

Esther 02 - Ahasuerus' "Beauty Contest" for a New Queen; Esther Became Queen; Mordecai Promoted, Foiled Plot to Kill the King

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Esther 2

(2) Esther's elevation as the new queen (2:1-20)

The events of Esther 2 occur about four years after the events of Esther 1 and the king's divorce from Queen Vashti. During this time, Ahasuerus fought his ill-fated campaign against Greece, lost badly, and came home in disgrace and humiliation.

(A) Beauty pageant among the beautiful Persian virgins (2:1-4)

1 After these things, when **the anger of King Ahasuerus** had subsided, **he remembered Vashti and what she had done**, and what had been decided regarding her.

1 After these things when the anger of King Ahasuerus had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her.

1 After this, when the anger of King Ahasuerus had subsided, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what had been decreed about her.

1 After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her.

- "...the anger of king Ahasuerus" - between Esther 1-2 at least four years pass, during which Xerxes went on his disastrous Greek campaign (481-479 BC). He came home in defeat and disgrace.

- "...he remembered Vashti and what she had done" - Ahasuerus had second thoughts about having divorced Vashti, but later concluded that it was the right decision and he needed to move on

2 Then the king's attendants, who served him, said, "Let beautiful young **virgins** be sought for the king.

2 Then the king's attendants, who served him, said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king.

2 Then the young men who attended the king suggested, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king.

2 Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king:

- His attendant's plan no doubt was designed to comfort the king as well as appeal to his damaged ego

- "...virgins" - *betulah*, young women of marriageable age

— Ahasuerus did not need a woman...he had a harem full of women, and he had the power to have any woman in the kingdom. At the snap of his finger, she would be in his presence or in his bedchamber.

— It appears that Ahasuerus was not looking for a one night stand, but for a wife, someone to be in relationship with, a long-term companion

3 And may the king appoint overseers in all the provinces of his kingdom, and have them bring every beautiful young virgin to the citadel of Susa, to the harem, into the custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let their cosmetics be given *to them*.

3 Let the king appoint overseers in all the provinces of his kingdom that they may gather every beautiful young virgin to the citadel of Susa, to the harem, into the custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let their cosmetics be given *them*.

3 Let the king appoint officials in all the provinces of his kingdom to bring all the beautiful young virgins into the harem in Susa the capital. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women to give them their beauty treatments.

3 And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the palace, to the house of the women, unto the custody of Hege the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women; and let their things for purification be given them:

- The plan was to assemble the most beautiful women of the land and bring them to the king so he could choose the most favored to be his queen to replace Vashti. Sort of a "Miss Persian Empire" contest where the king would select his queen.

- Josephus says that Ahasuerus had a total of 400 women to choose from

4 Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen in place of Vashti." And the suggestion pleased the king, and he did accordingly.

4 Then let the young lady who pleases the king be queen in place of Vashti." And the matter pleased the king, and he did accordingly.

4 Then let the young woman who pleases the king rule in place of Vashti." This advice pleased the king, and he did this.

4 And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so.

(B) Esther taken into the King's harem (2:5-11)

(a) Esther's Jewish cousin Mordecai (2:5-7a)

5 There was a Jew at the citadel in Susa whose name was **Mordecai**, the son of Jair, the son of **Shimei**, the son of Kish, a Benjaminite,

5 Now there was at the citadel in Susa a Jew whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite,

5 In Susa the capital there was a Jewish man from the tribe of Benjamin, Jair's son Mordecai, who was a descendant of Kish's son Shimei the descendant of Benjamin.

5 Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite;

- "...Mordecai" - a Persian name, with connections to the god Marduk. It was common for Jews in captivity to receive and use pagan names (Cf. Dan 1:7; Ezra 1:8).

— His name is mentioned 58x in Esther, and 7x he is identified as a Jew (Cf. 2:5; 5:13; 6:10; 8:7; 9:29,31; 10:3)

- "...Shimei" - as also Saul, son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin; he was the son of Gera, a Benjamite, of Saul's house

— David, while fleeing from Absalom, had an encounter with Shimei (Cf. 2 Sam 16:5-13).

