

SBC – July 11, 2021

Esther 1:1-12

“Feasting with King Ahasuerus”

1

Author: Unknown. Suggested possibilities include: Mordecai, Ezra, or Nehemiah. The book is named after its principal character. Esther’s Hebrew name was Hadassah meaning “myrtle”. Esther was her Persian name meaning “star”.

We are not sure whether she was named after the myrtle bird or the myrtle tree or for some other reason.

Slide # 1



Slide # 2



Esther is one of two books in the Bible that are named after a woman. The other is Ruth.

Theme: God’s providential Care For His People

Outline:

Chapter 1 – Queen Vashti Deposed

Chapter 2 – Esther Becomes Queen

Chapter 3 – Haman’s Plot Against the Jews

Chapters 4-7 Esther’s Courage – Haman’s Plot Backfires

Chapter 8 The Jews Avenged

Chapter 9 The Feast of Purim Instituted

Chapter 10 Epilogue – Mordecai Exalted

Background:

1. Chronologically this book fits between chapters 6 and 7 in the book of Ezra. The date of events takes place after some of the Jews had returned from the Babylonian Captivity and the Second Temple has been rebuilt. Date of events are approximately 483-473 B.C. with date of writing perhaps about 450 B.C.
2. Esther was an orphan who was raised by her cousin Mordecai. Mordecai served as an official in the palace of the Persian king. This king's name in Hebrew is Ahasuerus but in Greek it is rendered as Xerxes. This king reigned over 127 provinces which including an estimated 2-3 million Jews.
3. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah had made it very clear that following the Babylonian captivity the intention of God was that His people return to their homeland (cf. Isa. 48:10, Jer. 29:10, 50:8). However, many of the Jews remained outside the land contrary to the apparent will of God.
4. God's name is not mentioned in the book of Esther, which is unique to this book of the Bible. There is no New Testament quote from this book. The context is SECULAR and relates to a people who are largely out of the will of God. And yet in that context God is faithful to His people and His promises, as He PROVIDENTIALLY cares for His own.
5. Although God's name is not mentioned, His PROVIDENTIAL hand is seen throughout the book. The circumstances surrounding Esther becoming queen, the circumstances surrounding Haman, Mordecai, Ahasuerus, and the fate of the Jewish people, all point to a God who is PROVIDENTIALLY working things out according to His own sovereign purposes.
6. The Feast of Purim was instituted after the turn of events that resulted in the fall of Haman followed by the deliverance and vengeance of the Jews. **Pur** means "lots". Purim is the plural of Pur. Haman had cast lots to determine the day when the mass slaughter of the Jews would be carried out. Lots would be related to the idea of "luck" or "chance", but in fact what comes through in this book is the PROVIDENCE of God. Purim is observed on the 14th and 15th days of the month of Adar, which is the last month on the Hebrew calendar and corresponds to our February-March (cf. Est. 3:7, 9:24-26).

The book of Esther gives us a segment of the history of the Jews which is not supplied elsewhere in the Bible. For instance, it is here that we learn about the origin of the Feast of Purim which as we all know is celebrated by the Jewish people to this very day.

– **Carl Armerding**

7. The words PROVIDENCE and SOVEREIGNTY are closely related in matters of theology. Sovereignty speaks of the fact that God is the supreme authority and ruler over all things. All is under His SOVEREIGN authority. It is a very broad definition and covers all things. God promotes some things, permits some things, and prevents some things; but all these things are under His sovereign control.

The word “providence” comes from a Latin word meaning “to provide”. “Pro” means before and “Video” means to see. Putting it all together it means “to see beforehand in order to provide”. Providence is specifically related to the PROVISION of God and the exact TIMING of His provision within the normal course of events by which He cares for His people. A miracle relates to God’s supernatural intervention whereby He bypasses the normal laws of nature. Both are great demonstrations of His sovereignty. There are no miracles recorded in Esther, but perhaps no other book in the Bible so strongly stresses the PROVIDENCE of God.

