



Disciplers Bible Studies

ESTHER OVERVIEW, OUTLINE, AND CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF ESTHER

God is faithful: faithful to His people, faithful to His promises, and faithful to His character. He will not fail those who put their trust in Him. It is useless to fight against God, to plot against His people, or try to thwart the fulfillment of His promises because God is always victorious in the end! The Book of Esther is a beautiful illustration of God's faithfulness to His people and His promises. It also depicts His providential power which results in victory over those who strive against Him.

The Plot

The plot of Esther centers around the impending tragedy facing the Jews because of their wicked enemy Haman and their ultimate triumph through the providential care of God. Although God's name is never mentioned in the book, the reader quickly becomes aware of God's working behind the scenes to rescue His people and overrule the evil intentions of their adversaries.

The People

In the Psalms, David wrote about God's dealings with both righteous and wicked people. Psalm 34:15-19 depicts God's actions in response to the righteous:

*The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears,
And delivers them out of all their troubles.
The Lord is near to those who have a
broken heart,
And saves such as have a contrite spirit.*

Psalm 37 is an expression of the legacy of the righteous and the disaster which befalls the wicked:

*The wicked plots against the just,
And gnashes at him with his teeth.
The Lord laughs at him,
For He sees that his day is coming.
The wicked have drawn the sword
And have bent their bow,
To cast down the poor and needy,
To slay those who are of upright conduct.
Their sword shall enter their own heart,
And their bows shall be broken.
(verses 12-15)
The Lord loves justice,
And does not forsake His saints;
They are preserved forever,
But the descendants of the wicked shall be
cut off. (verse 25)*

The final six verses of Psalm 37 particularly relate to the people and the plot of the Book of Esther.

*I have seen the wicked in great power,
And spreading himself like a native green tree.
Yet he passed away, and behold, he was no
more;
Indeed I sought him, but he could not be
found.
Mark the blameless man, and observe the
upright;
For the future of that man is peace.
But the transgressors shall be destroyed
together;
The future of the wicked shall be cut off.
But the salvation of the righteous is from the
Lord;
He is their strength in the time of trouble.
And the Lord shall help them and deliver
them;
He shall deliver them from the wicked
And save them,
Because they trust in Him. (verses 35-40)*

In the Book of Esther, we meet both the righteous and the wicked. We will see that the end of each one is exactly what God's justice demands. Following is a brief description of each of the main characters in the Book of Esther. As you read, ask yourself which one is most like you? Which one would you most like to emulate?

King Ahasuerus: He is documented as a real historical king who reigned over the Persian Empire from 485-465 B.C. From chapter one, we know that he was a powerful king, controlling one hundred and twenty-seven provinces from India to Ethiopia (Esther 1:1). He was the man who made the name of Persia respected and dreaded in the ancient world. He liked to party, and he liked to do it in a big way. He enjoyed showing off *the riches of his glorious kingdom* (Esther 1:4). He also had a blazing temper (Esther 1:12 and 7:7-8). The historian, Herodotus, tells of Ahasuerus' reaction when a bridge he had built over the Hellespont was destroyed in a storm. In his rage, he ordered that the sea receive three hundred strokes of the scourge, that a pair of fetters (shackles for the ankles) be thrown into it at the Hellespont, and that the bridge builders be beheaded. Ahasuerus was impulsive as well. He deposed his queen for refusing to appear before his drunken guests. He honored Mordecai on the spur of the moment after being reminded of a good deed he had done years before. He sentenced the entire Jewish

population of his empire to be slaughtered and later turned full circle to sanction their right to retaliate. He was a man of great power but seemingly lacked the power to control his own passions.

Queen Vashti: We know little of her except what can be inferred from the few verses where she is mentioned in chapter one. She seems to have been a woman of honor and principle. In a day when women were merely chattel, it took great courage for her to deny the drunken demands of her husband, the king. Secular history records the name of Ahasuerus' queen as Amestris. It is possible that Vashti was a title which singled her out as the favorite wife. The name Vashti is derived from Persian words meaning "best," "beloved," or "the desired one."

