

For Such A Time As This

esther



If you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will come to the Jewish people from another place, but you and your father's family will be destroyed. Who knows, perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this. 4:14

ON THE TIMELINE The story of Esther is rooted in the historical account of King Ahasuerus, who ruled as king of Persia from 486–465 BC. Esther is made queen of Persia in approximately 479 BC, Haman's plot to destroy the Jews occurs in 474 BC, and the first celebration of Purim occurs in 473 BC. The events in Esther occur before the events of Ezra and Nehemiah, but after the Decree of Cyrus had allowed the Jews in exile to return to Jerusalem. Most likely the book was written in the fourth century BC with Mordecai as its author.

A LITTLE BACKGROUND Esther is a unique book. It is the only book in the Bible that never mentions God, although His presence is implied in Mordecai's allusion to divine providence (Est 4:14). The book of Esther is tightly connected with specific historical events, yet it is also a piece of literature, a narrative with all of the literary features necessary to make a great story. Esther is also unique in that its purposes are not always explicitly stated but are derived from the story as a whole.

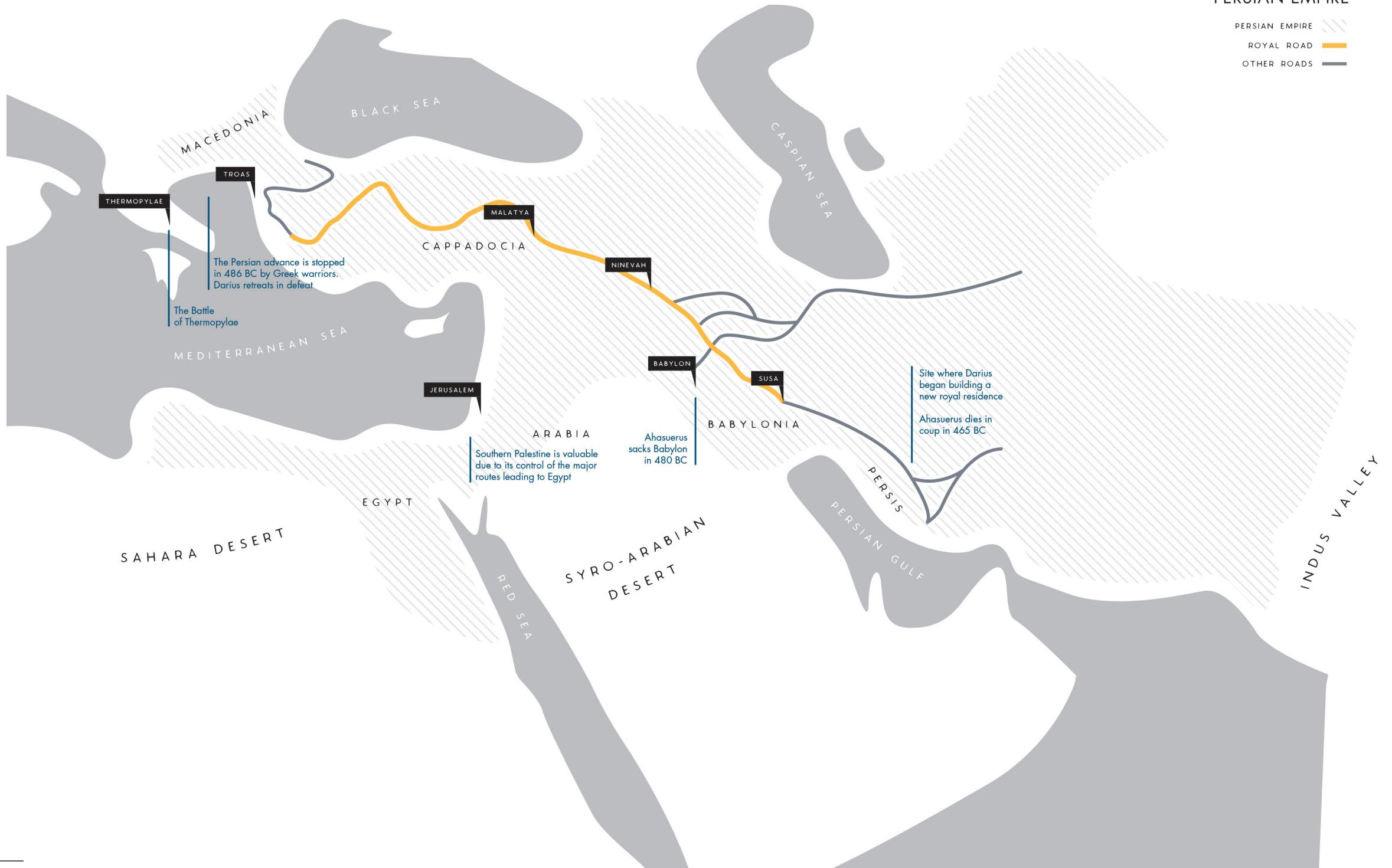
MESSAGE & PURPOSE For the Jewish people scattered around the Persian Empire, the book of Esther was a story that gave encouragement and hope. It provided a model of how Jewish people could not just survive, but thrive in a Gentile environment. It displayed the work of God, evident but unseen, in the unfolding story of deliverance and redemption—making an orphan girl the queen and using her courage and influence to save the Jews from annihilation.

