

Wednesday Night Adult Bible Study (Esther Chapters 1-3)

October 7, 2020

Esther is the last of the historical books of the Bible, so its main character is named Esther - that is, Venus, the morning star, which sheds its light after all the other stars have ceased to shine, and while the sun still delays to rise. Thus the deeds of Queen Esther cast a ray of light forward into Israel's history from a dark time. Quoted from Blue Letter Bible

Esther 1:1-5

Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this was the Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia)...that in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants—the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces being before him— when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days in all.

And when these days were completed, the king made a feast lasting seven days for all the people who were present in Shushan the citadel, from great to small, in the court of the garden of the king's palace.

This was a very proud and powerful king. He gave two feasts - one for the "haves" that lasted 6 months and one for the "little people" that lasted a week. Seems pretty relevant to today.

Esther 1:9-12

Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women in the royal palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus.

On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded...seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, to bring Queen Vashti before the king, wearing her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials, for she was beautiful to behold. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command brought by his eunuchs; therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him.

The queen likewise was pretty proud, it seems.

Esther 1:13-22

Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times... "What shall we do to Queen Vashti, according to law, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus brought to her by the eunuchs?"

And Memucan answered before the king and the princes: "Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also all the princes, and all the people who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. For the queen's behavior will become known to all women, so that they will despise their husbands in their eyes...This very day the noble ladies of Persia and Media will say to all the king's officials that they have heard of the behavior of the queen. Thus there will be excessive contempt and wrath. If it pleases the king, let a royal decree go out from him, and let it be recorded in the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it will not be altered, that Vashti shall come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. When the king's decree which he will make is proclaimed throughout all his empire (for it is great), all wives will honor their husbands, both great and small."

And the reply pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan. Then he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province in its own script,

and to every people in their own language, that each man should be master in his own house, and speak in the language of his own people.

It is interesting to me that on the one hand, the king appeared very progressive and inclusive. He allowed "religious freedom" and encouraged "ethnic diversity" even sending out the letters in every local language (just like CA DMV). On the other hand he worked to maintain a tight grip on controlling opinion.

Esther 2:5-7

In Shushan the citadel there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite. Kish had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been captured with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. And Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman was lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.

Look at 1 Samuel 9:1-2. What happened to Saul and his sons? Now look at 2 Samuel 16:5-10.

David understood there was hurt there – he was a man after God's own heart. Who else understands and is faithful to restore his people when they turn to Him?

Esther 2:8-9

So it was, when the king's command and decree were heard, and when many young women were gathered at Shushan the citadel, under the custody of Hegai, that Esther also was taken to the king's palace... Now the young woman pleased him, and she obtained his favor; so he readily gave beauty preparations to her, besides her allowance. Then seven choice maidservants were provided for her from the king's palace, and he moved her and her maidservants to the best place in the house of the women.

To be sure, Esther was probably beautiful. More than that though, she had a humble, caring spirit. This is what made Esther truly beautiful and it is made more evident by the attitude of Queen Vashti.

Esther 2:15-17

Now when the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter, to go in to the king, she requested nothing but what... the king's eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her. So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

Humble obedience and she obtained grace and favor.

Esther 2:21-22

In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs... doorkeepers, became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. So the matter became known to Mordecai, who told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name. And when an inquiry was made into the matter, it was confirmed, and both were hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.

Technically, Mordecai was a refugee immigrant living under a government that was not his own and under laws that he did not necessarily agree with. Still, he recognized the need to speak

up and do what is right for the leadership appointed over him.

Esther 3:1-2, 5-6

After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him. And all the king's servants who were within the king's gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage.

When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath.

But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus—the people of Mordecai.

So Haman was an Agagite – a descendent of Agag...Look at 1 Samuel 15:1, 7-11.

Esther 3:8-11

Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people's, and they do not keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain. If it pleases the king, let a decree be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring it into the king's treasuries."

So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. And the king said to Haman, "The money and the people are given to you, to do with them as seems good to you."

So it is the struggle of evil against good continues. Ephesians 6:12.

Esther 3:10-17

Then Esther spoke to Hathach, and gave him a command for Mordecai: "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, he has but one law: put all to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days." So they told Mordecai Esther's words.

And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: "Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish!"

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing – Edmund Burke. Proverbs 24:11-12. This seems particularly appropriate today. Esther goes on in the following chapters to demonstrate how to do something.