

## Esther Chapter 2 – John Karmelich

1. How does God guide our lives? If that interests you, you have come to the right place. Does that mean He somehow controls or manipulates us? My question is, how does that work practically? In this lesson we will see examples of this process of God guides the lives of the main characters. Hopefully, it gives us some ideas of how exactly God does guide our lives.
  - a) The interesting thing to consider is that we can't ask Him how He is working. All we can do in effect is watch our lives unfold and watch the events of our world. By accepting the idea that God is involved in our lives, we can live our lives with a sense of peace knowing that He is working out our lives and the world around us for His glory.
  - b) Given, that do we go through our lives asking or beg for His help? In other words, do we just go through life, praying for what we desire and let then Him do what He wants? My question is essentially, how do we pray given the concept that God is guiding our lives?
    - i) The answer is about getting our will in line with His will. Jesus taught that God the Father will give us what we ask for in prayer. (See Matthew 7:11 as support.) That doesn't mean if we pray hard enough for things, then God will bless us with lots of expensive things. It just means that if it is our will to do His will, He will make it happen. The trick of course, is to figure out what is His will.
    - ii) So if we pray for His will to be done, how do we know when God answered that prayer? The answer is to watch our world and our lives unfold and then we can know that God's will is working out. If we are living by biblical principals and it is our desire to please Him with our lives, He does guide us to do His will
2. OK John, nice lecture. ☺ What does it have to do with Esther, Chapter 2? Let me explain what is happening here and then I'll explain how it ties into this theme of God working in our lives: In this chapter we get introduced to the main character, Esther. She is described as beautiful. That means she is both beautiful to look at, as well as possessing inner beauty. It is in effect a story of how God works in the background to raise this girl up to be the top woman in a large empire.
  - a) To describe her beauty, let me state something I heard way back in college by a roommate of mine back then. He said, if a girl is very good looking, the most credit one should give for one's physical looks is a "5 on a 10 scale". The other five points should be given based on one's personality and attitude. I believe Esther was a ten using that system, and that is why she goes from being a "nobody" in this story to becoming the queen of an empire.
  - b) This chapter also introduces us to another main character. A man named Mordecai. He is a much older cousin to Esther. He raises her after her parents died. This chapter gives a bit of his family background. The last part of this chapter tells how he stopped a plot to kill the king of the Persians. What Mordecai did to stop this plot is another example of how God works in the background. That action not only protected the life of Esther, but also helped to make the main event in this story possible, coming up in later chapters.
3. OK then, based on Chapter 2 of Esther, how does God want us to act? By being obedient to the commands of God, even and especially in very difficult situations. Let me explain:
  - a) Think of it this way: Do you think the main character Esther liked being part of a large harem with only a long shot at being the queen of this empire? Do you think she wished this to happen, or had to do this against her will? I believe she did exactly what she was told to do by her cousin Mordecai and later by her captives in order to be a good witness for God even in a very difficult situation. It is essentially thinking, "I can't always control what happens to me, but I can control my own attitude."
  - b) That is how God works in the background of our lives. We trust Him through the good and bad times of our lives. We live by the principal of, living for His will to be done. I will accept whatever happens to me, because I know it is His will for me to be at this place and time. With that attitude stated, it is time to start Verse 1 of this chapter.

4. Chapter 2, Verse 1: Later when the anger of King Xerxes had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her.
  - a) If one reads Verse 1 in context of the last chapter, it appears to be saying that the king had the former Queen Vashti removed for refusing to obey his order to see him when he was drunk. Now that the king has sobered up, he regrets the action. However, that is not the case here. To explain, first we have to look at the historical time line:
    - i) Back in Verse 2 of Chapter 1, the text says the "third year of this king."
    - ii) In Verse 16 of this chapter, the text says it is "seventh year of this king".
    - iii) My simple point is the "anger of the king" is not about his hangover wearing off from the drinking fest of the previous chapter.
  - b) OK John, then what is going on? It may help to learn a little history here. In between the time of the last chapter and the time of this chapter, the Persian Empire suffered a great loss in war. A major army was organized to fight a rebellion in Greece. The loss was not enough to end the Empire. That event would not happen for roughly another 100 years. However, the king came back home with at least a million fewer men and obviously he was not in a good mood due to the loss. That is the background of the "anger subsiding".
