

Lessons From Esther

Homebuilders Bible Class

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(Draft)

A Review of the Book of Esther

Esther Review – Chapter 1

- Great book about good and evil, and justice, with drama and suspense and flare and plots and schemes and twists. Happy ending. You can get a nice warm fuzzy from this book.
- Yet we see it the way we have been conditioned and the way we want to see it. Let's look a little deeper this time, a little differently.
- We start with a kingdom of 127 provinces from India to Cush. We have the land of Persia and Media. *Media, seems appropriately named, and could have been the original Hollywood because they liked to put on a show.*
- Xerxes (preferable to his other name of Ahasuerus) is the King who likes productions. In the 3rd year of his reign he displays his vast wealth, his glory, and his majesty for 180 days – about half a year. He follows this with a 7 day banquet for all the people, least to greatest, in the citadel of Susa – the royal city. Xerxes liked wine and he let the spirits flow, having every man drink what he wished in his own way.
- Meanwhile Queen Vashti gave a banquet for the women. Were men and women completely segregated? *Was Mixed Drinking not allowed??*

Esther Review – Chapter 1 (cont - 1)

- On the last day of the banquet, the King is in high spirits from drinking and now wants to show off Vashti to the people, because she was *babe-ilicious* and really good looking. After 180 days of show plus a 7 day banquet, *Could it be that he was saving the best for last?* We can guess, but don't know his motives.
- Vashti refuses to come. She says *“Hey, Xerxes, we're talking amongst ourselves here, wearing our pajamas, doing our nails, and playing Bunko. You want me to drop all this to come do the catwalk for you and your hairy friends?! And anyway, when's the last time you romanced me?? You can talk to the hand!”*
- *Or, maybe Vashti was a vain teenager who looked at herself in the mirror and said, “OMG, I have a pimple! I'd rather die than go out there like this!”* We don't know her motives either. (Seems she was from royal family, maybe used to getting her way.)
- Xerxes was furious... but not rash. He consulted the wise men as was customary to do in matters of law and justice. (Notice that 7 was a popular number – 7 day feast, 7 eunuchs, 7 wise men, 7 maid for Esther. -- Move to “Observations”)

- The wise men said this is trouble and something must be done or else women will follow Vashti's example *and we'll have a whole women's lib movement on our hands*. Women will despise their husbands and we'll have no end of disrespect and discord, *So the Persian version of Barney Fife says we have to nip it, nip it in the bud!*
- So dispatches were sent to all 127 provinces in their scripts and languages proclaiming that each man should be ruler over his own household, to make sure that women respected their husbands. And Vashti was never again allowed to enter the King's presence. *One could ask, for Vashti, was this actually a loss? Was it a curse... or a blessing?*
- We find an interesting thing about the laws of Persia and Media in v1:19. They were *written in stone* so to speak. *There was no eraser*; they were irrevocable and could not be repealed.

Esther Review – Chapter 2

- Ok, now the first crisis is resolved and mayhem in the kingdom has been averted, but that leaves the need for a new queen. So the search is on for *Miss America, the Princess of Persia, the Media Madonna*. This actually happens about 4 years after the Vashti incident, because now we're in the 7th year of Xerxe's reign.
- Virgins from all over the kingdom are brought in to be contestants on in the reality show, “*The Royal Bachelor*”... or “*Who wants to marry a Millionaire - the King?*” First prize is to become Queen. Consolation prize is to be a one-time concubine.
- Esther was chosen as one of the contestants in the royal beauty contest and is taken away with the other virgins to the palace for 6 months of myrrh treatment followed by 6 months of perfumes and cosmetics followed by one night with the king.
- Esther is an orphan and Mordecai is her relative and caregiver. What relation are they? Cousins. (Often mistaken as Uncle and Niece... Apparently because her deceased/absent father was Mordecai's Uncle.) Mordecai adopted Esther. First reference to adoption we see in the Bible.

