



This Sunday we continued our new series in the book of Esther.

We were reminded of the context of the book of Esther: that the people of God are away from home, in exile in Persia. In fact they have been in exile for a number of generations. On Sunday we did a speedy bible overview, helping people to see the story so far and how we've arrived in Persia (in a nutshell, God's people arrived in the land he promised, then the nation split under Solomon, the North (10 tribes) were removed into exile by Assyria and never came back, the south removed later by Babylonia and then some returned to the land as the Persians rose to prominence – Esther though stayed in Persia)

In chapter 1 we saw the extent of King Xerxes' influence and desire to 'peacock' himself at his party, as well as the fact that a job vacancy had arisen at the palace as Queen Vashti had refused to come and parade herself in front of the king and his drunken mates. We noted particularly the contrast between Xerxes and our king Jesus. Chapter 2 is the outworking of the plan to replace Vashti.

#### **2v1-4: The Proposal**

The proposal that Xerxes' 'advisors' come up with is to enroll every young, beautiful female into a pageant. Once again it's a superficial plan and he seems to be forgetful as in 1v19 the original idea was to find him a 'better' wife – now it's simply the most beautiful.

#### **2v5-11: The players**

We are then finally introduced to Esther and Mordecai who seem to be 'a mixed bag', They have Assyrian / Persian names and postcodes but their identity is still somewhat linked to the people of God (v6 has the word exile in it 4 times). Esther is beautiful and so picked, and obedient and so progresses in the competition.

#### **2v12-18: The prescription**

The 'successful' women get to enjoy 12 months of beauty treatment and good food to make them even more beautiful. Esther, having spent a night with the king, wins the competition.

#### **2v12-18: The plot**

However, things are not entirely plain sailing – Mordecai comes across a plot to overthrow Xerxes, informs Esther who tells the king who is very thankful, noting down Mordecai's name but not rewarding him (yet).

### **Application**

The key application we noted was that Esther is not meant to be an example for us. Too easily we can work ourselves into the story and airbrush the reality of whom God uses for his plans and purposes.

It's very likely that Esther was thoroughly assimilated into Persia and so, as well as engaging in a year of beauty treatment, slept with the king. But in one important sense it's not a story about Esther – it's a story about how our faithful God works despite and through fallen and flawed individuals like Esther (and like us).

What kind of a plan does the king's advisors come up with to replace Vashti? What criteria are they using?

What do we learn of Esther and Mordecai from this section? In what ways are their identities complex?

What is the planned system for selecting a future bride? Why does Esther win favour?

How does Esther win further favour at the end of the chapter? How does Xerxes respond to this?

With the moral ambiguity involved in this chapter, what do we see it was a chapter about? What does this teach us about God and his plans?