

Esther Chapter 2

Esther 2:1 "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."

"After these things ... he remembered Vashti" suggests a lapse of time, and since verse 16 tells us that it was the seventh year of Ahasuerus before Esther went into the king's presence, probably the Greek war intervened before the king gave a thought to Vashti. Esther became queen in December 479 B.C. (verse 16), and more than a year must have elapsed between the decree of verse 3 (verse 12), and her marriage. The king may have first become attracted to Vashti while he was still waging his great campaigns against Greece.

Most likely during the latter portion of the king's ill-fated war with Greece (ca. 481-479 B.C.).

"He remembered Vashti": The king was legally unable to restore Vashti (compare 1:19-22), so the counselors proposed a new plan with promise.

Secular history reports that as many as four years passed between the events of (chapter 1 and 2:1), during which time "Ahasuerus" was at war. His realization that he had divorced the one person capable of cheering him up may have been heightened by his miserable defeat at the hand of the Romans, in which he lost more than one million men and his entire fleet.

The indication here, is that he was sorry he had listened to his advisors and put Vashti away. None of this would have happened, had he not been drinking. After he settled down and thought about what had happened, he had to realize that this was his fault and not hers. He cannot change her punishment however, because he had made it a law.

Verses 2-4: Realizing that the restoration of Vashti would spell doom for them, the princes abandoned the precedent of providing a queen from among their own daughters, and suggested that the king choose a new queen from among the most beautiful virgins in the empire. "Hege the king's chamberlain" was a eunuch in charge of the "house of the women," a most responsible post. The leaders were well aware of the weakness of Xerxes' character, and took full advantage of it for their own purposes.

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

Fearing that, if Vashti should be restored, vengeance would be taken on them; or however to remove the grief and melancholy of the king, they gave the following advice.

"Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king": That he might enjoy them, and choose one of them, the most agreeable to him, and put her in the room of Vashti.

Esther 2:3 "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]:"

Who best knew where beautiful virgins might be found in their respective provinces, in which they dwelt.

"That they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the palace": The metropolis of the kingdom, where the royal palace was.

"To the house of the women, unto the custody of Hege the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women": In which house it seems were two apartments, one for the virgins before they were introduced to the king, the other for them when they were become his concubines, which had a keeper also. But this Hege seems to have been over the whole house (Esther 2:14). It was not only usual with the eastern people, as with the Turks now, for great personages to have keepers of their wives and concubines, but with the Romans also.

"And let their things for purification be given them": Such as oil of myrrh, spices, etc. to remove all impurity and ill scent from them, and make them look smooth and beautiful.

The king's servants had discovered the sadness of the king at the loss of his queen. In an oriental palace, there are separate apartments for the women away from the men. We saw that in the Palace of King David. These young, beautiful virgins were to be gathered from the many provinces that Xerxes ruled. They would be brought to the women's quarters at the palace, and prepared to meet the king. Most of these young women would not have fine clothes to wear, so they would be provided for them to wear before the king. Even though they were virgins, they would be purified in some way. This took approximately a year for the purification. This possibly meant that they were bathed and clothed in the garments provided. It also meant they were perfumed and rubbed with ointment in the purification.

Esther 2:4 "And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so."

Have the royal estate that was taken from Vashti, given to her, the crown royal set on her head, etc.

"And the thing pleased the king, and he did so": Appointed officers in all his provinces to seek out the most beautiful virgins, and bring them to his palace. So with the Chinese now, the king never marries with any of his kindred, though ever so remote. But there is sought throughout his kingdom a damsel of twelve or fourteen years, of perfect beauty, good natural parts, and well inclined to virtue. Whence, for the most part, the queen is the daughter of some artisan; and in their history, mention is made of one that was the daughter of a mason.

The king was lonesome, and by his own edict he could not get Vashti back, so he agreed to the suggestion. He sent for the maidens to be brought. In the next few verses, we can see that the hand of the LORD was in all that had happened.

Verses 5-7: Mordecai” was a name current in Babylon incorporating “Marduk,” The name of the state god of Babylon. The names in his genealogy are well known from the family of King Saul: Kish” (1 Sam. 9:1; 14:51; 1 Chron. 8:33) and “Shimei” (2 Sam. 16:5). He had royal blood and was a member of God’s chosen family who inherited the promises. The phrase “who had been carried away” most likely does not refer to Mordecai but involves a telescoping of generations (Gen. 46:27; Heb. 7:10). “Jeconiah,” also known as Coniah (Jer. 22:24-30), and as Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:6-17), was Judah’s king (in 597 B.C.), and was deported by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon (2 Kings 25:27-30). “Hadassah” is the Hebrew name of the heroine and means “Myrtle.” In prophetic symbolism, the myrtle would replace the briars and thorns of the desert, so depicting the Lord’s forgiveness and acceptance of His people (Isa. 41:19; 55:13; Zech. 1:8). Myrtle branches are still carried in procession at the Feast of Tabernacles, and signify peace and thanksgiving. “Esther” is the Persian word for “Star”; it picks up the sound of the Hebrew, and suggests the star-like flowers of the myrtle.

