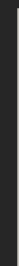


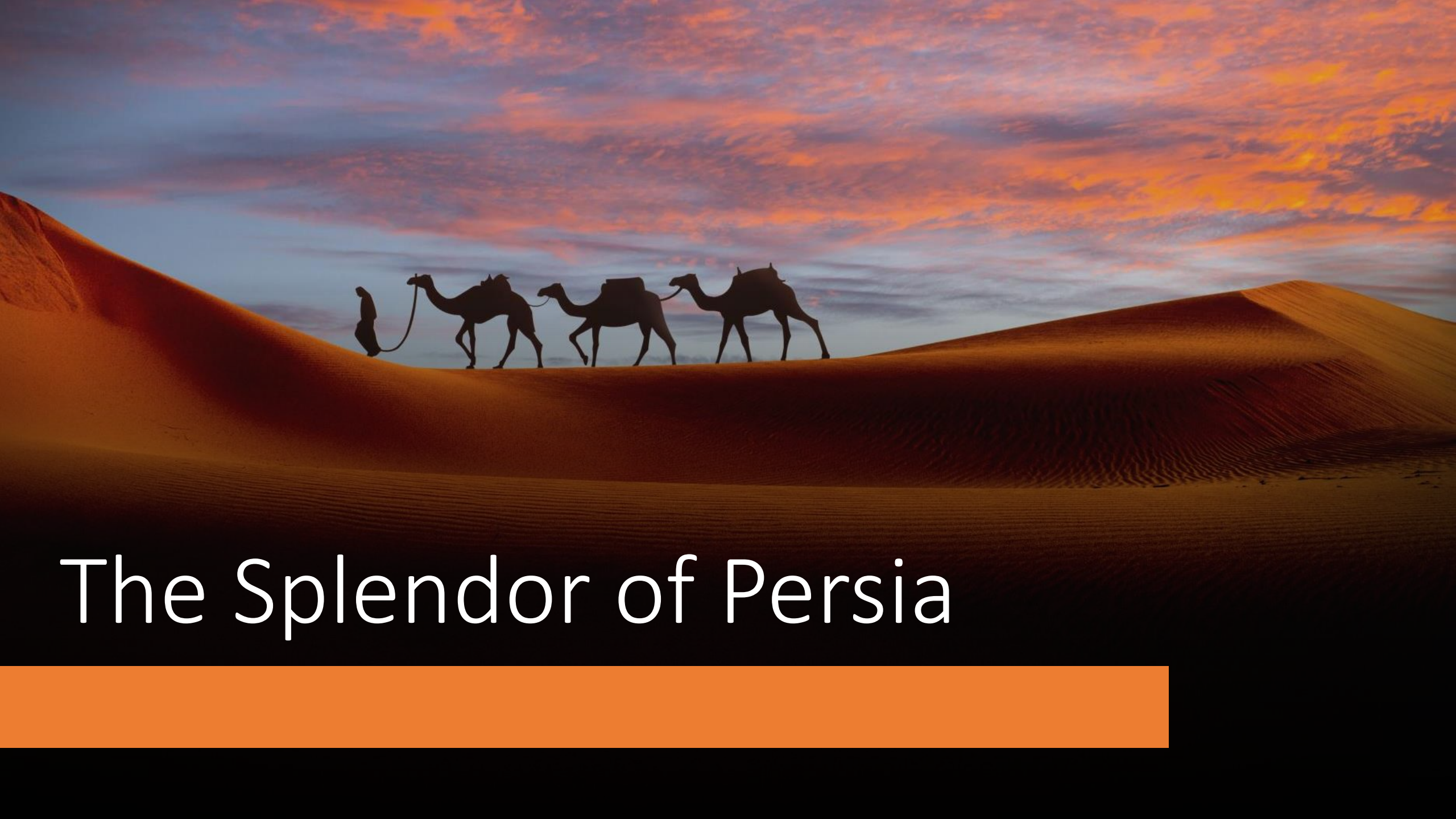


For Such A Time As This

# THE STORY OF ESTHER AND MORDECAI



Part II – A Tale of Two Queens  
Esther 1-2



# The Splendor of Persia

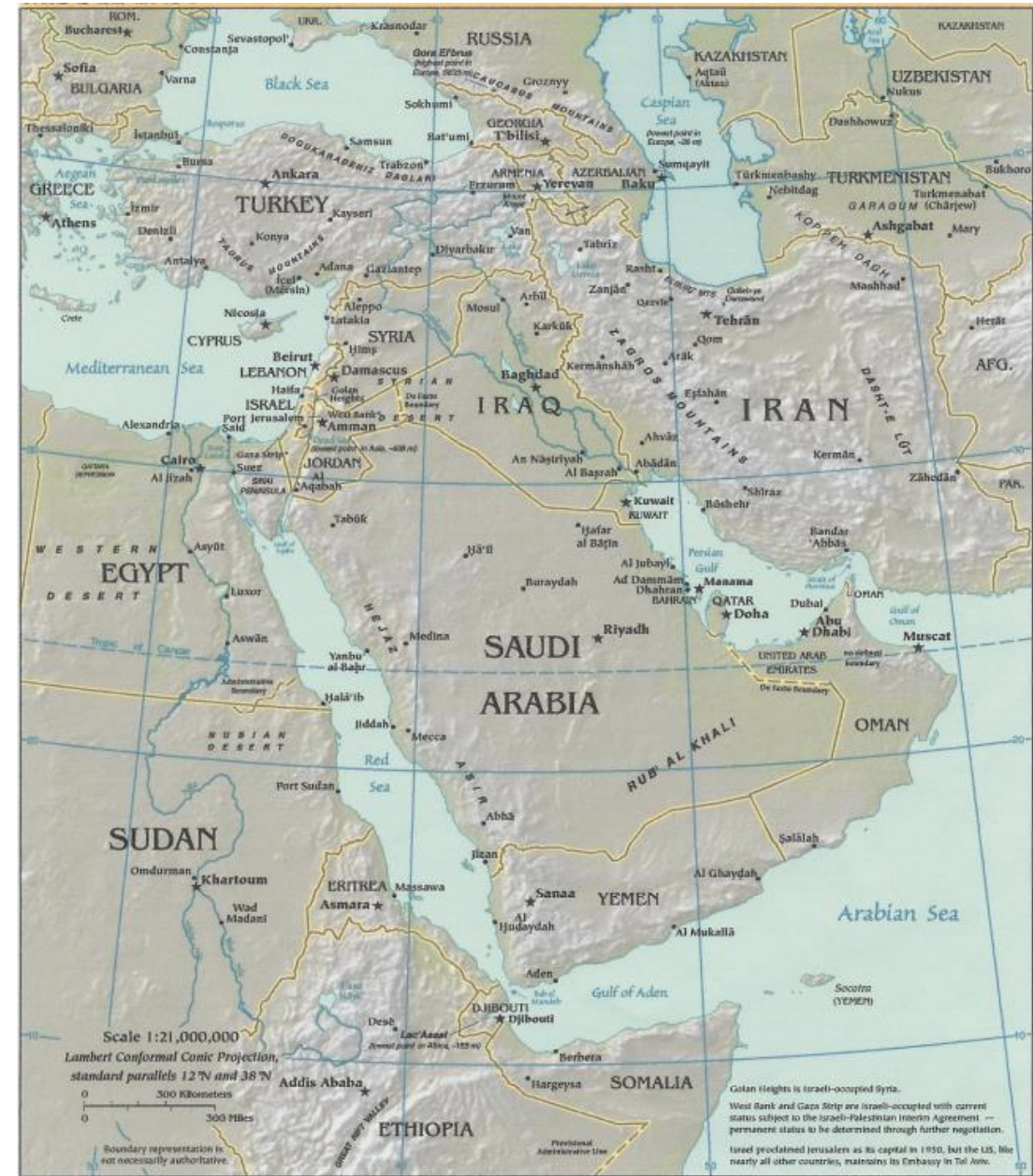
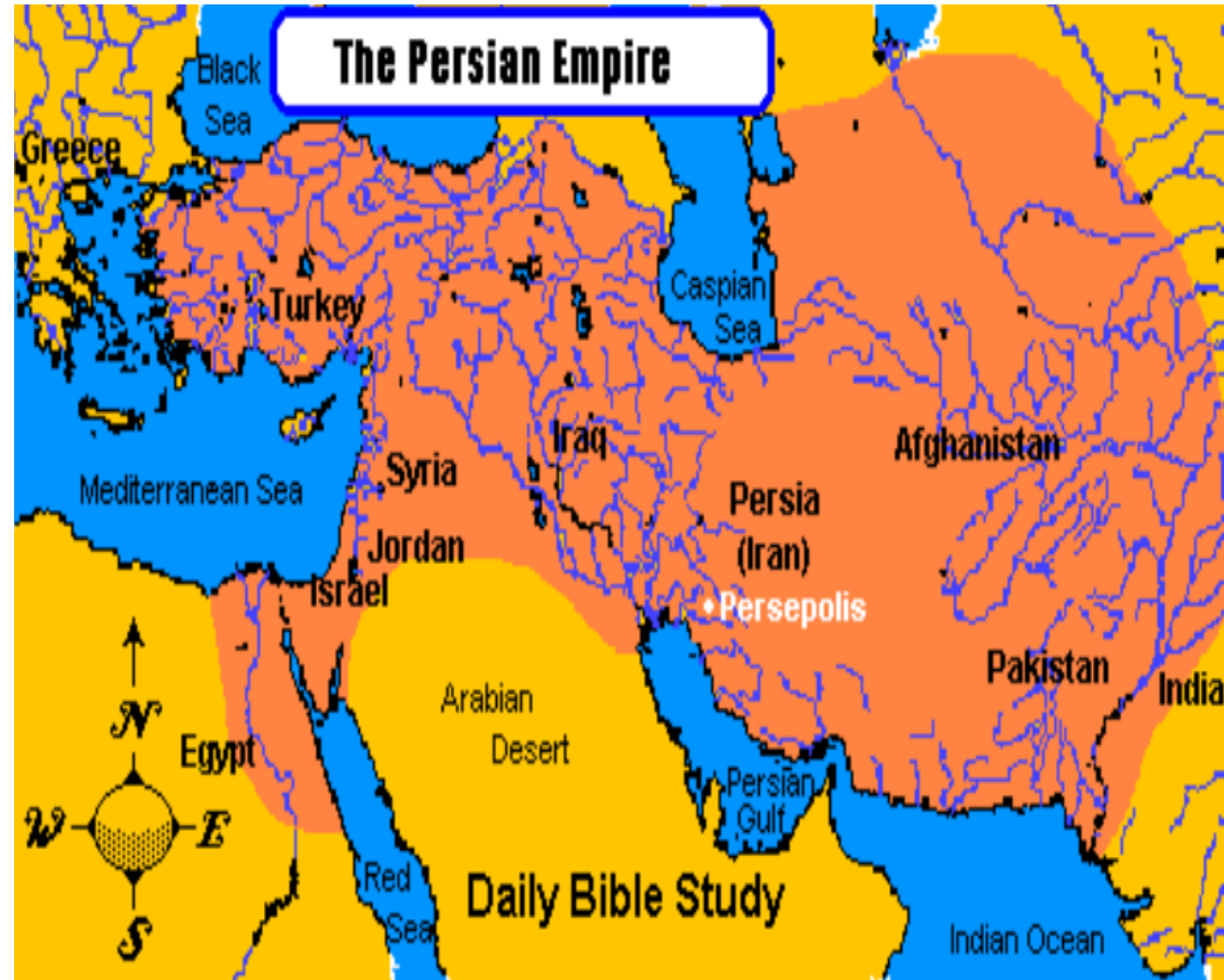


