



## THE STORY



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**Scripture:** *The Story*-Chapter 20 - Esther

My parents gave me the name Mordecai, which is kind of fitting since the name means, “Warrior”. Makes me wonder what they knew about some of the things I would face later in my life. Parents sometimes have that strange sense of intuition, don’t they?

Some things in life you can never anticipate or ever be fully prepared for; some things in life that just never think that you’ll be asked to step in to. As a young man, I only expected to have to be responsible for me. I hadn’t taken a wife, I wasn’t planning on getting married anytime soon, I didn’t even have a girlfriend. And in my youth, when I wasn’t ready for it in any way, shape, or form, something unexpected happened- tragedy struck.

My uncle and his wife, died untimely and died young. As if being in exile in a foreign land wasn’t devastating enough, this loss in our extended family was just salt in the wound. It’s tragic when family members die suddenly isn’t it? Unexpectedly, and especially when, they are in their youth. But, in this case, what was even more tragic, is that their passing from this life to the next, left behind not only shattered memories, but a shattered little family. For you see, in their passing, they left behind a little girl, a beautiful, baby girl, now an orphaned, beautiful baby girl. Her name was Hadassah- and even though I was not old enough or wise enough to know how to raise a baby, because family is everything in our culture, I stepped to the plate. I took Hadassah as my own daughter. I ‘ll never forget the first time that I held little baby Hadassah in my arms, and prayed, “*God, help me to raise this girl in a way that brings glory to you*”. And, for the record, “I think raising girls may be more of challenging than raising boys” 😊

I asked God if I could receive just a portion of His wisdom in raising Hadassah, and He faithfully gave it, but I still made my share of mistakes, or at least things I wish I could have done differently. When Hadassah was now no longer a baby, but a young girl, God was sending many of our people home from exile in Babylon. The road was now made clear for us, God used a pagan king, Cyrus was his name, to release us to go back to Jerusalem, the city of peace where God himself dwelt. Our people had waited for this moment for many years, and our people were headed back to Jerusalem with singing, rejoicing and much jubilation.

I’ll never fully understand why I didn’t make the trek back to Jerusalem with our people. There were many days early in our story where I wished we had made the journey back home to Jerusalem with our people. But, for reasons unknown, we, along with some others, stopped for a season in Susa, in Persia, and it was here I, along with Hadassah, were about to see what it meant, what it truly meant, to be the people of God in a foreign land.

Susa was such a challenging place, much, much more than I could have ever imagined- we had lots of cultural learning to do. I had no idea how many cultural adjustments we would have to make in this new land. In an effort to ensure Hadassah grew up strong and was accepted amongst these people, I decided to change her name, from a Jewish name, to a Persian name. I gave her the Persian name Esther. I chose Esther, because it means “star”. I had no idea how brightly this star was eventually going to shine. Her parents couldn’t have possibly imagined the way that their little star was going to shine. It was indeed their prayer for her, before she was even born.

Of all the days I lamented about not taking Hadassah, Esther, back to Jerusalem, there was never a day that I sorrowed about stopping in Susa, like this one day. It was a day that served to stir up my biggest regrets, but a day that would also eventually lead to one of our biggest redemptions.

As you may know, not every King is a King after God's heart and eager to lead in God's ways. Even some of our own Jewish Kings fed their own egos and their own selfish appetites. The King here in Susa, King Xerxes, was the epitome of a King who fed his own selfish desires. The rumors were circulating everywhere- through the markets, through the places of worship, through all the hustle and bustle of the city that the King, Xerxes, had removed his wife, Queen Vashti, from the throne because she refused to parade herself like a sexual object in front of the King's drunken loyal subjects. Many people believed that Xerxes was selfish enough to ask this of the Queen, because he was known for doing only what served for his selfish, sexual pleasures. But many people failed to believe that he would remove the Queen from the throne. But, all of Susa was about to see how selfish their King truly was. That is when the worst day of my life came to pass.

