



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION (page 1)

What, if any, parts of the historical context and back story to Esther were fascinating to you or helped provide further insight into chapter two?

How does Esther 2 appear without understanding King Xerxes, where he was at this point in his life, and how much he differed from his father, Darius the Great, and his grandfather, Cyrus the Great?

Attempt to put yourself in Esther's shoes – what do imagine she's going through in the months where she's kept waiting in the King's harem?

Though not discussed at length in the sermon, what can we learn from the fact that in light of her circumstance, Esther continually gained favor by those around her (Ester 2:9; 15-17)?

Agree or disagree – we are prone to misunderstanding or mischaracterizing others around us (as we can with Esther 2) because we are quick to assume everything is going well or everything is going terrible.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION (page 2)

Read 1 Peter 4:7-11. In what ways can we seek to become like this for one another? What would happen if our church were characterized by our genuineness and us being good stewards of God's grace? What does that look like? What does that mean?

As discussed in week one, God is not mentioned in the book of Esther. Perhaps we can envision, however, that much of her time spent alone in her room of the harem was spent as described in 1 Peter 5:7. Read 1 Peter 5:7-11. What is powerful about us taking these words to heart when we face challenges and circumstances that leave us feeling uncertain or in limbo?



Leader's Guide

ESTHER: Let's Get This Right

In Esther 2, we are introduced to our book's namesake, Esther, and her guardian, Mordecai. Traditionally, we read and interpret this chapter one of two ways: 1) Like the beginning of a fairytale, a Cinderella story of sorts; or 2) As a harsh condemnation of Esther for what's interpreted as her full embrace of pagan culture. With a much closer look at the historical context, however, one can clearly see how the aforementioned are either misunderstandings or oversimplifications of what is really at hand. Caught in limbo, her life hijacked by the desires of a struggling king, and unsure of what's to come, we can begin to see Esther for more than her beauty, in addition to discovering a valuable lesson about how we look at others – but only if we get this right.

OUTLINE & SCRIPTURES

Brief Overview of Ancient Near Eastern World Powers (Superheroes to illustrate)

Ultron: Assyrian Empire – Considered one of the first ancient superpowers, they were incredibly advanced in their warfare technology and military tactics. They are seen in Scripture as destroying the Northern Kingdom of Israel and exiling the captives.

Iron Man: Babylonian Empire – They conquer the Assyrians and have a short-lived reign, but their most well-known king, Nebuchadnezzar, conquers the Southern Kingdom of Judah and exiles the slaves to Babylon.

Captain America: Cyrus the Great (Persian and Median Empire) – A rising power from the east, Cyrus the Great unites Persia and Medes and conquers the Babylonian Empire. Cyrus is incredibly progressive and revolutionary in his social, political, and religious reforms. He is incredibly respected in Scripture for his decree that the exiled Jews in Babylon are free to return home.

The Hulk: Darius the Great (Persian Empire) – As son-in-law of Cyrus the Great, Darius eventually takes the throne and the Persian Empire expands in territory to extents that the world has never seen. The kingdom is enormous and remains progressive in its dealings with conquered regions, forming alliances, encouraging religious freedom, establishing governing systems, and much more.



The Reverse Flash: King Xerxes (Persian Empire) – He is the son of Darius the Great, grandson of Cyrus the Great, and yet he is so unlike them. He violently crushes a revolt in Egypt and sends for his son-in-law to effectively do the same in the tense city of Babylon. His disrespect for national deities in his empire and his dealings with Queen Vashti sharply contrast what his father or grandfather stood for. His massive failure to conquer the Greeks leads to his personal downfall and the eventual collapse of the once-mighty Persian Empire.

Review of Esther 1 – Xerxes shames Vashti and disregards Persian culture and his family's progressive ways

Esther 1:3-4; 10-12; 16-22

Introduction to Esther 2 – Xerxes retreats to Susa after failing to conquer Greece (battles of Thermopylae and Salamis) and focuses on building his palace and harem

The quest for the new queen and introduction to Mordecai and Esther

Esther 2:1-4; 2:5-7

Listen to the story with the historical context and background as our framework

Esther 2:8-18; 2:19-23 (quick mention of Mordecai discovering assassination plot on Xerxes – history nugget: he is assassinated later in 465 BC)

So is Esther 2 a Cinderella story, a lesson on how Esther compromises and becomes a shameful pagan, or something else?

Esther chapter 2 can teach us....

- That we ought not quickly read over each other like we can Esther 2, but instead have genuine concern and compassion for those around us (1 Peter 4:7-11)
- **Let's be a church that is characterized by our genuineness and how we steward God's grace.**
- To do as we can envision Esther doing during her period of uncertainty, perhaps akin to what's summarized in 1 Peter 5:7-10
- **Let's be a church built on our dependence on God and our support for one another**