

Esther Part 1



GOD IN THE SHADOWS

ESTHER

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We are in Eastertide, the time between Easter and Pentecost. We want to preach through Esther and Ruth for these next 9 weeks...I will introduce Esther and then take a month off.

Esther is in the middle of the Bible. I'd like to give you some setting details for this book to begin with.

Setting – Exile in the Persian Empire



1. Esther's story takes place in Susa, the capital of Persia.
2. Time period: The reign of King Xerxes I (circa 480-465 BC).
3. The Jewish people were living in exile, scattered across the Persian Empire.
4. They were far from their homeland of Jerusalem, navigating life under foreign rule.

At the time of Esther, the Jewish people were in exile in Persia; this entire story happens during the reign of King Xerxes in Susa...

When the Babylonians conquered other nations, they liked to spread them out to prevent family groups from revolting. The Persians, however, let the people they conquered go home after a revolt; consequently, some of the Israelites went home and some stayed. Nevertheless, they

were scattered. Wherever they were, it was home. But sometimes it doesn't feel like home for a very long time. The Israelites are without a homeland during this time.

Culture – A World of Power, Prestige, and Fear

1. Persian society was defined by wealth, rigid class structures, and absolute authority.
2. A single law or the king's whim could either elevate a person or end their life.
3. Status held supreme importance

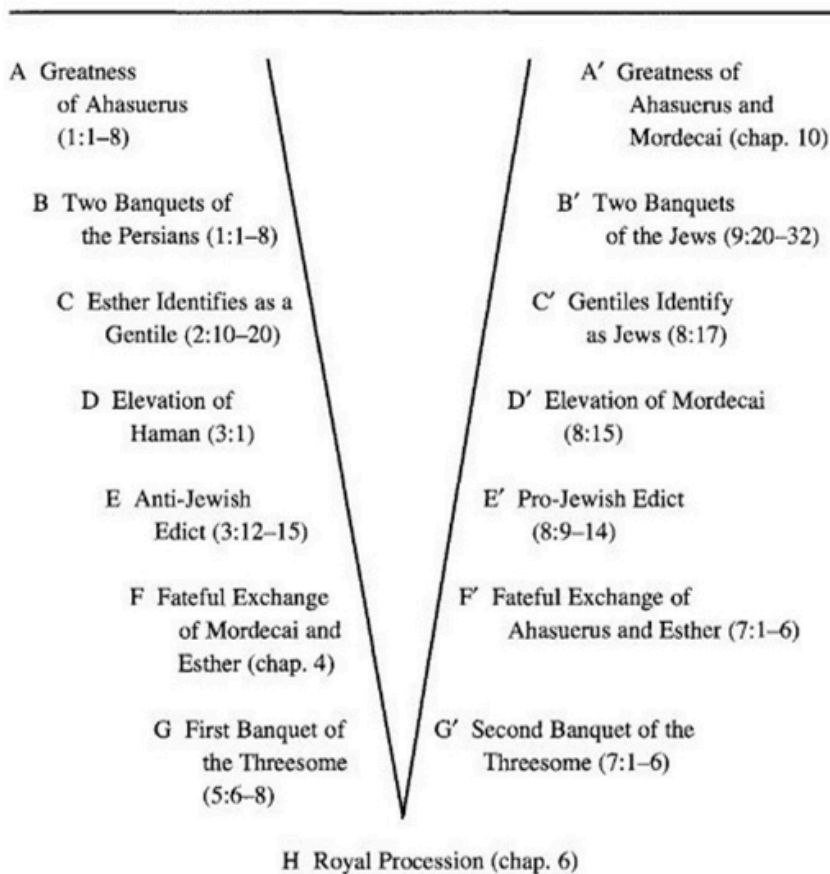


You will see these characteristics of the Persians in this story. Status has much importance and you don't want to talk about someone higher than you; keeping your mouth shut was the cultural application.

The Situation

The Jewish people were vulnerable—without land, temple, or political protection

Notice there is no temple or political protection. These people are trying to figure out how life works.



