

North Christian Church Women's Bible Study

The Women of the Bible: Esther

4/1/15

Topic

The Book of Esther

Historical Context (From Zondervan NIV Study Bible)

- Author: Unknown
- Audience: The Jewish People
- Setting: City of Susa in the Persian Empire
- Date: Sometime after 460 BC
- Theme: The book of Esther describes how the Jews of Persia are saved from certain destruction through divine providence.

Reading Outline

- Read entire Book of Esther, chapters 1-10
- Don't lose sight of the overall purpose of the book, the "big-picture" themes.
- Have fun and see how this book can edify and teach women regarding the unity of the faith.

Post Reading Questions/Conclusions:

Chapter 1

- **v1:1-8** What is the significance of the wealth/power of the Persian Empire? To King Xerxes? To Queen Vashti?
- **v1:10-12** How does Queen Vashti dishonor her husband? What is the significance of this? What are common precursors to the downfall of kingdoms?
- **v1:16-18** A concern of the King's wiseman is the example Queen Vashti will be to other women. Is this a valid concern? What has history shown us and what do we see today regarding this truth?
- **v1:20** Queen Vashti will be replaced by someone who "is better than she." What is meant by "better"? Where does the Bible continually remind us true beauty lies? Proverbs 31:30, 1 Pe 3:3-6.
- **v1:22** Proclaims that every man should be ruler over his own household. What is the importance of this?

Chapter 2

- **v2:5** Mordecai is introduced. He is a Jew from the Tribe of Benjamin and was exiled to Babylonian captivity. What is the significance of this and his being a part of the “remnant?” (God always preserves a Jewish remnant.) God never needs numbers! ☺ Rom 11:1-5.
- **v2:7** Hadassah (later named Esther) is introduced and is the cousin of Mordecai. Mordecai raised her because both of her parents had died while she was young. What type of man is Mordecai? What type of influence does a man of his character have on Esther? How can this be applied to our lives?
- **v2:9** Esther wins the favor of Haggai, and she receives 7 female attendants. What is the role of these female attendants? How does the theme of servanthood continue to unfold in this book to further His purpose?
- **v2:12** What is the importance of 6 months of beauty treatments? What is the significance of oil and myrrh? See Song of Solomon 1:13 and Phi 3:10-11. (Myrrh presented to Christ parallels pivotal points in His life: at His birth in Mat 2:11 and when He hung on the cross in Mark 15:23)
- **v2:15** What do we learn about Esther's character?
- **v2:19-23** How does Mordecai's ability to uncover the conspiracy of the King's officers reinforce Divine providence in His plan and the idea of “being in the right place at the right time”?

Chapter 3

- **v3:2** What does this verse say about Mordecai's character? Can you think of a time in your life when you, or someone you knew, took the unpopular route based on personal convictions? Did you have the opportunity to see God's justice play out in this given situation?
- **v3:4-9** What seems to enrage Haman the most, the disobedience of Mordecai, or the fact that He was a Jew? What type of stage is being set for Esther? What is she up against?

Chapter 4

- **v4:4-5** Once Esther is notified of Mordecai's state of mourning in sackcloth and ashes by eunuchs and female attendants, why is her first response to send clothes? According to Jewish custom, didn't sackcloth clearly signify mourning? It is not until Mordecai refuses the clothes that Esther orders Hathak to find out what is troubling Mordecai. Is there any significance to this? Can you, as a woman, relate to her response?
- **v4:9-11** After hearing Hathak's report of all that had happened to Mordecai and of the edict for the annihilation of the Jewish people, what is Esther's response to Mordecai's request for her to beg the King for mercy? What do you think is going through Esther's mind as she is telling Hathak her message to Mordecai? Is she in a state of thought leading emotion or emotion leading thought? What are the dangers of the latter? What role does her conscience play as she has to make a decision to follow either the Rules of Royalty or obedience to her Uncle and servanthood of her people? (1 Pe 2:13-16 vs. Col 3:22-25)

- **v4:13-14** What does this section reveal about Mordecai's faith? Mordecai addresses Divine timing. Can you think of a time when God brought you to a difficult crossroad where you had the choice to carry out His will for His glory? Have you ever been "called" yet ignored His calling? What life lessons have come from such times? (Proverbs 19:21)
- **v4:15-16** After Esther considers Mordecai's words, she immediately requests that her people fast for her. What is the significance of fasting (Psalm 35:13, Isa 58:6-9)? What does this section reveal about Esther's faith? What do you think Esther's motivation is? Ultimately, does it matter? (1 Samuel 16:7)

Chapter 5

- **v5:1-2** What do you think was going through Esther's mind as she stood in the inner court of the palace? Did she expect to live?
- **v5:4-7** What is the purpose of Esther preparing more than one banquet for the King and Haman? Why did she not submit her petition at the initial banquet?

