

A Royal Mess or An Act of Providence?

Esther 1:1-22 | Notes

I. The King's Pride (v1-9)

- We are immediately introduced to the most wealthy, prominent, & powerful man in the world at the time: King Ahasuerus** ("Ahashweros"; a.k.a. "Xerxes")
- King Ahasuerus reigned from **486 B.C. to 465 B.C.** and his empire was vast! It covered "127 provinces" from modern Pakistan (east) to Sudan (west). (Map)
 - We are told of an exceedingly opulent banquet held by the king that lasted "for many days, 180 days"—essentially six months!
 - We are also told **WHY** the king held this extravagant banquet: It was to "show the riches of his royal glory & the splendor & pomp of his greatness."
 - From the pillars of marble, to the couches & curtains of luxurious fabric, & vessels of gold—**everything was designed to display the king's splendor.**

Everybody loves a party, but this party was not without its POLITICAL purpose. The Bible is not the only place that we read about this great banquet.

- The annals of history remember this event as, "**The Great War Council of 483 B.C.**" The true purpose and goal was for king Xerxes to lavishly showcase the grandeur of his wealth, power, and authority in order to garner the support of his empire for a future war against the Greeks.
- Shortly before this, at "**The Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C.,**" Xerxes' father, Darius I, was embarrassingly defeated by the Greeks.
- The king wanted revenge and this opulent party was part of his plan for winning the allegiance of his forces toward that end.

But, it is not as though the officials and armies of the whole nation were all in Susa partying for six months straight.

- When we think of this grand banquet we should envision it this way: Throughout the time, various leaders and strategic army regiments from different parts of the empire would have their turn to arrive and feast with the king before returning home in order to make way for the next group.
- By the end of the time, the king's aim was to wine, dine, impress, and allure all the people he believed to be important to fulfill military his ambition.
- What Xerxes wanted most out of this banquet was for those leaders & armies to walk away with a clear sense of his ability to lead them to victory.

Toward the end of this parade of pomp & power was a final feast of "7 days" for "all the people present in Susa the citadel, both great & small". (v5)

- This final feast was a combination of:
 - A "thank you" banquet for locals who helped provide food, shelter, & other services for all the visitors during the prior six months (i.e. the "small").
 - A final, more elaborate, and more intimate banquet for his highest & most strategic leaders in the empire, (i.e. the "great").
- With his highest nobles all present, if ever there was a time for the king's authority to be demonstrated as beyond question the time was now.**

II. The Queen's Refusal (v10-12)

At (or as?) the climax of this extraordinary feast, the king gave a PUBLIC COMMAND for his queen to be brought before the eyes of the drunken men.

- v10 makes plain that the king was intoxicated. Notice: At a time when he is supposedly showing his power, he has been mastered by alcohol.
- Moreover, we do not have to speculate about the king's intention because the text tells us plainly: Queen Vashti was **commanded** to come "with her royal crown, in order to show the people and the princes her beauty," (v11).
- In other words, after the king had proudly paraded all his other 'possessions' before the eyes of his guests, he would now use even his wife like an object of conquest, by forcing her to parade around and be gawked at by the lustful eyes of drunken men.
- In this moment Xerxes was treating Vashti like nothing more than another one of his trophies of ambition which demonstrated, **NOT her value**, but his own triumph, **NOT her preciousness**, but his own power, **NOT her dignity and honor**, but his own insatiable pride and lust for approval.

But as the saying goes, "pride comes before the fall" (Prov. 16:18). With the attention of all of his most important nobles and military leaders all fixed upon him, the king's command is publicly, blatantly, and conspicuously disobeyed before the watching eyes of all.

- The king—who is doing all in his power to show the grandeur of his authority in order to solidify the allegiance of his nobles for war—was just publicly disobeyed and disregarded by (what would have been thought at that time to be) 'a lowly woman'. This would have been **EXTREMELY EMBARRASSING**.
- In an instant, the king who, only moments before, seemed to be so strong, so powerful, so prosperous, so certain and so unstoppable, was suddenly exposed as, in reality, being **weak, vulnerable, and impotent**.
- Perhaps the men began to think to themselves: "**If this king is conquered in his own household, how could he ever conquer the Greeks?**"
- It is not hard to see why the text tells us that, "**At this the king became ENRAGED, and HIS ANGER BURNED within him,**" (v12).

III. The Throne's Vacancy (v13-22)

With such a PUBLIC EMBARRASSMENT arresting the focus of all his guests, the king now seeks PUBLIC RETRIBUTION to vindicate him.

- King Xerxes desperately wants to publicly demonstrate that **no one can disregard his authority and get away with it—not even the queen!**
- So, he gathers all his wisest counselors together and asks them:
"According to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti because she has not performed the command of the King Ahasuerus...?" (v15)

The counselors begin by quickly getting the spotlight off of the king's bruised ego. (v16 "Not only against the king has Vashti done wrong...")

