

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS
LESSON 2
THE BOOK OF ESTHER
CHAPTER 2**

INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with the banishment of Vashti, the former queen of Persia, and the effect it had on King Ahasuerus. The position of the queen was vacant for some time. The present study shows a plan to fill the position of the queen of Persia. In the process of finding a woman to fill the position, the names of two Jews are introduced. They were Mordecai, an elderly Jew and his very young cousin, Esther, who was an orphan and whom he raised up as his daughter. They were among the many descendants of the generation of Jews, who were taken captive in 586 B.C. from Judah to Babylon. When Cyrus, the Great ascended the throne and became the king of the vast Medo-Persian Empire in 539 B.C., he issued a decree permitting these Jews to return to their homeland and giving them religious freedom to rebuild their Temple in Jerusalem and to worship the LORD God.¹ Forty-nine thousand eight

¹ Ezra 1:1 Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be

hundred and ninety-seven Jews returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:64, 65). The events in Esther took place about fifty years later (483 B.C.).

Many Jews had opted not to return to Jerusalem, and among them were Mordecai and Esther, who are introduced for the first time in this chapter. Young Esther is the main character. The book of Esther is about her and the role she played in the deliverance of the Jewish people. In this chapter, we learn how Esther became queen of Persia.

This chapter reveals the unseen providential hand of God working in the lives of these men and women to accomplish His will and plan on behalf of His chosen people. God's faithfulness to His covenant promise to the nation Israel is a great comfort and assurance for Christians who wholly trust in Him for their salvation from the fires of hell and for a blessed place in heaven. The

fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and *put it* also in writing, saying, 2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah. 3 Who *is there* among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which *is* in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he *is* the God,) which *is* in Jerusalem. 4 And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that *is* in Jerusalem.

chapter can be divided into the following sections:

- 1) A Bridal Proposal (2:1-4);
- 2) Introducing Mordecai and Esther (2:5-7);
- 3) Preparing Esther (2:8-11);
- 4) Esther Chosen (2:12-20);
- 5) Mordecai's Deed (2:21-23).

COMMENTARY

A Bridal Proposal – 2:1-4

The chapter begins with the phrase, *after these things*, indicating that some time had passed. It might be three years when Ahasuerus returned from his campaign against Greece (479 B.C.). This is only a guess, as we cannot be dogmatic on this.

It is evident that Ahasuerus was becoming restless and increasingly unhappy. According to the Persian law, it was not possible to reinstate Vashti. Once a law is passed and enacted, it stands. Not even the king himself can overturn that law. Immediately, the king's personal servants sprang into action. They proposed a plan to seek *fair, young virgins* throughout the empire, and that they be brought before the king. The purpose was to find a replacement for Vashti. Three criteria deemed the women qualified for the selection. They had to be *fair* which means extraordinarily beautiful and compliant, *young* and unmarried. No other qualities, such as intelligence, were required.

The method of gathering these women were unlike today's beauty pageant. There were no preliminary contests at provincial level and then selected for a final contest before the king. The gathering of these women was by order of the king. The recruitment of these *fair, young virgins* was compulsory. These women were not allowed to refuse. It was not a competition.

When these women were brought to the palace in Shushan, they would not be presented straightaway to the king. They must undergo a treatment of purification and beautification under Hegai, who knew how best to prepare the women for that one special evening with the king. Hegai was the chief eunuch of the king's harem in charge of looking after the women. And when the time came for these *fair, young virgins* to appear before the king, the lady who *pleaseth* the king most would become queen in the place of Vashti. Apparently, the king was delighted with the plan and he gave his approval. His earlier memory of regret disappeared at the anticipation of a new beautiful queen.

Introducing Mordecai and Esther – 2:5-7

The divine writer introduces Mordecai and Esther for the first time. They are the main players in this saga to save Israel from total annihilation. They do not know it yet, but the all-knowing and all wise God did. That is all that matters in the life

of faith for all believers. God is aware of the future for He controls the future. The believer lives day by day trusting the LORD. This is what faith is.

Mordecai is introduced as being *in Shushan the palace* (v.5) suggesting that he held some kind of an official position in government. He was a Jew although his name was not Jewish. He did not leave with the others under Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem. He remained in Shushan. He was the son of Jair, who was the son of Shimei, who was the son of Kish, a Benjamite. His great grandfather was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon in 586 B.C. together with Jeconiah, who was the king of Judah.

Mordecai had a cousin by the name of Esther, who was his uncle's daughter. Esther was an orphan and nothing is said about how her parents died when she was very young. Mordecai raised her up as his own daughter. Esther (meaning *star*) whose Hebrew name was Hadassah (Hebrew meaning: *myrtle*) is introduced here as being *fair and beautiful* (2:7). She is described as *fair* because she had a comely appearance; and *beautiful* because she had a good, pleasant and agreeable nature. We know from the account that Mordecai was older than Esther for he was her guardian.