## The Persian Empire was very powerful and they controlled a large land mass

*“Now it took place in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 Provinces” (Esther 1:1)*

- The territory ranged from what was then called India (modern day West Pakistan) to what was then called Cush (which included modern day Egypt, Sudan and Northern Ethiopia).
- The large empire was broken up into 127 smaller “provinces” and each one had its own governor. Judah was one of the provinces under their rule.

# The Persian Empire





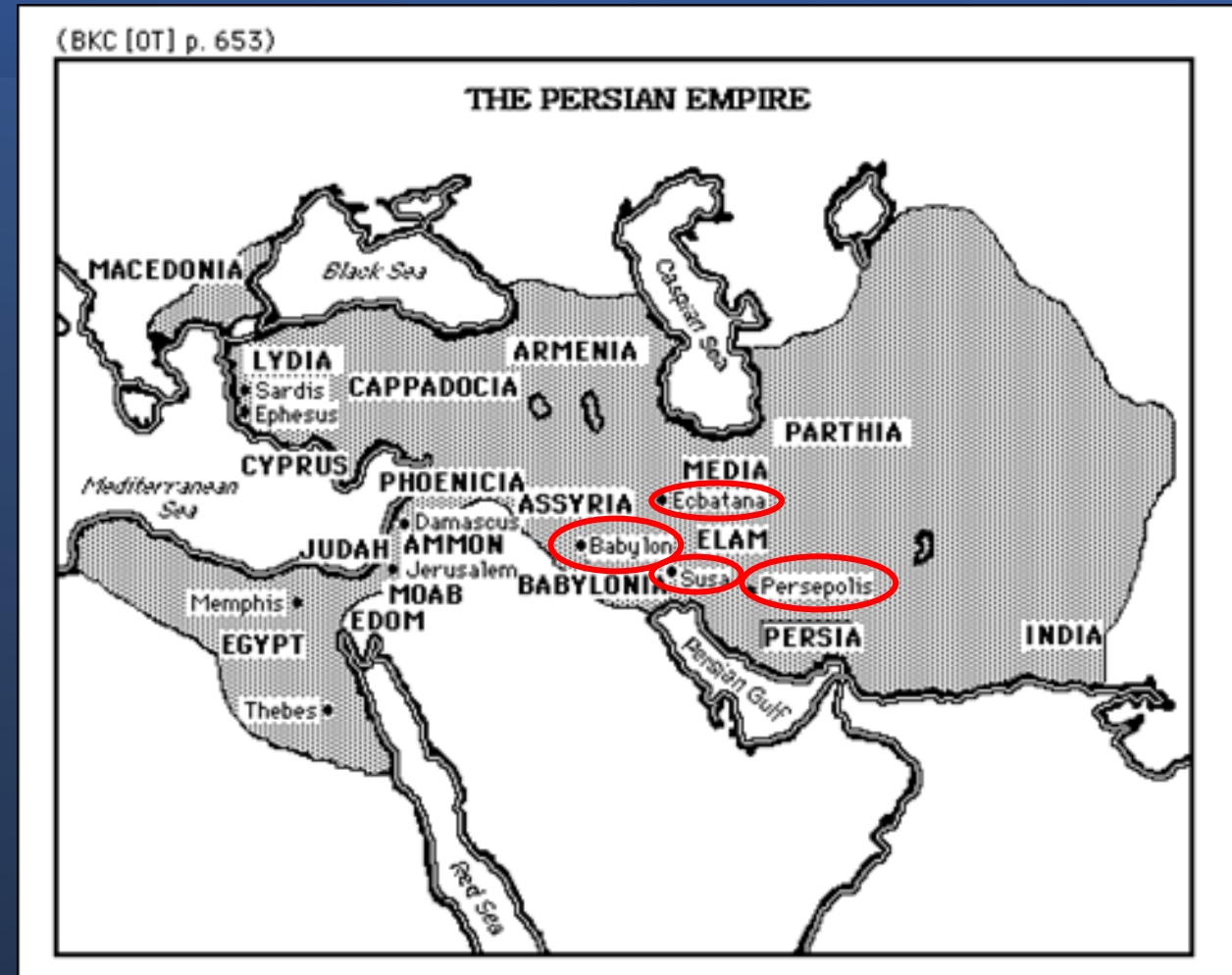
- The leader/ruler of the empire at the time was a dictator named **Ahasuerus** or **Xerxes** depending on which translation you have. (Esther 1:1)

*“Now it took place in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 Provinces” (Esther 1:1)*

1. With the later influence of the **Greeks** and the subsequent translation of the Old Testament (The Septuagint) into Greek you will see his name appear as **Xerxes** in most Greek history and writings as that is his “**Greek**” name
2. **Ahasuerus** is the name used in **Hebrew/Jewish** writings. This is a transliteration of his **Persian name** which is **Khshayarsha**.
3. His reign lasted from 486 B.C. to 465 B.C
4. He was well known as a builder/developer and vastly improved the palaces that were built by his father Darius I (the Great). He is most responsible for consolidating the empire into what is described in Esther 1:1.