    - i) Another bit of history is that the king had a son from Queen Vashti, who would go on to be the next king. In the Persian Empire, the queen is supposed to come from one of several prominent Persian families. Think of it this way: Since the king is the king, he could have a large harem for his personal pleasure. That was a benefit of being a king of an emperor during that time and era.
    - ii) However, I think this king wanted something more. It wasn't that the king didn't have lot of good-looking women if he wanted company for a short time. I believe the king was missing more than that. It is about desiring a wife with inner beauty that a king could talk to and share his life with. As boys become men, they realize there is more to life than desiring women to satisfy their sexual desires. Mature men desire life-long companions, and I believe that is what we see here.
  - c) So what happened to Queen Vashti? Jewish tradition is that she was killed. Others will argue that because she belonged to a royal family, she was "buying time" until she was allowed to come back into power again. Whatever the situation, the point is the king desired someone to take her place and for better or worse, decided to pick someone new.
5. Verse 2: Then the king's personal attendants proposed, "Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. <sup>3</sup> Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful girls into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them. <sup>4</sup> Then let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it.
  - a) Time to set the scene here: This is not the king taking advice from the "wise men" who were his top advisors as stated in the first chapter. These men being described here are the king's personal attendants. Visualize the people who work at the White House in Washington who personally help the president with whatever he needs at the moment.
  - b) Since these men had access to the king, they said in effect, "Forget about the various royal families that have power in this empire. You are the king. Instead of getting a new wife from one of those royal families, hold a beauty contest throughout the empire. Bring back the best looking women here. Let those women get beauty treatments and let the winner by the next queen instead of Vashti."
    - i) Whether or not the wise men and other leaders of the empire would approve of this plan, the point is the king gave the irrevocable order to do so.
    - ii) Visualize palace guards going from town to town, seeing good looking young women and telling them in effect, "Come with us, you now belong to the king. Sorry, but your life as you know it is now over."

- c) Once these women were taken and transported back to Susa, they were put in a harem along with the other young women who were taken captive. This was a separate harem from the one the king already had with other women that were previously taken to be the king's concubines. Therefore, I believe the king was looking for something more than just young women to add to his existing concubine. The king was probably looking for a new wife to share his life with. The other women brought to this house would end up being part of that harem. These other women will never be married to anyone.
  - i) Imagine the attitude that went on in this harem. First, all of these young women would be in bad moods because they have been separated from their old lives. They would also be in a bad mood as they realized that only one of them would be a queen and the rest of them would be forced to live out a single life for the rest of their lives in a harem. One can just imagine the jealousy, fighting and bickering that went on in within this group.
  - ii) I feel sorry for the eunuch (a man named Hegai, Verse 3) who had to put up with these women every day. I could just hear the complaints about how this other girl got better treatment than me. I could hear any one of them complaining that she gets better spa treatment, or look at her flaws, the king will never pick her.
    - a) The fact that Hegai was listed by name is another bit of proof that whoever wrote this book had intimate knowledge of what was going on here at that time. I believe it gives support that Mordecai was the actual author.
  - iii) Note that this was not all bad for the girls. Yes they were dragged out of their homes, but they were dragged to this beauty spa for a one-year treatment. We'll discover why it was a one-year treatment later in this chapter.
- d) Now that we've finished the story background, it is time to meet the main characters:
 

6. Verse 5: Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, <sup>6</sup> who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah.

  - a) The first main character we meet is Mordecai. Verse 5 states he had a Jewish background from the tribe of Benjamin. For those of you who are new to bible studies, the Jewish people were originally divided into 12 tribes based on a common ancestor, who had 12 sons. Each of those sons became the leader of a tribe of Israel.) The point here is simply that Mordecai was from the tribe of Benjamin. His family was taken into captivity when the Babylonians conquered Israel. That event was about one hundred years prior to this story. To state another fact from Chapter 1, the Persians later conquered the Babylonians. Therefore, most of the Jewish people who were literally taken over 1,000 miles away from the land of Israel during the Babylonian captivity now lived within the Persian Empire.
