

ESTHER

INTRODUCTION

One of the most inspiring women of the Bible is Esther. Her life and ministry were so prominent and of such great value that she is one of only two women who have a book of the Bible that bears her name. Esther is an ordinary woman that God chose to use for His purposes. The book of Esther tells the story of a young Jewish girl who became a queen, but it also provides insight into the life of the Jewish people living under Persian rule. At the time of Esther's life, the Persian Empire was vast and stretched from what is now India in the east to Turkey and Ethiopia in the west. Although God's name is never mentioned specifically in this book of the Bible, the story of Esther is included in the canon of scripture because of its relevance to mankind and God's providential work revealed through its pages. Even though the story of Esther is an historical account of her life and the lives of the Jewish people in Persia, it is applicable for Jews and Christians throughout all time. In this paper, Esther's life, ministry, and leadership qualities will be discussed.

Esther's Life

Esther was no different than any other young lady. She had the same desires and feelings each woman possesses. Her early life probably mirrors that of many women today. She was orphaned at a young age and raised by her male cousin, Mordecai. It is a traumatic thing for a child to lose their parents and can result in life-altering affects. Her life and attitudes were

certainly affected by her orphaned status. However, just as anyone struggling with a devastating obstacle in life, this is a barrier that Esther had to overcome.

At the time of the events in this book transpired, Esther was living in the Persian city of Susa with her cousin. The events recorded in Esther take place fifty years after King Cyrus had decreed that the exiled Jews in Babylon could return to Jerusalem and twenty-five years before Ezra's return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. This information puts Esther and her life into context. Although she and Mordecai were free to leave Persia, they had chosen to stay. This may be an indication of how actively they were adhering to their Jewish faith and how comfortable they had become in the Persian culture. Nevertheless, God's word tells us that He is a jealous God, "For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God." (Deuteronomy. 4:24)¹ and He pursues His people relentlessly so they will turn to Him alone.

Esther was a lovely woman. She was so strikingly beautiful that she won the king's favor through a beauty contest that was held for all of the young maidens in the land. This propelled her to the position of Queen of Persia. It is possible the king observed more than just outward beauty when he looked at Esther. As Vander Velde said, "He must have seen intelligence, integrity, and courage in Esther---not a fawning but a queenly character."² These are qualities that would certainly attract a king.

Beauty was a desirable attribute in Esther's time, just as it is in today's world. When physical attractiveness is considered extremely important, it is easy for any woman to fall prey to this much sought after trait in life. Beauty and beauty rituals were all Esther needed to concern herself with. This was her life, a life devoted to pleasing King Xerxes.

¹All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the English Standard Version.

²Frances Vander Velde, *Women of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1985), 129.

Esther had to deal with the baggage of losing her parents, the societal priority of physical beauty, and the inferior place of women within the culture. However, God divinely placed her as a leader and tool for His glory. Only God can equip and establish a person as an instrument to accomplish His will. God chose Esther to be such a device. If God can use an unlikely candidate like Esther, surely He can use any woman who desires to surrender herself to His plans and purposes. God can use anything or anyone to accomplish His will; even if one does not possess faith in Him. It does not matter how little one has to offer God, He takes whatever is given and makes it enough. It is not what we possess, but who possesses us, that constitutes the difference.

Esther found herself entwined in a life she knew nothing about. She went from being a carefree young girl in Mordecai's household to the courts of the king. She was in unfamiliar territory. Many times, as leaders, we find ourselves engulfed in unfamiliar territory trying to do and accomplish things we have never done before. We must, like Esther, learn how to be flexible, adapt, and have the assurance that God is present and working regardless of our situation.

God formed Esther into the woman she was and she continued to rely upon the characteristics He had instilled in her. Esther continued to be respectful of others and humble, even though her social position in life had changed dramatically. Respectfulness of others and sincere humility are leadership qualities that will propel us to places beyond what we can imagine.

