

THE RETICENT QUEEN WHO SAVED AN ENTIRE NATION OF PEOPLE

Presented by

Blake Brown

As Tyler and I worked our way methodically through the Old Testament in our Sunday-morning Bible class over the past two years, we met some truly intriguing individuals. Some of them were genuinely good, while others were exceedingly evil. Some of them were born leaders who took charge and pressed forward against all odds, while others were meek people who found themselves thrust into situations they never would have desired if left to their own devices. Some of them were wealthy, while others were poor. Some of them were old, while others were young. Some of them were self-promoters who sought personal glory at all costs, while others were humble folk who never sought the limelight of fame.

But regardless of which of these categories the people we met fell into, one thing is certain: None of them was ever dull or uninteresting! From Genesis to Malachi, we were introduced to first one person and then another who **never** failed to command my attention or captivate my intellect. We saw Cain murder his brother Abel. We saw Abraham raise his hand with a knife in it to slay his beloved son Isaac. We saw Moses part the waters of the Red Sea so that 2,500,000 Israelites could walk across on dry land in a single night. We saw Joshua part the waters of the River Jordan and lead those Israelites into the Promised Land of Canaan after forty long years of wandering in the wilderness. We saw Rahab the harlot and her family saved as the walls of the city of Jericho collapsed around them. We saw Elijah raise a woman's son from the dead, and we saw Elisha heal Naaman of his leprosy.

We saw some servants (like Jeroboam) become rulers, while other servants (like Gehazi) became lepers. We saw kings (like Manasseh) who were so wicked that they filled the streets of Jerusalem with innocent blood from one end of the city to the other, and we saw queens (like Athaliah) who were so evil that they murdered innocent old men and small children in order to further their own depraved agendas. We saw fathers (like Noah) curse their sons, and we saw mothers (like Hannah) dedicate their sons to a lifetime of faithful service to the Lord. We saw humble shepherds (like Amos) being called by God to serve as powerful prophets to the Jewish nation, and we saw inexperienced youths (like Jeremiah) being instructed by God to deliver messages of doom to that same nation.

As I said earlier, during our journey through the Old Testament we **really did** meet some truly intriguing individuals. But one of those individuals is a person who practically falls into "a category of one." The first thing that makes this person unique is the fact that she not only was a **woman**, but also a **queen**. The second thing that makes her unique is the fact that she was not a queen of the Jews, but instead a queen of the famed and powerful Medo-Persian Empire. The third thing that makes this woman unique is the fact that although she was a queen in the Medo-Persian Empire, she herself was a Jewess. The fourth thing that makes her unique is the fact that she did not arise from a royal background, but

arose instead from a background of poverty among the common people of her day. The fifth thing that makes her unique is the fact that she had been selected from a large number of women who also sought the position of queen. In short, this woman seemed to possess **none** of the heritage, traits, and qualities that one would have expected of a person who eventually would ascend to the influential position of queen of the Medo-Persian Empire. For all intents and purposes, she was, so to speak, “the wrong person for the wrong job.” Yet there she sat in all her radiant glory—as queen, next to her husband, King Ahasuerus.

By now, of course, you probably realize that I am speaking of the woman we know as **Queen Esther**. Of all the women in the Bible, she is one of only two to have a Bible book named after her (the other being the Moabitess Ruth, who ended up being in the lineage of our Lord, Jesus Christ). When we were first introduced to Esther, it was quite a shock to watch her go from being a poor peasant girl to being the queen of the most-powerful Empire on the face of the Earth at the time. But, as we soon were to discover, that was just the beginning of the many fascinating facets of this amazing woman’s life and times. We **never** could have imagined the incredible nature of the events that were going to play out in Esther’s personal life. Nor could we have dreamed of the important part that this lady was destined to play in God’s foreordained plan to bring His Son to Earth as our Savior. Today I would like to share with you some of what I was privileged to learn about this remarkable woman.

If you know your Old Testament well, you probably know that Esther came to the throne of the Medo-Persian Empire because the former wife of King Ahasuerus, Vashti, fell into disfavor with the king and was removed from her position as queen of the realm. An Empire-wide search was held for a woman to replace Vashti. At the end of that lengthy, year-long process, Esther stood alone as the favorite of the king. In fact, the Bible informs us that “the young woman pleased” the king, who “loved Esther more than all the other 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” (Esther 2:9,17).

But unbeknownst to Esther, trouble was brewing behind the scenes in the palace. A wicked, self-centered man by the name of Haman was the favorite adviser of King Ahasuerus, and eventually became the second most-powerful man in the Empire. Haman hated the Jews. Interestingly, as it turns out, one of the reasons he hated the Jews as much as he did was because Esther’s cousin, a man by the name of Mordecai, refused to bow down to Haman as he traveled through the streets of the capital city. Haman therefore set out to find a way to get rid of not only Mordecai, but also the rest of the Jews in the Medo-Persian Empire as well. To do that, he fed King Ahasuerus false information about the Jews by suggesting, as Esther 3:8-9 explains, that “there is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people’s, and they do not keep the king’s laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain. If it pleases the king, let a decree be written that they be destroyed.” The king believed Haman’s lies, and gave him permission to “do with

them as seems good to you” (Esther 3:11). It was not long, then, before Haman had drawn up a royal decree stating that on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, all Jews in the Medo-Persian Empire were to be killed.