  - b) OK, John, this is all interesting ancient history. What does it have to do with this story? I'm glad you asked. Note in Verse 5, Mordecai's great grandfather was named Kish. OK, John, one more time, so what? If one reads in 1st Samuel Chapter 9, Verse 2, the first king of Israel was named Saul. He too was a son of Kish. So was Mordecai a descendant of king Saul? More likely, a descendant of another of Kish's sons, but a relative of that king.
    - i) OK John, even one more time, so what? To answer that question, we have to recall what was the downfall of King Saul: He was removed from being the king of the Israelites for failing to kill the leader of the Amalekites, a traditional enemy of the Jewish people. God ordered Saul to kill all of those people. God gave that order in order to prevent a future disaster involving the potential death of the entire Jewish nation. That potential death is the key plot point of the book of Esther that we won't get for another chapter and an example of how God cares for His people.
    - ii) My point is that Mordecai didn't forget his "family roots" when it came to dealing with that enemy. The villain of this book (coming up in the next chapter) was a descendant of the group that King Saul failed to completely wipe out.

- c) OK John, now that we've established that Mordecai was a Jew and a relative of an even more ancient Jewish king named Saul, why should I care? The point of the story coming up is that Mordecai will be an example of someone being used by God to do the right thing. For Mordecai, King Saul's failure was probably a family legend not to be forgotten. My guess is that Mordecai was raised to remember, "Don't let your life be like great uncle Saul who suffered for his failure to be obedient to what God asked him to do."
    - i) The point is, that story about his family background, along with Mordecai's trust in the God of the bible, inspired him to live a life to make a difference for God. That is what we will read about him as we go through this book.
    - ii) Meanwhile, it is time to get introduced to the main character of the story: Esther.
7. Verse 7: Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.
- a) The first thing we learn about Esther, was that this name was not the one she was born with. Her Jewish name was "Hadassah" and the local Persians called her Esther. Why she was renamed is not known. We do know from later in the story, that Mordecai desired that Esther hide the fact that she was Jewish. Therefore, when Esther was taken captive along with many other young women, she was told to use her Persian name and no other.
  - b) The next thing these verses teach us is that she was "lovely in form". The thought behind the original language is that she was very gorgeous to look at. I suspect that like all good parents, Mordecai tried to hide her from the guards when they collected girls for the king, but once the guards got a look at her, they said in effect, "You are coming with us."
  - c) Speaking of parents let me talk a little about Esther's background. All the text says was that Esther was raised by her older cousin Mordecai when her parents died. We don't know how or when her parents died. It must have been at a young enough age where she needed to be raised by someone else, and Mordecai took on that responsibility. Imagine being Esther in this situation. She could have gone through life complaining, "Poor me, my parents died when I was young, and nothing good will come of my life." The point is we never know how and when God will use our lives and our situation for his glory.
    - i) I couldn't help but think about another fact about King Saul, the distant relative of both Mordecai and Esther. Saul was picked as king because he was tall and good-looking. (See 1st Samuel 9:2). I suspect that good looks ran in that family and that was a reason Esther was picked to join this beauty contest.
    - ii) We also see a sign in these verses of the character of Mordecai. He was a lot older than her. Yet, there is no hint in the story that he ever violated that relationship. If anything he did the right thing by taking in Esther after her parents (his aunt and uncle) past away. That is another example of showing God one's inner beauty by doing the right thing. The fact that Mordecai raised Esther to do what is right is an example of how we show others our faith in living out our lives for Him.
    - iii) Meanwhile, back to the story itself:
8. Verse 8: When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many girls were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. <sup>9</sup> The girl pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven maids selected from the king's palace and moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem.
- a) If you recall, the man in charge of the harem was named Hegai. Apparently, he was taken by the physical beauty of Esther. He gave Esther the best room in this palace and also gave her seven maids to take care of her and provide her with beauty treatments.
  - b) I suspect the reason Esther won his favor was more than just her looks. I would guess that most of those women were good looking. Hegai saw something in her character.

