

Session 1

April 22, 2018

BE READY TO STAND

Esther 2:5-10, 15-17

The story of Esther is unusual. Here we have a young Jewish woman, who, through the providence of God, rose through the ranks of the palace of Persia to become the queen. While she kept her ethnicity a secret for some time, she eventually was used by God to intercede for the Jews, saving them from massacre. Notably, the name of God never appears in the book! But God's providential care of His people—even those in exile—is clear on every page.

It's interesting that Esther's personality and temperament are masked in the early chapters of the book, but her humble submission to the authorities over her should not be mistaken for lack of convictions. Once again, God used her willingness to serve her people and her God to everyone's advantage.

Esther's Background. Esther's family life was bitter-sweet. Verse 7 tells us that both her father and her mother had died. But she was blessed to be adopted by her cousin, Mordecai, an original product of the Babylonian exile. But some time ago, the conquering Babylonians had themselves been conquered, and Mordecai, his family, and a host of other Jews now found themselves under Persian rule.

Esther's Beauty. The text points out that Esther was an exceptionally attractive woman. There is no apology here, nor any inkling that Esther was arrogant about it, or used her beauty to manipulate anyone. Rather, her natural beauty gave her providential access to the king and his influence. Chapter 1 explains the fate of the previous queen, Vashti, and how the king's system of choosing the next queen had been arranged. While holding a beauty contest for Vashti's replacement seems pretty shallow to us, it made perfect sense to the worldly king and his worldly court of advisors.

Esther's Favor. While the text reminds us of Esther's outer beauty, there is equal emphasis on her inner beauty. Verse 9 indicates that Esther's warm and pleasant personality won the favor of Hagoi, the one in charge of preparing the ladies who were seeking the king's approval. This friendship proved helpful to God's process, and Esther was given special treatment. Again, there is no indication of manipulation or self-promotion. The gifts that God gave to Esther and her gentle humility at displaying them were providentially used by God, ultimately for the good of others. The fact that Esther was consistent in her manner and unchanging in her personality is evidenced by her quiet submission to both her cousin Mordecai (v. 10) and her advisor Hagoi (v. 15a). As a result, "Esther won approval in the sight of everyone who saw her" (v. 15b).

Esther's Future. Who could have possibly guessed the adventure that lay ahead for this young and beautiful Jewess? The process by which the next queen was chosen is certainly distasteful to us, but was apparently the custom of that culture at that time. Like King Solomon long before, the king was afforded a multitude of wives, and one must remember that all the young women taken to him in this text became a part of his household. Nevertheless, the qualities of Esther won over the heart of pagan King Ahasuerus, for "The king loved Esther more than all the other women. She won more favor and approval from him than did any of the other young women" (v. 17). When he placed the royal crown on her head, she became the queen.

Thus, the story of Esther begins. God in His providence, made her beautiful on the outside and kept her beautiful on the inside. But this was no selfish display of God's personal favor, for Esther would ultimately be used to save her people—God's people—from certain destruction.