God uses many things to form a leader. The culture and community of a leader's younger years have a profound effect on future years. Many times attitudes are formed and instilled during early years and these can either benefit or hinder the leadership of a person. It is evident that Esther did not allow the fact that she was an orphan to determine the outcome of her life.

She chose to ascend above her less-than-perfect situation. As present day leaders, we must learn to overcome our past circumstances and difficulties. We must not allow them to dictate our future. Esther is a prime example of this type of overcoming attitude.

Esther's Ministry

A casual observance of Esther's life does not seem to reveal that she had any desire or motivation to be in any type of service or ministry for the Lord. She was content with life in Mordecai's house and then became content with the day to day concerns of life in the courts of the king. She never set out to serve God in any grand manner or be used as His instrument. However, God had strategically placed Esther to be His divinely placed tool even though it was not sought after or understood by her.

We may not set out to be in ministry for God or have any high and lofty aspirations, but God knows why He has created us and what He has ordained as the purpose our lives will fulfill. We may not feel as though we have any unique skill set, gifting, talents or qualities, but whatever God has developed and poured into our lives is more than enough to accomplish the task when anointed by the Holy Spirit.

Esther was an unlikely leader in God's army. However, God chooses and divinely prepares and establishes whoever He desires to fill the assigned places He ordains. He will do His work through surrendered vessels. Just as He used Esther, He is able to use any woman that surrenders herself to Him.

Esther risked her life to save the Jewish people. Esther took on a responsibility that many would have been unwilling to accept. Because of the actions of this young Jewish girl, an entire group of people's lives were spared. Esther's life is inspiring.

Thirty years after Esther's actions saved the Jewish people, Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. This would never have happened without the intervention of Queen Esther. God always finds a way to accomplish His will, but looking at this situation through human eyes, it would appear that without Esther there would not have been a Jewish nation for the Messiah to come from. "Esther paved the way, unknown to her, for the coming Christ. Through her God has also indicated that His guidance is available to His followers for making decisions. These decisions should be based upon the Word of God, tested by prayer, and the counsel of others, dependent upon an inner assurance and upon God-opened doors."³ God desires to use each one of us. He will guide and direct us, as we wait on Him. We can also be used by Him as His instruments in the world.

Leadership Qualities of Esther

A young inexperienced woman became queen of the great Persian Empire. She was the chosen vessel of God for delivering the Babylonian Jews from certain death. However, this young queen was subject to the laws of the land. She was only able to enter the presence of her husband, the king, when summoned by him. To enter without an invitation could mean death for her. The leadership qualities that God had deposited within Esther would eventually surface for all to see.

Esther, isolated from society by her royal home, did not realize that a decree had been announced issuing the death of the Jews. She was informed of this serious situation by information received from Mordecai through her attending eunuch, Hathach. Upon receiving the information of the decree, Esther was shocked, but did not realize the seriousness and future implications of such a decree. A challenge was issued to her by Mordecai to be strong and

³Gien Karssen, *Her Name is Woman: Book One:24 Women of the Bible* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1975), 119-120.

defend the Jewish people. He said, "... Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:13-14)

An important quality for leadership is seen in Esther's exchange with Mordecai. Esther was open and willing to take counsel and advice from her cousin. Just because she was the queen, she did not consider herself to be all-knowing or above seeking counsel. A good leader is open to the advice of others and requests input and suggestions for consideration.

Fear is a great hindrance to any leader. A leader must learn to overcome fear, which is exactly what Esther did. Coming before the king without a summons could result in her death. The matter at hand was of such vital importance that Esther risked her own life to save the lives of her people, the Jews. This took courage. She was willing to endanger herself by entering the king's presence without invitation. She could never have mustered the courage for such a courageous feat unless she employed another attribute that must be resident within a leader; a dependence upon God revealed through a reliance on prayer.

Esther knew she could never do what was being asked of her in her own strength and survive the ordeal. She called upon the Jewish people to fast and pray for three days while she also fasted and prayed. A good leader must recognize their need for God. Prayer invites God into the situation. Time spent in fasting and prayer demonstrates a dependence upon God and His intervention and presence in our circumstances. A good leader must be a person of prayer.

