

CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION TO ESTHER 2

By the advice of the ministers of King Ahasuerus, fair virgins were sought for throughout his dominions, and brought to his chamberlain, the keeper of the women, among whom was Esther, a Jewish virgin, (^{<1711>}Esther 2:1-8), who found favour with the chamberlain, and afterwards with the king, who made her queen instead of Vashti, and a feast on that account, (^{<1711>}Esther 2:9-18). Mordecai, to whom Esther was related, and according to whose advice she acted, sitting in the king's gate, discovered a conspiracy against the king, which he now made known to Esther, (^{<1711>}Esther 2:19-23).

Ver. 1. *After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus was appeased,* etc.] Which went off with his wine, and so was quickly after, a few days at most, unless this can be understood as after the expedition of Xerxes into Greece, from whence he returned to Shushan, in the seventh year of his reign; and if he is the Ahasuerus here meant, he married Esther that year, (^{<1711>}Esther 2:16) and it seems certain, that after his expedition he gave himself up to his amours, and in his way to Sardis he fell in love with his brother's wife, and then with his daughter ^{f75}:

he remembered Vashti; her beauty, and was grieved, as Jarchi observes, that she was removed from him; and so Josephus says ^{f76}, that he passionately loved her, and could not bear parting with her, and therefore was grieved that he had brought himself into such difficulties: the Targumists carry it further, and say that he was wroth with those that advised him to it, and ordered them to be put to death, and that they were:

and what she had done; that it was a trivial thing, and not deserving of such a sentence as he had passed upon her; that it was not done from contempt of him, but from modesty, and a strict regard to the laws of the Persians:

and what was decreed against her; that she should come no more before him, but be divorced from him; the thought of which gave him great pain and uneasiness.

Ver. 2. *Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, etc.]*

Fearing that, if Vashti should be restored, vengeance would be taken on them; or however to remove the grief and melancholy of the king, they gave the following advice:

let there be fair young virgins sought for the king; that he might enjoy them, and choose one of them, the most agreeable to him, and put her in the room of Vashti.

Ver. 3. *And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, etc.]* Who best knew where beautiful virgins might be found in their respective provinces, in which they dwelt:

that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the palace; the metropolis of the kingdom, where was the royal palace:

to the house of the women, unto the custody of Hege the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women; in which house it seems were two apartments, one for the virgins before they were introduced to the king, the other for them when they were become his concubines, which had a keeper also; but this Hege seems to have been over the whole house, (¹⁷²⁴Esther 2:14). It was not only usual with the eastern people, as with the Turks now, for great personages to have keepers of their wives and concubines, but with the Romans also ^{f77}:

and let their things for purification be given them; such as oil of myrrh, spices, etc. to remove all impurity and ill scent from them, and make them look smooth and beautiful.

Ver. 4. *And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti, etc.]* Have the royal estate, that was taken from Vashti, given to her, the crown royal set on her head, etc.

and the thing pleased the king, and he did so; appointed officers in all his provinces to seek out the most beautiful virgins, and bring them to his palace; so with the Chinese now, the king never marries with any of his kindred, though ever so remote; but there is sought throughout his kingdom a damsel of twelve or fourteen years, of perfect beauty, good natural parts, and well inclined to virtue; whence, for the most part, the queen is the daughter of some artisan; and in their history ^{f78}, mention is made of one that was the daughter of a mason.

Ver. 5. *Now in Shushan the palace was a certain Jew*, etc.] Not one of the tribe of Judah, for he was afterwards called a Benjaminite; but was so called, because he was of the kingdom of Judah, which consisted of both tribes. Jarchi says, all that were carried captive with the kings of Judah were called Jews among the nations, though of another tribe:

whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite; who was among those that came with Zerubbabel from Babylon to Jerusalem, and returned to Persia again, (^{<1511D>}Ezra 2:2 ^{<1511E>}Nehemiah 7:7), though some think this was another Mordecai; (See Gill on "^{<1511D>}Ezra 2:2"), who descended not from Kish, the father of Saul, but a later and more obscure person.

