

Esther 1,2

Day 1

Royal Banquets. Read Esther 1:1-12

FYI: "The book of Esther is unique in at least two respects. It is one of only two Biblical books centered around a woman (the other is Ruth). It is the only book with no mention of God anywhere in its ten chapters, although the providential hand of God is marvelously evident throughout the book...one senses the strong faith of both Esther and Mordecai, as well as the remarkable sequence of providential ways in which God, behind the scenes, was preserving His chosen people...All that is known about the times, places and people in the book is consistent with all known data from ancient history and archaeology. There is no valid reason to doubt the complete historicity of the book of Esther."
- Henry Morris

1. When and where does the story of Esther take place? 1:1-3a (How vast was King Ahasuerus' domain?)

FYI: Traditionally Ahasuerus is said to be Xerxes I (486-465 B.C.) but some identify him as Darius Hystaspis "the great" (522-486 B.C.).

"At this time...the Persian Empire was the largest the world had ever seen. It covered what we call today Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel; and also, parts of modern day Egypt, Sudan, Libya, and Arabia."
- David Guzik

"Some have estimated that between 2 and 3 million Jews were living in Persia and Babylon during the time of the book of Esther."
- Irving Jensen (82)

The citadel/palace of Susa "This fortified area, a favorite winter residence for the Persian kings...The city of Susa was the pre-eminent city among four capital cities used by the Persian rulers. Situated in Elam (south-west Iran), about 240 kilometres north of the Persian Gulf, it had the advantage of being situated in a fertile plain with plentiful rivers."
- Debra Reid (61)

"Persia became Iran in 1935. If you go to Iran, you can inspect the remains of Susa. It's a mound of ruins some 200 miles north of the Persian Gulf. Scholars identified the location in 1852...The town (of Susa) lay on the right bank of a wide river. Today only slight undulations of the plain mark the site of the town. They show it to have been seven miles around. Across the river stood the fortified palace, on an acropolis 72 feet higher than the surrounding plain. It's two and one-half miles around."
- Margaret Hess (14)

2. Ahasuerus' first banquet:
- Who was invited to the banquet? 1:3
 - What did he want to show? 1:4
 - How long did it last? 1:4
3. Ahasuerus' second banquet:
- Who was it for and how long did it last? 1:5
 - How lavish was this affair? 1:6-8

4. What is your impression of the atmosphere and influence of these banquets?

FYI: "The writer seems overwhelmed by the scene he describes and piles on the images of luxury...A detailed account of the history and the physical appearance of the palace of Susa, based on archaeological evidence, is provided...Of particular note is the claim that the palace of Susa was decorated more ornately than any other Persian palace and that its structure was highly complex. Inscriptions also indicate that materials (gold, cedar timber, precious stones, silver, ebony) were brought from all over the realm to decorate the palace."

- Ray Stedman (65,67)

"[The king] wanted to demonstrate by the magnificence of his feast, what a great man he was. You know how much it costs to put on one company dinner. Imagine providing six months of gormandizing for hundreds of people."

- Margaret Hess (11)

5. Where was Queen Vashti's banquet and who was invited? 1:9

6. When the King sent for Queen Vashti:

- What condition was the King in? 1:10 (Compare 1 Samuel 25:36)
- How did he summon the queen? 1:10 (How intimidating would this be?)
- Why did he send for her? 1:11

FYI: "Eunuchs were castrated men employed to guard the harem. Because the legitimacy of the king's offspring was of paramount importance, no men except eunuchs were permitted contact with the harem."

- The Woman's Study Bible (785)

(Grk. *eunouchos*; Heb. *saris*). "The Greek word means literally 'bed keeper,' i.e., one who has charge of beds and bedchambers. The original Heb. word clearly implies the incapacity that mutilation involves. Castration, according to Josephus (Ant. 4.8.40), was not practiced by the Jews upon either man or animals; and the law (Deut 23:1; cf. Lev 22:24) dealt severely with this kind of treatment of any Israelite. It was a barbarous custom of the East to treat captives thus."

- The New Unger's Bible Dictionary

7. What reasons do you see for the Queen's refusal to come to the banquet?

8. Why do you think Ahasuerus reacted so strongly to Vashti's refusal? 1:12 (Why do you think he might have expected that she would agree to it or have felt favorable about it?)

FYI: "Sexism is not a theme in the book, because norms are not challenged, but only assumed...It is important that the first chapter of Esther should be understood as providing the setting for the story...In the end, this chapter is more about Xerxes' court than it is about either Vashti or Esther, for it is the way Xerxes exercises his reign that is ultimately the threat to the Jewish people and the focus of the story...The crisis in this story centres not on male/female power but on Persian power versus Jewish vulnerability. When times are particularly critical, it seems that God chooses to work in unexpected ways by reversing roles and redistributing effective power." - Debra Reid (77)

9. What adjectives would you use to describe King Ahasuerus so far? (Compare Matthew 20:25-28)

Applying the Word: *Have you ever made assumptions about on a relationship that produced barriers rather than closeness? What are some ways we can make sure we are understanding and respecting another person's thoughts or feelings?*

Day 2

King Ahasuerus Seeks Advice. Read Esther 1:13-22

10. With whom did King Ahasuerus consult? 1:13,14 (Compare Daniel 2:2) Why do you think he didn't talk with Queen Vashti?

