

ABIDE

DISCOVERING YOUR OLD TESTAMENT



GOD, SAVE THE QUEEN

ESTHER

There are two books in the entire Bible named after women. The first is one we've covered recently, and that is the book of Ruth. And the second is right where we are— the book of Esther.

That said, their stories are very different. In Ruth, you have the story of a woman who was a gentile who captured the heart of a Jewish man. In Esther, you read the story of Jewish woman who captured the heart of a gentile man— a king, no less.

Esther's story is a fascinating one. This book was written about those Jews who decided to stay in Babylon, instead of leaving to go back to Jerusalem, as those we read about in Ezra and Nehemiah had. Actually, the majority of God's people stayed in Babylon. They had made a nice life for themselves. They were prospering, comfortable, and apparently, they loved the culture.

It probably came down to comfort though. It's hard to leave a comfort zone. But as we will see in a moment, comfort turned to distress very quickly.

And this distress started with a seemingly insignificant action as far as danger to God's people was concerned. It started with a six month long feast thrown by king Xerxes so that everyone could see how great, powerful, and wealthy the king had become.

One night, when the king was "...merry with wine..." he called his queen, Queen Vahti, to come before all of the princes of the kingdom so that they could see how beautiful she was. However, queen Vashti snubbed the king and refused to be put on a pedestal. This then caused the king great embarrassment and ultimately ended with a divorce from his wife.

Once the divorce happened, the search was on for a new wife for the king, which was conducted by a nationwide beauty contest. Out of all women in the kingdom, from both Jew and Gentile, Esther, the Jewish woman, was selected to be the next queen.

This position ultimately aided her in saving all of God's people who were still living in Babylon.

How to Think About Esther

This book can be easily broken down into three sections which correspond with the major events of the narrative:

The Search for a Wife (Chapters 1-2): As mentioned in our introduction, the celebration was to tell the world how Babylon was at the top of the food-chain when it came to power, riches, and beauty. No doubt the food was extravagant, the service was excellent, and every portion of the celebration signified the glory of the empire. Even the queen was a reflection of all that the nation was believed to be— glorious and beautiful.

The Loss of Queen Vashti (chapter 1)—Queen Vashti was no prize to be touted before a bunch of drunk men. Though it cost her dearly, Queen Vashti made the right decision. What she was asked to do was a huge blow to her dignity as a woman and should be looked upon as a role model for all women.

The Gaining of Queen Esther (chapter 2)— Since Queen Vashti had to be put away, her standard of beauty had to be replaced. Once again, the queen was an essential standard bearer for what this empire attempted to exemplify— superiority. Therefore, after a nation-wide search for the most beautiful woman, Esther is chosen and quickly rises to the very top.

Also in this chapter you are introduced to a relative of Esther named Mordecai. Early on a plot was uncovered to execute the king, but because of Mordecai and Esther the king's life was spared and those involved punished.

The Secret Plan of evil (chapters 3-7)— In these chapters you are introduced to a man named Haman. This individual was able to weasel his way to position of power and began to demand that the king's servants bow down to him. All did except for one— Mordecai. This infuriated Haman, and at first Haman, toyed with the idea of taking care of Mordecai at that very moment, but suddenly is shown the people group that Mordecai is descended from and chooses instead to take his revenge on a far grander scale. Haman decides to exterminate every single Jew from the nation.

The Protection of God's People (chapters 8-10)— Esther is finally able to appeal on behalf of her people and Haman's plot is discovered. By God's grace and justice, Haman is executed on the very same gallows that he had prepared for God's people.

You also read here of a great victory celebration and the increased fame of both Esther and Mordecai because of their faithfulness.

What to Look for in Esther

Key People— There are five key people that you need to pay attention to if you want to unlock the book of Esther:

Xerxes: This is the king of Persia who had conquered the Babylonian empire.

Vashti: We've discussed this brave lady at length, but this is how the drama unfolded as it did. It was because of Vashti's bravery and being expelled from royalty that Esther was placed in a position of prominence so that she could intercede on behalf of her people.