- c) Try to visualize this harem full of good-looking women. I would logically guess that most were angry that they were dragged away from their lives. When they saw the beauty treatment they would receive and the jewelry they got to wear and learned that there was a chance of being the queen of the largest empire in the world at that time, I suspect all of that positive stuff made them forget about leaving their old lives behind. Again, I believe that this made for a lot of jealousy between the women. I'm speculating that they picked on each other and pointed out flaws in each other's looks.
  - i) Now visualize Esther being part of this group. I'm guessing that like most of the women that were there, Esther didn't want to be there. I'm also speculating what made Esther stand out from the crowd wasn't just her good looks, but the fact that she didn't care for all of this special treatment. It is like thinking, "I'm doing this because I don't have a choice in life and I have to make the best of it". That is the type of attitude that made the head guy take notice of her and give her the best room in the palace and seven assistants. You can just imagine the jealousy that went on when the other girls saw that Esther was treated as the favorite.
  - ii) So how do you know Esther acted better than the other girls here? That is a guess based on the text in the rest of the chapter and the fact she was chosen to be given the best place in that palace. Even if I'm wrong here, the point is God is working out the details so that a Jewish girl would be the queen of this entire empire.
- 9. Verse 10: Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. <sup>11</sup> Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her.
  - a) Remember that Esther was raised by her uncle Mordecai. Like the other girls that were taken captive in this situation, she was scared and didn't know what to do. What she did do was listen to the advice of Mordecai through this situation. Esther used her Persian name and never revealed her Jewish background to anyone at the palace. Give Esther a little credit here for never revealing her family secrets to anyone, even when she was given seven maids to pamper her through this time of her life.
  - b) Also remember that Mordecai's job was as a palace guard. Since he had the opportunity and the means, he checked on her every day by walking past this harem. As a guard, he probably got regular updates on Esther's status in that harem. I suspect that word got back to Esther that Mordecai was checking on her all the time. The point is if she were tempted to reveal her true identity to others, that temptation would go away knowing that Mordecai was checking on her all the time. The point is even if we know God is watching us, sometimes having that extra incentive to do the right thing is helpful for all of our lives. It is a reminder for us to encourage each other to do what is right.
- 10. Verse 12: Before a girl's turn came to go in to King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women, six months with oil of myrrh and six with perfumes and cosmetics.
  - a) Remember how the king wanted a new queen? Let's just say that he didn't get to satisfy that desire the next day. First it took time to gather up these women from all over the empire. Even then, these women had to complete a 12-month beauty treatment.
    - i) So why this long of a treatment? For starters, it was to make sure the women were not pregnant from a previous relationship before they got to go before the king. That way the king could not be blamed for a baby that was not his.
    - ii) Next, if these women were all naturally beautiful, why the long term spa? This is one of those areas of life where women understand it better than men. Think of this as a long-term opportunity to work on any flaws in one's physical looks. The original text implies a lot of rubbing on one's skin to work on this treatment.
  - b) The classic joke here is, don't complain about how long it takes for your girl to get ready. These women were given 12 months just to prepare for their one big night with the king.

11. Verse 13: And this is how she would go to the king: Anything she wanted was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace.<sup>14</sup> In the evening she would go there and in the morning return to another part of the harem to the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not return to the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name.
  - a) Now we get to the "beauty pageant" itself. Each girl was allowed to take anything she wanted when it was her turn to parade in front of the king. Think of it as being given lots of jewelry and perfume and the leader saying, "This is your big turn, do your best". After 12 months, I would think most of the girls would be thinking, "Give me lots of stuff, so that no matter what happens, I get to keep what I have gotten here from the spa."
  - b) Verse 14 mentions that after each girl's big day or night with the king, they then had to move to the king's permanent harem. In other words, the 12-month beauty spa treatment is now over and now they have to live with the other concubines until and if ever the king calls on them again. These women were now to live without the chance of ever having a real family and just being at the disposal of the king. Also know that history does not speak highly of this king. Besides grabbing beautiful women from all over the empire, he would often just see many women one time, and then banish them to this harem forever.
    - i) I visualize all of these girls thinking, "That's it? Twelve months in a spa and now I get this for the rest of my life?" I can almost see the king making a game out of this and saying to each woman, "I see the flaw in your looks here, here and there."
