

Preview Of Esther

The Book of Esther was named after the main character, whose Hebrew name, Hadassah, was changed to Esther. Although the Scriptures are silent concerning the authorship of the book, Jewish tradition, as well as much subsequent Biblical scholarship, considers Mordecai to be the author.

The setting of this dramatic story is both obvious and obscure. Geographically, the setting is clearly identified as Shushan (known as Susa in secular history). Shushan was the name both of the primary capital city of the Persian Empire and of the palace complex itself, which was the home of the royal family and the seat of government. Chronologically, the setting is the subject of much debate. Almost all scholars agree, however, that these events occurred sometime in the approximately seventy years between the return of the Jews from captivity under Zerubbabel and the arrival of Ezra at Jerusalem.

The Book of Esther is unique in that not once does the name of God appear.

Furthermore, the story refers little to the Law or the Hebrew religion. This has caused some to question its rightful place in the canon of Scripture. This presents no real problem, however, for God's hand is evident in these events from the beginning to the end in a most marvelous way. Indeed, this book reveals in intricate detail the providence of God—through His foreknowledge bringing to naught Satan's efforts against His people, and through His wisdom effecting their deliverance. In this account, the Lord uses both men and women to accomplish His purposes. The ten chapters of this short book can be divided into several sections. Chapters 1 and 2 are the introduction, describing how Vashti was deposed as queen (chapter 1) and how Esther replaced her (chapter 2). Chapters 3-5 trace the development of a grave crisis for God's people; they describe Haman's plot to destroy Mordecai and the entire Jewish people (chapter 3), Mordecai's plea for Esther to rise to the occasion (chapter 4), and Esther's bold plan to bring "enlargement and deliverance" (chapter 5). Chapter 6 opens with a seemingly trivial event that

actually provided the key that turned the crisis into a miraculous deliverance for God's people. Chapters 6-10 then trace the development of that deliverance—describing Mordecai's honor, Haman's fall into disgrace, and his execution (chapters 6, 7); the Jews' vindication against their enemies and the institution of Purim (chapters 8, 9); and the exaltation of Mordecai (chapter 10). Studying this moving story should enrich our faith and challenge our fidelity. We too face a vicious enemy, just as intent upon the annihilation of the New Testament church as he ever was of Old Testament Israel. Can we trust in God's unseen hand accomplishing His sovereign purposes in our lives and on the world scene? Do we understand that we have "come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Are we willing to step forth and fill the place God calls us to fill?

Will we persevere unto the end and receive the reward of the faithful?

We can be the "Mordecais" and "Esthers" whom God will use to build His kingdom today.

Lesson 10 5 January, 2014

Esther Becomes Queen

Lesson Scope: [Esther Chapters 1 & 2](#)

Lesson Focus

The Persian kingdom had expanded until its borders reached from the Aegean Sea to India and from central Asia to northern Africa. In this account, the monarch of this era, King Ahasuerus, "made a feast unto all his princes and his servants" (Esther 1:3), displaying his riches and honor for 180 days.

A seven-day feast followed for everyone "in Shushan the palace" (Esther 1:5), offering luxurious accommodations and "royal wine in abundance" (Esther 1:7). While intoxicated, Ahasuerus commanded to bring Vashti the queen so that the people might see her beauty. Vashti refused to degrade her feminine dignity in this manner; and the king, on the advice of his counselors, divorced her.

Chapter 2 records the process of choosing a new queen. The virtuous life of Esther stands in sharp contrast to the rash carnality of the king, and subsequent events confirm that truly God had brought her to the kingdom for such a time as this.

The details of personal and world events often seem incidental. God, however, is sovereignly weaving the tapestry of human history with the welfare of His people in sharp focus. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD" (Psalm 37:23). We must surrender to God's placement and timing. We must humbly and faithfully serve where He places us so that His perfect plan and purposes for His people can be realized.

In respect to Jesus' words "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), church and state are ordained of God as separate entities in His divine plan. We do not seek to influence the government in their work but rather pray for them.

Lesson Aim: To see God's sovereign providence in behalf of His people.

Theme Verse: [Proverbs 21:1](#). The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.

Lesson Text

Vashti's Unjust Dismissal

[Esther 1:10-12](#) ¹⁰ On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, ¹¹ To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she *was* fair to look on. ¹² But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by *his* chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him.

[Esther 2:1-2](#) ¹ After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her. ² Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king:

Esther's Unsought Advancement

[Esther 2:5-10](#) ⁵ Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew, whose name *was* Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite; ⁶ Who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. ⁷ And he brought up Hadassah, that *is*, Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid *was* fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter. ⁸ So it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was brought also unto the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women. ⁹ And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her the things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, *which were* meet to be given her, out of the king's house: and he preferred her and her maids unto the best

place of the house of the women. ¹⁰ Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew *it*.

