

Esther 2

An ugly beauty contest



We really don't dare to be naïve about this chapter. It can be airbrushed into a fun kind of beauty contest, just as with the notion that Jesus turned water into *non-alcoholic* wine, just because the truth is unpalatable to some – as if it is somehow beneath the Bible to deal with things we find so offensive. The bleak truth of this chapter is that scores or even hundreds of young girls were involved in this state-sanctioned trafficking and serial abuse. *And yet ...* God clearly used *even this* to forward his own agenda of grace, providing protection for his own covenant people (for which we must read on through the book).

Three sections on his chapter provide further background to that even greater drama, as *genocide* will subsequently be avoided.

➤ **The background of the beauty contest (1-4)**

Returning, most likely, from foreign *non-exploits* against the Greek empire, Ahasuerus *remembers* Vashti.

What thoughts and emotions might have been involved?

How realistic are his memories?

How accurate and / or how helpful are your memories?

Is it significant that *young* men came up with this plan?

➤ **The contest (5-18)**

What do you think of both Esther keeping her Jewish heritage secret? - while Mordecai was *known* as a Jew (5)? Is their joint collusion in this secrecy (10,20) compromise or wisdom? And if we are aliens in the country in which we live, are we always called to be *overt* followers of Jesus? - as in Mark 8:38?

How come Esther so routinely “wins favour” (9,15,17)? Is this just natural? Or is it God? Or is it both?

If Vashti refused to play ball to Ahasuerus' objectivisation of women, couldn't have ... shouldn't have ... Esther?

➤ **The conspiracy (19-23)**

How can Mordecai bear to be a relative high-up in a system which is clearly (at least in our eyes) so abusive?