    - ii) Yes this whole story would make a great movie. One can see at the least, why the story of Esther is a fun story to share with others. Let us not forget the underlying important aspect here. It is that God is working behind the scenes to manipulate things so that Esther would be the next queen of Persia. Speaking of Esther:
12. Verse 15: When the turn came for Esther (the girl Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail) to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her.
  - a) The way I visualize this whole scene is that when each girl got their big night in front of the king, they each said, "After 12 months here, I know what looks best on me. Give me those gold pieces over there, these earrings, these necklaces, these rings and this perfume. It is as if the girls were thinking, "Even if I lose, I get this stuff for the rest of my life."
    - i) Contrast that with probably how Esther viewed this moment. When it was her turn to go to the king, she only took what the man in charge told her to take.
  - b) Notice that in Verse 15, we get the basic fact that Esther was a cousin of Mordecai. Why is that fact mentioned here, at this point of the story? I think it is to remind us that Esther has not forgotten who she was. Yes this is her big moment in front of the king. Despite that, Esther thought of herself as a Jewish girl that was doing what she was told. That is, Mordecai told her to not say anything about her Jewish background to the king.
    - i) Speaking of listening to good advice, Esther not only followed the advice of the man who raised her, but also the advice of the man in charge of this harem. The point is I don't believe Esther cared if she won or lost. She was living to be a good servant of God by being a good servant to those who were in charge of her life. That fact alone is worth studying this lesson. Meanwhile, back to the palace.
13. Verse 16: She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.
  - a) Here we get the specific month and year that Esther got her big moment. So why state this fact here and now? It is for us to notice the time gap between Chapter 1 and 2. Here was this king of an empire who came back over a year ago from a bad defeat. Now this king is focusing on a beauty contest to pick a new queen, as opposed to going through the royal families of Persia to pick a new queen. It is a sign of decadence and God is using that event to put Esther in power.

14. Verse 17: Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.
- a) In this story of "palace intrigue", we don't know how Esther won his favor. We don't know what she said or didn't say to the king. We don't know if it was just her good looks or the way she talked, but somehow, the king picked her over all of the other girls in the harem. The king celebrated the end of this process by putting a crown on her head and probably publicly announcing how she is queen instead of the other girls.
  - b) Again, the key thing to see here is simply how God is working things out on behalf of the Israelites. Remember that most of the Jewish people who were alive at that time did not choose to go back to Israel, but just made nice lives for themselves, first in the Babylonian Empire and now in the Persian Empire. This story is a nice reminder that God cares for us no matter where we are in life if we are willing to put our trust in Him. Didn't God want all of the Jewish people to return to Israel? Probably. The point is that God always works on our level to draw us close to Him. Using Esther to become a queen is simply one of millions of examples of how God works behind the scenes to work out life not only for His glory, but also for the glory of those who trust in Him.
  - c) I was trying to visualize Esther at this point in the story. I don't believe she cared whether or not she became the queen. She was just doing what she was told first by Mordecai and then by the keeper of this harem. What had to be running through her mind at this point of the story is simply, "OK, now I'm queen, now what? What is going to happen to my life now, that I am queen?" One can see how all of this makes a great story to contemplate the facts given in each verse. Meanwhile, back to the story itself:
15. Verse 18: And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality.
- a) To explain this verse, I want you to think about this whole episode from the perspective of the king. This is a guy who could have essentially any woman he wanted. He had a reputation in ancient history as being a big drinker and being with lots of women. Let's face it, if the guy had a harem full of women, there is no limit to his excesses. Now think about the fact that for the Persian Empire, there were some prominent families (seven if my memory is correct) and the queen was supposed to be from one of these families.
  - b) With all of that in mind, who does the king pick as the next queen? A commoner. He picks a girl where nobody in the empire knows anything about her background. Word may have gotten around that a guard at the palace raised her, but the point is she came from an insignificant background to becoming the queen. I can picture the gossip and discussion about Esther as the king announced this big empire wide banquet to honor her as the new queen. This is the king saying in effect, "I don't care whether or not she is from a Persian royal family. I don't care about the hundreds of other women I have locked up in the harem. I want this one to be my wife and now there is going to be a big party throughout the empire to celebrate this fact."
