

# Esther #1 Ch. 1-2

by Chuck Missler

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*Chuck Missler explores the Book of Esther, highlighting its historical context, themes of hiddenness, and God's providence in the lives of His people.*

**Duration:** 50:30

**Scripture:** Romans 15:4, 1 Corinthians 10:11

**Topics:** "Esther"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the strange events and rules in the Bible as examples, warnings, instructions, and admonitions for believers. He references Romans 15:4, which states that everything written in the Scriptures is for our learning and hope. The speaker encourages those going through trials to turn to the Word of God for encouragement and comfort. He also highlights the challenge of teaching children not to lie when leaders, like the president, lie under oath. The sermon concludes with a prayer expressing gratitude for God's provision and protection, and a reminder that God is watching over believers just as He watched over the people in the book of Esther.

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## Transcript

Well, I've been looking forward to tonight because we're going to take on a book. I don't know why, I must be an apostle of the strange or something. Because I seem to enjoy, particularly, books that are a little weird, a little different.

We're going to take on one of those tonight. A book that's often neglected. We're going to undertake a little look at the book of Esther.

The book of Esther in the scripture. This is a colorful little book. Ten chapters, some of them quite short.

It's really quite a romantic love story. It's full of palace intrigue. It's got a vengeance scheme that would make a great movie.

It's a fun book. It's a book about human love. It also is placed in one of the most colorful eras of human history.

The Persian Empire. To most of us, even with just a superficial knowledge of Persia in its glory days, we think of Arabian nights or we think of pomp and ceremony. Indeed, all that has allusions, if you will, to this very, very intriguing culture that we associate with Persia.

The story of Esther, of course, is of a Jewish maiden who ends up, through a strange set of circumstances, becoming the queen of Persia at a time where she can use her position, although at great risk to her personally, to save her people. The Jews in Persia were subject to a Hitler-like annihilation attempt that is thwarted by the intervention of this extremely attractive gal. In fact, the events in the book of Esther are the basis for the celebration among the Jewish community of the Feast of Purim.

Purim comes from the word pur, which is casting of a lot. And it celebrates the two-day celebration in which our Jewish friends exchange gifts and indulge in all kinds of fun things. It is based, of course, on the book of Esther, and the book of Esther is always read at that particular holiday season, usually occurring in, what, February, March, on our calendar, typically.

But there are some puzzles about the book of Esther. If you stand back from the book of Esther, it's very famous because the name of God doesn't even appear anywhere in the book. You will find no indication of worship or faith in the usual sense.

There's no messianic predictions in the book, no mention of heaven or hell. There's nothing religious, if I put that in quotes, about the book. It's a gripping tale.

It's colorful to go through. We'll have a lot of fun going through it. And yet, the question that we need to ask ourselves is, why is it in the Bible? There are lots of interesting histories.

There's lots of important histories. The first book of Maccabees is a very important historical book. It's not part of the canon.

It's not considered inspired. Where do we get the idea that this book is inspired? It can be argued that it reveals God's provision for His people, but that may seem like a thin thread to hang its canonicity on. Do you know that Martin Luther argued that it should not be in the canon? Interestingly enough.

Well, one of the first things you notice about a book is the name of the book. The name of the book is Esther. Her Jewish name was Hadassah, the myrtle tree.

The myrtle, a very fragrant name. But her Persian name was Esther. And Gesenius, it's amazing how few commentators know this, but Gesenius, who's considered one of the great authorities on language, Semitic languages, points out that her name comes from a root meaning to hide.

The name Esther actually means something hidden. Aha! And by the way, it gets hidden on several levels. And so that's one of the things we're going to get into this.

Some of you who are familiar with our materials on cosmic codes know that there are acrostics that have been discovered in Esther. There's also some equidistant letter codes that show up in Esther that are quite provocative. And we'll get at those.

But we'll also discover there's something far more profound hidden in Esther. So when we come across a book or even a section of a book that has these characteristics, they're interesting, provocative, but we can't seem to understand why is it in the Bible, it's a good time for us to be reminded what Paul told us. In 1 Corinthians 10, verse 11, Paul reminds us, Now all these things happen to them, that is to Israel, for examples or as a warning.

And they are written for our instruction, our admonition. 1 Corinthians 10, 11. All these things.

You take the Tanakh, the Old Testament. Everything in there is written for us. All these strange things that happen to Israel.

