

women IN SCRIPTure

EXPLORING ALL THE WOMEN IN THE BIBLE

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Esther: A Woman Born for “Such a Time As This”

by Stephanie Catmull



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Yet Esther’s willingness to serve her God was stronger than her fear of death. Even more so, she understands that perhaps she was born “for such a time as this.”

The Book of Esther, though penned nearly 2,500 years ago, should be a lengthy

expose in the New York Times. Take a quick whirlwind tour of modern news. See the gruesome, horrifying news as the Boko Haran terrorists kidnap and force hundreds of Nigerian girls into sexual slavery. Witness the torturous accounts of Hitler's persecution of the Jews during WWII. Look firsthand at the contentious relationship between Israel and the United States. Shudder at the endless crisis in the Middle East, and cringe at Iran's persistent desire to wipe Israel off the face of the map.

Maybe Esther is like you. Perhaps you have you disguised or hidden your past, not wanting others to know what you've done or who you were. Maybe you worried that your past will define your future. Maybe you felt that if people knew the "real" you, they would ridicule you, tease you, or reject you.

When you had a major life decision to make, did you leave your fate to chance by merely flipping a coin? Or did you instead fast and pray about it? Are you married to someone who does not share the same faith as you, and are struggling how to serve both your spouse and God? Ever been a victim, powerlessly subjected to the will of others? Ever wonder about your life's purpose, and why God even put you on this earth?

You are reading at this moment for a reason: to become intimately connected with Esther and translate her story into God's purpose for you.

Aside from the book of Ruth, Esther is the only other book in the Bible named after a woman. And you probably didn't know that Esther never mentions GOD by name. *Esther's* name, however, is recorded 55 times, more than any other woman in the Bible - including Mary, the Mother of Jesus. And, her honorary "Feast of Purim" is the only Jewish feast that, still celebrated today, was not specifically commanded by God.

Esther's ascendancy to the throne is the ultimate rags to riches story. Esther was literally a Cinderella plucked from Jewish obscurity into the court of a famous Persian King, and became God's instrument within the annals of world and biblical history. You, too, may feel unimportant in this world, but your destiny, your fate, your purpose is just as crucial as this little Jewish girl, because God made you for a purpose, just as He made Esther. And you are especially vital in His kingdom.

Interestingly, Esther has an impressive family tree. Her great-grandfather is Jesse from the tribe of Judah. Jesse had seven sons, and his first-born son was Eliah. Eliah's daughter was Abihail, and Abihail's daughter was Esther. Jesse's last born son was the legendary King David...that same boy who conquered Goliath. The same man who is the ancestor of our Savior Jesus Christ. Esther is a direct descendant of Jesse, and King David is her great-uncle.

Yet her relationship to King David is insignificant and unmentioned in the Bible. Esther was rather a small leaf on a huge oak family tree. Esther certainly doesn't enjoy any of the privileges of a royal family, nor is this relationship even alluded to. Why? **Hear this.** Neither your birth, your ancestry, nor your spouse determines your personal, saving relationship with God. Whether Jew or Gentile, you are grafted into God's family by your faith in God, not by your birth, what you do, or whom you are related to. God lovingly made who you who are, and it's only your acceptance of Jesus Christ that saves you.

At a very young age, little orphan Esther is scooped up by her uncle Mordechai, and raised within the strict Judaic tradition. She lives amongst the displaced Jews (the diaspora), forced into exile in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians because of their assimilation into the unfaithful, disobedient pagan worship of their neighbors. Esther finds herself living in Susa, a crucial Persian town at the crossroads of significant military, political, and cultural importance governed by King Xerxes.

Note that 50 years earlier, Xerxes' dad, King Cyrus, granted permission for her fellow Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild their Temple in Jerusalem. The stature of the Jews is on the rise, and Esther is part and parcel of this new-found Jewish fervor, floating along the waves of a growing Jewish reputation.

Xerxes rather encourages the Jews' return to Jerusalem, since the rebuilding of the great Temple would be a monumental legacy to his reign. Any ruler, whether Persian, Greek, Roman or Egyptian, were immortalized by their prolific building as it directly correlated to the strength of their empire. Yet Mordecai and Esther, along with thousands of Jews, decide to remain in Persia and live under King Xerxes' reign since they enjoy strong ties to their community. And unfortunately in Susa, not everyone welcomes the Jews' rising prestige as it becomes an increasing threat to their power and way of life.

