

# Esther

## Women of the Old Testament—part 5

June 5, 2016

### PROVIDENCE

#### **DAY 1: An overview of the book of Esther**

1. Setting: City of Susa, the capital of Persia, when Persia was the dominant world power. God's people are in exile there.

2. Time frame: 483-473 B.C.

3. 5 central characters:

King Xerxes—an unstable king;

Vashti—Xerxes' beautiful and modest wife

Haman—Xerxes' assistant, driven to exterminate the Jewish population worldwide.

Mordecai—a faithful Jewish leader; cousin to Esther (acting as her foster father)

Esther—the ravishing Jewish orphan girl that God raised up to rescue His people.

4. King Xerxes spent six months flaunting his wealth and glory before the nobles and important people of Susa. At the end the king decided to flaunt Queen Vashti before the nobles, like a “trophy-wife.”

5. Queen Vashti refused to be treated like a thing to display and for men to gawk at.

*Esther 1:12 But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger.*

6. Anger occurs when someone blocks a “goal” we have toward achieving feeling successful, important and respected, or feeling loved and valued.

7. Think of a recent time you were angry. How were you, even unwittingly and unconsciously seeking approval, respect, a sense of importance or value, etc.?

8. The king is in search of a new queen among his harem. Esther, a Jew in exile, was added to King Xerxes' harem. She is brought before the king. Her beauty wins the day and the king crowns her queen. No one in the court knows she is a Jew.

9. The character of Vashti, and the promotion of Esther to be queen were providential, as we'll see in the story. Such events may *seem* like God is not at work, but as we'll see He is setting the stage!

## **DAY 2: Haman's pride and wicked plot**

*Esther 3:1 After these events, King Xerxes honored Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, elevating him and giving him a seat of honor higher than that of all the other nobles.*

*<sup>2</sup> All the royal officials at the king's gate knelt down and paid honor to Haman, for the king had commanded this concerning him. But Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor.*

1. Haman rises to number two in the land of Persia. Suddenly, he has become a “rock star” in the government. Everyone who is anyone bows down to him, all except one—Mordecai. Mordecai is a Jew, who will only bow to God.

*Esther 3:5 When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged.*

*<sup>6</sup> Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.*

2. We see another of example of anger. What was Haman really seeking? Importance? Respect? Other?

3. His anger grew to such fury that he now looked for a way to EXTERMINATE all the Jewish people in the entire Persian realm, which stretched from Egypt to India!

*Esther 3:8 Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom whose customs are different from those of all other people and who do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. <sup>9</sup> If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will put ten thousand talents of silver into the royal treasury for the men who carry out this business."*

4. The king agreed to this plan. Every Jew in every one of the 127 Persian provinces was to be killed in the twelfth month of the year, the month being determined by the casting of a lot.

5. There are times in life where it seems like the world is completely out of control. On one hand you look at the decree that the wicked Haman ran by the king with nary a thought. “Where is God?” you may ask.

6. Behind the scenes, the sovereign God is using what look like “random” events and even wicked events to weave together His redemptive story.

7. When a wicked event occurs, like Haman's “grand plan” to exterminate God's people, what normally goes through your mind? Do you question what God is doing? Do you doubt His ability to work redemptively, both behind the scenes and through the story?

### DAY THREE: Esther's dilemma and courage

1. When word hits the streets the Jewish people are devastated. It is a law that cannot be rescinded, even by the king himself!

2. Mordecai sends word to Queen Esther that she must talk to the king. This was not as easy as you might think. Esther sends this message back to Mordecai.

*Esther 4:11 "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: **that he be put to death**. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."*

3. What a predicament! To go to the king without being summoned meant near certain death, but to not go the king meant certain death for all the Jewish people.

*Esther 4:12 When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, <sup>13</sup> 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.*

*<sup>14</sup> 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?"*

4. Mordecai tells Esther she has no choice! On the human level she must go! But Mordecai also raises a most important question. It is the question of providence, God's hidden workings behind the scenes! His question is something like this: "Do you not see the "irony" that (1) "You are a Jew, (2) All the Jews will be massacred, (3) You will survive only because no one at the palace knows you are a Jew!" (4) Certainly God has put you in this position!"

