

Hello podcast listeners! This is Angie on your podcast dial. I hope yesterday you had an incredible Resurrection Sunday with your family and friends. Up from the grave He arose! What a blessing to celebrate together!

Today we start a journey through the book of Esther! These next 12 podcasts will focus on this 17th book of the bible, as we continue to gain insight from scripture on what it means to be on mission together.

Here is some background on the book of Esther:

The Author is unknown, but it is clear from the language spoken and details shared that the writer was a devout Jew. The book's events likely occurred between 483 BC to 473 BC, during the first half of the reign of King Xerxes. During this time period, the first remnant of Jews had returned to Judah, but Esther and Mordecai, along with many other Jews, had remained in Persia.

The name of God is never specifically mentioned, referenced or even prayed to within the book. Does that mean God was not present in the story? Is Esther just a secular book that was haphazardly thrown into the bible?

Let's explore! Esther begins with an introduction of King Xerxes. Here is what we know about him:

Xerxes was raised in luxury at the King's palace. Like most ancient kings, he wasn't elected by the people. It was his dad who handed him the keys to a vast kingdom. Which made him spoiled and extremely egotistical.

His empire extended over 3 million square miles. He ruled over people who spoke many different languages, had control over a vast army, and had a god-like status over the people that he ruled. In fact, he gave himself the title "king of kings." Though a powerful and forceful leader, he lacked in what we would call "people skills."

One thing we do know is that the King liked to throw parties!

Imagine the scene: For 180 days, people were encouraged to eat and drink as much as they wanted! The food was limitless and the wine was flowing freely. The party, followed by a banquet were held amongst the lavish beauty of the royal palace. It could be claimed that King Xerxes was showing off. Add arrogance to the fact that he had consumed several days' worth of alcohol and it was a recipe for a drunken disaster. As we all know, intoxicated people sometimes say and do really dumb things.

And seriously, 180 days equals 6 months! What's the longest party you've ever been to? I bet it never lasted for 6 months. #partylikeits1999

Pastor Greg Laurie gives some insight into what happens next, "So the great king decided to summon his beautiful queen, Vashti. She was to come in among the drunken subjects and be paraded about. Many Bible commentators believe the text implies that she was to come in naked, wearing only her crown. Xerxes was treating Queen Vashti like an object or personal

possession. To her credit, she flat out refused, not wanting to be humiliated. So, the king decided he was going to remove Queen Vashti's crown and replace her."

In a perfect world Queen Vashti would have been vindicated for her decision, people would have respected her and talked about what a virtuous woman she was. But what happens is a story we know well, having just celebrated Easter. We remember that Jesus Christ the Son of God, who was perfect and without sin was mocked and beaten and hung on a cross to die, punished when he did nothing wrong. Queen Vashti did nothing wrong but she was punished too.

In the book of Esther, God's hand isn't seen until the final acts are played out. But that doesn't mean God wasn't at work. In our lives we sometimes can't understand what is happening, but that doesn't mean God isn't at work. In our lives we sometimes can't understand why or what is happening to us. Sometimes unjust things happen to us, and it feels upsetting and confusing. It's hard in those moments to trust and rest in Him. In John 5:17 Jesus says, *"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working."* Always.

Chuck Swindoll, in his book on Esther, wrote, "God's presence is not as intriguing as His absence. His voice is not as eloquent as His silence. Who of us have not longed for a word from God, searched for a glimpse of His power, or yearned for the reassurance of His presence, only to feel that He seems absent from the moment, distant, preoccupied. Yet later, we realize how very present He was all along."

The same is true for us, friends. He never leaves nor forsakes. He is always at work behind the scenes. Now we see in part, one day we will see in whole. When we cannot understand or the outcome is unjust, we can trust He IS with us and He IS ALWAYS at work. Amen.