Esther 2:15-20 ¹⁵ Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her. ¹⁶ So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus into his house royal in the tenth month, which *is* the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. ¹⁷ And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti. ¹⁸ Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, *even* Esther's feast; and he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts, according to the state of the king. ¹⁹ And when the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai sat in the king's gate. ²⁰ Esther had not *yet* shewed her kindred nor her people; as Mordecai had charged her: for Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him.

Mordecai's Unwavering Fidelity

Esther 2:21-23 ²¹ In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those which kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus. ²² And the thing was known to Mordecai, who told *it* unto Esther the queen; and Esther certified the king *thereof* in Mordecai's name. ²³ And when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out; therefore they were both hanged on a tree: and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.

Questions for Study

Vashti's Unjust Dismissal

1. From the lesson scope, list ways King Ahasuerus followed his carnal impulses.
2. How should we respond to civil leaders who do not exemplify integrity?

Esther's Unsought Advancement

3. Why do we conclude that Esther's presence was not self-assertive?
4. Upon what basis did Esther receive commendation and favor?
5. List ways our homes influence God's work today.
6. What concepts will enhance security in circumstances that are beyond our control?

Mordecai's Unwavering Fidelity

7. What actions of Mordecai indicate his diligence in responsibility?
8. What qualities must characterize our motives and aspirations for service?

Analyzing the Passage

King Ahasuerus was a proud and passionate person. Queen Vashti's refusal to come when he summoned her provoked a violent outburst of anger (Esther 1:12). He expressed no feelings of mercy or pardon and consulted his wise men who "knew law and judgment" for a judicial penalty.

Queen Vashti's refusal was viewed as disobedience (Esther 1:15) and a threat in that it set a public example of contempt for her husband (Esther 1:16-18).

Appeased and remembered (Esther 2:1) suggest that Ahasuerus may have regretted his hasty decision to divorce Vashti.

At the suggestion of his servants, the king appointed officers to gather fair young virgins from the provinces to Shushan the palace (Esther 2:8). "That Esther was brought also" (Esther 2:8) suggests that her presence was involuntary.

The godly character of Esther was outstanding (Esther 2:9). She followed Hegai's requirements, but she did not try to gain the king's favor with the vanity of physical adornment.

That Mordecai "sat in the king's gate" (Esther 2:21) suggests that he held an official position, for the king's gate was often a place of business and legal activity. In the course of duty, he discovered the plot to destroy the king (Esther 2:21). The conspirators were punished, but Mordecai received no reward. This seemingly insignificant detail plays an important role in chapter 6.

Principles and Applications

Vashti's Unjust Dismissal

1. God uses events that seem but remotely related to His people to accomplish His purposes in their behalf (Esther 1:10-12). God knows the future and is able to move men's hearts and even to use their God-defying choices to further His cause. From things that seem trivial to things foreboding, and through natural phenomenon or civil decree, God is at work in behalf of His people. His purposes cannot falter.

2. God overrules in the wrath and wickedness of men to accomplish His purposes for His people (Esther 1:12; 2:1-2). "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee" (Psalm 76:10). The Lord is able to use the carnal outburst of emotion or the conceited ambition of worldly men to develop circumstances that will enhance the building of His church on earth.

3. Godly homes fill a vital role in God's sovereign purposes (Esther 2:5-7). Out of these spiritual bulwarks have come many spiritual giants, not only in Biblical history but in every age. The nurture of children in godly fear and spiritual devotion is a high calling in light of the eternal implications.

God wants fathers who exemplify faithfulness, mothers who express devotion, and children who learn submission. May God help us to serve Him consistently in the roles He has assigned us.

Esther's Unsought Advancement

4. God providentially places faithful individuals where their influence can contribute to the outworking of divine purposes (Esther 2:5, 17). It is not ours to question where God has placed us. Our responsibility is to be faithful wherever that is and whatever it might include. God places each of us where we can best serve, and He gives the gifts needed to fill our special work for His kingdom.

5. God sovereignly works out His purposes even through less than ideal circumstances (Esther 2:8). His grace is sufficient and will protect and enable individuals who are exposed involuntarily to such circumstances, to remain faithful to Him. The fabric of life is interwoven with threads of care, disappointment, and failure. Even in the dark valleys, we must believe that God is working all together for our good.

6. God uses the prudence of His people to accomplish His purposes for their welfare (Esther 2:10, 20). Even though God is in control of circumstances, He expects us to be careful with our words and actions.

Prudence involves conscientiously respecting God's Word and respecting the direction of parents and the standards of the church.

7. God blesses the lives and influence of those who have learned obedience (Esther 2:10, 20). "And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts" (Psalm 119:45). God's divine commands establish bounds of conduct that are "exceeding broad" (Psalm 119:96). Those who loyally heed His charge experience the fullness of His provision and discover the security of His protection.