  - c) The verse mentions that a holiday was proclaimed throughout the empire. The idea of the verse is that gifts was probably distributed in terms of food and drink to poor people so that everyone in the empire can celebrate the fact the king got a new wife. For a king that liked women and parties, this event certainly fit in his personality.
  - d) Now let's get back to the theme of how God works in the background of our lives. Think about how marital love works in life. No one forces us to love our spouses. Even if we correctly consider our spouses to be the most beautiful things we have ever seen, we still have this built in desire to look at others. My logical speculation is that concept applies for this king as well. Despite his power and cares of the world, God planted it in his mind to fall in love with Esther to the point of making her a queen. It is an example of how God works in background to manipulate our lives for His purposes.

- e) Before we continue this story, let us also stop and contemplate this again, from Esther's perspective. She too understood that she was not from one of the royal families. She too was probably shocked by the idea that she not only won this "privilege" of spending the rest of her life with a man known for being a drunk and a womanizer. I'm guessing that Esther spent a lot of time contemplating what her future would be like with this man.
    - i) Little is said about Esther's personality, so we have to speculate based on the entire story. Remember she went along with what Mordecai told her to do and what the eunuchs who ran the harem told her to do. Now she was the queen of the empire.
    - ii) She probably thought, "OK, now I just have to go along with whatever this king tells me to do." If this king could have Vashti banished (or killed), then he could do the same for me. Therefore, I will go along with whatever he says. If the king says it is time for a huge banquet throughout the empire, I'll go along with it.
    - iii) Did Esther love this king? Probably not. Did she probably enjoy all of the flattery for this moment in time? I don't know. I believe she probably accepted the idea of trusting God to get her this far and now she has to trust Him to get through her new life as queen of the Empire.
    - iv) Remember that the king was "taken" by her. I suspect that it was far more than her looks that attracted the king. I suspect she let him do all the talking and her willingness to submit to Him appealed to his ego as well as her good looks.
  - f) Again remember that this is a king whose empire was recovering from the loss of millions of men from a recent war. I'm guessing that the king's revenue was way down due to the loss from the war. This is also the loss of a lot less men earning a living and being able to give money to the king. I suspect one reason for the banquet was for the king to proclaim to the empire, "Despite the loss against Greece. All is well. I have married a new queen. We're all going to have a big party to celebrate my new marriage. In fact, here are gifts for everyone in the kingdom so we can all celebrate this event."
    - i) In case you are interested, there are historians who lived around this time who wrote about the wars with certain Greek cities and had some personal knowledge of this king. That is why I can write with some accuracy about the war and what motivated the king to not only marry Esther but to celebrate the way he did.
    - ii) Meanwhile, back to our story and back to the big party:
16. Verse 19: When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate.<sup>20</sup> But Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do, for she continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up.
- a) Remember all of the other girls that were assembled in order to find a queen? Well they are mentioned here for an "encore" appearance. Apparently the king made all of the other girls stand there and look at Esther. I don't know if the king did this to rub it in to them or just to say, "I have chosen Esther and let me show you why". Again, the key point is that God is working behind the scenes for Esther to be queen for the key event that we will discuss in the next chapter of this book (next lesson).
  - b) Therefore, God put it in the heart of this wicked king to pick Esther. Remember that God didn't do it just for her sake, but for the sake of the Jewish people who were mostly living in this empire at this time. It is God's way of saying, "I care about those who trust in Me. I want to watch over their lives and guide them. I am working in the background, even through the heart of a pagan and wicked king like Xerxes."
  - c) Time to apply this to us Christians: The point for us is that if God is willing to go to this much trouble in order to protect the Jewish people who at this point in history, who were not walking that close with Him, how much more do you think He cares about guiding the lives of those of us who are trusting Him to guide us? Next time we have doubts that God is real, think about how He manipulates our lives ultimately for His glory.



- d) Now it is time to talk about something else from Verse 19. It is a small fact that Mordecai is sitting at the king's gate. Understand that, this is a big deal. Let me explain:
    - i) The people who sit at the gate's entrance to a city decide who can and who cannot come into that city to do business there. Throughout ancient history, including the history of Jewish people, the elders of a city would sit at the city's gate. They not only decided who can come in and out, but also are in charge of the city's business.