How does a self-indulgent, pleasure seeking, King replace his Queen? Of course, he simply surveys the land for the one most sensually pleasing and most sexually pure. Xerxes sent his commissioners, all throughout Persia, to find the most beautiful and the purest, and to bring them to Him. And of course, the event I feared the most came to pass, they came, they came, for my beloved daughter Esther. My beautiful, innocent, pure, and terrified daughter, being taken to the courts of the King. Yes, a Jewish girl, going to a Persian harem. A day I cried and wailed, and lamented, asking *"why, why, why, didn't I make the journey to Jerusalem rather than detouring to Susa?"*

It shouldn't have surprised me when Esther didn't come back. I knew she was full of power and beauty, and the grace of God was on her. After they took her, I went to the King's gate every day for months, and did what any dad would do. I paced back and forth, and forth and back. I worried, and prayed and prayed, and worried, and listened to see what I could learn, and I knew the worst and the

best was about to happen. And it did, my Hadassah, my Esther, was taken by King Xerxes not just into his harem, but unto his throne. My cousin, who became my daughter, had now become, King Xerxes queen.

It was painful, and as I reflect back now, strangely probable, that she would rise to this. Maybe I did too much, to ensure that she would fit in here in Persia. My Hadassah, who became my Esther- I always told her never to tell anyone here where she was really from, for certainly there would be those here in Persia that would hate her for her connection to our people. But, for now, and maybe forever, it was to be our secret. And for this season, she need to be the Persian queen, not a Jewish wanderer.

It's amazing what you hear sitting at the King's gate. The days when I paced and prayed for the welfare of my Esther, I heard, I overheard, a conversation that was not mine to hear. Sometimes you wish you didn't hear what you heard, because you know you have to do something. This day was one of those times. Two men, Bigthana and Teresh, who were King's officers, supposed to be his supporters, were actually plotting to kill King Xerxes. Conspiring to kill your own King? These men were the lowest of the low- and I knew I had to spoil this plot. I relayed this news to my Hadassah, I mean, Queen Esther, as quick as I could. It was only a few days later, these men were hanged, in the public square, for all of Susa to see. God used me, to save the King- a King that I actually resented deep down in my being. However, agree or not, I will serve the King. I was never recognized officially for debunking this spoiled plot, but I knew someday, I would receive my reward in eternity.

I always told Hadassah, Esther, Queen Esther, that being Jewish doesn't serve to our benefit, or our security, in this country. Even though we are not alone here, there are many who hate us, for no good reason, only because of where we are from and the way we have been divinely favoured. This could only serve as a secret for a season, I knew our roots would eventually serve to our ruin.

King Xerxes honored and exalted a man named Haman, to one of the highest positions in the land. And I can honor any man, I could even honor a King who took my daughter, but I could not honor

this man. Haman was an Agatite. Us Jews had always been enemies, way back from the days of the Exodus, with these pagan Agatite scoundrels. And now, because of his high-ranking status, everyone was expected to bow to Him, and everyone did. Well, almost everyone. I did not, I would not, I could not, I should not, I must not...never, ever, bring me death first....

I didn't know it then, but by defying this wretched Haman, it was as if I had enraged Beelzebub himself. Haman, as if he didn't detest me enough for not giving him the honor he was due, hated me with a rage that was unquenchable when he found out what I had kept a secret since my first day in this city. He discovered that which I had concealed until this very day. He knew it, and he hated me for it....He knew I was no Persian, He knew....I was a Jew. And just to "*flex his royal muscle*" and win the epic showdown between his ancient peoples and my ancient peoples, he decided to not simply make me pay, but to make all of my people pay....and he rolled the dice....I mean, he really did...he literally rolled the dice on the fate of my people.

With the approval of our King Xerxes, he cast, what is called in our culture, the pur, he rolled the dice, and the dice landed on a month, and a day. The month landed on was the month of Adar, the day landed on was the 13<sup>th</sup> day. That is the exact date, that Haman decreed, every Jew in Susa, would die. Yes, you heard it correctly friends, one wicked man, with the roll of a dice, sealed the fate, the death sentence, the genocide of an entire people. When the date of your death, and date of the death of your people, is set by the roll of the dice, the fate of the draw, it makes you wonder, if there's really a sovereign who is in control. Does our lives rise and fall by the luck of the dice (pur), or is it by the hand and purpose of the Almighty? On this day in Susa, it appeared as though if there was a god, if there was someone in control, it was Haman.

This news, shocked me, and even shocked the Persians of Susa. They were absolutely bewildered. Us Jews were good neighbours, hard workers, and people of humility and integrity. But who dare question Haman, the pride of King Xerxes? Nobody would come to our defense, even though it was clear before God and man, that this was not a "just" decision, this was a diabolical historical vendetta.

Besides tearing my clothes in sorrow and weeping and wailing in grief for what was coming for my people, what was I to do? I feel that because of my stubborn national pride, and my personal decision not to bow, I had now brought all of us into this death sentence, and there was nothing I could do, to bring us out. Hope was crushed by despair. I knew then, in that moment, that there was only one hope for our people. If there was any good reason why we had detoured into this city, and any good reason why my Hadassah, my Esther, got taken from my care, and got forcibly swept into Xerxes throne room, it was about to be revealed.

It was always my desire to want the best for Esther, I raised her the best I knew how, I protected her from abandonment when her parents passed and from cultural stigma in this city to the most of my ability. I did what I could, God will be my judge, to protect and shelter my Hadassah. But now, it was time, it was time for my Hadassah, to be the Queen Esther, that she was now assigned to be. I could protect her no more, it was time for her to be the person that her parents always prayed and hoped, that she would be.

I knew I had one chance to reach Esther with this message, not just to reach her ears, but to reach her heart, to speak to her soul. She was the only one, she was the chosen one, to reach our people. And my message to Esther, a message of dire urgency, it was critical, it was life or death, that she must know, that this was the moment that she had not only been put in position for, but this was the moment she was born for.

We have had a lot of "why moments" in our relationship! "*Daddy, why do our people long so much for a city many of them have never seen?*" "*Daddy, why do we seem to never fit in, but always roam from place to place?*" "*Daddy, why did God have to take my real mom and dad?*" "*Daddy, did they love me?*" "*Daddy, do you really love me or did you just take me out of obligation?*" We have had lots of those moments? I am sure that since the day she was taken from me and brought to the King, there are more why questions now than ever.

All of those "why" questions, now had one overarching answer. In my plea to Esther, as I scribed the parchment with tears dripping down, the

answer to all the why questions, all her questions that I could never really answer until now, came forth like a mighty river flowing from the throne of God, *“Esther, my Hadassah, now Queen of all Persia, do not think that because you are in the Kings house that you alone of all the Jews will escape Haman’s wrath- you won’t. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise from another place, but you, and us, we’ll all perish. And who knows, well, we all know, I know, God knows, your mom and dad know, that you were brought here to Susa, and brought to this royal position, for such a time as this...”*

I thought I knew how Esther would respond- a part of me wondered if she would step into this, and a part of me never doubted for a second that she would. Esther’s response arrived only days later, and her reply, being a person of conviction and few spoken words, replied with the passion of the beautiful, strong Hadassah I had given my life to raise, *“I will go to the King. Even though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish...”*

She was the only one who had the power to influence Xerxes to change this decision, but Xerxes was so unpredictable and so irrational, that you never knew how he would respond. He removed the first Queen on a whim, what will he do when he learns Esther is a Jew who wants to save all the rest of the Jews? She could have died that day. Hadassah could have found a most unfortunate fate and joined her parents prematurely in the regions of the dead. Would Xerxes kill or would Xerxes cooperate? Would Xerxes erupt in slander or would he empathize with sympathy?? Would he listen to Esther and deliver our people, or would he laugh at Esther and destroy our people?

There were many sleepless nights, restless and anxious nights, nights where spirit and mind would wander, awaiting what the Kings reply would be. Have you ever had a sleepless night? I certainly have. It happens to us all I guess. Even Xerxes had a sleepless night in the midst of all this. It’s amazing what you will do when you are sleep deprived. What do you do when you are encumbered with anxiety in the deep watches of the night and sleep cannot find you?

I’ll tell you what Xerxes did on his sleepless night. He calls for a bedtime story. But not the kind of bedtime stories I used to tell Hadassah, he called for his servants to come to him, in his chambers, and as he laid trying to find rest, they read to remind him of the stories of his kingdom, and his victories, and the praises of his people. He liked to hear of himself. As the servants told him the grand tales of his Kingship, they read to him about a time in his kingship when two of his most “loyal followers” planned for his death, and a lowly, unknown, obscure Persian foiled the plan and saved his life.

