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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A2385 ~ The Queen's Invitation.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

The book of Esther presents a difficult choice to the young Jewish Queen of the Persian Empire in declaring her Jewish nationality to her husband King Xerxes. King Xerxes' right-hand man, Haman, had tricked the king into making a decree that would cause all Jews throughout the empire to be killed on a certain date. Queen Esther's relative, Mordecai, urged her to go to the king and beg for his mercy and plead for her people. But it was against the law for Esther to go and see the king without first being invited. The penalty for doing so was death. So Esther asked Mordecai to call on all the Jews living in the capital, Susa, to fast for three days and nights. Then she'd visit the king and take the consequences of death if he hadn't accepted her visit.

However, King Xerxes did greet Esther favourably and asked her what she wanted. He knew that she wouldn't have risked her life unless there was something important on her mind. Xerxes even offered to give her anything that she'd asked for – even up to half the kingdom. But this was a figure of speech that indicated the king's generosity but wasn't meant for Esther to take literally.

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Esther didn't give the king an answer as to why she'd come to see him; instead, she invited him and Haman to a banquet she'd already prepared for them that evening. After they'd eaten well, Xerxes again asked Esther what was her request. Again she put off answering, but again, invited the king and Haman to a second banquet the next night, when she'd reveal her request to the king. She wanted Haman present so that he couldn't deny her claims about the decree that he had imposed to kill all the Jewish people. The king had shown extremely poor character by taking no interest in which people group Haman had wanted killed.

Why did Esther put off telling the king what her real request was? God was guiding her in a wise way, even if she was unaware of it. But the delay also put Mordecai's life in danger. Haman had felt very happy that he'd been the only other person invited to eat with the king and queen for two nights in a row. But on his way home, Haman saw Mordecai sitting at the palace gate and not standing up to respect him. His happiness quickly changed to anger but he somehow restrained himself and went on home.

Then Haman gathered together his friends and his wife, boasting to them about his great wealth and his large number of children. He also related the honours that he'd been given by the king, as well as being the only other person to eat with the king and queen that night, or the next. But he also told them that it was all worthless as long as he saw Mordecai sitting at the palace gate, ignoring him. So Haman's wife and friends suggested that he should kill the old Jew. They proposed that Haman build an extra high set of gallows in his own backyard to hang Mordecai the following morning. Haman could then enjoy the 2nd banquet with the king and queen so much more. So Haman liked that idea and had workmen start building the gallows right away.

That night, King Xerxes couldn't sleep. Maybe he was wondering what Esther was planning to ask him? He had an attendant read to him from the palace records of his reign. When it came to the discovered plot to kill the king 5 years earlier, Xerxes asked what reward had been given to Mordecai for his good deed. But nothing had been done.

While the king was considering what should be done to honour Mordecai early in the morning, Haman entered the outer court to ask the king's permission to hang Mordecai. Not knowing why Haman had come, the king asked Haman what should be done for someone whom the king wanted to honour. Proud Haman thought that the king must have been referring to himself! So, Haman gave the king some suggestions that appealed to him greatly! He imagined being led by a high official through the streets of Susa, wearing the king's robe and riding on the king's horse. And so this is what he told the king.

Imagine Haman's shock and horror to only discover that it wasn't himself that the king wanted to honour, but Mordecai, the very man he wanted to hang that very day. The king told Haman to be the official to honour Mordecai. It proved to be total humiliation for Haman to walk the horse around the streets and shout out: "This is what the king does for someone he wishes to honour!" After it was all over, Haman rushed home very upset. But his friends and wife didn't give him any sympathy this time. They advised him that Mordecai was a Jew; his plans against the Jews would never succeed, and it would be fatal to continue opposing Mordecai.

While they were still talking about the problem, the king's attendants came to take Haman to the 2nd banquet that Queen Esther was holding. After the three had eaten, again the king asked Esther what her request was and this time, she told him. She asked that her life and the lives of her people could be spared. The king must have been confused. So she then explained that she and her people had been sold for destruction. She referred to the bribe Haman had offered to the king to persuade him to order a decree for the Jews' destruction.

Esther added that she would never have bothered the king if she and her people had merely been sold as slaves; it was because they were being sold for destruction that she had petitioned the king. The king wanted to know who would dare to do such a thing. Esther identified Haman right there in front of them as the guilty person. The king jumped to his feet in a rage and went out into the palace garden. The king's pride took a blow to learn that the man he had so highly promoted and honoured was only a self-seeking traitor who was about to kill his queen, Mordecai and all other Jews who had caused no harm. The king needed time to work out what to do now, because it had been he himself who had authorised Haman to issue the decree, even though Haman had been deceitful about the people group that he had wanted to destroy.

