



## The Playbill

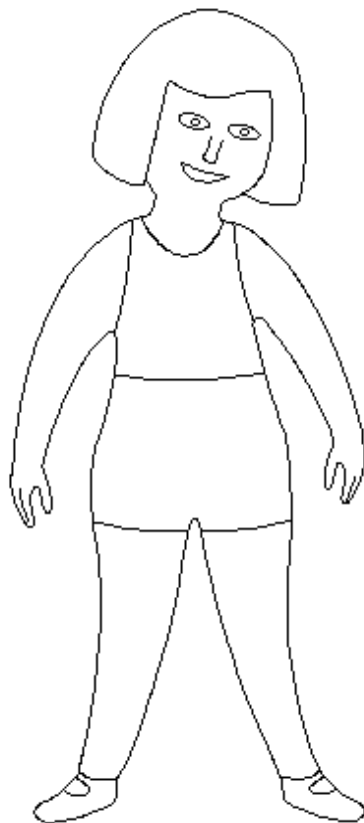
WEEK 2: The Whole Book

Esther 1 - 10

### Shuffle the Deck

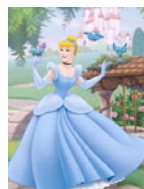


**Happy Birthday.** Go to [this website](#) and enter your birthday. Jot down any interesting events or inspiring people that were born or died on your birthday.



**Paper Doll.** This is Esther. Add clothing, makeup and a hairstyle.

(<http://www.cultureofiran.com/cosmetics.php>)



**Cinderella.** Just for fun, [watch the trailer](#) to Disney's movie, "A Cinderella Story."



## Deal the Cards

A lot of people love rags-to-riches stories. Think about Cinderella.

Lots of cultures have such stories, whether mythological or fact-based. The plotline goes something like this: poor girl meets rich, handsome prince who rescues her from her fate by taking her to the castle, where they live happily ever after.

What Cinderella is to America, Esther was to the children of Israel. That she was the Queen of Persia (Iran) only makes the story that much better.

Yet if we stop to think about it, the one who gets first mention in the *Playbill* of the Esther story isn't Queen Esther. Or King Xerxes. Or cousin Mordecai. It's God.

What's really ironic is that God's name is never mentioned.

Any good story writer knows you can't have too many coincidences or the story won't work. People say, "No way." That is, unless the story is true. Then when you string together a bunch of seeming coincidences, people shake their heads in amazement. The more "coincidences," the more people attribute the goings-on to God.

Consider a sampling of the numerous "coincidences" in Esther's story:

- Esther is blessed with astounding beauty—enough to win the kingdom's beauty contest.
- Esther's cousin has both access to Esther and info on a plot to kill the king.
- Somebody records Mordecai's revelation in the king's annals. (This will be important later. *Years* later.)
- When the lot is cast to see when the Jews will be slaughtered, the "dice" fall in such a way as to give God's people the most possible time to prepare.
- The king walks in just as Haman is falling on Esther for mercy. Oops! That doesn't look so good. So "off with his head" (in a manner of speaking).
- The post that Haman has erected for having Mordecai spiked (ew!) ends up being Haman's own gallows.
- Not one Jewish person dies, while more than 75,000 of those who set out to destroy them get killed.

Kind of points to God, eh? I'd say the shoe definitely fits. The queen is in the right place at the right time with the right circumstances to save her people—God's people—from genocide. God had made promises to his people centuries earlier, and he orchestrates this Cinderella story to demonstrate that, despite their failure, He keeps His word.

He has made promises to us, too. And He hasn't changed a bit.



### **Monday: *Ahasuerus Introduced***

1. Read [Esther 1:1–2:10](#).
2. Know: From history we assume [King Ahasuerus is Xerxes I](#). That the name is different isn't all that strange. My daughter's name is "Alexandra" but in Russia she would go by "Sasha." The men who translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek for the first time rendered Ahasuerus (Hebrew) as "Artaxerxes" (Greek). Artaxerxes reigned for twenty-one years around 486–465 B.C. He was known to have invaded Greece with a huge army that definitely should have won, had numbers been the only consideration. Yet only about five thousand of his men made it home, having been soundly trounced by the tenacious Greeks. After his disastrous Greek campaign Xerxes chose Esther as queen.

The name "Ahasuerus," when pronounced aloud in Hebrew, sounds a lot like "King Headache." So perhaps it was intended by the author as a stage name rather than the actual historical name of the king.