Ver. 6. *Who had been carried away from Jerusalem*, etc.] Which, according to some ^{f79}, is to be connected, not with Mordecai, but with Kish, his great-grandfather; and indeed otherwise Mordecai must be now a very old man, and Esther his first cousin, they being brothers' children, must be at an age, one would think, not to be reckoned among young virgins, and not be so amiable as she is represented; and indeed, according to the former Targum, she was seventy five years of age, which is not credible; and yet this, and more she must be, to be equal to Mordecai, if he was carried captive, as follows:

with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away; which was eleven years before the destruction of Jerusalem, for so long Zedekiah reigned after that captivity of Jeconiah: hence Sir John Marsham ^{f80} makes this affair of Esther to be within the time of the Babylonish captivity, and places Ahasuerus her husband between Darius the Mede and Cyrus, contrary to history and Scripture, (see ^{<1511D>}Daniel 6:28)

Ver. 7. *And he brought up Hadassah (that is Esther) his uncle's daughter*, etc.] Her Hebrew name was Hadassah, which signifies a myrtle, to which the Israelites, and good men among them, are sometimes compared, (^{<1511D>}Zechariah 1:8). Her Persian name was Esther, which some derive from "satar", to hide, because hidden in the house of Mordecai, so the former Targum, and by his advice concealed her kindred: or rather she was so called by Ahasuerus, when married to him, this word signifying in the Persian language a "star" ^{f81} and so the latter Targum says she was called by the name of the star of Venus, which in Greek is $\alpha\sigma\tau\eta\rho$; though it is said ^{f82}, that the myrtle, which is called "hadassah" in Hebrew, is in the

Syriac language “esta”; so “asa” in the Talmud^{f83} signifies a myrtle; and, according to Hillerus^{f84}, “esther” signifies the black myrtle, which is reckoned the most excellent; and so “amestris”, according to him, signifies the sole myrtle, the incomparable one. Xerxes had a wife, whose name was Amestris, which Scaliger thinks is as if it was *rtsa ꝓh*, and the same with Esther; but to this are objected, that her father’s name was Otanes, and her cruelty in the mutilation of the wife of Masistis, her husband’s brother, and burning alive fourteen children of the best families of the Persians, as a sacrifice to the infernal gods; and besides, Xerxes had a son by her marriageable, in the seventh year of this reign^{f85}, the year of Ahasuerus, in which he married Esther: but it is observed by some, that these things are confounded with the destruction of Haman’s family, or told by the Persians to obliterate the memory of Esther, from whom they passed to the Greek historians:

for she had neither father nor mother; according to the former Targum, her father died and left her mother with child of her, and her mother died as soon as she was delivered of her:

and the maid was fair and beautiful; which was both the reason why she was taken and brought into the king’s house, and why Mordecai took so much care of her:

whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter; loved her, and brought her up as if she had been his daughter, and called her so, as the Targum. The Rabbins, as Jarchi and Aben Ezra observe, say, he took her in order to make her his wife; and so the Septuagint render it; though perhaps no more may be intended by that version than that he brought her up to woman’s estate. Josephus^{f86} calls him her uncle; and so the Vulgate Latin version, his brother’s daughter; but both are mistaken.

Ver. 8. *So it came to pass, when the king’s commandment and decree was heard*, etc.] In the several provinces of his kingdom:

and when many maidens were gathered unto Shushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai; Josephus^{f87} says, there were gathered to the number of four hundred:

that Esther was brought also unto the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, the keeper of the women: by force, as Aben Ezra and the former Targum, and so the word is sometimes used.

Ver. 9. *And the maiden pleased him,* etc.] Not the king, into whose presence she was not yet introduced, but the chamberlain; her beauty and her behaviour recommended her to him, and he concluded within himself that she was the person that of all would be acceptable to the king:

and she obtained kindness of him: had favours shown others had not:

and he speedily gave her things for purification; as oil, spices, etc. that she might be the sooner fitted to be had into the king's presence:

with such things as belonged to her; food and drink from the king's table; the Targum interprets it gifts, as chains and royal apparel:

and seven maidens, which were given her, out of the king's house; to wait upon her the seven days of the week, as the same Targum:

and he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the house of the women; removed her and them to it, which was the most splendid, had large, airy, and pleasant rooms.

Ver. 10. *Esther had not showed her people nor her kindred,* etc.] What nation or family she was of; it not being asked, she was under no obligation to declare it; and being born in Shushan, as very probable, she was taken to be a Persian:

for Mordecai had charged her that she should not show it; lest she should be despised and ill treated on that account; fearing, if the king knew it, he would not marry her, as Aben Ezra; or rather, as the same writer thinks, that she might keep the law of God privately, observe the sabbath, etc.

Ver. 11. *And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house,* etc.] Being one of the court, and in an high post, as Aben Ezra thinks, he might walk there without being examined, and called to an account for it:

to know how Esther did; to inquire of her health and prosperity, or peace, the word here used signifies, even all sorts of it:

and what should become of her; or was done to her, whether she was well used, or as yet introduced to the king, how it fared with her, and what befell her.