*“At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the **citadel of Susa**”  
(Esther 1:2)*

- The city **Susa** (or Shushan) was a known place in historical and archeological records. It was considered the winter palace for Xerxes
- Xerxes ruled from three other capital cities in the Persian Empire:
  1. Babylon
  2. Ecbatana
  3. Persepolis (Summer Palace)







# Bragging Rights

## For Xerxes and his Kingdom





“In the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his princes and attendants, the army officers of Persia and Media, the nobles and the princes of his provinces being in his presence. And **he displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty for many days, 180 days”**

(Esther 1:3-4)



- The sheer size of the empire (127 provinces) would require the support of an enormous government administrative system – so this was no small party!
- The writer doesn't tell us the purpose of the banquet, but the timing does correspond with the historical account by the Greek historian Herodotus, in which he records Xerxes invasion of Greece (481 B.C). It was common for a king to have a great feast coinciding with a planning session with his military leaders to prepare for a great battle.
- The 180-day party served that purpose and allowed Xerxes to show off a bit and led to “other” additional parties for the elite and common persons to attend and participate in.

When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest who were in the citadel of Susa. The garden had hangings of white and blue linen, fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and other costly stones. Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king's liberality. By the king's command each guest was allowed to drink with no restrictions, for the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man what he wished. (Esther 1:5-8)







# Introducing Queen Vashti

Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes. On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Karkas to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at. But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger. (Esther 1:9-12)





## A little background about Queen Vashti

- Her name means; best, beloved, desired one, or a lovely name by which to be known. Her name translated in Greek was Amestris.
- She was the mother of Artaxerxes (3rd son of Ahasuerus/Xerxes) who would later be responsible for the decree that permitted the Jews to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (Daniel 9:25)
- Queen Vashti refused to parade herself in front of everyone (some commentators conclude it was because she was pregnant), and that action upset king Ahasuerus which will cause her to lose her crown and her official status as Queen. (Vs. 12)

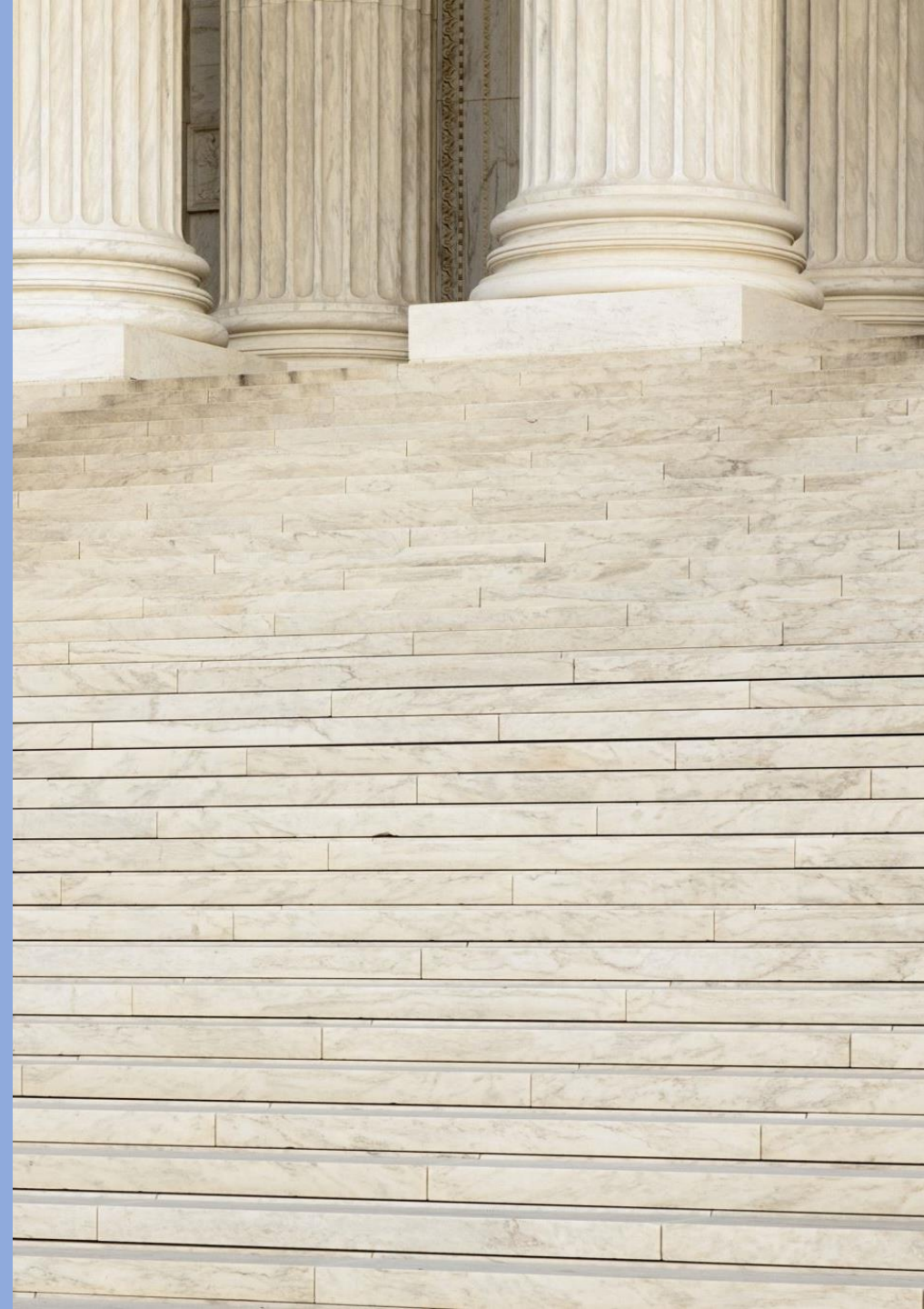
# Big Trouble in Little Persia

- The refusal by Vashti to obey the command of the king was a serious matter in Persian culture as well as royal etiquette. It totally infuriated King Ahasuerus and he was not only rejected by his queen, but he also had a confidence problem, and his leadership may have even been in question
- The king was used to getting whatever he wanted and this refusal no doubt caused some public embarrassment for him
- The stage was being set for the removal of Queen Vashti which would allow for Esther to be noticed and eventually become Queen herself...stay tuned!!



*“Since it was customary for the king to consult experts in matters of law and justice, he spoke with the wise men who understood the times and were closest to the king—Karshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memukan, the seven nobles of Persia and Media who had special access to the king and were highest in the kingdom. “According to law, what must be done to Queen Vashti?” he asked. “She has not obeyed the command of King Xerxes that the eunuchs have taken to her.” (Esther 1:13-15)*

- The role/influence of “wise men” within the government of the countries and empires of the Near East was significant. This can be confirmed in the book of Daniel, as well as in the historical writings of Herodotus.
- These “wise men” were like an inner council and some of the king’s closest advisors. Whatever edict that would be issued would hold the weight of the king and thus become law.



