



Where do you see yourself in 20 years? What are your plans for your life in 20 years? Just take a moment and think, imagining your life 20 years from now. What do you think it will look like? Keep this in mind because we're going to come back to that later.

[Teacher Note: You can ask the question below or if the setting doesn't allow interaction, you could show a clip from *The Bachelor*.]

ASK: Do any of you watch *The Bachelor*? Somebody recap for me: how does *The Bachelor* work?

The story we're going to be covering over the next three weeks is something like *The Bachelor* mixed with a soap opera on steroids. It has a *Bachelor*-style contest, adoption, attempted assassination, racism, attempted genocide, love, and danger. It's a jam-packed story. For the next three weeks we are going to look at the story of a woman named Esther. She was probably about your age – a teenager. She had her whole life ahead of her.

With her whole life ahead of her, I'm sure Esther dreamed of similar things to you all for 20 years down the road; a wonderful future with career, spouse, family, stability, and happiness.

We're going to see tonight that God had a plan for Esther's life that was bigger and better than anything she could imagine. From this we'll learn that God also has a plan for you and me.

[PRAY]

Let's set up the story a little bit. Esther lived roughly 600 years after the stories of David. David was king, his son Solomon became king, then bad things happened and the kingdom of Israel began to fall apart. In 586 BC, Jerusalem was destroyed and the Jewish people were exiled to Babylon. This means they were taken against their will from their homeland and spread out in Babylon. Then, Babylon was taken over by Persia and the Jewish people under Persia were allowed to go back to their homeland.

Some Jewish people choose not to go back to their homeland, but some did, and these people began to rebuild it. Then, after all that we get to the story of Esther.

We're not going to read chapter one of the book of Esther tonight, but I'd encourage you to read it this week on your own. Let me recap it for you, though.

The king of Persia was King Xerxes. He had a huge celebration for 180 days to show off his power and his kingdom. It ended with a huge party for everyone in town and Xerxes knew how to party. His party lasted seven days. You may think you've been to some good parties but none like King Xerxes parties. The king had all the food and drinks that you can imagine!

The king specifically set no limit to the drinking: a terrible idea! So, by day seven, people were pretty out-of-it drunk and then, just as now, people tend to make bad decisions when they're drunk. The king in his drunkenness decided he didn't want to just show off his power and kingdom, he also wanted to show off his wife, Queen Vashti. Vashti was a strong woman and said, "No, I'm not going to parade myself in front of your friends like a piece of meat." Good for her! But this, of course, made the king angry so he kicked Vashti out of his presence and took away her Queenship. Now we're going to pick up our story in Chapter 2.

READ: Esther 2:1 (NIV)

¹ Later when King Xerxes' fury had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her.

Xerxes sobered up and realized what he had done. But he had to have a queen. So, his advisors came up with a plan.

READ: Esther 2:2-4 (NIV)

² Then the king's personal attendants proposed, "Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. ³ Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful young women into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them. ⁴ Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it.

He was the king, so in his mind he could have anyone he wanted. And that's exactly what he did. He decided to search the entire kingdom for every young, beautiful girl. This is the first season of *The Bachelor* ever! This was going to be a tough competition because there were going to be a lot of young girls who wanted the shot at being queen. There would be a lot of competition and drama. This would be more vicious than anything you'll see on *The Bachelor* because not only would they get an eligible bachelor, they would get to be queen! They would have riches, power, and the easy life.

One of those girls in the competition was Esther...

READ: Esther 2:5-7 (NIV)

⁵ Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, ⁶ who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah. ⁷ Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

Mordecai was a Jewish man whose family was exiled to Babylon from Jerusalem. Mordecai has a younger cousin, Esther, whose parents died, so he adopted her and raised her like his own daughter. People thought Esther was gorgeous - like drop dead beautiful. Remember, that's what the king was looking for! He was pretty shallow, so that's all that mattered to him.

READ: Esther 2:8-9 (NIV)

⁸ When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. ⁹ She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants selected from the king's palace and moved her and her attendants into the best place in the harem.

Esther was taken as one of the girls for potential queen. But there was an interesting point that we may miss. The word "taken" is in a passive tense which implies that Esther was not really interested in going. She was taken

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