

**Esther 2**  
**August 1, 2021**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: Gentlemen, you can participate with the ladies in this question too! Put yourselves in the shoes of Esther. What feelings (or internal conflict) do you think you would have if for every day for a whole year, you were pampered & primped, manicured & pedicured, with (7) servants at your beck and call, who has as their daily goal to make you more attractive than the rest? [Let people engage]

**Transition:** Between chapters 1 and 2, at least four years have passed, during which Xerxes went on his disastrous Greek campaign (481bc–479bc). You will recall from last week that he threw an extravagant banquet in year three (3) of his reign in which he requested the presence of his wife, Queen Vashti, and she refused to come. The king felt dishonored by her and chose to dethrone her. So now he is ready to begin the process of replacing her.

To do this, King Xerxes is putting on a year-long private pageant to crown a new “Miss Persia!” And Esther becomes one of the contestants, if you will, to become a part of a new harem that has been ordered by King Xerxes. Throughout the year, a woman is called by the king to “display her beauty,” shall we say (?), from evening until morning. You get the idea! Let’s see how this story unfolds. Would someone read Esther Chp 2?

**BOOK:**

**Esther Made Queen**

2 Later (4 yrs later!) when the anger of King Xerxes had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her. <sup>2</sup> Then the king’s personal attendants proposed, “Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. <sup>3</sup> Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful girls into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king’s eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them. <sup>4</sup> Then let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti.” This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it.

<sup>5</sup> Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, <sup>6</sup> who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah. <sup>7</sup> Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

<sup>8</sup> When the king’s order and edict had been proclaimed, many girls were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king’s palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. <sup>9</sup> The girl pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven maids selected from the king’s palace and moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem.

<sup>10</sup> Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. <sup>11</sup> Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her.

<sup>12</sup> Before a girl's turn came to go in to King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women, six months with oil of myrrh and six with perfumes and cosmetics. <sup>13</sup> And this is how she would go to the king: Anything she wanted was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. <sup>14</sup> In the evening she would go there and in the morning return to another part of the harem to the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not return to the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name.

<sup>15</sup> When the turn came for Esther (the girl Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail) to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her. <sup>16</sup> She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

<sup>17</sup> Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. <sup>18</sup> And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality.

### **Mordecai Uncovers a Conspiracy**

<sup>19</sup> When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. <sup>20</sup> But Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do, for she continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up.

<sup>21</sup> During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. <sup>22</sup> But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. <sup>23</sup> And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were hanged on gallows (hung or impaled on poles). All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

### **LOOK:**

We are meant to see that God's plans are not hindered when the events of this world are carnal or secular. His presence penetrates even the godless banquet halls of ancient Persia, in the natural outworking of events, how without violating human free will, and without interrupting the ordinary ongoing of human affairs, God unsuspectedly but infallibly controls all things.

### **Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Es 2). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

## **II. Esther the Queen (2)**

Between chapters 1 and 2, at least four years pass, during which Xerxes went on his disastrous Greek campaign (481bc–479bc). He came home a bitter man, and it was only natural that he should seek some kind of comfort in his own home. But then he remembered that Vashti had been dethroned and he was without a queen. Of course, he had many women available in his harem, but he missed his beautiful queen. The counselors advised him to seek another queen. (If Vashti had gotten back on the throne, she might have punished her husband's counselors.) Thus began the great search for the ideal queen, and this is where Esther comes in.

Esther and Mordecai were cousins; Mordecai had raised her like his own daughter. Mordecai was known at the palace and probably held some minor office, for we find him seated at the gate. He advised Esther to "enter the contest" but not to make known the fact that she was a Jewess. This meant that Esther probably had to eat unclean foods and break some of the OT laws; otherwise she could not have held her own among her Gentile competitors. (However, see Daniel's experience in Dan. 1.) Does this mean that "the end justifies the means"? Of course, these laws were temporary rules and not basic, eternal laws involving salvation, but they were

still the Word of God. However, we are not to judge, for Esther did prove herself a courageous woman. After a year of special preparation (v. 12), Esther was presented to the king—and chosen! Verse 15 says that “she required nothing”; that is, she did not decorate herself with gaudy jewels as did the other women. She depended on her beauty and her character; see 1 Peter 3:3–4. She was made queen in the year 479 and a great feast was held in her honor. In vv. 21–23 we have what appears to be a minor incident, but later it becomes an important matter. Perhaps these men tried to slay the king because they disapproved of his treatment of Vashti.