A prime example is Haman, Xerxes' appointed second-in-command, who certainly does not share a desire for a stronger Jewish nation since he is notoriously anti-Semitic. His hatred for the Jews is legendary and lethal, and King Xerxes blindly gives Haman unchecked control in affairs of the state. And he is not about to share his power with anyone, *especially* the Jews.

Contrast Haman to Mordechai, Esther's uncle and father-figure, who is highly regarded in Susa. He adheres to all the Judaic customs and is widely known to be a leader in the Jewish community. Hence, Esther was Jewish through and through, by birth and by her upbringing, by her nature and nurture, living within the Jewish culture amidst the crumbling Persian Empire.

The time for Esther's rise is at hand. A decade earlier under Xerxes' father King

Cyrus, Persia suffered a crushing, humiliating defeat to the Greeks at the Battle of Marathon. This battle became a pivotal turning point to Persia's downfall as a global empire. The Persians had to regroup, and King Xerxes, licking his father's wounds, invites all of the military leaders back to Susa for a 6-month long feast/war strategy session which would eventually culminate in his incredulous success at the Battle of Thermopylae – otherwise known as “The Battle of 300.”

During the last day of the military feast, King Xerxes, surrounded by his entourage of commanders, is drunk. Xerxes summons his then Queen Vashti to dress provocatively so he can show off his beautiful trophy wife in front of his men. She, quite aware how offensive her “catwalk” would be to Persian modesty and decorum, haughtily refuses to accommodate the King's wishes. Instead, she holds her own feast for the women of the kingdom. Xerxes is humiliated, and in order to save face and set an example to all other married women who rebel against their husbands, issues Vashti a certificate of divorce. Queen Vashti is never heard from again.

A year later, the lonely Xerxes decides to take another wife – this time, one who will respect him, honor him, and do his bidding. His new queen would be beautiful on the eyes, humble in spirit, have a servant's heart, and love him unconditionally.

By Xerxes' command, 300 beautiful virgin girls are kidnapped by eunuchs who terrorize the land and force the girls into Xerxes' harem of concubines. Esther is one of these beautiful virgins, ostensibly taken because of her exotic beauty. She, like the innocent young girls today who are sold into sexual slavery by ISIS, is a powerless victim of a man's lustful desires. Yet no tour de force can defeat the presence of God within her - this unspoken, invisible Spirit of God that guides her to saving the Jewish nation from extermination.

Once kidnapped, Esther is imprisoned within the castle walls. For an entire year, she is prepared for her “presentation” to the king with the finest oils, perfumes, costumes, hair stylists, and makeup artists. King Xerxes inevitably falls head over heels for Esther, as her exotic beauty and gentle spirit draws him to her. She is selected as his next queen. Xerxes, however, is completely unaware that she is Jewish by birth and inadvertently seats beside him the woman who will advance God's plan for His chosen people.

Uncle Mordecai, understandably, is petrified that her Jewish roots will be found out, and he counsels Esther to conceal it for her own safety. While King Xerxes' reaction may or may not be favorable, Haman's reaction most certainly will not. Mordecai paces daily at the palace walls, praying for God's provision and

protection over her. And while there, he hears of plans to assassinate the King. He reaches out to one of the guards, relays the plans, and foils the attempt. Mordecai's name, deed and financial reward (that he never receives) are recorded in Persia's financial record book.

Haman sees this annoyingly Jewish Mordecai at the palace gate, and his blood boils. Unaware that this is the Queen's uncle, he forces Mordecai to bow to him – a law Haman himself enacted, as typical of Greek leaders who would pronounce themselves as gods to be worshiped. Mordecai adamantly refuses – a foreshadowing of the prophet Daniel under Nebuchednezzar's reign in Assyria. Haman not only orders Mordecai dead, but conveniently uses his noncompliance as an excuse to slaughter ALL of the Jews, and slyly coerces King Xerxes to sign off of the order.

Haman flippantly casts lots to set the date of the Jews' genocide. The date coincidentally lands on the eve of Passover, where 1,000 years prior in Egypt, the Israelites are passed over by God as the hard-hearted pharaoh is severely tormented for oppressing God's people. The date also lands on the eve of the Passover when, 500 years hence, Jesus dines on his Last Supper before His crucifixion for the sins of the world. Casting lots puts the decision into God's hands, and His Divine Will is never more apparent than using it for the providence and saving grace of His chosen people.

