



## **ESTHER** (Week 1) - Brave in Circumstances

**The Bible is filled with stories of men and women who obeyed God in such courageous ways that the only word we can use to describe them is brave.**

**And as we begin our series in the book of Esther today, the main character in our story can certainly be described as brave.**

**The book of Esther is itself a brave book. It is the only book in the entire Bible that never mentions God by name, which is very interesting in a compilation of books inspired by God. However, something else occurs in the book of Esther that is hard for us to see**

because of our unfamiliarity with the Bible itself.

What happens all throughout the book of Esther can be compared to movies that reference other movies. For instance, in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, after Ferris miraculously gets Cameron to leave his dad's Ferrari with a parking garage valet, we see the valet and his buddy out joyriding in it. We see them soaring through the air in the car in a shot that echoes the Millennium Falcon jumping into hyperspace as the Star Wars theme plays.

This happens all throughout Esther. As the story plays out, it shadows scenes from other Old Testament biblical stories. Time does not permit us to delve into each one of these references today, but maybe another Sunday in this series we'll look at one or two.

However, by the end of the book we will see God's hand in every detail of every aspect of every life in this book.

The book was probably written by the character Mordecai (Esther 9:20), but it never says so explicitly.

The purpose of this book becomes clear. If not for the purposeful hand of God in the details of the specific lives in this account, God's people would have been extinguished forever, which would mean no future Savior for mankind. In the book of Esther we see that what Job says is true: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted."

This book should destroy deistic views of God in your daily life.

If you engage the Bible, you eventually have to give up deistic concepts of God where He is distant and hands off except in rare circumstances. It seems even a lot of Christians have a view of God where He intervenes only when necessary. He's pretty much hands off, let free will rule the day but He'll course correct when needed.

This book demonstrates that God is involved in every detail of every circumstance of every life even when we are unaware of His presence. God is orchestrating events just as Scripture testifies that He is.

**This knowledge will allow us to face any circumstance in life with great bravery, as Esther does.**

## **Esther 1:1-22**

1 Now in the days of Ahasuerus (hash-sue-wear-us), the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, 2 in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa, the citadel,

**We can see that the author intends for the text to be taken as an actual story, not as a parable or as a fable or anything other than an actual account that happened during the reign of King Ahasuerus.**

3 in the third year of his reign he gave a feast for all his officials and servants.

**So, powerful man throws big party.**

The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were before him, 4 while he showed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days, 180 days.

**A powerful man wants to display his power. That's such an ancient problem. I'm glad that doesn't happen anymore.**

5 And when these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in Susa the citadel, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace. 6 There were white cotton curtains and violet hangings fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rods and marble pillars, and also couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and precious stones. 7 Drinks were served in golden vessels, vessels of different kinds, and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king. 8 And drinking was according to this edict: "There is no compulsion." For the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace to do as each man desired.

**In other words: "You only have to party as much as you want. You don't have to drink, but we're all getting drunk."**

9 Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women in the palace that belonged to King Ahasuerus.

10 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine,

**His heart was merry with wine... guess who got wasted? A powerful man is powerfully drunk. This never leads to good things.**

he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, 11 to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at.

**Does he summon her because he wants to enjoy her company? Nope. Does he summon her to exploit her beauty for his own ego? Yup.**

**King Ahasuerus wants to show her off for his own sake. This is the point of what is called “the trophy wife.” She’s only there to make the man look good. It’s a very self-centered type of emotion, which is why women often respond to it negatively. Queen Vashti is no different. She responds negatively to the selfish motive of the King.**

**This has not changed. Women still respond negatively to such exploitative behavior.**

12 But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. At this the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him.

**This is so like human nature. A man acts selfishly toward a woman and then he gets upset because she reacts negatively to his selfish behavior.**

**This is proof positive (or rather proof negative) that humanity’s predicament has not changed. We modern people confuse current fashions and technological advances**

**with human change when all that’s really changed is the context in which we live out the same human condition in which King Ahasuerus found himself. We don’t have unique problems today that require new answers. We don’t have new problems. We just have new distractions.**

13 Then the king said to the wise men who knew the times (for this was the king's procedure toward all who were versed in law and judgment, 14 the men next to him being Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king's face, and sat first in the kingdom):

**So these seven boneheads had position and power and they wanted to keep it. The best way to do so was to be as foolish as the king they served.**

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?” 16 Then Memucan said in the presence of the king and the officials, “Not only against the king has Queen Vashti done wrong, but also against all the officials and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.

