

THE LIFE OF ESTHER

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BIBLICAL STUDIES

Abstract

The Book of Esther is an interesting one; the fact that this book only contains 10 chapters and a 167 verses, (that is less than all of Psalm 119 which has 177 verses) it contains one of the most intriguing stories of how a girl adopted and raised by her cousin; and in which God uses her to save her people from extinction at the hands of evil Haman.

We will follow Esther from Mordechai's house in Susa as she lived in relative obscurity until she wins the local beauty contest and is prepared to become Queen, then she moves to the palace. All the while her identity as a Jew is concealed, for such a time as this. Her strength, dignity and beauty give her favor and the courage to approach the King to save her people.

CONTENTS

Abstract..... i

CHAPTER I The girl who would be queen.....3

CHAPTER II Mordecai discovers a secret plot.....3

CHAPTER III Haman's plan to exterminate the Jews4

References.....10

CHAPTER I

”ESTHER, THE GIRL WHO WOULD BE QUEEN”

The book of Esther was written around 486-465 B.C. and is set in modern-day Iran. The king of Persia at this time in history was Xerxes (Greek translation) or another translation is Ahasuerus. (Hebrew translation) (NKJV John MacArthur, 1997)

In Chapter 1 of Esther we read that King Xerxes has a banquet that lasts seven days. King Xerxes asks Queen Vashti to appear; at the same time Vashti is also having a banquet for the women. The summation of the event is that Queen Vashti feels that she is being put on display as a trophy. She refuses to attend the banquet of King Xerxes. This enrages the king and he is ultimately embarrassed in front of his guests. As they wait for his reaction. King Xerxes consults with his advisers and they come to a conclusion that Vashti has disobeyed the King. He then issues a proclamation to dethrone Queen Vashti as a punishment for her rebellion.

King Xerxes then issues another decree to seek a new Queen to replace Vashti by having local beauty contests. Letters are sent to all King Xerxes' provinces which covered parts of India and Ethiopia (David E. Pratte, 2006, Is#1 2) he also sent out announcements for the event in their own languages.

Soon after, King Xerxes' anger has subsided and it begins to sink in; he realizes what he has done and perhaps he wants to change his mind. His servants seek only the most beautiful girls for the King to get his mind off of Queen Vashti. One of King Xerxes advisors is also concerned that should he have a change of heart about dethroning

Vashti and that rebellion from other women would spread throughout his kingdom. King Xerxes continues with the search to crown a new Queen..

Mordechai being Esther's only living relative adopts her as his own daughter. Mordecai also allows Esther to participate as a “contestant” if you will, in the search for the new Queen of Persia. Mordechai strongly suggests that Esther keep her Jewish heritage a secret, possibly perhaps fearing that she would be eliminated from competing.

All of the maidens in the contest had to participate in a one year time of preparation which included beautifying themselves and preparing them in the local customs to meet the king.

The Bible says that when the king saw Esther, he loved her more than any of the other women in she obtained grace and favor in his site. That is when he placed the royal crown upon Esther's head, thereby replacing Vashti as his Queen. (*Esther 2:17*)

CHAPTER II

“MORDECIA DISCOVERS A SECRET PLOT”

Mordecai was about his business at the gate and he learned of a plot by two eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, who had intended to kill the king. They were doorkeepers, so in some sense they were responsible to guard the doors from intruders. They became very angry at the king and sought to lay hands on him. Mordecai learned of the plot and revealed it to Esther. She in turn warned the king, giving Mordecai credit as her source of information (she could do this without revealing her nationality or relationship to him).

The accusation against these men were investigated and determined to be true. The men were then hung on a gallows and the king's life was spared. All this was recorded in the chronicles of the official record of royal history.

This event also reveals the admirable character of Mordecai. The story may seem to be told here just for the sake of interest, but we will later learn that this record in the chronicles plays a major role in the subsequent story.

CHAPTER III

“HAMAN”’S PLOT TO EXTERMINATE THE JEWS”

In the book of Esther we are introduced to Haman who is described as the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite. (*Esther 3:1*).