This is the cool part of Esther: they had a celebration similar to Halloween because people dressed up in costumes. It's two days: on Day 1, they read the first half of Esther. When Haman's name is read, everyone boos. On Day 2, they read part 2. The story goes along like a V... Esther is written like a historical play. We are continuing to discover these characters are real people in this drama. Israel understands this and celebrates it like a play. It opens and ends with a party: Notice there are many parallels.

At the bottom of the "V" to the left is the Royal Procession. Haman, the bad guy, wants to get rid of Mordecai because he

won't honor his status. Haman has a plan so the king will punish Mordecai. However, the night before the king can't sleep and has the law read to him. At the time he hears how Mordecai prevented an assassination attempt on him and wonders if Mordecai was properly honored. The next morning Haman comes to see the King in order to get Mordecai killed but before he could speak, the king asks him to find Mordecai and parade him through the city on a horse so everyone could see how great he was. The story is bad for Haman in the end when he was impaled on a stake.

Before we go further, I have a personal story:



Once when my daughter was little, we were house-sitting Sue's parents (who coincidentally lived near the Village) and they had a small dog. We decided to walk the dog and noticed a neighbor had a huge dog chained to a metal stake. The dog saw us and barked and yanked the chain and ran toward us. I froze but at that moment, out of nowhere, a small Asian guy came running with a big shovel and smacked the dog in the nose as hard as he could. The dog moaned and left and the shovel guy said nothing and walked away.

This is how I want my life to be all the time: God magically intervenes at the perfect time through miracles like he did with the Israelites, splitting the Red Sea, etc. However, now the people of Israel are stuck in Persia and God doesn't seem to be around like he used to be.

The curious thing about this book is:

God is never mentioned.

Not even when prayer is discussed, God is not mentioned. It's a drama and we are supposed to interpret something. Therefore, I want you to have God from Psalm 139 in your mind as we read this book. In every moment, God is in the shadows, always doing something and moving them in the right direction:

Psalm 139

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|---|--|
| 1 You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. | 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make |
| 2 You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. | my bed in the depths, you are there. |
| 3 You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. | 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, |
| 4 Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely. | 10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. |
| 5 You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. | 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," |
| 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. | 12 even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, |
| 7 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? | for darkness is as light to you. |

The 180 + 7 Day Party!!!

Esther 1:4 For a full 180 days he (Ahasuerus/Xerxes) displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty. 5 When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest who were in the citadel of Susa.

The story opens with a 180-day party; the king and queen are partying. Persians liked to show they were the best at everything, even at giving parties.

The Queen Says NO!

Esther 1:10 On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Karkas – 11 to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at. 12 But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger.

On the 7th day, the king is displeased because he cannot display his wife's beauty. The original language implied she was wearing her royal crown and perhaps you can infer that she is not wearing anything else. Sometimes we read over the line where the queen refuses the king what he wants. But don't miss that this was highly risky: we don't know what happens to her after this. The men surrounding the king realized that this incident was a poor and risky example to all the

others in the kingdom and they decided that they needed a law to prevent this from happening again. This was a very dramatic moment when they made this law. A plan to get a new queen is made.

Esther

Esther 2:7 Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

"Hadah" means myrtle tree and it also means peace/righteousness. The name "Esther" comes from a word for sexual goddess but in Hebrew it actually means "hidden." God is hidden and Esther represents this. Her righteousness and peace are also hidden. She is the picture of peace and righteousness yet the Persians know it as something different.

Esther

Esther 2:8 When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was **taken** to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. 9 She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants selected from the king's palace and moved her and her attendants into the best place in the harem.

In 2025, we haven't experienced a harem...but we need to know that Esther didn't think this was a good idea. She was TAKEN. This is like

a princess story with a brutal beginning. This was not her choice.

When you think about Persian society, what do you notice about what they valued in men and women?

