

I. Xerxes the Carnal King (1-4)

A. A man without a wife (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."

Between chapter 1 and chapter 2 of Esther, four years have passed. History teaches that during these four years, the king had attempted a major military conquest that had utterly failed. Coming home in defeat to an empty palace must have been lonely for Ahasuerus (also called Xerxes) in light of the fact that, although he had many women, he no longer had a wife. Even a proud and carnal king had times when he needed someone whom he could love, and someone to love him back. His status and position provided him with as much sexual activity as he desired, but there was no *wife* with whom he could share his heart. We cannot say for certain, but this verse may indicate that he was experiencing some level of regret for ridding himself of his wife four years earlier. The king was alone.

B. A man without a watchman (2-3) - "Then the king's young men who attended him said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king. 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."

Not only was Xerxes wifeless, the king also had no man with wisdom who cared for his soul, nobody to warn him, nobody to caution him, no friend to moderate him. He had no accountability for his actions and no guide to help him aspire to better living. He was surrounded by younger men in whom there was little wisdom. They told him what they thought he wanted to hear. Perceiving that their king was unhappy about the absence of a wife, the young advisors created a plan to search the entire empire for young women of beauty to come and compete to become the queen to a middle-aged king. Again, the clear revelation here is that the women were treated as property whose greatest value was rooted in how to please men. While this was not unique to the Persian empire, nor to King Xerxes, it still does not make it acceptable. Surely there would have been someone in the king's inner circles to speak wisdom, temperance and guidance into his life. Yet, the king surrounded himself with young men who would be typically given to

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their own base desires, living vicariously through a king who could make any woman he desired to become his wife with all the other women becoming his concubines. The result was that a plan from the young men was created to host the first Miss Persia pageant.

C. A man without a worry (4) - "And let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This pleased the king, and he did so."

Notice the absence of any concern or consideration for what the young women may have desired. One woman would become the queen and the rest were viewed as dispensable. Truly, what the women may have wanted was never once factored in to the very plans that were being made which would forever affect each one of their lives. Here we have the oft-repeated example of men in power selfishly determining what would happen to women in their sphere of control. In the Persian Empire, women were viewed as the property of men. Some men still fall into this trap today. Instead of valuing women as the daughters of God, men either consciously or subconsciously place them on some lesser tier of humanity. Where the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not pervasive in a culture, the demeaning and subjugation of women is clear. Christ elevates equal status and value between men and women. While differing roles are assigned within the two genders, **Scripture makes no distinction between the worth and gifting of men and women** in the Kingdom of God. In Xerxes inner-circle, it was simply a mindless quest to find the woman who could bring the most pleasure to the king.

II. Mordecai the Exiled Jew (5-6)

A. He was part of an unbreakable covenant (5a) - "Now there was a Jew in Susa the citadel whose name was Mordecai..."

There, in the midst of a pagan empire, God had one of His chosen ones still under His watchful care. Some 100+ years after the Jews were taken captive from their land, God still had a remnant preserved. His promises to Abraham had not been nullified by Israel's disobedience and chastisement. God had brought temporary discipline but not full rejection. Mordecai was still viewed by God as one among His chosen seed. Though Mordecai was living in the kingdom of Xerxes, the Kingdom of God was alive in

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him. God's unconditional covenant with Abraham has never been nullified. Woe unto those who oppose Israel for, in doing so, they resist the promises of God Himself.

B. He was from a royal line (5b) - "...the son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite..." {King Saul's lineage}

The casual reader might miss this important statement that will have even fuller meaning later when the wicked man, Haman enters the story. Mordecai is a royal descendant of Israel's first king, Saul. Here we have a simple statement about the lineage of a Jew in Susa named Mordecai who was connected to the former glory of his native country. One of the failures of King Saul was that he failed to exterminate all the people of Agag when he was king. In fact, this failure to fully obey the command of God through Samuel 500 years earlier was connected to the story of Esther. Keep watching as this important fact will make re-entry into our study.

