



Esther

Lesson 2

Esther Chapter 2

Many aspects of the Esther story reveal the culture of the Persian Empire. The details within the situations and how they are dealt with identify the worldviews and thought processes of the people at that time. In Esther we get a fairly clear picture of what life in the aristocracy or nobility was like. And though behavior can be diverse in different cultures, the source of those behaviors or beliefs are always initiated within the fallen heart of man. Mankind's state of fallenness will produce motives and actions that express selfishness, immorality, pride, and cruelty that sometimes become the dominating character.

The Persian religion at the time of the Esther event was mainly influenced by Zoroastrianism which is a monotheistic faith, but the people were encouraged to worship whatever they personally chose. Archaeology has discovered statements that seem to verify this.

"...later rulers of the Achaemenid Empire such as Darius I (the Great, r. 522-486 BCE) and Xerxes I (r. 486-465 BCE)

although, with these and later monarchs, it seems more likely they were Zoroastrian. Praises to Ahura Mazda appear in artwork, decrees, and dedications, notably at Darius I's great city of Persepolis and in the famous Behistun Inscription but, in keeping with the Achaemenid Empire's policy of religious tolerance, the faith of the royal house was not imposed on the populace. Every faith was welcome in the Achaemenid Empire and people were allowed to believe and worship as they pleased" (Mark, Joshua, L. World History Encyclopedia).

Therefore, the fact that the details of this event are part of the Bible doesn't mean that the behaviors and beliefs of those told about are good or right. Many times, the ungodly details are given as a testimony to how sin influences any culture that is void of God.

READ ESTHER CHAPTER 2

1. *From 2:1, what has changed with the king, and what might have brought that change about?*

2. *What plan did the king's advisors come up with? Vs. 2-4*



According to the historian Josephus, there were 400 virgins chosen to be a part of the contest.



“The extravagant course was taken to please the king with another wife instead of Vashti. Josephus says that when his anger was over he was exceedingly grieved that the matter was carried so far, and would have been reconciled to Vashti but that, by the constitution of the government, the judgment was irrevocable—that therefore, to make him forget her, they contrived how to entertain him first with a great variety of concubines, and then to fix him to the most agreeable of them all for a wife instead of Vashti.”

~Matthew Henry Commentary

3. *What do the details of the cultural practices here reveal about the common beliefs today of making women beautiful in order to be acceptable to men? What does God say makes women beautiful? 1 Peter 3:1-4; 1 Timothy 2:9-10. How do these two oppose each other? How have women fallen into the trap of the false cultural definition, and how can that be changed?*



Now that the search for a new queen has been initiated, the introduction of the main people and purpose of the book is to be explained. At this point in history no one knows the threat to the Jews that is about to be manifest. But God is going before and providing the necessary situations and people that will be a part of the redemption of His people.

4. *Why are Mordecai and Esther (Hadassah) in Susa? 2:5-7*

5. *Why was Esther taken to the palace? 2:8*

6. *Why do you think Esther received special privilege and attention from Hegai? Vs. 9*
7. *Describe the process of elimination given in verses 12-14. How would this procedure affect the understanding of women's roles or their value in that culture? How would it change the concept of the family unit?*
8. *How long has it been since Vashti was sent away? See Esther 1:3 and 2:16.*



After the banquet of chapter 1, Xerxes left Susa to lead his campaign against Greece. He has been on the battlefield since then, winning and losing many battles. He is warring against the empire that eventually conquers Persia when Alexander the Great comes to power. Now that he has returned, he wants to fill the position that Vashti once held.

9. *Why do you think Mordecai wanted to hide their heritage? 3:20 and also 2:10.*
10. *How did Mordecai save the king? Vs. 21-23*



The reason why the virgins were gathering a second time in 2:19 is not given. Possible reasons are the king liked the first process so well that he decided to do it again, or this is just a flash-back to the original process of choosing a queen, and that is when Mordecai overheard the plot against the king.

Prayer requests:

Group time notes:
