

## Esther Story

Long ago, in the land of Persia, there lived a community of God's people who had been moved far from home because of war. They had lived in this new land for a while, and it was starting to feel like home to the youngest in the community, but sometimes they were still reminded that they were outsiders.

This land had a king who was the final authority on everything. No one argued with the king's decisions, especially after he got rid of the queen. That's right. The king called for the queen and she didn't come when he called. The next thing everyone knew, there was a nationwide search for a new queen, and the old queen, well, no one knows exactly what happened to her.

The king's search for a new queen did not just include those who were from royal or rich families. The king wanted the most beautiful queen in all the land, so he searched everywhere. The winner was a young Jewish girl named Esther. She was one of the people who had moved to Persia because of the war. The king didn't know anything about her family, and he didn't care. She was the most beautiful, so she was to be queen.

Esther did not have much family. Her parents died when she was young, but an older cousin named Mordecai had raised her. He was a brave man, honest and true. Mordecai had heard about a plot against the king and warned the authorities. For his bravery, Mordecai's name had been written down in the king's log, so his service would not be forgotten.

Not everyone appreciated Mordecai. One of the king's top advisors was a man named Haman. He thought that because he worked for the king, people should treat him as special. He even called on people to bow down and praise the king. But Mordecai believed that people should only praise God and refused to bow down to the king. Haman was embarrassed by Mordecai ignoring his command, and convinced the king that Mordecai and all those who believed like him were a threat to the king and should be put to death.

The king didn't know any details and didn't seem to care. He trusted Haman and signed the order for all Jews to be killed on a particular day to come. Haman made preparations for killing all the Jews. When word got out, Mordecai went to Esther and told her, "you must speak to the king." Esther explained that no one went to the king without being invited and those that demanded anything of the king could go missing, like the last queen. Mordecai encouraged Esther to be brave, knowing that God would be with her as she tried to save her people.

Esther asked Mordecai to have all the people say special prayers for her and keep praying for her till she was able to talk to the king. Esther's servants also prayed for her and supported her in her task. With the courage of her community and God's promise to always be with the people, Esther made a plan to change the king's mind.

First, Esther invited the king to a party. She was very wise to not demand a meeting to ask a favor, but instead to offer a special invitation. The king was thankful and appreciated Esther. Once the king was feeling good, after lots of celebrating, Esther asked if she could make one request. The king was so pleased with Esther that he offered to do anything she asked. Esther only had one request. She asked the king, "Save my people."

The king was surprised that Esther was Jewish. The king was surprised that Mordecai, whose name was recorded in the king's book for special service, was a target of anyone's plot. The king was even more surprised that Haman was behind the whole thing. Once the king realized that Haman had taken advantage of him, the king understood what a horrible thing Haman had been plotting. Right then, the king made a decree that all the Jews should be saved!

With the courage of her community and the strength of God's promise to always be with the people, Esther had changed the king's mind and saved her people. Even to this day, the Jewish people celebrate the bravery of Esther and the courage of her community by celebrating her story at a festival called Purim.