The ups and downs and all these weird rules and stuff. Why are they in the Bible? All of them, the scripture tells us, is for our examples, our warnings, our instruction, our admonition. Again in Romans chapter 15, verse 4, very key verse in your notes is Romans 15, 4. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and the comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

Might have hope. How many of you here right now are going through some trials? I'm skipping a few of you, not many. You know, as we go through trials, one of the first things we should do is always get into the Word of God.

And there are many, many encouragements in the Word of God. We turn to Job. If you're really going through trials, you really get to appreciate some of the Psalms.

Many of the Psalms you sort of read other times, they don't sort of register. And when you go through troubles, then some of those leap out at you. It may sound strange to think of the book of Esther in this regard.

But Esther is going to be full of some surprises in that regard, where God is going to be providing for His people, but deliberately doing it invisibly. There's some reasons why He's going to be doing it invisibly. And that can also perhaps comfort us in some other ways.

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through the patience and the comfort of the scriptures might have hope. Some examples of that, the Feasts of Israel. And I'm not talking about Purim now or Shanak.

I'm talking the Feasts of Moses. There are seven feasts outlined in Leviticus 23. And when we study those feasts, we know that all seven are historical, commemorative of a past event.

They also are prophetic. And Paul teaches us that. And as we go through the seven Feasts of Moses, we discover the first three in the first month are prophetic of Christ's first coming.

The last three in the seventh month are prophetic of His second coming. There's a very strange one in between. But as we study the historical commemoration of those feasts, we discover that they apply to us in terms of giving us a glimpse ahead.

When we study Noah and the flood, yes, there's a flood, but also Jesus says there are lessons in the days of Noah that we can apply prophetically. When we study this weird story of Abraham offering his son Isaac, strange story the more you think about it. And yet we realize, those of us that have gotten into that, is that that's prophetic.

Abraham knew he was acting out prophecy because on that very spot 2,000 years later, another father did in fact offer his son as an offering for us all. So we discover every detail of that narrative. We study the Book of Ruth.

Every subtle detail of the Book of Ruth speaks of the New Testament. You won't understand Revelation 5 unless you've studied the Book of Ruth. Jonah and the way, we all know the story of Jonah.

But the three days and three nights in the belly of the whale are also what? Prophetic. So we discover this is all tied together. And this of course underscores the basic premise of our approach to expositional Bible study.

And that is that we have 66 separate books that were actually penned by more than 40 individual authors who didn't even know each other over thousands of years, and yet we discover it's an integrated message. Every subtlety, every detail, every number, every placement is there by design. So as we look at the Book of Esther, we're going to go through it first somewhat historically.

It really happened. These are real people. It's a very critical period of history.

We'll go through that and try to understand it. But when we've done that, we'll go back and review it and discover that there is a story behind the story. But the story behind Esther is the story of ourselves.

There's a sense in which it affects you and I personally. We study the Bible to know God. And as we do that, we also come to know what else? Ourselves.

Now the key of course to all these things is the New Testament. And we're going to take a quick glimpse later of Esther as a survey of the Book of Romans in some very surprising ways. Now, before we jump into Esther, it's useful for us to recap in our minds the Book of Daniel, the times of Daniel.

You may recall that after Solomon, his son Rehoboam and then Jeroboam had the civil war, divided the nation in two parts. The northern kingdom under Jeroboam went into idolatry and pretty soon the Lord used Assyria to capture and take away out of history the northern kingdom. The southern kingdom called Judah had a few redeeming kings but more or less went from bad to worse.

And finally, under the preachments, if you will, of Jeremiah, who warned them that it was too late, that God was going to use Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon to judge them. And under the preaching of Jeremiah and also Ezekiel, indeed, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, takes them into captivity. You all know the story.

They went into captivity for 70 years. And in that first siege of Nebuchadnezzar, he set up a vassal king to assure his loyalty to hostages. Daniel and his friends get deported to Babylon.

We have the incredible adventures that are chronicled in the Book of Daniel. In the Book of Daniel, there are two chapters, chapter 2 and chapter 7, that outline all of Gentile history in advance. The first one occurs, of course, when Nebuchadnezzar has his famous dream that troubles him, the multi-metal image.

It's Daniel's interpretation of that by telling the king what he dreamed. He didn't even tell him what the dream was, but Daniel told him what the dream was and interpreted it for him. And this metal image turns out to be a timeline of all history.