C. He was part of a troubled generation (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."

While Mordecai was not actually alive at the time of the original conquest of Israel by her enemies, his ancestors were. Their failures led to the captivity that the Jewish people endured. Mordecai was reaping from the bad seed that his ancestors sowed. All of us do well to intentionally remember that our present actions have a direct ripple effect into the lives of those coming behind us. We not only decide things for ourselves, but our decisions directly impact our children, grandchildren and future descendants. It is a great day when a modern-day believer recognizes that he or she can either lay a beautiful foundation or a broken foundation for those coming after. Mordecai's ancestors had chosen poorly, and now he was living in a foreign land under pagan rule. Fortunately, Mordecai would soon emerge as a heroic figure who intentionally acted in ways to bless the generations coming behind him.

III. Esther the Beauty Queen (7-9)

A. Broken in her circumstances (7a) - "He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother..."

For the first time, **we now are introduced to Esther**. Her Hebrew name, Hadassah, means *myrtle*. Her Persian name, Esther, means *star*. We are told here that both of her parents were deceased. Esther was an orphan living in a foreign land. By God's grace, she had an honorable older cousin who took her in as his own daughter. Who could have thought that the one whom God would use to eventually deliver His people from genocidal holocaust would have been a young girl, orphaned, and living in broken circumstances. God delights in choosing and using those whom the world views as insignificant. There is hope for all of us in the Kingdom.

B. Beautiful in her appearance (7b) - "The young woman had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at..."

Let the Scripture say what it says. Esther is described as a beautiful young woman with an attractive physique. Because we live in a culture that worships physical beauty, some Christians wrongly assume that for a person to be physically attractive is a less-than-spiritual attribute. The Bible does not teach this. The Bible **does** teach that physical beauty is temporary and can possibly lead to vanity, therefore it should not be a primary quest for any Christian. Scripture teaches that modesty should be the goal of all believers as we preserve our physical bodies for the person with whom we will share life in marriage. The Bible, however, nowhere says that attractiveness is a detriment. It is a shame that so many Christian women who happen to be physically attractive tend to become the objects of envy, jealousy or scorn from other women who may not possess the same degree of beauty. Worse yet, a woman's physical attractiveness may mark her as a target of conquest by carnal men who view her appearance as an invitation to satisfy his desires. Physical beauty is not to be viewed as a necessity to pursue, but nor is it any indication of carnality or lack of spirituality. God determines our physical appearances. He sovereignly chooses to make some beautiful, some average and some plain. No matter our appearance outwardly, every believer has the call to beautify the inner person through cooperation with the Holy Spirit.

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C. Beloved by her cousin (7c) - "...and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter."

Simply noted is the blessing that, although her life was filled with loss, Esther was beloved by one who cared for her. How good of God to supply when circumstances had removed. Esther was not utterly forsaken. Her cousin, Mordecai, was stirred by God to look after this young woman in a foreign land.

D. Blessed with favor (8-9) - "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."

Esther was noticed for her beauty and swept up into the empire-wide movement to find a new queen for the king. She was taken from the home of Mordecai and placed into the high-society world of the royal palace. The invisible God granted Esther favor with the man in charge of preparing the women for their "audition" with the king. Esther was placed on a regimen of diet and cosmetics which would prepare her socially and physically to stand before the eyes of the king. While we groan at the treatment of all of these young women who are being objectified for their physical appearance and potential pleasing of the king, we must remember that, for Esther, there is the unseen God of the Jews promoting her along in a process that will eventually place her in the most prominent position of all the women in the Persian Empire. **Esther still has no idea that God is bringing her into the kingdom for a time like this.** She is simply a young woman, caught up in a process wherein she has no control. Whether she was excited or afraid, God was directing all of the affairs shaping Esther's life. Believers today must discipline themselves to remember that God is working intentionally and invisibly in our own lives. When we cannot understand why things are the way that they are, Esther's life serves as an example that our great God is working on levels far deeper than we can perceive. Faith teaches us that He is making all things work together for our good and the good of others. Esther was about to see this in a crystal-clear fashion.