Esther 2:5 "[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” is the hero of the Book of Esther. He was a resident of Susa (Shushan), the Persian capital during the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes I), the king of Persia (ruled 485 – 465 B.C.). Mordecai took his orphaned cousin, Hadassah (Esther), into his home as her adoptive father (verse 7). Later, Mordecai uncovered a plot to murder the king and saved his life (verses 21-22). This good deed was recorded in the royal chronicles of Persia (verse 23). Mordecai refused to bow to Haman, and as a result, Haman introduced a plan to kill all the Jews in the Persian Empire (3:6). Mordecai then exhorted Queen Esther to approach the king and save her people (3:1 - 4:17). Haman was hanged on the very gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai (7:10), and Mordecai became second in command, succeeding Haman.

(2 Chronicles Chapter 36), reports three different deportations of Jews under King Nebuchadnezzar. Mordecai was living in Shushan because his ancestors, likely his great grandparents, had been deported in one of these waves (2 Kings Chapters 24 and 25).

“Kish”: Mordecai’s great grandfather who actually experienced the Babylonian deportation. After Babylon fell to Medo-Persia (ca. 539 B.C.), Jews were moved to other parts of the new kingdom. Kish represents a Benjamite family name that could be traced back (ca. 1100 B.C.), to Saul’s father (1 Sam. (9:1).

During the Babylonian captivity, Mordecai had been taken to Shushan. This is the first mention of a Jew in this book. We read of a Mordecai in Ezra and in Nehemiah, it is probably not the same person. The Mordecai here, was a Benjamite.

Esther 2:6 "Who 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."

“Jeconiah”: Former king of Judah (also known as Jehoiachin and Coniah), who was deported (ca. 597 B.C.; 2 Kings 24:14-15; 2 Chron. 36:9-10). Due to his disobedience, the Lord removed his descendants from the line of David to Christ (Jer. 22:24-30). The family of Mordecai and Esther were part of the good figs (in Jer. 24:1-7).

There were a number of captivities that took place. This one seems to have been fairly early on. This was probably the second captivity, because of the capture of Jeconiah. Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon at the time.

Esther 2:7 "And he brought up Hadassah, that [is], Esther, his 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."

Like Daniel and his friends (Dan. 1:7), “Hadassah” was probably given a new name by her captors. Most scholars believe that the name “Esther” originates from a Babylonian deity, Ishtar.

“Esther” was the Jewish queen of the Persian king, Ahasuerus (Xerxes). She saved her people, the Jews, from a plot to annihilate them. Esther was a daughter of Abihail (verse 15; 9:29), and a cousin of Mordecai (verses 7-15). After her mother and father died, Mordecai raised her as his own daughter. Her Jewish name was Hadassah, which means “Myrtle” (verse 7). The story of Esther’s rise from an unknown Jewish girl to queen of a mighty empire illustrates how God uses events and people to fulfill His promise to His chosen people. Ahasuerus appointed Esther to replace Queen Vashti (verse 17). Esther exposed Haman’s sinister plot to slay all the Jews. As a result, Ahasuerus granted the Jews the right to defend themselves and destroy their enemies. With ironic justice “they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai (7:10).

Hadassah is another name for Esther. It appears, that her mother and father were dead, and Mordecai had raised her. It was Mordecai that brought Esther up to be shown to the king for a possible wife. She was a virgin, and she was very beautiful.

Esther 2:8 "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."

“Esther was brought”: It is impossible to tell if Esther went voluntarily or against her will.

It seems, that many beautiful maidens from throughout the provinces were brought to the women's apartments to be prepared to be viewed by the king. Hegai was the eunuch that was in charge of the women, who would be viewed by the king.

Esther 2:9 And the maiden pleased him, 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."

"Pleased him": That she pleased Hegai points to God's providential control.

It seems, that when Hegai saw Esther, he was pleased with her, and he wanted every advantage shown her. He assigned 7 maidservants to her and gave her the nicest of the women's apartments. He saw that all of her needs were met, while she was waiting. We may safely assume that the LORD caused the king to be pleased with Esther.

Esther 2:10 "Esther had not showed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not show [it]."