Preparing Esther – 2:8-11

In accordance with the king's edict, many young virgins were taken and gathered into the king's palace in Shushan. They were all placed under Hegai, the chief custodian of the king's concubines. Esther was one of the maidens taken and brought to Hegai. Esther won the favour of Hegai, immediately. Hegai took a special liking for her. He was kind to her. He wasted no time in giving her all the required perfumes and cosmetics for her beauty treatment and assigned seven maids to assist and attend to her. He hastened anxiously to do it was the literal translation of the word "speedily". In addition, she and the seven maids were given the best quarters in *the house of the women* to live.

However, Esther had not revealed her Jewish ethnicity. The reason was that Mordecai had instructed her not to do so. Esther was faithfully loyal and obedient to Mordecai, trusting him that he knew best. No reason is given why Mordecai instructed Esther to conceal her ethnicity. Some Bible scholars suggested that there might have been a growing anti-Jewish sentiment. Esther is portrayed as an obedient young lady who listened to every advice of Mordecai. Mordecai made daily visits to *the court of the women's quarters* to find out how Esther was doing and what was to become of her. His fatherly instinct did not leave him even though Esther

left him for a new beginning. Like many girls Esther's age, they were taken forcibly to be presented before the king of Persia. It was a privilege to be chosen to live in the palace. It must have been the dream of many young ladies including their parents to marry a king! Mordecai ensured that Esther was well looked after. He was a caring guardian to Esther. The word "know" refers to intimate knowledge that points to genuine and sincere concern. He was like a father to her.

Esther Chosen – 2:12-20

Each of these young virgin aspirants had one year of beauty treatment—for six months her body was treated with *oil of myrrh*, and the latter six months with perfume and other scented fragrance. When the period of beautification was over, each young maid would be presented to the king. She would be given whatever she needed or wanted to please the king that night. In other words, she would stay overnight with the king to please him. She went in the evening and the next day she would return to *the second house of the women*, where she would live for the rest of her life. The eunuch in charge of this second harem was Shaashgaz (Persian meaning, *servant of the beautiful*). Those ladies who were sent to this second harem could only see or be with the king again if he delighted in her and called her by name. Success was slim indeed in the eyes of man. But the

God of Israel was not bound by statistical odds. If God wanted Esther to be the next queen to replace Vashti, no one has the power to stop Him. This means that even the disagreeable conduct of Vashti was of the LORD in order to bring in Esther for the salvation of Israel. Bear in mind that each and every one of the players in this saga did what they did willingly without any gun pointed at their head. They were held responsible for their own actions for their self-determination was not vitiated or diminished at any time.

The time for Esther's turn to appear before the king arrived. Her father's name was given here as Abihail (Hebrew, meaning: *my father is might*) who was the uncle of Mordecai. Esther did not ask for any thing except what Hegai gave to her. She trusted Hegai who definitely knew the likes and dislikes of Ahasuerus. She was humble and cooperative. In this regard, Esther was observant and wise. It is also mentioned that Esther was liked by all who *looked upon her*. That tells a lot about Esther. She was not only beautiful but she was also pleasant in character and conduct. Esther went to the royal house of King Ahasuerus in the month of Tebeth (the tenth month of the Jewish calendar) in the seventh year of his reign (479 B.C.).

Esther charmed the heart of King Ahasuerus. The king loved Esther above all the other young virgins. She obtained grace and

favour even in the sight of all the other young women. The king chose her and crowned her with the royal crown that was worn by Vashti. Esther was made queen in the place of Vashti.

King Ahasuerus made a great feast to celebrate the coronation of Esther as queen. He even called the banquet *Esther's Feast*. The king *made a release* (v.17), which means that he cancelled certain taxes for the whole nation. He also gave gifts to express his pleasure to his subjects. It was truly a happy day for all the people. One can expect and imagine that nothing was overlooked in making a stupendous and memorable occasion. A lot of money would have been spent on the facilities, decorations, clothing and feasting. The dignitaries from all the provinces would be invited to this coronation. One can be certain that nothing was left undone.

All the virgins who also vied to be the next queen but were not chosen came and sat down to join in the celebration. This was a kind gesture from the king. This time Mordecai was said to be sitting *in the king's gate* (v.19). This means that he was made an officer in the king's administrative arm. He was promoted.