In his commentary David Pratt, believes Haman to be a descendent of King Agag from the book of *1 Samuel 15:8-33* and that King Saul was supposed to execute King Agag along with his descendents. However, an act of disobedience Saul allows Agag and some of the Amalekites to survive. Samuel ends up executing Agag it is believed some Amalekites escaped; therefore making Haman one of Agag’s descendents.

Perhaps because of the story of what happened to Agag, this may hold the answer as to why Haman has such disdain and hatred for the Jews.

Haman is a distinguished member of King Xerxes’ Court. As part of his position subjects in the kingdom may have been required to bow to Haman. However, Mordecai refused to bow which incited Haman even more. Perhaps Mordecai felt that during Xerxes reign his religion forbid him from bowing to another person thereby showing worship as to a deity. This act would have been strictly forbidden by the Jews, who are commanded to only worship the God of Israel.

Even though Mordechai was urged by some of his companions to honor Haman, he refused and could not go against his own conscience.

In Haman's rage against Mordecai, he approaches King Xerxes to write a decree to make it a law that everyone must bow to him, this in turn is directed at the Jews.

Haman also tried to lead the king to believe there was a “Certain People” that had been in rebellion and subversion to the king. Although he had not given all the

information to King Xerxes that the decree was intended to be used against the Jews before the decree was issued; specifically towards Mordecai.

The decree from King Xerxes was finalized and contained the seal from the King's signet ring and was circulated throughout the kingdom without haste specifically targeting the entire Jewish race.

When Mordecai learned of this, he tore his clothes and began to mourn in the midst of the city and cried out to God. Soon after all of the Jews realize the danger they faced and they all fasted and prayed for protection.

Esther's servants had heard about this and reported Mordecai's actions to her. Mordecai advised Queen Esther of the decree that Haman had constructed to execute the Jews.

Mordecai gave instructions to Esther to intercede to the king for the Jews on his behalf. Although Mordecai trusted in God he had to have known that God had placed Esther in the palace for reason. Mordecai had sent this message through his companion Hathach, who was unaware that Esther was a Jew.

Esther pointed out that Persian law forbade anyone to enter the inner court where the king was, unless the king called them to approach. Any who entered unbidden would be killed, unless the king held out his golden scepter to them. Then the person would be spared to have an audience with the king. Esther feared to go unbidden to speak to the king.

She also pointed out that she had not been called to an audience with the king in the previous thirty days. This would indicate that she foresaw no opportunity to speak to the king it was not like she had an appointment with him every day! Furthermore, the fact

he had not called might indicate he did not particularly desire to see her. This would make it especially dangerous for her to go.

Mordecai pointed out to Esther that since she was a Jew her life was in just as much danger as his was. If she did nothing, she too could be executed. Esther's position as Queen did not exempt her from being a Jew. On the contrary it gave her an opportunity to meet with the king, now it was a matter of when and how.

Mordecai also points out that Esther may have been chosen Queen as God's plan to save the Jews just as Joseph was sold into slavery as God used his experience to save the nation from starvation.

Esther tells Mordecai to gather the Jews and fast for three days to intercede for her to have wisdom on how to approach the king.

At the end of three days Bible tells us in *Esther Chapter 5:1-2* that Esther put on her royal robes facing the entrance of the house she had attracted the king and found favor in his sight he extended his golden scepter, this gave Esther an opportunity to speak to the king. She proposes a banquet for the king promising to let her petition be known at the banquet.

Meanwhile King Xerxes has trouble sleeping so he commands the book of his records to be read aloud and the story of the plot to assassinate him is reread and Mordecai is the one who saved the king's life. The king responds by asking if any type of honor had been bestowed on Mordecai and it had not.

King Xerxes intending to honor Mordecai consults with Haman on how to give an unnamed person honor and justice. Haman being full of himself and seething with pride believes that King Xerxes wants to bestow favor and honor on him.

Haman comes up with many grandiose ideas thinking he'll be the one who will be honored. In the meantime, Haman is constructing gallows to hang Mordecai on.

Once Haman realizes that the honor, dignity and parade like atmosphere is not for him but for Mordecai he is filled with more hatred.

