

Old Testament Reading—Genesis 12:9-20

New Testament Reading—1 Timothy 5:1-8

Introduction

Esther is a wonderful account of God's preservation of and provision for His people: God delivers. The Name of God is absent throughout the book, yet the providence of God is woven throughout, it marks the story. Matthew Henry said it well: "though the name of God be not in it, the finger of God is."

Beauty

Whether you agree with every designation of beauty as something beautiful, we must admit, beauty of some sort is all over the place in chapter two. There is something of a Persian *Beauty Pageant*; there are *beauty* preparations for the young virgins who have gathered in Susa; there is a *beautiful* adoption-like provision of Esther by Mordecai; there is the *beauty* of honor and obedience being offered by Esther to Mordecai; and there is the straight-forward description of Esther as someone who was "lovely and *beautiful*" (v. 7).

Design & Decree (2:1-4)

The bulk of the chapter is consumed with a design and a decree; a *design* to satisfy the king's "wife-lessness", and a *decree* to fix this situation. This design and decree result in a Persian beauty pageant (of sorts). Apparently, the king settled down from his previous fuming (2:1), and this was noticed by his servants, who hatched a design to satisfy the king's loneliness: "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king" (2:2-4a). Once again, King Ahasuerus follows the counsel he received.

Mordecai & Esther (2:5-7)

While the decree was issued and the ladies started to arrive, we are introduced to two, seemingly insignificant, people—cousins, Jews, people of the captivity, and one of them was an orphan. We are simply introduced to Mordecai and Esther, and we are given a bit of their heritage and history. In this, there is a wondrous contrast between the king and Mordecai. Mordecai was from the tribe of *Benjamin* (this is important to keep in mind as it will help us understand the story).

Here, in Mordecai's kindness to Esther, we find the first indication of true, Biblical beauty in this story, and it is something that extends beyond physical beauty; Mordecai cared for his orphaned cousin, Esther, and she is described as a young woman who was very beautiful. Beyond Esther's beauty, there is beauty in and with Mordecai's service to his family. He adopts his cousin and provides for her, like his own daughter. Obedience to God is always beautiful, and this beauty is before us in Mordecai. God is called the "Father of the fatherless" (Psalm 68:5), and James tells us that tending to orphans and widows makes up a part of true and undefiled religion.

The Palace, Perfumes, and the Preparations (2:8-14)

We now come to the gathering of the ladies who have come to the palace in order to be the king's new bride. 2:8 indicates that "many young women were gathered," and Josephus sets the number at 400 virgins being gathered for the king's fancy. In what follows, we see full vent to Persian pride and passion. It was appointed that these virgins undergo 12 months of "preparation." There were two phases, six months each, two houses for the women, one before they saw the king, one after, and there were two custodians (keepers) of the women, Hegai and Shaashgaz; apparently they were in charge of these different houses (2:12-14).

King's Favor and Esther's Feast (2:15-18)

Favor has surrounded Esther and this favor continues. Hegai has already shown some favor/preference to Esther upon her arrival (2:9), and now he gives her some further advice before she goes to the king. In the midst of this, the king places his favor upon Esther and she becomes his queen (2:17), and the kingdom is to rejoice in this with a banquet and a holiday (2:18).

P.S. — Assassination Plot (2:19-23)

As something of an "Oh, by the way," or a postscript, a note is added to the end of this chapter: two eunuchs who were doorkeepers wanted to kill King Ahasuerus, the plot was exposed, and they ended up dead.

In Conclusion

Providence and Sin; Sin and Providence. As the story of Esther is a story of God's providence, we need to keep in mind the fact that God's providence is not de-railed because of sin; actually, it is seen in the midst of sin! Tidy minds have problems with this, and they also have problems in dealing with the other sinners who surround them. Again, we are seeing the outworking of the Gospel, and here the Gospel jumps off the page.