Beauty, power, appearance, wealth, protocol. Has anything really changed? Even today, we value beauty for women, success, power, command, and wealth for men. Nothing has changed!

Exiles in Peter's First Letter

1 Peter 1:1 – To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces...

1 Peter 1:17 – Live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear.

1 Peter 2:11 – Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires...

Peter mentions “exiles” three times in I Peter:

Let's stop and think about what happens to a woman who is not acceptable to the king. She becomes a concubine, held captive with few choices or benefits. Today, we are also exiles in a foreign culture and value system and are taken and made into concubines without even really knowing it. How many of you drink coffee? The logo of Starbucks

is a siren and you drink your coffee under this. You live in a foreign culture where we have to walk on the balance beam of truth. Esther has some things that will help us think this through.

Esther 2:15 When the turn came for Esther (the young woman Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail) to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her. 16 She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. 17 Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. **So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.** 18 **And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality.**

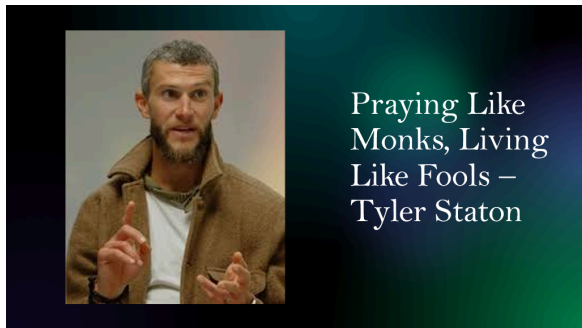
Modern and ancient scholars have trouble with Esther because she participates in everything and doesn't say no. Why didn't she act like Vashti? Keep in mind she is an exile and trying to figure it out without a temple or political protection. She finds favor and becomes queen.

Mordecai is desperate and worried about his niece. He has told her not to tell anyone she is Jewish.

Esther 2:21 During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. 22 But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai. **23 And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were impaled on poles. All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.**

Things looked good: the message is summed up in the first 2 chapters and then played out: ***God works in cascading coincidences.*** God is moving in all these events and aspects of our lives. It can be hard for us to acknowledge this, look for it, or imagine the story God is working out in our lives. Sometimes someone

will come out with a shovel and save us dramatically but most often, God moves in every little coincidence to save his people and care for us. It's difficult to grab ahold of this.



Tyler Staton knows how to be unkempt and yet cool in everything. Check out his book where he introduces a prayer to help us as exiles see God (from Ps 139) played out.

The Prayer of Examen is made up of five things to do at the end of the day, taking about 10 minutes.

The Prayer of Examen

Recognize God's Presence

Pause and remember that God is near, that He longs to meet you in this moment.

Prayer: Lord, help me see my day as You see it.

Give Thanks

Look back over the day and name moments where you experienced goodness, beauty, or kindness.

Thank God for the blessings, big and small.

Review the Day

Walk through your day like replaying a movie.

Where did you feel alive? Where did you feel distant from God? What stirred in you—joy, anger, fear, love?

Face Your Shortcomings

Be honest about the places where you missed the mark—where you were impatient, selfish, afraid.

Not with shame, but in the light of grace, asking for forgiveness and healing.

Look Toward Tomorrow

Ask God to be with you in the coming day.

Invite His strength, His wisdom, His love to guide you into whatever is next.

1. Pause and remember God is near: you pray to see the day that just happened.

2. Thank God for seeing the moments of goodness, beauty, or kindness. God is in these moments! This will help you understand where God was moving in your day.

3. You are ready to remember your day and narrate what happened.

4. Now we remember the places where we needed forgiveness and healing. It's amazing to go to bed with a clear and clean account!

5. We enter prayer by looking toward tomorrow with God's guidance.

This is a 10-minute process that will change how you narrate your life: you stop looking for the guy with the shovel and you will see things with hope and anticipation of what God is doing and going to do.

Look at how God positions Esther to bring deliverance and you can see this in your life, too! Practice this a couple of times and see how useful it is!

