

Esther 06-02-28B

Let's pick up our study now in Esther chapter 1. How many different kinds of background have you got now? You've got a three-dimensional background. You've got the Persian history background. You've got the Jewish history background.

And now you've got the Herodotus Greek history background. So we've got our crosshairs, our X, Y, and Z axis are all firmly on chapter 1. So let's return to the biblical text here. When we left this festive scene, Ahasuerus, who we just heard about, had his heart merry with wine.

He commanded his seven eunuchs who serve in his presence to bring the queen wearing her royal crown. Now this is not a little here-she-is Miss America deal. This is a big turban.

They don't wear crowns like imperial margarine. Do they still make that? When I was little, they had these black and white commercials on TV and you would eat this margarine, imperial margarine, and a crown would pop onto your head. And so ever since then, when I think of a crown, I think of these little diadems.

It's not a Burger King type of crown. This is a turban. These are oriental people.

They're Persians. Turbans were invented over there. And so this is a big wrapping cloth kind of a hat thing.

It's encrusted with jewels and it's very ornate and special. By the way, this very same word is going to be used later on when Mordecai goes horseback riding. The horse is going to wear one of these.

So it's not a gold crown. It's an ornate headdress that is a badge of rank. This is the idea.

Nobody but the queen gets to wear this elaborate head wrap turban. So, wearing her royal crown in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials because she was beautiful to behold. Now, the thing about Xerxes or Ahasuerus, he looks the same here in the book of Esther as he does in Herodotus.

We have some inscriptions of Xerxes. If you look at Herodotus and you look at the Bible both, you observe that Herodotus is nasty, that he has a bad temper, that he is impatient, that he is shallow, right? He's fickle, loves his sister-in-law, loves his niece, etc. Well, here is an inscription that they found that Xerxes put on a monument.

They've dug this up out of the earth over there in Iran. And here's what it says. I am not hot-tempered.

I hold firmly under control by my will. I am ruling over myself. The man who cooperates, according to his cooperations, thus I protect.

Who does harm, according to his damage, thus I punish. It is not my desire that a man should do harm, nor is that my desire if he should do harm, he should not be punished. When a man says against a man, that does not convince me until I hear the solemn testimony of both.

That is an actual inscription from Ahasuerus. It was published by a man named Garib, G-H-A-R-I-B, in a recently discovered inscription. So, now, do you know people like this? Not only are they untrustworthy, not only are they unpredictable, and are their affections unpredictable, but they are quick to tell you that they are just the opposite of what they are.

Have you known people like this? I am not hot-tempered, says the man who tracked his own brother down and had him slaughtered on the road. I hold firmly under control by my will. I am ruling over myself.

I am in control. Of course, the Bible says, the king was furious and his anger burned within him. And he calls all of his council of seven, his wise men who understand the times.

Now, what does it mean to understand the times? This is astrology. Understanding the times. What marks the movement of time in the ancient world? It is the great sidereal movement by which time is generally reckoned.

Planets, moon movements, lunar phases, and so on. So, these men who understood the times, this was the king's manner toward all those who knew law and justice. Notice, the law and justice are tied in with the astrological mumbo-jumbo.

So, depending on what day it is, you can make a request and it will be granted. On some other day, you might make a request and it won't be granted. It is very unpredictable, very shifty.

So, why does it give us these names? I have puzzled for a couple of weeks now over these Persian names. They are very difficult to get any etymology for. But, I will tell you this.

If you are reading along in Hebrew and you have some familiarity with Hebrew, there is a beautiful sound to spoken Hebrew. It is a very lilting, very beautiful language. You can get up on the web and find a cantor who is reading the Jewish scriptures or reciting a Jewish prayer and there is audio files and you can listen to it.

If you hear that, you will hear that Hebrew is a very beautiful spoken language. So, if you are reading along in Esther, and I can't do it justice and I am not going to try. I might read it a whole lot better than I speak out loud reading it.

But, if you are reading along and everything is flowing so smoothly and then you get to these names, Mehuman, Bizta, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zithar, and Carcass, they sound almost as goofy in Hebrew or goofier than they do in English. Abagtha? Come on. Who is going to look down in a cradle and name a baby Abagtha? His name shall be called Bigtha.

I mean, it is like pig Latin or something. Well, it sounds just as comical in Hebrew. Many

scholars believe that the reason these names, they are real names and they do have antecedents in the Persian language, but the reason they are included is to highlight the silliness of the Persian court.

Because this is basically a domestic squabble. This is a husband-wife type of thing. Ahasuerus says, Vashti, come walk the runway here so that everybody can admire you.

