

We're turning to an: Old Testament book ~ that we've not studied before: ~ **Esther** One commentator, has said: 'Esther' is a tribute to God's invisible 'providence'  
Providence = God cares for us, & the world he's created

To begin to understand this **book**, we need to know:

The **time** ~ meaning: where it fits, **in Jewish history**.  
The **place** ~ or **location**, where the story is unfolding.  
The **people** ~ **who** are the main characters in the story.  
The **plot** ~ **what overall theme**, is being presented.

- **The Time:** The book opens:  
In the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of King Xerxes' reign.  
About 47 years, after **Daniel's** death, (in 530 BC)  
All these events happened between: (483 BC & 473)

When we were studying **Daniel ...** God gave **Nebuchadnezzar** a dream ~ describing: the three **World Empires**, that'd follow his Babylonian one.  
The first empire would be **Persia**, (Now called: **Iran**)  
And it's **in that empire**, the book of **Esther** is set.

- **The Place:** The political boundaries of Persia, have changed many times, since Esther's day.

As various kings, have fought to takeover,  
Some other country. Taking slaves & demanding duties  
& taxes, to pay for their ever expanding empire.  
King Xerxes' Persian Empire was **huge**, stretching from  
North of India, across the countries **that we call**: Iran,  
Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Syria, Turkey, & south:  
Including Israel, Jordan, Egypt & Ethiopia (**127 provinces**)

- **The People**: The **main** characters in the Bible,  
also appear in the **secular records**, of both **Persia**  
& some of the **Roman historians**, like: Herodotus.  
Which is **why** some ~ have more than one name,  
**Depending** on which language was being used.  
**So the 5 main characters are:**

1<sup>st</sup> **The King of Persia**: **Xerxes** (that's his Greek name)  
His name is pronounced ~ as if it was: 'Zerkzes'  
Some translations call him: **Ahasuerus**,  
(because: that's his Hebrew name)

2<sup>nd</sup> **The Queen of Persia**: **Vashti**, (no other name given)

3<sup>rd</sup> **A new Queen**: named **Esther** ~ (her Persian name)  
She was Jewish ~ and was born: **Hadassah**:  
(her Hebrew name)

4<sup>th</sup> **Mordecai**, a Public Servant, who was also a Jew.

He was **Hadassah's** older cousin. He took her in,  
And became her guardian, after her parents died.

5<sup>th</sup> **Haman**, a very **self-important, Govt. official**.  
**Haman** is the **villain** of the story, who plans to kill  
**All the Jews, in every part** of the Persian Empire.  
We'll find out: '**Why he's so angry**' ~ next time.

- **The Plot:** The book of **Esther** describes **how**, the  
Jews survived a plan to completely annihilate them.  
It also explains: the reason for their **annual**: '**Feast  
of Purim**' which remembers this deliverance.  
A feast, they still celebrate **today** ... (2,500 years later)

**Why ~ is the story of Esther ~ so important ?**

Because if **Haman had succeeded** ~ God's promise  
Of a **Jewish Messiah** ~ **could not** be fulfilled.

And there would have been, no '**Mary**' or '**Joseph**'  
To bring God's Son to birth in Bethlehem,  
And take care of Him in Nazareth.

Now, let's open the book by reading:

**Esther. Chapter 1, vs:1-12**

**It's hard to imagine ~ the unlimited wealth & power, Of King Xerxes. The absolute, Ruler of the Empire.**  
Xerxes inherited an extensive multi-country empire.  
Following the death of his father: **Darius**, (in 486 BC)  
**But ~ We can see ~ both Russia, & China,**  
**On a similar path today, towards world domination.**

In our world ... **Xerxes** would be a **multi-Billionaire !**  
With taxes from his 127 Provinces, including duties on  
Many kinds of goods, being moved around the Empire  
Then add ~ untold numbers of slaves, in each country.  
**Xerxes** could easily afford a **party**, lasting **6 months !**

**BUT - There's an important reason, for it lasting so long**  
**'Officials' from all the provinces, in one place, at one time**  
**Would provide the perfect opportunity for: 'A Coup'**  
So the 6 months, allowed all the Officials ~ to travel long  
distances ~ coming & going ~ in a **steady relay of groups.**

This was followed by, another week of banqueting for the:  
**Palace servants ~ held outside ~ in the Palace gardens.**

In.8. We read:

**The only restriction on the drinking, was that no one  
should be compelled to take more, than he wanted.**

This must have been: **very unusual,**  
To get **special mention** ~ made of it !