GIVE THANKS FOR THE BOOK OF ESTHER:

Without ever mentioning God directly, the book of Esther underscores the providence of God. God's promise to give the Jews an eternal ruler remained in place, even in the face of threatened annihilation. Esther shows us that many Jews remained faithful to their God even in exile. Some scholars believe they kept their identity as God's people through the synagogues that developed as centers of the Jewish community wherever Jews were dispersed. The synagogues would later play a significant role as the gospel spread throughout the Roman Empire.

PERSIAN EMPIRE

- PERSIAN EMPIRE 
- ROYAL ROAD 
- OTHER ROADS 



THERMOPYLAE

TROAS

The Persian advance is stopped in 486 BC by Greek warriors. Darius retreats in defeat.

The Battle of Thermopylae

MALATYA

CAPPADOCIA

NINEVAH

BABYLON

SUSA

Site where Darius began building a new royal residence.

Ahasuerus dies in coup in 465 BC.

Ahasuerus sacks Babylon in 480 BC.

ARABIA
Southern Palestine is valuable due to its control of the major routes leading to Egypt.

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

EGYPT

SAHARA DESERT

RED SEA

SYRO-ARABIAN DESERT

PERSIS
PERSIAN GULF

INDUS VALLEY

MACEDONIA

BLACK SEA

CASPIAN SEA

READ AND UNDERSTAND ESTHER

The Bible is a complete work in which many stories combine to tell one story. As you read the book of Esther, consider reading the additional passages to discover how the whole of Scripture works together.

Week 1	GOING DEEPER
<input type="checkbox"/> Esther 1	Psalms 32:7; Proverbs 27:15-16
<input type="checkbox"/> Esther 2	Proverbs 31:10-31; John 10:27-29
<input type="checkbox"/> Esther 3	Psalms 68:20; Proverbs 16:33
<input type="checkbox"/> Esther 4	Isaiah 15:1-3; Romans 5:6-11
<input type="checkbox"/> Esther 5	Proverbs 16:18; Mark 6:14-29
Week 2	GOING DEEPER
<input type="checkbox"/> Esther 6	Proverbs 26:27; Isaiah 52:1-2
<input type="checkbox"/> Esther 7	Psalms 91:2-3; Revelation 20:11-15
<input type="checkbox"/> Esther 8	Romans 8:10-11; Colossians 3:1-4
<input type="checkbox"/> Esther 9:1-22	Nehemiah 8:10; Luke 1:46-55
<input type="checkbox"/> Esther 9:23-10:3	Leviticus 16:29-31; Ephesians 1:3-14

VASHTI ANGERS THE KING

1 These events took place during the days of Ahasuerus, who ruled 127 provinces from India to Cush. ²In those days King Ahasuerus reigned from his royal throne in the fortress at Susa. ³He held a feast in the third year of his reign for all his officials and staff, the army of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the officials from the provinces. ⁴He displayed the glorious wealth of his kingdom and the magnificent splendor of his greatness for a total of 180 days.

