

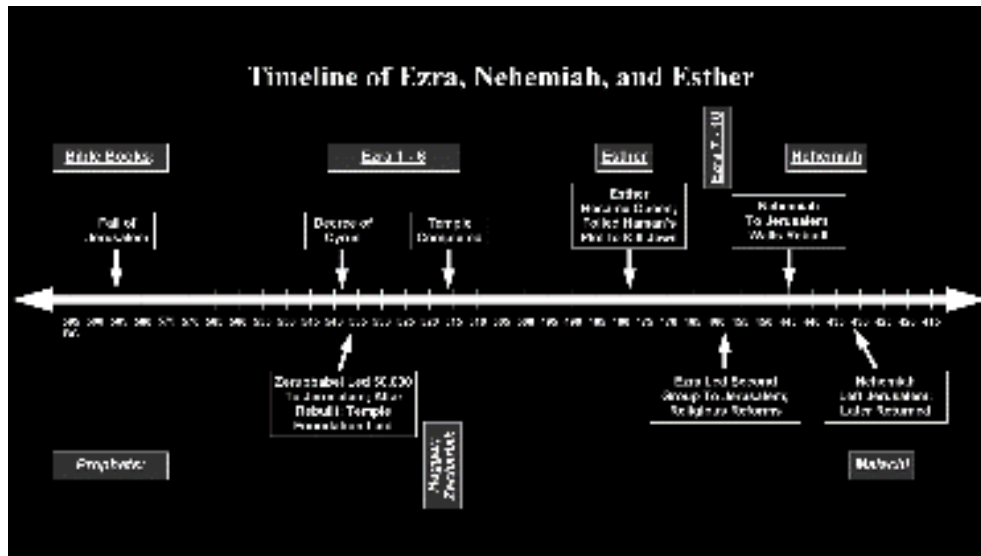
Preparing Heroes

Esther 2

Go ahead and be turning in your Bible's to Esther chapter two.

REVIEW...

The reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) was from 486BC to 465BC.



Given that the events of the passage we're studying took place some 20 years before Ezra led the second group to Jerusalem and 35 years before Nehemiah heads out to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, it's likely they both lived through them.



Ahasuerus ruled over a MASSIVE empire (127 provinces from India to Ethiopia), and at the outset of his reign, he was immediately embroiled in suppressing uprisings all throughout Babylon.

The first chapter begins in Susa, one of the capitals of the Persian empire, the capital in which the royal officials would WINTER because of the oppressive heat of the region.

As Pastor Dale pointed out last week, we begin at a LAVISH BANQUET in the WINTER CAPITAL OF SUSA. This grand feast preceded his MILITARY CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE GREEKS, and it was meant to assure everyone that HE COULD AFFORD TO WAGE THIS WAR.

If only he'd stopped there... He had displayed his might and wealth, but then he makes a request that causes his wife to refuse him, he and his attendants blow it WAY OUT OF PROPORTION, and the king in his irrational anger banishes the wife he seemed to cherish, never to lay eyes on her again. Sounds like a soap opera, right?

"These are the days of our lives..."

However, none of it caught God of His guard. The writer continues in chapter two, saying...

Esther 2:1

After these things, when the anger of King Ahasuerus had abated, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her.

Now, while this passage seems to pick up right where the last one left off, many scholars agree that there was a gap of, at least, FOUR YEARS here, during which time the king waged his UNSUCCESSFUL military campaign against the Greeks. Remember, the first chapter was a

DISPLAY OF WEALTH AND MIGHT to the representatives of all the provinces of the Persian empire, showing them that Ahasuerus had everything he needed to wage war.

Well, *THAT* didn't go as planned. Now, returned to Susa and quite deflated, the "anger" and preoccupation with war having abated, the king shuffled about the quiet halls of the citadel, and he felt ALONE. He missed Vashti. Sure, the king had a harem full of women he could be with, but given the fact that Vashti filled his thoughts, it's clear that she was special to him.

"...he remembered...what she had done..."

All she had done was refused to be ogled by the masses, something that was BELOW her station as queen, as well as unlawful if the masses weren't allowed to even see the king's harem. So, in his drunken stupor, it's possible that the king had demanded something unlawful of Vashti, something he would've never demanded had he not been drunk. It's why it's written in the Proverbs...

Proverbs 31:4-5

**4 It is not for kings, O Lemuel,
it is not for kings to drink wine,
or for rulers to take strong drink,
5 lest they drink and forget what has been decreed
and pervert the rights of all the afflicted.**

Kings weren't to indulge in wine or strong drink because, in their station, they would not only break the laws like any drunk, but they would PERVERT the law! I mean, when Vashti refused to comply with the king's demand, his court was AT A LOSS OF WHAT TO DO because she had broken no law!