Head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron and feet of iron, but also iron mixed with clay. Really four primary empires. Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome.

Rome in two phases. Later in Daniel's life, he himself gets treated to a series of visions. This time the idioms in the visions are very different.

There are strange creatures coming out of the sea. But again, four empires. Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome.

And again, Rome in two phases. We much studied Daniel 2 and 7, but the point is, in the days of Daniel, someone that understood the scripture, was paying attention, knew that Babylon would be succeeded by Persia. And Persia would ultimately be succeeded by the Greek empire.

Who in turn, of course, would be succeeded by the Romans. Interestingly enough, Daniel 5 talks about the fall of Babylon. And that's the famous time that the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, felt that the city is impregnable.

The Persians were on the march, but he wasn't sweating it. Threw a party for a thousand of his lords. You all remember the famous incident with the handwriting on the wall, in which it's announced, in effect, that the kingdom has fallen.

Belshazzar sees the handwriting, panics. None of his wise men can interpret it. They call Daniel out of retirement.

He comes, interprets it for them. That night, Babylon fell. What they didn't know, but Herodotus gives us a lot of details, the Persian army sent up a division upriver, dammed the Euphrates, diverted it actually, which lowered the moat.

They slipped under the gate. They took over the city without a battle. Go to the London Museum, you can read the Stele of Cyrus, in which he brags that he captured the capital of the world without a battle.

And a very famous incident, the fall of Babylon. When Cyrus makes his grand entrance, ten days after the actual conquest, he makes his formal entrance, Daniel greets him and shows him a letter written by Isaiah to him a hundred years earlier, more than 150 years earlier, which God calls Cyrus by name, outlines his career, and because of all this, he says, you'll know that I'm the God of the Hebrews and you'll let them go. And indeed he does.

He's very impressed. He not only lets them go, he gives them financial support to go back and rebuild their temple. Now, he gives them permission to return.

The Babylon captivity is over. Less than 50,000 go back home. A lot of them are quite comfortable in Babylon.

I want to say Babylon, not just the city, in the empire. And they don't go back. And strangely, our story deals with some that did not return.

They were quite comfortable. So it's interesting, you know, we'll read stories of the Scripture, like Daniel, where Daniel, despite the fact that he was in Babylon, was remarkably faithful. Refused to eat the Babylonian food, the fancy foods.

He honored, he adhered to the Torah. The whole Chronicle of Daniel, he's a phenomenal guy. The characters in Esther are not so.

They are very, very important persons. They are faithful to an extent, don't misunderstand me, but they're not as strictly observant as Daniel was. A little different situation you're going to discover here.

When they go back, the ones that do go back, when they go back to Jerusalem, they rebuild the temple under Ezra. Have a lot of troubles. One reason they have so much trouble is they're not allowed to make a, protect themselves, to make a city-state.

After Ezra, it's a guy by the name of Nehemiah that happens to be the cupbearer to the then king, who gets permission from his boss to actually give them permission to rebuild the city. That's what Nehemiah is all about. The Book of Esther occurs between those two books.

The Book of Esther occurs between chapters 6 and 7 of Ezra, roughly. In other words, the Jews have been allowed to go back and rebuild their temple, Esther is among those that have remained, in effect, at the capital of the Persian Empire. To get the context here, it's going to turn out to be important.

But you need to understand that Esther, on the one hand, you know, some of the commentators are quite critical because she was supposed to go back with her people. You know, she's a Jew, and the Jews are allowed to go home, you're supposed to go back, there's all kinds of admonitions in Jeremiah to come out and come back and build the temple. She didn't.

Because she stayed back there, the temple was possible. Because she will be married to the father of Artaxerxes, Langemanus, that gives the permission to rebuild Jerusalem and all that. If you're going to study background here, review background, you want to have in your mind Daniel 2 and 7 that I just reviewed, roughly.

The fall of Babylon, Daniel 5. Also the 70-week prophecy in Daniel 9, where Gabriel visits Daniel and gives him the exact day that Jesus was to present himself on a donkey riding into Jerusalem. Fascinating, fascinating passage. That mathematical prophecy that Gabriel gave Daniel in Daniel chapter 9, in which Gabriel tells Daniel it will be 173,880 days from the decree, the decree in reference is the decree that Artaxerxes Langemanus gives to rebuild the city.