Slide # 4

Key Verse: Esther 4:14

Esther 4:14 (NKJV)

14 For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet **who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?**”

You see this has everything to do with God’s providential timing -His working just so for such a time as this.

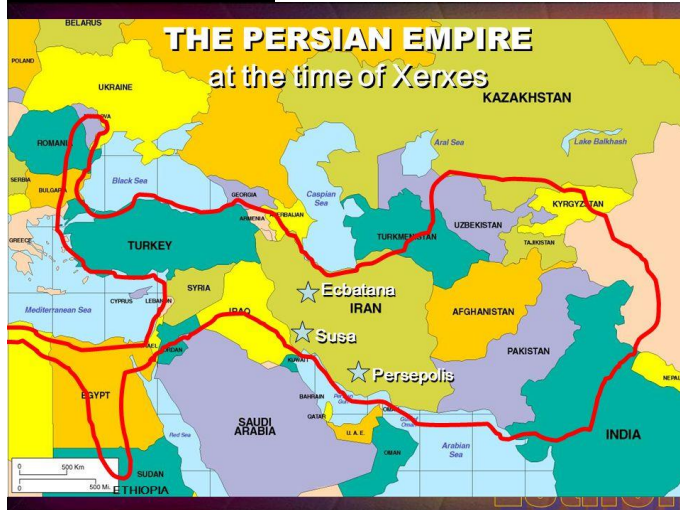
Esther 1:1–12 (NKJV)

1 Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this was the Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia),

Ahasuerus ruled over the Persian empire for 21 years from 485 to 465 BC (cf. Ezra 4:6; Dan. 9:1). One of the provinces he ruled over was Judah (Neh. 1:2).

India here in Esther 1:1 corresponds to modern day West Pakistan and Ethiopia to the upper Nile region including present day southern Egypt, Sudan, and parts of Ethiopia.

Slide # 5 – Map



Suffice it to say it was a vast empire.

2 in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the citadel,

Shushan (also called Shush or Susa) is in the southwestern part of modern Iran. It was one of Persia's four capital cities (cf. Neh. 1:1; Dan. 8:2). The word "citadel" means "fortified palace".

3 that in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants—the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces being before him—

The third year of the reign of Ahasuerus was in 483 BC. Commentaries bring out that right at this time he was preparing to go to war with Greece which happened in 480 B.C. So part of what may have been happening here along with all the festivities was that the king was building support for this coming war effort.

Persia was the dominate force but Media was also a main power center now under the controlling authority of king Ahasuerus. Media was once a separate nation but was conquered by the Persian king Cyrus the great in 550 B.C. Still Media and Persia were recognized as the centralized power centers as seen in this verse.

Slide # 6

4 when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days in all.

This was show off time and it was party time. This BIG SHOW went on for 180 days or 6 months. That is a lot of time to do nothing but basically flaunt your greatness. As it says here “showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty”. This was all about the king and HIS glorious kingdom – HIS excellent majesty.

5 And when these days were completed, the king made a feast lasting seven days for all the people who were present in Shushan the citadel, from great to small, in the court of the garden of the king’s palace.

After the 6-month celebration it seems there was a special 7 day feast just for those in this main capital city of Shushan (also known as Susa) and everyone was invited. This city was the site of one of Daniel’s visions as seen in Dan. 8:2. Remains of this city have been unearthed in the modern day city of Shush in Iran.

Slide # 6 (again - Susa)

6 There were white and blue linen curtains fastened with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars; and the couches were of gold and silver on a mosaic [Various colored patterns] pavement of alabaster [smooth/white/translucent], turquoise, [bluish/green] and white and black marble.

It was quite a sight! This was an elegant garden if ever there was one. Someone has called this “the most colorful verse in the Bible.” Beauty, eloquence, and extravagance” defined the moment.

7 And they served drinks in golden vessels, each vessel being different from the other, with royal wine in abundance, according to the generosity of the king.