Let's not forget the tasty tidbit of Haman's background. He comes from the line of Esau, the older twin brother of Jacob who carelessly gave up his birthright for a bowl of stew. Amalek, Esau's grandson, rejected God and grew more corrupt than the Philistines and more brutal than Moses' hard-hearted Egyptian pharaoh. The deceitful Amalekites even tricked Joshua into believing they were allies; otherwise, they would have been wiped off the map.

It doesn't end there, though. Years later, Saul was ordered to eliminate the Amalekites completely, yet disobeyed God's command and left their king Agog alive: the primary reason Saul was stripped of his kingship. And the kingship was turned over to none other than David, Esther's great-uncle.

Haman and Agog's anti-Semitic vein continues in none other than Hitler, their descendant. That's right. Hitler is Haman's descendant. And Hitler succeeded in exterminating 6 million Jews. Is it any wonder that on March 7, 2012, on the Feast of Purim honoring Queen Esther, that the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, gives this Book of Esther to President Barak Obama? In a speech given to the United Nations, Bebe explains the history of his country, and how the prevailing anti-Semitism of Iran (then ancient Persia), still exists today. Look at World War II. Look at The Middle East crisis, and behold Iran's desire to

wipe Israel off the map. Understand that Israel's history and its relation to the world has its beginnings in Genesis, continues throughout the Book of Esther, and persists on the front page of every newspaper today.

Haman, an Amalekite, never forgets his people were blotted out of heaven by Jacob (Israel). Haman detests the fact that the Israelites are God's chosen people. He hates the fact that Almighty God is on their side, and is more powerful than his pagan idols. He is jealous of their beliefs, and seethes at God's favor upon them. And now Haman has been surrounded by exiled Jews for years, seeing their rise in stature, which only feeds his murderous appetite.

The ugliness of Haman is in stark contrast to the beauty of Esther. But it's not just her external beauty that separates her. She exhibits love, courage, wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, fortitude, piety, and fear of the Lord – all the essential characteristics of a woman who lives in the Gifts of the Spirit. God does not have to be mentioned to be seen. He is visible in His Creation. He is seen in the light and countenance of those who belong to Him. His Shekinah – His Light – is amplified through you and affects those around you.

Xerxes chooses Esther as he is drawn like a moth to the flame of the shekinah surrounding her. This is certainly reminiscent of the time Pharaoh's daughter rescued Moses, and she was overcome by the shekinah encompassing the baby Jewish boy floating in a basket on the river. Both were shining children of God, and both were instrumental in the survival of the Jewish nation. Xerxes makes her his bride in a lavish ceremony, and a Jewish Queen sits on the throne of pagan Persia.

Many critics decry the fact that Esther did not live as a true Jewish woman should, denouncing the fact that she did not adhere to the strict Jewish diet while in the palace. Yet understand that Esther was more about her relationship with God, and her soul was not defined by what she ate. Intuitively, she knew this even before Jesus preached it 450 years later in Mark 7:18-20:

“Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods. And He said, ‘What comes out of a man, that defiles man.’”

She practiced this before the Apostle Paul later confirmed it in 1Cor 9: 19-22:

“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without

law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."

Now Mordecai is frantic: Haman's decree of the Slaughter of Jews is imminent, and Mordecai begs her to act: Approach the king and plead their case, not just for their family but for their people. Esther is keenly aware this is nothing but a suicide mission. The King hasn't called for her in months, and Xerxes isn't exactly receptive to those he believes are trying to usurp his power.

Remember what happened to Queen Vashti. Xerxes could easily divorce Esther too, or worse, have her beheaded. If he doesn't reach out with his golden scepter of acceptance, she is finished.

Yet Esther's willingness to serve her God was stronger than her fear of death. Even more so, she understands that perhaps she was born "for such a time as this." God put her on this earth for a reason, and He was giving her His ultimate purpose for her life. If she was destined to die, then so be it. She had her solid trust, and faith, in God. She took Proverbs 3:5-6 (written by her cousin King Solomon) to heart:

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."

How glorious and wonderful to know how much God loves you as much as you love Him, and to know that He made you exactly the way you are, and the time where He placed you, for His glory and for His purpose. You are special to Him just like Queen Esther— don't ever forget that. His purpose for you is to further His kingdom, and He has put you where you are, with specific people surrounding you, for a reason and for a purpose. And He will lead you to it, if you only ask.

Esther, similar to her great-uncle David, prays and fasts to the Lord her God for three straight days before deciding how to proceed. She commits herself to the wisdom, knowledge and Spirit of God, closely aligning herself with His will and purpose. Her great-uncle King David used to do so as well, before he went into battle and throughout his glorious reign as king. Esther, like her great-uncle, desired to know God's heart and will. She doesn't have to specifically say God's name for us to know whom she is praying to.