Ver. 12. *Now when every maid's turn was come to go in to King Ahasuerus, after that she had been twelve months, according to the manner of women*, etc.] That were prepared in the house of the women to be presented to the king for his liking; for it seems that these virgins came in turns to him, according to the time they had been in the house; as did the wives of the kings of Persia, as Herodotus relates^{f88}:

for so were the days of their purifications accomplished; that is, in the space of twelve months, which were thus divided: to wit,

six months with oil of myrrh; which Ben Melech interprets of musk:

and six month's with sweet odours; the former was used to make the skin smooth and soft, and these to remove all ill scents through sweat, or any other cause:

and with other things for the purifying of women: by bathing, rubbing, etc. and such a space of time was observed not only for the thorough purification of them, but partly was of state and grandeur, and partly that it might be a clear case they were not with child by another, before they came to the king.

Ver. 13. *Then thus came every virgin unto the king*, etc.] When her twelve months were up, and she was purified in the manner before observed:

whatsoever she desired was given her to go with her out of the house of the women unto the king's house; whatever she commanded the chamberlain was obliged to furnish her with, or grant it to her, whether for ornament, as jewels, rich apparel, etc. or for attendance; whatever prince or peer she required to accompany her to the king, was to be obtained for her, as the Targum: and everything for mirth, all kinds of songs, or instruments of music, as Jarchi.

Ver. 14. *In the evening she went, and on the morrow she returned into the second house of the women*, etc.] Or the other apartment of the house of the women, where were kept those the king had made his concubines or secondary wives. Aben Ezra interprets it the second time, and so the Targum by “again”:

to the custody of Shaashgaz the king's chamberlain, which kept the concubines; of which the kings of Persia had a great number; Darius, whom Alexander conquered, had three hundred and sixty^{f89}:

she came in unto the king no more, except the king delighted in her, and that she was called by name; but remained shut up in the house, and might not lie with, nor be married to, another man.

Ver. 15. *Now when the turn of Esther the daughter of Abihail, etc.*] For this was her father's name, and not Aminadab, as the Septuagint version:

the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter; which makes it quite clear that Mordecai was not Esther's uncle, as Josephus, but her own cousin: now when her turn

was come to go in unto the king; which the virgins under purification took by turns, (^{<T024>}Esther 2:14),

she required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed; what he ordered her to have, or to do, she submitted to, being in his hands, and so obeyed his orders; but more she asked not, either for ornament or attendance, being not at all solicitous whether the king liked her or not; for it was not of choice, but by constraint, she went unto him; nor needed she anything to recommend her, her virtue, modesty, and beauty, were sufficient:

and Esther obtained favour of all them that looked upon her: when she came to court, the eyes of all were attracted to her; all admired her beauty, her innocent and modest look, and her graceful mien and deportment.

Ver. 16. *So Esther was taken unto King Ahasuerus, into his house royal, etc.*] Did not return on the morrow to the house of the women, as those who only became the king's concubines did, (^{<T024>}Esther 2:14), but she was taken to be his wife, and designed for his queen, and so was retained in his palace, and placed in an apartment suitable to the dignity she was about to be advanced unto:

and this was done in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth; and answers to part of December and part of January; not the twelfth month Adar, as the Septuagint version, and so Josephus^{f90}, contrary to the original text: either that law had not obtained among the Persians, or the

king thought himself not bound by it, which forbid marriage at any other time than the beginning of the vernal equinox^{f91}:

in the seventh year of his reign; and the divorce of Vashti being in the third year of his reign, it was four years before Esther was taken by him; who, if Xerxes, it may be accounted for by his preparation for, and engagement in, a war with Greece, which took him up all this time; and from whence he returned in the seventh year of his reign, at the beginning of it, and married Esther at the close of it, (see ^{<770>}Esther 2:1) as may be suggested.

Ver. 17. *And the king loved Esther above all the women*, etc.] The virgins he made his concubines, as next explained; though Jarchi interprets it of married women, for such he supposes were gathered and brought to him, as well as virgins:

and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; who had been purified, and in their turns brought to him:

so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti; declared her queen, and gave her all the ensigns of royalty: so it was usual with the eastern kings to put a crown or diadem on the heads of their wives at the time of marriage, and declare them queens^{f92}.

