



[Show Slide 1] What does it take to be a hero? These days, it seems like it's all about superheroes, right? Ironman, Black Panther – T'Challa and Shuri, Wonder Woman, Shazam. The list goes on! Who is your favorite hero? [Leader tip: tell your favorite hero!] Mine is Green Lantern; I love a hero that can form things with his or her imagination.

Here's the thing, I think we all get that heroes in the real world don't wear capes or have special powered suits.

[Show Slide 2] We're going to spend the next three weeks looking at a Jewish hero who is celebrated every year with the Festival of Purim to this day. She's one of my favorite heroes in the Bible, Esther. She lived around 2400 years ago during a time when the Jewish people were under the rule of the Persian empire.ⁱ

The book opens with the Persian King, King Xerxes, throwing a six-month party to show off his wealth and celebrate his kingship. Once that party was over, he threw a weeklong after party. He even made an edict declaring that no one could be cut off from the alcohol. It was a rager.

[Show Slide 3] *Esther 1:10-12 (NLT) ¹⁰ On the seventh day of the feast, when King Xerxes was in high spirits because of the wine,*

Bible language for drunk out of his mind.

he told the seven eunuchs

I don't know how to say this nicely but if you don't know what eunuch is, I feel like I need to explain it. You know how sometimes you get a male dog or male cat and take them to the vet to get neutered? To get "fixed"? Back in the day, they used to neuter the men who were servants in the palace so there would be no danger of them having a party with one of the Queens, if you know what I mean. It was pretty brutal since anesthesia hadn't been invented yet. Yikes.

he told the seven eunuchs who attended him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas— ¹¹ to bring Queen Vashti to him with the royal crown on her head. He wanted the nobles and all the other men to gaze on her beauty, for she was a very beautiful woman. ¹² But when they

conveyed the king's order to Queen Vashti, she refused to come. This made the king furious, and he burned with anger.

We like to romanticize Kings and Queens. We're fascinated by them as a culture. But this wasn't a romantic situation. Women didn't have the status men did, they were essentially property of their husbands, even if they were a Queen. And King Xerxes was livid that his property was disobeying him in front of everyone.

She knew she was taking a big risk refusing him. Why did she do it? There are a few possible reasons. Here's the big one: rabbinic tradition claims that when it says she was supposed to come with her crown on, what that meant was that that she should come with nothing on but her crown so the King could parade her around naked in front of his friends.ⁱⁱ

Is anybody else starting to think this King was disgusting? That he had no respect for women? Well, he wasn't done. He turned to his top advisors, probably drunk as well, and said:

[Show Slide 4] *Esther 1:15 (NLT) ¹⁵ "What must be done to Queen Vashti?" the king demanded. "What penalty does the law provide for a queen who refuses to obey the king's orders, properly sent through his eunuchs?"*

[Show Slide 5] *Esther 1:16-18 (NLT) ¹⁶ Memucan answered the king and his nobles, "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but also every noble and citizen throughout your empire. ¹⁷ Women everywhere will begin to despise their husbands when they learn that Queen Vashti has refused to appear before the king. ¹⁸ Before this day is out, the wives of all the king's nobles throughout Persia and Media will hear what the queen did and will start treating their husbands the same way. There will be no end to their contempt and anger.*

"Your majesty! All our wives are going to start thinking they aren't property if you don't do something! Women everywhere might start thinking they can think for themselves!" Sheesh. So basically, all these guys were disgusting.

[Show Slide 6] *Esther 1:19-20 (NLT) ¹⁹ "So if it please the king, we suggest that you issue a written decree, a law of the Persians and Medes that cannot be revoked. It should order that Queen Vashti be forever banished from the presence of King Xerxes, and that the king should choose another queen more worthy than she. ²⁰ When this decree is published throughout*

the king's vast empire, husbands everywhere, whatever their rank, will receive proper respect from their wives!"

The King thought this was a great plan, so he went through with it. Classy.

We have no idea what happened to her, but it couldn't have been good. The world was not a safe place for an unattached woman back then.

Meanwhile, King Xerxes sobered up and was a bit bummed about not having a Queen anymore. Granted, he probably had other wives, but no queen. So, his people said to him, *"Let us search the empire to find beautiful young virgins for the king."* (Esther 2:2, NLT) They went on to say, essentially, whichever one you enjoy the most can become the new queen.

There's a few things going on here. First, they believed a King could only marry a virgin.ⁱⁱⁱ Secondly, by enjoy, they meant sleep with them. And third, these "young virgins" were young. They were probably around 14 years old,^{iv} which is horrifying to realize. It's made even worse by the knowledge that King Xerxes was close to 40 years old when they started going throughout the kingdom and collecting these girls.^v One commentator points out that parents most likely "sought to hide their daughters from the lecherous monarch."^{vi}

Which brings us to the introduction of our hero part way through chapter two:

[Show Slide 7] Esther 2:5-7 (NLT) ⁵ At that time there was a Jewish man in the fortress of Susa whose name was Mordecai son of Jair. He was from the tribe of Benjamin and was a descendant of Kish and Shimei. ⁶ His family had been among those who, with King Jehoiachin of Judah, had been exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. ⁷ This man had a very beautiful and lovely young cousin, Hadassah, who was also called Esther. When her father and mother died, Mordecai adopted her into his family and raised her as his own daughter.

Esther was an orphan. She had lost her freedom to the Persians, she had lost her parents to death, and now she was about to lose any say in her future.



- What is your favorite reversal in a story or movie?
- What stands out to you from today's passage?
- What do you think it was like for Haman to have to honor Mordecai?
- What do you think Esther was feeling and thinking as she planned these banquets to save her people?
- Why was Esther's approach to the King so strategic?
- God is never directly mentioned anywhere in the book of Esther; should it be in the Bible? Why or why not?
- In what ways do we see God in Esther?
- Read Ecclesiastes 3:11. How can we know that God is in control? Is there a time in your life where you can look back now and see God was working?
- Read John 14:15. What does it mean to obey God?
- Why can it be difficult at times to obey God?
- What is an area that you need to work on to obey God? How can we help?



Week Two | The Villain

Esther 4:10-11, 13-16 (NLT)

¹⁰ Then Esther told Hathach to go back and relay this message to Mordecai: ¹¹ “All the king’s officials and even the people in the provinces know that anyone who appears before the king in his inner court without being invited is doomed to die unless the king holds out his gold scepter. And the king has not called for me to come to him for thirty days.”

¹³ Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: “Don’t think for a moment that because you’re in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. ¹⁴ If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. **Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?**”

¹⁵ Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶ “Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die.”

1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NLT)

Never stop praying.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM ESTHER:

1. TURN TO PRAYER
2. TAKE ACTION



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