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## Lesson 1 Esther 1:1-22

### Esther 1:1-22 (NASB)

<sup>1</sup> Now it took place in the days of Ahasuerus, (ay-HAS-eeoo-EHR-uhs) the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces,

<sup>2</sup> in those days as King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne which *was* at the citadel in Susa,

<sup>3</sup> in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his princes and attendants, the army *officers* of Persia and Media, the nobles and the princes of his provinces being in his presence.

<sup>4</sup> And he displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty for many days, 180 days.

<sup>5</sup> When these days were completed, the king gave a banquet lasting seven days for all the people who were present at the citadel in Susa, from the greatest to the least, in the court of the garden of the king's palace.

<sup>6</sup> *There were hangings of fine white and violet linen held by cords of fine purple linen on silver rings and marble columns, and couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and precious stones.*

<sup>7</sup> Drinks were served in golden vessels of various kinds, and the royal wine was plentiful according to the king's bounty.

<sup>8</sup> The drinking was *done* according to the law, there was no compulsion, for so the king had given orders to each official of his household that he should do according to the desires of each person.

<sup>9</sup> Queen Vashti(vas ti) also gave a banquet for the women in the palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus.

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

<sup>11</sup> to bring Queen Vashti before the king with *her* royal crown in order to display her beauty to the people and the princes, for she was beautiful.

<sup>12</sup> But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. Then the king became very angry and his wrath burned within him.

<sup>13</sup> Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times—for it was the custom of the king so *to speak* before all who knew law and justice

<sup>14</sup> and were close to him: Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media who had access to the king's presence and sat in the first place in the kingdom—

<sup>15</sup> "According to law, what is to be done with Queen Vashti, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus *delivered* by the eunuchs?"

<sup>16</sup> In the presence of the king and the princes, Memucan said, "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but *also* all the princes and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.

<sup>17</sup> "For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women causing them to look with contempt on their husbands by saying, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in to his presence, but she did not come.'

<sup>18</sup> "This day the ladies of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's conduct will speak in *the same way* to all the king's princes, and there will be plenty of contempt and anger.

<sup>19</sup> "If it pleases the king, let a royal edict be issued by him and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media so that it cannot be repealed, that Vashti may no longer come into the presence

of King Ahasuerus, and let the king give her royal position to another who is more worthy than she.

<sup>20</sup> "When the king's edict which he will make is heard throughout all his kingdom, great as it is, then all women will give honor to their husbands, great and small."

<sup>21</sup> *This* word pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed.

<sup>22</sup> So he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province according to its script and to every people according to their language, that every man should be the master in his own house and the one who speaks in the language of his own people.

## Commentary

### I. ESTHER PLACED IN A POSITION OF PROMINENCE ([1:1-2:20](#))

This first major section of the book describes the need for God's deliverance of His people, and the background of that deliverance. Undoubtedly many of the original readers, like readers today, would be helped by knowing the background of the story. The author described in some detail the setting of the Persian banquet and the reasons Esther came into a prominent position. Besides carefully conveying historical facts, the author was also a good narrator.

#### A. Vashti deposed by Xerxes ([chap. 1](#))

##### 1. THE KING'S 187-DAY CELEBRATION ([1:1-9](#))

[1:1](#). The account opens with the mention of **Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces... from India to Cush** (cf. [8:9](#)). Xerxes, called Ahasuerus throughout the Hebrew text of Esther (cf. NIV marg.), ruled the Persian Empire for 21 years from 485 to 465 B.C. He is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible only in [Ezra 4:6](#) and [Daniel 9:1](#). The vast extent of his empire has been confirmed by several outside sources which state the size of that empire in similar words (see the map "[The Persian Empire](#)," near [Ezra 1:1](#)). Judah was one of the provinces over which the king ruled (cf. [Neh. 1:2](#)). "India" corresponds to present-day West Pakistan; "Cush" was a term for the upper Nile region which included present-day southern Egypt, all of Sudan, and northern Ethiopia.

[1:2](#). **King Xerxes** had an elaborate palace in Persepolis as well as a winter **citadel** (palace) in **Susa** (cf. [Neh. 1:1](#)). Persepolis and Ecbatana ([Ezra 6:2](#)) were other major cities in the Persian Empire (see the map "[The Persian Empire](#)," near [Ezra 1:1](#)). An inscription from the time of Xerxes' son Artaxerxes noted that the palace was destroyed by fire sometime in Artaxerxes' reign. Reference in [Esther 1:2](#) to this citadel has been confirmed by archeological work at Susa. An author from a later period probably would not have known about the palace so it can be inferred that the author of this book was someone who was close to the events chronologically.

[1:3-4](#). **In the third year of his reign** (483 B.C.) Xerxes **gave a banquet** to which he invited **his nobles and officials** as well as **military leaders... princes, and nobles of the provinces**. Mention of these leaders fits the known fact that the Persian Empire had a large administrative system. Though not stated, this banquet probably corresponds to the great feast Xerxes gave

when he was planning to invade Greece. According to Herodotus it took Xerxes four years to get ready for the invasion he launched in 481. (Herodotus' four years would extend from the beginning of Xerxes' reign in 485.) No doubt the **180 days** involved planning sessions in which all the provinces' leaders were being prepared for the war effort, as well as being impressed with Xerxes' **wealth** and **splendor**. The campaign was to be a costly affair.

The Book of Esther says nothing about Xerxes' invasion of Greece, but other sources state that he wanted to avenge his father's defeat at Marathon near Athens. Xerxes' immense fleet defeated the Greeks at Thermopylae but was defeated at the famous Battle of Salamis in 480 B.C. and the Battle of Plataea in 479. He had to retreat home. Esther gained the favor of the king in 479 B.C., the seventh year of his reign ([2:16](#)). This would have been after his defeat by Greece. Thus these events recorded in Esther fit the facts known from secular sources.

