

Esther's Ascension

September 2, 2012

ESTHER 1:1 – 2:20

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Core Competency:

Personal God- I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

I lift my eyes toward the mountains. Where will my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. (Psalm 121:1-2)

Using This Study

❶ EXAMINE His Word

What does God SAY? The words God uses to communicate matters so pay close attention to the details emphasized or repeated in the passage.

❷ DISCOVER His Word

What does God MEAN? Answer the questions and then bring to your COMMUNITY GROUP to discover and discuss with others.

❸ LIVE His Word

How does this truth FIT? God's word is lived in real life so engage with truth in your LIFE GROUP.

Introduction

The Old Testament books of Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of the Jews who returned to the land of promise following their seventy-year God-ordained captivity. This book, on the other hand, reveals what happened to the remnant of Jews who elected to remain in Persia.

It has been noted that the name of God does not appear even once in the ten chapters of Esther. Nevertheless God's fingerprints are all over the book. The Lord used a beautiful young Jewish girl and her wise uncle to thwart a genocidal plot in a dramatic story filled with suspense, intrigue, and surprises. This great deliverance of the Jews was, and is, commemorated by the Feast of Purim, an annual celebration of God's faithfulness to His people.

Chronology of the Book of Esther

Xerxes I (Ahasuerus) becomes king	486 BC
Xerxes holds his banquet, deposes Vashti (Esther 1:3)	483
Persia fights Greece and is defeated	482-479
Esther becomes queen (Esther 2:16-17)	December 479-January 478
Haman plots against the Jews (Esther 3:7)	April-May 474
Xerxes issues the edict against the Jews (Esther 3:12)	April 17, 474
Xerxes issues the edict to protect the Jews (Esther 8:9)	June 25, 474
The day of destruction (Esther 3:13 ; 8:12)	March 7, 473
The first Purim celebration (Esther 9:17-19)	March 8-9, 473

This Week

Esther, her Jewish ancestry a secret, became a contestant in this royal beauty contest (chapter 2) to find a new queen. The result was that "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" (2:17). Learn how God uses this woman in his grand plan.

① EXAMINE His Word

What does God SAY? The words God uses to communicate matters so pay close attention to the details emphasized or repeated in the passage:

Esther 1:1 - 2:20

1 These events took place during the days of Ahasuerus, who ruled 127 provinces from India to Cush.

2 In those days King Ahasuerus reigned from his royal throne in the fortress at Susa.

3 He held a feast in the third year of his reign for all his officials and staff, the army of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the officials from the provinces.

4 He displayed the glorious wealth of his kingdom and the magnificent splendor of his greatness for a total of 180 days.

5 At the end of this time, the king held a week-long banquet in the garden courtyard of the royal palace for all the people, from the greatest to the least, who were present in the fortress of Susa.

6 White and violet linen hangings were fastened with fine white and purple linen cords to silver rods on marble columns. Gold and silver couches were arranged on a mosaic pavement of red feldspar, marble, mother-of-pearl, and precious stones.

7 Beverages were served in an array of gold goblets, each with a different design. Royal wine flowed freely, according to the king's bounty

8 and no restraint was placed on the drinking. The king had ordered every wine steward in his household to serve as much as each person wanted.

9 Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women of King Ahasuerus's palace.

10 On the seventh day, when the king was feeling good from the wine, Ahasuerus commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who personally served him,

11 to bring Queen Vashti before him with her royal crown. He wanted to show off her beauty to the people and the officials, because she was very beautiful.

12 But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command that was delivered by his eunuchs. The king became furious and his anger burned within him.

13 The king consulted the wise men who understood the times, for it was his normal procedure to confer with experts in law and justice.

14 The most trusted ones were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan. They were the seven officials of Persia and Media who had personal access to the king and occupied the

highest positions in the kingdom.

15 The king asked, "According to the law, what should be done with Queen Vashti, since she refused to obey King Ahasuerus's command that was delivered by the eunuchs?"

16 Memucan said in the presence of the king and his officials, "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king, but all the officials and the peoples who are in every one of King Ahasuerus's provinces.

17 For the queen's action will become public knowledge to all the women and cause them to despise their husbands and say, 'King Ahasuerus ordered Queen Vashti brought before him, but she did not come.'

18 Before this day is over, the noble women of Persia and Media who hear about the queen's act will say the same thing to all the king's officials, resulting in more contempt and fury.

19 "If it meets the king's approval, he should personally issue a royal decree. Let it be recorded in the laws of Persia and Media, so that it cannot be revoked: Vashti is not to enter King Ahasuerus's presence, and her royal position is to be given to another woman who is more worthy than she.

20 The decree the king issues will be heard throughout his vast kingdom, so all women will honor their husbands, from the least to the greatest."

21 The king and his counselors approved the proposal, and he followed Memucan's advice.

22 He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to each province in its own script and to each ethnic group in its own language, that every man should be master of his own house and speak in the language of his own people.