- What advice did he seek? 1:15

FYI: "Understood the times" is a phrase used to suggest that the wise men could determine by divination or astrology the most opportune time for action [see Isaiah 47:13; Daniel 2:27; 5:15]."
- The Women's Study Bible (786)

11. How did Memucan align himself with the king? 1:16 (How would this have made Ahasuerus feel?)

- What consequences did Memucan say there would be because of Queen Vashti's behavior? 1:17,18

FYI: "Xerxes (NIV) is saved from criticism: no one mentions that if women are to imitate Vashti, men first have to imitate Xerxes."

"The king's advisers, led by Memucan, 'fabricate a crisis out of nothing and come up with a proposal that throws the spotlight on their own embarrassment' (Fox)...The Vashti incident, like all incidents in this court, is assessed in terms of the honour it brings."
- Debra Reid

12. What course of action did Memucan suggest? 1:19 (What appeal would this have to the King's honor and power?)

13. What results did Memucan say this response would have? 1:20 (*Where do you see Memucan using exaggeration and flattery? What do you think the actual effects were?*)

- What counsel do you think would have been good for the King?

Food for Thought: "Those governors and princes gained official sanction for selfishness. The decree would inspire all wives to fear their husbands. It would also make all husbands tyrants. What a far cry from the give and take of marriage that the Bible shows us in so many Hebrew home! What a contrast to the tender love God intended between the sexes!"
- Margaret Hess (33)

"The *goal* presented here...speaks to the need within every man to sense respect and honor from his wife... However, the *means* used here to gain and preserve this respect were foolish. A man cannot demand or coerce respect from his wife – if it isn't freely given, then it isn't worth anything."
- David Guzik

14. From the edict that was issued, how did the king and his wise men feel that respect was obtained and maintained? How is it really developed in a relationship?

15. How vast and thorough was the distribution of the edict? 1:22

FYI: 1:22 he sent letters. "The Persian postal system at this period was very extensive and efficient, being structured in similar fashion to the United States Pony Express system of the mid-nineteenth century. An actual leather postal sack containing Persian official documents of the period has been found preserved in the dry climate of Egypt, which was then a part of the Persian Empire."
- Henry Morris

"That such an edict issues from a king who has not been able to induce obedience when it really mattered to him is plainly ironic."
- Debra Reid (73)

16. In the story so far, in what ways did the wealth and power of King Ahasuerus fail to meet his needs?

- By his actions in 1:12-22, what are some things that seemed to rule Ahasuerus' life?

17. What do the following say about anger?

- Proverbs 14:29
- James 1:19-20

Digging Deeper:

King Solomon was "*greater than all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom*" (1 Kings 10:23).

From Ecclesiastes 2:

How did Solomon feel about his accomplishments (2:4-9) while he was doing them? 2:10

How did he feel as he looked back?
2:11,17,20

What did he finally recognize as the only source of good that comes in life?
Ecclesiastes 5:19

Applying the Word: How does anger affect your relationships? What ways help you “cool down” before you make a decision?

Day 3

The Search for a New Queen. Read Esther 2:1-11

18. What happened when the King’s anger subsided? 2:1 How do you think he was feeling?

- What did the king’s attendants suggest? 2:2

Digging Deeper
What does 1 Cor. 7:2 say about marriage?

19. Where were the women gathered from and taken to? 2:3 (What does this indicate to you about the choice these women had?)

- How were they supervised?
- What would determine who would be queen? 2:4

gathered' (2:3) Strongs OT #6908 *qabats*; to grasp, i.e. collect

20. List what you learn about Mordecai and Esther in 2:5-7. (See also 1 Samuel 9:1,2)

Mordecai	Esther

FYI: 2:6 **who had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the captives** "This would make Mordecai 120 years old if the King were Xerxes and not Darius. Those who identify the king as Xerxes, therefore, say it was probably Mordecai’s grandfather who had been taken into exile."

"Esther (whose Jewish name *Hadassah* means "Myrtle"; the Persian name *Esther* means "star") was raised by her cousin Mordecai since the death of her father and mother."
- David Guzik

"The first mention of the 'Jews' in the book links this story to the history of Israel. The term "Jew was used of the Israelites from the time of the Exile."
- The Women’s Study Bible (787)

21. What happened to Esther? 2:8

- How do you think the people of the land felt about this edict? (e.g. the women, the parents, the young men)

FYI: was taken/brought (2:8) Strong's OT #3947 *laqach*, "to take, receive, take away."