And she says, no, I am not coming. And Ahasuerus turns this into a governmental matter. And he calls in his counselors and he calls in his wise men.

He calls in Tarshish and Admapi and Meres and Marsena and Mehmukan and Karshena and Zithar, the seven princes. And he makes this, he blows it all out of proportion. She does not want to come into a room full of men who are all drunk and parade around.

And so he decides to make this a case for the Supreme Court. That is the bottom line. He takes this domestic difference, and we think that maybe there is a lot of history behind it from reading Herodotus.

But he says, she did not obey the command of the king, so what should be done to her? And so Mehmukan answers and says, Vashti is not only wronged the king, but all the princes. It is her example. Her crime is far worse than a simple no, because look at the example that it sets.

There will be contempt and wrath when people hear of the behavior of the queen. So let a royal decree go out from him. Let it be recorded in the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it will not be altered, that Vashti shall come no more before King Ahasuerus.

Let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. When the king's decree which he will make is proclaimed throughout all his empire, all wives will honor their husbands, both great and small. The reply, verse 21, pleased the king and the princes.

The king did according to the word of Mehmukan. He sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province in its own script, to every people in their own language, that each man should be master in his own house, and speak in the language of his own people. Now, all of this takes time.

All of this takes time. This is not the age of the internet in ancient Persia. They don't have TV.

They don't have radio. They can't lick a stamp and put it on this decree, and it's going to get there in two days. This is something that's going to take months.

The spread of the Persian empire, if you look at an ancient map, the thing is huge. It goes all the way from India all the way across to Greece. It's gigantic.

It takes months before this word can reach all of the provinces. So, after these things, now we're in chapter 2. After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus subsided, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what had been decreed against her. So the king's

servants who attended him said, let's do something about this.

Now it says, after his wrath subsided, and he remembered her. This implies that a sizable period of time has passed, right? And what I would suggest to you, and what a lot of scholars believe, is that the intervening period between chapter 1 and chapter 2 is when the war took place that we saw with the Greeks, and the falling in love and coming back, and Vashti is still around, but she and the king aren't talking anymore. And so, she doesn't come in again until this other banquet, when she asks for her sister-in-law, and he has to grant it.

But then he says, I've got to get rid of her. So then, the king's servants said, let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king. Let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan, the citadel, into the women's quarters, under the custody of Haggai, the king's eunuch, custodian of the women.

And let beauty preparations be given them. Then let the young women, who pleased the king, be queen instead of Vashti. This thing pleased the king, and he did so.

Now, how long is it going to take to send all these messengers out, and have people have beauty contests, and have run-offs, and get the beautiful women, and mail them back, send them back by caravan and so on, to Shushan? Again, months. This is a long period of time. Verse 5, In Shushan, the citadel, there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite.

Kish had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives, who had been captured with Jeconiah, the king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had carried away. Now, you notice Kish is in italics, because in Hebrew it says, he had been carried away. There used to be a lot of confusion, because it sounded like Mordecai had been carried away with Jeconiah.

Well, if that were the case, Mordecai would be like 125 years old, and Esther would be about 75, and I don't think she would have really been in contention for being the next queen. And there's a rule of Hebrew, but oddly enough, the rabbis, the ancient Jewish commentators, thought that this was talking about Mordecai, and they just accepted it, that Mordecai was 125, and Esther was 75, but God just made her incredibly beautiful, even though she was an old woman. Well, that just tells you the reason why we don't rely on rabbinic commentaries very much.

They're not really helpful. So, Mordecai, the son of Jeir, the son of Shimei, Shimei is his grandfather, Kish is his great-granddad. So you can see that over the course of these years, it's been a long time.

We're down to 483, 481, 480, somewhere around in there. And the carrying away took place 100 years earlier. Now, who was around 100 years ago in your family? Your parents were not alive 100 years ago.

My grandparents were born in the teens, 1915 to 1920, around in there. And so my grandparents, my great-grandparents, would have been the ones around in 1906 having their children. And that's exactly what we have here.

The lifespans and the generations run just about the same. 100 years earlier, it was Kish. And by the way, Kish is a Benjamite.

Do you know any other Kish from Benjamin that rings a bell? King Saul's father's name was Kish. And King Saul was a Benjamite. So this is an old Benjamite name going way back.

Now, this is important because we're going to see a conflict between two people in this book and their history goes way back. The first one is Mordecai. He is a Benjamite.

His great-granddaddy's name was Kish, who was carried away from Jerusalem with the captives that captured Jeconiah, king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away. And Mordecai, verse 7, had brought up Hadassah, that is Esther. Now, by the way, Mordecai, what does his name mean? Well, you don't see Yah or El anywhere in there, do you? Because it's not a Jewish name.

