

# ESTHER

## 2:1-3:15

### Esther 2:1-3:15

Taught at our Sunday evening service, 30th October 2022 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

**Reading:** 1 Samuel 15:1-9

**Good evening. Let's pray.**

### Introduction

This is our second week studying the Old Testament book of Esther verse by verse; if you missed last week's study you can find both it and study notes on our web site, [dcf.church](http://dcf.church)

As a quick recap, some quick details about this book are...

- **Written by:** Ezra, the scribe
- **Takes place in:** Shusan (also known as Susa, which is nearby modern day Shush in Iran)
- **Length:** 10 chapters, 167 verses, 5637 words (so can be read in much less than an hour)
- **Timing:** Likely 516-506 B.C. (during the era of the Medo-Persian empire)
- **Theme:** The deliverance of the Jews during their Babylonian captivity (the feast of Purim)

Last week in chapter 1, we were introduced to King Ahaseurus - which is a title, not a name - with this specific Ahaseurus quite possibly being Darius the Mede of Daniel chapter 5 (though some believe him to be Xerxes). And in his third year of ruling, he threw an enormous banquet - a feast lasting 180 days. After which, he added another 7 days of feasting.

On the 7th day of that feast the king has too much to drink, and requests the queen to show off her beauty to those present. The queen refuses, but in protecting her own honour, dishonours the king, so the king seeks then follows the advice of those closest to him to remove Vashti as queen. This is a terrible display of how to act. Yet even in a troubled marriage in a pagan nation, we start to see God's providence as things are set in motion, unbeknown to anyone, to save the Jewish nation, despite the fact they were out of His will and in captivity.

## Overview of Esther

Tonight, we'll study chapters 2 & 3 - here's a quick refresh of how the chapters are laid out:

- Chapter 1 (22 verses) - The King removes Vashti as Queen
- Chapter 2 (23 verses) - Esther is made Queen, while Mordecai uncovers a plot
- Chapter 3 (15 verses) - Haman plots against the Jews
- Chapter 4 (17 verses) - Esther agrees to help the Jews
- Chapter 5 (14 verses) - Esther sets a banquet while Haman plots against Mordecai
- Chapter 6 (14 verses) - The King dreams and Mordecai is honoured
- Chapter 7 (10 verses) - Haman's plot is unveiled but he is killed instead
- Chapter 8 (17 verses) - Haman's plot against the Jews is reversed
- Chapter 9 (32 verses) - The Jews overcome their enemies
- Chapter 10 (3 verses) - Mordecai's position remembered

## Overview of chapter two

Looking more closely at chapters 2 & 3 then, we see in the first 4 verses of chapter 2...

- v1-4 - The desire and plan to find a new queen
- v5-7 - Esther introduced
- v8-11 - Esther finds favour, Mordecai waits for news
- v12-18 - Preparation & selection of Esther as queen
- v19-23 - The plot against the king

## Overview of chapter three

Then in chapter 3 we see...

- v1-6 - The promotion and pride of Haman

- v7-11 - The plan and permission to kill the Jews
- v12-15 - The decree is published, the people are perplexed

## Chapter two

Let's then dig into chapter 2. In verse 1 we read...

### Esther 2:1

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

So then, following on from the events of chapter 1 which took place in the third year of the king's reign - and no more than 3 years later - we see the king's desire for a queen. But there is no going back to Vashti, for as we saw last time:

### Esther 1:19

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.

So a suggestion is made:

### Esther 2:2-4

Then the king's servants who attended him said: "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king; 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. Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This thing pleased the king, and he did so.

So those closest to the king offer their advice on who he should marry (and who he shouldn't). And that's the way it always is, right? And, I speak to those who are not married, that makes it incredibly important who you have as your closest friends - for if your closest friends do not love the Lord, they will not offer you sound counsel on who to marry. I know this first hand - my work colleagues did not make helpful suggestions, but my closest friends did - because they loved God.

And I would add, that we each need to be there for each single person in this church. And we need to show up with better answers than "wow, that's hard. I don't know what I would have done in that situation". We need to show up with godly, Biblical advice.

But here in chapter 2 we see the goings on of a pagan nation - we see a beauty contest arranged, with the winning contestant becoming queen.

Yet, as will become evident, God's providence is at work - and indeed has already been at work through the obedient actions of a man we're about to meet. The unseen rudder is steering the ship. And what is put in motion here will have far bigger consequences than the king finding a new queen. And thus, we are introduced to 2 central characters to this book:

#### **Esther 2:5-6**

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. 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.

So we're introduced this man, Mordecai, who based on other timings was perhaps somewhere between his late 40s to late 50s. And somehow, following Nebuchadnezzar's captivity of the Jews, he had ended up serving in the palace in Shushan. We're also told...