*“Then Memukan replied in the presence of the king and the nobles, Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes. For the queen’s conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say, ‘King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.’ This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen’s conduct will respond to all the king’s nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord.” (Esther 1:16-18)*



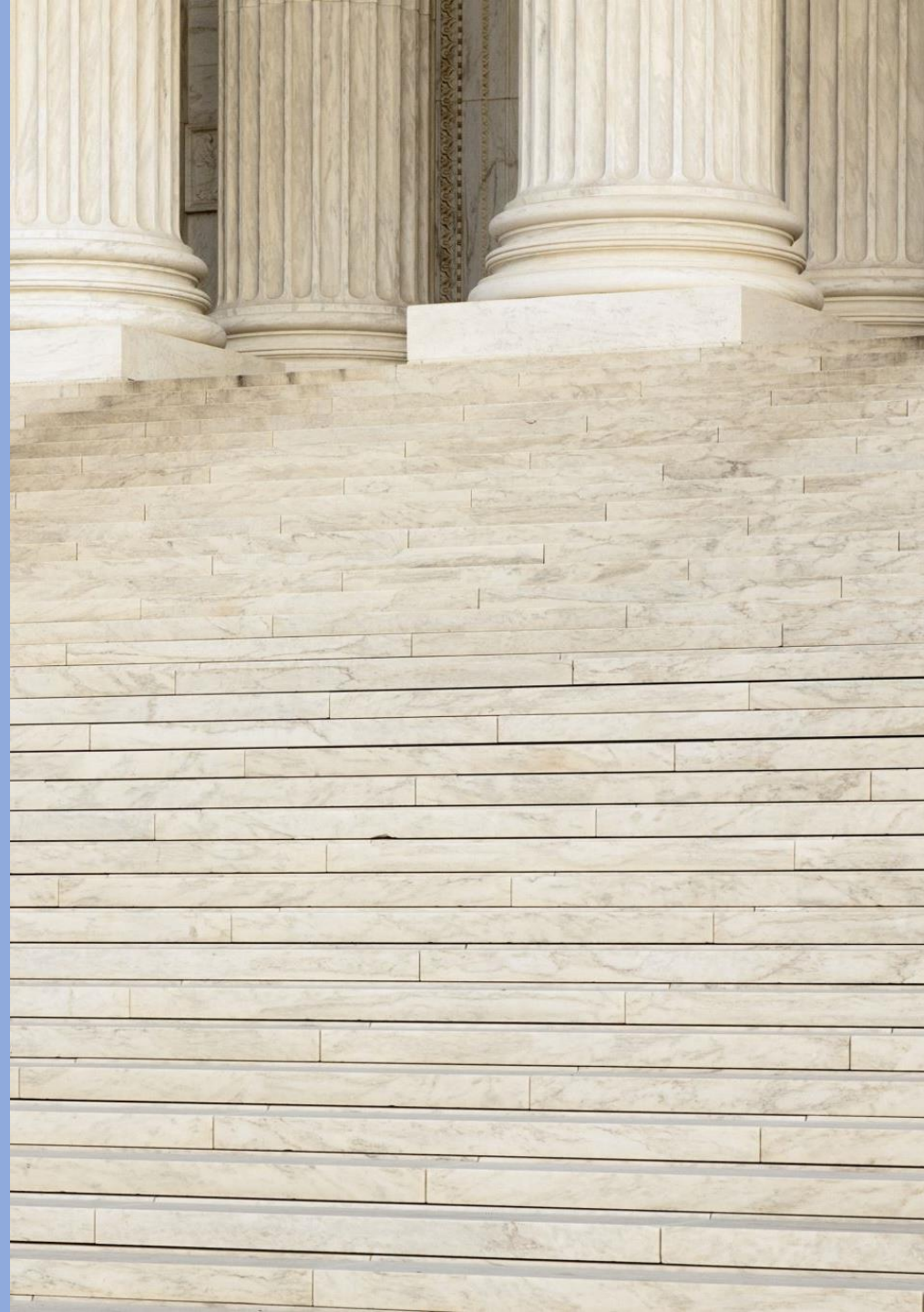
Talk about  
shaking up  
an Empire!



*“Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she. Then when the king’s edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest. The king and his nobles were pleased with this advice, so the king did as Memukan proposed. He sent dispatches to all parts of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in their own language, proclaiming that every man should be ruler over his own household, using his native tongue.”*

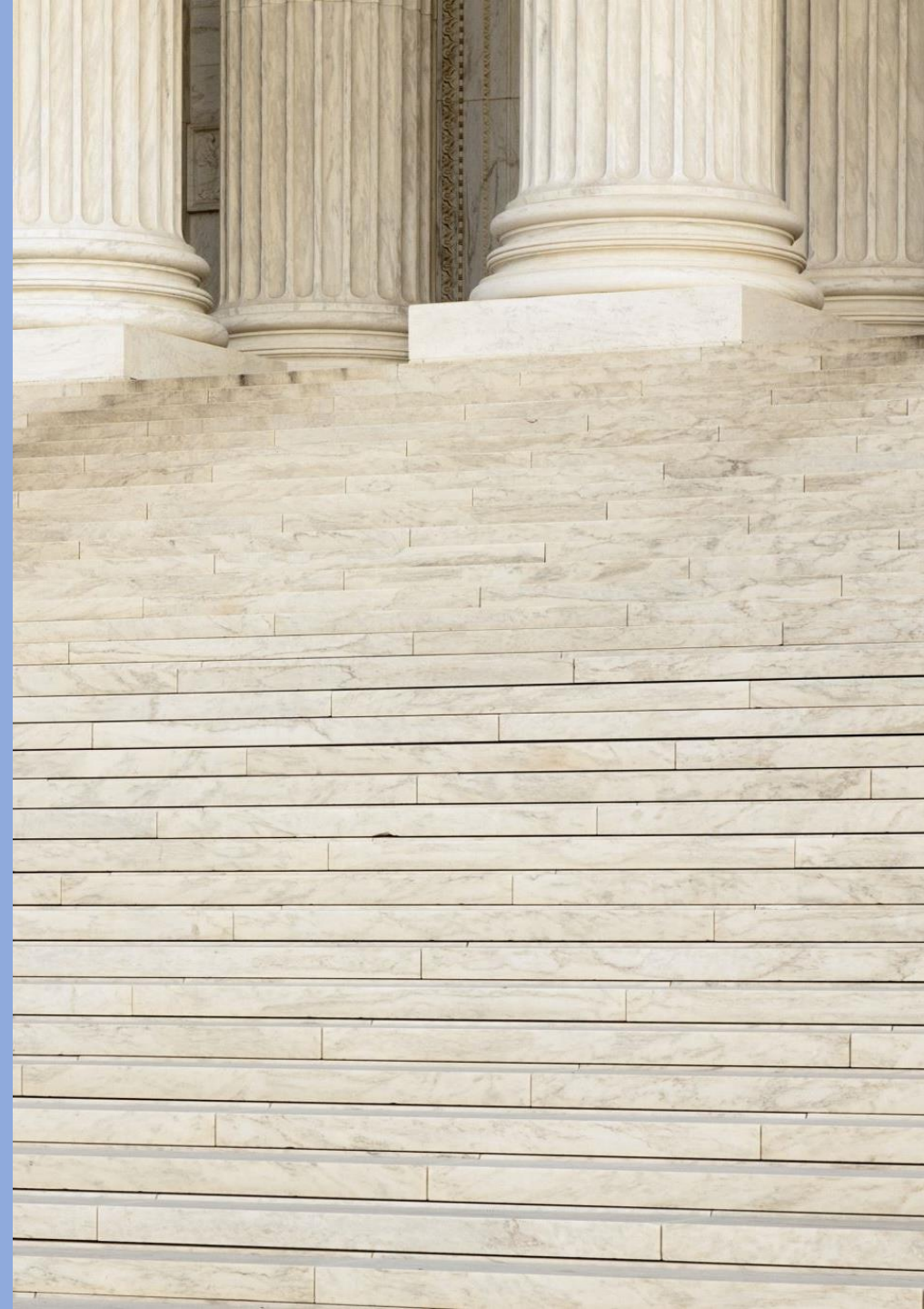
*(Esther 1:19-22)*

- Queen Vashti is **deposed** and loses her royal **status**
- The king’s edict was dispersed throughout the empire via the Persian version of the Pony Express.