      - a) For example, if there were some sort of legal dispute, the elders of that city would decide the case. Those elders are the one's who sit at the gate.
      - b) The point is that it appears that Mordecai got a promotion from just being a palace guard to being an elder in the city. The reason that is significant will be explained in the next few verses.
  - e) Before we get there, I need to talk about why Verse 20 is given here. Verse 20 repeats the point that Esther kept quiet about her background. She never told the king that she was Jewish. Now that she was queen, the important point is she didn't forget who she was, and who brought her up. Let me explain what that is significant and why I believe that verse is mentioned here.
    - i) I'm sure when the king was asking Esther questions about her life, he asked her about her background. After all, if Esther was going to be the queen, the king needed to know about her background. I suspect Esther said something like, "I was raised by my cousin Mordecai because my parents died when I was young".
      - a) The king probably figured she was raised as a commoner in Persia.
      - b) The point is that Esther never revealed she was Jewish, but most likely did reveal Mordecai's name to the king when discussing her background.
    - ii) I can just hear the king saying, "I can't have the guardian of my beautiful wife be a palace guard. I'll promote Mordecai to be a city official." Therefore, since she is not from a royal family, at the least, the man who raised her can be one of the officials in charge of the city business. " Whether or not it actually happened that exact way we don't know for sure.
      - a) I can't see Esther begging the king to promote Mordecai. I suspect the more likely reason is just to satisfy his big ego and say, "If my new queen wants the man who raised her to be something special, I'll make him a city official in charge of protecting the city where I reside."
      - b) However it happened, Mordecai was now just more than a guard. He was now a city official. Further, the point of these verses is that Esther kept her word to keep quiet about her background.
  - f) Let me ask one more question here before I move on. Why was it so important for Esther not to reveal her Jewish background? Maybe there was some anti-Jewish sentiment in the kingdom. I suspect the main reason is that if Esther was to be a queen and she was not from one of the royal families, at the least, she had to hide the fact that she was amongst the families taken into captivity by the Babylonians and she was not Persian.
17. Verse 21: During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. <sup>22</sup> But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai.
- a) Again, remember Mordecai worked as a city official at the gated entrance to this city. Mordecai did not work alone here. It is again important to understand that these men's jobs were far more than just opening and shutting the gates. They decided who could and could not enter this city. They also decided disputes amongst people who lived here.
  - b) So besides Mordecai, two other men who worked the same gate were named Bigthana and Teresh. Apparently, these two other officials didn't like the king and they organized a plot to kill the king. Mordecai found out about the plot and stopped it from happening.

- c) Remember that plots to kill the king are common in any kingdom, let alone an empire. Also, let's remember that this king was a big drinker and womanizer. He also recently lost a major war to the Greeks where millions of Persians were killed. As I mentioned in the last lesson, there is a gory movie called "300" (1987) that chronicled that war.
    - i) History records that many years later this king was assassinated by one of his own sons. My point is, it does not surprise me that someone wanted to kill this king.
    - ii) So why did Mordecai stop this effort if this king was such a bad person? The first answer is because Esther, who he loved as a daughter, was the queen. It is almost as if Mordecai thought, "Forget him, I must protect Esther".
    - iii) The other possibility is that Mordecai understood the biblical principal that we should honor our leaders, wicked or not. This is Mordecai thinking, "Whether or not I like this king, he did make me a city official. Now that there is a plot to kill him, I must do what I can to stop it, at the least to protect my job and at the most to protect Esther who I love."
    - iv) The real point being is that God used this event of Mordecai stopping the attempt to kill the king to help out Esther and the Jewish people later in this story. Again it is another example of how God works in the background of our lives in order to protect His people. This event is one of those times.
  - d) Let's personalize this for a moment: How can God use the events of our life for His glory. You may say, "I'm not a queen or even an important town official like Mordecai. How can I know that God can or will manipulate my life for His will?" The truth is we can never know for sure. As I have heard Chuck Swindoll say many years ago, the only word we may get out of our mouth in God's presence is the word "Oh". We may wonder why God allowed "this" to happen? After He answers, we only say "oh". Then we think about some other tragedy we are familiar with? When He answers, we say "oh".