I won't take our time here in this study to recap the whole Daniel 70-week thing, if you follow me. The place to really start understanding prophecy is to study the last four verses of Daniel 9, the 70-week prophecy. But the key date that triggers that whole thing is the date that occurs when Esther's stepson signs the decree.

And if events in Esther didn't happen, there'd be no Jews to build the temple. That's really what historically the book of Esther is going to deal with. So the book of Esther, by the way, is not just a story to highlight a moral or something like that.

It deals with an escape from annihilation, every bit as vivid as the Holocaust in Nazi Germany. It enables, the events in Esther enable the events that lead to the temple and the Messiah. If you look at the chain, you'll realize that it's a critical part of it.

It takes place in what's called the Persian period. That's roughly 539 to 331 B.C. 331 is when Alexander the Great finally conquers the Persians. There are many admonitions by Isaiah and Jeremiah that they should have gone back.

These are the ones that didn't. Also, I want to call you to remind you of the book of Hosea. In Hosea 1, verse 9, God said, speaking to Hosea, naming his son, He says, call his name Lo-Ami, which means not my people.

For ye are not my people, and I will not be your God. The whole first and second chapter of Hosea is a grim reading. You always think of Israel as God's chosen people, indeed they are.

But there was a period of time that God announces that you're not my people. He turned his back on them. And this occurs in that period.

The name of God does not appear here quite deliberately in that sense. And yet we're going to discover he invisibly is behind the scenes providing for them. And even his name is behind the scenes, and we'll get to that when the time comes.

So that's a quick profile of what we're jumping into in this interesting, rather dramatic story of Esther. So let's jump in. Enough of the palaver here.

Let's jump in to Esther chapter 1, verse 1. Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus. This is Ahasuerus who reigned from India even unto Ethiopia, over 127 provinces or satrapies. Thus in those days, even when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace.

Well Ahasuerus, that's the first name we stumble over. There are three different kings designated by this title. It's actually a title, not a name.

It's like a name. Often in the scripture, you know, the titles and names tend to get commingled. It's a title like Pharaoh or Caesar, that sort of thing.

The first one is the father of Darius the Mede, who is mentioned in Daniel chapter 9, verse 1. This is probably Syaxes the first, known by this name in profane history. He was the king of Medea and the conqueror of Nineveh. A second king was mentioned in Ezra chapter 4, verse 6. This is probably the canvases of profane history, the son and successor to Cyrus.

The third one is the one we're interested in, the son of Darius Hattazapis, whose king is named in the book of Ezra. He ruled over the kingdoms of Persia, Medea and Babylonia from India to Ethiopia. And this is all probably, we know him in profane history as Xerxes the first.

And he succeeded his father Darius, if you will. He reigned from 45 to 465 B.C. Not all scholars are in agreement, but there's a broad consensus that the king here is probably Xerxes the first. The Septuagint uses Artaxerxes for Ahasuerus in this passage.

But anyway, the events in this book essentially appear to occur roughly between Ezra 6 and Ezra 7, for those of you trying to get a historical order here. And the events in the book extend over about 10 years, from about 483 to 473, from Xerxes' third year through about his twelfth year. By the way, it says that his empire ran from India all the way to Ethiopia.

In the Hebrew, it's actually Kush, which includes southern Egypt, all of the Sudan, and northern Ethiopia. It also becomes idiomatic for Black Africa, in contrast to Put, which is the North Africans. But anyway.

Now, in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace. That was the winter palace. He had a summer palace in Persepolis.

Shushan is about 200 miles east of Babylon. And it was the capital of what they called in those days Elam. It's interesting that in 1852 they found a description of Artaxerxes II, who is read as follows, My ancestor Darius built this palace in former times.

In the reign of my grandfather, Artaxerxes I, it was burned. I have restored it. It's interesting that when you read the account, somebody from a later period would not have known a lot of that background that we

now know from archaeological things.

Many, many subtleties in the passage indicate that the writer of the narrative Esther was an eyewitness at the time. I won't get into all of that in detail, just a passing comment. Now, this palace that we're talking about was the one that Darius, he authorized the rebuilding of the temple.

It was a residence of Darius, it was a residence of Artaxerxes, Esther's husband, and also her stepson Artaxerxes I, he's the one that authorizes Nehemiah. In fact, Esther was probably still alive when her stepson signed the famous decree that gave Nehemiah the go-ahead. Excavations have found the ruins of the king's gate.