Haman stayed behind to plead for his life with Queen Esther for he knew that the king now intended to kill him. In his despair, Haman fell onto the couch where Queen Esther was sitting, just as the king came back inside. It appeared to the king that Haman was trying to molest his wife. And that sealed Haman's fate. One of the king's servants informed him that Haman had just built a gallows on which he'd planned to hang Mordecai that very day. At the king's order, Haman himself was hanged on them instead. In Psalm 7, it says: "The wicked dig a deep pit to trap others, then fall into it themselves."

The writer of the book of Esther gives no indication that King Xerxes was troubled by finding out that Esther was a Jew. Neither do they tell us if Esther heard about Mordecai's triumphant ride around the city streets on the king's horse earlier in the day before giving her request to the king.

However, the king appointed Mordecai to take Haman's place as his chief advisor.

Esther had exposed the enemy and saved her own life but now, what about her people? The king couldn't revoke his decree, but he could issue another one. He gave the Jews the right to arm and protect themselves on the same day chosen by Haman and gave them 9 months to get ready. This decree was good news indeed for the Jews and so they celebrated. The people of the land soon got the message that the king didn't want the Jews to be harmed in any way. Then many people became Jews themselves, for they feared what the Jews might do to them.

However, when the day chosen by Haman came, it turned out that the Jews did have many enemies who hated and attacked them. But the Jews were able to overcome them. However, they took no plunder from their fallen enemies. In total, throughout the 127 provinces of the empire, 75,000 of their enemies were killed that very day. Again, on the next day, the king had given permission for the Jews to fight in Susa and protect themselves again if they needed to. The following day after that, all the Jews rested and gave thanks to God for His protection and overruling their persecutors.

This result had an immediate and beneficial effect on the Jews living throughout the Persian Empire. The story of Esther assured them that even though they hadn't returned to Judah, God would still look after them, wherever they were. Esther established a festival known as 'Purim', which is celebrated by the Jews each year to remember God's great deliverance of His people at that time. The word 'purim' means 'lots'.

During this festival, which continues to be observed by faithful Jews in modern times, the entire book of Esther is read out aloud. As a result of this, the story of Esther is as familiar to the average Jew today as any other part of the Old Testament. Christians can read the book of Esther with great thanksgiving too, for it shows how God preserved the Jewish exiles, and through Esther, God overturned Haman's plan to kill all the Jews.

Haman's hostile behaviour towards the Jews, just because they were Jewish, is known as anti-Semitism. This prejudice or discrimination against Jews is still found in many nations in present times. Anti-Semitism often regards Jews as an inferior race of people and punishes them by trying to oppress or kill them off, just like Haman did. However, the modern nation of Israel, which is now nearly 70 years old, is thriving under God's blessing. It has produced many more technical inventions in these years than any other nation has, when each nation's population ratio comparison is made.

Many Christians blamed the Jews for their rejection of Jesus, which resulted in Him being crucified. While the Jewish religious leaders did have murder on their hearts, it was actually the Roman authorities who ordered and carried out Jesus' crucifixion. In similar ways, the Jewish people have been persecuted cruelly over the centuries. In particular, in World War II, Hitler had 1/3 of the Jewish population slaughtered; six million Jewish people in all perished.

But God can use even anti-Semitism to carry out His purposes. Jewish people who are facing persecution in the lands where they've been living for generations, now desire to return to Israel. In Jeremiah, Chapter 31, Verse 10, the Lord says: "Listen to this message from the Lord, you nations of the world; proclaim it in distant coastlands: The Lord, who scattered his people, will gather them and watch over them as a shepherd does his flock. For the Lord has redeemed Israel from those too strong for them. They will come home and sing songs of joy on the heights of Jerusalem."

God invites all Jews and Gentiles to be involved in this Jewish return to Israel, and will certainly bring the Jews back to their homeland. In helping this to happen, at least one Christian organisation's ministry pays for the airfares of poor Jews so they can get there. These Jewish people who are making the trip back to Jerusalem see their journey as a spiritual return. Many also view it as an act of repentance and of returning to God. They truly believe that He is drawing them back to the land and also to Himself.

When will the Jewish people escape from being the ones who are typically downtrodden? In an upcoming 1,000-year reign of the Lord Jesus over the whole world from Jerusalem, people will honour and respect the Jews; for in Zechariah, Chapter 9, Verse 23, there is recorded this prophecy: "This is what the Lord of Heaven's Armies says: In those days, ten men from different nations and languages of the world will clutch at the sleeve of one Jew. And they will say, 'Please let us walk with you, for we have heard that God is with you'."

The book of Esther teaches us that God is sovereign and can overrule every circumstance we face in our lives too. He is with us in every trial we meet, and if we cast ourselves on Him, He will see us through it. For in Psalm 121, Verse 4, it says: "He who watches over Israel (and over us too) will neither slumber nor sleep."

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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