**Martin, J. A. (1985). Nahum. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 703-705) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

### *B. Esther elevated to queen (2:1–20)*

Esther, a Jewess, was placed in a position in which she could help the nation Israel. Her being elevated to queen happened even before Israel needed help. The original readers would realize that this was another instance of God protecting His covenant people.

#### **1. SOLUTION PROPOSED FOR A NEW QUEEN (2:1–4)**

2:1–4. After **the anger** of the king **subsided**, apparently sometime later, he realized that he had been foolish in his actions. Throughout the book it is evident that **the king** was led along by his officials. It appears that he was somewhat provincial in his outlook. Like all men of power, he had to rely on others to be his eyes and ears on the outside and did not always receive the best information.

In this case it was suggested to **the king** that **beautiful young virgins** (unmarried women) be brought to **Susa**, placed under **Hegai** (the **eunuch ... in charge of the harem**) and given **beauty treatments** (cf. v. 9), and that **the king** be allowed to pick from them a woman to replace **Vashti**. His **personal attendants** (probably “the wise men who understood the laws ... seven nobles,” 1:13–14) had suggested that Vashti be deposed. So now they certainly did not want Xerxes to reinstate her for fear that she would turn against them. The suggestion **appealed to the king and he followed it**. The fact that he had a harem in Susa is known from other sources. New women were constantly being brought into the Persian harem to replace the older women.

#### **2. ESTHER TAKEN INTO THE HAREM (2:5–11)**

2:5–7. **Mordecai** is a Babylonian name taken from the god Marduk. The name *mrdek* is attested in fifth-century Aramaic documents. Mordecai was **a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin**. He had tried to hide the fact that he and his cousin were Jews (vv. 10, 20). Verse 6 may mean that Mordecai was deported by **Nebuchadnezzar** along with **Jehoiachin** (597 B.C.). But this would mean that Mordecai would have been about 115 years old by the time of Xerxes’ third year and Esther would have been 80. It is better to understand that **Kish**, Mordecai’s great-grandfather, was the one who was carried away in the 597 deportation.

Mordecai’s **cousin**, Esther, also a Benjamite, had been raised by him, apparently because her parents died when she was young. Her father was Abihail (v. 15; 9:29). The name **Esther** (“star”) is Persian. Her Hebrew name, **Hadassah**, means myrtle. She was beautiful, **lovely in form and features**.

2:8–11. **Esther** was taken into Xerxes' harem to await **the king's** choice, along with **many** other young women of the kingdom who were summoned to **Susa**. Esther immediately pleased **Hegai**, the eunuch (cf. v. 3) and as a result was given a favorable position **in the harem**. He saw that she had **beauty treatments** (cf. v. 3) **and special food**, apparently food of a better-than-ordinary quality. Esther was even given **seven maids** to serve her. The wait in the harem was at least 12 months (v. 12) so Esther must have appreciated her favored position.

**Esther** kept her Jewish nationality a secret (cf. v. 20), not telling Hegai, her maids, or anyone else **because Mordecai had** told **her** not to. From this and other statements in the book it is clear the author was making the point that God protected and used Esther and Mordecai *in spite of* the fact that they were not living according to the Law commanded by God to the people of Israel. By Law Esther was not to marry a pagan (Deut. 7:1–4) or have sexual relations with a man who was not her husband (Ex. 20:14), and yet this was the purpose of her being included in the harem. **Esther** could be contrasted with Daniel who refused to eat the things from the king's table (Dan. 1:5) because the food would include items considered unclean by the Jewish Law. Apparently, Esther had no qualms about the food she ate (Es. 2:9). She certainly did not set herself apart as Daniel had done.

### **3. ESTHER CHOSEN TO BE QUEEN (2:12–20)**

2:12–15. Esther became extremely popular during her year of preparation for her night with the king. Each girl's **beauty treatments** were designed to enhance her attractiveness. **Myrrh**, a gum from a small tree, gives a fragrant smell.