[1:5-9](#). At the end of the 180 days Xerxes gave another **banquet**; this one lasted **seven days** for **people** in **Susa**. Both great and small were invited. The descriptions of the decor of the king's palace **garden** ([vv. 6-7](#)) add to the feeling that the writer had firsthand knowledge of the setting and the occasion. Perhaps Mordecai was among the guests at the seven-day banquet. **Linen... silver, and marble, and other costly stones** are known to have been used in Persia, and Persian **couches** (cf. [7:8](#)) **of gold and silver** were referred to by Herodotus. **Blue** and **white** were the royal colors (cf. [8:15](#)). Drinking vessels (**goblets**) of expensive material were a Persian luxury. The feast was livened by the fact that any **guest** could **drink in his own way**, that is, he could drink as much or as little as he desired. In other words the king was liberal with the **wine**. Meanwhile **Queen Vashti** was giving a separate **banquet for the women**. Separate banquets were not unusual in that culture.

## 2. VASHTI DEPOSED ([1:10-22](#))

[1:10-12](#). Xerxes told his **seven eunuchs** (cf. [6:14](#)) **to bring... Vashti** into his banquet hall so that **her beauty** could be admired by the male guests. **But** she **refused to come**. One of the eunuchs named here is referred to later (**Harbona** in [7:9](#)). This order was given **on the seventh day**, that is, the last day of the feast which had turned into a drunken party. The mention of "seven eunuchs" serving the king fits the era in which the account took place. It was a well-known practice then for young men who served the **king** to be castrated so they would have no illusions of starting their own dynasties.

Vashti's refusal is not explained by the author. There is no implication that the king wanted her to do anything immoral or to expose herself. Perhaps she simply did not wish to be in mixed company at that time. It has been suggested that if this queen was Amestris, perhaps she refused to go to the banquet because she was pregnant with Artaxerxes, who was born in 483. Regardless of the reason for her refusal, her action was a breach of etiquette. **The king** was used to getting whatever he desired whenever he desired it. Therefore her response made him **furious** (cf. [7:7](#)).

[1:13-15](#). **The king** consulted **wise men** about what he should do. These **seven men had special access to the king** and were the ones who knew the **law** well. Herodotus has confirmed the fact that this use of wise men was a feature of ancient Near Eastern courts. Throughout the ancient Near East wise men played important roles in governments (e.g., Daniel's position in the

Babylonian and Persian Empires). The crime the **queen** had committed was that she disobeyed a **command** of the king. Obviously **the king** and queen did not share an emotionally intimate relationship. This was true of **Xerxes** and the women in his harem. This is again apparent later when Esther noted to Mordecai that she had not even seen the king for a month and was afraid to ask to see him ([4:11](#)).

[1:16-22](#). **Memucan**, one of Xerxes' wise men, suggested that he have the **queen** deposed ([v. 19](#)) so that other noble **women** ([v. 18](#)) of the empire (and in fact **all the women**, [v. 20](#)) would not follow Vashti's example and **despise their husbands** ([v. 17](#)) and the empire be filled with female **disrespect and marital discord** ([v. 18](#)). It is difficult to see how this punishment would cause the women of the empire to **respect their husbands** but that was the idea behind the decree. This is partially explained by the fact that the men had been drinking heavily ([v. 10](#)). (The words "if it pleases the king" occur nine times in the OT, seven of them in the Book of Es.: [Neh. 2:5, 7](#); Es. [1:19; 3:9; 5:4, 8; 7:3](#) ["your majesty" is lit., "the king"] [8:5; 9:13](#).)

The idea **pleased the king and his nobles** so an edict was sent throughout the empire in various languages (cf. [3:12](#)), stating **that every man should be ruler over his own household**. A vast relay communications system, something like an ancient pony express, made it possible to spread news throughout the empire quickly (cf. [3:13; 8:10](#)). This bit of information helps set the stage for the rise of Esther.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

### Open it

1. What do you think are some of the drawbacks of having status and power?

**Being under the eye of the public, just waiting for you to make a mistake**

### Explore it

2. Why did the king want Queen Vashti to leave her own banquet to come to his? ([1:11](#))

**To display her beauty to his people and princes**

3. How did Queen Vashti respond to the king's command? ([1:12](#))

**She refused and make the King very angry**

4. Whom did the king consult about what to do about the queen's disobedience? ([1:13-14](#))

**Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times—for it was the custom of the king so to speak before all who knew law and justice and were close to him: Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media who had access to the king's presence and sat in the first place in the kingdom—**

5. What fear did the wise men have about the ramifications of Queen Vashti's behavior? ([1:17-18](#))

**"For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women causing them to look with contempt on their husbands by saying, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in to his presence, but she did not come.' 'This day the ladies of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's conduct will speak in *the same way* to all the king's princes, and there will be plenty of contempt and anger.**

6. How did Vashti's actions affect all the women in the kingdom? ([1:22](#))

**So he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province according to its script and to every people according to their language, that every man should be the master in his own house and the one who speaks in the language of his own people.**

### **Get it**

7. Why was it so important to the king that he punish the queen for her disobedience?

**To keep the women from causing trouble in the land for their husbands**

8. In what ways have you seen your own actions influence other Christians or nonbelievers?

**I was the one with more patience at work, who tried to allow things to work out**

### **Apply it**

9. What can you do today to set an example for someone else?

**Continue following the ways I believe God wants me to**

10. What sacrifices are you willing to make in the next few weeks to stand up for what is right?

**Battle the orge's of the five kingdoms.**