Esther Review – Chapter 2 (cont)

- Esther's other name was Hadassah. So why call her Esther? *Because she loves S's? Because Hadassah sounds too much like Parsel-Tongue (snake language in Harry Potter)?* Don't know, but read that Esther means “Star”. Could indicate something about her personality and/or be a pet name.
- Mordecai and Esther happen to live in the same city as the king, the citadel of Susa. They are Jews, but Mordecai forbids Esther to reveal this about herself. Meanwhile, he himself reveals that he is a Jew.
- Along with her beauty, Esther seems to have charisma and qualities similar to Joseph as she wins favor wherever she goes - including the palace, and ultimately the King. Esther is selected as Queen and they have a party and a national holiday, celebrating the release of their new movie, *Babeylon II*.
- Mordecai checks on Esther every day. He cares about her, and he's looking out for her. *The ability to check on a daughter was a luxury likely not available to every father – especially those that lived in the further provinces.*

Esther Review – Chapter 2 (cont - 2)

- One day, while Mordecai is **loitering and eavesdropping** at the King's gate, he overhears a plot to assassinate the king. He tells Esther, who then tells the King and credits Mordecai. The plot is thwarted and the king's enemies are hanged.
- **Note that Mordecai may well have been loyal to the king, but even if he wasn't, he was still looking out for Esther. For if the king was killed, what would happen to Esther? She would certainly not remain as Queen, and in fact the new king might consider her a threat and have her killed.**

Esther Review – Chapter 3

- Now we meet our villain, Haman. He's the highest noble, such that by the king's command even the royal officials must kneel and give him honor.
- Mordecai, however, refuses to do this. We don't know why. There might be a tendency to automatically assume this was for religious reasons, as with Daniel. *However, while kneeling in worship before an idol or false god is an obvious conflict, kneeling in honor before officials is not.*
- This bothered Haman so much that he scorned the idea of killing just Mordecai and told the king about this troublemaker people that didn't follow his customs or laws, convincing him they should be destroyed. *(Did Haman even reveal **what** people – that it was the Jews?)*
- The king trusts Haman and acts rashly, agreeing to the destruction of the Jews. He even handed his signet ring over to Haman giving him carte blanche. This happens in the 12th year of Xerxes reign – almost 9 years after this all started. After casting lots (pur) for the date of destruction, the decree is sent on 1/13 that all Jews are to be killed eleven months later on 12/13. *Were these Fridays? Could this have been the origin of Friday the 13th?*
- The King and Haman sit down to drink (nonchalant?), but the city of Susa is bewildered.

Esther Review – Chapter 4

- Mordecai learns of the decree to kill the Jews and plunder their goods. Remember these decrees are irrevocable. He sends word to Esther urging her to plead to the King for the Jews. [He doesn't want the Jews to be the first victims in the Friday the 13th series.](#)
- We find that you must actually be summoned to see the king, or by law you will be put to death – unless the King grants mercy and extends his golden scepter. Esther also reveals that its been a month since she was last summoned.
- Mordecai responds to her with the line that may be most famous from Esther, saying “Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” (4:14) [**Purpose**]
- But he also says that she will NOT escape the death decree (4:13) if she doesn't take the risk of approaching the king. [**Security**]
- That deliverance for the Jews will come from another source [**Gap**]– but not for her and her father's family. (4:14)
- So at Esther's request, she and her maids and the Jews in the city all fast for three days. *Fasting: a power we fail to tap?*
- *Then Esther became a bad girl. She broke the law, committed a crime, perpetrated a felony.* She appeared uninvited before the king. [Vashti didn't come when called, but Esther came uncalled.]