What a great guy – free drinks on the king for everyone served in a most flamboyant manner. It was party time in the capital.

8 In accordance with the law, the drinking was not compulsory; for so the king had ordered all the officers of his household, that they should do according to each man’s pleasure.

Drinks were on the king but no one was forced to drink. The king was really seeking to raise his popularity level – again many think because he was strategically preparing to go to war against Greece. The emphasis here was not on the king forcing his way, but catering to “each man’s pleasure.” That usually gets politicians high ratings.

9 Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women in the royal palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus.

While the men carried on with their drinking party there was also a special feast for the women headed up by queen Vashti. And it also took place in the royal palace with special emphasis on it belonging to King Ahasuerus. Everything is strategically planned to make the king look good.

10 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus,

On the last day of the feast the king was feeling the effects of the wine – as the text says he was “merry with wine”. And in that context he commanded seven of his eunuchs to go and get Queen Vashti and bring her to the men’s main event so he might show her off too.

After all he was showing off everything else to make himself look really good – why not his good-looking beautiful wife?

Men were often made eunuchs to serve in relation to the king's royal harem because being emasculated they were no longer a threat to the king in terms of trying to seduce his women. And so verse 11 says the king dispatched them...

11 to bring Queen Vashti before the king, wearing her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials, for she was beautiful to behold.

Notice the king in his “merry” state did not think to ask Vashti if this would work for her – he simply gave the command. The spirit of this is in contrast to verse 8 where the emphasis is “each man’s pleasure”. Just from a common sense stand point it is never a wise move to force your wife to parade around in front of a bunch of drunk men. That is never a good idea. But when you are the king like Ahasuerus was, especially when feeling the effects of the wine, what is to stop you?

And so he commanded that Vashti be brought before the king wearing her royal crown. Now because of her refusal to come it has often been discussed WHY she refused.

Some have suggested the emphasis on showing her beauty may have involved some leud connotations, but in truth it doesn’t say that. All it says is that he wanted her to appear impressive with her royal crown. He wanted her to look good to make him look good.

12 But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king’s command brought by his eunuchs; therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him.

Oh boy, this was a really bold move. No one refused the king’s command. To do so was to put your very life in danger. It would be nice if we were told more about her reasoning and WHY she did not want to come.

Was it because she did not want to be portrayed as merely a sex object – the king's trophy wife? Was it that she resented being commanded to perform in this manner?

Commentators bring out that history shows that Vashti was in fact pregnant at this time with a third son that she would bring forth of Ahasuerus. If that is true – it might explain everything. Don’t ask a pregnant woman who very possibly isn’t feeling well to put herself on parade. Morning sickness and beauty pageants don’t go well together – especially forced ones!

An interesting note is that the son Vashti went on to give birth to later succeeded his father Ahasuerus on the throne. His name was Artaxerxes (cf. Ezra 1:1). Interestingly the son whom Vashti was pregnant with became a stepson of Esther.

Whatever the reason for Vashti's refusal it doesn't appear the king even bothered to inquire WHY. Being on a weeklong drinking binge does tend to dull the senses where common sense is out the window.

Slide # 7

Proverbs 31:4–5 (NKJV)

4 It is not for kings, O Lemuel, It is not for kings to drink wine, Nor for princes intoxicating drink;

5 Lest they drink and forget the law, And pervert the justice of all the afflicted.

Drinking dulls the senses and gets in the way of making sound judgment calls. The Bible doesn't forbid wine if used in moderation, but there is danger which is why the Bible says this:

Slide # 8

Ephesians 5:18 (NKJV)

18 And **do not be drunk with wine**, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,

As believers we are to be under the influence – under the control of the Spirit – not of alcohol. The Spirit-fill person and the alcohol controlled person are two different things.

All Ahasuerus, in his wine influenced state could think about was his ego, his party, his reputation. It was after all – all about him.