Mordecai: When Cyrus had issued his decree for the Jews to return to their homeland, Mordecai had not yet been born. We do not know why his parents had chosen to remain in Persia. Perhaps they had legitimate reasons. They must have raised their son to honor and obey God, for it is obvious that he was a godly man. He took the responsibility of raising his young cousin, Esther, when her parents died. (It is conjectured that Mordecai was about fifteen years older than his cousin who was probably around twenty-five when the events of the Book of Esther take place.) He was her advisor and she clearly respected his counsel because she obeyed him. Mordecai showed his respect for God in his refusal to bow to Haman, and he showed his love for his people in mourning over Haman's decree and in appealing to Esther for help. He showed his strong belief in the sovereign God when he told Esther, *If you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place* (Esther 4:14). In forming an opinion of Mordecai, it should suffice us to know that God exalted him to become *Great among the Jews and well-received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his kindred* (Esther 10:3).

Esther: This is her book. She is the humble heroine, beautiful above all the women of the Persian Empire, but above all, beautiful in spirit. In trying situations and against overwhelming odds, Esther displayed selflessness, courage, obedience, love, and faith. All were surely characteristics which exalted her to be used of God in a great way in a time of crisis for His people.

Haman: Haman was a man with a black heart against God's people and consequently against God. He was the embodiment of wickedness. He was filled with himself — a man with an enormous ego (Esther 5:12; 6:6). He was also filled with hatred which controlled his thoughts and actions (Esther 3:5; 5:9). His pride overflowed in boasts of his glory and riches (Esther 5:11). He was a shrewd manipulator who used political

power to accomplish his evil goals (Esther 3:8-9). Some Bible scholars believe that Haman is a foreshadowing of the Antichrist who will appear at the end of the age and stand in opposition to God and His people as their mortal enemy. (See 1 John 2:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10; Revelation 13:1-10.)

OUTLINE OF ESTHER

I. God raises Esther to a position of influence - Chapters 1-2

- A. Queen Vashti disgraced - Chapter 1
- B. Queen Esther crowned - Chapter 2

II. God reverses evil plot - Chapters 3-7

- A. Haman's plot established - Chapters 3-4
- B. Haman's plot exposed - Chapters 5-6
- C. Haman's end - Chapter 7

III. God rescues His people - Chapters 8-10

- A. Edict of encouragement - Chapter 8
- B. Extermination of Jews' enemies - Chapter 9
- C. Epilogue - Chapter 10

CHAPTER 1 -- QUEEN VASHTI DISGRACED

From the very beginning of the Book of Esther, the providence of God is evident. Persia was a pagan nation, and the heart of the king was far from God, wrapped up in power, politics, pleasure and pride. But God used the Persian law and a personal marital problem to maneuver the course of history for His people. In chapter one, God sets the stage for the evil events which are to transpire.

Outline of Esther 1

- I. The King's Demand - Esther 1:1-11
- II. Vashti's Defiance - Esther 1:12a
- III. The King's Decree - Esther 1:12b-22

I. The King's Demand - Esther 1:1-11

- A. Dignity of King Ahasuerus - Esther 1:1-2

Ahasuerus, known in secular history as Xerxes, was the son of Darius Hystaspes. He ruled over a vast domain which extended from India, an area which is now Pakistan, to Ethiopia, or Cush, which is south of Egypt, present day Northern Sudan. The area contained one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, one of which was the province of Judah (Nehemiah 1:3). Under Cyrus and Darius there had been 120 provinces, so the empire had expanded under the rule of Ahasuerus.

The winter capital of Ahasuerus' empire was Shushan or Susa. Actually, the word citadel in verse two refers to the fortification within the city which contained the entire palace complex. The citadel was built one hundred and twenty feet higher than the rest of the city to provide security for the king and also to draw

attention to his might and majesty. The buildings were extravagant and luxurious, having been rebuilt by the Persian kings after their conquest of Babylon. Ahasuerus was extremely wealthy in both gold and luxury goods, most of which he had inherited from his father, Darius. The rest he had obtained as tribute from subjugated nations and taxation of the people. It should be noted that while Persian royalty lived extravagantly, the people themselves were very poor.

