

CHAPTER 7

ESTHER - PERSIAN QUEEN

Did you realize that one book in the Bible has a Persian name? It is the book named Esther. Do you know how Esther became queen? The king had a big party. Although we don't know for sure why Queen Vashti refused to join her husband, Khashayarshah, and his guests, her disobedience and subsequent divorce changed the lives of perhaps hundreds of young women throughout the provinces of Persia, particularly a young Jewish orphan named Esther whose beauty and demeanor won the heart of a king. The true story of Esther shows us how God uses faithful individuals to deliver His people from ruin.

A. THE PERSIAN SETTING

1. Khashayarshah (Ahasureus in Persian Standard translation) who reigned from 486 to 465 B.C. His description in Esther 1:1 is made with particular distinction, inferring that there must have been more than one Khashayarshah since he is titled as the king who ruled over 127 providences. Contrast this with the text in Ezra 4:6, which as mentioned before, the author believes refers to Cambujieh.
2. Notice the breadth of the Persian Empire, stretching through 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia.
3. Shushan, the Palace, was located near the Iranian city of Shush which is near Andimeshk north of Ahwaz in southwest Iran.
4. Some commentators believe the banquet described in Esther 1 was given to gain the support of the local governors and military leaders for military campaigns against the encroaching Greek Empire. Others believe the banquet happened after Khashayarshah lost the battles, giving himself over to "wine, women, and song."
5. Although Khashayarshah led unsuccessful campaigns against the Greeks, he left the modern sporting world with a legacy - the marathon. Historical tradition holds that when the Persians were defeated in battle, a Greek soldier ran the distance from the town of Marathon to Athens to proclaim the Greek victory. During the 1908 Olympic Games, the run was commemorated with a foot race from the royal castle at Windsor to the Olympic stadium—a distance of 26.2 miles. Today marathons are run all over the world.

B. THE CROWNING OF ESTHER

1. Queen Vashti was divorced and dethroned since she would not obey the king's command to show her beauty (Esther 1:10-22).
2. Esther's Jewish name was Hadasseh (Esther 2:7).
Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah. This girl, who had the Persian name of Esther, was lovely in form and features, Mordecai had cared for her as his

own daughter when her father and mother died.

3. The name “Esther” is Persian.
 - a. The name “Ishtar,” the goddess of Babylonia and Assyria, is a form of Esther.
 - b. Esther is Persian for the star Venus.
 - c. The English word “star” is of Persian and Assyrian background, derived from the same root consonants “s”, “t” and “r” as Esther.
4. Like a modern beauty contest, the royal search for a new queen had winners and losers, but the losers of Khashayarshah’s pageant would never go home. To lose the king’s contest meant living a life of seclusion with the rest of the women in the king’s harem.
5. Would you have liked having your daughter snatched away by the king’s command to satisfy his whims? Imagine Mordecai’s anguish. He was raising Esther who had lost her parents. Mordecai, her cousin, told Esther not to reveal that she was a Jew, probably to shield her from anti-Jewish feelings.

C. THE WORK OF ESTHER IN FREEING THE JEWS

As we look at the highlights of this familiar story we will see God’s working in the Palace of Shushan. I once led two tours of different groups of English-speaking expatriates from Tehran Bible Church to Shushan the palace. The ruins have provided rich digging for archeologists over many years. The palace gate, the throne room, and the probable banquet hall are displayed. Standing there one can picture Mordecai sitting at the gate, King Khashayarshah sitting on the throne, and Esther pleading for her people before him or hosting several banquets with the king and Haman.

1. Notice that Haman was willing to pay 10,000 talents of silver (\$20,000,000) to kill the Jews (Esther 3:9-15). I’m sure he expected to be paid back plus make a great profit from the bounty he would receive by destroying the Jews and taking their riches from them including the gold and silver previously given to the Jewish people by Cyrus.
2. Esther was told that God could use her to save the Jews, “And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14)
3. Notice the miracle of God’s timing in working out His purposes!
 - a. Mordecai, Esther’s cousin, overheard a plot to kill the king. He informed him and saved the king’s life, but he was not rewarded initially (2:21-23).
 - b. The king had insomnia, and instead of calling for a doctor or perhaps a minstrel to entertain him, he decided to read memorandums about his own kingdom (6:1).
 - c. In reading he was reminded that Mordecai discovered a plot to kill him and

questioned whether or not Mordecai had been rewarded (6:1-3).