3. We learn some things about Xerxes from the following:
  - A. The size of his kingdom ([Esther 1:1](#)):
  - B. His wealth ([Esther 1:4, 6, 7](#)):
  - C. His attitude about women ([Esther 2:4, 6–19](#)): Herodotus makes mention of Xerxes' illegitimate sons [*The Histories* 8.107].
  - D. His attitude about the genocide of his own subjects ([Esther 3:8–11](#))?
  - E. Sometimes Esther's story is told like "The King and I" as a great love story between a kind king and a holy girl. How does that portrayal compare to what you find in the biblical text?

### **Tuesday: *Esther Introduced***

Esther was a Jewish woman living under Jewish law in a pagan land. Yet apparently she wasn't observing God's law. What of God's laws did she violate?

1. [Deuteronomy 7:1–4](#)?
2. [Leviticus 11:46–47](#)?



3. Now Read [Daniel 1:5, 8](#). Compare and contrast Esther's actions during this period of history with Daniel's.

### **Wednesday: Mordecai Introduced**

1. What was Mordecai's nationality ([Esther 2:5](#))?
2. Why is Mordecai in Susa when he's from Judah ([2:5-6](#))?
3. How are Mordecai's and Esther related ([2:7, 11, 15](#))?
4. What instructions did Mordecai give Esther about her nationality ([2:10, 20](#))?
5. Where did Mordecai spend his time ([2:19, 21](#))?
6. What was Mordecai's response to Haman ([3:2-4](#))?
7. Why did Mordecai say he refused to pay homage to Haman ([3:4](#))?

### **Thursday: Haman Introduced**

1. What do we know is Esther's nationality?
2. What was Haman's nationality ([Esther 3:1](#))?
3. Who was Agag according to [1 Sam. 15:7-14](#)?
4. Who were Agag's ancestors according to [Exodus 17](#)?



5. Who were the Amalekites and what did they do?
  
6. Read [Deuteronomy 25:17–19](#). What had God commanded concerning the Amalekites?
  
7. Later what did God command King Saul to do with the Amalekites? Contrast His command with what Saul actually did ([1 Samuel 15](#)).
  
8. What was the ultimate significance of ongoing disobedience on the part of their ancestors mean for Esther and her people?

**Friday: *God Plays the Lead***

God isn't mentioned in the Book of Esther, so we can't find Him in any chapter and verse.

1. List ways you know from this book that God is present, even though He isn't named.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. List ways you know He is working in your life and in the lives of others you know, though you can't see Him.



## **Saturday: *Of Prejudice and Patience***

God was patient with His people. Here he had given clear instructions about what should happen to all the Amalekites, yet His people disobeyed.

The Book of Esther gives us an example of the consequences.

Jewish Mordecai refuses to bow down to Amalekite Haman. As the descendent of an Amalekite king, Haman is ready to exact revenge against Israel, and he's willing to pay big bucks to do it (see [Esther 3:9](#)).

Now, how much exactly did he offer? Well, we know that the Persian Empire's annual revenue was 14,560 Euboean talents, so Haman's offer comes to about two-thirds of the royal income for the year. Bear in mind that the king has just had a badly failed campaign that cost big bucks. Haman probably didn't have that kind of money, but no problem! All he had to do was plunder the Israelites he killed and pay what he'd promised by using their own money and property as payment ([3:13](#)).

This king is not exactly looking out for his own subjects. When Haman makes his offer, the king tells him, "The silver is given to you." Now, most scholars through the years have understood this to mean that the king turned down the money, but recently translators have reconsidered. Perhaps "the silver is given to you" is an ancient way of saying, "Hey, it's your money!"

The fact that Mordecai knows the amount ([4:7](#)) and Esther says later "I and my people have been sold" ([7:4](#)) suggest this interpretation has much to commend it.

Whether the king stood to profit, we know for sure that Haman has pride and prejudice motivating him.

If only God's people had obeyed in the first place, there never would have been a Haman.

If only...

We might read that and criticize. Yet consider what commands we ourselves fail to obey.

We are told to quit laying up treasures down here and send them ahead to heaven. But that car looks so great!

God tells us to treat our bodies as temples worthy of His Spirit's presence. Yet we stuff them with French fries, all the while condemning smoking.

We know we're supposed to have dominion over the earth, to demonstrate good stewardship with what God has made. Yet we consider recycling too much of a hassle.