1 Some time later, when King Ahasuerus's rage had cooled down, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what was decided against her.

2 The king's personal attendants suggested, "Let a search be made for beautiful young women for the king.

3 Let the king appoint commissioners in each province of his kingdom, so that they may assemble all the beautiful young women to the harem at the fortress of Susa. Put them under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women, and give them the required beauty treatments.

4 Then the young woman who pleases the king

will become queen instead of Vashti.” This suggestion pleased the king, and he did accordingly.

5 In the fortress of Susa, there was a Jewish man named Mordecai son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite.

6 He had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the other captives when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took King Jeconiah of Judah into exile.

7 Mordecai was the legal guardian of his cousin Hadassah (that is, Esther), because she didn’t have a father or mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was extremely good-looking. When her father and mother died, Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter.

8 When the king’s command and edict became public knowledge, many young women gathered at the fortress of Susa under Hegai’s care. Esther was also taken to the palace and placed under the care of Hegai, who was in charge of the women.

9 The young woman pleased him and gained his favor so that he accelerated the process of the beauty treatments and the special diet that she received. He assigned seven hand-picked female servants to her from the palace and transferred her and her servants to the harem’s best quarters.

10 Esther did not reveal her ethnic background or her birthplace, because Mordecai had ordered her not to.

11 Every day Mordecai took a walk in front of the harem’s courtyard to learn how Esther was doing and to see what was happening to her.

12 During the year before each young woman’s turn to go to King Ahasuerus, the harem regulation required her to receive beauty treatments with oil of myrrh for six months and then with perfumes and

cosmetics for another six months.

13 When the young woman would go to the king, she was given whatever she requested to take with her from the harem to the palace.

14 She would go in the evening, and in the morning she would return to a second harem under the supervision of Shaashgaz, the king’s eunuch in charge of the concubines. She never went to the king again, unless he desired her and summoned her by name.

15 Esther was the daughter of Abihail, the uncle of Mordecai who had adopted her as his own daughter. When her turn came to go to the king, she did not ask for anything except what Hegai, the king’s trusted official in charge of the harem, suggested. Esther won approval in the sight of everyone who saw her.

16 She was taken to King Ahasuerus in the royal palace in the tenth month, the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

17 The king loved Esther more than all the other women. She won more favor and approval from him than did any of the other young women. He placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti.

18 The king held a great banquet for all his officials and staff. It was Esther’s banquet. He freed his provinces from tax payments and gave gifts worthy of the king’s bounty.

19 When the young women were assembled together for a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the King’s Gate.

20 Esther still had not revealed her birthplace or her ethnic background, as Mordecai had directed. She obeyed Mordecai’s orders, as she always had while he raised her.

DISCOVER His Word

What does God MEAN? Answer the following questions and then bring to your COMMUNITY GROUP to discover and discuss with others.

1. How would you describe the feast given by Ahasuerus? What does this extravagant affair say about him—his character, his rule, his values?
2. Why did Vashti refuse to comply with the king’s wishes? Who was right? Why?

3. The book of Esther falls sometime after the first return of the Jewish exiles to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple which is described in Ezra and Haggai. Why do you suppose that many of the Jews did not return to Jerusalem when given the opportunity? Read Ezra 1:1-6.

4. How were Mordecai and Esther related? What can you observe about their relationship? Based on his interactions with Esther, what can you surmise about Mordecai?

5. Read Jeremiah 24:1–7. What do the good figs represent in Jeremiah’s vision? What about the bad figs? Into which category would you put the family of Mordecai and Esther?

6. What does this passage (together with Esther 1 and 2) say about God’s sovereignty— that is, His control of both personal affairs and international situations?

7. a) What’s more valuable and why—wisdom (like Mordecai had) or beauty and influence (like Esther had)?

b) When have you been jealous of another person’s position, personality, or character qualities?

c) How can you learn to be grateful for how God has made you and the ways He is using you for His glory—just the way you are?

8. What are some of the unique experiences, positions, opportunities, and blessings that God has given you? How do you sense that He wants to use those to make an eternal difference in this world?

Sermon Notes:

③LIVE His Word

How does this truth FIT? God's word is lived in real life so engage with truth in your LIFEGROUP:

Read Psalm 75:6–7. What do you learn about God from these verses? How do you see these same characteristics at work in the story of Esther?

30 CORE Competencies

10 Core Beliefs

Trinity *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation by Grace *Ephesians 2:8-9* I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

Spiritual Gifts *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community *Acts 2:44-47*

I live life with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in the world.

Giving Away My Time *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away God's Money *2 Corinthians 8:7*

I give away God's money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith *Ephesians 6:19-20*

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 Core Virtues

Joy *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, me, and others.

Faithfulness *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I demonstrate loyalty in my relationships with others in response to God's loyalty to me.

Self-Control *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience *Proverbs 14:29*

I endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ

10 Core Practices

Worship *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness *Matthew 6:33* I focus on God and His priorities for my life.