

Introduction: Fairy Tale or For Real?

The classic tale of Cinderella has delighted the hearts of young girls and women of all ages for centuries. This enchanting story has been told all around the world and has thousands of variants. Surely, all the elements of a great narrative are present, yet we feel in our hearts that it is more than a tale. Has there ever been a historical woman who went from obscurity to fame, from injustice to redress, from fear to faith, from hopeless to heroine? Has there ever been a fairy godmother or, better yet, a faithful God who works in the shadows, unseen, yet all the while present?

As we journey back to 460 B.C., we find our answer, our Cinderella. She lives on in the pages of one the greatest books of the Bible, Esther. This incomparable biblical work was written by an unknown Jewish author from a Persian city. The author's primary intention was to "record the institution of the annual festival of Purim and to keep alive for later generations the memory of the great deliverance of the Jewish people during the reign of Xerxes."¹

As we look at the historical arc of Scripture, we find that this deliverance was crucial. The events that unfolded in the Persian city of Susa, the winter capital of the Persian court where King Xerxes was residing "threatened the continuity of God's purposes in redemptive history... the future existence of

God's chosen people, and ultimately the appearance of the Redeemer-Messiah..."²

God is undoubtedly at work in this fascinating book even though He is not explicitly mentioned. The omission of God's name is a unique feature, one that leads many critics to question the book's religious value altogether. It is clear, though, that our brilliant author was deliberate and intentional in his choice of words. His style served the greater purpose of highlighting God's sovereignty and control of every circumstance and situation we find in the book. It goes without question, God is moving even when he cannot be seen or heard. As Dr. Charles Swindoll writes,

"This is the wonder of God's sovereignty. Working behind the scenes, he is moving and pushing and rearranging events and changing minds until He brings out of even the most carnal and secular of settings a decision that will set His perfect plan in place."³

Ladies, get ready to meet one of the Bible's most courageous women. May her story be yours, and may her *once upon a time* awaken your heart to believe you also have been called "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14).

1. There are many women in the Bible, which one inspires you the most and why?

¹ TNIV study Bible. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001, 1840.

² TNIV study Bible. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001, 1840.

³ George, Elizabeth. Esther: Becoming a Woman of Beauty and Strength. Harvest House Publishers: Eugene, 2001. 18.

2. As a woman in the 21st century, being courageous and standing up for what we believe in can be difficult. Is there a female figure currently in your life, or who you have known in the past, that has inspired you with her courage and boldness?
3. What fact about this book of the Bible excites you most or are you the most curious about?
4. In what ways do you feel like this book of the Bible will challenge your faith and cause you to grow?

Move on to Study One Pre-Article Questions...