

Esther 2

- Set in during reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes I), who ruled Persia from 486-465
- Susa, made capital of Persian Empire by Cambyses II (d. 522 B.C.) continually inhabited since 4200 B.C., settled since 7000 B.C.

The Feasts of Xerxes (1.1-2.18)

1. The Royal Banquets (1.1-9)

Ahasuerus = Xerxes I

First party – 180 days. Likely hyperbole. Who is invited? Who is not there?

Second party – a week. Who is invited?

8 the drinking – ancient sources (Herodotus 1.33, Josephus) describe the ‘custom’: whenever the king drank at Persian banquets, the guests drank. Here, guests did not need to wait upon Xerxes.

Third party – Queen Vashti’s fiesta for the women

2. A Queen Puts Her Foot Down and Pays the Price (1.10-22)

Lit. ‘when the king’s heart was good with wine’ – He was happily drunk!

Eunuch – the king’s most personal attendants, with access to the harem

13-19 Counsel of ‘Wise Men’ – ‘sages who understood the times’ – court astrologers

14 ‘saw the face of the king’ – Think ‘Order of the Garter’ or an Executive Committee

Memucan and the Seven; ‘access to the king’s presence’

15 ‘according to law’ – the value of law and order in Persia. Contrast this ‘law’ to Torah

20-22 The King’s Edict

20 ‘great as it is’ – not found in the LXX. The Septuagint edition of Esther contains 106 verses not found in the Hebrew *Tanakh* (Bible)

Here, “the Persian Empire is ruled inexorably by law, but it is not a law that can bring much assurance or stability or justice to those who stand under its mandates. It is both irrevocable (and subject to) the will and whim of a weak and unstable despot who seems to care about little other than his own pride and pleasure.” (Bush, *Esther Biblical Commentary* 355)

2.1-18: Esther Becomes Queen

2 virgin – ‘a young woman of marriageable age’, assumed to be a physical virgin

5 'Jewish man', a member of the expatriate Jewish community dispersed throughout the Persian Empire; 'Mordecai, son of Jair, . . . a Benjaminite'; name derived from the Babylonian Marduk; from the line of Kish connects him to King Saul, the enemy of Agag and the Amalekites (Haman)

6 lit. 'with the exiles who were with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had exiled' (Jer. 24.1; 27.20; 1 Chron. 3.16); 597 B.C.; of a noble or prominent family

7 lit. 'fair of figure and lovely of appearance'; Hadassa – 'myrtle'; Esther, from Persian *stara*, 'star'

What is the relationship between Mordecai and Esther?

8-9 How does Hegai treat Esther? What is happening with/to her? Did she volunteer for this?

12-14 The King and the Candidates: 'to go to' – in the OT, used at times as a euphemism for sexual intercourse (Gen. 16.2; 29.21, 23; 2 Sam. 16.21-22; Ruth 4.13; 2 Samuel 11.4); told with great reserve

Extravagant hyperbole! Like the description of the king's party, this is 'biting satire on the silly artificiality and frivolous extravagance of the Persian court' (Clines 289).

What does Esther do differently than the other candidates? What does this say about her?

14 'he took pleasure in her' is deleted in LXX

16 'to his royal quarters' is deleted in LXX

'the 10th month, the month of Tebeth' – the post-exilic community adopted the lunar calendar; Tebeth, corresponds to December-January; four years since Vashti's removal

2.19-23: Mordecai Uncovers a Plot

'the king's gate' – In the 1970s, French archaeologists uncovered a 13,000 foot gate 90 yards from the palace

'sitting at the king's gate' - likely means 'to hold an office in the palace administration'

23 LXX – 'to hang on a wood', refers to crucifixion

What is the relationship between Mordecai and Esther now that she is queen?

What might be the importance of this passage (2.19-23)?

OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