Esther Review – Chapter 5

- Fortunately for our heroine, the King was pleased when he saw Esther and not only extended the golden scepter, but offered her half the kingdom. *I wonder if this was just a manner of speaking – like buying and selling land. I'd like to buy your land. Oh no, good sir, just take it. Nope, I must be fair and pay. Well it's worth a yazoo of shekels, but just take it... I'll pay the yazoo...* [Genesis 23:8-13, I Chronicles 21:22ff]
- Esther doesn't come right out with her request, but instead warms the king up with a banquet and wine, and then puts him off when he asks again, saying let's have another banquet tomorrow, and I'll tell you then. *Apparently the king enjoyed eating and drinking, as well as a bit of mystery and suspense.*
- Now these are very exclusive banquets, just Esther and the King, and one other. She invites the enemy of the Jews, Haman himself. Haman seems to be rather narcissistic, pompous, and conceited. So he is delighted about this new feather in his cap. He brags about his vast wealth, his many sons, his high honors from the king, his high position... and now being the exclusive one and only VIP invited to dine with the king and queen.
- Haman has it all. But, he says, it brings him **no** satisfaction b/c of Mordecai. *Unforgiveness will ruin you.*
- So his wife and friends say, just get rid of him so you can enjoy life. Build a 75 foot gallows and hang him on it before the next banquet. Haman loved the idea and jumped right on it. *(Hang 'em high? The old West couldn't compete with 75 feet!)*

Review – Chapter 6

- That night the king couldn't sleep. Whether it was the suspense offered by Esther, or indigestion from from the banquet, or something else, it was a providential insomnia. So the king says “Read me some bedtime stories – about me!”
- One of the stories is how Mordecai revealed the assassination plot against the king. The king asks what has been done for him? “Nothing”. The king wants to correct this oversight.
- Just about that time, Haman shows up in the *outer* court to talk to the king about hanging Mordecai. *Was this option – the outer court - not available to Esther? Could she not have shown up in the outer court and waited? Perhaps this was reserved for the wise men and nobles??*
- Xerxes asks who's in the court? Haman. The king calls in Haman.
- Now we have material for the TV show “My Name is Earl”, as karma starts kicking in. The king, with Mordecai in mind, asks Haman what ought to be done for the man the king delights to honor? Haman thinks, who would the king delight to honor more than me? So he says to wear a royal robe worn by the king and ride a horse ridden by the king, bearing the royal crest, and be led around the town by one of the most noble princes proclaiming 'this is what is done for the man the king delights to honor'. *Great idea! says the king to Haman, whose pride and ego and delight are now at Hindenburg capacity, just before the king delivers the explosive spark,* “ Do exactly what you said, commands the king, *for Mordecai* Leave nothing out! [Beware Assumptions / Do unto others...]
- Haman, *mortified about Mordecai*, does this, then rushes home in grief and shares his woes with his wife and friends. The same people that told him yesterday to hang Mordecai now bail on him and say something rather interesting “Since Mordecai, before whom your downfall has started, *is of Jewish origin*, you cannot stand against him – you will surely come to ruin!”
- Just then he is hurried away to Esther's 2nd banquet – more upset than he was the day before.

Review – Chapter 7 / 8

- At this banquet, the king asks again about Esther's request. She tells him that she and her people have been sold for destruction, that if it was only for slavery then that would be too small to bother the king! Xerxes : “Who did it?!”
- She tells him that it is the vile Haman. *Of course Haman couldn't have done it without Xerxes cooperation, but Esther wisely leaves out that part.* Xerxes is so mad he storms out and Haman is terrified. He decides to beg for his life from Esther. Clearly a foolish endeavor, except that at this point Haman has nothing to lose. Xerxes returns to find Haman falling on Esther's couch, and exclaims “Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?!”
- Apparently the king did not return alone, as Haman was seized and his face covered. One of them reported that Haman had made the gallows to hang Mordecai. So becomes *fully baked the karma cake* and our sense of justice when the king has Haman hanged on his own gallows.
- [Chpt 8] The icing is that Haman's estate is given to Esther who appoints Mordecai over the estate.
- What's more, after Esther finally reveals her relation to Mordecai, the king even presented him his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman. Mordecai, became 2nd in rank to the king. *Ah, sweet justice!*
- *Ah, but wait, there's more!!!*