We find that in chapter 4, the inner court that comes up in chapter 5, verse 1, the outer court in chapter 6, the palace garden in chapter 7. Even one of the dice, the poor that cast lots, the way they did it, has been one of those, not the specific ones they used then, but I mean, that type of thing has been found. Okay, verse 3. In the third year of his reign, he, the king, made a feast unto all his princes and his servants, the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the province being before him. Now, Artaxerxes was a real king.

His drinking parties were well known to archaeologists. He did have a very irrational temper, that's going to show up here later, and he often would have a fit of rage, and he did have his primary palace and a large harem there in Shushan. Now, the great feast that we're about to get into here, it's described in this chapter, it's inferred from the Persian inscriptions that it was held in preparation for his expedition against Greece.

He apparently wanted to avenge his father's defeat of the Greeks at the Battle of Marathon, some 10, 15 years earlier, near Athens. And so, according to Herodotus, it took Artaxerxes four years to get ready for this invasion of Greece. Now, his four years would extend from the beginning of his reign, 485.

There's going to be 180 days of festival, which also involved the planning, the planning sessions of the leaders of all the provinces to prepare for the war effort. Herodotus claims he put together an army of five million men. Most historians suspect that's probably an exaggeration, but certainly over a million.

And by the way, it gets clobbered. Comes back with 5,000. But we'll get to that.

Verse 4, when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honor of his excellent majesty in many days, even 104 score days, 180 days. Now, that's a party. That's a party.

How many have been to an 180-day party? And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people. See, that was for the leadership. But now they had a seven-day feast for everybody that were present in the shushan, the palace, both under the great and small, seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace, where were white, green, and blue hangings fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble, and the beds were of gold and silver upon a pavement of red and blue and white and black marble.

And they gave them drink and vessels of gold, vessels being diverse, one from another, of royal wine in abundance according to the state of the king. And the drinking was according to the law. None did compel, for so the king had appointed to all the officers of the house that they should do according to every man's pleasure.

Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house, which belonged to King Ahasuerus. Now, there's a large house. There's a large harem.

Got to get over that, girls. That was just the way it was in those days. And it was very common for the men to have their party, and Vashti the queen set up a party for the women.

And so all of that is quite customary in that day. By the way, some of the rabbinical sources, I don't know how authoritative this is. You get some very strange things in some of the rabbinical stuff.

But they portray Vashti as the granddaughter of Nebuchadnezzar. But you need to understand that often the rabbinical literature is full of conjectures and what you and I would call traditional assumptions, not necessarily historical fact. But anyway, Vashti is presented that way in some of the sources I've seen.

Verse 10. On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, that's King Xerxes English for stoned, huh? he commanded Mahaman, Bithsa, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zithar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, to bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal to show the people and the princes her beauty, for she was fair to look on. But the queen Vashti, verse 12, refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains.

Therefore the king was very rough, and his anger burned in him. Scholars are divided as to why she didn't come. There are some that suspect that verse 11 says that she was to come in her crown only.

And that is a conjecture. Some believe that she balked at showing up at this party nude, you see. I don't believe there's any really good historical corroboration of that.

In any case, her refusal to come does indicate that there's a breach of relationship between her and the king. This was considered a gigantic breach of etiquette. As you'll get sensitive to as the story unfolds, the king of Persia had some very strict rules.

Rules that even bound him. You may recall from Daniel chapter 6, when Darius was tricked into signing a decree that put Daniel in the lion's den. When he realized he'd been tricked, he didn't want it to happen, but he couldn't change it.

And that night that Daniel spends in the lion's den, the king himself is nervous and apprehensive. First thing in the morning, he checks and he's thrilled that Daniel survived. You follow me? You and I would think, gee, he signed the order, he ought to be able to rescind it.

Not the way they worked in the Persian legal system. That shows up in Esther too. Because if they can get him to sign something, it's a done deal, you can't change it.

It's a very formal system. One of the things that comes up, it's going to come up later in the story, is that if somebody comes before the king that was not bidden to come before the king, they're subject to death. Unless he holds out his scepter and, so to speak, pardons them.

So it's a very, very strange society. Well, for the queen to be summoned to a party and refuse to come, now she may have refused simply because she knew it was just a drunken brawl, didn't want any part of it. Who knows? But this is going to have heavy consequences for her.