That's his Persian name. One of the most famous gods in the Persian pantheon is Marduk. And he is Marduk-i.

Marduk-i. Man of Marduk is his name. This is sort of like Shadrach and Meshach and Abednego.

This is his captivity name. This is his pagan name. We don't know what his actual name is.

We know the Jewish names of all of his antecedents. Jair, good Hebrew name. Shimei, good Hebrew name.

Kish. By the way, there was also a Shimei in the family of Saul and Jonathan, if you remember. All of those are good Jewish names, but you get to Mordecai and we don't have his Jewish name.

Now, do we care about this? Nod your head. Nod your head yes. We care about this.

It's a detail of the Word of God. There's not a wasted word. There's not a wasted detail in the Word of God.

Now, pop quiz for you. Why is this important? What does it tell us? If you think back, there is something about three generations that is significant. Do you remember it? God had promised way back that if there were three generations in a row of unbelief and disobedience, that He would cut that line off in Israel.

Do you remember that? I get down to the third generation of them that hate me. And the idea is, if you have three generations in a row that don't have any interest in the things of God, God said, I'm just going to weed them out of Israel and they're not going to continue. Well, you have

the first generation that came out of the land, Kish.

He has his son and he names him Shimei. And he says, we have this ancient Benjamite heritage. My name is Kish.

I'm from the family of Saul. I'm from the clan of Saul. We have royal blood in our veins.

And I don't want my children to forget it. So, I'm going to name my son Shimei. And he'll remember that he's a Benjamite and that he's got a proud heritage.

Shimei grows up in captivity. And he has a son and he says, we have a strong Benjamite heritage. We're the people of God.

I don't want my children to forget it. I'm going to name my son Jair. Jair grows up.

He's the second generation in captivity. And he says, I don't know anything about Israel. I don't remember the Benjamites.

Who cares about King Saul? There is no kingdom. There is no capital. I'm going to name my son Mordecai.

Man of Marduk. We've got to live in the present. We can't live in the past.

You can't be pining away for stuff that's dead and gone. The northern kingdom never came back. The ten tribes blew away in 721 B.C. Nobody's seen Hydra or Haravan since.

You've got to live in the present. You've got to throw off the past and look to the future. If I want my son to get ahead, he's got to blend in with the Persians.

I'm going to name him Marduk man. Mordecai. Well, after three generations of faithfulness, it's starting to fall apart.

It is time for these people to be renewed. They've been too long away from their homeland, too long away from their heritage. It is starting to be forgotten.

And this idea of three generations, this is a complete cycle. You typically know your parents. You typically know your grandparents.

If you're fortunate, when you're a child, you know your great-grandparents. But how many people know their double greats? The heritage fades away and disappears. You don't have any stories.

You don't have any memories. You don't see any faces from more than the past three generations at most. And this is just a fact.

And when you see Mordecai, after three generations of Jewish names, you know that the memory of being the people of God in the land and caring about the things of God is starting to

fade out. And it's time for deliverance. It's time to motivate the people who have stayed in Persia to go back, to remember their identity, to remember who they are.

And that's what God is going to do in this time of Esther. That's what He's going to use Esther to accomplish is to renew a sense of identity to remind these people of God who they are and why they're on the earth. So, after these things, the wrath of the king subsides.

He remembers Vashti, what she's done, what was decreed against her. Why would he have forgotten this? He's been off in Sardis trying to woo his sister-in-law and falling in love with his niece and one thing and another. And he finally gets back and the woman gets all mutilated and bad things happen.

And he says, Vashti, this Amestris, has got to go. This woman is dangerous. Next thing I know, I'm going to be waking up in pieces somewhere.

So, we've got to get a new queen in here and get rid of her once and for all. So, it sounds good to him. So, they send out the decree.

You have Mordecai living in Shushan. He's in the capital. We have his pedigree, his background.

Verse 7 says, Mordecai had brought up Hadassah. That is Esther. Hadassah is one of the most beautiful names in Hebrew.

And yet, we don't name this book Hadassah, do we? In fact, you can find a lot of young ladies named and even older ladies in Israel today named Hadassah. Just like you find Benjamin. Have you ever heard of Benjamin Netanyahu over in Israel? Benyamin, son of the right hand.

And his last name, Netanyahu. Netan is from Nathan or Natan, which means to give. And Yahweh is Yahweh.

So, he's the son of the right hand given by the Lord. Great name. I don't know, he didn't do so well as prime minister, popularity wise, but he's got a great name.

Well, this is Hadassah, but she gets renamed Esther. Esther is just a Hebraization of Ishtar. Ishtar and Marduk, these are the male and female deities in the Persian world.