8. The beauty of godly character works a powerful yet quiet influence on those with whom God's people must relate (Esther 2:15-17). Esther revealed contentment in that she "required nothing." Although God had given her outward beauty, her pure, godly character gave her "favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her."

Purity, patience, contentment, honesty, industry, faithfulness, and obedience far outweigh any physical beauty that a child of God could desire. Those are the qualities that glorify the Lord (1 Peter 3:4).

Mordecai's Unwavering Fidelity

9. God uses those who are alert and faithful to accomplish His purposes (Esther 2:21-22). God needs people who identify with the vision of being partakers "in the defence and confirmation of the gospel" (Philippians 1:7). We must be diligent in life's responsibilities and be ready to promote truth in word and act.

10. God will establish witness and honor for the noble contribution of His people (Esther 2:22-23). We must focus on doing what is right today, doing nothing with the intentions of receiving recognition here in time. Our goal should be to honor and glorify God, "who will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life" (Romans 2:6-7).

Important Teachings

1. God uses events that seem but remotely related to His people to accomplish His purposes in their behalf (Esther 1:10-12).

2. God overrules in the wrath and wickedness of men to accomplish His purposes for His people (Esther 1:12; 2:1-2).

3. Godly homes fill a vital role in God's sovereign purposes (Esther 2:5-7).

4. God providentially places faithful individuals where their influence can contribute to the outworking of divine purposes (Esther 2:5, 17).
5. God sovereignly works out His purposes even through less than ideal circumstances (Esther 2:8).
6. God uses the prudence of His people to accomplish His purposes for their welfare (Esther 2:10, 20).
7. God blesses the lives and influence of those who have learned obedience (Esther 2:10, 20).
8. The beauty of godly character works a powerful yet quiet influence on those with whom God's people must relate (Esther 2:15-17).
9. God uses those who are alert and faithful to accomplish His purposes (Esther 2:21-22).
10. God will establish witness and honor for the noble contribution of His people (Esther 2:22-23).

Answers to Questions

1. From the lesson scope, list ways King Ahasuerus followed his carnal impulses.

The king used his resources to provide lavish feasting and to display his power and the strength and scope of his kingdom (Esther 1:5-6). He wanted to make a public display of the queen (Esther 1:11). He displayed anger and displeasure (Esther 1:12, 15). He blindly followed the advice of others to divorce Queen Vashti (Esther 1:16-22). He followed sensual practices to choose a new queen (chapter 2).

2. How should we respond to civil leaders who do not exemplify integrity? Earthly governments represent God-ordained authority. Their responsibility is to maintain order in society. God calls us to honor this establishment of law and to obey direction and ordinances as outlined by the government. When they require that which violates the Scriptures, we must choose to obey God rather than men.

Our support of the government does not mean we must appreciate men of evil character. Our only contribution to the political scene is to "pray without ceasing" for them.

3. Why do we conclude that Esther's presence was not self-assertive? Esther was "brought also unto the king's house" (Esther 2:8). This suggests that those responsible to gather the maids discovered her. When her turn came to present herself to the king, "she required nothing but

what Hegai ... appointed" (Esther 2:15).

4. Upon what basis did Esther receive commendation and favor?

Esther had a virtuous character. She displayed purity, humility, graciousness, submission, and discretion.

5. List ways our homes influence God's work today.

The Christian home is a stronghold for truth in today's world. A resounding testimony issues from a godly home. As our homes develop the fear of the Lord and teach from the Bible, children learn the qualities of obedience, truthfulness, kindness, and forbearance. They gain concepts of accountability, responsibility, simplicity, and modesty. These virtues add strength to our schools and our congregations today and prepare the future generation of faithful Christian workers.

6. What concepts will enhance security in circumstances that are beyond our control?

We must remember that God's grace is sufficient for every need and that His promises cannot fail. Remember the Lord hears the prayers of His children. We must walk by faith and not by sight. God promises eternal life to all who believe in Him; if we need to give our lives for the Gospel, we will receive a reward.

7. What actions of Mordecai indicate his diligence in responsibility?

Mordecai had taken his cousin, Esther, when she was orphaned, to be his own daughter. When Esther was in the palace, he checked on her well-being daily. He heard of a plot to destroy the king and reported it.

8. What qualities must characterize our motives and aspirations for service?

We must be committed to do the will of God. We must express humility, not focusing on prominent places or desiring exceptional talent. We labor, desiring that God's kingdom be established to His honor and glory.

Summarizing the Lesson

Our God is on the throne,

The coming days will show,

And watching o'er His own, As the ages flow;

Our God is reigning still, And though we may not see,

Is working out His holy will to all eternity.

—George O. Webster