



Session 2 | October 19, 2016 | Esther 1:1-22

### Review of the Introduction

- Esther lived in the reign of Ahasuerus, who either Xerxes I (486-465) or Artaxerxes (465-424 BC).
- It is a book about Jews who rejected the right of return and thereby displayed a lack of dedication to their God and their faith.
  - There is no mention of God in the book of Esther.
  - In the relatively contemporaneous book of Nehemiah, God is mentioned at least 70 times.
- In the book we see God's care for the Jewish people even while they are out of fellowship with Him.
  - This care is always through natural means but under the control of His providence.
  - God does not work directly with the Jewish people when they are out of fellowship with Him. (See Dt. 31:16-17).
- The book of Esther, like every book of the Bible, must have some doctrinal instruction and cannot be viewed as history alone. As we look beneath the surface of the history, we will be looking for God's work with Jews living in a state of disobedience.
  - CI Scofield: *"The significance of the Book of Esther is that it testifies to the secret watch care of Jehovah over dispersed Israel."* From *The Scofield Reference Bible*

### The King's Celebration | Esther 1:1-8

- Verse 1 –
  - The setting is after the return of the exiles, and thus the Jews in the story had chosen not to return. In implicit prophecy, the book shows the providential care of the Jews during the period of their rejection of Him.
    - From JN Darby: The providential care of Israel when God is hidden from them, while Lo-ammi is written on them. He takes care of them while He is hidden from them and does not own them. God's name is never mentioned. The Gentile queen fails to show her beauty, and the Jewish bride supersedes her.
    - Darby also notes that it is "characteristic" that the book does not mention God, because God doesn't show Himself to Israel when she rejects Him. But, as per Jer 31:20, has a deep and abiding love nonetheless.
  - In all likelihood, **Ahasuerus** is a title rather than a name. The parenthetical statement gives support to this understanding, as it clarifies the **Ahasuerus** in view.
- Verse 2 – **Shushan** – (Notes based on Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible)
  - Also called Susa, one of four royal cities of the Persians (the others were Ecbatana, Babylon, and Persepolis).
  - The famous "Law code of Hammurabi" from the 12th Century BC was found in the ruins of Susa.
  - Nehemiah served Artaxerxes in this city.
  - Daniel's vision of the ram and the goat is set at the citadel of Susa (though Daniel received the vision in Babylon).
- Verse 4 – Likely, the 180-day celebration was something that took place around the Kingdom and was celebrated throughout the Kingdom, giving time for all the government officials to attend one of the events.

- Verse 5 - Josephus describes the event:
  - Now this feast was ordered after the manner following:—He caused a tent to be pitched, which was supported by pillars of gold and silver, with curtains of linen and purple spread over them, that it might afford room for many ten thousands to sit down. The cups with which the waiters ministered were of gold, and adorned with precious stones, for pleasure and for sight. He also gave order to the servants, that they should not force them to drink by bringing them wine continually, as is the practice of the Persians, but to permit every one of the guests to enjoy himself according to his own inclination. Moreover, he sent messengers through the country, and gave order that they should have a remission of their labors, and should keep a festival many days, on account of his kingdom. <sup>1</sup>

#### The Queen's Stubborn Refusal | Esther 1:9-12

- Verse 9 - It is believed that Vashti was the daughter of Alyattes, King of Lydia.
- Verse 10 - Clearly, the writer of this book had close knowledge of the affairs of the Kingdom.
- Verse 12 – Queen Vashti's refusal
  - Josephus says, "But she, out of regard to the laws of the Persians, which forbid the wives to be seen by strangers, did not go to the king"
  - Bullinger says the refusal is due to the fact that she was sent for by **chamberlains** rather than nobles, and to appear before the "people's feast" (v. 5) rather than the noble's feast (v. 3).
  - There have been dozens of speculated reasons that Vashti refused to come. In the end, all we can say is that she did not come, and this upset the King.

#### The King's Decree | Esther 1:13-22

- Verse 13 - There is no consensus on what these men were. Some speculate they were magi who **knew the times** by astrology, others say that they were simply wise in understanding the demeanor of the populace (like modern day pollsters).
- Verse 16 – The suggested response of the **wise men** – Three lessons about humanity:
  - Politicians have always worked to spin a story to their advantage and "never let a crisis go by."
  - People have always been too easily offended by things that are none of their business
  - Exaggeration of danger is human nature.
- Verse 19 –
  - The unchangeable nature of the "law of the Medes and the Persians" is only noted in Scripture. See also Esther 8:8 and Daniel 6:8.
  - The fate of Vashti is not made known in Scripture beyond this information.
- Verse 21 –
  - Further insight from Josephus: "But the king having been fond of her, he did not well bear a separation, and yet by the law he could not admit of a reconciliation, so he was under trouble, as not having it in his power to do what he desired to do: but when his friends saw him so uneasy, they advised him to cast the memory of his wife, and his love for her, out of his mind, but to send abroad over all the habitable earth, and to search out for comely virgins, and to take her whom he should best like for his wife, because his passion for his former wife would be quenched by the introduction of another, and the kindness he had for Vashti would be withdrawn from her, and be placed on her, that was with him. Accordingly, he was persuaded to follow this advice"

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<sup>1</sup> Josephus, Flavius, and William Whiston. *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987. Print.