⁵At the end of this time, the king held a week-long banquet in the garden courtyard of the royal palace for all the people, from the greatest to the least, who were present in the fortress of Susa. ⁶White and violet linen hangings were fastened with fine white and purple linen cords to silver rods on marble^a columns. Gold and silver couches were arranged on a mosaic pavement of red feldspar,^b marble, mother-of-pearl, and precious stones.

⁷Drinks were served in an array of gold goblets, each with a different design. Royal wine flowed freely, according to the king's bounty. ⁸The drinking was according to royal decree: "There are no restrictions." The king had ordered every wine steward in his household to serve whatever each person wanted. ⁹Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women of King Ahasuerus's palace.

¹⁰On the seventh day, when the king was feeling good from the wine, Ahasuerus commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carkas — the seven eunuchs who personally served him — ¹¹to bring Queen Vashti before him with her royal crown. He wanted to show off her beauty to the people and the officials, because she was very beautiful. ¹²But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command that was delivered by his eunuchs. The king became furious and his anger burned within him.

THE KING'S DECREE

¹³The king consulted the wise men who understood the times,^c for it was his normal procedure to confer with experts in law and justice. ¹⁴The most trusted ones^d were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marse-na, and Memucan. They were the seven officials of Persia and Media who had personal access to the king and occupied the highest positions in the kingdom. ¹⁵The king asked, "According to the law, what should be done with Queen Vashti, since she refused to obey King Ahasuerus's command that was delivered by the eunuchs?"

¹⁶Memucan said in the presence of the king and his officials, "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king, but all the officials and the peoples who are in every one of King Ahasuerus's provinces. ¹⁷For the queen's action will become public knowledge to all the women and cause them to despise their husbands and say, 'King Ahasuerus ordered Queen Vashti brought before him, but she did not come.' ¹⁸Before this day is over, the noble women of Persia and Media who hear about the queen's act will say the same thing to all the king's officials, resulting in more contempt and fury.

¹⁹"If it meets the king's approval, he should personally issue a royal decree. Let it be recorded in the laws of Persia and Media, so that it cannot be revoked: Vashti is not to enter King Ahasuerus's presence, and her royal position is to be given to another woman who is more worthy than she. ²⁰The

^a1:6 Or *alabaster* ^b1:6 Or *of porphyry* ^c1:13 Or *understood propitious times*
^d1:14 Lit *Those near him*

THE AUTHOR AND THE LEAD

ESTHER 1; 2 PETER 1:19

Everyone has a strong response to this passage.

There are two main camps: Vashti the brave and Vashti the bad.

Vashti the brave: Some smart people think Ahasuerus (also called Xerxes) was a drunken voyeur who wanted to show off his gorgeous queen to his party guests. She refused. I call this the “Vashti, you go girl!” response.

Vashti the bad: On the other hand, some scholars argue Ahasuerus was calling his queen to perform a normal state function: show up at the party. Ahasuerus was planning to go to war with Greece, and he needed Vashti to show up to underscore to all the visiting dignitaries that he was powerful and magnificent enough to be the guy who could defeat the Greeks. It was embarrassing when she refused him. Ahasuerus and his wise men make an example of her to keep other women from undercutting their husbands as well.

Whether we interpret Vashti’s actions as brave or bad, this story is about God and His providential care for His chosen people in exile. Vashti is a side note in the book of Esther, but **God is the main character of every story.**

The easy response to this passage is to fall into the same trap as Ahasuerus and think the story is about him, or Vashti, or even Esther. Our temptation is to draw an easy moral here: if Vashti did

right, it’s “stand up for your dignity,” and if she was wrong, it’s “submit to authority.”