#### **Esther 2:7**

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.

Here we're introduced to Esther, whose real name was Hadassah, meaning *myrtle*, but was now given the Persian name Esther, meaning *star*. And we're told that she was both lovely and beautiful - surely speaking to her character as much as her complexion.

A lovely character, despite the hardship she had already faced, because sadly, we also read that she had been orphaned. How her parents died we don't know, but what we do see is the great care shown to her by her older cousin Mordecai, who not only cares for her, but takes her in as his own daughter. And to note, I mistakenly said in passing last week that he was her uncle. But as we read here, she was his uncle's daughter which of course makes her his cousin.

There's no mention of Mordecai being married or having children of his own, so this is a big commitment he had made, and no doubt the events we read next troubled him greatly...

#### **Esther 2:8**

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.

Jon Courson notes that according to Josephus and tradition, Mordecai was determined to hide Esther. But this was impossible because her beauty was so well known.

And so she is taken to the king's palace to be entered into the royal beauty contest.

Was this how Esther imagined her life would pan out? Or how her future would be determined? I would imagine not! But I believe we see her character shine, and open doors, for next we read...

**Esther 2:9**

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.

And I don't know about you, but this reminds me of Joseph - a man who was taken against his will, not once, but twice, yet excelled both in Potiphar's house and the Egyptian jail. How? A combination of his obedience and God's providence. And here we see Esther pleasing Hegai, who was responsible for preparing these young women ahead of meeting the king, the result being an almost unfair advantage given to her.

Ezra then notes...

**Esther 2:10**

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

And this is sound advice from her cousin - for like all empires seem to do, those taken captive were despised compared to their own people. And with a no living parents and a Persian name, Esther was able to conceal her real background.

**Esther 2:11**

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.

So genuine care for Esther's wellbeing was shown here by Mordecai. She really had become as a daughter to him. And Ezra continues...

**Esther 2:12**

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.

Esther has a year of uncertainty. We read this in a few verses, in a few seconds. But life pans out much slower - yet sometimes we're so keen for things to happen in our timing, and by that, we mean now! But sure enough, things are working out not only for her good, but for the good of all Jews - not in her timing, but God's.

Now, this amount of preparation - a year of getting ready is quite something! But consider that this is much like the preparation of a bride today - you'd not typically find a bride who gave no thought to what her appearance would be like on her wedding day until the wedding day itself.

And in that, there is a beautiful parallel for us to consider. For we are also a bride - that is, the church is referred to as the bride of Christ. And likewise we should be getting ready to meet our groom, the one the Bible says we've been betrothed to. Paul writes to the Corinthian church:

## **2 Corinthians 11:2**

For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

How should we be presented? Well, look at what happens with Esther. First, six months of myrrh - symbolic of death. And we are to die to ourselves. To put our old life away. But as one pastor calls out, the Bible calls us to lay down our lives, but most of us aren't even willing to lay down our opinions. We need to be willing to let go of all we have.

Second, Esther has six months of perfumes and preparations? What for us? - well, we are to be a swelling smelling aroma to our God. We read in Ephesians chapter 5:

## **Ephesians 5:1-4**

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

Jon Courson comments: The women spent twelve months preparing themselves in order to make a good impression on the king. Do we do the same for our King?

But back to the account we read of Esther:

## **Esther 2:13-14**

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. 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.

This is not how the Bible prescribes to find a wife. Yet, again I think we see something of Esther's character here...

## **Esther 2:15**

Now when the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter, to go in to the king, she requested nothing but what Hegai the king's eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her.

She's certainly humble.

## **Esther 2:16-17**

So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. 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.

Once again Esther finds favour, and, her background still unknown, is made queen in the most powerful empire on earth at that time.

#### **Esther 2:18**

Then the king made a great feast, the Feast of Esther, for all his officials and servants; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces and gave gifts according to the generosity of a king.

So we have a royal wedding, a bank holiday, and souvenirs! Whatever you think of monarchies and our monarchy - it certainly is a useful frame of reference to live in a country that has one.

And with Esther as queen, we now see that Mordecai is serving in the king's gate, where judgements on civil matters were made (such as we read in the book of Ruth). And we read here...

#### **Esther 2:19-20**

When virgins were gathered together a second time, Mordecai sat within the king's gate. Now Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him.

What a beautiful picture of obedience. So should children obey their parents - not only in youth, but in adulthood. We are to honour and respect our parents. The dividing line of course is where our parents are suggesting or demanding something contrary to the Bible. But there is a wonderful thing that experience does - it matures us. And in our enthusiasm of youth, we sometimes don't consider that. This is a wonderful example.