Verse 13, Then the king said to the wise men, which knew the times, for so was the king's manner toward all that knew law and judgment. And next to him was Carshena, Shethar, Admantha, Tarshish, Merez,

Marcena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, which saw the king's face and which sat the first in the kingdom. What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to the law, because she hath not performed the commandment of the king Ahasuerus by the chamberlains? And Memucan answered before the king and the princes, Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes and to all the people that are in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus.

For this deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes when it shall be reported. The king Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, and she came not. Likewise shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all their king's princes, which have heard of the deed of the queen, thus shall there arise too much contempt and wrath.

If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, that Vashti come no more before the king Ahasuerus, and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she. And when the king's decree, which he shall make, shall be published throughout all his empire, for it is great, all the wives shall give to their husbands honor, both too great and small. So that's Memucan's proposal, you know.

Can't have this, you know, all the women will, you know, treat their husbands the same way. His principle is an interesting one. We may smile at that.

And yet I wonder how many parents are having a tough time telling their kids not to lie, when they know that the leader of our country lies under oath. The principle he's suggesting sounds colorful and amusing here, and yet there is a ring of validity to it that should bother us. In any case, verse 21, the saying pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan.

For he sent letters unto all the king's provinces, unto every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man should bear a rule in his own house, and that it should be published according to the language of every people. And so ends chapter one. Leadership at the top affects all people, is the principle that's being suggested there.

Colorful though it may strike us. Now, we're going to continue in chapter two, but you need to understand a lot of time will have gone by. The next verse doesn't follow chronologically immediately after the previous verse, because in the meantime, this incident occurred.

Vashti's disgraced. Xerxes is now going to invade Greece with his army. It's said over two million men.

Herodotus even says five million. Only five thousand will come back with him. He's going to suffer an enormous defeat.

His immense fleet defeated the Greeks at Thermopylae, but he was defeated disastrously at the famous Battle of Salamis in 480 BC and the Battle of Plataea in 479. So he comes home really defeated, very serious. And it was after his return home, after this disastrous defeat, that Esther will be chosen as queen.

That's what chapter two is going to deal with here. He will then live for another thirteen years. She will live into the reign of his stepson, of her stepson.

And Arnax Xerxes and the Nehemiah thing and all of that. So Esther, chapter two, verse one. After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti and what she had done

and what was decreed against her.

Now again, see the narrative here isn't focusing on the history of Persia and his problems. The narrative is focusing on the role of the queen. So this duration of time in the battle, in effect, isn't focusing on the narrative here.

But anyway, verse two. Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king, and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of the kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the palace, to the house of the women, unto the custody of Hegi the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women, and let their things for the purification be given them. And let the maiden which pleased the king be queen instead of Vashti.

And the thing pleased the king, and he did so. Now see, you can understand his advisors. The last thing in the world they wanted was for Vashti to be reinstalled.

Because she's probably going to take it out on them then. So they have probably their own axe to grind to keep her out of the picture. What may have happened historically is she may have just bided her time.

It's very possible that as the years went by, she later gets reinstalled. She probably had more than one wife anyway. So that's a complexity that's outside the book.

I'm just mentioning that in passing. But in any case, the recommendations of his advisors appealed to him, so he took them. Verse 5, Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai, the son of Ejair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite.

Now, Mordecai, in a sense, is the real hero of the piece. Esther has a key role. I won't correlate.

She's the heroine. But Mordecai is going to be a major player in the story. His adversary will be introduced in chapter 3. In fact, whenever this book is read among serious Jews, whenever the adversary of Mordecai's name is mentioned, everybody boos and hisses.

Okay, you don't have to do that in this. We're recording this. But when we get to Haman, which will be chapter 3. But Mordecai needs a little more comment before we get into him personally, and that's his genealogy.

Who is he a son of? Who is he a son of? Son of Kish, a Benjamite, right? Who else in the scripture was a son of Kish, a Benjamite? Saul, the first king of Israel. Saul is going to be very important in developing another thread of the story. In the interest of time, I won't get into it quite here.

But this is what some people might call a coincidental connection. It's not coincidence. The rabbis tell you coincidence is not a kosher word.

This is all part of the thing. Esther, thus, is part of the royal family. And Josephus makes that point in his writings.

But Saul's failure will figure prominently in the whole plot line of the book of Esther. But we'll develop that as we get to it. Let's continue first with Mordecai.

He's introduced here. Mordecai is an interesting player here. We're going to keep an eye on him.

