



ESTHER: TRIUMPH OF GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

INTRODUCTION

In the story of Esther, we will see the providence¹ and sovereignty² of God. Physical beauty is often a main characteristic mentioned when describing a woman. This was true in the life of Esther, an orphaned young girl raised by her cousin Mordecai, a Jew in captivity (Esther 2:5-7). It was her beauty that allowed her to be brought to the palace of a heathen,³ King Ahasuerus, to be part of his royal harem (Esther 2:8, 9). Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her. The king loved her more than all the others and chose her to be queen (Esther 2:15-17).

However, it isn't simply her physical beauty that is remembered, but also that as queen, Esther was used of God to accomplish His divine purposes. Through her submission to Mordecai and her faith in God, she offered a moving petition for the lives of her people, the Jewish nation. Queen Esther continually responded to the opportunities given to her to be used *for such a time as this*. Through her example, may we also determine in our hearts to be God's servants in our place and time.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

... and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? (Esther 4:14b)

¹ providence of God: God working out His purposes regardless of man's knowledge of it or submission to Him.

² sovereignty of God: God's rulership over all that is in the earth; kings, kingdoms, dominions.

³ heathen: a foreign nation; hence a Gentile; a non-believer.

Names Given to the Women in this Story

Queen Vashti Wife of King Ahasuerus	<i>Vashti the queen.</i> . . (Esther 1:9). The wife of King Ahasuerus. <i>Vashti</i> means - beautiful woman. Her name seems to correspond to her description. A Persian queen succeeded by Esther.
Hadassah Maiden Daughter	<i>And he [Mordecai] brought up Hadassah . . . his uncle's daughter . . . the maid was fair and beautiful . . . [he] took for his own daughter</i> (Esther 2:7). Esther's original Hebrew name was <i>Hadassah</i> meaning - myrtle.
Esther Virgin Queen	<i>And the king loved Esther above all the women and she obtained grace and favour . . . more than all the virgins . . . [he] made her queen instead of Vashti</i> (Esther 2:17). The queen of Persia after Vashti. She became the wife of Ahasuerus. The name is from <i>aster</i> meaning - star, implying that of good fortune. Although given a Persian name, she is a Hebrew of the descendant of Benjamin.

SECTION 1 - Refusal of Queen Vashti

READ Esther Chapter 1.

1. How vast was the region of King Ahasuerus' rule (vv. 1, 2)? _____

In what place was the throne of his kingdom? _____

LOOK DEEPER

LOCATE on a Bible atlas the regions of King Ahasuerus kingdom to see how vast it had become. Then FIND Shushan, the royal city.

2. When King Ahasuerus made a feast who was invited (vv. 3, 4)? _____

What did he make a show of? _____

How long did this feast last? _____

3. When the feast was over, King Ahasuerus gave another feast lasting only seven days. Who was invited to this feast (v. 5)?

4. DESCRIBE the palace (vv. 6, 7). _____

5. What was the law concerning drinking (v. 8)? _____

6. What was Queen Vashti doing during the King's feast (v. 9)? _____

7. After seven days of drinking, King Ahasuerus commanded that Queen Vashti be brought, by his seven chamberlains before him and those in attendance. Why did he want to put Queen Vashti on display (vv. 10, 11)?

What was his condition? _____

8. What was the queen's response (v. 12)? _____

What was the king's reaction? _____

PERSONAL

Have you ever been the focus of attention at a drunken feast? EXPLAIN. _____

If so, what did you do? _____

If not, what would you do? _____

Vashti as a heathen queen made her decision according to what she had experienced as wife of King Ahasuerus. She most likely knew and accepted the repercussions of her actions.

9. The king sought the wise men⁴ for counsel concerning Vashti. Who were they? What was their duty (Esther 1:13-18)?

⁴ wise men: refer to astrologers or magi; counselors to the king.

What concerned them about the effect of Vashti's behavior on others in the kingdom? _____

10. What was their counsel to the king (vv. 19-21)? _____

11. What did the king do (v. 22)? _____

SECTION 2 - The Search for a Queen

READ Esther 2:1-14.

When the king's anger subsided he remembered what Vashti had done and what was decreed⁵ against her (v. 1).

1. How did the servants advise the king (vv. 2-4)? _____

2. Who was Mordecai (vv. 5, 6)? _____

What had happened to him? _____

3. Who was Hadassah (v. 7)? _____

Esther being beautiful, through God's providence, was one among many women gathered to Shushan the palace, the royal city of Persia. She was placed in the king's house under the custody of Hegai who was a keeper of the women (Esther 2:8).

⁵ decreed - Hebrew *gazar* to cut down: destroy, divide, exclude, a decision.

⁶ Benjamite: a descendant of the Patriarch Benjamin; from Benjamin the youngest son of Jacob; the tenth of the twelve patriarchs which make up the tribes of Israel.

4. Esther found favor with Hegai. LIST what she obtained from him (v. 9). _____

5. What did Mordecai advise Esther to keep silent about (v. 10)? _____

6. How did Mordecai show his concern for Esther (v. 11)? _____

Mordecai had become a man of prominence in Shushan. He seems to have been a palace official who would be seen in the important places of the king's gate and was trusted; and therefore able to walk before the court of the women's house.

PERSONAL

Perhaps God hasn't placed you in a palace, but wherever He has placed you, that is where He wants you to be at this time. DESCRIBE where God has sovereignly placed you and the different people He has around you.

LOOK DEEPER

What do the following verses say concerning God's sovereignty?