- You never know how an egomaniac like Xerxes may respond when he has been public embarrassed. History records times when King Xerxes beheaded his own people on a whim of his own minor displeasure with their performance. (i.e. Hellespont Bridges)
- Perhaps with this in mind, these "wise men" seek to divert the offense away from being centered on the king to being an offense against them all.

Moreover, they greatly exaggerate that what Queen Vashti has done will somehow incite a riot of unrest within the homes of the whole nation.

- They assert: **"This very day...the queen's behavior will be made know to all women, causing them to look on their husbands w/ contempt..."** (v17)
- Thus, they finally suggest the following resolution to the king's embarrassment:
"If it please the king, let a royal order go out from him"—(i.e. a show of force & authority)—"and let it be written among the laws of the Persians & the Medes so that it may not be repealed, that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus. Let the king give her royal position to another..."
- Thus, **through** all these events of **pride, power, pomp, humiliation, and abuse of authority, a vacancy for queen was opened in the empire of Persia.**

IV. Pointless or Providential?

At this point, perhaps it is fair to ask: **Why are the military ambitions & marital dysfunctions of an ancient Persian king of any importance to my life?**

- Another way to get at the same question is to ask: **Are all these events just random & pointless or are they part of God's perfect providential plan?**
- If you know the story of Esther, you know that this books is intended to show us that **the answer is the latter.**

1. All the events of chapter one happened BEFORE ANY THREAT WAS KNOWN or APPARENT.

- The point of Esther chapter one is not only to show us *that* the throne opened up, and *how* it opened up, but also & especially **WHEN** it opened.
- God was **already** working for the good of his people, subverting the will of their enemies and the might of foreign powers, even **before** his people knew their danger at all or did anything to try to obtain God's help.
- **Before** the trouble came, salvation was already being worked out through God's providential turning of events.
- **Before** the threat was made, God had **already** opened up the throne so that an obscure Jewish peasant girl would become queen and become the instrument on God's deliverance of his people.

2. To human senses alone, all this seemed POINTLESS, PETTY, RANDOM, & TRIVIAL. But it wasn't. And the same is true for the details of our lives.

- The daily motions of our lives, the circumstances we face, the people who have authority over us or whose decisions and actions have a strong influence on the quality and joy of our lives... **sometimes all these things seem random, meaningless, and without purpose.**
- We often ask ourselves: *Why am I facing this struggle? Why is this person being allowed to mistreat me? Why do I have this illness? Why did I lose my job? Why did my car break down? Why did I lose that opportunity I had been longing for? Why...why...why...?*
- The questions are endless, and sometimes to our human senses, our lives just don't make sense. The same was true in the days of Esther, beloved.
- **But we have the privilege of seeing the FULL STORY.** We are not only watching the events of Esther unfold in time, we get to know where they were headed & to see how they end. And they end w/ the faithful God keeping covenant & steadfast w/ his people & letting none of his promises fail.
- **On of the great lessons the book of Esther is intended to teach us is this: If we judge our lives & circumstances by feeble human senses alone—and not by faith in God and in the Word of his promise—we will always end up judging them wrongly.** (II Cor. 5:7)
 - We will end up *thinking the hand of God as absent* when, in fact, the wise & loving work of our Father is all around us in every detail of our lives.
 - We will end up *thinking the protection of God is lacking* when, in fact, he is always going before us to uphold, preserve and bless his children.
 - We will end up *thinking the voice of God is silent* when he has spoken countless promises to us in his Word and not one of them has ever failed.
 - We will end up *seeing the love of God as cold* when, in fact, he is working all things together for our good—even in our failings & sorrows.
- The statements I just made were **not only true** in the situations & circumstances which took place **in the days of Esther.** (Rm. 15:4; I Cor. 10:6)
- **The whole point of Esther's story being written down is so that you & I can know that the very same is true for all the details of our lives as well.**

3. The highest kings & kingdoms of this world are all under the almighty, wise, irresistible, and sovereign hand of God.

- Do not miss the picture your Father in heaven is giving to you in Esther chapter one:
*It was **during** one of the most elaborate displays of earthly wealth, power, and authority by the most powerful king on earth at the time, that your God subverted the whole royal mess by an act of his perfect providence in order use that king and his petty pride to bring deliverance to his people.*
- Beloved, our Father in heaven turns the kings and kingdoms of this world as he wills. (Acts 4:27-28)
- Our Almighty God rules and reigns over the heights and over the depths, over the breadth and over the length; over the past, over the present, and over the future.
- There is no situation, no circumstance, no molecule or monarch over which our God does not rightly say: **"Thou art mine and thou shalt fulfill my holy will and accomplish my purpose."**
- And he rules in unimpeachable and irresistible sovereign perfection over all things **in order to protect, defend, and prosper his people for their everlasting good and his everlasting glory.**
- **Psalm 33:8-11** | *"Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm. The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations."*



Application: (Proverbs 3:5-6)

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your path straight."