David resisted Abishai's desire to kill him and instead showed him mercy. David even believed that Shimei may have been the voice of God speaking to him.

— Later, after David was reinstated as king, Shimei threw himself at David's feet for forgiveness, which David granted to him (Cf. 2 Sam 19:16-23)

— David's mercy in sparing Shimei eventually resulted in Mordecai. But David, while passing the throne to Solomon, instructed Solomon to "not leave him unpunished" saying "you will know what to do to him" (i.e. kill him). Solomon later gave Shimei a reprieve conditioned on obedience, but after three years Shimei disobeyed Solomon's order and was summarily killed (2 Kings 2:36-46).

The Genealogy

- Abihail was the uncle of Mordecai (literally "the paternal uncle" or the "father's brother")
- Kish begot Shimei
- Shimei begot 2 sons: Jair and Abihail
- Jair begot Mordecai; Abihail begot Esther, but later died
- Mordecai "adopted" Esther

Genealogical Ironies:

- Saul was supposed to kill Agag, but did not, which resulted in Haman (Esther 3)

6 who had been taken from Jerusalem with the exiles who had been deported with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had deported.

6 who had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the captives who had been exiled with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had exiled.

6 He had been taken into captivity from Jerusalem along with the exiles who had been deported with Jeconiah, king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon had taken into exile.

6 Who [Mordecai] had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away.

- Mordecai was taken into captivity in Babylon during the second siege of Jerusalem (597 BC). He remained in Babylon and was moved into the Persian Empire after they conquered

Babylon.

— The second deportation, under Jeconiah, occurred about 80 years before the time of Esther

(b) Esther's beauty (2:7b)

7 He was the guardian to **Hadassah**, that is **Esther, his uncle's daughter**, for she had no father or mother. Now the young woman was **beautiful of form and face**, and when her father and her mother died, **Mordecai took her as his own daughter**.

7 He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had no father or mother. Now the young lady was beautiful of form and face, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.

7 Mordecai had raised his cousin Hadassah, or Esther, because she had no father or mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was very attractive. When her mother and father died Mordecai had taken her as his daughter.

7 And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his [Mordecai's] uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter.

- "...Hadassah" - means "myrtle" which is a beautiful fragrant tree; this was Esther's Jewish name

- "...Esther" - means "Star"; derived from the same root as Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess of love

— By mentioning both her Jewish name and her Persian name, the author is pointing out that Esther had two identities

- "...his uncle's daughter" - Mordecai and Esther were cousins

- "...beautiful of form and face" - literally, "beautiful in form and lovely to look at"

— We'll learn that Esther's wisdom and virtue were her greatest beauty, but it is an advantage to a diamond to be well set. Esther received "pretty girl privileges."

- "...Mordecai took her as his own daughter" - obviously quite older, Mordecai took Esther on as his foster-daughter since both of her parents had died

(c) Hegai's favor toward Esther (2:8-9)

8 So it came about, when the command and decree of the king were heard and many young ladies were gathered to the citadel of Susa into the custody of Hegai, that Esther was taken to the king's palace into the custody of Hegai, who was in charge of the women.

8 So it came about when the command and decree of the king were heard and many young ladies were gathered to the citadel of Susa into the custody of Hegai, that Esther was taken to the king's palace into the custody of Hegai, who was in charge of the women.

8 The king's order and edict was proclaimed, and many young women were brought to Susa the capital under the care of Hegai. Esther was taken to the palace into the care of Hegai, who was in charge of the women.

8 So it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was brought also unto the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women.

- It doesn't seem that Esther had much choice in the decision. In view of Ahasuerus' great power, she was likely "forced" to enter this "beauty contest."

— The decision of Mordecai to "allow" this, as far as he even had a choice, was very dangerous. He commended Esther into a contest to see who would become queen to a pagan king.