I Chronicles 29: 11, 12 _____

Psalm 83:18 _____

Psalm 135:5-7 _____

Daniel 4:35 _____

7. What were the preparations and what was their purpose (Esther 2:12-14a)? _____

8. What condition was given in order to come into the king's presence again (v. 14b)? _____

SECTION 3 - A Queen is Selected

READ Esther 2:15-20.

1. We have seen that when a young woman went to the king she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women's quarters. What did Esther request (v. 15)?

With whom did she obtain favour? _____

2. What was the king's response to Esther (vv. 16, 17)? _____

3. As queen, did Esther reveal her Jewish identity? Why (vv. 18-20)? _____

4. What evil plot, through God's providence, did Mordecai hear at the king's gate⁷ (vv. 21-23)? _____

What did he do? _____

What was the result? _____

SECTION 4 - Haman, Enemy of the Jews

READ Esther Chapter 3.

1. Who was Haman (v. 1)? _____ ⁸

⁷ king's gate: the gate was the place for great assemblies of the people as they passed into and out of a city; the place for public deliberations; reading the law and proclamations.

⁸ Agagite: a synonym for Amalekite, bitter foes of Israel.

2. What was Mordecai's response to the king's command to bow to Haman (vv. 2-5)? _____

Why would he not bow? _____

How did Haman react? _____

3. What did Haman plan to do (v. 6)? _____

4. How was the time to act decided (v. 7)? _____

5. What did Haman tell the king about God's chosen people, the Jews (v. 8)? _____

6. What decree was made (v. 9)? _____

7. What was the king coerced to do by Haman, the enemy of the Jews (vv. 10-14)? _____

8. What did the king and Haman do? What about the people in Shushan (v. 15)? _____

SECTION 5 - The Plan of Mordecai

READ Esther Chapter 4.

1. What was the reaction of Mordecai and the Jews as the decree became public (vv. 1-3)? _____

2. What was Esther's response (vv. 4, 5)? _____

3. What did Mordecai tell Hatach and charge Queen Esther to do (vv. 6-9)? _____

4. What was Queen Esther's fear in regards to appearing before the king without being called (vv. 10-12)?

5. What did Mordecai say (vv. 13, 14)? _____

6. What did Queen Esther ask Mordecai and all the people to do (vv. 15, 16a)? _____

Fasting, together with prayer, is a part of the Christian life. The purpose of a spiritual fast is always to focus on God and draw the believer closer to Him. True fasting is not simply abstaining from food, but a sincere turning of the heart of God's people toward Him and His will.

7. What did Esther and Mordecai do to endanger their lives (vv. 16b, 17)? _____

PERSONAL

Have you ever felt that you would "perish" because you chose to do God's will? EXPLAIN. _____

SECTION 6 - Esther's Feasts

READ Esther Chapters 5 and 6.

1. Esther put on her royal apparel and went before the king. What happened (Esther 5:1-3)? _____

2. What did Esther request of the king (v. 4)? _____

The king asked Haman to do as Esther requested. At the banquet, before Haman, the king promised to grant her petition up to half of the kingdom. She then requested they both attend another banquet (vv. 5-8).

3. What did Esther's banquet and Mordecai's actions cause Haman to do (vv. 9-13)? _____

4. What was Haman's wife and friends' advice (v. 14)? _____

5. What did the king discover that night when he could not sleep (Esther 6:1-3)? _____

6. Why was Haman in the king's outer court (vv. 4-6)? _____

What did the king ask him? _____

7. How did Haman want to honor the man the king delighted to honor (vv. 7-9)? _____

8. Who was the man the king would honor and what did Haman have to do (vv. 10, 11)? _____

9. What warning did Haman's wise men and his wife, Zeresh give him (vv. 12-14)? _____

SECTION 7 – Queen Esther’s Petition

READ Esther Chapter 7.

1. What was Esther’s petition (vv. 1-6)? _____

2. King Ahasuerus was enraged. What did Haman do (vv. 7-10)? _____

How did the king react? _____

What did Harbonah the chamberlain remind the king of? _____

What pacified the king? _____

SECTION 8 - Mordecai and a New Decree

READ Esther Chapter 8.

1. What was given to Esther (vv. 1, 2)? _____

What was given to Mordecai? _____

2. How did Esther approach the king? What was her request (vv. 3-6)? _____

3. How was her request answered (vv. 7, 8)? _____

4. What were the Jews permitted to do (vv. 9-15a)? _____

What was Mordecai’s new conduct? _____

5. How did the city of Shushan and the Jews respond (vv. 15b- 17)? _____

SECTION 9 - Victory

READ Esther Chapters 9 and 10.

1. Because of God's overruling power, what were the Jews strengthened to do? What about Mordecai (Esther 9:1-18a)?

2. DESCRIBE their celebration (vv. 18b, 19). _____

3. SUMMARIZE what Mordecai wrote to the Jews (vv. 20-23)? _____

4. How did these days of celebration come to be called Purim (vv. 24-26)? _____

By the decree of Esther, the feast of Purim is still celebrated today (vv. 25-32).

5. What became of Mordecai (Esther 10:1-3)? _____

LOOK DEEPER

RE-READ footnotes one and two. God’s name is not mentioned once throughout the book of Esther. In what part of the story did you perceive the providence and sovereignty of God most strongly?

PERSONAL

Have you ever sensed the providence and/or sovereignty of God in your life? EXPLAIN.

MEMORY VERSE

_____ ? (Esther 4:14b)

We have learned from the life of Esther the importance of being spiritually aware and surrendered to the call of God in our lives so that we may be used for His purposes. Through Esther’s example, we see a woman of courage, faith, and obedience. By putting the life of her people before her own, she became a part of God’s sovereign plan to sway a king’s opinion. God gave her the wisdom, authority, and resources to devise a plan to save her nation, God’s chosen people.

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