

Act 1

Esther Chapters 1 and 2

Esther can be read like a play in which there are four acts. Just like in a classic melodrama, the first act of Esther introduces the characters and sets the scene. And the first act contains the seeds of the plot which is about to unfold.

It would be helpful to read the introduction to Esther in Thomas L. Constable's notes on the web <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/esther.pdf>. The notes are brief but they will help you with the background to the story.

What's going on in this section

- It is important to know that many scholars are highly sceptical of historical references in verses 1-8. This is a part of their scepticism with regard to the whole Bible and the possibility of God revealing himself. Regarding the book's unknown author, what's the obvious implication of all the historical references and the detail?
- If you only had the detail in these chapters, what might you say about the character of Xerxes?
- If Queen Vashti could have anticipated the consequences of refusing the king's request, what might this suggest about the public exhibition he expected of her?
- When Mordecai is introduced (2:5-7), what details are significant for the author?
- How do these verses show us that both Mordecai and Esther were of noble birth?
- How important is both 2:10, 20 for the rest of the story?
- If this was a classic melodrama, which character is lacking?
- It just so happened that Mordecai overheard a plot to kill the king (2:21-23). When you think about it, are there any other coincidences in these chapters?
- If Ezra 1-4:5 are events preceeding this time, what is the prospect of the Jewish nation at this time? If rebuilding the temple is

stalled, what does this say about the promises of God like that in Zech 2:10-13?

- If this was the first act in a melodrama, what role is missing?

What about us here and now?

- If all the detail implies accuracy/reliability of the story and the familiarity of the original author with this part of Persian history, what confidence can we have in the account?
- Why might God arrange for such a story to be kept accurately down through the ages?
- Can you and/or your group develop a rough time line that ties together events and expectations in Esther, Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, Nehemiah and Malachi? Have you learnt anything about the interrelationship of these frequently neglected books of the Bible?
- In the archaeological remains of Persia there are very, very few representations of women. It's possible the consequence of Xerxes' decree was an intensifying of extreme, oppressive patriarchy. Was he right or wrong? What's the problem with using Xerxes and Vashti as illustrations of relationship between the sexes?

So what can I do?

- If you are a married male, what presumptions do you make about your relationship with your wife?
- If you are a married female, what expectations do you have about your husband's behaviour?
- This is the first act in Esther's story, there is no mention of temple, sacrifice, priest, prayer or even God. Can anyone write a story about God without using religious words?