But let’s push past those easy responses and consider wisdom rather than moralism. It’s hard to decipher what the people in this story are up to, and Scripture doesn’t give us a final verdict on Vashti’s actions. What we do know is Queen Vashti had to come and go so Queen Esther could take her place. God would use Esther to save Israel from genocide in the Babylonian exile.

God doesn’t necessarily call us to understand everything that’s happening in Vashti’s story, or even in our own story! But He does call us to be faithful in the everyday things. He calls us to wisdom. When we look at Vashti, we aren’t going to find it. We have to look to the main character in every story: God.

Wisdom is a lamp shining in a dark place (2Pt 1:19). It is looking to God for our guidance rather than to the ways or expectations of man. Wisdom isn’t knowing all the answers—it’s knowing what’s important, and walking in light of that.

We don’t get all the details about the stories we read, and we don’t even get all the details about the stories we’re in. We do, however, get the bullet points from the author and star Himself: Do justice. Love mercy. Walk humbly (Mc 6:8).

Don’t be afraid of what you don’t know. God knows. Walk in His wisdom.

decree the king issues will be heard throughout his vast kingdom, so all women will honor their husbands, from the greatest to the least.”

²¹ The king and his counselors approved the proposal, and he followed Memucan’s advice.²² He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to each province in its own script and to each ethnic group in its own language, that every man should be master of his own house and speak in the language of his own people.

THE SEARCH FOR A NEW QUEEN

2 Some time later, when King Ahasuerus’s rage had cooled down, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what was decided against her.² The king’s personal attendants suggested, “Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king.”³ Let the king appoint commissioners in each province of his kingdom, so that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem at the fortress of Susa. Put them under the supervision of Hegai, the king’s eunuch, keeper of the women, and give them the required beauty treatments.⁴ Then the young woman who pleases the king will become queen instead of Vashti.” This suggestion pleased the king, and he did accordingly.

⁵ In the fortress of Susa, there was a Jewish man named Mordecai son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite.⁶ He had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the other captives when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took King Jeconiah of Judah into exile.⁷ Mordecai was the legal guardian of his cousin[^] Hadassah (that is, Esther), because she had no father or mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was extremely good-looking. When her father and mother died, Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter.

⁸ When the king’s command and edict became public knowledge and when many young women were gathered at the fortress of Susa under Hegai’s supervision, Esther was taken to the palace, into the supervision of Hegai, keeper of the women.⁹ The young woman pleased him and gained his favor so that he accelerated the process of the beauty treatments and the special diet that she received. He assigned seven hand-picked female servants to her from the palace and transferred her and her servants to the harem’s best quarters.

¹⁰ Esther did not reveal her ethnicity or her family background, because Mordecai had ordered her not to make them known.¹¹ Every day Mordecai took a walk in front of the harem’s courtyard to learn how Esther was doing and to see what was happening to her.

¹² During the year before each young woman’s turn to go to King Ahasuerus, the harem regulation required her to receive beauty treatments with oil of myrrh for six months and then with perfumes and cosmetics for another six months.¹³ When the young woman would go to the king, she was given whatever she requested to take with her from the harem to the palace.¹⁴ She would go in the evening, and in the morning she would return to a second harem under the supervision of the king’s eunuch Shaashgaz, keeper of the concubines. She never went to the king again, unless he desired her and summoned her by name.

[^]2:7 Lit *uncle’s daughter*

ESTHER BECOMES QUEEN

¹⁵ Esther was the daughter of Abihail, the uncle of Mordecai who had adopted her as his own daughter. When her turn came to go to the king, she did not ask for anything except what Hegai, the king's eunuch, keeper of the women, suggested. Esther gained favor in the eyes of everyone who saw her.

¹⁶ She was taken to King Ahasuerus in the palace in the tenth month, the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. ¹⁷ The king loved Esther more than all the other virgins. She won more favor and approval from him than did any of the other virgins. He placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti. ¹⁸ The king held a great banquet for all his officials and staff. It was Esther's banquet. He freed his provinces from tax payments and gave gifts worthy of the king's bounty.

