

I WANT TO KNOW MY BIBLE

Saying “Yes” to God

Text: Esther

INTRODUCTION: On this Mothers' Day we find ourselves doing three things: One, we want to honor and encourage all who bear the title of “mother.” Two, we are nearing the completion of our chronological reading of the Old Testament, and three, we are preparing to begin our reading and study of the New Testament by allowing God to make us ready for His New Day and New Way. In the providence of God, He has brought us in our reading to the perfect book for the hour, the Book of Esther.

STORY: Nearly 100 years before she was born, Hadassah's great, great grandparents had been taken from their home in Jerusalem to the city of Babylon by the forces of King Nebuchadnezzar. Although they had been deported from their homeland, and their temple had been utterly destroyed, the love and mercy of their great God YHWH continued to shine upon them.

Some of their fellow captives, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, had actually been given positions of great authority in the empire. This was without question the work of God's own hand.

The rule of the Babylonians was ended by Darius, the King of the Medes and the Persians, and Babylonia became a part of the Persian Empire. Darius was followed by Cyrus, who let those Jews who wanted to return to Israel go back to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. Hadassah's grandparents, like most of the Jews now living in the expanding Persian Empire, declined the gracious offer of their king. For though they were Jews in heritage and faith, they had been born in Babylon. They knew little of the land that had been left desolate by the marauding armies of King Nebuchadnezzar. They preferred to raise their families and worship their God in the safety of Persia.

Hadassah's parents had even moved, along with many other Jews, to the capitol city of Persia called Shushan. There they lived in relative peace, blending in with the local Persian population, even after a new king came to power. His name was Ahasuerus. He is known in secular history as King Xeres. The Persian empire under the rule of Ahasuerus was composed of 127 provinces and stretched from India to Ethiopia.

The peace that most of the Jews in the empire enjoyed was sadly broken for Hadassah when both of her parents died. Thanks be to God that she was quickly adopted by her older cousin Mordecai who loved her and treated her as his own daughter. Mordecai was a godly man, who loved and trusted the Lord. He worked as a low level bureaucrat in the palace of King Ahasuerus. Hadassah grew to be a meek, gentle, and beautiful young woman under the tender care of Mordecai, and she loved and trusted him like a father.

Ahasuerus was great in power but not noble in character. He was known for the drunken parties that he would host for his friends and government officials, parties characterized by lewdness and debauchery. In the year 483 B.C., King Ahasuerus summoned the governors of all of the

provinces of his kingdom to come for a sixth month stay in the capital city of Shushan. During that time they were indoctrinated into the greatness of the Persian Empire and of their king and taken on tours that they might see glorious displays of the might and power of Ahasuerus. These six months concluded with a seven day feast held in the palace courtyard and open not only to government officials but even to the citizenry of Shushan. Banquet tables covered with linen cloths were set up in the midst of the beautiful marble columns that established the splendor of the surroundings. For seven days the men of Shushan came and went through this extravaganza of food and drink.

While Ahasuerus was thus entertaining the men, he had his queen Vashti doing the same for the women, though probably in a much more subdued, nevertheless elegant manner. Then came the last day of the feast, and the king was drunk. He decided that in addition to showing off the wonders of his empire, he also wanted to show off his wife, Queen Vashti, for she was known far and wide for her exquisite beauty. So the king sent his servants to fetch the queen with the intent of parading her before his equally drunken guests.

But when the servants presented the king's demand to her majesty, she refused to come and be the object of the lustful glares of the drunken men of the city. When his servants brought back the word of his wife's refusal, Ahasuerus and his counselors decided to remove her from the throne and seek for the king a new wife, one even more beautiful than Vashti herself.

And thus the first "Miss Persia" contest was born. The governors were sent back to their provinces with orders to find the most beautiful young virgins in their territory and send them back to Shushan to appear before the king as a candidate to be his new wife and the Queen of the empire of Persia.

Participation in this contest was not voluntary. Those who were picked by the king's authorities were forced to go to the palace where they were held in captivity until their appointed audience with Ahasuerus. And in the mysterious providence of God, Hadassah was selected to be taken before the king. I have no doubt that neither Hadassah nor Mordecai desired for Hadassah to be chosen. They would have wanted a God fearing Jewish man to one day become her husband. But although they did not seek it, God had allowed it. Hadassah was carried to the palace of the king.

In addition to the physical beauty the Lord had bestowed upon Hadassah, the godly qualities of her life were immediately apparent to all who met her. She quickly became a favorite among the servants of the palace, even before the king met her. And when the king did meet her, by the providence of God, he chose her to be his new queen. He changed her name from Hadassah to Esther, which means star in Persian, and she became his wife. How marvelous, that our **God works even in the trying events of our lives** and even in the lives of those who do not know Him **to accomplish His purposes and to keep His promises!**

And why would the providence of God be involved in taking a Jewish girl and making her the wife of a pagan king? Because God knew what no one else knew. God saw what was hidden from the eyes of all men in the empire, even from the eyes of the king. What was this great secret, hidden from all except God? I will tell you soon. But first, while all others were blind to His superintending action behind the scene, God had another piece of the puzzle to put in place.