B. Display of riches - Esther 1:3-9

1. 180-day banquet - 1: 3-4

In the year 483 B. C., the third year of Ahasuerus' reign, he prepared a banquet for his officials and for the powerful nobles and princes who served him throughout the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of his empire. For one hundred and eighty days, he wined and dined his guests and impressed them with the lavish wealth of his kingdom. This may have been the most extravagant banquet of all time. Most scholars believe that Ahasuerus used it as an opportunity to plan a military campaign against Greece and to secure the military loyalty of all those who were influential in his empire. Secular history records a three year military campaign (481-479 B. C.) in which Ahasuerus invaded Greece in an attempt to expand his kingdom.

2. Seven-day banquet - 1: 5-8

At the end of the one hundred and eighty day banquet, as a culmination to the festivities, the king gave another party to which he invited all the people in the citadel. That would have included all the king's retinue, his officials, and any visitors who were present. The citadel did not include the common people who lived in the city. This feast took place in the court of the king's palace garden. Again, there was a lavish display of royal splendor. The detailed description makes one think that the author of Esther might have been present at this banquet.

The royal colors of Persia were white and blue (or violet), and linen fabric of those colors was hung on silver rods, draped between marble columns, and tied back with purple linen cords. The guests reclined on couches of gold and silver. The floor of the courtyard was an ornamental mosaic made of alabaster, marble, mother-of-pearl, and inlaid stones of various colors. Drinks were served in golden vessels, probably shaped like drinking-horns, and each one was unique and different. The wine flowed freely, reflecting the generosity of the king. But no one was forced to drink; each one was permitted to drink as much or as little as he chose. This was in contrast to a common custom of the times that all guests were to drink every time the king drank.

3. Vashti's banquet - 1:9

Although the Persian custom did not dictate separate banquets for men and women, on this particular occasion, the queen entertained the women at a party of their own. Perhaps this was due to the large number of people who were invited or because of the extended drinking which went on at the king's banquet.

C. Drunken desire - Esther 1:10-11

On the final day of the king's banquet, when he and his guests had been drinking for seven days, Ahasuerus sent seven of his eunuchs (men who worked in the personal service of the king and were castrated to foster servility) to fetch Queen Vashti and bring her into his presence wearing her royal crown. She was a very beautiful woman and he desired to show her off to his intoxicated guests. The mighty king, who dominated the known world of his day and put on the appearance of great dignity, was unable to dominate his own debased desires. He wanted to include his queen as one of the many possessions he was showing off to his guests.

II. Vashti's Defiance - Esther 1:12a

The queen refused the command of the king. No reason is given for her refusal, perhaps implying that no reason, however valid, would justify her rejection of the king's command. It has already been stated that Persian women were considered chattel and thus had no rights in society. How much more would this hold true in relation to a command of the king! Vashti must have known that her defiance would place her in a very dangerous position. We can only guess what her reason may have been. Some commentators believe she may have been pregnant, since Ahasuerus' son, Artaxerxes, was born in that same year (483 B. C.). Some think that Ahasuerus' command may have been for Vashti to appear before the royal guests wearing nothing but the royal crown, which would have been humiliating and degrading for her. The historian Herodotus states that she feared for her dignity in the midst of the group of drunken men. On the other hand, Vashti may have been showing open contempt for her husband's authority, especially since he was extending it beyond what may have seemed proper in her eyes.

Whatever Vashti's reason may have been for refusing the king's command, it is clear that she was a woman who stood up for what was right and moral in a debased society. Her stand took courage. Do you have the courage to stand for what is right and true and moral in your world?

III. King's Decree - Esther 1:12b-22

A. Anger aroused - Esther 1:12b

All the guests waited anxiously for the appearance of the beautiful Vashti. As the king's eunuchs returned, the men probably craned their necks to catch the first glimpse of her. But the eunuchs returned alone. Whispers went through the crowd of drunken men. The queen had refused to appear. No one refused the king - not even the beautiful, beloved Vashti! The king was furious and *his anger burned within him*. This phrase infers that Ahasuerus' anger so raged within him that he was unable to control it. He was totally consumed with anger and could think of nothing other than the demeaning predicament into which Vashti had cast him. He failed to see his own foolishness which had set the stage for the situation to unfold. He failed to take any responsibility for his drunken error in judgment. Do you always take responsibility for your actions?

