

STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF ESTHER
A Study of Esther 1:1-22
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Introduction

- This OT book is named after Queen Esther of Persia, the central character and heroine of the story.
- Esther’s original Hebrew name was “Hadassah” (“myrtle”); she was given the Persian name “Esther” (“star”) by Mordecai, her adopted uncle (**Est. 2:7**), most likely to hide her Jewish ancestry (**Est. 2:10**).
- Because the author seems to have a detailed knowledge of Persian court affairs, Mordecai is the possible writer of this book, given that he, as a main character, served as a court official and prime minister in Persia (**Est. 2:11; 2:19; 2:21-23; 3:2-5; 4:1-2; 4:6; 5:13; 8:1-2; 8:7-10; 8:15; 9:3-4; 9:20; 9:31; 10:3**).
- This OT book was probably written and completed in terms of its compilation in the **mid-470s BC**.
- The historical setting of this OT book takes place during the reign of the Persian king Ahasuerus, who is also called Xerxes (**PK 598**), who reigned from 486-465 BC; the Ahasuerus of Esther and Ezra (**Ezra 4:6**) is not the same Ahasuerus that is mentioned in the book of Daniel (**Dan. 9:1**).
- The main message of this OT book is to show how God used a beautiful, courageous woman from humble beginnings to be a timely instrument of deliverance for the Jewish people during a great crisis.
- This main message is demonstrated by two key phrases that are mentioned in the book: “who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (**Est. 4:14**) and “so I will go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish” (**Est. 4:16**).

General Outline of the Book

1. **Esther 1:1-2:20 – Esther’s Rise as Queen of Persia**
 - An Official Feast Held by Ahasuerus (**1:1-9**)
 - Vashti’s Refusal and Removal as Queen (**1:10-22**)
 - Ahasuerus’ Search for a New Queen (**2:1-11**)
 - Esther Chosen as the New Queen (**2:12-20**)
2. **Esther 2:21-3:15 – Haman’s Plot Against the Jews**
 - Mordecai Saves the Life of Ahasuerus (**2:21-23**)
 - Haman’s Promotion and Hatred of Mordecai (**3:1-5**)
 - Haman’s Plan for Revenge against Mordecai (**3:6-11**)
 - Haman’s Decree to Exterminate the Jews (**3:12-15**)
3. **Esther 4:1-5:8 – Esther Stands for the Jewish People**
 - The Jewish Fast in Response to Haman’s Decree (**4:1-3**)
 - Mordecai Appeals to Esther for Help in the Crisis (**4:4-14**)
 - Esther Chooses to Go in to the King Uninvited (**4:15-17**)
 - Esther Holds a Banquet for Ahasuerus and Haman (**5:1-8**)
4. **Esther 5:9-7:10 – The Fall and Execution of Haman**
 - Haman’s Plot to Execute Mordecai (**5:9-14**)
 - Ahasuerus is Reminded of Mordecai’s Loyalty (**6:1-3**)
 - Haman’s Plot is Discovered by Ahasuerus (**6:4-7:8**)
 - Haman and His Sons are Found Guilty and Executed (**7:9-10**)
5. **Esther 8:1-10:3 – The Triumph and Deliverance of the Jews**

- Haman's Decree is Countermanded to Protect the Jews (8:1-14)
- The Deliverance and Rejoicing of the Jewish People (8:15-9:19)
- The Proclamation of the Jewish Feast of Purim (9:20-32)
- Mordecai Becomes the Prime Minister of Persia (10:1-3)

Reflections on Esther 1:1-12

- Ahasuerus (Xerxes), king of Persia, reigned over a vast territory consisting of 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia; in the 3rd year of his reign (483-482 BC), he held a 180-day feast for his princes of the provinces; the king showed his vast riches and wealth his servants; when this six-month feast ended, Ahasuerus held another seven-day feast for the people who were employed in his Shushan palace, no matter their status.
- During this time, Queen Vashti also held a feast for the women of Ahasuerus' harem; on the 7th day of this second feast, Ahasuerus commanded Vashti to appear wearing her crown so that he could show off her beauty to his servants; Vashti refused the king's command, which made him very upset.
- The reason for her refusal is not mentioned, but it is possible that the king wanted Vashti to give an immodest, immoral display of her beauty (*SDABC*, 3:465); she knew that the king and his servants were intoxicated with alcoholic wine, and were not thinking clearly; perhaps she felt that once the king became sober, he would understand her refusal and commend her course of action (*CC* 243).

Reflections on Esther 1:13-22

- Angry at Vashti's refusal, Ahasuerus consulted with his wise men, who were familiar with the laws and policies of the kingdom; these wise men included the top seven princes of Persia (Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan); he asked them for their advice on how they should deal with Vashti's refusal to follow the king's request.
- Memucan mentioned to the king that Vashti had not just offended the king, but all of the people of the empire, in the sense that her actions would encourage women to despise their husbands and rebel against their wishes; he suggested to the king that Vashti not be allowed to appear before the king any longer, and that her royal estate be given to another woman of the king's choosing; Memucan suggested that this decree would motivate wives in the Persian Empire to honor their husbands with respect.
- Memucan's suggestion pleased Ahasuerus and the other princes; the king passed a decree that was sent to every province in the empire; this decree required that all wives in the kingdom serve render their husbands due honor and respect (i.e. seemingly obey their every wish); this decree was published and translated into every language of the various peoples in the Persian Empire.

Lessons from Esther 1:1-22

- Evil results can come from indulging in the use of intoxicating wine; the marriage relationship is sacred; husbands and wives are involved in an equal partnership; husbands are not to lord over their wives.
- Vashti's refusal to appear before the king stemmed from the fact that the king and his princes were imbibing in alcoholic wine and intended for her to display her physical beauty, possibly in an inappropriate and elicited manner; she is to be commended for refusing to comply with the king's request.
- Vashti's exile shows also that, at times, there are consequences for standing for our convictions; Vashti stood for her beliefs, and paid a heavy price by losing her position as queen; there are consequences at times when faithful believers stand for their religious convictions.
- Vashti's exile also prepared the way for Esther to later become queen and expedite the deliverance of the Jewish people from Haman's evil plot; it is also interesting that Vashti refused to come before the king at his command, and was shown disfavor through her exile; however, Esther later came in to the king uninvited (which was a huge risk), and yet was shown favor by the king.
- **Summary lessons** – (1) we should not drink alcoholic wine (it makes us too impressionable to the wrong suggestions of others, among other things); (2) we should have the courage to stand for our convictions; (3) we should not show off our possessions to look good in front of others; (4) we should not objectify people for show (our spouses should not be "trophy" spouses); and (5) marriage is an equal partnership between husbands and wives (neither spouse is to lord over or control the other).