#### **Esther 2:21**

In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, doorkeepers, became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.

That is, they wanted to assassinate the king.

#### **Esther 2:22**

So the matter became known to Mordecai, who told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name.

The actions here are important. If Mordecai and Esther didn't do this, the outcome would have been different - not just for the king! But also, if Esther had taken credit for this, and never mentioned Mordecai's name, then the turn of events we see in chapter 6 would not have happened.

#### **Esther 2:23**

And when an inquiry was made into the matter, it was confirmed, and both were hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.

I find it interesting to see the king's thoroughness in having an inquiry - not reacting as he did in the spur of the moment with Vashti (who merely didn't obey his command, rather than seek to kill him). The difference a few drinks makes, eh?!

But let's also note - there is no reward for Mordecai here, in much the same way as there was no instant reward for Joseph for correctly interpreting the dreams in jail. But like Joseph, there would be reward later. And so too must we patiently wait and let God have His way in His timing - we are not to exalt ourselves.

## Chapter three

So let's consider what we've read for a moment as we begin chapter 3. We've seen the king act unreasonably under the influence of alcohol and then remove Vashti from being queen. Then, still desiring a queen, he accepts the suggestion of choosing a new queen through what sounds rather like a beauty contest. And albeit without choice, so Esther enters the stage, as does her older cousin, Mordecai, who had raised her since she was orphaned. So, God's providence and Esther's obedience sees her become queen, and Mordecai now serves as part of the royal household, and we jump ahead 5 years and read in verse 1:

### 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.

This verse is **key** to understanding the attitudes of both Mordecai and Haman in this and later chapters. Why? Because of Haman's lineage. He is an Agagite - a name that was given because of his Amalekite descent, and their long dead king, Agag.

Now, I want to say how thankful I am to our pastor for so faithfully and frequently explaining the role of the giant tribes in the Old Testament - because the Amalekites were intent on destroying Israel. Why? Because of who they were, and who Israel were.

We read in Genesis 6 that there were giants both before and after the flood, that were the offspring of fallen angels and women of the earth. And in both cases, the people and nations that resulted from their offspring were an attempt by Satan to destroy the line through to Jesus - to prevent the promised seed from ever being born, to prevent us having a Saviour! (we covered some of that last week).

While initially these giant tribes and their wickedness were wiped out by the flood, those that were born afterward became long-term enemies of Israel, seeking to utterly destroy them. In the case of the Amalekites we see them as early as Genesis 14 where Abraham's nephew, Lot, gets caught up in fighting between nations including the Amalekites, and taken prisoner. We then see them again in Exodus 17 where God gives Israel victory over them in the famous account where Moses' hands are held up by Aaron and Hur, while Joshua and the men fight.

Then in 1 Samuel 15, we read of Saul's terrible mistake. He had specifically been told by the Lord to destroy every single one of the Amalekites, but he spared at least King Agag and kept the best of the spoil for himself. What follows is that famous rebuke by Samuel where he says "to obey is better than sacrifice", and subsequently Saul is replaced by David as King of Israel. This, however, wasn't only a mistake that affected him, but the whole nation.



How? Well, evidently, from what we read here, there were Amalekites that survived. For starters we read in 1 Chronicles 4 that in the days of King Hezekiah of Judah, that the tribe of Simeon defeated the Amalekites that were camped at Mount Seir. And now we find Haman and his family, some of the remaining Amalekites, here in the book of Esther. And by the time we get to the end of this chapter we'll see Haman plotting to annihilate the *entire* population of Jews. One act of disobedience by Saul could have had catastrophic consequences.

The parallel for us should be clear, that this is the nature of sin when it is left un-dealt with. When we are unwilling to deal with it, it will fester, and rear it's ugly head. And like this Agagite will soon try and kill the Jews, so will sin try to kill you. You can't mess with it. If you have sin in your life that you are not dealing with - you have a serious problem. And I think the worry we should have is that perhaps few, if any of us are as repulsed by sin as we should be.

So, keep in mind this key detail, for it will unlock the reason for the attitudes we see, starting in the very next verse where we read...

### **Esther 3:2**

And all the king's servants who were within the king's gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage.

Why would Mordecai not bow or pay homage? It's certainly reminiscent of the situation we read of in Daniel chapter 3 where Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego refuse to bow to the statue of Nebuchadnezzar. But I think likely his refusal was because he could not honour someone whom God had cursed. We read in Exodus 17:

### **Exodus 17:14**

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven."

There was not just history between the Jews and the Amalekites, but God had declared His own intentions. Mordecai surely wasn't willing to go against that. We read...

### **Esther 3:3**

Then the king's servants who were within the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?"

We find his answer in v4...

### **Esther 3:4**

Now it happened, when they spoke to him daily and he would not listen to them, that they told it to Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand; for Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew.

And so we read...

### **Esther 3:5**

When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath.

Is this an indication of pride? Maybe so given how he acts in later chapters. But there's more at play here. Remember Satan's intent in the giant nations was to eliminate the Jews, and this is still the case right here for we read...

### **Esther 3:6**

But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus —the people of Mordecai.

This is a pretty severe reaction to one man's actions, right?! But again this was another one of Satan's attempts to destroy the people of God through whom the Messiah would come. And Haman starts to form his plan...

### **Esther 3:7**

In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, the lot), before Haman to determine the day and the month, until it fell on the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.

That is, the date he settles on to commit genocide against the Jews is around 11 months later in the month of Adar - that's our March time - and crucially this gave enough time for not only the plan to be put in place, but for it to be exposed and thwarted too, as we'll see. Next, Haman presents his plan to the king...

### **Esther 3:8**

Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people's, and they do not keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain.

Of course Haman presents it as a threat to the king, rather than a threat to his own ego, but there are some details we should note. First, he says:

1. The Jews are different from other people.
2. They do not keep the king's laws.
3. They do not profit the king.
4. I will pay 10,000 talents of silver to get rid of them (Esther 3:9).

Why should we note these things? Because the same arguments have often been used throughout history, and even today. Today?! Yes, today.

Even in recent decades leaders in Western governments have said "black people are different, they don't keep our rules". While Hitler declared that "Jews are not normal people", and once again tried to destroy them - resulting in 6 million murders. You may or may not know that it's estimated Hitler and the Nazi regime also murdered close to 250'000 disabled people as well, because they didn't believe they profited society. But we know better, right? Sadly not - we've merely moved from murdering those with downs syndrome in gas chambers to murdering them in the womb. And indeed, the same argument is used for almost all abortion - that "They are different from other people"- that they are "not really human, but just a clump of cells". What a wretched reality this is.

Haman concludes...

**Esther 3:9**

If it pleases the king, let a decree be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring it into the king's treasuries."

Haman presents it as a win win for the king - just give the word, and he'll remove the perceived problems and threat, and bring in money (which at today's values would be in the 10's of millions £)

**Esther 3:10**

So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.

The king is happy with the suggestion, trusts Haman, and doesn't question the motives.

**Esther 3:11**

And the king said to Haman, "The money and the people are given to you, to do with them as seems good to you."

So the order is given, and Haman gets to work without delay...

**Esther 3:12**

Then the king's scribes were called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and a decree was written according to all that Haman commanded—to the king's satraps, to the governors who were over each province, to the officials of all people, to every province according to its script, and to every people in their language. In the name of King Ahasuerus it was written, and sealed with the king's signet ring.

This command was official and binding. No government u-turn possible! We might be tired of the ever changing political direction in our country, but how awful it would be to live in a society where no change were possible, for that's only helpful when good decisions are made!

But also note the timing - the 13th day of the first month. That's the day before the Jews would have celebrated passover, and I can't help but think Satan revelled in this - sealing their destruction the day before they celebrated God's deliverance from Egypt. But God was not finished here - as always, He was not only going to arrange circumstances to deliver the Jews again, but had in fact already been working as we've seen in these opening chapters.

**Esther 3:13-14**

And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions. A copy of the document was to be issued as law in every province, being published for all people, that they should be ready for that day.

This is genocide! In intent, in planning, and in law. And the letters go out to all the provinces in this vast kingdom. So vast, it's estimated at least 127 languages were spoken in it! This is a carefully orchestrated plan, and this chapter closes noting that...

### **Esther 3:15**

The couriers went out, hastened by the king's command; and the decree was proclaimed in Shushan the citadel. So the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Shushan was perplexed.

The king and Haman carry on as if the lives of the Jewish people are worth nothing. But the people can't understand it. And just imagine if a law was signed that meant several of your neighbours and their children were going to be murdered by the state in a matter of months?

It's easy, or at least easier for us to read this. But imagine being in that situation. Imagine the horror. Imagine the conversations in homes that evening - trying to figure out a way out, and worse still, perhaps concluding that there was no way that they could see.

But God was not finished with the Jews. Indeed God is still not finished with them today. And praise God, He's not finished with you and I either.

### **Application questions**

As we go into this week, let's think very carefully on these 3 questions:

- Is there any sin in your life that you're not dealing with?
- Is there any sin in your life that you don't want to deal with?
- What sin do you want to keep a little bit of?

**Let's pray.**