

January 26, 2020 - Esther 2: 1-18 - "Esther is Designated Queen"

Introduction

On June 5, 2018, it was announced that the Miss America Pageant would no longer be judged based on physical appearances. The national Miss America event would now be considered a competition rather than a 'beauty' pageant. Contenders are now candidates not contestants. The Miss America Pageant originated in 1921 as a 'beauty' contest, it grew to include a talent performance and interviews. The young woman who is the winner receives a crown and cape and then makes a procession down a walkway receiving the applause of all spectators. However, unlike our Miss America pageant Ms. Persia had to go through a whole year of beauty preparations. In today's scripture we have described how a Jewish maiden by the name of Esther became a contestant for the beauty queen of Persia. It begins with...

I. A Replacement Plan for a new Queen 2:1-4

1. Xerxes himself did not fare well after Vashti demise from the throne. Esther 2:16 indicates that there was a four-year span before the contest finished of finding a new queen. During that time the King made his great but unsuccessful invasion of Greece and he came home a defeated man. The Battle of Salamis was a disaster for the Persian fleet and cost Xerxes dearly. His army was forced to eat bark, weeds, and leaves because there was no food left in the regions they traveled through. The men were ravaged by disease and many died of dysentery. By the time Xerxes reached Sardis, he had hardly any army left to speak of. His staff wanting to cheer his heart through sensual diversions thus began the replacement contest for a queen.
2. Chapter two opens with King Xerxes remembering that he had banished his queen. According to Herodotus He regretted what he had done but there was no turning back. The King did not come up with a plan by himself. Large harems and political queens were royal status symbols in ancient West Asia. If she was beautiful that added to the king's status.
3. The plan was to assemble a harem from the most beautiful women of the land; to bring them into a harem for the king, and to choose the most favored woman to be his queen from that group. This was sort of a "Miss Persian" contest, and the winner would be queen. The Jewish historian Josephus says the Xerxes had a total of 400 women selected.

II. Background of Esther and her family 2:5-7

1. Mordecai the cousin of Esther came to Persia in one of the waves of exportation that the Babylonians enforced on Judah when it conquered that land. They were part of the large Jewish community that was forced to relocate out of Judah, and didn't decide to return with Ezra. In the day of Mordecai and Esther, the land of Judah was regarded as a wild and backward place. Mordecai is perhaps the most important character in this story.
2. In verse 7 we first hear of Esther whose Jewish name was **Hadassah**; it means "Myrtle"; the Persian name *Esther* means "star". She was raised by her cousin Mordecai since the death of her father and mother. She was a beautiful woman. The Hebrew for lovely and beautiful is literally, "beautiful in form and lovely to look at."

III. Gathering for the Kings Harem 2:8-9; 12

1. In verse 8 Esther is taken into the king's harem. The Jewish historian Titus Flavius Josephus was a first-century Romano-Jewish historian who was born in Jerusalem. Josephus wrote around 93-94 AD, he recorded the number of Xerxes' harem at about four hundred." That is small compared to King Solomon who had 600 royal wives and 300 concubines (1 Kgs 11:3). The advice that came from his servant to replace Vashti pleased the king, so he accepted it.

2. It seems that Esther didn't really have a choice about this and there is a sense in which he had no right to have this young lady. She belonged to God's chosen people, a race that was forbidden by law to marry with another race. She was a Jewess, and yet here she is in this foreign land, and is placed in the procession of the king's search; and when he finds her he knows that this is the one for whom his heart longs. This of course is by the sovereign, overruling grace of God.

3. Hegai the keeper of the women is a eunuch and is specifically mentioned by the Greek historian Herodotus as being an officer of king Ahasuerus, a man entrusted with the oversight of the king's harem for obvious reasons. It appears that in verse nine Hegai found favor with Esther and indulged her. He quickly gave beauty preparations to her, besides her allowance.

Then seven choice lady servants were provided to look after her beauty need from the king's palace, He moved her and her maidservants to the best place in the house of the women. Esther did not have it too shabby. We cannot know her total situation and why she still was in Susa. As an exile Jewish women she was at liberty to go back home. We see in verses 12-14 the elaborate process of preparing for their presentation to the King.

4. Each young woman's has a turn to go in to King Xerxes after she had completed twelve months' preparation, according to the regulations for the women. They spend six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying themselves. One reason for the lengthy time of preparation was to tell if the women had been pregnant upon coming into the harem, so that the king would not have an offspring unworthy of the crown.

On a cultural note Persia was one of many countries famous for its pungent perfumes and ancient customs for the preparations of brides, including ritualistic baths, plucking of the eyebrows, the painting of hands and feet with henna, facial make-up, and applications of a beautifying paste all over the body, meant to lighten the color of the skin and to remove spots and blemishes. Also, this was an arid country and it took its toll on the skin and senses.

IV. Esther conceals her Jewish identity. 2:10-11

1. Esther had not revealed her people because her cousin Mordecai had instructed her not to reveal her heritage. Every day Mordecai we see in verse 11 paced in front of the court of the women's quarters, to learn of Esther's welfare and what was happening to her. Normally, there is never a good reason for hiding the fact that we are Christians. We can't live a life of denial and expect God to recognize us. However, we do recognize that there are situations where God may have us be discreet about our Christian identity not for the purposes of permanently concealing it, but waiting for the opportune moment to reveal it. We ask the question were they

complicit? If so, God used even their disobedience to fulfil His plan.

V. Esther is selected as queen. (Est 2:15-18)

1. Now when Esther turn came who was the daughter of Abihail (ab-ba- hyle) the uncle of Mordecai to go in to the king, she requested nothing but what Hegai the king's eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised her to. Esther attained favor of all who saw her because of both Esther's godliness and beauty. 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. Esther was selected to be the queen to king Ahasuerus.

2. Esther's life so far has been remarkable. She was the child of Jewish exiles, who both died; she was raised by her cousin in a foreign and often hostile land; she was taken by compulsion into the king's harem; she found favor with all whom she met; and she was finally selected to be the queen of the realm. As for the 399 who lost, they were banished to the harem where they stayed the wife or the concubine of the king, but rarely if ever saw him afterwards. And they were never free to marry another man, essentially living as a perpetual widow.

Application:

These courses of events were not a coincidence; God had a plan, and Esther is part of it. Proverbs 16:4 can give us a bit of insight. **The LORD hath made all *things* for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.** A disaster is forthcoming and God is working His plan using both the evil and the good. He did not create evil nor does he solicit any to do evil but evil cannot stop him. In exactly the same way, we have a place in God's plan.

Wherever you are right now, God has a purpose for it and God has a reason. To this point, the story of Esther also shows us that in the outworking of His plan, God can use the evil and disobedient of man. We find assurance in the truth that no other person, no matter how evil they are, can defeat God's plan for our life, no matter what they have done to you or will do.

Conclusion:

God turn these events to bringing Esther to a place where she could save the Jewish remnant. God's providential care usurped the plans of men to save a race of people. God still works that way today. I believe that nothing happens in our lives as a result of coincidence. God has a master plan that He is working out in the world and in our lives, and every single situation that occurs happens for a reason. The people we meet and run into, the things we experience, etc., all are working according to God's plans. Even when men are wicked and refuse His will in their lives, God is still working His plans out in the world in spite of them.