## *Be careful what you wish for:*

- It's doubtful that this edict or punishment caused the women to respect their husbands more – but it was their apparent intent even though a foolish course of action
- It seemed to have a remorseful affect on the king, for once his anger subsided, he seemed to really miss his beautiful Queen Vashti (Esther 2:1)
- In the next chapter the writer will introduce the two main characters of the story which are; Esther and Mordecai. We will also see how Esther is elevated to the status of the Queen of Persia.





In Search of A  
New Queen

Esther 2





Later when King Xerxes' fury had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her. Then the king's personal attendants proposed, "Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful young women into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them. Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it. (**Esther 2:1-4**)



# No room for Regrets

The king was bound by his very own decree and even if he wanted to change his mind, the structure of the government of the Medes and the Persians was that no law/decreed could be repealed by the king, and he was required to honor it. To attempt to repeal the decree/law would put him in jeopardy of being overthrown and losing his position as king





These circumstances are what set things in motion to bring Esther to the forefront, but it is best to see this as a part of God's Providence

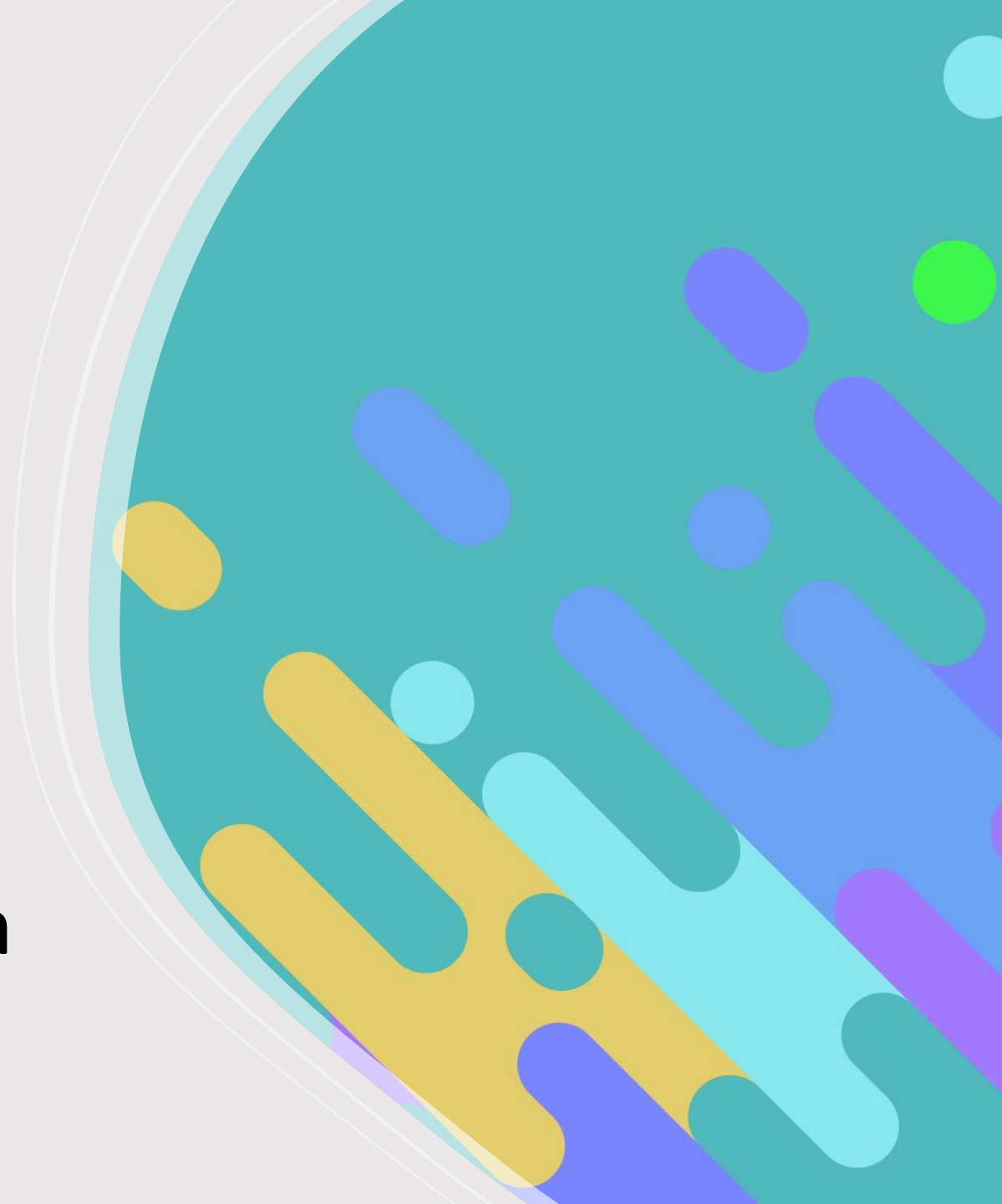




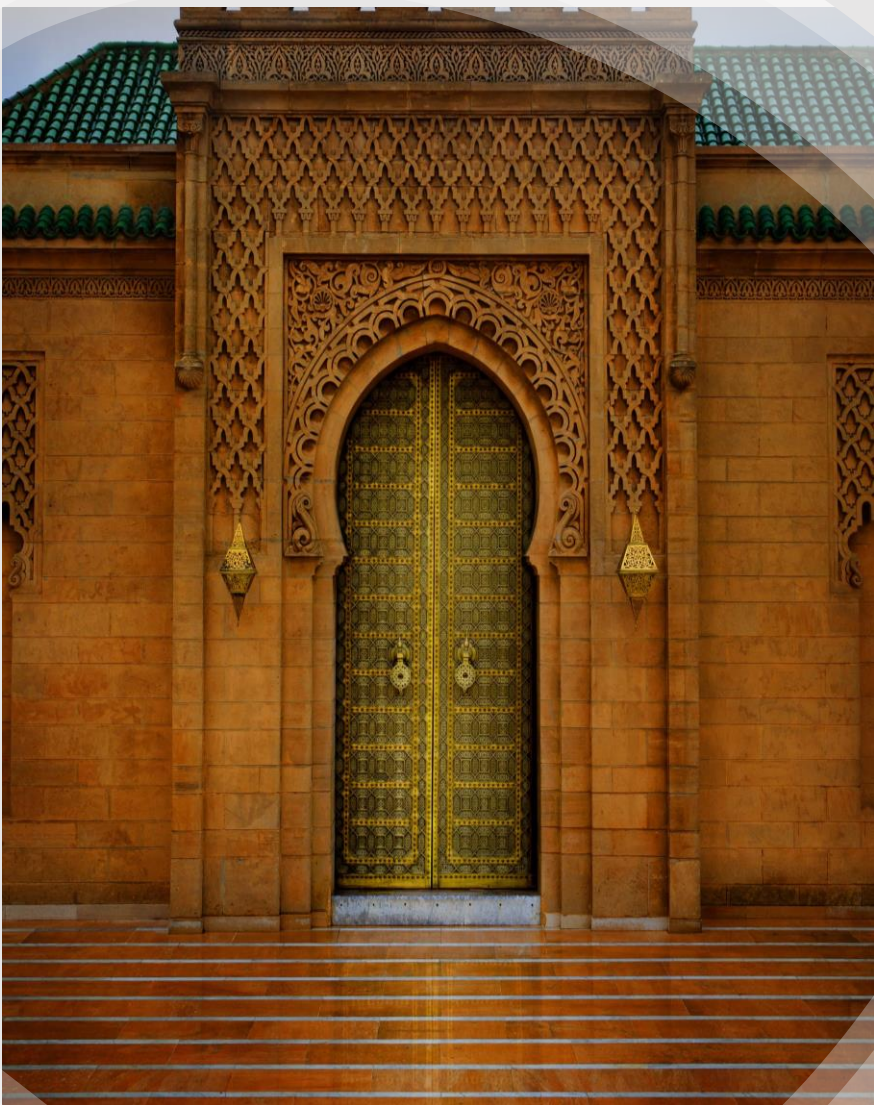
“Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named **Mordecai** son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah. Mordecai had a cousin named **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.  
(Esther 2:5-7)

