

Slide # 1

Theme: God’s providential Care For His People

Outline:

Chapter 1 – Queen Vashti Deposed

Chapter 2 – Esther Becomes Queen

Chapter 3 – Haman’s Plot Against the Jews

Chapters 4-7 Esther’s Courage – Haman’s Plot Backfires

Chapter 8 The Jews Avenged

Chapter 9 The Feast of Purim Instituted

Chapter 10 Epilogue – Mordecai Exalted

There are some strange stories in the Bible. They all tell an important part of God’s redemption story but on the face of it some of them come off strange. They say that truth is stranger than fiction and often it is.

Esther is one of those stories. It doesn’t even name God which is appropriate because God’s people in the book are clearly out of the revealed will of God. And yet God is the main player involved as seen in the providential care of His people in spite of themselves.

The setting takes place in about 483-473 B.C. after the time of the Babylonian Captivity which concluded in 538 BC with the decree of the Persian king Cyrus permitting the return of the Jews to their homeland. However, in disobedience MOST of the Jews remained in the land of Medo-Persia. That is the setting for the book of Esther.

Slide # 2

605/597/586 BC – Babylonian Captivity

538 BC – Decree by Cyrus permitting the Jews return

483-473 BC – Events in the book of Esther

The Persian king Ahasuerus ruled over a massive empire and he gave a HUGE party for those in the capital city of Shushan (also called Susa). And when the wine was flowing freely with his all male guests he invited the beautiful queen Vashti to come and show off her beauty to all these men.

Vashti refused to come which greatly angered the king and so with counsel the king had her permanently deposed from being queen and by law forbidden from ever coming into his presence again. This message was sent throughout the empire with the instruction that every man should be master of his own house.

We pick up the story tonight in chapter 2.

Esther 2:1–14 (NKJV)

1 After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus subsided, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what had been decreed against her.

Combining information from 1:3 with that 2:16 it would appear that about 3 or 4 years have past since Vashti was deposed. Scholars believe that during this time Ahasuerus had been focused on war with the Greeks (c. 482-480 B.C.). Therefore, it is suggested that the search for a replacement for Vashti did not take place in earnest until Ahasuerus returned from fighting the Greeks in 479 BC.

Whatever the exact time frame it would appear that after a considerable time lapse King Ahasuerus was having second thoughts about deposing queen Vashti. He remembered what she had done but also what had been decreed against her. Remember the decree against her was permanent law in accord with the “*laws of the Persians and the Medes*” (cf. Est. 1:19-22). So this was binding. And yet you get the feeling that the king at this point felt regret.

Slide # 3

Proverbs 14:29 (NKJV)

29 He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, But he who is impulsive exalts folly.

Proverbs 16:32 (NKJV)

32 He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.

Proverbs 25:28 (NKJV)

28 Whoever has no rule over his own spirit Is like a city broken down, without walls.

Uncontrolled anger is folly and the path of much regret! Rarely do people in great anger accomplish great things.

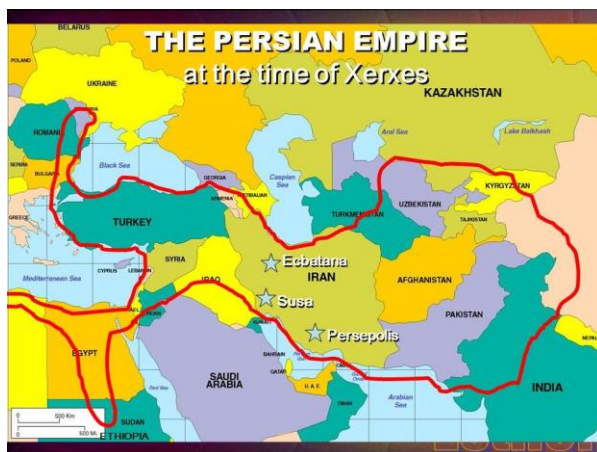
2 Then the king's servants who attended him said: "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king;

Throughout the book it is evident that the king was consistently led along by his officials. It doesn't seem he was a great leader or much of an original thinker. His servants seeing the situation recommended a search be made for a beautiful replacement for queen Vashti – with emphasis on "beautiful young virgins". Nothing but the BEST for the king.

3 and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan the citadel, into the women's quarters, under the custody of Hegai the king's eunuch, custodian of the women. And let beauty preparations be given them.

This was a kingdom wide search for young beautiful virgins who were then to be brought to the fortified capital (citadel) of Shushan (also called Susa).

Slide # 4



There these beautiful young ladies would be put into the care of Hegai the eunuch who was in charge of the king's harem of women.

