



LESSON TWO: A NEW QUEEN AND OLD RIVALS (ESTHER 2-3)

HOOK :

***Pray Paul's prayer for spiritual "sight" and enlightenment just before you read Esther chapters 2 – 3:

¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.
(Ephesians 1:16 – 21, *ESV*)

BOOK:

1. Now read Esther chapters 2 – 3. As you read observe and take note of the names of the major characters, locations within Susa, and markers of times or dates. What are the conflicts? In what ways are the characters flawed? In what ways are they courageous?

2. Now read Esther chapters 2 – 3 a second time. Put yourself in the "shoes" of each major character. Who is "winning" and who is "losing" at the end of chapter 3? How do you see God's hand moving through this story so far? (By story we do not mean a "made-up" story, but this is an historical narrative masterfully written as it examines real events).

LOOK:

1. From verses 1-4, what did King Xerxes' attendants convince him to do to replace Vashti?
2. From verses 5-11, what was Mordecai's background and relationship with Hadassah (Esther). What did he encourage Esther to do?
3. So I'll let Dr. Constable from Dallas Seminary point out the "elephant in the room." *"The king evidently had sexual relations with a different virgin every night whenever he pleased. The harem officials watched these girls closely to make sure they did not have some disease that they would pass on to him. The women in the harem used their time to become as attractive as possible."* (Dr. Constable's Notes on Esther, <https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Esther+2>)
... From verses 12-18, what made Esther different that Xerxes appointed her queen?

4. From verses 19-23, how did Mordecai and Esther gain influence with the King?

5. Turn to Deuteronomy 25:17-19 and 1 Samuel 15:17-20. Most believe that Haman the Agagite was a descendent of the Amalekites. From chapter 3, How did an ancient hostility lead to a genocidal decree? How did Saul's disobedience around 1000 BC lead to a potential threat to all Hebrews @ 475 BC?

"Esther became queen in the winter of 479-478 B.C., four years after Vashti's deposition (v. 16). During that four-year period the Greeks defeated [Xerxes] in battle. . . . [Xerxes] gave permission to Haman to confiscate the Jews' wealth and to put them to death (v. 11). Merrill suggested that [Xerxes] viewed the Jews as a scapegoat to blame for his humiliating losses to the Greeks (Dr. Constable's notes, quoting: Eugene H. Merrill, Kingdom of Priests, p. 502, <https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Esther+3>)

6. So the main "actors" were Mordecai, Esther, Haman, and Xerxes. After chapters 2 and 3 who looks noble? Who looks humble? Who looks foolish? Who looks evil? Why?

TOOK:

1. Ezekiel 18:21-23 states, *"²¹ But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. ²² None of the transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness that he has done he shall live. ²³ Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?"*

Mordecai and Esther compromised their Hebrew Bible in many ways to "prosper" in Persia (cf. Ex 20:14; Dt 7:1-4; Le 11:46-47). Daniel and his friends never compromised. Yet, when the time(s) came for courageous action that demonstrated a faith in God, everyone acted righteously and courageously. How does the passage above speak to the moral "grey" areas of the book of Esther? How should we respond in response to Ezekiel 18?

2. Look back at chapters 2 and 3. Where do you see God's grace "screaming" in the midst of this story? Now examine your own life. Where do you see God's grace "screaming" in the midst of your circumstances?

3. Finally, look at Paul's testimony in Acts 26:9-23. How did his testimony demonstrate the truths of grace and mercy, along with personal accountability in Ezekiel 18? Esther is the story of characters who actively chose righteous acts or evil acts. Today, you have access to God's grace. What will you set aside and what act of faith will you pursue?

*"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ"
(Philippians 3:7-8 ESV)*