

Esther

Esther's story begins in 483BC, 103 years after Nebuchadnezzar had taken the Jews into captivity, [2 Kings 25:1-21], 54 years after Zerubbabel led the first group of Jewish exiles back to Jerusalem, [Ezra 1:2] and 25 years before Ezra led the second group to Jerusalem, [Ezra 7:1-6].

Esther lived in the kingdom of Persia, the dominant kingdom in the Middle East after Babylon's fall in 539BC.

Esther's parents must have been among those exiles who chose not to return to Jerusalem, even though Cyrus, the Persian king, had issued a decree allowing them to do so.

The Jewish exiles had great freedom in Persia, and many remained because they had established themselves there or were fearful of the dangerous journey back to their homeland.

Xerxes was the fifth king of Persia [486-465BC]. He was proud and impulsive, as we see in the first chapter of Esther.

Esther 1:10-12 [New King James] *“On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, to bring Queen Vashti before the king, wearing her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials, for she was beautiful to behold. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command brought by his eunuchs; therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him.”*

Queen Vashti refused to parade herself before the king's all-male party, possibly because it was against Persian custom for a woman to appear before a public gathering of men. This conflict between Persian custom and the king's command put her in a difficult situation, and she refused her half-drunk husband's command, hoping he would come to his senses later.

Some have suggested that Vashti was pregnant with Artaxerxes, who was born in 483BC and did not want to be seen in public in that state.

Her action was a breach of protocol that placed Xerxes in a difficult situation.

Once a Persian king made a command he could **not** reverse it, [Esther 1:19; Esther 8:8; Daniel 6:8].

The original decision to call for Queen Vashti was rash, half-drunk decision, based purely on feelings.

Poor decisions are made when people are **not** thinking clearly; impulsive decisions can lead to severe complicated situations.

With all his important guests, if it was perceived that he had no authority over his own wife, his military credibility would be damaged, which was the greatest criterion for success for any ancient king.

Also, King Xerxes was accustomed to getting what he wanted.

Middle Eastern kings often did **not** have a close personal relationship with their wives, Xerxes demonstrates this.

- 1) He had a harem, [Esther 2:3].
- 2) He showed no respect for Vashti's personal feelings, [Esther 1:10-12].

3) **Esther, when she became queen, did not even see the king for long periods of time, [Esther 4:11].**

Esther 2:1-4 [New King James] *“After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus subsided, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what had been decreed against her. Then the king’s servants who attended him said: ‘Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king; and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan the citadel, into the women’s quarters, under the custody of Hegai the king’s eunuch, custodian of the women. And let beauty preparations be given them. Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti.’ This thing pleased the king, and he did so.”*

The replacement of the deposed Queen Vashti was set in action.

Esther 2:5-7 [New King James] *“In Shushan the citadel there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite. Kish had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been captured with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. And Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle’s daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman was lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.”*

We are now introduced to Esther and her sad background and Mordecai who will continue to play an important part in the life of Esther and the Jewish people.

Esther was among those who assigned to be candidates for the new queen and was given the *“full beauty treatment,”* [Esther 2:8-9, 12].

Mordecai wisely told her **not** to reveal her family background, and continued to show great concern for her future, [Esther 2:10-11].

Esther 2:15-17 [New King James] *“Now when the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter, to go in to the king, she requested nothing but what Hegai the king’s eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all who saw her. So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.”*

Esther won the king’s favour and became the new queen.

Mordecai continued to show concern for Esther’s future and as a result of him being as close as he could to her when she was in the king’s court, he overheard and reported to the new Queen Esther a conspiracy to assassinate King Xerxes. Queen Esther reported this to the king and gave the credit to Mordecai, [Esther 2:19-23].

King Xerxes honoured Haman and he expected people to kneel before him but Mordecai refused, making Haman angry. When Haman found out that Mordecai was a Jew, he planned to destroy all the Jews in the Persian kingdom, [Esther 3:1-8]. Haman then added a bribe to his request to King Xerxes and the king gave him authority to carry out his plan, [Esther 3:9-15].

Mordecai again got as near as he could to Queen Esther to let her know what had happened, [Esther 4:1-8].