God caused Mordecai to overhear a plot against the life of the king. Mordecai in turn relayed the information to Queen Esther, and Esther told the King. The king had the matter investigated and found the accusation made by Mordecai was true. The two perpetrators were quickly hanged, and the whole matter was recorded in the book of the chronicles of the king. The matter seemed forgotten, but on the chess board of human history, God had put His piece in place.

For there was another plot brewing that no one overheard. No one knew but God. The plot was conceived in the wicked mind of Haman, called Haman the Agagite. Agagite means that his family originated from Amalek, and the Amalekites were the long sworn enemies of the Jews. Haman hated the Jews, all of them, and he wanted them exterminated from the kingdom. His hatred was enraged all the more whenever he came near Mordecai. For Haman was the right hand man to King Ahasuerus, while Mordecai served in a far more humble role. Whenever Haman would walk in the palace or even on the streets, people would bow before him showing him honor and inflating his ego. Everyone bowed before Haman except the king, ... and except Mordecai. Mordecai the Jew would not pay him homage, and Haman hated Mordecai and the Jews all the more because of it.

So Haman concocted a plan to destroy all of the Jews in the Kingdom of Persia in a single day. He cast lots called purim to determine the day that he would strike. The lots fell on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. With his plot carefully prepared and craftily disguised, Haman took it to the king to gain his approval. Haman said, "Oh king, there is a certain people called the Jews who live scattered through the provinces, that are different than every other kind of people. They have their own strange laws, and they do not keep the laws of the king. Therefore, if it pleases the king, let me dictate a law that will rid the kingdom of these misfits in a single day. We will take their lives and confiscate their goods, and I guarantee that we will bring in ten thousand talents of silver into the king's treasury."

The king agreed, and the statute was written into the laws of the Medes and the Persians and stamped with the imprint of the king's ring. It was translated into the many languages of the empire and published in every city of every province. Immediately the Jews began to weep and wail, and they wondered if God had abandoned them and left them for destruction. Mordecai also mourned and clothed himself in sackcloth and ashes and was seen outside the palace wall weeping with great sorrow upon his heart.

Word came to Queen Esther that her cousin mourned in sackcloth in the streets of the city. She could not of course go to him, but she sent a messenger to inquire. She had not yet heard of the king's decree and knew nothing of the approaching danger to herself and to her people. The messenger asked Mordecai the reason for his great sorrow. Mordecai sent a copy of the decree of death back to be given to Esther along with this message, "As the queen, you must go to the king and beg him to spare the lives of your people."

When Esther read the message she was horrified. But she sent word back to Mordecai, "I cannot go to the king. No one can enter his presence whom he does not summon, and I have not been called before him now in 30 days. If a person comes before him without being called, he shall die, unless the king extends to him the golden scepter."

Mordecai sent a return message to the queen, saying, "Queen Esther, make no mistake; you too are in danger like every other Jew. If you do not speak to the king, God will find another way to

save His people as He has promised, though you and your father's house will perish. But who knows if you have come into the kingdom for such a time as this?"

God used the words of Mordecai to stir the heart of his gentle but brave servant. Esther sent a final message. "Gather the Jews of Shushan together to fast and pray for three days. My maids and I will do the same. Then I will go to the king; and if I perish, I perish.

So Esther, Mordecai and all the Jews fell on their faces before God and sought His protection and deliverance. They wept before the Lord with great agony of soul, and pleaded for the Almighty to spare their lives.

Little did they know that God had already sown the seeds of their deliverance. While Haman was busy setting his pieces on the game board, God's pieces were already in place.

After three days of prayer and fasting, Esther put on her royal robes and stepped into the inner court of the king's palace and suddenly appeared before King Ahasuerus. The king looked upon his wife, and held out to her the golden scepter. The queen drew near and touched the top of the scepter. The king said, "What do you wish Queen Esther? I will give you whatever you want, up to half the kingdom." But Esther did not reveal the true desire of her heart. God had given her a plan, and she would follow it. She said to the king, "I have prepared a banquet for you and for Haman, and I wish you come and dine with me." The king immediately summoned Haman, and together they joined the queen at the banquet she had prepared.

After eating and drinking the king asked again, "What is your request? You may have anything, up to half the kingdom." But Esther knew it was not yet God's time to make her plea to the king. She said, "I want you and Haman to join me for another banquet tomorrow, then I shall make known my request." The king was pleased and agreed; but Haman was absolutely delighted. He alone had been invited to dine privately with the king and queen. He was sure tomorrow would be a very good day.

Haman was so sure in fact, that he invited family and friends to his house to celebrate. There he bragged about his closeness to the king and how he alone would be with the king and queen tomorrow in a great feast. But as he talked, a devilish hatred recaptured his soul and stole his happiness. For he remembered Mordecai the Jew who even that day would not bow before him as Haman passed through the street. He shared his grief over Mordecai with his family, and his wife said, "Why don't you build a gallows in the square in front of the house, and tomorrow, you can gain the king's permission to hang Mordecai upon it." That very night the sleep of Haman's neighbors was interrupted by the incessant cutting of the saws and the hammering of the pegs for the construction of the gallows in front of Haman's home. By sunrise it was ready. Only a word from the king was needed to end the life of Mordecai the Jew.