- d. Haman arrived early in court and had the king's permission to kill all the Jews, which would have included his enemy, Mordecai. Can you imagine how shocked he was when the king asked him to honor Mordecai for saving his life (6:4-11)?
- e. Imagine how pained Haman was to lead Mordecai throughout the city on a white horse proclaiming that this is a man whom the king honors! Imagine how Haman felt about his reputation.
- f. God gave Esther wisdom in having two banquets. The first was to prompt the king once again to ask for her request. But after a pleasing evening well-hosted and served by his Queen, the King promised to grant Esther's request even before he heard what it was. Having won her king's favor, Esther then invited him and Haman to the second banquet, where she would plead on behalf of her people and herself and expose the wicked plot of Haman to kill all Jews. Consequently, he was hung on his own gallows (5:7-12, 6:14, 7:1-8, and 7:9-10)

“Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, “A gallows seventy-five feet high stands by Haman's house. He had it made for Mordecai, who spoke up for the king.” The king said, “Hang him on it!” So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided.” Esther 7:9-10

- 4. The same swift courier post (set up by the previous king Darius), which spread the command to kill the Jews throughout all the provinces of the kingdom also dispatched the second decree, which saved them (3:12-15; 8:9-14).
- 5. Read chapter 5 and 8 of Esther and observe the events as they take place. It is a great picture of God's plan of salvation for mankind.
 - a. All the Jews were condemned to die because of Haman's decree, of which King Khashayarshah had previously approved (5:3, 12, 15). Comparatively, all of mankind is under the condemnation of death because of sin.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:23

“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.” John 3:18
 - b. Esther had compassion for her people, who were condemned and made a great personal sacrifice to save them. Likewise Jesus died for the sins of the world. Those who do not perish and are not condemned will have eternal life.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that

whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” John 3:16-17

- c. Because “no document written in the king’s name and sealed with his ring can be revoked” (8:8), the king wrote another decree, giving the Jews the right to defend themselves—providing a way of salvation without revoking his first decree. Similarly, because mankind is sinful and the wages of sin are death, God provided his son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty and replace our sins with His righteousness.
“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” II Corinthians 5:21
 - d. The king’s command was translated into all 127 languages of the provinces of Persia from India to Ethiopia so that all the different people would hear it in their own language, not just in Persian (8: 9-10). The Gospel which tells the good news that we are made righteous through Christ’s death and not by our good works must be translated for every ethnic group.
 - e. The king’s command immediately was distributed in the best and quickest means possible, which meant using the best horses in the royal stables (8:10-14). Today the best means available should be used to spread the good news of Jesus Christ such as radio, television, the internet, mass media, and especially, through personal witness. The riders of these fast horses did not delay or stop by the oasis to lounge for awhile, but as the Scriptures say they were “spurred on by the king’s command”. (8:14) All true Christians should be motivated to obey the command given by the King of Kings (Jesus Christ) to disciple all nations (ethnic groups). Perhaps God has blessed you so that in addition to Farsi, you know other languages spoken in Iran. Would God have you to take the good news of Salvation in Jesus in that language? We should be spurred on with all haste to spread the good news.
“The couriers, riding the royal horses, raced out, spurred on by the king’s command. And the edict was also issued in the citadel of Susa.” Esther 8:14
6. In chapter 8:17 it is recorded, “In every province and in every city, wherever the edict of the king went, there was joy and gladness among the Jews, with feasting and celebrating. And many people under other nationalities became Jews because fear of the Jews had seized them.” Esther and Mordecai wanted the Jews saved from the destruction plotted by wicked Haman. In the process, many others, including Persians, became followers of the one true God, thus inheriting the hope of the coming Messiah, who would pay for their sins. In the Old Testament provisions were given for non-Jews to become followers of the true God.
7. The feast of Purim was instituted to commemorate the Jews’ deliverance. It is still

celebrated today by Jews during the first week in February. A triangular-shaped cake, symbolizing Haman's hat is eaten. Jewish children perform plays depicting the life of Esther. With every mention of Haman's name, a trumpet is blown to symbolically blot it out.

D. MAKE A PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. How can God use you this week to minister spiritually to Farsi-speaking people and to others whose languages you know? This month? This year?
2. Has God put you in a special situation similar to Esther's? Mordecai told Esther, "For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to the royal position for such a time as this?" Esther 4:14 Does God have a special job for you? Will you obey God and do what he wants to do in your life?

E. DIG DEEPER

1. How does Haman's downfall illustrate Proverb 29:23, "The bigger they are, the harder they fall?"
2. I Peter 5:5 states, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." If you are having problems in your Christian life, or with other people you might ask God if you have a proud spirit, like Haman.