Esther 1:15

According to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti, because she has not performed the command of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs?

They couldn't determine a specific LAW she had broken other than that she had refused the king, so they MADE a law to punish her. It says the king remembered "**what had been decreed against her,**" and as I read it, I can't help but think that he now felt her punishment was overly severe...

Esther 1:19

If it please the king, let a royal order go out from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be repealed, that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus. And let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she.

Vashti was stripped of her crown and EXILED. She was essentially a PRISONER. She would be taken care of for the rest of her days, but she would essentially be like one of the king's concubines, only she would never be summoned again. More on that in a moment...

Thanks to his drunken and rash edict, he could never see her again. What a pathetic ruler. He banished the woman he loved forever all because the "henpecked" Memucan was afraid his wife would walk all over him when he went home because of Vashti's actions.

Esther 2:2-4

2 Then the king's young men who attended him said, Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king. 3 And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in Susa the capital, under custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women. Let their cosmetics be given them. 4 And let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti. This pleased the king, and he did so.

The king's attendants set out to find him a new lover! THEY needed him to have a new lover! His DESPONDENCY affected them because, as long as the king was unhappy, they were likely to encounter his wrath. What's more, if the king devised a way for Vashti to return, things would be even worse for them because these were likely the "wise men who knew the time" from chapter one who got her sent away in the first place (Memucan).

So, these attendants recommended that they institute a DRAFT! Except, instead of conscripting young men who were strong enough to wield a weapon and fight a war, they conscripted beautiful young ladies who were virgin and could please the king. Seriously! What they were suggesting was **NOT VOLUNTARY**. They didn't plaster the empire with posters advertising a beauty pageant with the grand prize of getting to be queen! These girl were **ROUNDED UP!**

Think of all the parents who likely hid their daughters and lied to officials, saying that they had no virgin daughters. As Wiersbe pointed out, think of how many beautiful girls hurried and got married TO ANYONE just so they wouldn't have to be locked away in the king's harem!

This would cause such HEARTACHE and UPHEAVAL, but hey! The king was lonely, so he went with the advice of his attendants! ***I tell you, for a guy who was supposed to be THE RULER, all I've seen him do is what others have told him to do.*** Anyway...

It was a pitifully pagan scenario, but God was sovereign enough to use it. As we'll see, the banishment of Vashti and the subsequent events kicked off God's plan to save His people Israel BEFORE THEY EVEN NEEDED SAVING! We'll talk about those perilous circumstances next time.

For now, know this: God was NEITHER THE AUTHOR of the sin that surrounded these events, NOR DID HE CONDONE the events by using them to bring about the salvation of His people. As Pastor Dale taught last week, even when you can't see Him, GOD IS STILL IN CONTROL, even in a godless empire like Persia.

It's like we sing on Sunday mornings (Way Maker)...

**Even when I don't see it, You're working
Even when I don't feel it, You're working
You never stop, You never stop working**

It was a frightful time in Persia, but we've all found ourselves in such harrowing circumstances, haven't we? Times when life itself seemed "OUT OF OUR HANDS?" It's terrifying...but EXCITING too, right? It's then that the Lord moves. When you and I have done all we can according to God's Word, God's getting ready to do something, and that's EXCITING!

A.B. Simpson said something that describes this scene in history well. He said...

"God is preparing His heroes, and when the opportunity comes, He can fit them into their places in a moment, and the world will wonder where they came from."

God is preparing YOU today. Did you know that? You say, "**For what?**" Exactly! *WHO KNOWS?!* The bottom line is this: God sees the big picture. He sees all that your life holds, and the experiences that He allows in your life today will prepare you for tomorrow if you'll submit to His way of handling them instead of your own. That's key! It's as King Solomon wrote...

Proverbs 3:5-6

**5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.
6 In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths.**

In all your ways--as you carry out your responsibilities on the job or at school, as you interact with others in your community or at home, as you make decisions and do things that no one but God will ever see, WILL YOU DO IT HIS WAY, trusting Him and not leaning on your own understanding? Will you let God prepare you? Make no mistake. GOD ALONE IS THE HERO OF EVERY STORY. He perfectly fit His key people into His grand plan, and now we get to meet them. In verse five it says...

Esther 2:5-6

5 Now there was a Jew in Susa the citadel whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite, 6 who had been carried away from Jerusalem among the captives carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away.

Now, it wasn't Mordecai who was taken in the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 597BC. It's likely Kish was the one taken 120 years prior to these events.

"Mordecai" literally means "little man" or "worshipper of Mars." It's a pagan name associated with the Babylonian deity Marduk. This would have been his secular name, similar to how the Hebrew Daniel was also called Belteshazzar, and Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah who are better known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. However, unlike these other Jews, Mordecai's Jewish name is unknown.

