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Esther 2:1-23 (NASB)

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.

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

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*.

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.

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,

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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—

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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

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.

B. Esther elevated to queen ([2:1-20](#))

Esther, a Jewess, was placed in a position in which she could help the nation Israel. Her being elevated to queen happened even before Israel needed help. The original readers would realize that this was another instance of God protecting His covenant people.

1. SOLUTION PROPOSED FOR A NEW QUEEN ([2:1-4](#))

[2:1-4](#). After **the anger** of the king **subsided**, apparently sometime later, he realized that he had been foolish in his actions. Throughout the book it is evident that **the king** was led along by his officials. It appears that he was somewhat provincial in his outlook. Like all men of power he had to rely on others to be his eyes and ears on the outside, and did not always receive the best information.

In this case it was suggested to **the king** that **beautiful young virgins** (unmarried women) be brought to **Susa**, placed under **Hegai** (the **eunuch... in charge of the harem**) and given **beauty treatments** (cf. [v. 9](#)), and that **the king** be allowed to pick from them a woman to replace **Vashti**. His **personal attendants** (probably "the wise men who understood the laws... seven nobles," [1:13-14](#)) had suggested that Vashti be deposed. So now they certainly did not want Xerxes to reinstate her for fear that she would turn against them. The suggestion **appealed to the king and he followed it**. The fact that he had a harem in Susa is known from other sources. New women were constantly being brought into the Persian harem to replace the older women.

2. ESTHER TAKEN INTO THE HAREM ([2:5-11](#))

[2:5-7](#). **Mordecai** is a Babylonian name taken from the god Marduk. The name mrdk is attested in fifth-century Aramaic documents. Mordecai was **a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin**. He had tried to hide the fact that he and his cousin were Jews ([vv. 10, 20](#)). [Verse 6](#) may mean that Mordecai was deported by **Nebuchadnezzar** along with **Jehoiachin** (597 B.C.). But this would mean that Mordecai would have been about 115 years old by the time of Xerxes' third year and Esther

would have been 80. It is better to understand that **Kish**, Mordecai's great-grandfather, was the one who was carried away in the 597 deportation.

Mordecai's **cousin**, Esther, also a Benjamite, had been raised by him, apparently because her parents died when she was young. Her father was Abihail ([v. 15](#); [9:29](#)). The name **Esther** ("star") is Persian. Her Hebrew name, **Hadassah**, means myrtle. She was beautiful, **lovely in form and features**.

[2:8-11](#). **Esther** was taken into Xerxes' harem to await **the king's** choice, along with **many** other young women of the kingdom who were summoned to **Susa**. Esther immediately pleased **Hegai**, the eunuch (cf. [v. 3](#)) and as a result was given a favorable position **in the harem**. He saw that she had **beauty treatments** (cf. [v. 3](#)) **and special food**, apparently food of a better-than-ordinary quality. Esther was even given **seven maids** to serve her. The wait in the harem was at least 12 months ([v. 12](#)) so Esther must have appreciated her favored position.

Esther kept her Jewish nationality a secret (cf. [v. 20](#)), not telling Hegai, her maids, or anyone else **because Mordecai had told her** not to. From this and other statements in the book it is clear the author was making the point that God protected and used Esther and Mordecai *in spite of* the fact that they were not living according to the Law commanded by God to the people of Israel. By Law Esther was not to marry a pagan ([Deut. 7:1-4](#)) or have sexual relations with a man who was not her husband ([Ex. 20:14](#)), and yet this was the purpose of her being included in the harem. **Esther** could be contrasted with Daniel who refused to eat the things from the king's table ([Dan. 1:5](#)) because the food would include items considered unclean by the Jewish Law. Apparently Esther had no qualms about the food she ate ([Es. 2:9](#)). She certainly did not set herself apart as Daniel had done.

3. ESTHER CHOSEN TO BE QUEEN ([2:12-20](#))

[2:12-15](#). Esther became extremely popular during her year of preparation for her night with the king. Each girl's **beauty treatments** were designed to enhance her attractiveness. **Myrrh**, a gum from a small tree, gives a fragrant smell.