B. Advice sought - Esther 1:13-15

Pride and anger led to a desire for vengeance. Vashti must be made to pay for her act of defiance. The king called his wise men. These would have been men who knew the law, men whom the king trusted and consulted in matters which were important to government. From ancient times, rulers had consulted wise men. Pharaoh had called for all the wise men of Egypt to try to interpret his dreams (Genesis 41:8). Daniel was chief administrator over all the wise men of Nebuchadnezzar's court (Daniel 2:48).

The question which Ahasuerus put to his wise men was, *What shall we do to Queen Vashti, according to the law, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus brought to her by the eunuchs?* (Esther 1:15). The king's mind was so controlled by his anger that he could not think straight. He didn't know what to do next, so he put what was essentially a personal marital problem into the hands of his wise men. His question inferred that perhaps there was something in the Persian law which would deal with the matter of the queen's disobedience to his command. It seems that the man who ruled one hundred and twenty-seven provinces was unable to make a decision in relation to his own wife.

C. Advice given - Esther 1:16-20

Memucan, one of the king's wise men, in deference to the king, suggested that Vashti had not only wronged King Ahasuerus but all the princes and all the people in all the provinces as well. When the women of Persia and Media heard of Vashti's behavior, there would be danger of all the men in the kingdom losing the respect of their wives. Women far and wide would be encouraged

to follow Vashti's example, assert themselves, and show contempt for their husbands. According to Memucan, Vashti's defiance was likely to give rise to a women's liberation movement throughout the empire. The solution must be a royal decree which could not be altered. (According to Daniel 6:8 any document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring was irrevocable.) Vashti must be divorced and deposed as queen. This would set an example for all the women of the empire. They would not dare to defy their husbands, and the status quo would be maintained. Memucan's words in verse 19 foresee the future turn of events and give us insight into the providence of God: *Let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she*. These words opened the way for Esther to ascend to the throne.

*The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord,
Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He
wishes.* (Proverbs 21:1)

D. Action taken - Esther 1:21-22

Memucan's proposal met with the approval of the king and the other princes and turned a private concern into a public crisis. Immediately, letters were prepared and translated into the predominate language of each province. Aramaic was the prevailing language of the Persian Empire, but because of the heterogeneous population, many different languages were spoken. The message of the letter was that each man was to be master in his own house and speak in the language of his own people. There are two possible interpretations here. It may mean that each man was to show leadership in his home by enforcing the speaking of his native tongue even when he may have foreign wives. Or the meaning could be that he was to say whatever suited him without regard for the women in his household. Either way, the letter was meant to enforce the institution of male supremacy which was already firmly entrenched in Persian society. It seems that such a letter would hardly have been necessary.

Application

Obviously the edict was issued in desperation to save the king's dignity. But in reality it probably made him appear to be more foolish than he had already demonstrated. What a contrast there is between the affluent and arrogant Ahasuerus at the beginning of the chapter and the drunken desperate despot at the end of the chapter trying to hang on to the last shreds of his dignity in the face of his wife's defiance. Pride, arrogance, and anger had brought him low. He had lost his beautiful wife and also at least some of the respect of his people.

The Book of Proverbs addresses the attitudes of

pride, arrogance, and anger and also the problem of drunkenness.

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. (Proverbs 16:18)

A man's pride will bring him low. (Proverbs 29:23)

*He who is slow to anger has great understanding
But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.
(Proverbs 14:29, NASB)*

*Wine is a mocker,
Intoxicating drink arouses brawling,
And whoever is led astray by it is not wise.
(Proverbs 20:1)*

The truth of these proverbs is illustrated by King Ahasuerus. He was a man of great wealth, power, and influence brought low by pride, arrogance, drunkenness, and anger. Ultimately, he was unable to admit his mistake of summoning Vashti before his drunken guests. Instead he permanently destroyed their relationship.

