-et*, the direct object marker with the conjunction, giving the list a formal, record-keeping character — this is an official accounting of the dead.
9. The final four names complete the list of ten. The name *Vaizatha* (sometimes *Vajezatha*) closes the catalogue. That all ten sons are killed indicates the complete elimination of the *Agagite* line — no descendant of *Haman* remains to perpetuate the threat.
10. The first of three statements that the Jews refused to take plunder (repeated in verses 15 and 16). The counter-decree explicitly authorized them to seize property (8:11), so this restraint is voluntary. The refusal may be a deliberate contrast with *Saul*, who kept the spoil of the *Amalekites* against the command in 1 Samuel 15. By refusing plunder from an *Agagite* enemy, the Jews of *Persia* succeed where *Saul* failed.
11. The king receives a body count from *Susa* specifically, indicating an administrative reporting system. This report sets up the exchange between the king and *Esther* in the following verses.
12. The king's extrapolation — if five hundred died in *Susa* alone, what about the rest of the empire? — suggests he is impressed rather than disturbed. His immediate offer of further concessions shows that his alignment with *Esther* remains firm. The petition/request formula (*she'elatekh / baqqashatekh*) appears for the final time, without the 'half the kingdom' qualifier.
13. *Esther's* request has two parts: a second day of authorized defense in *Susa*, and the public display of *Haman's* dead sons. The sons are already dead (verse 10), so the hanging is for public exposure, not execution — a Persian practice of displaying the bodies of defeated enemies as a warning. The second day of fighting suggests that the threat in the capital was not fully neutralized in one day, or that *Esther* wanted to ensure no enemies remained.
14. The king's approval is immediate and without negotiation. The decree applies specifically to *Susa*, not the entire empire — the provinces had only the one day. The public display of *Haman's* sons serves as both a deterrent and a symbol that the *Agagite* house has been completely uprooted.
15. The second day of fighting produces a lower death toll (three hundred versus five hundred), suggesting the resistance was diminishing. The second mention that the Jews refused plunder reinforces the narrative's insistence that this was defensive action, not opportunistic violence.
16. The phrase *ve-noach me-oyeveihem* ('and they had rest from their enemies') uses the same verb for 'rest' (*nuach*) that appears in the conquest narratives when *Israel* gains peace from surrounding enemies. The provincial death toll of seventy-five thousand is the largest figure in the narrative. The third and final statement about refusing plunder closes this theme definitively. The verb *amad al nafsham* ('they stood for their lives') emphasizes the defensive character of the action.
17. This verse explains why rural and unwallied-city Jews celebrate *Purim* on the fourteenth of *Adar*: they fought on the thirteenth and rested on the fourteenth. The establishment of a *yom mishteh ve-simchah* ('a day of feasting and joy') transforms a military victory into a communal celebration.
18. This verse explains the *Shushan Purim* tradition: because the Jews of *Susa* fought for two days (thirteenth and fourteenth), they rested and celebrated on the fifteenth. This is why Jews in walled cities (following the model of *Susa*) celebrate *Purim* on the fifteenth of *Adar*, while Jews in unwallied cities celebrate on the fourteenth. *Jerusalem* observes *Shushan Purim* on the fifteenth.
19. The word *perazim* ('rural, open, unwallied') and *arei ha-perazot* ('unwallied cities') distinguish between fortified and unfortified settlements. The practice of *mishloach manot* ('sending portions') — giving food gifts to friends and neighbors — becomes one of the defining customs of *Purim*. The phrase *ish le-re'ehu* ('each person to his neighbor') emphasizes the communal, relational nature of the celebration.
20. *Mordecai's* act of writing (*va-yikhtov*) and sending letters establishes the observance through official communication — the same mechanism used for royal decrees. The phrase *ha-qerovim ve-ha-rechoqim* ('the near and the far') ensures no Jewish community in the empire is excluded from the new observance.
21. The verb *le-qayyem* ('to establish, to confirm, to make binding') gives *Mordecai's* letter the force of a permanent institution. Both days — the fourteenth and the fifteenth — are included, covering both the rural and the *Susa* observances. The phrase *be-khol shanah ve-shanah* ('in every year and year') mandates annual repetition in perpetuity.
22. The verb *nehpakh* ('was transformed, was turned') is from the same root as *nahafokh* in verse 1 — the great reversal that defines the book. The four components of *Purim* observance are specified: *mishteh* ('feasting'), *simchah* ('joy'), *mishloach manot* ('sending food gifts'), and *mattanot la-eyonim* ('gifts to the poor'). The inclusion of giving to the poor ensures the celebration is not self-contained but extends to those in need.
23. The verb *qibbel* ('accepted, received, took upon themselves') is significant — the observance is not imposed but voluntarily adopted. The community accepts *Mordecai's* letter as binding. This voluntary acceptance becomes the legal basis for *Purim* in rabbinic tradition.
24. The verb *hippil* ('he cast, he caused to fall') is the standard verb for casting lots. The *pur* was likely a cube or stone used in Mesopotamian divination practices. The narrator's gloss *hu ha-goral* ('that is, the lot') confirms that the word was foreign enough to require explanation for the Hebrew-speaking audience. The verbs *le-hummam u-le-abbadam* ('to crush them and to destroy them') describe the intended result of the lot-casting.
25. The phrase *yashuv machashavto ha-ra'ah al rosho* ('his evil scheme should return on his own head') states the reversal principle explicitly. The verb *shuv* ('return') indicates that evil has a boomerang quality — it comes back to its origin. The summary compresses the narrative: *Esther's* appearance before the king, the counter-decree, and the execution of *Haman* and his sons are presented as a single act of royal justice.

