

ESTHER

The Girl With Two Names | Discussion Notes

During this series we are going to dig into the Old Testament book of Esther. Start by talking about why it is important we read the whole Bible, not just the easy bits, and what we can do to make this a more fruitful experience.

- Why should we read books like Esther from the Old Testament?
- How do you find trying to read the Old Testament?
- How can get more from the experience of reading books like Esther? Any tips or ways of looking at it that have been helpful for you?

You can read Esther 1 and Esther 2:1-16, however that is quite a lot to read in one sitting. So you might want to encourage people to read these chapters in advance of coming and then give this synopsis of the story so far:

“King Xerxes ruled over the Persian Empire as a god. He had complete control over the largest empire on Earth and showed it off with huge wealth and a large harem of women. When Queen Vashti decides she doesn't want to go along with King Xerxes misogynistic and degrading parading of her in front of his drunk party guests, she quits. Hearing this news, Mordecai (a Jewish man who was so assimilated to Persian culture that he was named after a Persian god) suggests to his cousin Esther (named after the sex goddess, Ishtar) that she should try to become the new queen. Esther also had another Jewish name, Hadassah, which means 'hidden'. So whilst hiding her nationality and religion she attempts to gain the King's favour.”

Philip explained how the Persian empire was pluralistic (you could believe whatever you want as long as you acknowledge that Xerxes is also a god - basically you do you but just keep it to yourself), materialistic and hedonistic (they sought pleasure above all else).

- Which of these do you recognise most in Bristol culture today?
- Is it surprising to see our modern culture in the Old Testament?
- Philip also explain that Mordecai and Esther had a choice to either assimilate into the Persia culture or live as Jews and isolate themselves from society. Do you ever feel this pressure today?
- In Esther we someone who had two names - one that helped her to fit in with Persian culture and one that was her Jewish name. Do you ever feel like Esther, holding two identities and trying to fit into different cultures in different ways?

Finally, Philip explains that even though we don't hear God's name in this story, He is working in the background. So even though Mordecai and Esther are quite clearly broken and not perfect people, they are used in amazing ways!

- Why should this encourage us today?
- Have you seen God use you in your brokenness and imperfection in the last few weeks?
- Spend some time praying together, especially for those areas where we feel that we aren't getting in right. Pray that God would continue to use us in the next week, even in our brokenness.