**Have you ever experienced a situation where a group creates a mountain out of a molehill? They treat the situation like it was so much more serious than it actually was.**

17 For the queen's behavior will be made known to all women, causing them to look at their husbands with contempt, since they will say, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come.' 18 This very day the noble women of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's behavior will say the same to all the king's officials, and there will be contempt and wrath in plenty.

**Because she has acted this way, this means that all women will act this way. That's called a straw man argument.**

**This is not really a legal question, but the King surrounds himself with advisors whose very livelihood depends upon being in the King's good graces. This is really a matter of a wounded ego. She said no to the King, showing everyone that his power is illusive. He wants to know what he can do to show that he really is powerful.**

**The book of Esther is satirical in nature. The King has been personally snubbed, but wants this personal affront to become a national affair. It's like a president whose wife refuses to pass the salt because he's rude, so he now wants to enact a national salt passing law.**

## **Ecclesiastes 10:14**

A fool multiplies words,  
though no man knows what is to be,  
and who can tell him what will be after him?

## **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.

**Doesn't this sound like the human pettiness that you've experienced in your life? "If you don't want to come to my party, then I never want to see you again."**

**How many of us have actually given ultimatums that we ultimately regret? Unfortunately, when a king gives one it cannot be overturned.**

And let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she.

**I'll find someone better than you. I'll show you how powerful I am.**

20 So when the decree made by the king is proclaimed throughout all his kingdom, for it is vast, all women will give honor to their husbands, high and low alike."

**This shows the fear-based nature of law. You can get people to behave a certain way if they are fearful. But what you can't produce with the law is faithful subjects who love you. You must twist their arms into submission.**

21 This advice pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed. 22 He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, that every man be master in his own household and speak according to the language of his people.

## **Esther 2:1-20**

2 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. 2 Then the king's young men who attended him said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king.

**I sense in these verses the subtext of regret, that the King missed her beauty, but he knew he could never see her again. So, the young men tried to comfort him with this idea:**

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 citadel, 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.

**That's called the set-up. That's the background story to why the King is bringing in young women before him to see which one pleases him.**

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.

**It is evident from his lengthy genealogy that Mordecai is an important person. After the exile was over (538 B.C.) many Jews stayed in Babylon and settled.**

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,

**I know that many women, especially when they are young, desire beauty. Beauty is a gift of God. God made Esther beautiful, but her beauty led to tragic circumstances in her own life.**

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.

Think about this. This is not like winning a beauty contest. She is taken against her will into custody so that some strange powerful man can use her as he pleases. Is that what you want for your life? Her beauty led to tragic circumstances... by God's design.

God's care for us does not mean that we avoid pain and suffering. It's the exact opposite. Because God cares for us and those around us, sometimes we will have to go through pain and suffering. That's what bravery is about.

Some find God's control troubling. Others find it comforting.

## **Acts 17:26**

26 From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

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.

## **Psalm 75:7**

but it is God who executes judgment,  
putting down one and lifting up another.

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.

In spite of her circumstances, Mordecai continued to show his care for her. Esther, despite very trying circumstances, showed great wisdom in listening to her adopted father.

## **Psalm 15**

A psalm of David.

**1 Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent?**

Who may live on your holy mountain?

**2 The one whose walk is blameless,**

who does what is righteous,  
who speaks the truth from their heart;

**3 whose tongue utters no slander,**

who does no wrong to a neighbor,  
and casts no slur on others;

**4 who despises a vile person**

but honors those who fear the Lord;  
who keeps an oath even when it hurts,  
and does not change their mind;

**5 who lends money to the poor without interest;**

who does not accept a bribe against the innocent.  
Whoever does these things  
will never be shaken.

**Because she has character which comes from trusting God, she is not shaken in her circumstances.**

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— 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.

**She's part of a harem. She's going to be used in every way that a woman is used in a harem.**

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.

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. 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.

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.