Verse 6, who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity, which had been carried away with Jeconiah, the king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had carried away. The deportation of Jeconiah would have been about 80 years earlier. So Mordecai was probably deported very, very young and was something more than 80 years old.

Follow me? So he's not a young buck here. Verse 7, and he brought up Hadassah, that is Esther, his uncle's daughter. For she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful, whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter.

So Mordecai adopts her and raises her. Hadassah is a Jewish name. We know her by a Persian name, or Esther.

Now, when she entered the royal harem, she was received by the name which henceforth became known. She was given a Persian name, Esther. Gesenius, who is one of the great authorities in Hebrew, indicates her name means something hidden.

In fact, we're going to discover that there's five acrostics and several equidistant letter sequence codes. We'll take that up separately so it doesn't distract us from the story. In fact, they'll mean more to you if you have the story behind you before we get into it.

Now, Esther was the daughter of Abahail of Benjamite, and her family then did not avail herself of the permission granted by Cyrus for the exile's return to Jerusalem. She resided with her cousin Mordecai. Mordecai apparently held some key office in the household of the Persian king.

Verse 8, So Haggai is the eunuch. He's in charge of the harem. And Esther, she's very attractive, so she's brought there.

Verse 9, That turns out to be a key part of the plot line too. And Mordecai walked every day, verse 11, So he's watching after his charge. She's in great shape on one hand, but he's concerned.

He keeps an eye on it. Verse 12, General guys, you sometimes get tired of waiting for a gal to get spruced up. This is a little different.

But it's worth it, right? Yeah, okay. Verse 13, In fact, apparently these are one night stands of a different kind, huh? Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abahel, the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Haggai, the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all them that looked upon her.

So Esther was taken unto the king Ahasuerus, unto his house royal, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. So this means this was four years after the great feast we read about in chapter 1. So some years have gone by here, if you get the meaning here. Key verse 17, And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set a royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Ashti.

So this gal is apparently a real winner. Everybody around her likes her. The supervision in the house and the harem liked her.

The king is so taken with her that he promotes her to actually be queen. And that turns out to be pivotal, not just to our story, but to the history of the Jews, for reasons that will start to unfold in a very, very interesting, colorful plot forthcoming. Verse 18, And the king made a great feast unto all his princes and servants, even Esther's feast.

And he made a release to the provinces and gave gifts according to the state of the king. And when the virgins were gathered together the second time when Mordecai sat in the king's gate, Esther had not yet showed her kindred nor her people as Mordecai had charged her. For Esther did the commandment of Mordecai like as when she was brought up with him.

In other words, she was an obedient gal. She followed his advice. It turns out to be absolutely crucial.

There's some very showdown scenes forthcoming here. Verse 21, In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king's gate, We're going to have a little plot line, a little incident occurs here. And if this was a Shakespearean play or something, you'd spot it right away as a plant.

There's an incident going to occur that gets forgotten, but becomes very pivotal later on. Verse 20, In those days, when Mordecai sat in the king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthing and Teresh, of those which kept the door, were wroth and sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus. These two guys are going to try to assassinate the king.

Okay? Verse 22, And the thing was known to Mordecai, who told it to Esther the queen, and Esther certified the king thereof in Mordecai's name. And when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out. Therefore, they were both hanged on a tree.

And it was written in the book of the Chronicles before the king. So these two guys were plotting to kill the king. Mordecai found out about it, tipped off Esther, tipped off the king.

They checked it out. These guys get hung. Now I might mention here, in the book of Esther, we're going to again later encounter what are translated gallows.

And you and I visualize a gallows in a traditional French guillotine style or something like, or excuse me, in a western hangman noose kind of thing. This was, rather than being hung by the neck as we tend to imagine it from western encounters, these men were probably impaled on a stake. This was not an unusual method of execution in Persia.

Darius Xerxes' father was known to have once impaled 3,000 men. A record of this assassination attempt here, of course, was written in the annals and recorded. Now, we're going to discover a gallows later on that's 80 feet high that the villain will ultimately get impaled on.

Now you should understand, this just sounds kind of gross, to give you a little more historical background, all of us in this room are familiar with crucifixion. Crucifixion was not invented by the Romans, it was invented by the Persians. It was adopted by the Romans and used very widely by the Romans, but it really has its invention accredited to the Persians.

We're dealing here about five centuries before Christ, and I think crucifixion in the form that we know it occurred probably about a century or two before Christ. So it actually emerges in the technology a few centuries later from here. But the idea that here what they're really doing is impaling is significant.