These festivities, were held at **Susa**. (its Greek name)

Or **Shushan**. (its Hebrew name)

At the king's ~ **Winter Palace** ~ near the Tigris River.

There was also, another Palace,

About 500 miles away ~ in the city of **Persepolis**.

**The Queen: Vashti**, arranged her own special banquet:  
for the women servants, of the Palace.

At the end of the week, **Xerxes** sent his 7 eunuchs ...

The only '**male servants**' allowed to talk to the women,

To bring **Queen Vashti**:

To openly show off her beauty ~ to the male staff !

**Vashti** flatly refused to come.

**Which made the King, very angry.**

**Surprisingly**, he didn't order her immediate death.

But, asked ... his best informed, Persian lawyers:

**'What penalty ? ... does the law provide:**

For a **Queen** who refuses to obey the **King's orders**' ?

The answer is quite long ... but it starts with:

***Queen Vashti has wronged ~ not only the King,***

*But also every official & citizen throughout your Empire*

And suggested, that this would result in: many wives showing disrespect for their husbands ~ it continues:

*So if it please the King, we suggest that you issue:  
**A Written decree: ...A law that cannot be revoked.**  
It should order that: **Queen Vashti,**  
**Be forever banished ... from your presence,**  
& that you choose another Queen more worthy than she.*

*When this decree is published, husbands everywhere will receive proper respect from their wives.*

*The King and his Princes, thought this made good sense.*

So letters were sent **to every part of the empire,**  
'In the local Language' ... Proclaiming that:

*'Every man should be the ruler of his home' (1.v22b)*

**Read chapter 2. Vs, 1-4.**

The King's harem ~ was divided into two parts,  
Each part, was controlled by one of the eunuchs:  
**Hegai's** task was to, prepare the girls for the King.

When Hegai heard about the ‘Beauty Competition’  
to look for a new Queen ... that included girls,  
from so many different countries.

He would’ve been very worried, about the dangers:  
That this could bring ~ into the harem.

Because part of Hegai’s task, would include:  
Checking each girl’s parents.

To insure there was no criminal history,

**Or any reason** ~ they shouldn’t be **trusted**.

In case, one of Xerxes’ **enemies**,

Used the occasion ~ to put: **an assassin**, into the harem.

So far we’ve said something about: **King Xerxes**,  
And **Queen Vashti’s** ~ **sudden fall from favour**,  
Along with plans, for a new Queen to replace her.

That leaves 3 other **significant people** in our story:

**Esther** ~ **Mordecai** ~ & **Haman**.

And each of them will soon come to the forefront,  
Of developments ~ in the King’s Court.

**Reading on in Chpt 2. vs,8,9 &10, it says,**

**As a result of the King’s decree,**  
**Esther**, along with many other young women,

was brought to the King's harem,  
at the fortress of Susa, and placed in Hegai's care.

Hegai was very impressed with **Esther**  
And treated her kindly.

He quickly ordered: **a special menu for her**  
And provided her with beauty treatments.

He also assigned her 7 maids **specially chosen** from  
The King's palace, and he moved her  
& her maids into the best place in the Harem.

**Esther** had not told anyone of her nationality &  
Family background, for **Mordecai** her told her not to.

**However** ... Hegai's own staff, **probably** reported on  
Esther's: family connection to Mordecai, & his religion  
Which would explain the provision of: **a special menu** !  
To check the families of so many girls,  
would take a lot of time, but it needed to be done !

Some people have questioned Esther's willingness,  
To become a harem girl ~ But, once she'd been selected  
By the Kings servants ~ she wouldn't have a choice !

Throughout our studies in Esther,  
I'll be using a commentary ~ by an American Pastor:

**Chuck Swindoll, & here's a quote: It's Headed:**

**Uneventful beginnings ~ Unbelievable Endings.**  
(Chuck uses 'unbelievable' ~ to mean: 'unexpected')

And he says:

**'Esther ... went from the humdrum life of an orphan,  
to the Palatial life of a Queen.**

And from there, she went on to become a **heroine,**  
and secure a **place of honour,** in Israel's history.

