

Esther Beauty and the Risk

Chapter 20
The Story

Background

- 50 years after the first group of exiles returned to Jerusalem
 - majority of Israelites remained scattered throught the Persian Empire
 - All the Israelites should have returned to the Promised Land
 - Their prophets had instructed them to do so even before the exile took place (Isa. 48:20; Jer. 50:8, 51:6, 29:10)
 - They were exiled for covenantal unfaithfulness and by returning to Israel, would be returning to a right covenantal relationship with God
- Esther and Mordecai, the heroine and hero of the story, have been considered to be exemplary pillars of faith
- However, remaining in Susa reveals that they were not fully compliant with God's Law
- The book of Esther is the only book in the Bible where the name of God is never mentioned
 - the Law, sacrifices, the temple and prayer are also absent
- These give the impression that Mordecai and Esther and their Jewish brethren were not overly concerned with their relationship with God

Purpose of the Book of Esther

- Teaches about the providence of God
 - In spite of Jews unfaithfulness – is faithful
 - Had Haman been successful – no Jews
 - We can not always see God working
- Provides history of the Feast of Purim
 - Haman cast a lot (pur)
 - Like Passover & Hanukkah – feasts of celebration
- To attack God's people is to attack God
 - Acts 9.4
- "Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there, he might take them to Jerusalem."³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

Ahasuerus

- Xerxes' – in Hebrew references
- Ruled from 486 – 465
- Father – Darius the Great
- Mother – Cyrus' daughter
- Ergo – He is Cyrus' grandson
- Lived in a 10 acre citadel

The Party of all Parties

- Vast Empire
- Powerful Empire
- Prosperous Empire
- A Beautiful Queen – Vashti
- Lasted 6 months
- When king drank – all drank
 - Could drink all you wanted when you wanted

Separate Party for Women

The Cast of Characters

- Mordecai –
 - Taken in Babylonian exile
 - Cousin and Adoptive Father of Esther
 - Name = contrition
 - Instructed Esther to not mention her heritage
- Haman –
 - A Descendant of Agag [Amalekite king Saul didn't kill]
 - Influential noble in Xerxes Court
 - Plotted to kill Jews because of grudge with Mordecai
 - Executed when his plot failed and was exposed

The Cast of Characters

- Vashti –
 - Beautiful Queen to Xerxes
 - Refused Kings call
 - Persian women carefully sequestered – not exposed
 - Xerxes asked her to do something beneath her station
 - To be exposed to the public gaze (demeaning & humiliating)
 - Demoted in harem – no power/prestige favors
- Hadasah –
 - Esther = secret or hidden
 - Adopted by cousin Mordecai
 - Became queen after Vashti incident
 - Saved her people from annihilation - & homicidal Haman

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Haman & His Boasting (p. 263)

- Restrained himself when Mordecai didn't bow
- Vast wealth
- Many sons
- All the ways the king honored him
- Elevated above all nobles
- Only one invited with king to banquet
- Built 50 cubit tower – to impale Mordecai
- Enjoy self

Sidebar

- Eunuchs-
 - Varied roles in governmental service
 - Young boys – castrated and trained
 - No threat to the harem
 - No threat because of conspiracies – no heirs

Queening

- From 600 AD satraps went and found girls
- Advantages
 - Every material comfort
 - Indulged and Pampered
- Disadvantages
 - No intimacy with King
 - Companionship only with haremites or eunuuchs
 - No husband or kids or families
 - Normal pleasures denied them

Haman's Plotting

- Homage Protocol
 - Herodotus – Greek Historian
 - Persians of equal rank – greet w/ kiss full on mouth
 - Slightly lower rank – kiss on cheek
 - Great difference – Prostration
 - Mordecai unwilling to prostrate himself for Haman
- Casting the *Pur*
 - Babylonian word for lots
 - Purpose – determine a favorable day for action
 - Casting – 3 consecutive times for a valid *pur*

Haman's Plotting

- P 280
- Haman offers 10K of talents of silver
 - Approx 333 tons - @ \$5/oz = \$5.6M
- The decree
 - Unbreakable or unchangeable
 - Military action – throughout empire (not public)

Ironies

- Esther to give banquet
 - Thought to be an honoring of Haman
 - Actually an unveiling or exposing of Haman
- The gallows
 - Built by Haman to hold Mordecai
 - Actually used for Haman
- Honors to be bestowed
 - King seeks council of Haman (p. 263-4)
 - What is to be done for a man that honors the king
 - Royal Robe & horse w/ Royal crest led thru city w/proclamation
 - Actually Haman to honor Mordecai
- Haman wealthy – estate given to Esther & Mordecai
- Decree to kill Jews – Jews can fight back/protect self

Esther's Risks

- Banishment like Vashti
- Death
- Scorn, ridicule

"Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time like this."

Matthew 5. 37

"All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

James 3. 1-11

"Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ² We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check. ³ When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵ Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a tiny spark, and realize that the tongue is like that among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. ⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can fresh water and salt water flow from the same springs?"

God

Jeremiah 50. 8

"Flee out of Babylon; leave the land of the Babylonians, and be like the goats that lead the flock."

James 5. 12

"Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. All you need to say is a simple "Yes" or "No." Otherwise you will be condemned."

Isaiah 48. 20

"Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians! Announce this with shouts of joy and proclaim it. Send it out to the ends of the earth; say, "The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob."

Jeremiah 51. 6

"Flee from Babylon! Run for your lives! Do not be destroyed because of her sins. It is time for the Lord's vengeance; he will repay her what she deserves."

Ephesians 4. 29

"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

Jeremiah 29. 10

"This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place."

THE UPPER STORY

GOD HAS A WAY OF RIGHTING WRONGS

EVERYTHING WILL WORK OUT

THE LOWER STORY

Despair

HOPE TRIUMPH VICTORY

Diabetes

might not be
tonight.
tomorrow or
the next day..
but everything's
gonna be ok

e.s