Esther was not in a beauty contest simply to win the king's affections; the women were being prepared to have sexual relations with **the king**. This is suggested by the words **in the evening she would go there and in the morning return**. After that they would be transferred to another harem, under **Shaashgaz**, which consisted of **the concubines**. Most of the women were relegated to living the rest of their lives in the harem of the concubines, many probably never again seeing **the king**. When **Esther** went to **the king** she followed the instructions of **Hegai the eunuch**.

[2:16-20](#). Esther was taken to King Xerxes in 479 B.C., his seventh year, the 10th month (**Tebeth** was the Babylonian name for December-January). **The king was attracted to Esther** and therefore **made her queen** in place of **Vashti**. Then a big **banquet** was prepared and he **proclaimed a holiday** and gave away many **gifts**. Throughout all this, Esther had still not revealed that she belonged to the Jewish nation (cf. [v. 10](#)). Apparently there was a gathering of another harem of **virgins** during the time **Mordecai was... at the king's gate** (cf. [v. 21](#); [3:2](#)). His being at the king's gate probably meant that Mordecai held an official position in the empire's

judicial system. His position thus helped set the stage for the following events. This fact about Mordecai shows how he could have uncovered an assassination plot and how a feud started that threatened the entire Jewish nation.

II. THE JEWS MARKED FOR EXTERMINATION ([2:21-4:3](#))

Many have noted that the Book of Esther is a great short story. Like Ruth, another little book in the Bible about a woman, Esther has all the earmarks of great literature, including a conflict, an antagonist, tension, and irony. The antagonist, Haman, is introduced here and his conflict with Mordecai began.

A. A feud and Haman's hatred of the Jews ([2:21-3:6](#))

1. KING SAVED BY MORDECAI ([2:21-23](#))

[2:21-23](#). Again a reference to Mordecai's position **at the king's gate** (cf. [v. 19](#)) as a judiciary official points to God's sovereign control over these events. Learning about a plot by **Bigthana and Teresh**, royal guards, **to assassinate the king**, Mordecai **told Queen Esther**, who **reported this to the king**. She gave **credit to Mordecai** for uncovering the scheme. **The two men** involved in the plot **were hanged on a gallows** (or "post," NIV marg.; cf. [5:14](#)). Rather than being hanged by the neck on a modern-type gallows, the men were probably impaled on a stake or post (cf. [Ezra 6:11](#)). This was not an unusual method of execution in the Persian Empire. Darius, Xerxes' father, was known to have once impaled 3,000 men. A record of this assassination attempt was written in **the annals**, the official royal record (cf. Es. [6:1-2](#)).

The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

Open it

1. What do you sense society believes are the most important qualities in a person?
Looks, wealth, power, position, home, car, family

Explore it

2. How did the king plan to find another queen for himself? ([2:3-4](#))
He was going to have all the beautiful young virgins be brought to Susa, give them cosmetics and then the one who pleases the king will be queen
3. What does the passage reveal about Esther and her background? ([2:7](#))
She was being raised by her uncle Mordecai as his own
4. For what reason did Esther not reveal her heritage? ([2:10](#))
Mordecai told her not to tell the king

5. What events preceded a woman's turn to go to the king? ([2:12-14](#))

After 12 months, and 6 months with myrrh and 6 months with spices, she would go to the king led by Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch in charge of the concubines, there in the evening and back in the morning, and not go again unless summoned by the king

6. How did Esther become queen? ([2:17-18](#))

The king loved Esther more than the other and he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen, a great banquet was held with all the princes and his servants. It was made a holiday and gifts were given according to the king's bounty

7. How did Esther continue to show her respect for Mordecai even after she had become queen? ([2:20-23](#))

She informed him of a plot that became known to Mordecai, when it was told by it was from Mordecai and was true, the two officials were hanged

Get it

8. What kind of relationship did Esther and Mordecai have?

Like a father to his daughter

9. How can we guard against the temptation to allow money, status, or power to influence our motivations and actions?

Keeps our wits, trust in God to lead you

10. What do you think is the proper attitude toward wealth and prestige?

They are just things

Apply it

11. What do you most want to remember from this story about money, status, and power?

Remain humble