After the third day, Esther approaches the King with no idea of what to expect, but she is assuredly stepping out in faith. As Xerxes welcomes her with a kingly flourish and showers her

with his favor, you have a front row seat at God's plan in action. Esther doesn't hastily demand a reprieve from the edict of death for the Jews; instead, she wisely shows honor and respect to her husband by requesting his presence at a dinner she makes especially for him and his second, Haman. Xerxes is flattered, and feels the high regard and adoration of his wife. Esther is the epitome of a woman as defined by Proverbs 31, again penned by her cousin King Solomon.

Glowing with his wife's honor bestowed upon him, King Xerxes gladly accepts her invitation. Of course Haman does too, but unlike the king, Haman is puffed up with self-importance. He brags and boasts to his family of his newfound prestige above all the officials and servants, and is beside himself with pride. His family counsels him that evening to build gallows over 50 feet high in order to hang his nemesis Mordecai, since Haman is still stewing over Mordechai's affront to his self-proclaimed deity. He builds the death gallow, unaware that he is digging his own grave.

The night of their dinner, King Xerxes is basking in Esther's presence. He tells her he would give her half the kingdom if she just asked. Again, through God's wisdom, she delays again her request to redact Haman's order of genocide, and invites him to a banquet the following evening. Xerxes and Haman accept again, giving Haman just enough time to finish Mordecai's--or rather his--hanging gallows.

That evening, as he suffers God-induced insomnia, Xerxes requests to peruse the tedious financial books of the Persian empire. God divinely directs his eyes to a discrepancy: Mordecai was never rewarded for stopping the assassination attempt against him. The king wants to remedy this, and asks advice from his second-in-command while not mentioning Mordecai's name. Proud Haman, of course, thinks Xerxes want to honor *him*, and tells the king he should have this man of honor paraded through town on horseback, adorned with the king's robes and riches, for the entire city to see. Haman, ironically, is ordered to honor Mordecai and be the one escorting him through the town.

That night, Esther's banquet takes place, and King Xerxes is falling over himself to please his wife. Haman, on the other hand, is furious, humiliated, and gritting his teeth at having to spend the day in service to his enemy. His jealousy and anger, coupled with his hatred of the Jews and his unbelief in God eventually leads to his demise.

Esther, in the right time and in the right place chosen by Her Lord, uses this moment to tell her husband of Haman's vicious plan to kill her people. Xerxes is horrified that his trusted counsel would betray his trust and slaughter his wife's nation. He leaves to get a breath of fresh air, and Haman literally falls at Esther's feet, begging *her* to save *him*.


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As the sin of jealousy leads to Haman's inevitable downfall, his wickedly corrupt nature will say or do anything to save his own skin, except one thing: Haman does not have a repentant heart. His words and deeds mean nothing. His unbelieving, jealous spirit is what separates him from God and clearly portrays the distinguishing difference between the character of the saved and unsaved. King Xerxes reenters the room and sees Haman in a compromising position with his wife – he is of course languishing at her knees, and Xerxes assumes the worst. This isn't exactly Haman's shining moment to make a pass at the King's wife, and Xerxes has Haman hanged the next morning on the same 50-foot gallows he built for Mordecai. Haman receives the just punishment that all who do not believe – eternal separation from God.

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Esther is a hero. Her country is saved, and her husband/king adores her. As such, Xerxes gives her authority to decree her people take up their arms, and in turning the tables, God emboldens the Jews to take up arms and kill the 75,000 meant to destroy her nation. Last but not least, her uncle Mordecai is promoted as Persia's Prime Minister.

Even today, the festival of Purim is celebrated every year on the 14th of the Hebrew month of Adar (late winter/early spring). It commemorates Esther's salvation of the Jewish people in ancient Persia from Haman's plot "to destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, infants and women, in a single day." And always on the eve of Passover.

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Esther is unquestionably the model of God's purpose in your life. You are born for a time, for a reason, for a season. I can't tell you what that reason is, but what I can tell you is that God's purpose is unique to you and for His kingdom. You will find it by fasting, praying, reading His Word, and abiding in Him. That's what Esther did, and look how God used her. You have a purpose. Don't be afraid to find it, and have Esther's unwavering courage to take action when the time comes. For maybe you too were born "for such a time as this."

Believe in Jesus, and you will be granted the boldness of Esther, the Spirit of God, and Everlasting, eternal life with your Creator.

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