

ESTHER 1

THE FEAST OF AHASUERUS

The Book of Esther is a very singular narrative among the historical records of the Bible! It contains an interesting memoir of that part of the Jewish history which concerns those persons who did not return to Jerusalem when they were permitted to do so in the reign of King Cyrus of Persia. The main subjects of this Book are the danger to which this group of God's people was exposed by the hatred of their enemies, and the Lord's watchful care over His people in the wonders of His Providence. The whole narrative confirms the Psalmist's observation in Psalm 37:12-13: "The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him; he sees that his day is coming!"

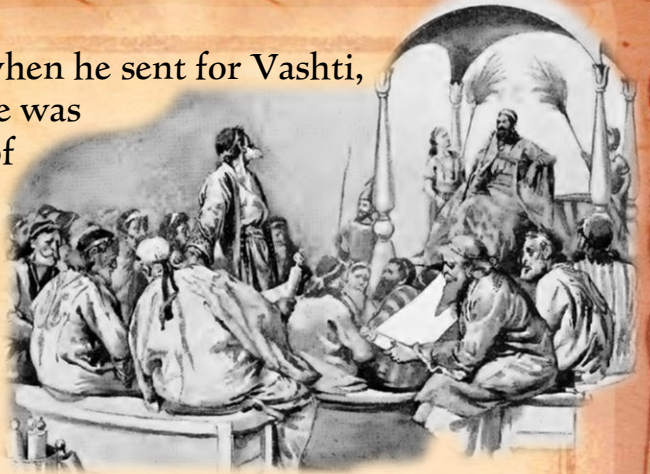
The setting of the Book of Esther opens in Shushan, the palace of King Ahasuerus of Persia, who governed 127 provinces extending from India to Ethiopia. And although this was a great kingdom indeed in its day, Christ's Kingdom is far larger than this; and one day, all the kingdoms of this world shall become His forever! This Ahasuerus was known in secular history by the name of Darius Hystaspes, and this is the story of how he came to sit on the Persian throne. After King Cyrus died, he was succeeded by his son Cambyses; but at the time when Cambyses died in 522 BC, his throne was being occupied by a usurper named Pseudo-Smerdis. This Pseudo-Smerdis stood his ground for a short time; but in the year 521, a group of seven Persian wise men hatched a conspiracy against him. After removing Pseudo-Smerdis from the scene, the conspirators selected one of themselves to be the main ruler of Persia; and that man's name was Darius. Nevertheless, an arrangement was made whereby each of the other six conspirators took turns sharing power with him. Shortly after Darius confirmed the decree of Cyrus which permitted the Jewish Temple to be rebuilt in Jerusalem (Ezra 6), he contrived a way to rid himself of the yoke of sharing power with the other six conspirators. Consequently, he threw a huge six-month-long celebration in the year 518, in honor of his becoming the sole ruler over the kingdom of Persia. That is the feast that is described here in the opening chapter of the Book of Esther, where Darius is called by the name Ahasuerus.

Ahasuerus put himself to vast expense to show off the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honor of his excellent majesty. He made two feasts – one for his nobles and princes, which lasted 180 days; and another for all the people, great and small, which lasted seven days. But this feast ended in heaviness, and it was all a result of the king's own folly. Better is a dinner of herbs with quietness and the enjoyment of oneself and a friend, than this banquet of wine with all the noise and tumult that certainly attended it.

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ King Ahasuerus throws a great feast for his princes and noblemen – verses 1-4
- ❖ He throws a feast for all the people in Shushan the palace – verses 5-9
- ❖ In the heat of his drunkenness, he divorces his queen – verses 10-22

The king displayed a great weakness when he sent for Vashti, his queen, to come into his presence when he was drunk, and in company with an abundance of men who were likely in the same condition. (Vashti, by the way, was the daughter of King Cyrus, the man who permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple.) When Ahasuerus' heart was merry with wine, nothing would satisfy him except Vashti coming in with the crown on her head, so that the princes and people might see what a beautiful woman she was. Hereby, he dishonored himself as a husband, who ought to protect the modesty of his wife. He also diminished his reputation as a king, by commanding something from his wife which the preservation of her virtue obliged her to refuse. When wine comes in, people's wits go out. If he had not been put out of the possession of his senses by his wine, he would not have done such a thing; and he would have been angry at anyone who would have even suggested it. But upon Vashti's refusal to obey his inappropriate command, Ahasuerus became enraged. The man who ruled 127 provinces had no rule over his own spirit; his anger burned within him.



However, although the king was very angry, he did not do anything in this matter until he advised with his seven counselors. The question proposed to them was this: "What shall we do to the queen Vashti according to the law?" Memucan made the proposal that Vashti should be divorced; for he said that the queen's disobedience to her husband would have bad consequences if it was passed over, by emboldening other wives to disobey their husbands. If this unhappy falling-out between the king and his wife had been private, the error would have remained with themselves, and the quarrel might have been settled privately between them. But judgment was pronounced against her, that she should come no more into the king's presence; and this judgment was never to be reversed, according to the customs of the law of the Medes and Persians.

This chapter shows us nothing concerning Ahasuerus except lust, pride, and passion. From such a wicked ruler, let us turn our eyes to a King Who is the reverse! Under the reign of Jesus, His people enjoy real splendor, real happiness, and real joy. He makes a gracious, spiritual feast; and He Himself is the Bread of Life. And by and by, He will bring all His people home to His everlasting mansions of light, joy, and happiness above – where He will lead them to fountains of living waters, and where He will wipe away all tears from all eyes!

Lord, we pray for grace to find satisfaction in one simple morsel of the Bread of Life, instead of seeking for fulfillment from things which can never truly satisfy man's hunger – such as extravagant feasts like the one hosted by King Ahasuerus. Amen.