Esther becoming queen was by the providence of God for a purpose which is not yet revealed at this point. **Proverbs 21:1** (KJV), "The king's heart *is* in the hand of the

LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will." Esther did not seek this honour. She was obedient to Mordecai and resigned to the prospect of being permanently incarcerated in the second harem. She was indeed young and obedient. She and Mordecai did not know what grave danger lay in the days ahead. Esther could have been somewhat spiritual. She might not be a pious Jew in her daily living, but she still acknowledged that the LORD was her God. She displayed this part of her character and conduct later on when she faced a very difficult and precarious situation later in time.

Mordecai's Deed – 2:21-23

Mordecai was now seated *in the king's gate* — the administration department of the king's government. One day while Mordecai was there, two of the king's *chamberlains* were plotting to assassinate the king. Their names were Bigthan (meaning: *in their wine press*) and Teresh (meaning: *strictness*). These two were not among the seven eunuchs who were named earlier. They were probably the king's most trusted eunuchs who stood guard at the king's private apartment. This made their treason doubly serious and dangerous. They were *wroth*. The word *wroth* (Hebrew: *qasap*) is a term expressing a burning consuming anger. The reason for their intense anger is not stated. This conspiracy to kill the king was known to

Mordecai. How he came to know is not told. He could have overheard it himself or someone must have informed him. Mordecai promptly reported to Queen Esther and probably instructed her to report to the king. Esther told the king and the matter was registered in the name of Mordecai as a good patriot. An investigation was conducted. The matter was found to be true. The two guards were *hanged on a tree*. It was recorded in the king's book of chronicles. There was no reward given to Mordecai who could have anxiously expected it — maybe another promotion. But it did not happen; he waited in vain. However, this patriotic action on his part is going to serve him well at a later time, according to God's timing.

COMMENTARY

The inclusion of Mordecai's report of an assassination attempt against the king seems to be out of place with the preceding flow of events. But in God's providential plan and purpose, this seemingly unrelated event would be used to fulfill His will at the right time. Mordecai did a good thing. We learn that every good thing that we do, small or great, will ultimately be rewarded. God knows what His children do and their good works will be rewarded in His appointed time.

Mordecai and Esther are good examples for us to emulate. They were caught in a system where they were captives. They had no choice in many matters especially in the choice

of a bride. There was no compromise on her part in marrying a heathen king as she had no choice. This was not breaking of the unequally yoke edict given by the LORD in His perfect Word. Enemies against God's plan of salvation for mankind are numerous. Events may appear innocent or of no consequence at that point in time but God was sovereign in every little detail to ensure that His plan for our salvation is not thwarted by Satan and his minions. It is a spiritual warfare all the way!

Esther appeared to be young and innocent. But she displayed a disposition that is exemplary. She was faithful and completely obedient to her guardian. She submitted to him implicitly. She was liked by Hegai because she was humble and cooperative. Esther is a great young woman. We will learn that in spite of man's ploy, God can use them to fulfill His purpose for His own glory and honour. For all things will work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His holy purpose, as was the case with both Mordecai and Esther. AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Esther 2:1-11; Genesis 39:1-9.

TUESDAY: Esther 2:12-20; Daniel 1:3-16.

WEDNESDAY: Esther 2:1-23; Proverbs 16:32; 21:15.

THURSDAY: Esther 2:1-23.

FRIDAY: Esther 2:1-23.

Discussion Questions

1. Are there innocuous events in a believer's life? What about the lives of unbelievers?

2. Can you find Esther mentioned anywhere else in the Bible?

3. Esther showed a sweet and compliant spirit toward those around her. Is that good or bad?

4. The divine author mentions three times that Esther won approval in someone's eyes (vv.9, 15, 17). What does this tell us about Esther?

5. Is it OK to hide certain truths about oneself from others around us? What about between husband and wife?

6. How will you describe Mordecai and Esther in this chapter?

husband that you would like to see in your husband?

7. What are the qualities of a godly wife? Should she live out these qualities if her husband is an unbeliever?

10. Esther found herself living in a foreign environment and complying with the wishes of foreign authorities. How can believers maintain their integrity when it is threatened by the customs of other cultures?

8. How did king Ahasuerus show that he was very pleased with Esther? Was this of God or man?

11. Do you think Esther and Mordecai would understand that God was positioning them where He could use them at this juncture?

9. Do you dream of marrying a king? What are the marks of a godly

12. Is it wrong to find favour *in the sight of all them that looked upon us like Esther (v.15)*? See *Prov. 3:1-4; James 4:4*.

15. How far should a Christian conform to the laws and customs of his country? What examples have you seen of this?

Cf. Daniel 1:8; 1 Peter 2:13-14

13. What three evidences of God's hand at work do you see in this chapter? How can faith in God's sovereignty impact our everyday living?

14. "God's timing is always perfect, and He sees to it that no good deed is ever wasted." What examples have you seen of this?