"Mordecai, the son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite,"

You know who else was a Benjaminite, a son of Kish, and had a relative by the name of Shimei? Israel's first king, Saul. As one commentator remarked, given the use of irony throughout the Book of Esther, it's likely more than a coincidence that the names of those in Mordecai's lineage match those in Israel's first king's. Next time, in chapter three, you'll see continued association with Israel's kings and her enemies. Just as Mordecai is associated with Israel's first king, Saul, the storyteller connects our story's antagonist, "Haman the Agagite," to King Saul's ancient enemy, Agag, king of the Amalekites.

Why does the storyteller emphasize this association? Who knows? However, it's clearly intentional. How did the scenario between King Saul and Agag end? You can check it out in 1 Samuel 15, but I'll give you a hint: it didn't go well for Agag. Talk about "FORESHADOWING!"

In verse seven we learn...

Esther 2:7-11

7 He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter. 8 So when the king's order and his edict were proclaimed, and when many young women were gathered in Susa the citadel in custody of Hegai, Esther also was taken into the king's palace and put in custody of Hegai, who had charge of the women. 9 And the young woman pleased him and won his favor. And he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and her portion of food, and with seven chosen young women from the king's palace, and advanced her and her young women to the best place in the harem. 10 Esther had not made known her people or kindred, for Mordecai had commanded her not to make it known. 11 And every day Mordecai walked in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and what was happening to her.

Mordecai was the caretaker for the book's namesake, HADASSAH (had-as-saw')...er, I mean Esther. Here again we see the double names, Jewish and Persian. "Esther" is possibly derived from the Persian word for "STAR," or even from the Babylonian goddess Ishtar.

The Jewish name Hadassah (Ha-da-saw) means "MYRTLE," as in the Myrtle Tree.



So, her Persian name means "star," and her Jewish name means "myrtle," and incidentally, the myrtle tree produces flowers that are shaped kind of like a star, so there's that. What do we now know about these new central character in our story?

- Esther was BEAUTIFUL, WINSOME, and OBEDIENT.
- Mordecai was LOVING and SHREWD, looking after his adopted daughter and instructing her to conceal her identity.

Esther 2:12

Now when the turn came for each young woman to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their beautifying, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women—

Between the oil of myrrh and spices, the women's skin, hair, and likely their clothes would be completely infused with pleasant aromas, especially after SIX MONTHS! Also, given the arid climate of the region and its drying effect on the skin, it makes sense that ointments would be a part of the women's beauty regimen.

Esther 2:13-14

13 when the young woman went in to the king in this way, she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. 14 In the evening she would go in, and in the morning she would return to the second harem in custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the concubines. She would not go in to the king again, unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.

While it's trendy in much of Christendom today to sexualize the scriptures—like saying that Ruth and Boaz had relations on the threshing floor (something I adamantly reject)—the description here of the king's evaluation of the women leaves little to the imagination.

The virgin girl would be brought at evening from the harem overseen by Hegai, the eunuch in charge of the virgins, she would spend the night in the king's chambers, and in the morning she would return to the "second" or SEPARATE harem overseen by Shaashgaz, the eunuch in charge of the concubines. After her night with the king, the woman's designation changed.

After their turn, none of the women would go in to the king again unless he delighted in her and specifically requested her return. What's more, they couldn't return home either. Once they had been with the king, they were his. Apart from EXTREMELY RARE INVITATIONS from the king, these young women would live out their days in loneliness. They may have formed friendships between one another and the eunuchs, but they would never know lasting companionship and intimacy.

You can see why it's likely that many a beautiful young lady, upon hearing of the king's edict, probably married anyone to avoid being taken. Even if she didn't love the man she married, at least SHE COULD STILL RAISE A FAMILY, ASSOCIATE WITH HER PARENTS, and LIVE WHERE SHE GREW UP. Any hope of these things vanished upon entering the harem.

Esther 2:15

When the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his own daughter, to go in to the king, she asked for nothing except what Hegai the king's eunuch, who had charge of the women, advised. Now Esther was winning favor in the eyes of all who saw her.

Once again, Esther proves her WISDOM. She had garnered FAVOR with Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the women, and when she was allowed to take something in with her to the king, she relied upon the RECOMMENDATION OF HEGAI. The scriptures are mute on the specifics, but we can infer from them that Hegai set her up with her best chance of success. She CULTIVATED the relationship, and then she RELIED upon it.

Esther 2:16-18

16 And when 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 women, and she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. 18 Then the king gave a great feast for all his officials and servants; it was Esther's feast. He also granted a remission of taxes to the provinces and gave gifts with royal generosity.

Naturally, the protagonist we've all fallen in love with wins the king's affection and becomes his queen, and upon her coronation, Ahasuerus celebrates lavishly.