What mistakes of pride, arrogance, anger, or other hurtful attitudes do you need to admit to yourself, to God, and to those you love? Will you do so and seek forgiveness in order that precious relationships may be restored? The Scripture says, *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1John 1:9).*



Disciplers Bible Studies

ESTHER CROWNED -- CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

The first chapter of Esther introduced us to Ahasuerus, King of Persia, a man of wealth, power, pride, pretentiousness, and explosive anger. In a fit of foolish, selfish rage he had divorced his queen and banished her from his presence. A chapter which began with a gala banquet in luxurious surroundings with all the best the king had to offer, ended dismally with the king revealing his very worst. With this unhappy situation at home, King Ahasuerus went off to wage war against Greece.

Between chapters one and two, secular sources infer that a period of three years passed during which Ahasuerus attempted to expand his kingdom in a military campaign against Greece (481-479 B. C.). He mustered the largest army the world had ever known and barely defeated the Greeks at Thermopylae. The Persian army then went on to capture and burn Athens. However, Ahasuerus' fleet of 300 ships met destruction against the Greeks at Salamis and his mighty army was defeated at Plataea and driven back home. The Greek campaign ended in disaster, and Ahasuerus returned home defeated and dejected. During these three years, his anger toward Vashti had time to subside. He began to miss her. Loneliness set in. Chapter two reveals the plan of the king's servants to remedy the situation and the providence of God in the outworking of their scheme.

Outline of Esther 2

- I. A Pleasing Plan - Esther 2:1-4
- II. A Providential Choice - Esther 2:5-18
- III. A Pair of Conspirators Foiled - Esther 2:19-23

I. A Pleasing Plan - Esther 2:1-4

The chapter begins, *after these things*: presumably the things which had taken place in chapter one and also the king's military expedition against Greece.

A. King's regret - Esther 2:1

After three years, Ahasuerus' wrath had subsided and he looked back with nostalgia at the events which had taken place at the close of his drunken banquet. He missed Vashti and probably regretted what had taken place.

B. Servants' suggestion - Esther 2:2-4

The servants who attended the king could not help but notice his disturbed state of mind. Perhaps he took out his discontent on them in some way. In any case, they knew that something had to be done. They approached the king with their suggestion, perhaps precipitated by Memucan's (one of the king's closest wise men) earlier idea of giving Vashti's royal position to another who is better than she (Esther 1:19).

The plan was to search the empire for the most beautiful young virgins and take them to the king's harem in Shushan (Susa), the citadel. They would be put under the custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch (only eunuchs had access to the king's harem) and undergo ritual beauty preparations. The king would then choose the one who pleased him most, and she would become queen in Vashti's place. This was much more than a beauty contest, and it certainly was not a joyful and glamorous event for the women. True, there was the chance for one to become queen, but for all the rest there was no future except life in the king's harem with all the other young women who had been tried out and passed over.

II. A Providential Choice - Esther 2:5-18

A. Mordecai and Esther introduced - Esther 2:5-7

In these verses, the writer takes an aside to introduce us to the hero and heroine of the story, Mordecai and Esther.

Mordecai was a Jew who lived in the capital city of Shushan. He was from the tribe of Benjamin. His great-grandfather had been among those taken into captivity in Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar had besieged Jerusalem and captured Jeconiah, king of Judah. (Jeconiah was also known as Coniah [Jeremiah 22:24-30] and Jehoiachin [2 Kings 24:6-17].) The Jews who were living as exiles in the Persian provinces had an opportunity to return to Judah in 537 B.C. under Cyrus' decree (see Lesson 1), but Mordecai's family had apparently chosen not to go.

Mordecai had a younger cousin whom he had taken into his care when her parents died. He had raised her as his own daughter. Her Hebrew name was Hadassah, which means "myrtle". The Persian equivalent is Esther

which means “star.” The New King James Version says that she was *lovely and beautiful* (Esther 2:7), but the Hebrew specifically states that she was *beautiful in form and lovely to look at*. The NIV reads, she was *lovely in form and features*. She obviously had both a beautiful face and lovely figure.

B. Esther taken - Esther 2:8-11

The king had agreed to the plan of finding a new queen (Esther 2:4), and he issued a decree to gather the most beautiful women of the empire into his harem at Shushan. Esther was among those taken. The Hebrew word for “taken” in verse eight can mean “taken by force.” It most definitely does not connote that Esther volunteered. Most likely she had no choice in the matter. Consider Esther’s circumstances. She was living in exile from her homeland and far from the country which God had given to His people. She had no home of her own. Her parents were dead, and she had been taken into her cousin’s home and raised by him. She had no husband to protect her, and this made her fair game to be taken according to the king’s decree. At the very least, hundreds of girls were gathered and taken into the harem at this time. Some commentators have estimated the number at over a thousand.