*Esther 4:15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai:*

*<sup>16</sup> "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."*

5. Esther makes a decision that puts her life on the line. If she dies, she will be the first.

6. It's easy 2,5000 years later to "arm chair" this and say, "What choice did she have?" But every week we face much less dreadful decisions where we must exercise courage so as not to give in to fear.

7. What is one issue in your life where courage is required to do what God says to do?

## DAY FOUR: Haman's demise

1. Three days later Queen Esther lingers just outside the king's hall. King Xerxes sees her and invites her in! He asks if she has anything he can provide for her.
2. Esther asks that she may host a banquet in which both the king and Haman attend. She then surprises the king by asking to host a second banquet in which both the king and Haman will attend.
3. Meanwhile, Haman is still fueled by:
  - a. Rage at Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman at the city gate,
  - b. Pride at being the only one to accompany the king at the queen's banquet
4. Haman builds a gallows seventy-five feet high in which to hang Mordecai.
5. The night after the first banquet the king could not sleep. He had a history book brought and read to him. The episode "just happened to be" when Mordecai exposed a plot to assassinate Xerxes. Nothing had been done to honor Mordecai.

6. The king orders Haman to publicly honor Mordecai!! Haman and his friends begin to recognize that there is "something" behind the Jewish people that keeps them alive. Their view was something like "fate" would do Haman in!

*Prov. 26:27 If a man digs a pit, he will fall into it; if a man rolls a stone, it will roll back on him.*

7. At the second banquet, Esther lays out the dastardly deed that Haman has inflicted on the Jewish people.

*Esther 7:3 Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life--this is my petition. And spare my people--this is my request.*

*<sup>4</sup> **For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation.** If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king."*

*<sup>5</sup> King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he? Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?"*

*<sup>6</sup> Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman." Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen.*

*Esther 7:8 Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, "Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?" As soon as the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.*

*<sup>9</sup> Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, "A gallows seventy-five feet high stands by Haman's house. He had it made for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king." The king said, "Hang him on it!" <sup>10</sup> So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided.*

8. The evil that looked like it would steamroll all across the Persian empire, annihilating the Jewish people was turned upside down on its head!

## **DAY FIVE: The hand of Providence**

1. The book of Esther is the only book in the bible that does not use the name “God.”
  
2. As Christians we usually “have eyes” to see God’s miraculous power in dramatic scenes. For example, the people of the Exodus were dumbfounded at the opening of the Red Sea, the escape of the nation between its parted waters and the destruction of the Egyptian army. What we tend not to see are the first nine plagues that *seemed* to “fail” to bring about the Exodus.
  
3. Let it be said that God doesn’t just move on the big stage, but He also moves behind the scenes.
  
4. God’s providential care is seen in the story of Esther in numerous “small” events the casual reader may miss. Here are some of them:
  - a. Queen Vashti stands up to the king at risk of her own life, in protest of being paraded as a trophy wife.
  - b. A Jewish woman goes undetected as Jewish as she is added to the king’s harem.
  - c. Mordecai “just happens” to overhear a plot to murder the king.
  - d. The king “just happens” to wake up at night, and of all things, asks to be read to from one of the history books of the nation.
  - e. The history reading “just happens” to be the episode of Mordecai’s saving the king.
  - f. The timing of the lot falling at the end of the year, thereby giving time for the plot to exterminate the Jews to be discovered, exposed, and overturned.
  - g. The king’s sudden acceptance and invitation for Esther to enter the palace hall.
  
5. Can you see the hand of Providence in the story?
  
6. In your life are your eyes “open” to see the hand of God in the “little” events of life? Or do you tend to only see the hand of God in the “big” events, or the blessings you are given?
  
7. That God is not mentioned by name is testimony to something sad. Even the sudden overturning of the death warrant for the Jewish remnant, there is no mention of praise to God, thanksgiving, gratitude, or worship to God.
  
8. What do you think God wanted you to see in this book and story of Esther?