The king moves from drowsiness to full state of alert and says, *“has this person ever been rewarded for his kindness towards me?”* Of course, the answer was no, and of course, this person, who saved the king so many years ago, and had never been rewarded... was me. And who did the King select to reward me? The man who thought himself to be worthy of praise and kneeling and adoration of course! Haman!! Haman was forced by the King to dress me in a Kingly robe and place me on his own horse and parade me around the city in praise and honor. Haman. The man who rolled the dice on my life and the life of my people, the man who tried to force me to kneel, was now leading a parade in my honor! Oh, how the great the reversal was. It was the moment I knew, there was something, someone working behind the scenes, and some way, somehow, my people would be saved.

The reversals of life are often ironic, but vindication is sweet. This was just the beginning of Haman’s humbling. Of course, because Hadassah and I, Queen Esther and I, were both led to this foreign land, for such a time as this, Xerxes honored his Queen’s request, and not only were our people saved, but Haman and his sons were hanged publically, for all of Susa to see.

And would you believe it, on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of Adar, the day that Haman, rolled the dice on God’s people to die, was the very same day, the very same day, that the people of God lived and defeated their enemies in Susa. The 13<sup>th</sup> of Adar, the day of purim, the day of lots that Haman had rolled on us, turned out to be a day where we were saved and not slaughtered. The 13<sup>th</sup> of Adar, the day of purim, the day of lots, turned out to be a day where we were exalted, and not exterminated The 13<sup>th</sup> of Adar, the

day of Purim, the day of lots, turned out to be a day where we were delivered, and not decimated.

We learned that day, I learned that day. That Haman doesn't control the lots. There will always be a Hadassah, an Esther that Yahweh can use, when the lots are stacked against you. Who knows, maybe it is you, that God is using, to step in, as his people in a foreign land, for such a time as this.

### **Transition**

So, is God at work in a book where his name is never mentioned? Is God at work in your life, in times like it seems he is far away? Mark Driscoll said it this way, "You may never hear the voice, never get the miracle, never hear the thunder of his presence, never get that one prayer answered, but he is at work, in the backgrounds....we need to learn to trust "the invisible hand of providence....."

- Are you trusting that God is going to use you for such a time as this?

- Is there a King, a person, that God needs to wake in the middle of the night to convict/reveal truth to, on your behalf?

- Are you assuming the sovereignty of God is in control, even though you don't see it?

- Are you believing that what the enemy meant for evil, God will use, turn around, reverse for your good?

I feel that if Esther and Mordecai were New Testament people, and they could claim a life verse, it would be this...

*"And we know, because He is working in the background, working great reversals on behalf of God's people, that in all things, in all things, in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose..."*  
(Rom 8:28, additions mine ☺)

**\* Kings rule over nations, but God rules over them both (Driscoll).**

## **Points to Ponder**

### ***THE STORY* – Esther Queen of Beauty and Courage**

#### **Chapter 20**

**With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.**

1. Mordecai was faced with an unexpected situation when faced with the prospect of raising an orphaned cousin, Esther. Have you faced unexpected family responsibilities that have shaped/impacted your faith journey?
2. Mordecai's detour to Susa (Persia) en route to Jerusalem began with a hopeless situation and ended with a display of God's sovereignty. Do you have these moments in your life where you sense you took a "wrong turn", but God eventually used it for your good?
3. Have you had one of those "Esther moments" where you knew the right, moral thing to do could cost you a steep personal price? If so, what did you do? Would you do the same thing if you had the opportunity over again?
4. God's name is never mentioned in the book of Esther. Yet, His sovereignty is at work behind the scenes. Reflecting over your life, can you recall a time when you didn't sense God's presence in the situation, but His behind the scenes work eventually displayed itself in an amazing way?
5. God used Mordecai and Esther in a foreign land, to reveal His power amongst a pagan people. How does this give you perspective on how God wants to use you in a land that is becoming more and more "foreign" to the ways of God?