Shushan (also called Shush or Susa) is in the southwestern part of modern Iran. It was one of Persia's four capital cities (cf. Neh. 1:1; Dan. 8:2). The word "citadel" means "fortified palace".

4 Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This thing pleased the king, and he did so.

This plan pleased the king and so he signed off on it.

Note the king has MANY women in his harem but only one would be queen. She was to be the most beautiful – a trophy wife for the king.

5 In Shushan the citadel there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite.

Here we are introduced to one of the main characters in the story. He was a Jew named Mordecai. His ancestry is traced back to the tribe of Benjamin. Mordecai is a Babylonian name taken from the chief Babylonian god named Marduk. Mordecai was born in exile and given this pagan name.

6 Kish had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been captured with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away.

Kish was evidently Mordecai's great-grandfather who was deported to Babylon in 597 BC along with Jeconiah who was then king of Judah. Jeconiah is also called Joehoiachin or Coniah (cf. 2 Kg. 24:14-15; 1 Chron. 3:16; 2 Chron. 36:9-10; Jere. 22:24-30)

7 And Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman was lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.

Mordecai was actually Esther's cousin – evidently an older cousin. Esther was an orphan and so Mordecai raised her as a daughter. Esther's Hebrew name was Hadassah (meaning myrtle) while Esther was her Persian name meaning "star" probably related to the deity called Ishtar.

Remember they are living in a pagan land and became assimilated into that culture which is even reflected in their names.

Esther was young, lovely, and beautiful. She was a natural stand out.

8 So it was, when the king's command and decree were heard, and when many young women were gathered at Shushan the citadel, under the custody of Hegai, that Esther also was taken to the king's palace, into the care of Hegai the custodian of the women.

We are not sure if this means Esther was forcibly taken or whether she volunteered to go. The language in the text says the officers in the various provinces were to gather all the beautiful young virgins and so the “taken” in verse 8 may suggest that beautiful (as she was) Esther may not have had a real choice in the matter. How exactly it came about is not stated with any precise detail.

Certainly, Esther did not fight it. Her demeanor all along is one of compliance. And so Esther along with MANY other young women were gathered and placed into the custody of Hegai the eunuch who was the caretaker of the king’s women.

9 Now the young woman pleased him, and she obtained his favor; so he readily gave beauty preparations to her, besides her allowance. Then seven choice maidservants were provided for her from the king’s palace, and he moved her and her maidservants to the best place in the house of the women.

Esther had a way about her that immediately brought her into favor with Hegai who was in charge of the women. He favored her by giving her special beauty preparations, seven choice maidservants, and the best of accommodations. That is a lot of favor – all with the goal of making a beautiful person look as beautiful as possible.

The word “favor” is the Hebrew word “**Hesed**” which is often translated as “covenant loyalty”. It is a combination of love, faithfulness, covenant commitment, grace, compassion, kindness, care, etc. The King James translators initially used 14 different words to translate it but eventually ended up with the compound word “loving-kindness”. Others translate it as “steadfast love”, “loyal love” or “covenant-keeping love”. It is the idea of LOVING FAITHFULNESS or LOVING-FAVOR. (cf. Grace in NT).

In other words, the word “hesed” used here is emphasizing incredible FAVOR so strong that the only reasonable explanation is that the hand of God is behind it (cf. Ex. 15:13; Lam. 3:22-23). Here again we see God’s providential hand at work behind the scenes.

When it talks about “her allowance” that is translated in the ESV as “her portion of food”.

Slide # 5

Esther could be contrasted with Daniel who refused to eat the things from the king's table (Dan. 1:5) because the food would include items considered unclean by the Jewish Law. Apparently Esther had no qualms about the food she ate (Es. 2:9). She certainly did not set herself apart as Daniel had done.

– *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*

Again, remember that in view are a compromised people who are out of the will of God in refusing to go back to the land of promise where they could live out their separated calling as God's chosen people. Instead, these Jews who remained in the land had grown comfortable in this pagan context. They were comfortable and compromised.

10 Esther had not revealed her people or family, for Mordecai had charged her not to reveal it.

Esther had a secret that she had not told anyone; namely her family heritage – the Jewish people group to which she belonged. Indeed, Mordecai had charged her to keep it secret. This is an early hint in the book that the danger of Antisemitism was real and that for someone of Mordecai's standing he did not want it known lest it be used against him – and also Esther in this case.

11 And every day Mordecai paced in front of the court of the women's quarters, to learn of Esther's welfare and what was happening to her.

Mordecai was concerned. If it turned out that Esther was not selected to be the queen she would probably spend most of her life in isolation with the other women in the harem. She would forever be denied a normal family life. You couldn't just resign from the harem. This after all was a pagan dictatorship where you could be killed at any whim of the king.