The one thing that Haman had not counted on—because neither he nor King Ahasuerus knew it—was that **Queen Esther was herself a Jew!** As soon as Mordecai learned of Haman’s evil plan to destroy all the Jews living in Medo-Persia, he “tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry” (Esther 4:1). When news of Mordecai’s condition reached Esther, she sent a servant to him to ask him why he was in such deep mourning. Mordecai sent word back to Esther about what Haman had done, along with a copy of the decree that carried the imprint of the king’s signet ring, indicating its authenticity. Mordecai then told the servant to beg Esther to “go in to the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people” (Esther 4:8). Esther sent the servant back to Mordecai with the following reply:

“All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, he has but one law: put all to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days” (Esther 4:11).

When Mordecai received Esther’s message, he sent the following note back to her:

“Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews. If you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. **Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?**” (Esther 4:13-14).

Esther’s heart was touched by Mordecai’s words, and she sent her servant back to him one last time with the following response:

“Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; **and if I perish, I perish!**” (Esther 4:16).

In Esther 4 we find two of the most-famous statements of the entire Bible. The first is Mordecai’s observation to Esther, “Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” That statement cannot help but remind us of what Joseph said to his brothers when they arrived in Egypt many years after having sold him into slavery, and he finally revealed himself to them: “You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive” (Genesis 50:20). Joseph was one such person who had indeed “come to the kingdom for such a time as this.” Esther, as it turns out, was another.

The second well-known statement found in Esther 4 is Esther’s reply to Mordecai when he asked her to present herself unlawfully to King Ahasuerus to plead for the lives of her people: “If I perish, I perish!” Again, such an attitude is reminiscent of another famous Bible character, Joshua, who said to the people

of his day, “If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: **but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord**” (Joshua 24:15). Esther was as determined as Joshua to set a good example for her people, and to do everything for them that she could.

Esther did present herself to her husband the king. And he did hold out the golden scepter to her—granting her an audience in his presence instead of invoking her immediate death. Oddly, however, Esther did not immediately ask her husband to save the Jews. Instead, she invited the king and Haman to a feast that evening to be held at her palace. The king was pleased to accept her gracious invitation, and sent word to Haman to join them at the specified time. During the meal, the king asked Esther, “What is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!” (Esther 5:6). Once again, however, Esther acted in what might seem to us to be a rather strange manner when she said once more to the king, “If I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said” (Esther 5:8). Haman, for his part, was utterly delighted to be enjoying all of this attention from one so powerful as the queen. As Esther 5:9 says, Haman “went out that day joyful and with a glad heart.”

But on his way home from the queen’s first feast, Haman ran into Mordecai, who once again refused to bow in his presence. By the time Haman got home, he was furious! When he complained to his wife and friends, they said, “Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high, and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it; then go merrily with the king to the banquet” (Esther 5:14). The Bible says simply, “This thing pleased Haman; so he had the gallows made” (vs. 14). Haman’s wrath was eased by the thought that in just a few days, Mordecai would be dead—and the rest of the Jews would die soon after.

Little could Haman have known what was in store for him at Esther’s next feast. During the meal, the king once again inquired of Esther, “What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request, up to half the kingdom? It shall be done!” (Esther 7:2). Esther then replied to the king,

“If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king’s loss” (Esther 7:3-4).

As soon as King Ahasuerus heard this, he asked, “Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing?” (Esther 7:5). Esther looked at her husband and said, “The adversary and enemy **is this wicked Haman!**” (Esther 7:6). Esther 7:7 then says simply, “So Haman was terrified

before the king and queen.” And well he should have been! King Ahasuerus became so angry at learning what Haman had done that he ordered him to be taken out and hanged on the very same gallows that Haman had built to hang Mordecai. Moreover, the king then told Esther and Mordecai, “You yourselves write a decree concerning the Jews, as you please, in the king’s name, and seal it with the king’s signet ring; for whatever is written in the king’s name and sealed with the king’s signet ring no one can revoke” (Esther 8:8).

When everything was finally said and done, the king imprinted his signet ring on a royal decree “permitting the Jews who were in every city to gather together and protect their lives—to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, both little children and women, and to plunder their possessions, on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month” (Esther 8:11-12). That decree then was sent speedily in a variety of languages to all 127 provinces of the Medo-Persian Empire so that the leaders of every section of the Empire would know that the Jews had the king’s full backing and support. When the day finally came for the Jews to be slaughtered, as Esther 9:1 reports, “the opposite occurred, in that the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them.” While the Bible describes in detail how the Jews slew many of their enemies, it says not a word about a single Jew losing his life during the occurrence of those events. In fact, after the tragedy was narrowly averted, the Jews instituted what is known as the Feast of Purim to commemorate their salvation as a result of Esther’s valor and bravery. As Esther 9:27-28 records, the Jews

“celebrated these two days every year, according to the written instructions and according to the prescribed time, that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city, that these days of Purim should not fail to be observed among the Jews, and that the memory of them should not perish among their descendants.”

And thus ends the beautiful, heart-rending story of the humble queen who saved an entire nation of people. It appears that, like Joseph, Esther had indeed “come to the kingdom for such a time as this.” When the time came for Esther to stand up and be counted, she did not flinch or falter. Rather, she calmly said, “If I perish, I perish!” and then marched stoically into the king’s inner court in a self-effacing—and ultimately successful!—effort to save her people.

Now you know what I meant when I opened this sermon by saying that as we worked our way methodically through the Old Testament in our Sunday-morning Bible class over the past two years, we met some truly intriguing individuals—some of whom were genuinely good. Queen Esther definitely falls into that category, wouldn’t you say? Because her faith in God was strong, and because her determination to do what was right was unflinching, the Jews survived—and the promised Messiah eventually was born into the house of David in the city of Bethlehem. How **intriguing** is *that?!*