Esther reminded Mordecai of the limitations on her, even as queen, and the fatal result of overstepping these controls, [Esther 4:9-11].

While God is **not** mentioned directly in the Book of Esther, His presence fills the pages. **Esther, Mordecai and the Jews believed in God’s care, [Esther 4:14-17].**

By calling for a fast, Esther was asking the Jews to pray for God's help on her dangerous mission.

Esther knew what she had to do and she knew it could cost her her life.

Yet she responded, *"If I perish, I perish."*

Do we have the same commitment to do what is right despite the possible consequences, trusting in God for the outcome?

Esther 5:1-8 [New King James] *"Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, across from the king's house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house. So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she found favour in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the sceptre. And the king said to her, 'What do you wish, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given to you, up to half the kingdom!' So Esther answered, 'If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him.' Then the king said, 'Bring Haman quickly, that he may do as Esther has said.' So the king and Haman went to the banquet that Esther had prepared. At the banquet of wine the king said to Esther, 'What is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!' Then Esther answered and said, 'My petition and request is this: If I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfil my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said.'"*

Esther must have been prompted by God, perhaps unknowingly, to delay telling the king her request, for something was going to happen that night to the king.

Esther 6:1-3 [New King James] *"That night the king could not sleep. So one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. And it was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, the doorkeepers who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. Then the king said, 'What honour or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?' And the king's servants who attended him said, 'Nothing has been done for him.'"*

Although the good deed was recorded in the history books, Mordecai had gone unrewarded until God planned to use it to fulfil His purpose, as we see is recorded in His Word, [Esther 6:4-14].

Esther 7:1-10 [New King James] *"So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther. And on the second day, at the banquet of wine, the king again said to Esther, 'What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!' Then Queen Esther answered and said, 'If I have found favour in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king's loss.' So King Ahasuerus answered and said to Queen Esther, 'Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing?' And Esther said, 'The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!' So Haman was terrified before the king and queen. Then the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine and went into the palace garden; but Haman stood before Queen Esther, pleading for his life, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king. When the king returned from the palace garden to the place of the banquet of wine, Haman had fallen across the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, 'Will he also assault the queen while I am in the house?' As the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. Now Harbonah, one of the eunuchs, said to the king, 'Look! The gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai, who spoke good on the king's behalf, is standing at the house of Haman.' Then the king said, 'Hang him on it!' So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath subsided."*

Haman's hatred and evil turned against him when the king discovered his true intentions.

Proverbs 26:27 [New King James] *“Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him.”*

The inspired wisdom of the Creator God warns us not to seek to harm others, for it may cause us to be harmed in the same way.

The God-given wisdom given to Esther and Mordecai, along with His direct supernatural intervention, saved the Jews worldwide.

We have in the record of Esther's life an example of how God works in the world.

The Creator God gave Esther natural beauty that allowed her to speak to the king; God also allowed Mordecai to overhear the plot to murder the king.

As Esther courageously planned to save her people, God responded to the prayers of the people and the trusting Mordecai was able to accomplish what was humanly impossible.

What can we learn from the life of Esther? –

Serving the Creator God often demands that we risk our own security and our own will.

The Creator God has a purpose for the situation in which He has placed us, even if this is not clear from the beginning.

Courage, while often vital, does not replace wise and careful planning that are the result of our request and trust in our Creator God and His Word, the Christian Bible.

How much of our security lies in our possessions, position and reputation?

The Creator God has not placed us in our present position for our own benefit, but to serve Him mostly through serving other human beings.

In the Book of Esther we can clearly see God at work in the lives of individuals and the affairs of a nation.

Even when it looks as if the world is in the hands of evil people and God's Word, the Christian Bible, confirms that this is true at this time, [1 **John 5:19**; 2 **Corinthians 4:4**; **Ephesians 2:2**], God is allowing this for a purpose that humanity can experience what life will always be like without human beings in harmony with His way of life. God is still in control and we can trust Him for our protection when we seek to do what we know is right, according to what we find in His Word, the Christian Bible.

Allow the life of Esther to inspire us to trust the Creator God and serve other human beings.