

## Who was Mordecai in the Bible?

Mordecai is first introduced in Esther 2:5-7: “Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah. Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.”

These verses note the following facts about Mordecai: 1) he was a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin, 2) he lived in Susa, the capital of Persia, 3) his great-grandfather, Kish, had been taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, and 4) he acted as a father to Esther. When Esther was selected as one of the virgins to possibly be the next queen of King Xerxes (or Ahasuerus), Mordecai advised her not to reveal her Jewish background (Esther 2:10). Esther was crowned queen (verse 17).

In Esther 2:21-23, Mordecai, who worked at the palace gate, hears of an assassination plot against the king. Mordecai reports the plot to Esther, and the queen passes the intelligence on to Xerxes. The would-be assassins are stopped, and Mordecai's name is recorded in the king's chronicles as the one who took action to preserve the king's life.

Mordecai was hated by Haman, an Agagite who held a prominent office in the kingdom. Haman's hatred was due to Mordecai's refusal to bow in honor to him (Esther 3:5). As a Jew, Mordecai would only bow to the Lord God of Israel. Haman was not content with simply doing away with Mordecai, however: “Having learned who Mordecai's people were, he

scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes" (verse 6). Haman spoke to the king and secured the king's permission to annihilate the Jewish people on a select date in the future. When Mordecai heard of the decree, he tore his clothing, put on sackcloth, and sat in ashes (Esther 4:1).

Mordecai had been checking on Esther each day. When she discovered he was mourning, she inquired of the cause. Mordecai informed Esther of Haman's plot against the Jews, telling her to go before the king and plead for the Jews' lives (Esther 4:8). At this, Esther balked—she did not have freedom to enter the king's presence without a summons; to approach the king uninvited was punishable by death (verses 9–10). Mordecai responded with logic: if she did not go before the king, she was dead anyway, for she herself was endangered by the king's edict (verse 13). Mordecai ends his message to the queen with this famous statement: "Who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (verse 14).

Esther agreed that she must break the Persian law that forbade access to the king, saying, "If I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16). She fasted for three days and then entered the king's presence uninvited. Xerxes received her graciously, however, and Esther took the opportunity to invite the king and Haman to a banquet (Esther 5:1–4). At the meal, the king asked Esther if she had a request, and Esther asked for their presence at another banquet the next night.

Haman, who was ignorant of the queen's ethnicity, was pleased to be honored with not one banquet but two. On the way home, he was "happy and in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai at the king's gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his

presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai” (verse 9). Once he arrived home, he issued an order to build a 75-foot-high gallows upon which to hang Mordecai (Esther 5:14).

That night after Esther’s first meal, King Xerxes couldn’t sleep. As a sleep-aid, he had his chronicles read to him. It just so happened that the account of Mordecai’s thwarting the assassination was read. The king then discovered that nothing had been done to repay Mordecai for his good deed. At that moment, Haman entered the palace in order to obtain the king’s permission to hang Mordecai—he never got the chance to ask, though, because the king ordered Haman to immediately take Mordecai through the streets of Susa to pay him homage (Esther 6:10-11). Haman was thus humbled before his enemy, and Mordecai received due honor.

After his humiliating experience of honoring Mordecai, Haman returned to the palace for Esther’s second banquet. During the meal, the king again asked Esther if she had a request. This time, she pleaded for the king to rescue her and her people from destruction (Esther 6:3-4), and she pointed out Haman as the one wanting to kill her (verse 6).

Haman was summarily put to death on the very gallows he had erected for Mordecai, and the Jews were given permission to defend themselves. The Jews successfully overcame Haman’s evil plot, and Mordecai was rewarded with a promotion. The final verse of Esther notes, “Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Xerxes, preeminent among the Jews, and held in high esteem by his many fellow Jews, because he worked for the good of his people and spoke up for the welfare of all the Jews” (Esther 10:3).

The story of Mordecai illustrates the truth of Psalm 75:7, "It is God who judges: / He brings one down, he exalts another," and Psalm 147:6, "The LORD sustains the humble / but casts the wicked to the ground." Mordecai's faithfulness and integrity put him in good stead with the king of Persia, and his concern for his Jewish compatriots brought the blessing of God.