

ESTHER: QUEEN OF PERSIA

(Esth. 4:8-16)

Introduction:

1. The Book of Esther takes place chronologically between Ezra chapters 6 and 7. There is roughly a 70 year gap between the two chapters; the time period between the first return of the Jews under Zerubbabel and the 2nd return of the Jews under Ezra.
2. Jerusalem had been destroyed in 586BC by the Babylonians and the last of the Jews carried away into captivity (1st captivity = Daniel in 606BC; 2nd captivity = Ezekiel in 597BC). The Babylonians had been conquered by the Persians with the help of the Medes around 539BC and the first return of the Jews took place in 536BC. The 2nd return under Ezra took place around 457BC. Esther became queen of Persia in 479BC.
3. With that in mind, let us consider Esther: who she was, what she did, and what we can learn from her.

Discussion:

I. Who she was.

- A. Esther was raised by her cousin (his uncle's daughter 2:7) Mordecai.
 1. Esther real name was Hadassa (probably her Semitic name, which means "myrtle"). Esther is a Persian name meaning "star".
 2. When Esther's parents died Mordecai adopted her (2:7).
 3. Mordecai was a Jew in captivity living in Shushan (Susa), the capital of the Persian Empire.
- B. Esther was lovely (*yapheh* = beautiful; *toar* = shape/form) and beautiful (*tob* = good/pleasant; *mareh* = appearance) as detailed in 2:7.

II. Where she found herself.

- A. Chapter One details the removal of Queen Vashti from her position and the summoning of young women from all over the Empire for King Ahasuerus (Ahasuerus is believed to be a title for the Persian kings as it is applied to three kings in the Bible; this Ahasuerus is identified as Xerxes 1) to select his new queen. These events probably followed the Persian's humiliating defeat in Greece.
- B. Because of her beauty, Esther was selected to be one of the maidens from whom Ahasuerus would choose his future queen (Mordecai had cautioned Esther not to reveal that she was a Jew).
- C. Esther was chosen to be the new queen of Persia (2:17).

III. What she did.

- A. The scene is set by one of the king's counselors, Haman the Agagite (some believe this to mean he was descendant of Agag, King of the Amorites, slain by Samuel in 1 Sam. 15), seeking to destroy the Jews in exile.
 1. Haman despised Mordecai because he would not "reverence" (*shachah* which can mean to worship as in Josh. 5:14) Haman. Haman may have been wanting "reverence" beyond civil acknowledgement and that may explain Mordecai revealing that he was a Jew (Esth. 3:1-4).
 2. Because of this refusal and possibly more, Haman conspires to destroy all of the Jews in exile (Esth. 3:8-12).
 3. The writing of Haman's plot is significant because Persian law could not be repealed (cp. Dan. 6:15).
 4. The scene was set and all Shushan was "perplexed" (Esth. 3:15).
- B. The final piece is put into place when Mordecai goes to Esther to ask her to intervene on behalf of the Jews, her people (Esth. 4).
 1. At stake is the survival of Esther's family and kinsman.
 2. At stake is the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel and all mankind!

- C. Esther takes her life in her hands and saves the Jews.
1. It was forbidden for anyone to approach the king except they were called (4:11).
 2. Esther did so and “found favor in his sight” and was allowed to speak (5:2).
 3. She invited the king and Haman to a banquet she would provide. The banquet pleased the king so much that he offered her up to half his kingdom. Esther simply invited the king and Haman to another banquet.
 - a. Haman, seeing Mordecai unafraid while leaving the first banquet, is filled with anger and has gallows 75’ high built, with the intent to suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged there the next day.
 - b. The night before the second banquet the king could not sleep and asked for the “Book of Records” to be read to him. Mordecai’s spoiling of the plot to kill the king (ch. 2) is read and the king realizes Mordecai had never been honored for his service. The king orders to Haman (oh, the irony) to dress Mordecai in the king’s robe and chauffeur him through Shushan on the king’s horse.
 4. At the second banquet (Esth. 7), the king is again very pleased and again offers her anything up to half the kingdom. Esther tells all, her being a Jew, the plot against her people, and requests that the king save her and her people. The king demands to know who devised the plot against the Jews and Haman is found out and hanged on his own gallows!
 5. The king writes a new law allowing the Jews to arm themselves and destroy those who would seek to destroy them (Esth. 8, 9).
 6. The book ends with Mordecai being 2nd in command in all Persia, watching out for his (actually God’s) people.

IV. What we can learn.

- A. The amazing providence (and faithfulness) of God.
1. Although the word “God” is never spoken in the book, His loving care and power towards His people is from beginning to end.
 2. Esther is beautiful, Mordecai saves the king by overhearing a plot, Queen Vashti is deposed and a new queen sought, Esther is favored by the king’s eunuch, Esther is chosen by the king, the king favors Esther and grants her a hearing and attendance to her banquets, the king can’t sleep and has the records read to him that just so happen to have Mordecai’s deed in them, the king returns from investigating Esther’s charge to find Haman begging Esther and thinks he is attacking her, Esther and Mordecai is given everything they need to save the Jews and even elevate them in captivity, and Mordecai is placed in a position like Joseph to shepherd God’s people into the glorious future to come.
- B. Yet another definition of “faithful unto death”.
1. Esther took her life in her hands when she dared to approach the king on behalf of God’s people.
 2. Providence (Esth. 4:14) plus faithfulness (Esth. 4:15) = life (Esth. 8:17)! Rev. 2:10.
- C. God’s will and providence are defeated when His people do nothing.
- D. The power of one! We may be only one but we are one! We may not be able to do everything, but we can do something!

Conclusion:

1. Here we are today. Perhaps for such a time as this, here we are. What are we willing to do for God and His cause?
2. Will we live His will and praise/preach His will to all we can? Are we content to watch the will of God be abandoned and forsaken. There may come such a day, but it is not this day...
3. Invitation.