

Learning from Esther's Life #1
"The Amazing Plan God has Prepared!"
Message Notes, July 3, 2022

◆ **The Book of Esther**

1. How did God deliver the Jews from the terrible situation that had come upon them?
2. God always protects His people (believers) in any crisis; they (we) are indestructible.

◆ **Setting of the Book of Esther**

1. Israel is the "People of Suffering." In 722 BCE, Northern Israel was destroyed by Assyria, and in 586 BCE, Southern Judah was destroyed by the Neo-Babylonian Empire. At that time, many people were deported to Babylon and other places, but in 539 BCE King Cyrus of Persia overthrew Babylon and issued a decree to free the Jews, allowing them to return to their homeland.
2. However, many Jews remained behind in foreign lands because they had established themselves there, and some, like Ezra, Nehemiah, and Mordecai, had become high officials in Persia. Nonetheless, as a people the Jews were a minority group in a weak position in the era from 500-450 BCE.

Esther Chapter 1

1) A Six-Month Long Banquet

- This banquet was held the year before the Greek expedition, and it is believed to have been held to boost morale in preparation for that battle.
- The Persians customarily discussed important matters over drinks (Herodotus, History, I), but this banquet had the purpose of "displaying the wealth and glory of the empire" (v. 4). Those who are truly powerful have no need to display it.
- ✧ The biblical principle is that "God brings low those who exalt themselves and gives grace to those who humble themselves," but the psychology of those who exalt themselves is that it is often the reverse of their sense of insecurity and inferiority.

2) Male-Dominated Society

- **(v. 11)** "...to bring Queen Vashti to him with the royal crown on her head. He wanted the nobles and all the other men to gaze on her beauty, for she was a very beautiful woman." What was the psychology behind this command? According to the Targum (an Aramaic interpretation of the Torah), the king ordered Vashti to come out completely naked, wearing only a crown. According to Josephus, the great queen was obeying the Persian law that a wife should not show herself to outsiders.←The king's order, made when he was drunk, was an outrage, an abuse of power, and sexually deviant.
- The response of male society (to this rejection of the queen): male authority is enforced by law from the outside (vv. 16-20). The Bible teaches in various places that leaders lead by the way they live. A true leader leads by the character that overflows from within, not by external restraints (Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Leadership*).
- The Bible's teaching written to "God's People" during the same period:
Malachi 2:14-16 (NIV)
¹⁴You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. ¹⁵Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth. ¹⁶"The man who hates and divorces his wife," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "does violence to the one he should protect," says the LORD Almighty. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful.
- ✧ The Modern Japanese Translation (現代訳) "I hate those who cover themselves with tyranny, as with a garment," The NLT says, "To cover one's garment with violence." It could be translated "to cover (one's husband's) jacket with blood" or "to cover up violence with a jacket." In any case, clearly the subject referred to is domestic violence. God is

defending women, who were in a weak position societally at that time (450 BCE), when the concept of domestic violence did not even exist.

Malachi 4:6 (NIV) “He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.”

- ✧ These words are the last words of the Old Testament, and they are directed to men who are husbands and fathers, whose problematic behavior is destroying society. The Bible teaches that this restoration of the family and relationships is essential for the restoration of society writ large.

Ephesians 5:25, 28 (NIV) “²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her...²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.”

- This is how the God of the Bible views this society. It is critically important to be aware of the deformity that male-dominated society is and to recovery from that problem. The Bible teaches us that the family and society are not to be ruled by force, but through love and compassion. Also, God has been protecting women, who have been relegated to a position of weakness since time immemorial.

Esther Chapter 2

3) Vessel of God's Choosing

- **The Regret of King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I):** Esther is called to be queen, probably the year after the defeat of the Greek expedition (2:16). At this time, the king was a wreck, both publicly and privately, and did not have the swagger he had displayed at the previously held banquet. Is this not the essence of humanity? When we are weak, we act as though we are strong. We must continuously be cognizant of that vulnerability.
- **Esther:** At just that time, God chose Esther, an orphaned Jewish girl. Her Persian name means “star” and represents hope, while her Hebrew name, Hadassah, means “myrtle tree,” (Isaiah 55:13, Nehemiah 8:15), which has beautiful flowers with white petals and many yellow stamens. The fruit was used as a painkiller, and its branches are used for the temporary huts during the Feast of Tabernacles, making them symbols of celebration. Isaiah 55:13, “Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow,” indicating deliverance from the Babylonian captivity, as well as a blessing in the apocalyptic sense. The word expresses hope that the curse will be transformed into a blessing. Esther embodied this hope through the way she lived.
- **Foreshadowing:**① Esther was called to be queen not for her own personal advancement, but for a greater purpose. ② At the same time, there is a situation (2:21-23) in which Mordecai passes on information about a mutiny against the king, which later becomes the key to a great upset that happens in God's time.
- ✧ These two people both did the best that they could where they were placed. Esther “won the favor of everyone who saw her” (2:15 NIV), and Mordecai was faithful to do what he could, raising Esther as his adopted daughter and serving the king as a government official.
- In the same way, God has intentions for everything in our lives. If we do whatever we can do now, to the best of our ability, it will have come to have meaning later. (Addition: “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.”)
- God remembers all the little good things you have done. So don't be discouraged, rather fulfill the responsibilities that the Lord has given you without becoming disheartened. One day, all will surely be transformed into an amazing blessing.

Conclusion

1. Do you believe that God uses those considered insignificant by the world to do great works?
2. Do you truly believe that God knows you personally?
3. Can you believe that what you are doing now will be used greatly by God someday?