

## Wonder Women! Then and Now

## The Story of Esther

Do you like a good story – one that has love, romance, murder, mystery, deceit, trust and courage and, most of all, a happy ending? If so, read The Book of Esther! It has it all. It is like a fairy story. Esther is like Cinderella in disguise! Esther begins life as a young Jewish orphan and ends up as Queen of Persia. Throughout history many nations have attempted to exterminate the Jews, God's chosen people, and The Book of Esther is the story of just one of those attempts.

There are four main characters; King Xerxes, Queen Esther, Esther's Uncle Mordecai, and the villain of the story - the Persian Prime Minister, Haman. The events took place in 480 BC around the palace in Susa, the capital of Persia. Haman was a descendant of the Amalkites and their hatred of the Jews went back centuries. Mordecai, being a Jew, would not bow down to Haman and thus became the particular target of Haman's hatred. Haman hatched a plot to murder Mordecai along with all the Jews – genocide of vast proportions! By this time Queen Vashti, having greatly displeased King Xerxes, had been banished and the king, after what amounted to be an enormous beauty contest, had chosen a new queen, none other than Esther - the Jewish niece of Mordecai. Xerxes did not know that Esther was a Jew and agreed to Haman's murder plans. Mordecai heard of the scheme and begged Esther to plead to the king to rescind his authorisation of such a plot. In those days the protocol was that no one appeared before the king without an invitation so, as she had not been summoned, it looked to Esther like mission impossible! However, she plucked up courage, told the king of the plan to slaughter the Jews and, as the king was completely enraptured by Esther's beauty, he agreed to her wishes. The details of how she did this you can read in Esther chapter 5/6. (as ever, the way to a man's heart is through his stomach!). Eventually the Jews are allowed to defend themselves; they win the ensuing battles and save their nation once more. Haman is killed, Mordecai is elevated to a high ranking position and Esther's courage is rewarded. A happy ending to the story! Jews today still celebrate the Festival of Purim every March, which reminds them of how God saved them through the bravery of Queen Esther.

Who was the director of this amazing story? Where was God in all this? God is never once mentioned throughout the book of Esther yet, make no mistake, God is there. Do you think the events were a series of coincidences? Mordecai 'just happened' to overhear the plot being hatched - King Xerxes 'just happened' to choose Esther as his new wife - I think not. God was working in the background, making sure people were in the right place at the right time and that his overall plan would be fulfilled. In Esther chapter 4 v 14b Mordecai says, "Yet who knows – maybe it was for such a time like this that you were made queen". Those words are almost a subtitle for the whole story. Maybe they could be a subtitle for our lives also. Maybe God has set us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century for a reason. The theme running through our papers this year is that of Wonder Women having the power to change things. Esther certainly had the power to change things and, through God, used her power for the good of others.

For discussion;

1. Has God put you in the right place at the right time?
2. Can you see God's plan for you or do you feel your life is just a series of meaningless events?

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