"...Primarily this word means 'to take, grasp, take hold of'...A secondary meaning is 'to take away, remove, take to oneself,' as when the invading kings 'took away' and 'took to themselves' all the movable goods of the cities of the plain Gen 14:11."
- Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words

"The ancient Jewish historian Josephus says the Ahasuerus had a total of 400 women selected." - David Guzik

"Ahasuerus didn't concern himself with how he wronged those women he locked up for life. He deprived probably three or four hundred of a normal life, of husbands who could concentrate on them alone. He didn't think of the men he wronged. Just one of those girls might have made an ordinary man happy." - Margaret Hess (39)

22. List the ways that Esther was favorably treated. 2:9 (Compare Daniel 1:9,17-20)

23. What do the actions in 2:10,11 indicate about the relationship between Mordecai and Esther?

FYI: "Many reasons have been suggested concerning Esther's hesitation to reveal her national origin. The time does come when Esther would identify herself and her people (see ch. 8). In fact, her self-disclosure would come at the point when the danger to her person was highest."
- The Nelson Study Bible (814)

"Persians considered only Persians their real equals. They accepted the Medes, living next to the, but people living farther away were thought to be inferior....Persians viewed Jews with disdain as a subject nation." - Hess (55)

Applying the Word: *It has been said that "Life is what you have, not what you wish you had." When have you had to endure the death of a certain dream for your life? What comfort/hope did you find in the Lord?*

Day 4

Esther is Taken to the King. Read Esther 2:12-23

24. How were the young women prepared before seeing the king? 2:12,13

FYI: "Twelve months in quarantine were required before a maiden could approach the pampered king - perhaps to make sure she carried no diseases, suffered no irregularities. Twelve months to train her in the use of costly perfumes and creams. Voluptuousness turned into an art and a toil. No inward preparation whatever is suggested and no education or training for high office."
- Margaret Hess (47)

25. What were the fates of the concubines after seeing the king? 2:14 What kind of life do you think this would have been for them?

26. What did Esther take with her when she went in to the king? 2:15 (Why do you think she trusted Hegai so?)

FYI: Esther “turned down an opportunity to pile up material things for herself. And as a result, she set herself apart, and the people took notice - including the king. Though much in Esther’s story was happening that was inconsistent with God’s character, the Jews were His covenant people, and he had promised to cover them.”
- The Tony Evans Study Bible (552)

27. Compare Esther’s “favor” (2:15b) with Acts 7:9,10. (Mark the word *favor* in 2:9,15,17.)

- How much time has passed since the Queen Vashti lost her position? Compare 1:3 to 2:16

28. List the phrases and/or actions taken that describe the King’s delight in Esther. 2:17,18 (What do you think besides outward beauty may have made her so appealing?)

FYI: “The king apparently was so delighted with Esther that he made her queen right away. The nouns *grace* and *favor* together mean ‘abundant favor.’”
- The Nelson Study Bible (815)

“What the Book of Esther does tell us is that ‘God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform.’ He works through people motivated by passion, ambition, and selfishness, as well as by noble motives. God is going to rescue the whole Jewish nation from destruction without a single supernatural act - no miraculous interventions in the Book of Esther. Yet the whole books builds up to a total miracle, detail by detail. God stands in the shadow, keeping watch over His own, whether or not anybody recognized his hand arranging circumstances.”
- Margaret Hess (34)

29. What things are reemphasized at this point in time? 2:19,20 (Compare 2:10,11) What does this add to the story?

FYI: *Sitting at the king’s gate:* “Much administrative and judicial business was conducted in the gate, which was a large building forming the entrance to the royal compound. Mordecai’s position gave him access to much of the royal compound but not to the harem or the palace. Archaeologists have uncovered the kings gate - a large building, 131 by 92 feet, with a central room 69 feet square...the gate opened onto a city square.”
- The Woman’s Study Bible (790,792)

The Plot against the King

30. What plot did Mordecai discover? 2:21 (What does the city gate indicate about Mordecai's status? See Joshua 20:4)

chamberlains/officials/eunuchs Strong's #5631 "A masculine noun meaning a court official, a eunuch. Derived from an Assyrian phrase meaning one who is the head or chief, this work can refer to someone with a high-ranking military or political status." - The Complete Word Study Dictionary (791)

31. How was this plot made known to the king? 2:22 (Note: What relationships were being strengthened?)

- How was this threat dwelt with? 2:23

Food for Thought: "Mordecai acted on the knowledge as a loyal subject in the employ of the king. Joseph, in Egypt, assisted those with whom his lot was cast. Daniel served the king of Babylon faithfully. Nehemiah, at Susa, held an honorable position next to the king. All, at the same time, remained faithful to God." - Margaret Hess (57) (See Jeremiah 29:7)

32. How does this event add to the suspense and background of the story?

Applying the Word: *Can you name someone in your life who has served as a helpful and godly advisor/mentor/advocate? What do you find most helpful about their support?*