

(If arranging a pageant, the banquet scene is the most important in the career of Esther.)

First Esther: One of the best known of biblical heroines is Esther, famed for her beauty, heroism, and nobility of character. Not only among her own people, whom she saved from destruction, but by all who are familiar with the biblical and historical record of Persia's noble queen, her deeds are praised. Esther was a Jewish maiden, the foster daughter of Mordecai, and was chosen by Ahasuerus, king of Persia, to be the successor of his former wife, Queen Vashti, who refused to appear at a banquet to which he summoned her.

Throughout all barbarous and unenlightened ages, woman has been held subject in toto to the will of her lord, and her husband, whether he be prophet, king or peasant, was in reality her master. Any attempt on her part to resist his authority, or to declare her individual opinion, was considered an outrage against the sovereign authority of his will and dignity, and was just cause for divorce, and sometimes even the severe punishment of death. Her descent from the Jewish people was carefully withheld from the king and his court, as Mordecai requested.

Second Esther: Esther was reared in refinement and in the strictest observance of the rites and ceremonies of the Jewish religion. During her childhood she was designated as "the lovely" on account of her gentleness and the peculiarly amiable traits of character which she manifested. The charm of her society grew with her growth and strengthened with her years. Throughout their subsequent captivity, which occurred in her early life, and through every trial and elation, she preserved the same cheerful obedience and willingness to serve Mordecai, and his devotion to her was very great. Purple and fine linen, beauty and luxury, had been the condition of their lives when Mordecai and Esther came to live in Shushan, the City of Lilies.

To the delicately nurtured, this reverse from affluence to penury must have brought disagreeable inconveniences, and painful restrictions, yet like the luster of a splendid diamond, which, though it may be covered with clay, still retains its brilliancy, their qualities of rare virtue existed amidst the obscurity of broken fortunes, and their lives were glorified by the performance of such deeds of goodness as their intrinsic merit dictated.



Third Esther: Shushan, the city of lilies, was the seat of royalty; it took its name from the vast quantities of this beautiful flower which grew around it; in the city, on the housetop, and everywhere there was room for the bulb to be planted, this graceful flower flourished. Shushan as a royal residence, was like all other cities in the East. It had the usual admixture of pomp and penury, of gaiety and pagentry, military and civil, refinement and vulgarity. It is recorded that about this time the city was fervid with excitement and anticipation of an unsurpassed festival which would be given to the princes and nobles. All the varied paraphernalia that the coffers of the royal treasury could afford, the taste of the merchants, the design of artists, and the ingenuity of the architect, were called into requisition to beautify and adorn the palace and its courts.

This was the setting for the drama in which Queen Esther played the star role, when she pled with the king for the preservation of her people.

Fourth Esther: It was at this banquet to which Esther had invited the King that she disclosed to him her nationality and relationship to Mordecai, and quoted the edict which Haman had issued in the king's name. Although the king was angered, Esther's great beauty, bravery, and the tender love with which he honored her, so appealed to him, that he extended to her the golden scepter, saying: "What wilt thou, Queen Esther, and what is thy request?" When Esther told him how Haman, through his envy of Mordecai, had induced him to issue the cruel edict for the entire destruction of her people, he became greatly angered, and had Haman hanged on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. The Jewish people were saved, and through Esther's timely interference, the day of desolation was turned into one of joy and thanksgiving for their deliverance.

This festival of joy and thanksgiving is held even to this day by the modern Jews, who ever honor the memory of Persia's noble queen, who saved her people from destruction. This is the Festival of Purim.