

Queen for A Day Such as This

Studies in the Book of Esther

"Beauty is Only Sin Deep"

Introduction

Like it or not, American Idol has been a phenomena since it debuted in 2002.

The success of American Idol has been described as "unparalleled in broadcasting history." The series was also said by a rival TV executive to be "the most impactful show in the history of television." It has become a recognized springboard for launching the career of many artists as bona fide stars. According to Billboard magazine, in its first ten years, "Idol has spawned 345 Billboard chart-toppers and a platoon of pop idols."

Don't forget that Jennifer Hudson won an Oscar.

One estimate puts the total number of contestants at 100,000 each season - about 10,000 per city. Contestants go through at least three sets of cuts. The first is a brief audition with a few other contestants in front of selectors which may include one of the show's producers.

Only a few hundred of these make it past the preliminary round of auditions. Successful contestants then sing in front of producers, where more may be cut. Only then can they proceed to audition in front of the judges. Those selected by the judges are sent to Hollywood.

As we are introduced to Esther, I want you to be thinking *American Idol*, in terms of the contest she was involved with.

Our story opened (in chapter one) in the palaces of Persia, where King Ahasuerus was throwing a feast. His queen, Vashti, had refused to come at his bidding. Ahasuerus decreed a law that Vashti should no longer be queen. We pick-up the story some few months after those events.

Esther 2:1 After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus subsided, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what had been decreed against her.

Esther 2:2 Then the king's servants who attended him said: "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king;

Esther 2:3 and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan the citadel, into the women's quarters, under the custody of Hegai the king's eunuch, custodian of the women. And let beauty preparations be given *them*.

Esther 2:4 Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This thing pleased the king, and he did so.

These young women were not rounded-up in midnight raids against their will. They wanted to be queen. They auditioned to be queen.

I'm sure there were preliminary rounds. There were hundreds or perhaps even thousands of young women who did not make the cut. Others did, and were sent on to Shushan to chase this once-in-a-lifetime dream.

The Jewish historian, Josephus, says there were around four hundred of these finalists. One of them was Esther – probably in her early 20's.

Esther 2:5 In Shushan the citadel there was a certain Jew whose name *was* Mordecai the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite.

Esther 2:6 *Kish* had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been captured with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away.

Esther 2:7 And *Mordecai* had brought up Hadassah, that *is*, Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman *was* lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.

Mordecai had been taken captive by the Babylonians, probably in the second of their three assaults upon Jerusalem. He had a younger cousin, whose Hebrew name was Hadassah, whose parents may have been killed in one of the sieges of Jerusalem. After the Persians defeated the Babylonians, Mordecai raised her as Esther as his would his own daughter.

Much emphasis is placed on Mordecai's genealogy. It is to highlight the fact that he instead chose to keep his nationality hidden. He doesn't reveal that he is a Jew until chapter three.

While men like Ezra and Nehemiah were risking everything for the sake of following God, Mordecai was content to deny his heritage and live as a Gentile. He was not walking with or living for the Lord.

Esther 2:8 So it was, when the king's command and decree were heard, and when many young women were gathered at Shushan the citadel, *under* the custody of Hegai, that Esther also was

taken to the king's palace, into the care of Hegai the custodian of the women.

Let's be honest about Esther. When we first meet her, she is not walking with or living for the Lord. Esther willingly entered the pageant as a candidate to become his queen. There is no indication in the language of the story that she was forced against her will. When the writer says she was taken to the king's palace, it is not a word that connotes force or capture. It is the same word used to describe Mordecai's adoption of Esther.

Esther should not have been a participant in this pageant; but she was.

Esther 2:9 Now the young woman pleased him, and she obtained his favor; so he readily gave beauty preparations to her, besides her allowance. Then seven choice maidservants were provided for her from the king's palace, and he moved her and her maidservants to the best *place* in the house of the women.

The Jews were under strict Old Testament dietary regulations which kept them separate from other people. Esther willingly ignored these dietary regulations, showing no regard for God's law. Compare her to Daniel, when he was a young man taken against his will by the Babylonians.

When they wanted to prepare him for a career in Babylon, he refused to eat his allowance of things which were not Kosher.

