

## Who was Hadassah in the Bible?

Hadassah is the Jewish name of Queen Esther, and she is mentioned by this name in Esther 2:7, “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.”

Hadassah is a feminine form of the Hebrew word hadas, meaning “myrtle,” a common perennial shrub with evergreen leaves and white, star-shaped flowers. The flowers of the myrtle are used for perfume, and the berries for allspice. Myrtle is referenced symbolically in the Bible as a sign of peace and God’s blessing in passages such as Zechariah 1:11, in which the angel of the Lord stands among the myrtle trees and says, “We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace.”

Esther’s early name of “Hadassah” was perhaps symbolic as well, not only because of her beauty but because her destiny was to procure peace and blessing for God’s people in Persia. The Jews in Esther’s time were under threat of genocide by Haman, a close confidant of King Ahasuerus (Xerxes). Hadassah entered Ahasuerus’s palace as a prospective concubine, but God had greater plans for the young Jewish woman.

King Ahasuerus was known for his drinking, lavish banquets, harsh temper, and sexual appetite. In 483 BC, after a 180-day display of his riches, splendor, and pomp, he held a massive banquet. In drunken merriment, Ahasuerus requested that his wife, Queen Vashti, appear before the king “in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at” (Esther 1:11). When Vashti refused, she was banished from the kingdom.

Ahasuerus appointed officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to his harem (Esther 2:3-4). Hadassah, that is, Esther, was taken into custody by the eunuch in charge of the women, yet her cousin Mordecai kept close watch on her (Esther 2:11). After ten months, Esther was brought before the king, and he loved her more than anyone else. Hadassah won the king's favor and took Vashti's place as queen (Esther 2:17).

Though Hadassah's initial circumstances appeared to serve the evil purposes of a lustful king, God used her situation, position, and character to protect the people of Israel. Esther, in meekness and humility, trusted in God's sovereignty with her every action, confident that His will would be done concerning her people—no matter what the consequences to herself. With no concern for her personal safety, Esther acted as an intercessor with the king on behalf of her people, the Israelites (Esther 4:16), ultimately exposing Haman's evil plot and saving the Jews from destruction.