And in a little over a month, we're going to celebrate a holiday that has this very same name. Why does Peter Cottontail show up? Easter. Easter is a corruption of Ishtar.

Esther. E-S-T-E-R. And all of these go back to the idea of star, of a heavenly stellar phenomenon.

Ishtar, Esther, star. That's what she is named here. So, it's his uncle's daughter.

Esther is his uncle's daughter. Now, if it's his uncle's daughter, what does that make her to him? Cousin, right? If it's his uncle's daughter, she's his first cousin. Now, normally, unless you have a really big family, I read about a guy, he's a judge up in Utah or someplace, and he has three

wives and 30-something children.

He married the first wife in 1975. How'd that go? It was either 65 or 75. And then ten years later, he married her sister.

And then ten years after that, he married the other sister. So, he's got three wives and they're all sisters. And between the four of them, they've got like 32 children.

He must be making pretty good money as a judge, is all I can say. But anyway, they kicked him out from being a judge. Somebody complained and they said, well, you know, this is really pretty egregious.

Well, the chances are that because Mordecai and Esther are cousins, they're probably not that far apart in age. We always imagine Mordecai is this little old geezer and Esther is this young orphan girl. Highly unlikely.

They're probably pretty close to the same age, which means Mordecai is probably fairly young. He's probably older than Esther, but probably not by a lot. So, it says he brought up Hadassah, that is Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother.

The young woman was lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter. Now, remember back in these days, you can be like 15 and be having children.

So, by the time you're 25, you can have 10-year-old children. So, if she was 10 and he was 25, then they're not that far apart in age. So it was when the king's command and decree were heard that when many young women were gathered at Shushan the citadel, under the custody of Haggai, that Esther also was taken to the king's palace into the care of Haggai, the custodian of the women.

Now, the young woman pleased him and she obtained his favor. Does this sound familiar at all? Has some of y'all been in our Daniel study? Remember when Daniel was hauled off with Hananiah and Mishael and Azariah and they all went under the care of the eunuch who was training them up to enter into the royal court? They found favor with the head guy, right? Same thing happened to Joseph when he was in prison and when he worked for Potiphar. Here's the principle.

You don't have to do what Ahasuerus did to curry favor and to court people's good opinion and to try to get them behind you. If you are the person that you're supposed to be, God will grant you favor in the eyes of those where it counts. Daniel went against the policies.

His three friends went against policies. Joseph did what he thought was best because of the wisdom that God gave him and so is Hadassah or Esther and God gives them favor with the people that they need favor with and God will do the same for you. You don't have to compromise.

You don't have to wheedle. You don't have to curry favor. You don't have to lower yourself and sacrifice your standards.

If God wants to promote you in some way, He's going to do it and there's not a force on earth that can stop it. And if God does not want to promote you, there is no amount of work that you can do and bribing and currying favor that you can accomplish that is going to get you into the right place. We have to depend on God.

If God promotes you, you are promoted. And if God does not promote you, anything that looks like a promotion isn't a promotion. It's going to be a disaster.

And you're going to wind up being the woman who thinks she's favored and then she winds up being the target of a horrible plot. And the spearmen show up at the door and the next thing you know, you're looking at pieces of yourself all over the area. This is what happens outside the protective care of the Lord God.

We have to trust God. He will do things in His time and in His way. So, if you don't remember anything else from Ahasuerus and Vashti and Esther, remember that.

Esther didn't come to the feast. She didn't parade around in a crown. She didn't do anything to try to get the favor of the king.

God gave her favor with this eunuch. And through that, she is going to gain the favor of the king and she's going to become the most powerful woman in the Persian empire. An empire that denigrates women.

An empire whose chief insult is you're worse than a woman. And yet, Esther is going to become more powerful than the king. More powerful than the king's chief advisors.

More powerful than Haman, who is the second most powerful man in the kingdom. It's an amazing thing to think about. But that's what God will do for those who are faithful, who are patient, who will concentrate and pay attention, live your life to please the Lord, do the things that are right.

God will advance you at the right time and in the right way and give you things that will last. Things that will matter. Things that will carry you all through your life.

The friends that you have will be good friends that last. The advancements and the successes and the accomplishments that you gain will be of a permanent, satisfying nature. Not something that's good today and turns to ashes tomorrow.

Well, we have to leave off with Esther coming to the palace, working with the chief of the eunuchs. We'll pick up here in the middle of chapter 2 next week. Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word.

Thank You for the principles and the promises and the doctrines that guide our lives and give

us the insight and the illumination on our path to make decisions and live in a way that is pleasing in Your sight. We pray that our lives will be the means of glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask it in His name, Amen.