And so he was furious! His anger burned within him. He was really hot!

It is brought out that the whole BIG affair that had been going on for months capped off with this the finale of this all-capital city party was intended to build support for the king as he needed the all-out support of his men for the up coming war. It was all to show his greatness, but now he couldn't even control his own wife. This looked really bad. This was a terrible way to end these glorious festivities.

Ahasuerus intended Vashti to be the crescendo of the show, but it was ending in disaster. How BAD this made him look if he couldn't even get his own wife to obey his explicit commands. This really looked bad on him which is why he was so angry.

Just as a practical matter a little communication would probably have gone a long way in this situation. The king should have talked privately with Vashti to see what she was thinking. Maybe before just refusing she could have tried to reason quietly with the king. Both seem to have had some ego issues involved.

The king headed up this big prolonged party to the glory of himself. Vashti too had a major role as she too had a big feast for the women. Neither really brought this down a notch to talk reasonably with the other person. That is always the root of trouble. Communication is KEY in any relationship.

And when it breaks down people get offended (Vashti) and people get angry (Ahasuerus) and then bad things happen.

But here is the MAJOR thing as we consider where the story line goes. Neither Ahasuerus nor Vashti had a clue where this was going, but God did.

People get so wrapped up in their own little world and are totally oblivious to what God is doing. Through it all God was providentially at work through what I am sure both Ahasuerus and Vashti both thought was a disastrous situation. But God had bigger plans! It was bigger than Ahasuerus, it was bigger than Vashti.

And isn't that always the case. God's ways are not our ways – they are ever above our ways and consistently contrary to our ways. Kings think they are in charge, but in truth God ever remains sovereign and providentially He is at work in the background to bring glory to Himself in relation to His people.

Slide # 9

Proverbs 21:1 (NKJV)

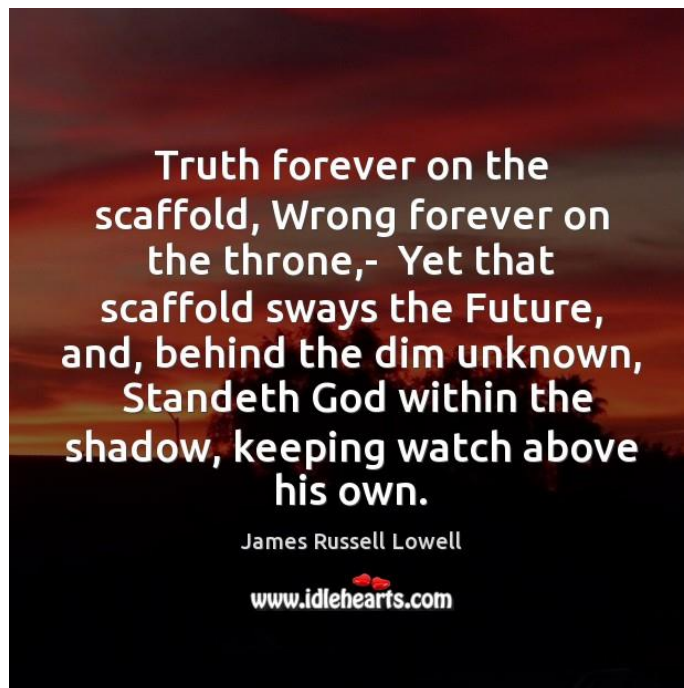
1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.

In these troublesome times it is good to remind ourselves that God is still Lord over all leaders and His providence always holds sway.

In truth its all about God! He ever remains the central character in all that is going on in the world! He ever remains faithful to His promises and His people – even when they are not.

We can rest easy in the providential care of God. Even when He is not named, even when He is overlooked, even when things seem really bad - no matter the circumstances or the situation God's providential hand can be seen by those Who see God's hand in everything.

Slide # 10



This is the central message of Esther: God providentially cares for His Own! You can rest in that reality! “***Behind the dim unknown, standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.***”