Rather than jump into chapter 3, we're making good time here, but what we have now so far in Esther, we've got Esther introduced, we've got Mordecai introduced, and the chapter 2 closes with this little incident that Mordecai is the hero of, but he gets no reward or recognition for this. And we're going to discover in a couple of chapters later that the king on a very critical night can't sleep. And he is going to, when he can't sleep, I don't know how many of you have trouble sleeping, but one of the simplest things you do if you have insomnia is to get up and read for a little bit, and then crash again, rather than just lay there and, you know.

Well, that's exactly what the king does. He gets up and he starts to browse through the chronicles, the histories, what's been going on. And he ends up encountering this record of what Mordecai did that occurs to him.

Mordecai had never received his Medal of Honor or whatever, and so that turns out to be a very, very key time. You say, gee, too bad that Mordecai didn't get recognition. No, God's timing is perfect.

He got it when it really counted, okay? So that's coming up. Now, for next time, and we'll leave the, we'll plunge into Chapter 3 next time, because Chapter 3 introduces the villain of the piece. After these things did King Ahasuerus promote Haman, the son of Hamadathah, the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him.

So this guy Haman has really emerged. Now, what your homework assignment is for next time is find out the background of Haman. And you'll discover that he's from Agag, the king of the Amalekites.

The Amalekites were a descendant of Edom, Esau. Esau. Now, Esau has a very, very key role in the Torah, in the Word of God.

And his descendants are traditionally the enemies of Israel. We'll develop that next time, but if you want to do a little homework, you might read up on that. You may recall that the Amalekites were thus the traditional enemies of Israel.

You also may recall that Saul was charged with wiping out all of them. And he did all but one. Agag, the king.

Remember, 1 Samuel 15 is where you're going to dig into all of this. We'll go through it next time. If you haven't done your homework, we won't be penalized too badly.

But it'll be helpful to do a little reading on that background. So you're going to find the intersection in Esther of two threads. You see? You're going to have the royal line of Benjamin in the form of Esther.

You're going to have, if Saul had done what God told him to do, there'd be no Haman. You see? And so this is going to have an interesting intersection. For those of you that don't want to do any background research on that, I encourage you, if nothing else, between now and next time we get together, I encourage you simply to read the Book of Esther.

Read it like a novel. Very colorful. And as you do, it'll raise some questions as you go.

Clearly, Esther's going to be the heroine of the piece, and clearly Haman's going to get his, but not without some very, very colorful twists and turns. And one of the most interesting scenes in the entire Bible occurs where Haman plots against Mordecai. It's with great restraint that I don't peek ahead and jump into that

interesting scene.

We'll say that when the time comes. But as you do this, then, there's something else you can be thinking about as you read the Book of Esther, because we're going to go through the Book of Esther like we're doing here as a historical chronicle of the times, and it's significant biblically. When we've done that, then we'll peek in under the text and see some of the codes that happen to be there.

They're very provocative. But then we'll really go back and look at Esther as a type, as a model. And some of the insights, frankly, I think, are very startling.

Once you have in grasp the narrative itself, very, very interesting. They're clearly, at least at two levels, there are indeed something hidden. Let's stand for a closing word of prayer.

It's going to be very interesting for us as we study Esther to realize God's hand of provision is on them. What makes it even more provocative, it's at a time when God has formally distanced himself, officially, so to speak, yet he's still there taking care of them. That should be incredibly encouraging to you and I, because in contrast to them, God hasn't distanced himself.

He has not declared we're not his people. Quite the contrary, he has declared us, if you're in Christ, as his people. So if he's so skillfully watching over them, how much more is he watching over us? Really very, it should be profoundly encouraging to each one of us.

Let's bow our hearts. Well, Father, we thank you for your word. We stand back in awe and enjoyment as we see your word unfold before us.

We thank you, Father, for revealing yourself to us through this history of your people and your provision for their needs and your hand of protection. And we thank you, Father, that you have openly declared that protection, that provision upon us, indeed also your people, as we abide in Christ. We pray, Father, that you would indeed continue to increase our appetite for your word.

Help us, Father, to really perceive these people that you call your own. And help us, Father, to understand the lessons you have here for our learning, for our encouragement, for our admonition, for our example. We pray, Father, that in all these things, you would help each of us to grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior.

As we commit ourselves into your hands, once again, in the name of Yeshua, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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