

Mordecai and His Cousin Esther

Esther 2

Esther 2:1-20 - *“After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus subsided, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what had been decreed against her. ² Then the king’s servants who attended him said: “Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king; ³ and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan the citadel, into the women’s quarters, under the custody of Hegai the king’s eunuch, custodian of the women. And let beauty preparations be given them. ⁴ Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti.” This thing pleased the king, and he did so.⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ 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.⁸ 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, into the care of Hegai the custodian of the women. ⁹ 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.¹⁰ Esther had not revealed her people or family, for Mordecai had charged her not to reveal it. ¹¹ And every day Mordecai paced in front of the court of the women’s quarters, to learn of Esther’s welfare and what was happening to her.¹² Each young woman’s turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after she had completed twelve months’ preparation, according to the regulations for the women, for thus were the days of their preparation apportioned: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women. ¹³ Thus prepared, each young woman went to the king, and she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women’s quarters to the king’s palace.¹⁴ In the evening she went, and in the morning she returned to the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king’s eunuch who kept the concubines. She would not go in to the king again unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name.¹⁵ 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 Hegai the king’s eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ Then the king made a great feast, the Feast of Esther, for all his officials and servants; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces and gave gifts according to the generosity of a king.*

¹⁹ *When virgins were gathered together a second time, Mordecai sat within the king's gate.* ²⁰ *Now Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him."*

Background Notes

King Ahaseurus was King Xerxes I of the Persian Empire. He banished his queen, Vashti, from the royal courts because she refused to display herself at the king's banquet. After King Xerxes' wrath had subsided, he remembered what Vashti, and what she had done, and what had happened to her.

The phrase "after these things" (v1) indicates that some time had gone by since the events of chapter 1. In fact, when we compare the date given in Esther 1:3 (*"in the third year of his reign"*) to the date of Esther 2:16 (*"in the tenth month... in the seventh year of his reign"*), we see that four years had passed between the removal of Queen Vashti and the selection of Esther as Xerxes' new queen.

Secular history records that Xerxes I of Persia lost a major military battle to Greece in 479BC. Most likely during this time of discouragement and defeat, Xerxes remembered Vashti, and longed for the comforting presence of his queen. But Vashti had been deposed by an edict or law of the Medes and the Persians (1:19), and it was impossible to repeal or revoke these laws. (See also Daniel 6.) In fact, that's where we get the expression for a law that cannot be rescinded: "it's a law of the Medes and Persians."

So the king's counselors came up with a plan to find a new queen. Beautiful virgins from all over the Persian Empire would be brought into the king's harem. After a year's preparation, under the guidance of the king's eunuch, the young women would go before the king. Hegai, the keeper of the king's harem, was a eunuch - for obvious reasons.

Apparently it didn't take too much arm-twisting to convince the king that this was a great idea! And so the process of gathering the beautiful young maidens began. Through all of this, God was working behind the scenes to bring Esther to the throne - in order to preserve the Jewish people from annihilation.

Doctrinal Points

1. God can use personal beauty to accomplish His purposes.

In 597 BC, a man named Kish from the tribe of Benjamin was taken captive from the southern kingdom of Judah, and brought to Babylon (v5-6). Now, more than 100 years later, Kish's great-grandson Mordecai was living in Susa, one of the capitals of the Persian Empire. Mordecai was raising and caring for his young cousin, Esther, who was an orphan. Her Hebrew name was Hadassah, and her Persian name was Esther.

Esther was beautiful of form and face, and as a result she was one of the lovely young maidens who were taken into the king's palace. Do you think Esther's beauty was all by chance? Or was it by divine providence? The answer is obvious. God can use personal beauty to accomplish His purposes.

Esther was selected for her beauty, but once she was in the palace she won the favor of Hegai, the king's eunuch, and she was given special preferential treatment. Before the young ladies went before the king, they went through a twelve-month beautification process. Can you imagine twelve months of skin and body treatment?

In verse 14 we read, *"In the evening she went, and in the morning she returned."* What did they do all night? Play chess? I don't think so. So here's the question: was Esther committing adultery when she spent a night with the king? No. Why not? Because she was considered to be the king's wife, even though she was not yet the queen. *All* the king's concubines in his harem were legally "wives of the king." Xerxes of course was a polygamist, but Esther was not committing adultery.

And 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"*(v17). God can use personal beauty to accomplish His purposes.

Did you know that a significant number of the young women who have won the "Miss America" pageant over the years have been evangelical Christians - and some of them have given bold and courageous testimonies? These testimonies have encouraged many younger Christian girls to take a bold and committed stand for Christ. God can use personal beauty to accomplish His purposes – then and today.

2. God can use political office to accomplish His purposes.

Esther 2:21-23 - *"In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, doorkeepers, became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.²² So the matter became known to Mordecai, who told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name.²³ 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.*

The fact that Mordecai was "sitting at the king's gate" probably indicates that he held a political office. In ancient days, the gate of the city was the place where civil transactions were carried out.

In his position at the gate, Mordecai overheard a plot to assassinate the king. Mordecai told Esther, and Esther told the king. The plot was investigated and confirmed, and the King's two enemies were put to death. These events were recorded in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king. These records will play a significant part in the story

later on in the book of Esther. (By the way, this was not the book of Chronicles in the Bible, but the chronicles or records of King Xerxes I of Persia.)

So God was working behind the scenes, even through the accounts that were written into the official records of the Persian Empire. God used Mordecai's political office to accomplish His purposes, and God can use political office today to accomplish His purposes. This applies to political office on the national or state level, as well as political office on a local level.

I know a Christian man who is on the council of a nearby town. As a Christian he is using his office to fight for biblical standards and Christian values to be maintained in his town. God is at work through his office. This doesn't mean that every Christian should run for political office, but God can use political office to accomplish His purposes.

Practical Application

Let's remember our roots.

Mordecai instructed Esther not to make it known that she was Jewish (v10, 20). Why not? Because anti-Semitism was present in Persia then, just as it exists in many places in the world today.

As secular Jews in high places, Mordecai and Esther could have hidden or denied their Jewish heritage, and just lived life for themselves. But they didn't. They remembered their roots! Even though they had not been a part of the faithful Jews who returned to Jerusalem to rebuild and worship at God's Temple, at least they remembered they were Jews – and the Jews were (and are) God's special people. Mordecai and Esther remembered their roots, and they did everything they could to preserve the Jewish people.

Do we remember our roots? Many of us were raised in Christian homes and have a godly heritage. We were taught biblical values and standards. What are we doing to preserve this heritage?

Let's be like Mordecai and Esther, and do whatever we can to preserve our godly heritage and the Christian community. Let's remember our roots!