Review – Chapter 8 (cont) / 9

- Esther pleads with the King to overrule the annihilation decree. He *again* extends the golden scepter. **So it appears she may have risked her life a 2nd time.** He tells her that the king's decree can never be revoked, but she can write a new decree on behalf of the Jews, as seems best to her.
- So on March (actually the 3rd month) 23, a decree is sent to all the provinces authorizing the Jews to unite and defend and destroy and plunder their attackers. This was just over two months after the first edict and almost 9 months before Attack Day. The lot fell on the last month of the year giving the Jews the maximum time? Providence? Yes if you believe Proverbs 16:33.
- The Jews rejoiced. And in the spirit of 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em' Many people became Jews, because they were afraid of them.
- December's Friday the 13th came and there will still many that hated the Jews. But no attacker could stand against them. The nobles helped the Jews b/c they feared Mordecai. The Jews killed 75,000 that day, plus Haman's ten sons – who were apparently hanged the next day, though already dead
- The Jews established the 14th as a holiday of joy and feasting and giving presents to each other. They call it Purim, but it sounds a lot like Christmas to me. **14th - 25th = 12 days of Christmas.**

Lessons From Esther

Commitment

- The lesson series was on human commitment, so examples from Esther:
- Mordecai adopted Esther. First example of adoption in the Bible. Commitment to family.
- Esther, even as Queen, still obeyed her father Mordecai (2:20). Commitment to authority.
- [Did Esther risked her life? If she believed Mordecai, then her life was forfeit anyway, and perhaps risked only a few months of it, depending on when her nationality would have come to light. But she did risk it.]
- Esther showed commitment to Mordecai, commitment to her people, commitment to doing the right thing.
- Not involvement, but commitment. **Commitment will change or end your life.**

Lessons /Observations

- First, this is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. This whole thing started because a woman disobeyed. The important lesson here is that *no one falls alone*. Others, including the innocent suffer the consequences of our actions. [ex. Joshua and Caleb, and Jewish children.]
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- Next, is the upside down kingdom perspective (Theme of the '08 Pepperdine Bible Lectureship). Seems kind of a fairly tale. How many girls might dream of being beautiful, being an Esther? She got to live in a palace, enjoy free fragrance and skin care products, beauty training. She won a beauty contest and became Queen! Yet the reality was that physical beauty got you taken away from your family for the year long preparations followed by one shot with the king to become his trophy wife who was often ignored and only got to see him when summoned, or risk death... (And again, runners up just got to be concubines for a night.)
- (See next slide for more upside-down)

Lessons /Observations

- “What is good???” Often we can't tell. We don't know and we don't know that we don't know. It's not what we think it is. It's upside down to us.
 - Winning a beauty pageant? Getting to live in the palace?
 - Having everything? (Like Haman)
 - Israel wanted a king. They thought that would be good. Was it?
 - Joseph betrayed by his brothers, thrown in a pit, and later jailed under false accusations? Was that bad? This then saved the people.
 - Moses losing his palace position to wander in the desert? Then he led the people.
 - David running from Saul? This made him a better king. [Compare to Saul's process.]
- Mordecai was loitering, eavesdropping - didn't he have work to do?? We know the story, but what if we didn't and we just saw the sights, what conclusions would we jump to? Would we condemn what we now see as good? Often we just don't know, though we think we do.
- **When God works together for good for those that love him, we don't know what that looks like, or how we're involved. (When did Esther find out? Joseph? Job? Moses?)**

Lessons /Observations

- Mordecai was looking out for Esther, looking out for the King, looking out for the Jews. There's someone looking out for you. *Are you looking out for someone?*
- Esther 4:12-14 :
 - 12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, 13 he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 14 For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"
- This is such a rich passage with lessons about
 - Purpose,
 - Security,
 - Standing in the gap.

