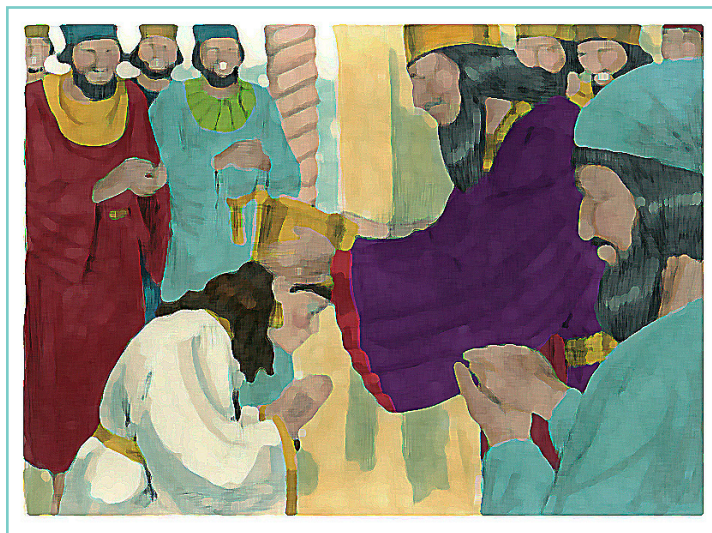


Lesson 4: Humility



Old Testament

New Testament

Where in the Bible?

The Book of Esther is in the center of the Old Testament.

The Old Testament: History

The story of Esther is different from other historical books of Scripture in that it takes the form of a melodramatic tale. In such stories, heroes are brave, villains are evil, and princesses are kind and beautiful. This story is the basis for the Jewish festival of Purim.

Biblical Time Period: Exile

The time of the Exile was a significant period in the history of Israel. God's people were first attacked and conquered in the north by the Assyrian Empire, then later in the south by the Babylonian Empire. Many of the people were carried away into exile far from home in Mesopotamia.

Eventually God brought King Cyrus of Persia to power over the Babylonians. God's people were allowed to return home to rebuild their temple and their nation. But some Jews, like Esther and Mordecai, remained and made a life for themselves in Persia.

Introduction

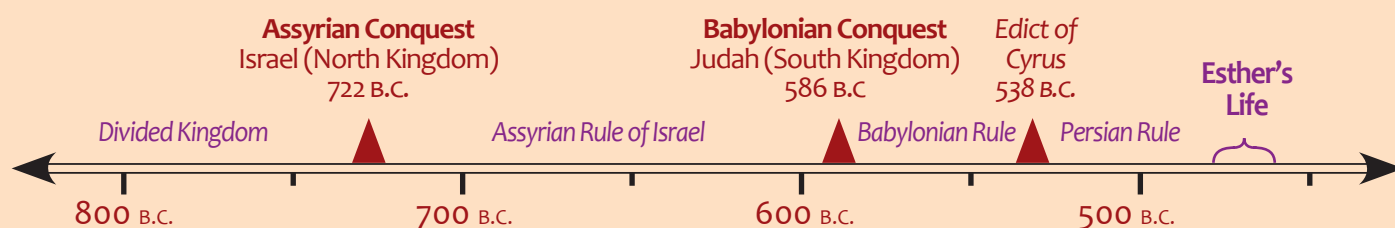
Vashti, the previous queen of Persia, had been dismissed for her prideful attitude. So a call was made for young women to come to the palace to see who would be chosen as the new queen. A young Jewish woman named Esther demonstrated her humility and grace.

Read: Esther 2:5-17a

On reading these verses, what are some of your initial impressions and questions? What stands out to you?

When in Time?

The Assyrian Empire conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C. Years later, the Babylonian Empire from Mesopotamia overcame the Assyrians. In 586 B.C., they conquered the southern kingdom of Judah, carrying many of the Judean nobility into exile in Babylon. The Babylonian exile lasted until 538 B.C., when King Cyrus of Persia allowed God's people to return to their homeland. Some stayed in Persia.



Discuss: Esther 2:5-17a

1. Read Esther 1:10-12 to see how Vashti, the previous queen, fell out of favor with the king. According to what you see here, in what way do you think *pride* was an issue for both the king and queen?
2. Depending on which edition of Scripture you are using, the king's name may be given as Xerxes (the Greek spelling) or Ahasuerus (the Hebrew spelling). Does it strengthen or lessen your faith to know that this historical king is well-attested in literature apart from the Bible? Or doesn't that matter?
3. The situation described in this story is similar to our modern-day talent show competitions on television. Why are such shows so popular? In what way do people like to see themselves as competitors or wish to be a part of such contests?
4. Verse 13 says that when each woman was brought before the king, "she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the harem to the king's palace." How might this have been a test?
5. When Esther had her chance to come before the king, what did she take from the palace? What sense do you get that there was more to Esther than just physical beauty?
6. Verse 10 says: "Esther had not made known her people or kindred." What does this story say about the degree to which the Jews had made themselves at home in Persia during the period of the Exile?
7. Read Luke 14:8-11. How is the story of Esther an illustration of the attitude Jesus describes here? In what way is this attitude an aspect of our faith?

Where in the World?

In the centuries prior to the coming of Jesus, the Jewish people had been exiled to the lands of Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. Advances in travel and trade also meant that people could more easily move from place to place.

This "spreading-out" of the Jewish people is referred to as the **Diaspora** (pronounced: die-AAH-spoe-rah).

By the time of Jesus, there were more Jews in the Diaspora than were actually living in Israel.



"The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations." (Deuteronomy 4:27)