

Esther: Marriage of Esther (Ch. 2)

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Verses 1-4

Based on this passage, it's almost as if the king regretted what had been done (cf. Pr. 15:18; 19:10-12), but his mood was quickly changed when his servants suggested a new queen be found.

Beautiful young virgins were selected for their appearance and purity – only the best for the king.

As previously mentioned, eunuchs were often charged with overseeing the women's quarters, for obvious reasons.

Verses 5-7

We are here introduced to both Mordecai ("little man") and Esther ("star"). Mordecai was the great-grandson of Kish, who had been carried away to Babylon with Jeconiah (Jehoiachin, 2 Kings 24:12; 597 BC). Jeremiah indicates that the "princes of Judah with the craftsmen and the smiths" were carried away at this time (Jer. 24:1), so it's likely Mordecai descended from nobility, and for this reason was permitted to sit within the king's gate (2:19). For this reason also, Esther, Mordecai's cousin and adopted daughter, would be eligible to be queen.

Right off the bat we understand Mordecai to be a good man. There is no indication he had a wife or children, and it is quite a noble thing for a single man to adopt a child to take on as his own, especially a female child.

Esther's Hebrew name was Hadassah ("myrtle"). It was common for people to have their names changed by the ruling power (Dan. 1:6-7).

Verses 8-9

The estimated size of the empire at this time covered about 3 million square miles, so who knows how many women were gathered to Shushan. According to Josephus, there were 400 virgins gathered (Antiquities 11.6.2).

Esther somehow pleases Hegai, it would seem in some way not related to sexual attraction (since he was a eunuch). This demonstrates right away that Esther was not only lovely and beautiful on the outside (v. 7), but inside as well (cf. 1 Pet. 3:3-4), which appears to be in contrast to the other women. For this, she is given 7 "choice" maidservants to attend to her, beauty preparations in addition to the normal allowance, and the best place in the house.

Verses 10-11

For some reason, Mordecai charged Esther not to reveal her people. Perhaps he was concerned she would be treated differently because of this, since the Jews were "different" than other people (cf. 3:8). Like a worried father, he paced in front of the women's quarters in order to receive updates on her well-being.

While it's good for parents to keep their distance when the child grows up, some let their children go too early. Good parents stay actively involved in the lives of their children until the proper time to let them go, and even then don't ever cease from all concern.

Verses 12-14

Each woman had to complete 1 year of preparation before going to see the king. The reason stated for this is to prepare with oil and myrrh for 6 months, and perfumes and “preparations for beautifying women” for another 6 months. Though beautiful, these women may have come from all walks of life, and so needed to be “cleaned up” a bit. Adam Clarke mentions that their diet may also have made them perspire more. It also seems obvious that this served another purpose so ensure that these “virgins” were not pregnant.

The women, in turn, being permitted to take something with them (likely jewels or clothing), spent the night with the king, and afterward were sent to Shaashgaz (“servant of the beautiful”), the eunuch who kept the concubines. It appears they remained as concubines if not chosen to be queen. They would now never be given in marriage to another man, and only if they were called for by name would they be permitted to go back to the king. This might be another reason why Mordecai was pacing (2:11).

Verses 15-18

Here we are given the name of Esther's father, Abihail (“father of might”). She takes the advice of Hegai pertaining to what she would take with her (v. 13). That fact that she obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her seems to refer to what she chose to wear/take with her. While many women would tend to deck themselves out to impress a man like the king, Esther's dress must have been modest such that it caused all to respect her (1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:1-4). Modesty is respectable, and often the difference between the woman a man takes for a night, and the one he takes to be his wife.

Four years after the episode with Vashti, (in the month of Tebeth; Dec. or Jan.), Esther goes to the king, and due to her character, for all the women were beautiful (2:3), the king selected her above all others as queen. He then throws yet another feast in her honor. We would do well to note that the most important events in the book are associated with feasts (1:5; 5:4-8; 7:1-10; 8:17).

One has to wonder if it was in fact wrong for Esther to marry the king (cf. Deut. 7:1-4; Ezra 9). The union does not seem to bother Esther nor Mordecai, and obviously would work to the advantage of Mordecai and the Jewish people (though that in itself would not necessarily excuse any wrong done).

Verses 19-23

It is unclear why the virgins are here said to be gathered together a second time.

The focus shifts to Mordecai, sitting within the king's gate (perhaps an officer of some sort; cf. 3:2). It is mentioned that, even with Esther now queen, she still obeyed Mordecai and had not revealed her nationality. Again reflecting her character, that even with her elevated position, she did not forget where she came from. Also reflecting the character of Mordecai is implied how instrumental he was in making Esther who she was (Pr. 22:6, 15; 23:13; Eph. 6:4).

While within the king's gate, Mordecai became aware of a plot by Bigthan (“gift of God”) and Teresh (“strictness”) to kill the king. He tells Esther, who informed the king, which foils the plot. The account was written in the book of the chronicles, which becomes important later (6:1-3; cf. Matt. 6:4).

The method of hanging (using gallows) as a form of execution may have originated with the Persians. The book of Esther contains the only reference to the gallows in the entire Bible.