

Esther was taken

- Esther 2:1-18
- I told you last week that Mark Dever said the story of Esther is one long narrative illustration of Romans 8:28, which is the promise “that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.” And we see in this story God working out Ephesians 1:9-10, which says that He has made known to us “the mystery of His will, according to His purpose, which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.” Esther was part of that divine plan which finds its fulfillment in Christ, and as I read again this week how Esther and Mordecai are introduced to the story, I found it interesting the number of times in chapter two that it is mentioned that Esther was taken. She was taken into the custody of her cousin Mordecai after her mother and father died. She was taken into the king’s palace with all of the other young beautiful virgins in the kingdom. When it was her turn, she was taken to the king, into his royal palace. And finally she was taken into his heart as he chose her to be his queen. And all of that happened as part of God’s plan. Let’s look at this passage today under these three headings: the king’s plan, God’s people, and God’s providence.
- **The king’s plan**
- It was a beauty pageant, plain and simple. As far as we know, there was no talent involved in the competition. There was no also interview portion, sadly, because that would have given the young women an opportunity to talk about world peace or maybe world domination: “You’ll get those rascally Greeks next time, O king!” No. The officials of the king were sent into every province to find women who met just three requirements. They had to be young, beautiful, and virgins. They were then brought to the capital city where they were turned over to the king’s eunuch, Hegai, who had authority over his harem. Apparently he was the world’s most renowned beauty consultant and would spend a year helping these women get ready to be on the cover of the Persian Vogue. Six months with oil treatments and then six months with spices, and I have no idea what that means. The modern equivalent I’m guessing would be that these women who were already beautiful would have a total makeover. While this was going on, they knew that they were in competition with each other, and one historian estimated there were 400 women selected for the Miss Persia beauty pageant. Only one would be chosen to become queen of the vast empire.
- That was the king’s plan. And we cannot know for sure whether Esther was taken into the number voluntarily or against her will. Many believe she resisted, as the language in verse 8, “was taken into the king’s palace and put in custody of Hegai” could be translated that she went against her will. Who could blame this young Jewish girl, who had been raised to love and obey God? She knew that the end of this one-year process would be that she would be brought into the chambers of a pagan king for a night. But if Esther protested or put up a fight, that is not recorded. I believe instead she was able to trust in God, just as she had been raised to do.
- Charles Bridges, in writing about this story and the providence of God, said, “In inert matter, God acts with physical force. In brute animals, by instinct and appetite. In intelligent beings, by motives suited to their faculties. In His redeemed people, by the influence of grace.” Though this was not the path Esther would have chosen for herself, she trusted God who works through our circumstances to show His grace and to fulfill His purposes.
- **God’s people**
- We are first introduced to Mordecai in verse 5, and I love the simplicity of his introduction. He was a Jew who was the fourth generation of exiles from his family. His great-grandfather, Kish, was in the same group as Daniel, part of the group that had been carried away to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. Besides that, what do we know about this man? He was Esther’s older cousin and had taken her to raise as his own daughter after her parents died. (vs 7) We know that he was Esther’s protector, as a father should be. The story is told of a young woman who brought her

fiancé home to meet her parents for thanksgiving dinner. After dinner, her mother told her father to find out about the young man. The father invited the fiancé to his study for a talk. "So what are your plans?" the father asked the young man. "I am a biblical scholar," he replied. "A Biblical scholar. Hmmm," the father said. "Admirable, but what will you do to provide a nice house for my daughter to live in?" "I will study," the young man replied, "and God will provide for us." "And how will you buy her a beautiful engagement ring, such as she deserves?" asked the father. "I will concentrate on my studies," the young man replied, "God will provide for us." "And children?" asked the father. "How will you support children?" "Don't worry, sir, God will provide," replied the fiancé. The conversation proceeded like this, and each time the father questioned, the young idealist insisted that God would provide. Later, the mother asked, "How did it go, Honey?" The father answered, "He has no job and no plans, and he thinks I'm God!"