Esther was a woman of patience, another necessary quality for leadership. Too often we rush into situations without counting the cost or looking at the circumstance from every angle. We have a tendency to want a quick resolution to our problems. However, Esther knew the

importance of timing and allowing God time to work in a situation before rushing forward. Esther allowed God time to work through the prayers of the people, and in the heart of King Xerxes, before embarking on her quest.

Proper timing is an important element of leadership. Even when Esther burst into the presence of the king without being summoned, she did not immediately verbalize her request. Esther invited the king and Haman to a banquet. Yet, at the banquet she was not quick to reveal her request. Instead, Esther invited them both to a second banquet. She waited for the proper time. She used wisdom to determine the proper timing of her request. Improper timing can thwart the best laid plans and ideas. As we follow God, we must stay in step with His timing and not get ahead of Him or behind Him.

Esther found favor with the king and Haman's plot was unraveled. What was previously a death sentence for Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews was turned around. Esther's request was granted and the Jews were given ample opportunity to defend themselves rather than acquiesce to their annihilation. These events all transpired because Esther chose to take time to seek the face of God and then patiently follow His direction. In the end, the Jews gained support from the government officials employed by the king. God turned things around completely.

It is important as leaders to never forget we must depend upon God. Our trust cannot be in our own talents, gifts, knowledge, and insight to accomplish desired objectives. God is the one who will guide us through difficult times and decisions. It may even be possible to avoid difficulties when we spend time seeking Him. Dependence upon God must be our motto.

Esther was a loyal woman. She was loyal to Mordecai and cared about what he was concerned about. She acted when he prompted her to act. Loyalty is a quality that is scarce in today's world. Mordecai knew he could rely on Esther to listen to his advice and concerns. As a

leader, loyalty to others and from others is extremely important. A person who displays loyalty and respect will also receive it in return from others.

CONCLUSION

When reading the book of Esther, we are tempted to believe situations like this only happened during Bible times. However, there are many opportunities that lie before each one of us. We must not let the busyness of life and things of this world blind us to His divine appointments. God is still on the throne and looking for people He can use in a variety of circumstances to be His instrument in the world.

“Esther came to what many would call her ‘defining moment.’”⁴ Esther could never have imagined she would be placed in such circumstances. At the time of Esther’s reign as queen and her intervention for the Jewish people, she probably never realized the importance of her decisions. This was Esther’s defining moment. It is in times of pressure we discover the truth of our framework. Esther never saw herself as a heroine for the Jewish people or having a pivotal place in history, yet this is where God placed her. She was an unlikely candidate for the job.

Many times we see ourselves as unlikely candidates for what God has called us to do. It is easy to feel inadequate for the task. However, realizing Esther was an ordinary person who dealt with human struggles (an orphan, young, Jewish, woman) should make us very aware of her humanity. If God can use Esther, He can use anyone.

Esther’s life is an example of what God can do with a life submitted to Him. He can take what little we have and multiply it and use it for His glory to accomplish magnificent exploits.

⁴Beth Moore, *Esther: It's Tough Being A Woman* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay Press, 2008), 102.

Esther is an encouragement and inspiration for women everywhere to pursue and develop leadership qualities. We must be women who recognize the necessity of total dependence upon God, living a life open to godly counsel and advice, committed to prayer and fasting, fearless, patient, and loyal.

Because of Esther's selfless actions in securing the deliverance of the Jews, she is now remembered annually at the Jewish Feast of Purim. A young ordinary woman became the heroine of the Jewish nation and will be remembered throughout time.

Esther was God's instrument for the saving of many lives. In many ways, Esther depicts the person that is standing in the gap in the following verse: "And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it, but I found none." (Ezekiel 22:30) Esther was a woman who was willing to stand in the gap for the Jewish nation and God used her mightily.

SOURCES CONSULTED

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