**Esther** was not in a beauty contest simply to win the king's affections; the women were being prepared to have sexual relations with **the king**. This is suggested by the words **in the evening she would go there and in the morning return**. After that they would be transferred to another harem, under **Shaash gaz**, which consisted of **the concubines**. Most of the women were relegated to living the rest of their lives in the harem of the concubines, many probably never again seeing **the king**. When **Esther** went to **the king**, she followed the instructions of **Hegai the eunuch**.

2:16–20. Esther **was taken to King Xerxes** in 479 B.C., his **seventh year**, the **10th month** (**Tebeth** was the Babylonian name for December–January). **The king was attracted to Esther** and therefore **made her queen** in place of **Vashti**. Then a big **banquet** was prepared, and **he proclaimed a holiday** and gave away many **gifts**. Throughout all this, Esther had still not revealed that she belonged to the Jewish nation (cf. v. 10). Apparently, there was a gathering of another harem of **virgins** during the time **Mordecai was ... at the king's gate** (cf. v. 21; 3:2). His being at the king's gate probably meant that Mordecai held an official position in the empire's judicial system. His position thus helped set the stage for the following events. This fact about Mordecai shows how he could have uncovered an assassination plot and how a feud started that threatened the entire Jewish nation.

## **II. The Jews Marked for Extermination (2:21–4:3)**

Many have noted that the Book of Esther is a great short story. Like Ruth, another little book in the Bible about a woman, Esther has all the earmarks of great literature, including a conflict, an antagonist, tension, and irony. The antagonist, Haman, is introduced here and his conflict with Mordecai began.

A. *A feud and Haman's hatred of the Jews (2:21–3:6)*

1. KING SAVED BY MORDECAI (2:21–23)

2:21–23. Again, a reference to Mordecai's position **at the king's gate** (cf. v. 19) as a judiciary official points to God's sovereign control over these events. Learning about a plot by **Bighthana and Teresh**, royal guards, **to assassinate the king**, Mordecai **told Queen Esther**, who **reported this to the king**. She gave **credit to Mordecai** for uncovering the scheme. **The two** men involved in the plot **were hanged on gallows** (or "post," NIV; cf. 5:14). Rather than being hanged by the neck on a modern gallow, the men were probably impaled on a stake or post (cf. Ezra 6:11). This was not an unusual method of execution in the Persian Empire. Darius, Xerxes' father, was known to have once impaled 3,000 men. A record of this assassination attempt was written in **the annals**, the official royal record (cf. Es. 6:1–2).

**Mathews, K. A. (1998). The Historical Books. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 194–195). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

**THE KING'S DECREE (2:1–2:23)**

The second section of the story concerns the exaltation of Esther and the evil plot by Haman to exterminate the Jews. The role of Mordecai as Esther's cousin and Haman's hated enemy links the two episodes.

*Queen Esther's Rise (2:1–23).* Xerxes, at his attendants' advice, ordered a search for Vashti's successor. The narrator revealed Esther's nationality by first identifying Mordecai's lineage as a Benjamite of the family of Kish. Mordecai was Esther's foster parent and elder cousin. Esther ("Hadassah," her Hebrew name) was among those brought to the king's palace because of her exceptional beauty. At Mordecai's advice she concealed her nationality, a factor that figured in her advantage over the enemy Haman.

One year of purification was required for an audience with the king. Esther was received by the king four years after the deposition of Vashti (479 B.C.; 2:16; 1:3). She won his approval and became queen. The western expedition against the Greeks by Xerxes' Persian ships ended in disaster at Salamis in 481 B.C. His selection of Esther occurred after this debacle.

Mordecai, who may have been in the king's service as a gatekeeper, discovered a plot to kill Xerxes (perhaps because of disaffection over his losses at Salamis). The two culprits were hanged on gallows, and Mordecai's heroism was recorded. From this incident Mordecai learned of Esther's new power at court. The concealment of her identity and the record of Mordecai's deed would lead to Haman's eventual undoing (6:1–2; 7:3–6). The traitors' gallows anticipated Haman's own death for the same crime of treachery (7:10).

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Es 2:1-23). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**