Esther 2:10 Esther had not revealed her people or family, for Mordecai had charged her not to reveal *it*.

Esther 2:11 And every day Mordecai paced in front of the court of the women's quarters, to learn of Esther's welfare and what was happening to her.

It was not a crime to be a Jew in Persia. A previous king, Cyrus, had signed a decree allowing Jews to return to Jerusalem. There was anti-Semitism, but open persecution had not yet broken out. Esther concealed her identity in order to live comfortably and get farther in the world.

Mordecai's pacing is the activity of a man who is relying on human wisdom rather than God's will. Although God will definitely use both Mordecai and Esther, they were not in His will at this time.

Dr. J. Vernon McGee points out that Mordecai and Esther were in God's providence. I like his definition of providence: Providence is the way that God leads the man that will not be led.

Esther 2:12 Each young woman's turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after she had completed twelve months' preparation, according to the regulations for the women, for thus were the days of their preparation apportioned: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women.

Esther 2:13 Thus *prepared, each* young woman went to the king, and she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace.

This was a spa vacation to die for. Six months of beautification treatments. Exercise... nutrition... cosmetics... massage... facials... hair and nails... fashion consulting... etiquette courses.

Esther 2:14 In the evening she went, and in the morning she returned to the second house of the women, to the custody of [Ryan Seacrest] Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who kept the concubines. She would not go in to the king again unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name.

It was a beauty pageant that included having sex with the only judge. Esther knew this, but willingly participated.

It goes without saying that God's Law prohibited sex outside of marriage – let alone with a non-Jew. Note, too, that if Esther was not chosen queen, she would instead become a member of the king's harem. She would be called upon from time-to-time to go in and satisfy him sexually. She wouldn't simply walk away and return to her life.

Mordecai and Esther were blowing it. Living in Persia, they had become too Persian. It's all an example to us of spiritual desensitization.

It can be tough to remain spiritually sensitive in a culture like ours. Every day, by multiple means, you are bombarded with ideas and images that are designed to erode your views and values.

What can you do? The only people in our story who were not being desensitized were those who had returned to Jerusalem when given the opportunity. Their example to us is to stay connected with the things of God by obeying His Word and gathering together with His people.

Esther 2:15 Now when the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter, to go in to the king, she requested nothing but what Hegai the king's eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her.

Up to this point, it's all outward. Esther has no inward, spiritual beauty to commend her – not yet. It is always the inner person God is concerned with.

The overwhelming emphasis in our culture on physical beauty is one of the key ways the world desensitizes believers. Our attention is constantly drawn to the physical, keeping our minds off the spiritual.

Esther 2:16 So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which *is* the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. Esther 2:17 The king loved Esther more than all the *other* women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.

Don't get fooled by the word loved. The pagan king was incapable of the higher love that comes from God. He preferred Esther and loved her as much as you could in the flesh. There was no spiritual component to it. This is not the fairy-tale romance that every girl desires. Vashti had once been in Esther's position. The way of the world tells us that Esther would one day be in Vashti's position. They would *not* live happily ever after, growing old together. Esther's husband would continue to sleep with his many concubines. Esther could never know true love – unless Ahasuerus converted to become a Jew. Not likely – especially since Esther was ashamed to even tell him about Jehovah.

Esther 2:18 Then the king made a great feast, the Feast of Esther, for all his officials and servants; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces and gave gifts according to the generosity of a king.

It was almost five years from the time Esther became queen to the time she revealed her true identity as a Jew. As queen she ate, dressed, and acted like a Persian - *and that included worshipping like a Persian.*

God considered Himself the Husband of the Jews; they were His wife. To marry this pagan king; to worship his pagan gods; was to conceal her vows to Jehovah. It was to commit spiritual adultery.

When the world beckons to you, it is as a harlot seeking to woo you away from your Beloved Bridegroom. It can be a worldly idea or ideal; it can be a worldly activity; it can be a worldly pursuit. These things may or may not be sinful to begin with. But they slowly begin to boil around you until you are cooked by them.

Typically we make lists of the worldly things we must avoid at all costs. Those can be helpful, I suppose. It's better to set your inward affections on things above. It's better to have your heart consumed with the pursuit of God. Then the harlot has no appeal for you.