Esther had little hope of being the one selected as queen. The odds were certainly against her. Also, as a Jewess, she knew it was against the will of God for her to have sexual relations with a man to whom she was not married, even if he was the king (Exodus 20:14). It was also against God’s Law for her to marry a Gentile (Deuteronomy 7:1-4). Even if she were to be selected as queen, life would be difficult for her. If she were not selected, it would mean spending the rest of her days as one of the king’s concubines. The situation must have seemed pretty hopeless to her. Have you ever been in a situation which seemed hopeless? Perhaps you feel right now as Esther must have felt then. Will you take heart in knowing that God, in His providence, and in ways which are not yet evident, is working behind the scenes for you just as He was working for Esther and her people?

1. Esther pleased Hegai, the eunuch - 2:9

There was something about Esther which pleased Hegai, the king’s eunuch in charge of the women in the harem. There must have been something appealing about Esther above and beyond her outer beauty because all the women in the harem possessed physical beauty. As we learn more about Esther, we will see what those appealing qualities must have been. Also, it is likely that God softened Hegai’s heart toward Esther.

2. Esther received special care - 2:9

Hegai favored Esther above the other young women in the harem. He singled her out from the rest, gave her extra in the way of beauty preparations, and provided her with special food. He also provided her with seven choice maids to serve her and moved them all to the very best quarters in the harem.

3. Esther protected by Mordecai - 2: 10-11

a. The secret - 2:10

Perhaps to protect her from anti-semitism which he knew existed in the Persian capital, Mordecai warned Esther to keep her heritage a secret. She dutifully obeyed the man who had raised her, but the secret must have been hard on Esther. She would not have been able to eat according to Jewish dietary laws and she would not have been able to openly pray to God. Outwardly, it would seem as if she had turned her back on her religion which was the very basis of her nation’s existence and probably the very core of her own life.

Even though the Jews were living as exiles in a pagan land, they had retained their own national and religious identity. They openly worshiped God in the foreign land to which they had been taken. Esther had most certainly been raised in the best Jewish tradition. However, in obedience to Mordecai, whom she obviously honored and trusted, Esther remained silent about her Jewishness. Ecclesiastes 3:7b tells us that there is *a time to keep silence, and a time to speak*. Esther will be able to reveal her secret at the appropriate time. Are you able to exercise control over your tongue and remain silent when it is appropriate? *Whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles* (Proverbs 21:23). Also see what the apostle James says about the tongue in James 3:2-6.

b. The surveillance - verse 11

After she was taken into the harem, Mordecai continued to look out for Esther the only way he knew how. Obviously he loved her and was concerned for her welfare. Every day he went to the courtyard outside the harem and paced back and forth in an attempt to learn anything he could about Esther and how things were going with her. Surely he was encouraged to hear that Hegai had taken a special interest in her. Perhaps Mordecai silently thanked God for answering his prayers concerning his beloved cousin. The wisest thing any of us can do for our loved ones is entrust them to the care of God.

C. Virgins go before the king - Esther 2:12-17

1. The preparation - 2:12

Twelve months of beauty preparations passed for the women in the harem. They went through six months of treatments with oil of myrrh, probably in conjunction with massage to soften and beautify the skin. After that, they spent six months undergoing treatments with sweet perfumes and cosmetics. Finally it was time to begin the review before the king.

2. The procedure - 2:13-14

Each day a different beautiful young woman was sent in to the king. Before going, she was given carte blanche to choose whatever cosmetics, jewelry, and clothing she desired to wear when she went to the king's palace. It was like going to the most expensive and exclusive stores and being able to use the king's credit card.

In the evening, the young woman went in to the king and spent the night with him. The following morning she was taken to the second harem, the house of the concubines. She would never go back to the first harem, as that was the house of the virgins. She would never go back in to the king again either, unless the king delighted in her (verse 14) and called her back by name. Most of the beautiful young women who spent the night with the king never saw him again. They spent the rest of their lives as though they were widows, in the harem with the other concubines. Even though they lived in beautiful surroundings and received the best of food, clothing, and care, surely it was a lonely and melancholy existence.