MORDECAI SAVES THE KING

¹⁹ When the virgins were gathered a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the King's Gate. ²⁰ (Esther had not revealed her family background or her ethnicity, as Mordecai had directed. She obeyed Mordecai's orders, as she always had while he raised her.)

²¹ During those days while Mordecai was sitting at the King's Gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who guarded the entrance, became infuriated and planned to assassinate^A King Ahasuerus. ²² When Mordecai learned of the plot, he reported it to Queen Esther, and she told the king on Mordecai's behalf. ²³ When the report was investigated and verified, both men were hanged on the gallows. This event was recorded in the Historical Record in the king's presence.

HAMAN'S PLAN TO KILL THE JEWS

3 After all this took place, King Ahasuerus honored Haman, son of Hammedatha the Agagite. He promoted him in rank and gave him a higher position than all the other officials. ² The entire royal staff at the King's Gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, because the king had commanded this to be done for him. But Mordecai would not bow down or pay homage. ³ The members of the royal staff at the King's Gate asked Mordecai, "Why are you disobeying the king's command?" ⁴ When they had warned him day after day and he still would not listen to them, they told Haman in order to see if Mordecai's actions would be tolerated, since he had told them he was a Jew.

⁵ When Haman saw that Mordecai was not bowing down or paying him homage, he was filled with rage. ⁶ And when he learned of Mordecai's ethnic identity, it seemed repugnant to Haman to do away with^B Mordecai alone. He planned to destroy all of Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout Ahasuerus's kingdom.

⁷ In the first month, the month of Nisan, in King Ahasuerus's twelfth year, the Pur — that is, the lot — was cast before Haman for each day in each month, and it fell on the twelfth month, the month Adar. ⁸ Then Haman informed King Ahasuerus, "There is one ethnic group, scattered throughout the peoples in every province of your kingdom, keeping themselves separate. Their laws are different from everyone else's and they do not obey

^A2:21 Lit and they sought to stretch out a hand against ^B3:6 Lit to stretch out a hand against

TAKING PART IN GOD'S WORK

ESTHER 4; LUKE 19:37-40

Rachel is a scourge to the devil in Vienna.

Every time I saw her she was flushed with excitement over a recent chance to share the gospel. Any encounter on the subway, any phone call, and every relationship irresistibly impelled her to tell people the good news. Although she was a gifted linguist with a degree from Cambridge, she carried Bible tracts in her pockets and she wasn't afraid to use them.

No amount of poor or sad or weird was enough to keep Rachel from befriending strangers and reaching out to them with hope and love. She is inspiring and a little overwhelming.

One afternoon Rachel invited me to a street music event she was staging on Kärntner Straße. She is a classical violinist and had gathered other string musicians to play a concert and share the gospel on that ancient, black stone street.

Feeling both shy and peckish, I got a gelato and went antique shopping instead.

I missed an opportunity. God didn't need me to help share His gospel; His gospel will go forth whether I stand up and speak His name or not. In fact, if I can't muster a good word about the Lord, the very stones will cry out in my place (Lk 19:40).

God invites us to join His work, not for His sake, but for ours. God invited Esther to join Him in saving the Jewish nation. If Esther had refused to go to the king, God still would have saved His people, but she would have missed an opportunity. As Esther's cousin Mordecai said:

"If you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will come to the Jewish people from another place, but you and your father's family will be destroyed. Who knows, perhaps you have come to your royal position for such a time as this."

ESTHER 4:14

Our refusal to take part in God's work doesn't thwart God. It limits our privilege to take part in what He is doing. God can even use unrepentant sinners to achieve His good purposes. Consider Pharaoh, Caiaphas the high priest, and Pontius Pilate (Ex 9:12; Jn 18:14; 19:5-16).

God's providence is comprehensive, wise, and holy. His timing and calling are no mistake, and He has placed us, like Esther, here, now, and for such a time as this.

We, like Esther, can have courage, comfort, and peace. From a human perspective, our lives and circumstances can seem totally out of control and scary. But we can rest in God's providence, knowing that He is working.

Look for God's invitation to join Him in His work. Have courage, comfort, and peace—you can join Him! You can get a gelato later.