Perhaps it was the sound of construction in the distance that robbed King Ahasuerus of sleep that night. Perhaps the Spirit of God simply stirred his soul and caused slumber to flee. We do not know. All we know is that the king could not sleep. And when the king does not sleep, nobody in the palace sleeps. His servants were called to read to him from the records of the chronicles of the king, a remedy that had proved useful in the past at inducing sleep among the restless. But this time, the servants read about the plot that Mordecai had discovered and exposed, saving the king's life. The

king asked, "What did we ever do to thank and honor Mordecai for saving my life?" They answered, "Nothing, my king."

The sun was rising and Haman was entering the palace. He was eager for this day that held so much promise. The king said, "Bring Haman here." But before Haman could seek the approval for Mordecai's death, the king asked Haman, "What should be done for a man whom the king wants to honor?" Haman, thinking surely the king wanted to honor him replied, "Let the king give him one of the king's own robes to wear and set him on the king's horse with the king's crest. And let one of the noble princes lead him around on the horse throughout the city saying, 'Here is what the king does for the man he wants to honor.'" And king Ahasuerus said, "That is what I want you to do for Mordecai the Jew who saved my life."

Haman's soul fell from the exhilaration of the mountain top to the very pits of hell, but he could not risk defying the king. With every step one of excruciating agony, and every word like bile in his throat, Haman proclaimed the honor of the king upon Mordecai the Jew throughout the streets of Shushan.

He had no more finished and returned to his home, his gallows still unused, and bemoaning what great tragedy and humiliation had befallen him that morning, when the servants of the king arrived to escort him to the banquet with Queen Esther. Haman had not reason to dread the event. Neither he nor the king knew that Esther was a Jew. Perhaps his private audience with royalty would turn the day around after all.

At the meal, the king asked Esther, "Now what is your request?" Esther replied, "I ask for my life to be spared and the lives of all of my people. For the plan has been laid to destroy, to annihilate us all." King Ahasuerus said, "Who would dare to do such a thing?" And Esther said, "This wicked Haman!" The king exploded in anger, and rose to walk outside the banquet hall in the garden. Haman was rightfully terrified and dropped to his knees to beg the queen for his life. In desperation he fell across her lap as the king reentered the room. Ahasuerus exclaimed, "Will you also assault the queen?" The servants immediately grabbed Haman, and one of them volunteered, "Haman had a gallows built so that he could hang Mordecai the Jew, the one who saved the life of the king." King Ahasuerus said, "Hang him on it."

Then the king summoned Mordecai and gave to him the position of Haman and to Esther all of Haman's vast wealth and possessions. And because a law of the Medes and the Persians could not be revoked, the king authorized another decree that on the day that the Jews were to be attacked by their enemies, they could defend themselves and attack those enemies so that the lives of men, women, and children might be spared.

And so it was, and those days in history are celebrated by the Jews to this day in the Feast of Purim. For God took a gentle and meek woman and placed her in the position He chose for her "for such a time as this." And in His sovereign providence, God provided the deliverance of His people and once again proved the faithfulness of His Word.

And my dear ladies, let me say to you that **what God did through Esther He is still doing through the lives of women today who trust and obey Him.** Your kingdom may not be as large as the empire of Persia in the eyes of men but it is no less critical in the eyes of God. Your kingdom may

be your home, your kid's school, your workplace, your neighborhood, your city, ... whatever domain the Lord has placed you in. But understand this: **He has brought you into your kingdom for such a time as this.**

The place that God has put you may not be one of your own choosing. You may have wondered, "Why did God put me here?" So it was with Esther. She did not want to become the wife of a pagan, drunken king. But God placed her and God placed you where He needs a faithful woman "for such a time as this."

For **God works through the lives of both women and men**

- **not only to those who read His Word**
- **but to those who are willing to do it.**

For God in His providence and love was not only preserving a people, He was preserving them that He might keep His promise of the coming Savior. For amongst the so called misfits of the Persian Empire in the city of Jerusalem now being rebuilt were two families. Likely, they barely knew each other, but both families had ancient ties to David, Israel's greatest king. The descendants of one of those families would culminate in another humble, God fearing young woman like Esther who was willing to say "yes" to God, whatever He asked. Her name was Mary. The other family would give rise to Joseph, a young man of similar courage and character. To them, through the miracle of the virgin birth, God would send His Son, the long awaited Messiah, to bring to lost mankind a New Day and a New Way.

Mothers, ladies, young ladies, men, young and old, God still seeks those who will read and study His Word. God still seeks those who will say "yes" to the Word God gives. If you will be that kind of follower, you too will discover that **God has placed you in the kingdom for such a time as this.**