26. The word *iggeret* ('letter, epistle') is used for official correspondence. The three grounds for observance — the written record, personal witness, and lived experience — create a robust basis for the tradition's authority. The Hebrew plural ending *-im* on the Akkadian word *pur* produces the hybrid form *Purim*.
27. The phrase *qiyemu ve-qibbelu* ('they established and accepted') uses two verbs of commitment. The obligation extends to *zar'am* ('their descendants') and *kol ha-nilvim alei hem* ('all who attach themselves to them'), which includes converts and those who aligned themselves with the Jewish community (as in 8:17). The phrase *ve-lo ya'avur* ('and it shall not pass away, it shall not be set aside') gives the observance the permanence of a binding law.
28. The verse builds from the smallest unit (*dor*, 'generation') through *mishpachah* ('family, clan'), *medinah* ('province'), and *ir* ('city'), covering every social and geographic level. The double negative — *lo ya'avru* ('they will never pass away') and *lo yasuf* ('it will never cease, it will never come to an end') — is a declaration of perpetuity. The word *zikhram* ('their memory') connects *Purim* to the broader biblical imperative of remembrance.
29. Esther is identified by her father's name (*bat Avichayil*) for only the second time in the book, anchoring her in her Jewish lineage at the moment she exercises royal power. The phrase *et kol toqef* ('with all authority, with full force') indicates this letter carries the weight of both royal and communal power. This is the second letter — the first was *Mordecai's* (verse 20). Esther's letter confirms and strengthens the observance.
30. The phrase *divrei shalom ve-emet* ('words of peace and truth/faithfulness') characterizes the tone of the letters. After a year of existential threat, the communication from *Mordecai* and *Esther* brings *shalom* ('peace, wholeness, well-being') and *emet* ('truth, reliability, faithfulness'). The full count of 127 provinces is repeated from 1:1, forming a literary bracket — the same empire that hosted *Ahasuerus's* extravagant feast now receives a message of Jewish peace.
31. The reference to *ha-tsumot ve-za'aqatam* ('the fasts and their outcry') introduces a dimension of *Purim* observance not previously mentioned — the fasting that commemorates the crisis before the deliverance. This becomes the basis for the *Fast of Esther* (*Ta'anit Esther*) observed on the thirteenth of *Adar*, the day before *Purim*. The verse connects celebration to the memory of suffering: you feast because you first fasted.
32. The word *ma'amar* ('decree, command, word') is used for *Esther's* authorization — the same word used for royal edicts. The phrase *ve-nikhtav ba-sefer* ('and it was written in the book') indicates that the *Purim* regulations were recorded in an official document, possibly the court annals or the scroll of *Esther* itself. This is the final act of the chapter: the festival has been established, confirmed, and permanently recorded.