Perhaps Mordecai charged Esther "she should not show it", her heritage, to protect her from potential violence, in case the Persians had an aversion to the Jews. Possibly because of the hostile letter mentioned (in Ezra 4:6), or the anti-Semitic sentiments of Haman and other like-minded people.

This just means that she did not reveal to the king that she was a Hebrew. Mordecai did not even allow her to tell the king that he had raised her.

Esther 2:11 "And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her."

Being one of the court, and in a high post, as Aben Ezra thinks, he might walk there without being examined, and called to an account for it.

"To know how Esther did": To inquire of her health and prosperity, or peace. The word here used signifies, even all sorts of it.

"And what should become of her": Or was done to her, whether she was well used, or as yet introduced to the king, how it fared with her, and what befell her.

Mordecai was very interested in Esther, since she was like a daughter to him. He was allowed to walk before the court of the women, because he wanted to find out about Esther and what would become of her.

Verses 12-15: The women had "twelve months" of "Purifications" before their brief audience with the king. So much was at stake. Six months were spent with "oil of myrrh", which served a double purpose: it was fragrant and also believed to have purifying powers.

Each woman prepared herself for “twelve months”, just for one night with the king (verse 12). These verses highlight the inhumanity of polygamy.

Esther 2:12 "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 odors, and with [other] things for the purifying of the women;)"

“Myrrh” was not only an ingredient in holy anointing oil (Exodus 30:22-33), it was also among the gifts presented by the Magi (Matt. 2:11), offered to Jesus as He hung on the cross (Mark 15:23), and used by Nicodemus to anoint Jesus’ body for burial (John 19:39).

Some of them had probably been out in the sun, and rough skin would not be becoming to a queen. After the twelve months in the apartments of the women, they would appear before the king to be selected. This oil of myrrh was perfume that was generally for the wedding bed. This was something to make her smell nice. During this time, she would have her skin rubbed with oil so she would be soft to touch. She was groomed to appear as a queen. During this time she was probably taught the duties of the queen as well.

Esther 2:13 "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."

When her twelve months were up, and she was purified in the manner before observed.

"Whatsoever she desired was given her to go with her out of the house of the women unto the king's house": Whatever she commanded the chamberlain was obliged to furnish her with, or grant it to her, whether for ornament, as jewels, rich apparel, etc. or for attendance. Whatever prince or peer she required to accompany her to the king, was to be obtained for her, as the Targum: and everything for mirth, all kinds of songs, or instruments of music, as Jarchi.

This is just saying, that every one of these maidens, individually, were given whatever clothes and ornaments they wanted to wear.

Esther 2:14 "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."

“The second house of the women”: The place of concubines.

The second house was for the king's concubines. It appears, that each of them stayed the night with the king and the next morning was carried to the house for his concubines. Shaashgaz was also a eunuch who took care of the king's concubines. They would never go again to the king, unless he called for them. If he called for one, she would be called by name, because he was pleased with her.

Verses 15-17: The king conducted the ungodly practice of choosing a queen by forcing hundreds of women to sleep with him. But God was not deterred. He silently worked through pagan people in a pagan culture to bring about His will and save His people from annihilation.

Esther 2:15 "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 favor in the sight of all them that looked upon her."

“Obtained favor”: According to the Lord’s providential plan.

Esther's father was Mordecai's uncle. It seemed each of these maidens went to see the king, and spent the night with him. When Esther's turn came, it was interesting that she did not demand any ornaments, or extra clothes. She just took what Hegai, the king's chamberlain gave her. They all loved her, because this proved she was not greedy or demanding.

Esther 2:16 "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."

“Tebeth”: The tenth month corresponding to Dec. / Jan.

“The seventh year”: Ca. 479 – 478 B.C., Four years had elapsed since Vashti’s fall from favor.

The month Tebeth is probably speaking of the month of January on our calendar. Four years had passed since Vashti had been put away for disobeying the king. Esther would be accepted or rejected, of the king on this night.

Esther 2:17 "And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favor 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 virgins he made his concubines, as next explained. Though Jarchi interprets it of married women, for such he supposes were gathered and brought to him, as well as virgins.

"And she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins": Who had been purified, and in their turns brought to him.

"So that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti": Declared her queen, and gave her all the ensigns of royalty. So it was usual with the eastern kings to put a crown or diadem on the heads of their wives at the time of marriage, and declare them queens.

The king loved Esther above all the other women. She was his choice of all the beautiful virgins of the provinces. He loved her so much, that he chose her to be his queen. He crowned her queen immediately.

Esther 2:18 "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."