    - i) OK, suppose we want to be used by God for His glory. What do we specifically do? For starters, we learn to live daily by biblical principals about how to live one's life. We then make the best decisions possible like Mordecai did here and then let God Himself deal with the long-term consequences of our decisions.
    - ii) Let me put it this way: Did Mordecai go bragging to the king how he stopped this plot? The text will say in a later chapter that the king had no idea this happened. In other words, Mordecai did this, because it was his job to do so, not for glory. That should be our attitude with God. We don't do good works for people to look at us. We do good works because we serve the King. How God rewards us (or doesn't reward us) for our good works is His problem and not ours. Our job, like Mordecai is just to serve the king. The rest in effect is His problem.
  - e) Meanwhile we still have one more verse to go:
18. Verse 23: And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were hanged on a gallows. All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.
- a) The bottom line is that Mordecai successfully stopped this plot to assassinate the king and records of that event were recorded in Persian history.
  - b) Let me talk for a moment about the hanging. This is not a "noose" hanging that has been used in the last few centuries. This is actually an early form of what we call crucifixion. There is a classic joke that the Persians invented crucifixion and the Romans (who came on the scene many centuries later) perfected the art of this cruel form of death. The point is the men who plotted against the king were literally impaled on a stick until they died. This fact about ancient history will also be a significant little detail later in the story.
  - c) If you haven't figured it out by now, we have not even gotten into the main plot of story. What we are reading so far is plot points leading up to the main event. The main event is a plot to kill all of the Jewish people and how Esther is a key person to stop this event. All of this background is given to show how God raised up Esther for this purpose.

19. OK, we've just gotten through 23 verses with a common theme of learning to trust God while He is working in the background of our lives. Where do we go from here (besides Chapter 3)?
- a) The idea is to realize and accept that God is working in the background of the lives of believers in order to make a difference for Him. That doesn't mean we have to struggle in order to get Him to work. It doesn't mean He controls us like a robot. It does not mean that every thought that gets planted in our head is God ordained. So if all of that is true, how do we get God's will done in our lives? Another good question.
    - i) For starters, we make the commitment to live out our lives for His glory. We make it a point to live by biblical principals. We trust Him to guide our lives and be our power source to make a difference for Him. That means if it is our desire to do His will, we trust Him to guide us in order to accomplish His will.
    - ii) Then what do we do? As I like to say, ask Him. Do what one enjoys doing with the assumption is nothing sinful or illegal. If one has a desire to do a certain thing, figure out how one can do that for His glory. We need to use our lives to make a difference for Him. If we are willing to live that way, and trust Him to guide us, I promise that by watching our lives unfold, we can see how He is guiding us in order to have His will done.
  - b) But John, as you implied earlier, what if I am not a powerful person like the characters in this story? What can I do? We may never know until we ask Him or take steps in faith to do things for His glory. God may want us to make a difference in the life of one person or millions. I believe we get rewards in heaven based on our loyalty to commitment to what He desires of us and not the size of what He has called us to do.
    - i) That is the point in the Gospel of Luke, Chapter 19, Verse 11-24, when Jesus gives the exact same reward to two different people who each earn a different amount of money for their boss. My point is we should not to worry about the size and scope of whatever God calls us to do. We just need to "go forward", make the best decisions possible and let God guide us to make a difference for Him.
    - ii) So what am I specifically called to do? That always begins by asking God. This gets back to the concept of finding a way to combine what one enjoys doing with what talents one has in order to make a difference for Him. I believe that if we are willing to commit our lives to serving Him, He will guide us for His glory. That idea in effect, is how God works in the background of our lives.
    - iii) With that happy thought stated, it is time to close in prayer.
20. Heavenly Father, we don't know what You have planned for our lives. We don't know what is going to happen to us today or in the future. Help us to trust that it is Your desire to guide our lives in order to make a difference for You. Help us to remember that You are always there, in the best and worst of times. Help us to remember that no matter how wonderful life is turning out for the moment or how bad life is turning out for the moment, that it is part of Your plan for our lives. Help us not to be passive about it, but to go forward, live to make that difference for You and work through us as we live to make a difference for You in this world. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.