10

Summary: *The book closes with a brief epilogue. King Ahasuerus imposes a tribute on the land and the coastlands of the sea. The full account of his power and authority, along with the record of Mordecai's greatness to which the king elevated him, are written in the official annals of the kings of Media and Persia. Mordecai the Jew is second in rank to King Ahasuerus, great among the Jews, and accepted by the majority of his kinsmen. He seeks the welfare of his people and speaks peace to all his descendants.*

What Makes This Remarkable: *This three-verse epilogue shifts the focus from crisis narrative to administrative summary, echoing the style of royal annals. The book that began with Ahasuerus displaying his power and wealth ends with Ahasuerus imposing tribute and Mordecai holding power beside him. The final portrait of Mordecai — seeking the welfare of his people and speaking peace — is a description of ongoing, sustained leadership rather than a single heroic moment. The phrase 'accepted by the majority of his kinsmen' (*ratsuv le-rov echav*) contains a surprising note of realism: not all of his kinsmen accepted him. Some interpreters read this as an acknowledgment that a Jew holding imperial power in a foreign court will always face criticism from within his own community. The book ends not with Esther but with Mordecai, positioning him as the lasting political figure whose influence shapes the Jewish community's relationship with Persian power.*

Translation Friction: *The abrupt shift to tribute collection and annals-style prose has led some scholars to argue that chapter 10 is an editorial appendix rather than part of the original composition. The mention of tribute on 'the land and the coastlands of the sea' may refer to the expansion of taxation during Xerxes' reign, possibly connected to the costs of the Greek wars. The phrase 'accepted by the majority' rather than 'all' is either refreshingly honest about political reality or a hint that Mordecai's integration into Persian power structures troubled some Jews. The absence of Esther from the final summary is notable — the book bears her name, but the closing words belong to Mordecai.*

Connections: Mordecai's position as second to the king mirrors Joseph's role under Pharaoh (Genesis 41:40-44) and Daniel's role under multiple Babylonian and Persian rulers. The reference to the annals of Media and Persia connects to the chronicles mentioned throughout Esther (2:23, 6:1) and to the same formula used in Kings for the annals of Israel and Judah. The description of Mordecai seeking the welfare (tov) of his people and speaking peace (shalom) to his descendants echoes Jeremiah 29:7, where the exiles are told to seek the welfare (shalom) of the city where they have been carried into exile. Mordecai embodies this instruction: a Jew thriving in exile while caring for his community.

¹King Ahasuerus imposed a tax on the land and on the coastlands of the sea. ²The full account of his power and strength, and the detailed record of Mordecai's greatness to which the king elevated him — are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia? ³For Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Ahasuerus, great among the Jews, and favored by the majority of his kinsmen — seeking the good of his people and advocating for the well-being of all his descendants.

TRANSLATOR NOTES

1. The word mas ('tribute, forced labor, tax') indicates the imposition of a levy across the empire. The phrase iyvei ha-yam ('the islands/coastlands of the sea') refers to the Mediterranean coastal regions and islands under Persian control — a marker of the empire's vast reach. This administrative note returns the narrative to the framework of imperial governance, reminding the reader that the Jewish story played out within a functioning empire that continued after the crisis.
2. The phrase sefer divrei ha-yamim le-malkhei Madai u-Faras ('the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia') refers to official Persian court records, not to the biblical book of Chronicles. These annals have not survived, but their existence is consistent with what is known of Persian administrative record-keeping from Greek historians. The verb giddelo ('he made him great, he elevated him') confirms that Mordecai's position was a direct appointment by the king.
3. The title mishneh ('second, deputy') places Mordecai in the highest position a non-royal could hold. The word ratsuv ('accepted, favored') is from the root ratsah ('to be pleased with, to accept') — Mordecai has the approval of his community. The phrase doresh tov ('seeking good') uses the same verb darash ('to seek, to inquire') that appears throughout the Hebrew Bible for seeking after something with intention and persistence. The final word zar'o ('his seed, his descendants') extends Mordecai's influence beyond his own lifetime.