Haman: Once again, this was the Jew-hating individual who had determined in his heart and mind that the Jews no longer deserved to have a seat at the table of life.

Mordecai: A great leader of the Jews at this time and is famed for his encouragement of righteousness towards others and his great integrity to do what is right no matter the cost.

Esther: The beautiful young lady God used to win the heart of a king and save her people.

Key Feasts— It is interesting to think about how most of the significant events that occur in this book, occur at a feast or celebration.

Feast for a Kingdom's Glory: This is where we find ourselves in chapter 1. Not too much time will be spent here because of what we have previously discussed, but it was at this feast where the story of Esther began to unravel.

Feast for a King's Heart: In this portion we find ourselves in chapter 7 when a plan was put in place by Esther in which she would hold a multi-day banquet for the king. This plan was to give credibility to Esther in the eyes of

the king and capture his heart so that he would be willing to listen to her when the time came. During the course of events, this is exactly what God caused to happen. The king was willing to listen to Esther and as she made her appeal, this is where Haman's plan was discovered and judgment brought against him.

Feast for the King of king's Provision: This comes to the forefront when we get to Chapter 9:26-29,

"Wherefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. Therefore for all the words of this letter, and of that which they had seen concerning this matter, and which had come unto them, the Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so as it should not fail, that they would keep theses two days according to their writing and according to their appointed time every year; And that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed. Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abigail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority, to confirm this second letter of Purim."

This is now called the "Feast of Purim" and is still celebrated to this day. On the 14th and 15th day of last month of the Jewish calendar, the people gather in the evening at the Synagog and the book of Esther is read aloud. Every time the name of Haman is mentioned, all the people hiss and say together, "Let his name be blotted out!" The next morning they meet again for prayer and reading of the law, and the rest of the day is reserved for rejoicing, feasting, and giving of gifts.

This feast is a reminder to God's people that God is the One who preserves His people.

What to Gain from Esther

This book really is a treasure of spiritual truth that can encourage and give peace to all those who would listen to its message.

The Importance of Godly Influences: We see this in Mordecai's relationship with Esther. Mordecai was the uncle of Esther, but more than this, he was a spiritual encourager. He had the respect of those closest to him because of the godly life he led and he used that influence to help shape and mold God's people— namely, Esther.

It was Mordecai's effort and influence that gave Esther the perspective she needed to choose what was right, not what was convenient.

Godly influences have that effect. Just like you can look into a mirror and see your reflection, you can also do that with the people with whom you associate. Esther had godly influences in her life, and because of it, godly choices were made.

The Importance of Courage: It has been said that courage happens when we are afraid to do what is right, but we do it anyway. That is the book of Esther. To see the king in an official capacity without being invited, even for the queen, could mean death. This is something that weighed heavily on Esther's mind as Uncle Mordecai asked Esther to intervene on behalf of her people. Esther protested and explained that her life would be in danger if she attempted to do this, but Mordecai explained that the lives of her people were in danger if she did nothing.

After this was explained, you read these great words from Esther in Chapter 6:16, "Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish."

There are some things worth dying for in the life of the follower of Jesus Christ. Notice what happened first: first prayer and fasting, and then the plan was put into motion. There came a time when everything had to go into the Lord's hand solely and what He decided is what would be. What an encouraging message of courage for our time!

The Importance of Remembrance: A fascinating observation to take note of in this book is that the name of God is not mentioned one time. I like what the preacher Jerry Vines said in relation to this, "The name of God is nowhere seen, but the hand of God is nowhere missing."

Oftentimes, this is the way it is in our life. God does not show up in mighty revelation of tangible power and strength, rather He is working in the background causing us to take every step by faith. Oh, but when we look back on those events we thought were devastating at the time, we see that God's hand was never missing from our lives.

And it is in those times when we need to remember to praise Him continually. That is what these people did. They finally saw that God was with them and they set aside a day to remember it always.

That is exactly what we should do.



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