3. The preferred one - 2:15-17a

Finally, Esther's turn came to go in to the king. A year had gone by since she had been taken to the harem. It was now the tenth month of the Jewish year, Tebeth, in the seventh year of Ahasuerus' reign. That would most likely make it December, 479 B. C. The weather outside would have been cold and wet in Shushan at that time of year, but the king's heart was warm toward Esther.

Exercising wisdom and humility, Esther did not adorn herself lavishly before going in to the king. She humbly submitted to the advice of Hegai, who probably knew the king's tastes well. She took only what he advised. Everyone who saw Esther looked favorably upon her. Not only was she physically beautiful, but she had an inner beauty sparked by humility and graciousness. The writer records that *the king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins* (Esther 2:17). Was

it a miracle? Surely Esther perceived it as such! Only God could have moved in the heart of the king to grant Esther such *grace and favor*.

D. Esther crowned by Ahasuerus - Esther 2:17b-18

Esther became queen in place of the deposed Vashti. Ahasuerus himself placed the royal crown on her head. Then, in celebration, he gave another royal banquet. This one was to honor his new queen, and it was called the Feast of Esther. In addition, the king proclaimed the day a holiday in all one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the empire. He gave generous gifts, most likely gifts of food, to the people. It was a great day of joy in the Persian Empire. It was a providential day for the people of God.

III. A Pair of Conspirators Foiled - Esther 2:19-23

The opening phrase of verse 19 is a difficult one. Why were virgins gathered a second time (presumably Esther 2:8 is the first time)? Did King Ahasuerus continue to expand his harem even after he made Esther his queen? It is certainly possible that he did, as ancient kings often had huge harems and many wives. The Scriptures record that King Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:3).

A. Mordecai at the gate - Esther 2:19-22

At this time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. Perhaps through Esther's influence with the king, Mordecai had obtained a position as a judge in the citadel of Shushan. It was a common practice in the ancient Near East to hold court at the gate of the city. The king's appointed official, the judge, "sat" near the gate of the city, within the gate, and the parties in litigation "stood" before him to state their cases and to receive justice.

1. Conspiracy overheard and reported - 2:21-22

Because of his official position at the gate of the city, Mordecai found himself caught up in a situation of oriental intrigue. Two of the king's doorkeepers had become disgruntled and devised a plot to kill King Ahasuerus. Mordecai found out about it and immediately informed Queen Esther. She told the king about the conspiracy, specifically stating that the information had come from Mordecai.

2. Conspiracy investigated - 2:23a

After an investigation, the conspiracy was confirmed and the two doorkeepers, Bigthan and Teresh, received the death penalty. They were hanged on a gallows.

B. Mordecai in the book - Esther 2:23b

The incident and the name of the one who reported it were recorded in the king's *book of the chronicles* in his presence. Mordecai had saved the life of the king, but he received no commendation, no reward, no promotion, no accolade. It seems that he didn't even receive any thanks from the king. But God was not finished. Mordecai's name was written in the book which contained the historical records of Persia, and that is all that is necessary for the time being.

Application

Have you ever felt that you were passed over and unrecognized for something you did in service for the Lord? Perhaps you have taught Sunday School for many years and nobody has ever thanked you. Or maybe you have faithfully worked behind the scenes in a ministry where you are never noticed.

Have you ever become discouraged because you work so hard and give your all and nobody seems to appreciate your sacrifice? Do not be disheartened. Your love and faithful commitment do not go unnoticed by God. Scripture teaches that Christians are not to labor for an earthly reward (Hebrews 11:26). Our reward is in heaven (Matthew 5:12). Jesus told His disciples that they were not to rejoice over the recognition which came to them through the great power He had bestowed upon them, but they were to rejoice because their names were recorded in heaven (Luke 10:20).

Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ? Then your name is recorded in heaven too — in the Lamb's book of life (Psalm 69:28; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 13:8; 17:8; 20:15). Will you release your desire for earthly reward and instead set your heart on the heavenly reward which is yours because you know that your name is written in God's book?