12 Each young woman's turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after she had completed twelve months' preparation, according to the regulations for the women, for thus were the days of their preparation apportioned: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women.

Good night everything was done with incredible excess – no expense spared. Each girl beautified themselves for 12 months in preparing themselves for an "interview" with the king.

Six months with the oil of myrrh (which was a sort of fragrant gummy substance). And then six months with perfumes. They must have gone over to the king smelling like a perfume factory.

Back in a more “legalistic” age some fundamentalists thought make up was a sign of sinfulness. J. Vernon McGee tells this humorous story.

A dear lady once came to me when I was pastor in downtown Los Angeles, California. She thought that some of the girls were using too much makeup. She did not think a Christian ought to use it, and she put me out on a limb when she asked me what I thought about the subject. I said, “Well, it depends on the woman. Some women would be greatly improved if they used a little makeup, and I think we should all do the best we can with what God has given us.” She took that personally, and I want to add that she had reason to.

– **J. Vernon McGee**

On this subject McGee was also known to say, “**If the barn needs painting, then paint it.**”

Well, in context these women were doing all they could to paint themselves up as best as possible, but it was all to one end.

Slide # 6

Esther was not in a beauty contest simply to win the king’s affections; the women were being prepared to have sexual relations with **the king**. – ***The Bible Knowledge Commentary***

That sounds crude and so antithetical to what God’s people are to be about that some have tried to soften this.

Slide # 7

God protected and used Esther and Mordecai *in spite of* the fact that they were not living according to the Law commanded by God to the people of Israel. By Law Esther was not to marry a pagan (Deut. 7:1–4) or have sexual relations with a man who was not her husband (Ex. 20:14), and yet this was the purpose of her being included in the harem. – ***The Bible Knowledge Commentary***

13 Thus prepared, each young woman went to the king, and she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace.

Each woman thus fully prepared to the best of their ability could then take whatever clothing, adornments, jewels, etc. with her as she went to see the king.

14 In the evening she went, and in the morning she returned to the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who kept the concubines. She would not go in to the king again unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name.

Without being explicit it is pretty clear what was going on here. In the evening they went to see the king and the morning they returned. Each one of these girls had a 1 night stand with the king.

Apparently there were two harems. As noted earlier Hegai was the eunuch in charge of the women in the women's quarters. These were potential women for the king. However, having spent a night with the king they were then considered one of his concubines to be used as he desired.

Shaashgaz, another eunuch, was in charge of this second harem. And when they returned from the king they were put into what is called ***"the second house of the women"***.

These women potentially might only see the king once and forever after that be relegated to living as a concubine in the women's quarters. They would not see the king again unless he delighted in her and summoned her by name. Such a life!

So the question is how in the world could Esther (a supposed woman of God) do this?

One commentator says, "Knowing Esther's character, we can be sure she would have refused to do anything contrary to God's law." But that seems to defy the obvious. Many commentators just kind of skip over this messy part of the story.

Clearly, she was breaking almost every law in God's book by going along with this. Daniel refused to stop praying no matter the consequences. Daniel stood up and refused to eat the king's food. We see none of this from either Mordecai or Esther.

They were living in compromise and not really taking a stand at this point.

The Bible tells it like it is warts and all. I love that about the Bible. It is real. It is truth.

Slide # 8

The Bible is not such a book as man would write if he could, because it condemns him. Neither is it a book that he could write if he would because it surpasses him. - **Lewis Sperry Chafer**

How true: The Bible is not a book we would write if we could; and it is not a book we could write if we would.

But here is the main point in the whole book of Esther. In spite of the unfaithfulness of His chosen people Israel God ever remains faithful. He is “hesed” faithful behind the scenes even when His people are not. Thus we see God’s providential faithfulness in the shadows of Esther all the way through. Indeed, this is a book in which God is the main character even though He is not named even one time in the book.

At the end of the day History really is HIS STORY. It’s really all about what God is doing in and through His people – often in spite of us and not because of us. All the glory truly belongs to Him.

Slide # 9

Jeremiah 31:35–37 (NKJV)

35 Thus says the LORD, Who gives the sun for a light by day, The ordinances of the moon and the stars for a light by night, Who disturbs the sea, And its waves roar (The LORD of hosts is His name):

36 “If those ordinances depart From before Me, says the LORD, Then the seed of Israel shall also cease From being a nation before Me forever.”

37 Thus says the LORD: “If heaven above can be measured, And the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel **For all that they have done**, says the LORD.

Malachi 3:6 (NKJV)

6 “For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

No matter what Israel does God remains faithful. He cannot deny Himself. Esther is testimony of this reality! The destiny of Israel is ultimately all about God and His character. He is the God of **hesed** faithfulness – loyal covenant faithfulness.