— The ladies who did not become queen would enter the king's harem. So if Esther lost the contest, she would be forced to be a concubine (someone available for the king's sexual pleasure at any time). She would rarely, if ever, see the king, but would be forbidden to marry another man. She would essentially live as a perpetual widow.

9 Now **the young lady** pleased **him** and **found favor with him**. So he **quickly provided her with her cosmetics and food**, gave her **seven choice female attendants** from the king's palace, and transferred her and her attendants to the best place in the harem.

9 Now the young lady pleased him and found favor with him. So he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and food, gave her seven choice maids from the king's palace and transferred her and her maids to the best place in the harem.

9 The young woman pleased him and gained his favor. He quickly provided her beauty treatments and gave her portions of food to her. He also assigned her seven suitable young women from the palace and transferred her and her young women to the best place in the harem.

9 And the maiden pleased him [Hegai], and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, which were meet to be given her, out of the king's house: and he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the house of the women.

- "...the young lady" - Esther

- "...him" - Hegai

- "...found favor with him" - an outworking of Prov 3:3-4: *Do not let kindness and truth leave you; Bind them around your neck, Write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and a good reputation In the sight of God and man.*

- "...quickly provided her with her cosmetics and food" - because of this favor, Hegai gave Esther special beauty preparations and food, beyond her allowance

- "...seven choice female attendants" - he also gave her seven of the best female attendants to look after her beauty needs

(d) Esther's secrecy regarding her Jewish nationality (2:10)

10 Esther did not reveal her people or her kindred, because Mordecai had instructed her that she was not to reveal *them*.

10 Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make *them* known.

10 Esther did not make known her people or heritage⁷ because Mordecai had instructed her not to make it known.

10 Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew it.

- Esther did not reveal her religion or ethnicity because Mordecai, her guardian, had instructed her not too

— Esther's ability to keep this information concealed, and her submissiveness to Mordecai, mark her as a wise woman

- Many Church Age believers get all up in arms about the fact that Mordecai did not want Esther to reveal her ethnicity/religion, and the fact that Esther obeyed. They bemoan the fact that she is "hiding her light under a bushel."

— However, to think this way belies a misunderstanding of the danger that Esther was in personally, and the danger that the entire Jewish nation would later be in, in which God used Esther to protect the Jewish people.

— A similar personal danger was present during Jesus' earthly ministry, in which a number of believers, including prominent Pharisees, kept silent about their faith and did not confess Christ (Cf. John 12:42; 19:38).

— To invoke Matt 10:32-33 here ("...everyone who confesses Me before people, I will also confess him before My Father.... But whoever denies Me before people, I will also deny him before My Father...") misunderstands the danger Esther and the Jewish people were in, as well as takes the Matthew passage out of context.

As will become clear throughout this book, Esther cooperated in practices that were contrary to the Mosaic Law. These included marrying a pagan (Deut 7:1-4; Cf. Ezra 9:12; 10:10-15), and eating unclean food (Lev 11:46-47). This sets Esther in contrast to Daniel, who purposed not to defile himself, even with unclean food (Dan 1:5,8).

Esther's obedience (or lack thereof) to God is not the reason she rises to her high position in the same way as Daniel, or how Joseph did in Egypt when he refused the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife and spent years in an Egyptian prison.

(e) Mordecai's concern for Esther (2:11)

11 And every day Mordecai walked back and forth in front of the courtyard of the harem to learn how Esther was and what was happening to her.

11 Every day Mordecai walked back and forth in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and how she fared.

11 Every day Mordecai would walk back and forth in front of the court of the harem to find out about Esther's well-being and what was happening to her.

11 And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her.

- Mordecai's concern for Esther's state and well-being demonstrates his love and care for her while she was in a potentially dangerous place

(C) Ahasuerus selects Esther as Vashti's replacement (2:12-20)

(a) The procedure (2:12-14)

(i) Beautification (2:12)

12 Now when the turn came for each young woman **to go in to King Ahasuerus**, after the end of her twelve months under the regulations for the women—for the days of their beauty treatment were completed as follows: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with balsam oil and the cosmetics for women—

12 Now when the turn of each young lady came to go in to King Ahasuerus, after the end of her twelve months under the regulations for the women—for the days of their beautification were completed as follows: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and the cosmetics for women—

12 Each young woman's turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus at the end of the twelve month period, at which time she was treated according to the regulations for women. This process completed the period of her beauty treatments—six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and cosmetics for women.