# Introducing Mordecai

From the **Tribe** of Benjamin

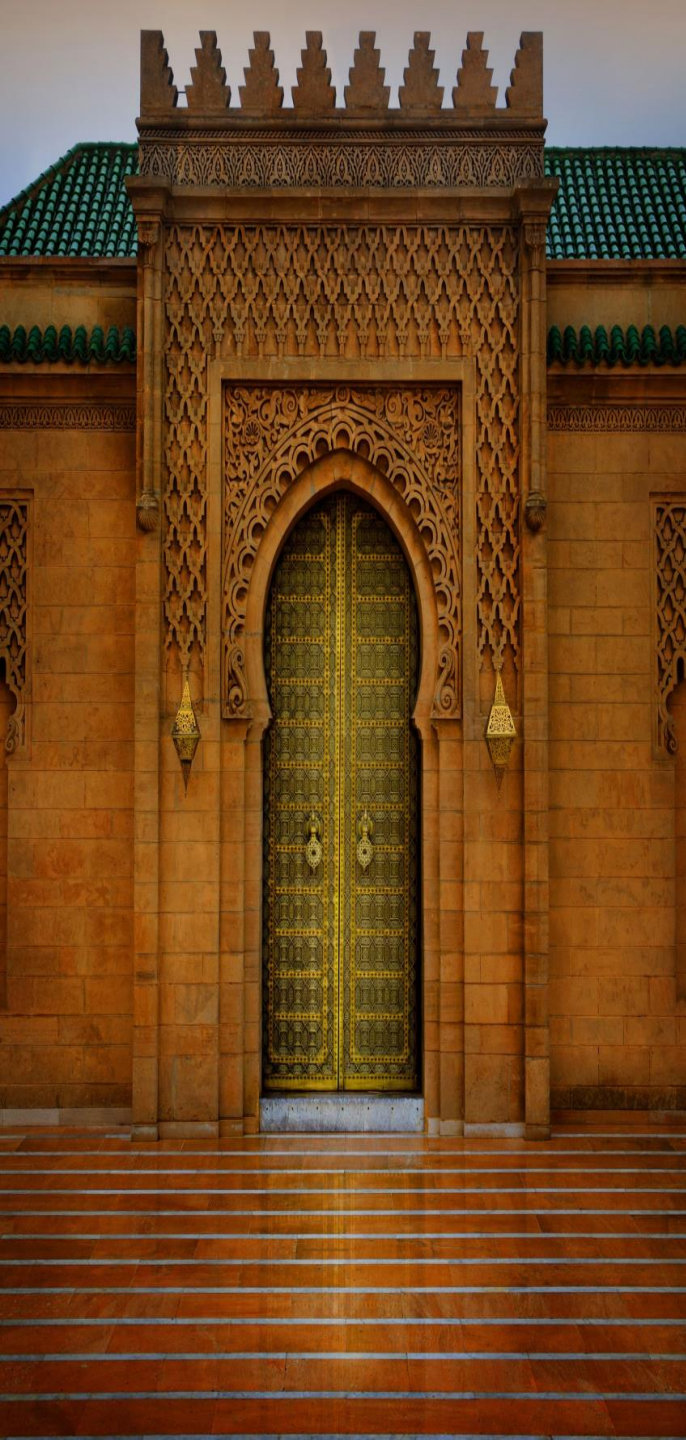






*“Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah  
(Esther 2:5-6)*

- Mordecai is his **Babylonian name**
- We are told that he comes from the tribe of Benjamin and is the great grandson of Kish who was deported during the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar
- During the time of the Persian Empire was when the term “Jew” was used to identify those from the region of Judah



## How did the Jews end up being deported to Babylon?

- You can read the full story in II Kings 25
- Jeremiah prophesied this would happen long before it did

*“Therefore, the Lord Almighty says this: “Because you have not listened to my words, I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon,” declares the Lord, “and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and **these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years**”*

*(Jeremiah 25:8-11)*



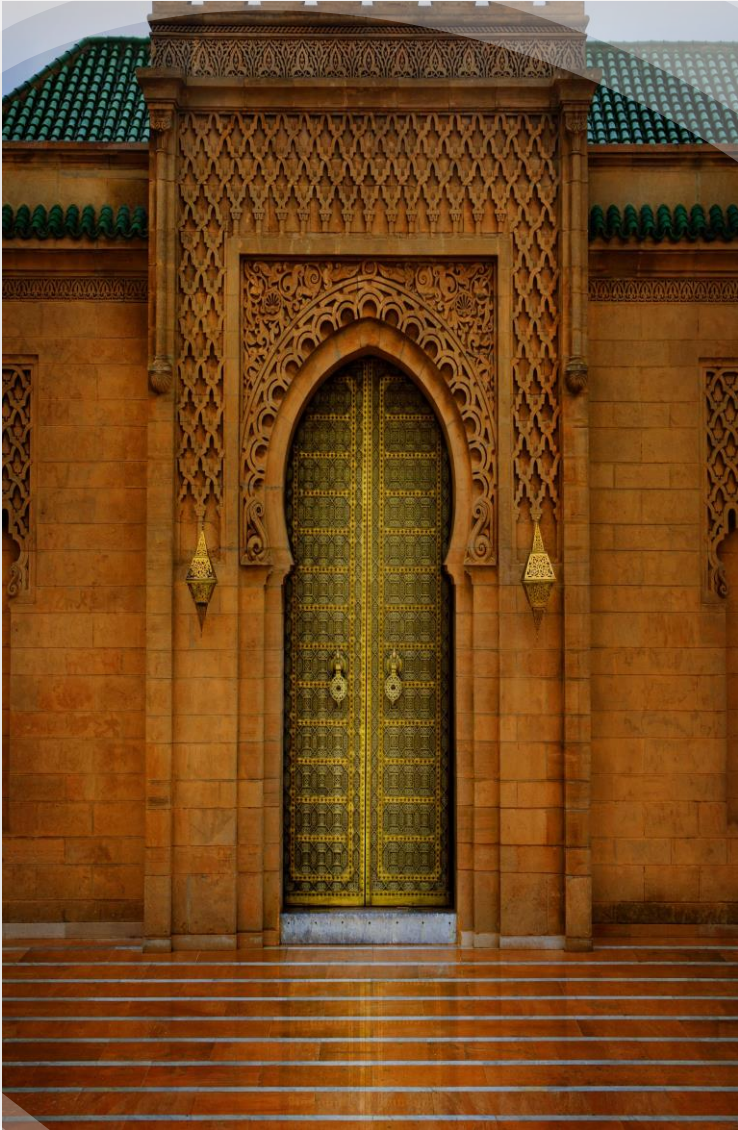


## How did these Jews (Mordecai, Esther and others) end up in Susa - the heart of the Persian Empire?

- When the Babylonian captivity ended the Jews were to return to Jerusalem:

This is what the LORD says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile

*(Jeremiah 29:10-14)*



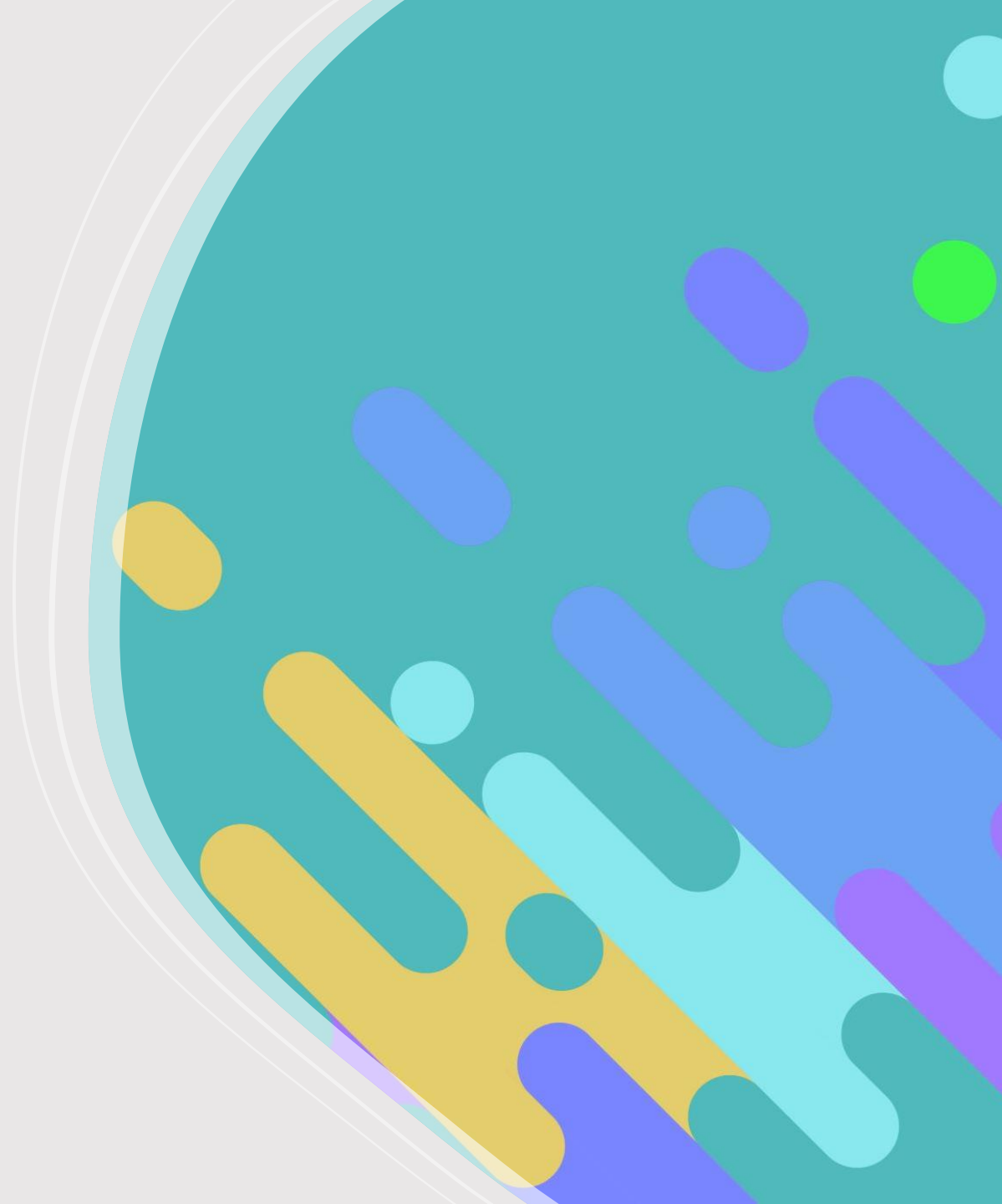
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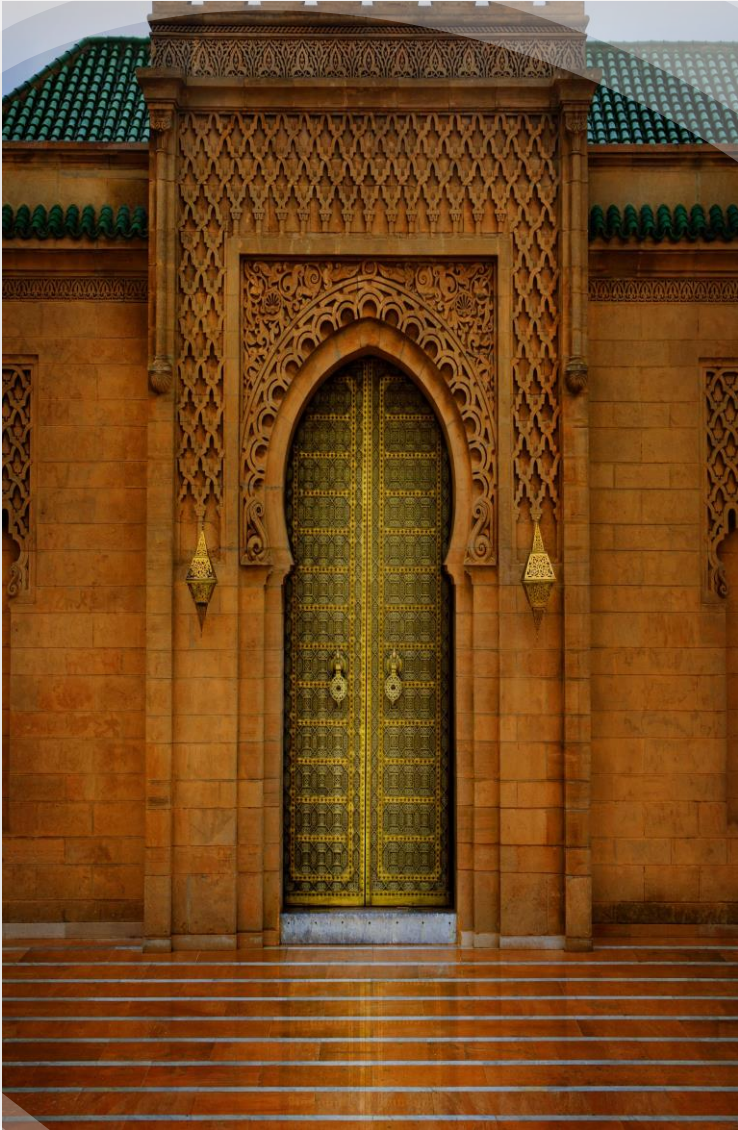
- **Mordecai** and **Esther** were a part of the exiled Jews that never returned to their homeland (Jerusalem and the Land of Promise)
- This is **their story**



# Introducing Esther

Soon to be Queen of Persia

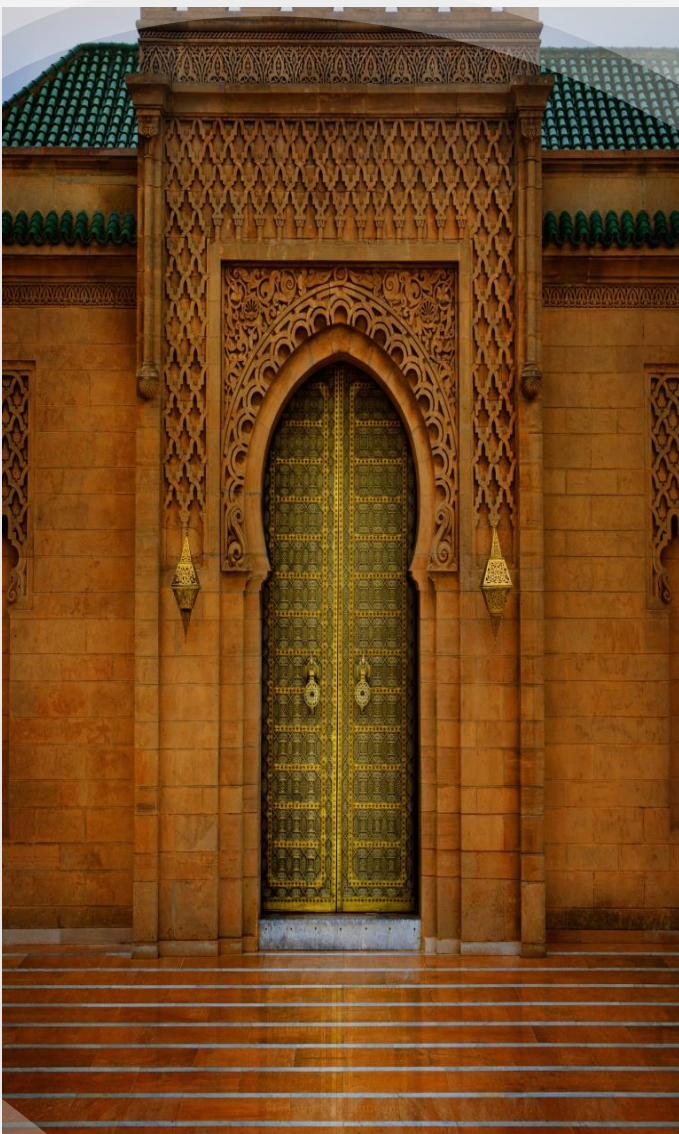




“Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as **Esther**, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died. (Esther 2:7)

- **Hadassah** is the Hebrew word for **Heroine** and actually means **“myrtle”**. The myrtle branch is a symbol for peace and thanksgiving
- **Esther** is her Persian name, and it means **“star”** which is probably a root or form of the name **Ishtar** - a Babylonian and Persian goddess





- Esther was raised by her cousin Mordecai
  - We are told that Esther's parents died, and Mordecai (probably through adoption) takes her as his own daughter. We will learn later that Mordecai is a very upstanding man of godly character
  - This shows God's providence by placing Esther in a home where she receives the right influence and religious training, even in the midst of the perverse and corrupt pagan environment of the Persian Empire
  - It was God who orchestrated the development of Esther's childhood and creates the right influences in her life to prepare her for a time such as this!