Ver. 18. *Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and servants, even Esther's feast*, etc.] A feast to all his nobles, courtiers, and ministers of state, on account of his marriage with Esther; which, according to the Greek version, was held seven days; but, according to Josephus, it lasted a whole month^{f93}:

and he made a release to the provinces; of taxes and tribute due to him, as was the custom of the kings of Persia when they came to the throne, as Herodotus^{f94} relates; so Smerdis the magus, that mounted the throne after Cambyses, pretending to be his brother, released them for three years to come^{f95}; and Grotius says kings used to do it at their marriage, but gives no instance of it:

and gave gifts: according to the latter Targum, to the provinces, all of them, that he might be sure that the people of Esther shared his favours, who were as yet unknown; but rather these gifts were given to his nobles, or it may be to Esther; so the former Targum,

“he gave to her a gift and portion:”

according to the state of the king; his royal ability and munificence, and suitable to his grandeur; and it was usual with the Persian kings to give to their wives whole cities for one thing or another, as for necklaces, hair laces, shoes, etc. ^{f96}; Socrates ^{f97} speaks of a whole country in Persia called the “Queen’s girdle”, and another her “Headdress”.

Ver. 19. *And when the virgins were gathered together the second time*, etc.] Some think this second collection is that which was made when Esther was taken and brought to the keeper of the women, called the second, in reference to a former collection of them, made when Vashti was taken and made queen; but as there is no proof of any such collection then made, rather the case was this, such was the lust of the king, though he had a queen he loved, and a multitude of concubine’s, yet a second collection of virgins was made for his gratification:

then Mordecai sat in the king’s gate; or court, being an officer in it, promoted by the interest of Esther, though not as yet known to be a relation of her’s: so *ψυρα* in Xenophon ^{f98} is used of the court of the king of Persia, as the Ottoman or Turkish court is now called the “Porte”.

Ver. 20. *Esther had not showed her kindred nor her people, as Mordecai had charged her*, etc.] As not before, so neither since she was made queen, (see ^{<1720>}Esther 2:10), though, according to the Targums, she was urged to it by the king himself:

for Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him: which showed great humility in her, notwithstanding her advancement, great respect to him, and a sense of gratitude for the kindness he had shown; and this charge to her was still continued by Mordecai, partly that she might not fall into contempt, and partly to prevent hatred and envy to the Jewish nation, through her promotion; but chiefly so it was ordered in Providence, the proper time being not yet come.

Ver. 21. *In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king’s gate*, etc.] Being, as before observed, an officer at court:

two of the king’s chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those that kept the door; of the inner court, as Aben Ezra, of the doors of his bedchamber; perhaps they were the chief of his bodyguards, as the Septuagint version; in later times, such officers were about the chambers of great personages as their guards ^{f99}:

these were wroth, and sought to lay hand on the King Ahasuerus; to poison him, as Jarchi and both the Targums; however, to take away his life by some means or another. Gorionides^{f100} says their design was, while the king was asleep, to cut off his head, and carry it to the king of Greece; there being at that time great wars between the kingdom of Greece and the kingdom of Persia, which exactly agrees with the times of Xerxes, and with this part of his reign, about the seventh year of it, what was the occasion of this wrath is not said, it is thought to be either the divorce of Vashti, whose creatures they were, or the marriage of Esther, and particularly the promotion of Mordecai, fearing they should be turned out of their places; so the former Targum.

Ver. 22. *And the thing was known to Mordecai,* etc.] But by what means does not appear; the Jewish writers say^{f101}, these two men were Tarsians, and spoke in the Tarsian language, which they thought Mordecai did not understand; but he, being skilled in languages, overheard them, and understood what they said; but, according to Josephus^{f102}, it was discovered to him by Barnabazus, a servant of one of the chamberlains; the latter Targum says, it was showed unto him by the Holy Ghost:

who told it unto Esther, and Esther certified the king thereof in Mordecai's name; whose name she mentioned, partly as a voucher of the truth of what she reported, and partly to ingratiate Mordecai to the king, that he might be still yet more promoted in due time.

Ver. 23. *And when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out,* etc.] That these two men had entered into a conspiracy to take away the king's life; full proof and evidence were given of it:

therefore they were both hanged on a tree; Josephus^{f103} says they were crucified; but hanging was frequent among the Persians, as Grotius observes, and better agrees with the word here used:

and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king; in a diary kept by the king's order, in which memorable events were set down, and might be done in the presence of the king, as well as the book lay open before him to read at any time; and this is observed to agree with the manner of Xerxes, who is reported^{f104} to sit on a throne of gold to behold a sea fight between the Grecians and Persians, and had several scribes by him to take down whatever was done in the fight.