12 Now when every maid's turn was come to go in to king Ahasuerus, after that she had been twelve months, according to the manner of the women, (for so were the days of their purifications accomplished, to wit, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odours, and with other things for the purifying of the women;)

- "...to go in to King Ahasuerus" - the king evidently had sexual relations with a different young woman every night, or whenever he pleased, after they went through the initial 12-month beautification program

(ii) Spending the night with Ahasuerus (2:13-14)

13 the young woman would go in to the king in this way: anything that she desired was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace.

13 the young lady would go in to the king in this way: anything that she desired was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace.

13 After that the young woman would go in to the king, and whatever she asked for would be given to her to take with her from the harem to the palace.

13 Then thus came every maiden unto the king; whatsoever she desired was given her to go with her out of the house of the women unto the king's house.

14 In the evening she would enter and in the morning she would return to the second harem, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not go in to the king again, unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.

14 In the evening she would go in and in the morning she would return to the second harem, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not again go in to the king unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.

14 In the evening she would go into the palace and in the morning she would return to the second harem, into the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the mistresses. She would not go again to the king unless the king wanted her and she was called for by name.

14 In the evening she went, and on the morrow she returned into the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's chamberlain, which kept the concubines: she came in unto the king no more, except the king delighted in her, and that she were called by name.

- After their night with the king, the former virgins would spend the night then return to a second harem (non-virgins) and become a concubine. The only way she would go back in to be with the king again is if the king "delighted" in her and summoned her again by name.

(b) Esther spends the night with Ahasuerus (2:15-16)

15 Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai who had taken her as his daughter, came to go in to the king, she did not request anything except what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the women, advised. And Esther was finding favor in the eyes of all who saw her.

15 Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai who had taken her as his daughter, came to go in to the king, she did not request anything except what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the women, advised. And Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her.

15 Now Esther was the daughter of Abihail, who had been Mordecai's uncle. Mordecai had taken Esther in as his own daughter. When her turn came to go in to the king, she did not

want anything except what Hegai, the king's eunuch in charge of the harem, advised. Esther found favor with everyone who saw her.

15 Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her.

- Esther had such natural beauty and charm that she required no special adornments to make her attractive

16 So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus in his royal palace in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

16 So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus to his royal palace in the tenth month which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

16 Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus to his royal palace in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

16 So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus into his house royal in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

- This was the winter of 479-478 BC, four years after Vashti was deposed as queen.

(c) Ahasuerus selects Esther as his Queen to replace Vashti (2:17)

17 The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found favor and kindness with him more than all the virgins, so that he set **the royal turban** on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti.

17 The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found favor and kindness with him more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

17 The king loved Esther more than any of the other women, so he favored her and was kinder to her than he was to any of the other virgins. He put the royal crown on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti.

17 And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti.

- "...the royal turban" - the queen's crown (Cf. 1:11)

- Esther's life so far has been remarkable. She was the child of Jewish exiles, both of whom 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 everyone she came in contact with. Finally, she was selected to be the queen of the realm.

Ps 75:6-7:

- 6 For not from the east, nor from the west, Nor from the desert *comes* exaltation;
7 But God is the Judge; He puts down one and exalts another.

(d) Ahasuerus' banquet honoring his new queen Esther (2:18)

18 Then the king held a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his officials and his servants; he also made a **holiday for the provinces** and gave gifts in proportion to the king's bounty.

18 Then the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his princes and his servants; he also made a holiday for the provinces and gave gifts according to the king's bounty.

18 The king put on a great banquet for all his officials and ministers to honor Esther. He declared a holiday for the provinces and gave generous gifts.

18 Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast; and he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts, according to the state of the king.