There is a second banquet planned by Queen Esther, this time she invites Haman. During this banquet Esther reveals that someone is trying to take her life and this incites King Xerxes. The king demands to know who it is that would do his Queen harm. Esther reveals that she is a Jew and that Haman and the decree that has been issued would surely end her life. The king in a rage leaves the banquet and Haman begins to plead for his life from Queen Esther. King Xerxes returns and finds Haman groveling for his life;

*Esther 7: 8 When the king returned from the palace garden to the place of the banquet of wine, Haman had fallen across the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, **"Will he also assault the queen while I am in the house?"** NKJV*

King Xerxes pronounced a sentence of death against Haman and has him hung on the very gallows that Haman had intended to hang Mordecai. The king also reversed the decree that he had originally ordered.

It is through this situation the feast of Purim is instituted to commemorate once again how God saved His people from annihilation by revealing a wicked plot that Haman had devised against the Jews that ended up being turned back on him. Haman's sons had also been hung on the gallows.

Mordecai was then given prominence by decree of the king and was honored by being written into the Chronicles of Persia. Mordecai was then appointed second in command by King Xerxes.

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SCRIPTURES

Esther 1:1-22 Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this was the Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia), 2 in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the citadel, 3 that in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants — the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces being before him — 4 when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days in all. 5 And when these days were completed, the king made a feast lasting seven days for all the people who were present in Shushan the citadel, from great to small, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. 6 There were white and blue linen curtains fastened with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars; and the couches were of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of alabaster, turquoise, and white and black marble. 7 And they served drinks in golden vessels, each vessel being different from the other, with royal wine in abundance, according to the generosity of the king. 8 In accordance with the law, the drinking was not compulsory; for so the king had ordered all the officers of his household, that they should do according to each man's pleasure. 9 Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women in the royal palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus. 10 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, 11 to bring Queen Vashti before the king, wearing her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials, for

she was beautiful to behold. 12 But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command brought by his eunuchs; therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him. 13 Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times (for this was the king's manner toward all who knew law and justice, 14 those closest to him being Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who had access to the king's presence, and who ranked highest in the kingdom): 15 "What shall we do to Queen Vashti, according to law, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus brought to her by the eunuchs?" 16 And Memucan answered before the king and the princes: "Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also all the princes, and all the people who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. 17 For the queen's behavior will become known to all women, so that they will despise their husbands in their eyes, when they report, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in before him, but she did not come.' 18 This very day the noble ladies of Persia and Media will say to all the king's officials that they have heard of the behavior of the queen. Thus there will be excessive contempt and wrath. 19 If it pleases the king, let a royal decree go out from him, and let it be recorded in the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it will not be altered, that Vashti shall come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. 20 When the king's decree which he will make is proclaimed throughout all his empire (for it is great), all wives will honor their husbands, both great and small." 21 And the reply pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan. 22 Then he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province in its

own script, and to every people in their own language, that each man should be master in his own house, and speak in the language of his own people. NKJV

Esther 2:17 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. NKJV

Esther 3:1 After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him NKJV

1 Samuel 15: 8 He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. 9 But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed. 10 Saul Rejected as King Now the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying, 11 "I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments." And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to the LORD all night. 12 So when Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul went to Carmel, and indeed, he set up a monument for himself; and he has gone on around, passed by, and gone down to Gilgal." 13 Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD." 14 But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" 15 And Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed."

16 Then Samuel said to Saul, "Be quiet! And I will tell you what the LORD said to me last night." And he said to him, "Speak on." 17 So Samuel said, "When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel? 18 Now the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' 19 Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the LORD?" 20 And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. 21 But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal." 22 So Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king." 24 Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. 25 Now therefore, please pardon my sin, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD." 26 But Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you, for you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel." 27 And as Samuel turned around to go away, Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. 28 So Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from

you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. 29 And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor relent. For He is not a man, that He should relent." 30 Then he said, "I have sinned; yet honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD your God." 31 So Samuel turned back after Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD. 32 Then Samuel said, "Bring Agag king of the Amalekites here to me." So Agag came to him cautiously. And Agag said, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." 33 But Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." And Samuel hacked Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal. NKJV

Esther 5:1-2 Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, across from the king's house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house. 2 So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter. NKJV

Esther 7: 8 When the king returned from the palace garden to the place of the banquet of wine, Haman had fallen across the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, "Will he also assault the queen while I am in the house?" NKJV