- Well, not so with Mordecai and his protection of his daughter. He protected her with wise counsel, we find out in verse 10, telling Esther not to make known to the people in the harem or in the palace that she was a Jew. He also protected her with a watchful eye, as we see in verse 11 that Mordecai walked in front of the court of the harem every day, in order to get news of Esther and how she was and what was happening to her. He was experiencing what every father who has a daughter possibly headed to marrying and moving out feels; only Mordecai's uncertainty was greatly magnified by the fact that they were living as exiles in a foreign land. We will learn much more about this man of God as the story unfolds.
- Esther's real name was Hadassah, which comes from the word that means myrtle, a lowly shrub, and the word means "fragrance." Humble, sweet fragrance. It's a wonderful picture of the character of Esther (whose Persian name means "star"), before and after she was chosen.
- What do we know about Esther? She was an orphan. That was God's choice. She was raised by Mordecai. That was God's choice. She was beautiful. That was God's choice. We talked about this two weeks ago, but I want to remind you that God makes each one of us exactly the way He wants to. Until we come to terms with that, we will be in a world of hurt. We will struggle with comparisons, where we look at how someone else was made and compare ourselves to them. Which then leads to a struggle with discontentment, where we wish we were taller or we wish we were fairer or we wish we had curly hair or straight hair or we just wish we had hair! Which then can lead to a struggle with bitterness, even bitterness against God. I mean, who can we blame for our height and hair color and complexion? The only one we can blame is God. But if and when we come to terms with the fact that God made each one of us exactly the way He wanted to, then we can be content, even joyful over that. Let me ask you, which is more valuable, to have wisdom like Mordecai, or good looks and influence like Esther? They are both valuable, and critical to the story. Have you been envious of another person's position, or appearance, or personality, or character qualities? We all have at one time or another. But if that is something you struggle with on a regular basis, I urge you to tell God about it and ask Him to forgive you for your discontentment with the way He made you. Thank Him for the way He made you, and rejoice in the ways He is using you for His own eternal purposes. I have had Hudson Taylor on mind since I heard in a podcast about this being the 150th anniversary of the China Inland Mission. Hudson Taylor was a small man, not even 5 feet tall, who did mighty works for God. But not without his struggles. When he was 52, and confined to bed and feeling forgotten, he wrote to himself in his journal, "So make up your mind that God is an infinite Sovereign, and has the right to do as He pleases with His own, and He may not explain to you a thousand things which may puzzle your reason in His dealings with you." When he lost his wife Maria at the age of 38, he wrote to his mother, "From my inmost soul I delight in the knowledge that God does or permits all things, and causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him."
- Esther was a woman of great beauty. As I said two weeks ago, it was her outward beauty that God used to open the door for her to be in the Miss Persia pageant. But it was her inner beauty that He used to open every door after that. What do we know about her character, just in this chapter?

- **She had a winsome personality**, and immediately won the favor of Hegai, the man in charge of all the young women, (vs 9) as well as everybody else. “Now Esther was winning favor in the eyes of all who saw her.” (15b) You don’t ever hear about the winner of the Miss America pageant also winning Miss Congeniality, but Esther did in Persia. She was not stuck on herself but obviously took an interest in the other women, and won their hearts.
- **She was a woman under authority**, exercising restraint and self-control in order to obey Mordecai’s command not to tell anyone of her heritage. (vs 10) We also see that in verse 20, when the writer reminds us that Esther obeyed Mordecai now, as an adult under his care, just as she had obeyed him as a child. “for E. obeyed M. just as when she was brought up by him.”
- **She had a teachable spirit**, asking Hegai to tell her what to take with her when it came her turn to see the King. (vs 15)
- **Listen! You cannot change your stature by one inch. But you can change your character.**
- **God’s providence**
- This beauty pageant was rigged. It was over before it began, because there was no way anybody but God’s chosen one would end up Queen. God made Esther beautiful on the outside. But because charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, and because a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised, God made her beautiful on the inside, using Mordecai’s loving parenting to train her up to be a woman who feared the Lord. God made sure that Esther found favor with Hegai and was advanced to the best place in the harem. God made sure that when it was Esther’s turn to appear before the king, the contest was over. We don’t know whether she was number 30 or number 300, but when her turn came, that was it. Verse 17, “the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen.” (vs 17)
- And all this time, her father Mordecai was watching over her. And their Father God was watching over both of them.