

Esther 2 — The Orphan Who Found Favor — A Hidden Name, a Recorded Deed, and the Unseen Hand That Set the Crown

Esther 2: after Vashti is deposed, a kingdom-wide search gathers the fair young virgins to Shushan under Hegai's keeping; Mordecai the Benjamite, carried from Jerusalem with Jeconiah's captivity, has reared his orphaned cousin Hadassah — Esther — who tells no one her people; she wins favor with everyone, is crowned queen instead of Vashti, and Mordecai's exposure of an assassination plot is written in the royal chronicles; Persia under Ahasuerus (Xerxes I), c. 479–478 BC, the seventh year of his reign.

Chapter 1 ended with a throne empty of a queen and a king whose temper had cooled into regret. "After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her" (2:1). It is a dangerous moment: a powerful, impulsive man is brooding over a decision he cannot undo, and his courtiers — who helped him make it — have every reason to redirect that brooding somewhere safe. So they propose a beauty search. What looks like palace intrigue and royal appetite is, from the reader's higher vantage, the first move in a rescue that no one in the room can see. God is never named in this chapter — never named in the whole book — and yet by the last verse the pieces for the deliverance of a people are quietly on the board.

Hebrew Word Studies

yapheh (H3303) / tov (H2896) (יָפֶה / טוֹב) — **fair, beautiful (of form) / good, beautiful, pleasing v. 7 (also vv. 2, 3, 9).** The narrator describes Esther with a doubled compliment — *yephath-toar* (*yapheh*, H3303, "fair of form") and *tovath mareh* ("good, H2896, of appearance"). The first word, *yapheh*, is the same term used of Rachel (Gen. 29:17), of Joseph — "a goodly person, and well favoured" (Gen. 39:6), the only man in scripture given this beauty-language — and of the shepherd-bride in the Song of Solomon ("thou art fair, my love," Song 1:15). It is striking that Esther is drawn in the very words that draw Joseph, because their stories rhyme: the beautiful young Hebrew, alone in a Gentile court, whose looks open a door that faithfulness then walks through toward the saving of a family and a nation. The second word, *tov*, is the word God speaks over creation — "and God saw that it was good" (Gen. 1). Beauty in Hebrew is never merely cosmetic; it leans toward the good, the well-made, the thing fit for its purpose. Esther's beauty is not the point of her story, but it is the hinge God uses — the outward gift that gets the covenant child through the palace gate, so that the inward gift of courage can do its work later. The Lord is not above using an ordinary grace, even a physical one, to place his servant where he needs her.

chesed (H2617) (חֶסֶד) — **lovingkindness, mercy, loyal covenant-love vv. 9, 17.** This is one of the towering words of the Old Testament — the loyal, faithful, covenant love the Lord declares of himself: "keeping mercy (*chesed*) for thousands" (Ex. 34:7), "his mercy (*chesed*) endureth for ever" (the refrain of Ps. 136). Its home is God's covenant. And here it lands on Esther twice: she "obtained *kindness*" of Hegai (v. 9), and later "grace and *favour*" from the king (v. 17). The book of Esther never says God's name, but it cannot help using God's word — the very term for covenant-love keeps attaching itself to the covenant child, as though the theology leaks through the silence. What Esther receives is what Ruth received before her, another outsider-woman folded into Israel's story by kindness she was shown and kindness she showed (Ruth speaks of *chesed* three times). And it is what every disciple lives on: not wages earned but mercy extended, "the tender mercies of the Lord" that Nephi says "are over all those whom he hath chosen" (1 Ne. 1:20). Esther is being shown *chesed* in a palace of concubines because the God she cannot name is keeping covenant with a people she is about to save.

chen (H2580) (חֵן) — **grace, favor, gracious acceptance vv. 15, 17.** *Chen* is favor freely bestowed — the delighted, unearned acceptance one person finds in another's eyes. Its most famous appearance is the hinge of the flood story: "But Noah found *grace* (*chen*) in the eyes of the LORD" (Gen. 6:8), the first mention of grace in the Bible, and the reason a remnant survived. That is exactly the freight it carries here. Esther "obtained *favour* (*chen*) in the sight of all them that looked upon her" (v. 15), and then, decisively, "she obtained *grace* and *favour* in his sight more than all the virgins" (v. 17) — and by that favor a people will survive. The parallel is deliberate: as Noah's *chen* preserved humanity through a flood, Esther's *chen* will preserve the covenant people through a decree of death. And the word looks forward as surely as back. It is the grace by which the young Jesus "increased in wisdom and stature, and in *favour* with God and man" (Lk. 2:52), and the grace the Restoration recovered as the enabling power of the Atonement — "by grace we are saved, after all we can do" (2 Ne. 25:23), "my *grace* is sufficient for the meek" (Eth. 12:26–27). Esther does nothing to conjure this favor. It goes before her. That is what grace, in every dispensation, does.

sepher divrei hayyamim (H5612 / H1697 / H3117) (סֵפֶר דִּבְרֵי הַיָּמִים) — the book of the words/matters of the days — the chronicles, the book of remembrance v. 23. Literally "the *book* (*sepher*, H5612) of the *words/matters* (*divrei*, from *davar*, H1697) of the *days* (*hayyamim*, H3117)" — the running royal record of events. The phrase is the Hebrew title of the biblical books we call Chronicles, and it names something the whole book of Esther is quietly about: the written record that outlasts memory. Mordecai's deed is inscribed here (v. 23), forgotten by every human at the feast, and reopened by the king in chapter 6 at the one moment it can save a life. That is providence's filing system. And it is a pointed image for Latter-day Saints, because scripture insists heaven keeps its own such book. "A book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name" (Mal. 3:16). "The dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books" (Rev. 20:12). In the Restoration the pattern is explicit from the beginning: Adam's people kept "a book of remembrance... in the language of Adam" (Moses 6:5), and the Lord's word to the living is that "the works of every man shall be written" and none forgotten. Mordecai's unrewarded good deed, banked in a Persian chronicle, is a working parable of a deeper promise — that nothing done in faith is ever finally lost, even when the reward is delayed years, or a lifetime, or longer.

From the Chapter's Architecture

But threaded through the rise is a reserve — two things set quietly in place and left, unexplained, for later. The first is the hidden name: Esther's concealed Jewishness (vv. 10, 20), a secret with no present purpose that will become the pivot of the entire book. The second is the recorded deed: Mordecai's exposure of the plot, "written in the book of the chronicles" (v. 23) and then dropped. Neither the secret nor the record pays off in chapter 2. Both are seeds. The artistry of the chapter is that it plants what the later chapters will harvest — and it does so without a single word from God, so that when the harvest comes, the reader will look back and see that the sowing was never random at all.