Chapter 6

- Please be prepared to comment on anything in this chapter that stands out to you.

Chapter 7

- **v7:1-4** Before she makes each request, Esther begins with "If it pleases the King..." What does this reveal about Esther's character? What is the significance of Esther noting she would not have disturbed the King if this were "merely" a matter of her people being sold into slavery? How far has contemporary society strayed from such character/integrity?
- **v7:5-7** What does King Xerxes' response to Queen Esther's petitions show us about his relationship with his Queen? What qualities describe their relationship? How is such a relationship fostered (Eph 5:33)? On the flip side, how can such a relationship become embittered?
- **v7:8** What is the significance of Esther "reclining?" How do we find rest, even under pressure situations (Psalm 23)?

Chapter 8

- **v8:1-2** How does Esther receive the gift of Haman's estate? What does this say about Esther's motivation? What is the ultimate gift/blessing for Esther (Proverbs 11:20-26)? How does God want us to receive gifts (Num 6:24-26, Phi 4:19, Jam 1:12, Jam 1:17)?
- **v8:8** King Xerxes commands that Esther and Mordecai write a decree on behalf of the Jews "as seems best to [them]..." How has Esther, along with Mordecai, earned such trust from King Xerxes (Titus 2:7, 2 Timothy 3:2)? How do we earn trust from others?

Chapter 9

- **v9:13-18** Esther requests for Haman's ten sons to be killed. She also requests that a day be set apart for the Jews to be permitted to take vengeance on their enemies who sought to kill them. What about having love and forgiveness towards our enemies? Is this difference in thinking due to living on the other side of The Cross and not understanding its cry for forgiveness, as Dr. Lockyer suggests? Or is this Esther being lockstep with God's will and getting rid of evil (Psalm 94:23, 1Cor 15:33)?

Chapter 10

- **v10:3** Why is Mordecai "held in high esteem by his many fellow Jews?" How can we follow his example today in our Christian walk (Rom 14:7-13, Phi 2:3-4)?

Key Post Reading Summary Points (from Dr. Herbert Lockyer's *All the Women of The Bible*)

- Esther, from "aster", means "a star." Esther was a "star of hope" and a "star of joy" to her people.
- She went from exile and poverty to a queen of great wealth.
- God's providence is seen throughout this book, yet His name is not mentioned- as in Song of Solomon.
- Because of her beauty she became an inmate of the palace, because of her courage/faith/honor she would become a "star of hope" to her Jewish people, lightening the load under Persian rule.
- King Xerxes must have been captivated by her beauty, but "through her beauty there shone a radiance of personality and character which enhanced her beauty and gave it distinction in the eyes of [King Xerxes] who chose her to be his queen". (p 53)
- Mordecai and Esther shared faith in the high destiny of Israel as a nation.
- Haman, the chief court favorite, was an enemy of the Jews and wanted all Jews massacred. "The future existence of God's chosen people and ultimately the appearance of the Redeemer-Messiah are jeopardized by Haman's edict to destroy the Jews (Zondervan NIV, p 770)
- It is because Esther saved the Jews from destruction that the book of Esther is read every year by Jews at the Feast of Purim held on 14th day of Adar.
- Esther requests Haman's ten sons be killed. She also requests that a day be set apart for the Jews to be permitted to take vengeance on their enemies who sought to kill them. What about having love and forgiveness towards our enemies? Is this difference in thinking due to living on the other side of The Cross, and not understanding its cry for forgiveness, as Dr. Lockyer suggests?

Key Lessons And Questions To Consider From The Book of Esther

- Esther was one who kept her pledge, dutifully obeying her foster father, Mordecai (Lesson for young people to obey their parents and also to others having obedience to other biblical forms of authority).
- She exhibited patriotism and loyalty to her people.
- Esther utilized great opportunities to glorify God, instead of self-gain and promotion.
- How does her story relate to our ambassadorship and servanthood as women?
- How has God's providence come through for you when you have been simply obedient to His calling in your life?
- Esther seeks Divine guidance in times of difficulty (4:15-17)
- What are examples of areas where you have had to renounce self and exert self for others? Where lays the joy in such humility?
- Through Esther we can learn the value of seeking cooperation of fellow-believers.
- Dealing with the ultimate safety of the Jews, which Esther secured, we learn to have complete confidence in God's Providence, to not undervalue small things, and how merciful our God is.
- From the story of Haman and his reversal of fortune, we learn of God's righteous retribution. Haman received himself what he had proposed for others, illustrating the transitory nature of earthly possessions and the end of ill-gotten earthly power and possessions. How does this relate to what has come from the pulpit recently? (Proverbs 1)