Little did this insignificant orphan girl, know:

**The incredible way, God would work in her life'**

'God is still in the business of bringing about  
Unbelievable endings ~ from uneventful beginnings.'

Chuck continues:

**A Medo-Persian ~ beauty pageant, almost seems  
Something to raise eyebrows over ~ but God used it:  
In His own way, to merge Esther's path with Xerxes  
And to rescue the Jewish nation from annihilation.**

**Continuing from vs.15:**

**When it was Esther's turn to go to the King,  
she accepted the advice of Hegai,  
The eunuch in charge of the Harem.**

She asked for nothing, except what he suggested,  
And she was admired, by everyone who saw her.

16. When **Esther** was taken to **King Xerxes** at the royal palace in early winter of the 7<sup>th</sup> year of his reign,

17. The King loved her, more than any of the other young women ...

He was **so delighted with her** that he set the **royal crown** on her head and declared her **Queen**, instead of **Vashti**.

To celebrate the occasion the King gave a banquet !

Soon after this, **Mordecai** became a Palace official. (v19)

Verse, 20. **Esther continued to keep her nationality & family background a secret.**

**She was still following Mordecai's orders, Just as she did when she was living in his home.**

**Read, Ch.2 vs: 21-23**

What's recorded in these few verses,  
Will come back into the story next time.  
With quite dramatic results !

From Persia's own historical records, it seems that:  
Sometime ~ between: our Chapter 1. & chapter 3.  
Xerxes tried to extend his power. (like his father had)  
By attacking: the Greeks, to add **Greece**, to his Empire.  
He was **defeated** ~ on both land and sea (in 480 BC & 479)

**Many years later**, in 331 BC, the roles were reversed:

**As Greece conquered the whole Persian Empire.**

Coming back to **Charles Swindoll's** comments:

'God still works in what seems to be Uneventful times.'  
Esther's life is a classic example of an **uneventful beginning**, that led to an **unexpected ending**.

**'What about today ?** Does God still work through Uneventful beginnings ? ... He, surely does' !

**Here**, are three thoughts to keep in mind,  
When you're starting a new week, and it's:  
**'Monday morning'** ... once again.

**1<sup>st</sup> God's plans ~ are not hindered: ...**  
By events that are **secular**, rather than **spiritual**

**2<sup>nd</sup> God's purposes ~ are not frustrated: ...**

By 'moral' or 'marital' conflicts.

God is still in control.

**3<sup>rd</sup> God's people ~ are not excluded: ...**

From important positions,

Just, because of handicap or hardship.

Esther was a foreigner ~ and an orphan !  
So by all human odds ~ you wouldn't expect her to be  
**Invited to join a 'Beauty Competition' let alone win it.**

It is easy ~ to see God in the miraculous !

Its not so easy ~ to see Him in '**ordinary life**'

**But that's ~ where most of us live.**

We live with God ~ not '**centre stage**'

But **directing things** ~ unobtrusively, from the wings.

Back in: **1 Samuel 16, v7b** God said:

**The Lord doesn't make decisions the way people do.  
People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord  
looks at a person's thoughts and intentions.**

Similarly in: **Isaiah: 55.vs 8 & 9:**

‘My thoughts are completely different from yours’  
says the Lord. ‘And my ways are far beyond anything  
you could imagine.

For just as the heavens are higher than the Earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.’

Chuck Swindoll continues:

‘Make no mistake about it ~ God will have his way.

Though he remains ~ **invisible**, to us.

**He’s never ~ indifferent !**

Whenever the mountains are crumbling around you,

**Listen for ~ the whisper of God,**

**Behind ~ the roar of your circumstances.**

And be assured, that **God is for you**, not against you.

Like the wind ~ he moves invisibly through our lives,  
Sometimes ... softly reassuring us of his presence,  
Sometimes ... **powerfully altering the landscape  
of our circumstances’**

Next time, we'll see exactly that ...  
And our **four remaining characters**,  
Will each have a dramatic role to play.  
But ... with deadly outcomes !

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