Purpose

(Lessons continued)

- “Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?”
- Did Esther know her purpose beforehand? What about Joseph? Moses? Job? Noah? Gideon? What about the man who was lame for 38 years? “~Created to do good works God prepared in advance.” Ephesians 2:10 You don't have to understand.
- If you actually understand your path, it may not be from God. God uses us for God-sized tasks. Moses escaped death to become a prince of privilege, then escaped that to become a desert redneck, then becomes a leader of a nation. [Would Aaron still have been a priest, had Moses done the speaking?] Joseph was thrown into a pit and sold into slavery then to rise to a good position then to be thrown in jail by false accusation for doing the right thing, then to become a leader of Egypt who saved the people. Did they understand these paths??
- Your purpose is to *Be There*. To answer God’s call. (If you don't have caller ID or voice mail, He will call back.) Your purpose is to “show up”. [My son Zachary used to say when he was younger and did well: “Man, I really showed up!"]. Esther showed up. Mordecai showed up.

Gap

(Lessons continued)

- 4:14 Deliverance for the Jews will come from another place. “~Created to do good works God prepared in advance.” Ephesians 2:10 Good works prepared in advanced.
 - If Esther did not act, fulfill her purpose, she would leave a gap.
- Will you leave a gap or stand in the gap? [Ezekiel 22:30]
- Nehemiah accomplished an impressive feat getting the wall rebuilt quickly. How? Everyone did their part. There was no gap. Esther did not leave a gap. Will you leave a gap?
- Will you fulfill your purpose, do your part and leave no gap? Or will someone else have to stand in your gap, doing the works prepared for you?
- Will you stand in the gap?

False Security, True Risk

(Lessons continued)

- Don't think you will escape (4:13) Esther had a royal position of privilege, but it wouldn't protect her.
- *What false security or what false fear keeps you from taking a risk, standing up for others?*
- Esther the Queen might have been executed - that was the more immediate threat. The one in your face at the moment tends to seem bigger - a flashlight in your face vs the stars in space. There is no comparison. We need to learn the difference and respond accordingly.
- Reminder that the Lord's blessings become a trap to us. Ironic and disastrous how what he gives us often displaces him in our hearts. *Fear of losing the blessings becomes greater than the commitment to the one who provides them.*
- Did Esther risk her life, or did she **LIVE** it? Erwin McManus in his book Chasing Daylight urges us to : "Risk all that is for all that could be."
- "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." ?? Matt 10:39
- True security in God, he covers the gaps— 4:14 deliverance will arise from another place.

Sow/Reap, Hope in the Dark

(Lessons continued)

- The evil we intend for others will hang us. Proverbs 26:27, Proverbs 28:10
- Law of the Harvest - reap what you sow. As you sow, so it will be to you. Will you leap for joy or weep with grief when you get what's coming to you?
- Unforgiveness and hate will destroy you. Haman had everything, but he couldn't let go of his resentment of Mordecai. As a result he lost everything, including his own life.
- Irrevocable declaration. Seems that there is no hope, but what is impossible with man is possible with God - he can provide a way.

Lessons From Esther

(Summary)

- Purpose
- Security and Risk
- Illusion and Reality – things are not always as they seem.
- Gap Management
- Providential Provision
- Law of the Harvest - reap what you sow. As you sow, so it will be to you. Will you leap for joy or weep with grief when you get what's coming to you?
- The Upside Down Kingdom. What is good?? (Joseph)
- All started because a woman disobeyed – no one falls alone.

So What?

- You have a purpose. It is ok if you don't know it. God does. Just show up and God will see that it gets done. Stand in the gap rather than leaving one.
- Beware of false security and false fear. Seek the truth. Be willing to risk all that you have for all that could be - for in reality, if you don't, you risk failing to live in the first place.
- Whatever your situation, however unyielding and irrevocable it may seem, God can provide the way. He may not stop the attack, but then he will provide for your defense.
- When God provides a way for someone, it just might be through you.