Esther was not in any position to influence her success. It was God who quietly orchestrated her journey from obscurity to the second most powerful position in the entire kingdom. Every believer is in the process of God's will being worked out on his or her behalf.

“Made a release”: Probably refers to a remission of taxes and/or release from military service.

All joyful occasions were accompanied by a feast. The king announced this feast to celebrate Esther's becoming queen. He sent gifts and released the provinces from taxes and fighting in war, for a time to celebrate his queen.

Verses 19-23: The “second time” evidently was another occasion when the king added to his harem, after Esther had been made queen. Mordecai's sitting “in the king's gate” may indicate that when Esther became queen, she had him appointed a magistrate or judge. He is now in a position to overhear what is being said by palace officials (verse 21), and to have access to the royal courts (verse 22). He is found sitting at the king's gate on a regular basis (2:21; 3:2; 5:9, 13; 6:10, 12). He actually foiled an assassination plot against the king, and the report of this service was duly recorded in the king's diary (6:1-2). Xerxes later lost his life through just such a plot.

Esther 2:19 "And when the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai sat in the king's gate."

“The second time”: Perhaps the king intended to add the second best to his concubine collection.

These had to be the maidens that had been chosen from the provinces. Mordecai sitting in the king's gate, showed that he was one of the king's servants.

Esther 2:20 "Esther had not [yet] showed 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 had done everything that Mordecai advised to this point. This did not change once she became queen. In her continual heeding of Mordecai's godly counsel, she exemplifies true submission to the ultimate will of God.

Esther showed great respect to Mordecai, as she would a father. She had not told the king, or anyone else, that she was a Hebrew or that she was raised by Mordecai. Mordecai thought it best that she not tell, and she obeyed his wishes.

Esther 2:21 "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."

“The king’s gate”: Indicates the strong possibility that Mordecai held a position of prominence (3:2; Dan. 2:4).

“Were wroth”: Perhaps in revenge over the loss of Vashti.

These two men were highly regarded by the king. They were eunuchs that guarded the door to his sleeping chamber. They would have had an advantage, if they decided to kill the king, because they were trusted and could surprise him in his sleep.

Esther 2:22 "And the thing was known to Mordecai, who told [it] unto Esther the queen; and Esther certified the king [thereof] in Mordecai's name."

But by what means does not appear. The Jewish writers say, these two men were Tarsians, and spoke in the Tarsian language, which they thought Mordecai did not understand. But he, being skilled in languages, overheard them, and understood what they said. But, according to Josephus, it was discovered to him by Barnabazus, a servant of one of the chamberlains. The latter Targum says, it was showed unto him by the Holy Ghost.

"Who told it unto Esther, and Esther certified the king thereof in Mordecai's name": Whose name she mentioned, partly as a voucher of the truth of what she reported, and partly to ingratiate Mordecai to the king, that he might be still yet more promoted in due time.

Somehow Mordecai got word to Esther of their plan to kill the king. Esther told the king of their plot against his life. She also told him that it was Mordecai that sent the warning to him. She still did not reveal that she was related to Mordecai.

Esther 2:23 "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 tree”: The Persian execution consisted of being impaled (Ezra 6:11). It is likely that they were the inventors of crucifixion.

“Book of the chronicles”: The king would 5 years later (Ahasuerus’ twelfth year), read these Persian records as the turning point in Esther (6:1-2).

The king had this checked out and found it to be true. He had them both hung in punishment. This is a matter of historical record.

Esther Chapter 2 Questions

1. When the king got over his anger, he remembered _____.
2. None of this would have happened, had he not been _____.
3. What did he realize about the whole thing, after he thought about it?
4. Why could he not change her punishment?
5. What did the king's servants say to him?
6. The apartments of the women were _____ from the men's.
7. How long would they take for purification?
8. The maiden that pleased the king shall be _____.
9. Who was the Jew that was in the palace?
10. What tribe was he from?
11. Who had taken him captive?
12. What was another name for Esther?
13. What relation was she to Mordecai?
14. Why did Mordecai raise her?
15. Where was Esther brought?
16. Who was Hegai?
17. What special favor did the king show Esther, even before she became his queen?
18. What does verse 10 mean?
19. How did Mordecai check on Esther?
20. What was given to the maidens after the 12 months of grooming?
21. What was the second house they were taken to, after being with the king?
22. Who was Esther's father?
23. How did Esther find favor with those who had kept her, before she went to the king?
24. When was she taken to the king?
25. The king loved Esther _____ all the other women.

26. What was the name of the feast the king gave?
27. Esther treated Mordecai as a _____.
28. Who plotted to kill the king?
29. How was their plan stopped?
30. What happened to these two men?