“When the king’s order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king’s palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants selected from the king’s palace and moved her and her attendants into the best place in the harem. Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her” (Esther 2:8-11)



“Esther also was taken to the king’s palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. She pleased him and won his favor”



- Esther was given favored status (in a similar fashion as Daniel was in Babylon) and this too was orchestrated by God showing His **providence**
- This favored status will place her in line to become the next queen and her purpose (slightly different than Daniel) was to save the Jews from annihilation

“Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her”



- The emphasis by Mordecai that Esther use discretion by not making her Jewish identity known becomes obvious as the story unfolds
- The Jews that remained behind in Persia were unwelcomed or unwanted by many within the Persian Empire
- Mordecai seemed to have keen insight as to the dangers of revealing their heritage and as such chose to keep such disclosure secret
- Mordecai “walked back and forth in front of the court of the harem” which reveals his fatherly concern for Esther and his desire to keep her from harm





“Before a young woman’s turn came to go in to King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women, six months with oil of myrrh and six with perfumes and cosmetics. And this is how she would go to the king: Anything she wanted was given her to take with her from the harem to the king’s palace. In the evening she would go there and in the morning return to another part of the harem to the care of Shaashgaz, the king’s eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not return to the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name. When the turn came for Esther (the young woman Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail) to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king’s eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her. (Esther 2:12-15)



- Esther will spend about one year preparing for the opportunity to impress the king with her beauty, poise, and charm. (Esther 2:12-15)
- These verses describe the process by which these women (who were specially chosen) would go through a rigorous and lengthy process of beauty treatments in preparation for their one night with the king. *This was rather demeaning (in my opinion), but it was the method by which a queen was chosen, and no doubt satisfied the lustful cravings of a pagan king*





- We are not given a lot of specifics as to what transpired when it was time for Esther to appear before the king. Here are my observations of the text:
  1. Esther's beauty, qualities and character were obvious to others without all the cosmetics, perfumes and other extravagances
  2. Esther impressed all who saw her (especially the king) and in similar fashion to Daniel the prophet, her inner qualities were what made her so favorable



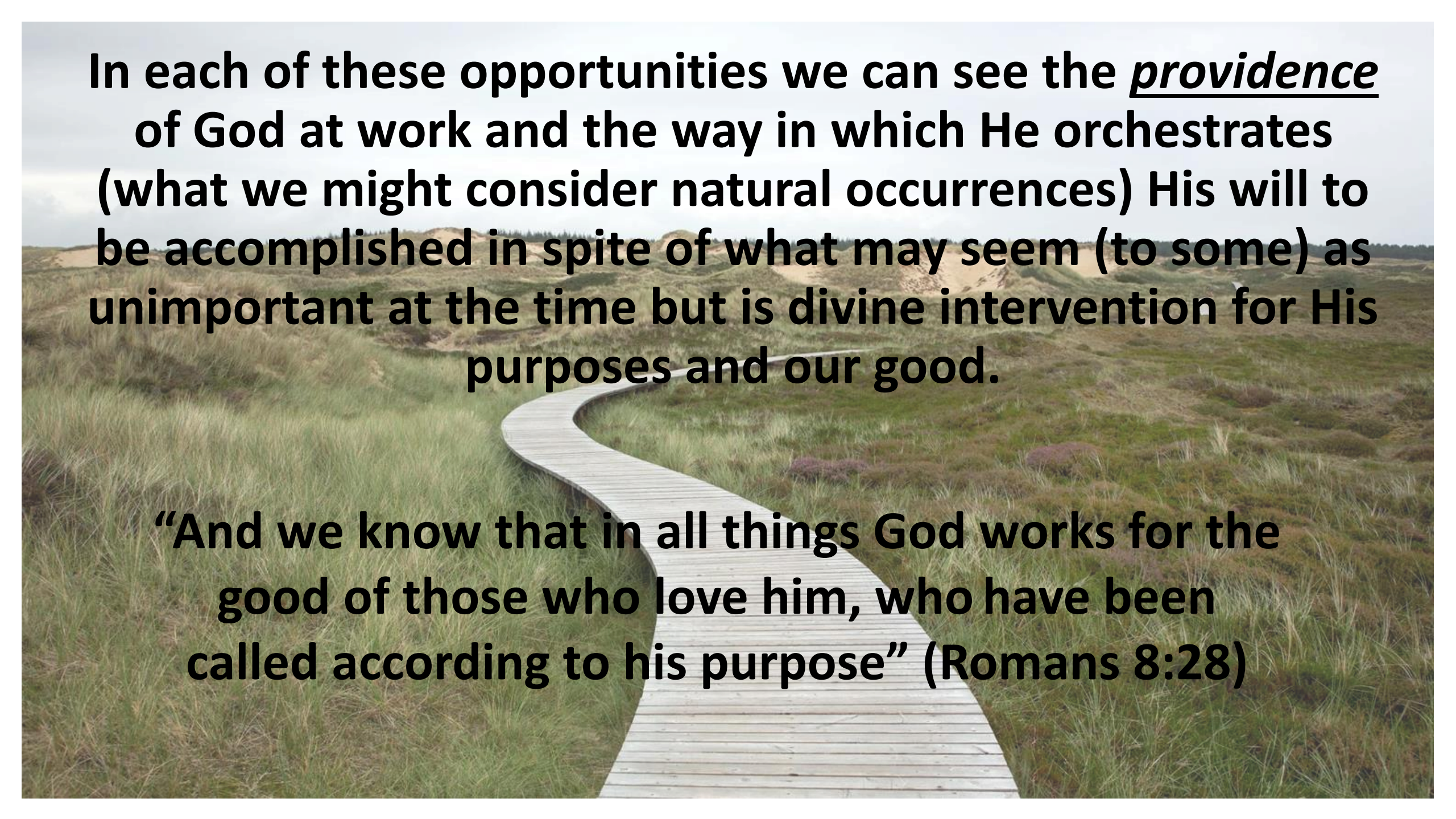
She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So, he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality. (Esther 2:16-18)





- The **seventh year of Ahasuerus' reign** would have been the year **479 B.C**
- The 10<sup>th</sup> month **Tebeth** (the Babylonian name); would have been at the same time as our December-January
- It had been about 4 years since Vashti had been removed as queen
- The Scriptures tell us that **the king loved Esther** more than all the other women in his harem and he proclaimed her to be queen which was his right to do



A wooden boardwalk made of light-colored planks winds through a vast, open landscape. The ground is covered in tall, dry grass and patches of low-lying vegetation. In the background, there are rolling hills and a line of trees under a cloudy sky. The text is overlaid on the upper half of the image.

**In each of these opportunities we can see the providence of God at work and the way in which He orchestrates (what we might consider natural occurrences) His will to be accomplished in spite of what may seem (to some) as unimportant at the time but is divine intervention for His purposes and our good.**

**“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28)**