Ahasuerus “**granted a remission of taxes to the provinces...**” Oh, yeah! That’s right! Out of all 127 provinces of his vast empire, the woman who would become the queen was already right there in Susa. Was that coincidence? Was it coincidence that this daughter of a man **associated with Israel's first king** would be the “fairest of the land,” and ascend to the palace and become integral in God’s plan to save His people? That the girl raised by a man who was **right in the mix of events with the ability to influence them** would be chosen? NOPE.

God is in control! Nothing is impossible for the Lord, including making sure this lovely, young lady found favor with everyone she met, including the king. As it says in Proverbs...

Proverbs 21:1

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.

However, the “coincidence” doesn't end there. Esther has been elevated to the king's side, and Mordecai would soon follow...

Esther 2:19-23

19 Now when the virgins were gathered together the second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. 20 Esther had not made known her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had commanded her, for Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him. 21 In those days, as Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. 22 And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai. 23 When the affair was investigated and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows. And it was recorded in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.

Many scholars believe that, since Mordecai regularly sat at the king's gate, he was a **high-ranking government official** since the gate was where important business was transacted.

Even after Esther had been elevated to the king's side as his queen, SHE OBEYED THE MAN WHO RAISED HER. We witnessed the wisdom of Esther in relying upon the king's attendant for all she needed to impress the king, and now as we see her keep her heritage a secret, HER SHREWDNESS IS COMMENDED.

As Mordecai continued serving the empire and inquiring into Esther's welfare, sitting daily at the king's gate, he overheard a CONSPIRACY to ASSASSINATE the king! This was not an uncommon way for a king to go out. There are a multitude of examples from history and even a few from the Bible as well as. King Joash went out this way...

2 Kings 12:20-21

20 His servants arose and made a conspiracy and struck down Joash in the house of Mollo, on the way that -goes down to Silla. 21 It was Jozacar the son of Shimeath and Jehozabad the

son of Shomer, his servants, who struck him down, so that he died. And they buried him with his fathers in the city of David, and Amaziah his son reigned in his place.

Here's another example from ASSYRIA...

2 Kings 19:36-37

36 Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went home and lived at Nineveh. 37 And as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, struck him down with the sword and escaped into the land of Ararat. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.

So, yeah, assassination was not an uncommon way to go out as a king in ancient times. This is a **"real deal"** account of life in the royal court. Mordecai informed Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king "in the name of Mordecai." What a brilliant thing to do! Did Esther need further favor in the king's eyes? No! She was already queen! So, now she elevated the man who had raised her in the eyes of the king, and what did he do with the conspirators?

The scriptures say that he hung these guards **"on the gallows,"** which, when you hear this phrase, you likely think of this...



However, the word in the Hebrew vaguely has to do with a wooden object, and the Persians were better known for putting people on these...



Please excuse the watermark. This was the largest, least gruesome pic that I could find that had to do with impalement. Word to the wise, if you ever think you need to find a pic having to do with impalement, trust me, you don't. Just don't. It is what the Persians did, though. It's how King Darius threatened those who attempted to challenge the edict of the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem; he vowed that he would destroy the individual's home and impale him on a beam from it.

This is almost certainly how the king's would-be assassins were executed.

And what did the king do for the HEROIC Jew who reported the conspiracy and saved his life? NOTHING! So much for that, right?! Oh, yeah, he wrote it down and all. *"Mordecai stopped me from being killed. Good job, Mordecai."*

However, even the king's failure to reward his protector in that moment was fortuitous. As we'll see, Mordecai's reward would come later, **PRECISELY WHEN HE NEEDED IT THE MOST**. And so it is with us. Yes, God gives us good things in this life because He's good, but when does He reward believers for the deeds done in the body? **AT THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST!** Right after the **RAPTURE!**

The Book of Esther is a book of **APPARENT IRONY** and dramatic **REVERSALS**. In the **ONLY BOOK** of the Bible that **NEVER MENTIONS GOD**, one could naively esteem much of what transpires in it as **COINCIDENCE**, but you see...



...the "irony" and "coincidence" are the FINGERPRINTS OF GOD! It isn't SERENDIPITY; it's SOVEREIGNTY.

I want to share Simpson's quote with you again...

"God is preparing His heroes, and when the opportunity comes, He can fit them into their places in a moment, and the world will wonder where they came from."

God is preparing YOU. Will you allow Him to grow you by surrendering to His will in whatever situation comes your way? God created you with divine purpose. He wasn't just killing time and filling space when He made you, and as you and I allow Him to have His way each day in our lives, He prepares us to be fit into His perfect plan and be INSTANTLY READY. How are you allowing Him to prepare you? In what ways could you submit further to His preparation?