- "...holiday for the provinces" - the king forgave the tax debt of the people, or at least a portion of it, to celebrate the new Queen

(e) Esther's secrecy regarding her Jewish heritage (2:19-20)

19 Now when the virgins were **gathered together for the second time**, then **Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate**.

19 When the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate.

19 When the virgins were gathered a second time, Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate.

19 And when the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai sat in the king's gate.

- "...gathered together for the second time" - the reassembling of the virgins was part of a procession that the king designed to show off Esther's beauty compared to the other contestants in his beauty contest

— This was likely part of the gala that celebrated the king's wedding to Esther

- "...Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate" - Mordecai had evidently received an appointment to a governmental position as a magistrate or judge, perhaps based on Esther's influence

— "king's gate" - was where people settled legal matters; subsequent references to the king's gate in Esther (Cf. v21; 3:2-3; 4:2 [2x],6; 5:9,13; 6:10,12) confirm that Mordecai occupied an official position that required his presence there

20 Esther *still* had not revealed her relatives or her people, just as Mordecai had instructed her; for Esther did what Mordecai told her just as she had when under his care.

20 Esther had not yet made known her kindred or her people, even as Mordecai had commanded her; for Esther did what Mordecai told her as she had done when under his care.

20 Now Esther had not declared her heritage or her people, just as Mordecai had instructed her, for Esther did what Mordecai told her just as she had done when she was raised by him.

20 Esther had not yet shewed her kindred nor her people; as Mordecai had charged her: for Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him.

- Esther's obedient and wise submission to Mordecai, even after she became queen, is remarkable, admirable, and praiseworthy

(3) Mordecai foils a plot to assassinate Ahasuerus (2:21-23)

(A) Conspiracy to assassinate Ahasuerus (2:21)

21 In those days, while Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's officials from those who guarded the door, became angry and sought to attack King Ahasuerus.

21 In those days, while Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's officials from those who guarded the door, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.

21 At that time when Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs among those who guarded the threshold, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Ahasuerus.

21 In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those which kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus.

- Mordecai overhears that these two guys are plotting to kill the king, which was the first step in his plan to exterminate the Jews

— Ahasuerus later lost his life, 14 years later, through a conspiracy formed by Artabanus, the captain of his guard, with Aspamitras, a eunuch and chamberlain

(B) Mordecai discovers the conspiracy and reports it to Esther who in turn reports it to Ahasuerus (2:22)

22 But the plot became known to Mordecai and he informed Queen Esther, and Esther told the king in Mordecai's name.

22 But the plot became known to Mordecai and he told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name.

22 When Mordecai learned about the plot, he told Queen Esther, and she told the king in Mordecai's name.

22 And the thing was known to Mordecai, who told it unto Esther the queen; and Esther certified the king thereof in Mordecai's name.

- Mordecai learns of the plot, tells Esther, who in turn tells the king that Mordecai gave her the info

(C) Hanging of the conspirators (2:23)

23 Then when the plot was investigated and found *to be so*, they were both **hanged on a wooden gallows**; and it was **written in the Book of the Chronicles** in the king's presence.

23 Now when the plot was investigated and found *to be so*, they were both hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the Book of the Chronicles in the king's presence.

23 After the matter had been fully investigated, Bigthan and Teresh were hanged on a pole, and this was recorded in the Book of the Chronicles in the presence of the king.

23 And when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out; therefore they were both hanged on a tree: and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.

- "...hanged on a wooden *gallows*" - "gallows" literally means "tree"; in actuality they were impaled on a post, much like crucifixion

- "...written in the Book of the Chronicles" - a record of this assassination attempt was written in the annals, the official royal record (Cf. 6:1-2)

— This will prove to be a "plant" in the plot and of pivotal significance later in the tale...

*Note: Mordecai was never "acknowledged" for saving the king's life at the time...God was holding his accolades to come in His timing.

God's Providence Throughout Esther

1. Vashti's decision (1:12)
2. Esther's selection (2:17)
3. Mordecai's advancement (2:19)