

ESTHER

The story of Esther abounds with opportunities for the enterprising Presiding Officer. Within the pages of this book there are color, pageantry, intrigue, love and tragedy. The elements of contrast are numerous. The following article covers two of the least discussed contrasts, but Presiding Officers may add sections covering contrast between Esther and Ahaseurus, Haman and Ahaseurus, Haman and Mordecai, Mordecai and Ahseurus, and others as their time and energies permit.

If ever a story was interwoven by contrast upon contrast, it is surely the one told in the Book of Esther. Let us first consider the contrast that exists between Esther and the other young women "competing," as it were, for the queenship.

It was the custom that, having completed the preparation period, each young woman was permitted to adorn herself however she wished from a great collection of gowns and jewels. Each was permitted to enhance her own natural charms with as many frills and furbelows as she felt would catch the fancy of the monarch. Nothing was spared to provide each candidate with whatever she deemed necessary or appropriate. Each, in turn, bedecked themselves in grand attire to answer the summons of the King. Each, in turn, was sent to the House of the Concubines, there to remain until such time, if ever, that the King again summoned her by name.

ESTHER CHOOSES TO BE HERSELF

Finally, the young and innocent Esther approached the night of her presentation to the King. The fabulous gowns and gems did not appeal to her. Somehow, Esther was content to be herself. The long stay in the preparatory house, in the company of the countless fashion conscious young women had had little influence on Esther. She was herself first of all. She dressed herself in the simplest of garments, her radiant youth her only ornament. Her natural beauty and her unsophisticated and artless manner doubtless combined to endear her to the King. Ahaseurus set the crown of power and authority on the head of this young woman who rose above the artificialities of her ages to the grandeur of simple dignity. At an early age Esther had learned to "be herself."

ESTHER - ZERESH

Another woman in this story provides definite contrast to the lovely Esther. Zeresh, who was Haman's wife, was certainly in the next ranking position of prestige in Persia. As the wife of the Prime Minister, she surely enjoyed sufficient prestige and distinction that one may contrast their behavior without being unduly harsh in the analysis of Zeresh.

To begin with, one must briefly review the situation that existed between Haman and Mordecai. Originally, Haman's only complaint against Mordecai was that Mordecai did not afford him the courtesy of bowing when they encountered, however casual that encounter might be. Actually, the venomous wrath which this excited in Haman was all out of proportion to the "crime" committed. It was, rather, that Haman expressed his hatred for the whole Jewish race by his hateful vengeance seeking reaction to Mordecai's indifference to his position of power and prestige.

When Haman advised Zeresh, his wife, of the depth and extent of his aggravation over Mordecai's public slights, Zeresh advised Haman to build a gallows and hang the man! What a sharp contrast to the gentle, tactful measures Esther took to help Ahaseurus with one of his problems. When Esther realized that Ahaseurus was inadvertently sponsoring an intolerable injustice against a whole race, Esther originally only sought the preservation of her race. She did not suggest Ahaseurus that he "hang the man." However, as King, Ahaseurus subsequently did hang Haman for violating the position of trust which he enjoyed by attempting to exterminate the Jewish race.