

Esther: For Such a Time as This
Esther Becomes Queen
Esther 2:1-18

Esther is a real-life Cinderella, an orphan girl far away from home who marries the greatest king in the world. But true to biblical-historical form, her story is not Disneyfied. Esther enters a harem. Hundreds of women remain in that harem. It's one thing when Xerxes gets drunk for six months and mistreats his pagan wife, but what do we do when God's daughter enters into the contest? And wins?! This book teaches us to read the Bible, apply it to our lives, trust the Lord, and be faithful like Esther and Mordecai.

Xerxes the Vulnerable

It's four years after Xerxes divorced his wife Vashti (cf. 1:3, 2:16). He has been in a military campaign against the Greeks that isn't going well. Herodotus describes him spending the rest of his days after defeat overindulging himself. He failed in gold and glory, so he goes for girls, including the wives of his officers, which led to his assassination in 465 BC. Proverbs 28:25: "Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls." The most powerful man in the world politically is a personal weakling tossed about by his emotions and desires. His previous anger calms, so his servants offer to fetch virgins from the kingdom so he can pick a new wife (vv2-4). Broken down walls allow anyone or thing to walk right in and take over. His servants and counselors are once again worthless, simply trying to flatter and please him (v4). Everyone has "counselors" of some sort, even if it's a magazine or talk radio. The question is whether we have wise counselors who are in a position to correct us (cf. Prov. 11:14, 15:22). These can be friends in the close sense, but don't need to be. They must be people whose faith is worth imitating, whose lives reveal the connection between faith and life. Xerxes the Great is an unfolding disaster, and the reasons are plain.

A Lot is in a Name

In this opulent palace a certain Jew named Mordecai is present. His name comes from *Marduk*, a male god of the Babylonians. God's grace is multigenerational and covenantal, so we find out Mordecai is the son of Jair, son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjaminite, people away by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC, over a hundred years earlier (2 Kgs. 24:14-15). Mordecai isn't in Kansas and he's probably never even been there. He's a second or third generation exile, and some think he is culpable for not returning to Israel after the decree of Cyrus. But Mordecai is a faithful Jew who has adopted his cousin Esther, watches after her, exhorts her to be faithful, and won't bow to Haman because he knows the score. The author could have just told us he was a Benjaminite, but instead gives details. Haman is an Agagite, and Saul lost his kingdom because he refused to obey the Lord and execute king Agag (3:1; 1 Sam. 15:22-23). Mordecai and

NOTES:

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Haman know this and are gunning for each other. *Esther*, a Persian name, is derived from the pagan goddess Ishtar which means “star”. Like Daniel and his three friends, they were named in exile, but they were faithful to God anyway. Esther’s Hebrew name is Hadassah, which means “myrtle”, a fragrant and lovely tree (v7). The Israelites who returned to Israel used it to build their tents during the feast of booths (Neh. 8:15). Both at the beginning and the end of this book we are told she is the daughter of Abihail (v15, 9:29). Her identity in the people of God is ignored in Susa, but she clings to it. Mordecai and Esther live in the world but not of it, and she was ready to reveal her identity at the right time (v10). Mordecai is principled and strategic, watching feverishly over Esther (v11).

Playing the Hand You are Dealt

Esther is *taken* into the king’s palace and custody of Hegai (v8). She doesn’t jump at the chance, but neither does she refuse and die a martyr. The king requires beautiful, young virgins to be brought to him (v2). She is not only “good to look at”, but also “fair of form” (v7). Esther was striking, and she didn’t simply find favor as others had, but she “won” it (v9). Each woman would be prepared for a year, go see the king for a night, and the head to the second house of the women, to remain a concubine living a life of pointless ease unless the king call her back (vv12-14). Esther went through the preparations, followed Hegai’s expertise, and won over everyone including the king (vv15-17). He loved her so much that he gave a feast in her name and tax break to the provinces (vv17-18). Now we understand why it took some centuries for the church to know what to do with this book. Suffering at the hands of ungodly people and systems does not make one ungodly. Polygamy is a sin, but it’s not Esther’s sin. Lust and materialism are evil, but not her issues. Esther is a woman of incredible faith, following the counsel of her adoptive father Mordecai and trusting her heavenly Father who controls the hearts of kings. The problems in Esther’s life are not bugs, but features. The problems, the conundrums, the frustrations, even our ignorance and discomfort are the things God our Father, the perfect storyteller, puts in our path to bless us and further His kingdom. If this story makes you uncomfortable, it should remind you of the uncomfortable situations God puts you in. May we have the courage of Esther.