

Esther Crowned Queen of Persia

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Esther is crowned the queen of Persia after Vashti is deposed
2. aim – to cause us to remember that God's providence includes how we respond to circumstances
3. passage – Esther 1:1-2:18

b. outline

1. The King's Banquet (Esther 1:1-9)
2. The Queen's Refusal (Esther 1:10-22)
3. The Crowning of Esther (Esther 2:1-18)

c. opening

1. the **structure** of our exposition of the book
 - a. designed to be accomplished in six (6) sermons – between now and mid-July
 1. frankly, that's not rushing it – that's a "comfortable" schedule through a short, narrative book
 - b. examining **realistic pericopes** of text – sections encompassing events in a logical structure
 1. **today**: the downfall of Queen Vashti and the rise of Queen Esther
 2. **future**: the plot of Haman, Esther agreeing to help, her revelation of Haman's plot, the work to save the Jews from Haman's plot, the institution of Purim as a celebration of victory
 - c. under the assumption that you will **read ahead** (so we don't have to do so here!)
2. the **direction** of our exposition of the book
 - a. chapter 3 is the "center" of the book – the plot by Haman to destroy the Jews
 - b. **IOW**: chapters 1-2 lay out in *detail* how it is that Esther (a Jewess) was able to rise to the throne of Persia, *in anticipation* of the threat that would come against her own people

I. The King's Banquet (Esther 1:1-9)

Content

a. the details of the banquet

1. the timeframe of the banquet (**vv. 1-3a**)
 - a. **note**: this section is designed to explain why a banquet was being held in Susa
 - b. **note also**: the section is designed to demonstrate who this Ahasuerus was
 1. an emperor, ruling over a vast swath of territory (**i.e.** over virtually the entire "known" world)
 2. an emperor, controlling a vast bureaucracy (**i.e.** provincial governors, military leaders, officials)
 - a. Persia and Media in **v. 3b** are provinces of the empire, the capital (Susa) situated in Persia
 3. an emperor, possessing a tremendous wealth (**i.e.** in terms of both capital and people)
 - c. **the book opens with a realistic introduction to a king with tremendous power**
 1. and, the entirety of the book revolves around the display of that power – many of the events are *directly* related to the power of Xerxes I in that timeframe (**e.g.** the number of edicts)
 - d. **from a redemptive-historical perspective, the real power at play here is the power of the "invisible" God clearly at work throughout the events**
 1. **IOW**: Xerxes may have had *human* kingly power, but his power was insignificant compared to what God could and would do along the way (**e.g.** the emperor could not control his wife!)
2. the royal display preceding the banquet (**vv. 3b-4**)
 - a. **purpose #1**: to begin the preparations for an invasion of Greece
 1. Xerxes' attempt to push the empire farther to the W – he launched his attack in 480BC (three years hence) at the Battle of Thermopylae, and was eventually able to conquer most of Greece
 2. this 6-month display of his royal "*glory*" and "*splendor*" may simply be his way of gathering his military leaders (and allies) and creating in them a sense of awe, dedication, and confidence
 - b. **purpose #2**: to show off his great wealth, common to those with vanity and pride ("**open house**")
 1. a problem even among the kings of Israel (Solomon: **1 Kings 10**; Hezekiah: **2 Kings 20**)
 2. **in human terms, greatness is only great if it is manifested – in biblical terms, greatness is only great if it is humble and submissive under God**
3. the details of the banquet (**vv. 5-9**)
 - a. the banquet was held in the citadel in Susa – a palatial party fit for a king (and his men; **see v. 9**)

- b. the banquet was open to everyone in the city “*both great and small*” – every official at every level
- c. the banquet was a lavish affair – the palace was decorated “to the nines”
- d. the banquet was accompanied by a women’s banquet – hosted by the queen also in the palace
- e. the banquet was a full 7-day affair – a full week of feasting and drinking (**note vv. 8, 10**)

b. the intention of the banquet

- 1. (**as above**) for the king to demonstrate his great wealth, and to build loyalty amongst those he would rely on for his continuing conquests as an emperor (**i.e.** his preparations are now complete)
- 2. (**and, as above**) as a natural extension of his human depravity – a week-long indulgence of the senses simply because he “could” (**i.e.** drunkenness, sexuality, gluttony – **not a “dinner party”**)
- 3. **note the irony here** – the whole book is an explanation of how the **Feast of Purim** came into being
 - a. **a feast of personal indulgence (by the king) begins the process of another feast coming into being, which celebrates the success of a people (by God) over one man’s personal evil**

II. The Queen’s Refusal (Esther 1:10-22)

Content

a. the details of her refusal

- 1. the reason for the king desiring Vashti to come to the banquet (**vv. 10-11**)
 - a. his “*heart was merry with wine*” – this was a *drunken* request (**i.e.** his inhibitions were lowered)
 - b. his wife was “*lovely to look at*” – this was a request for a *lewd* performance before the men
- 2. the refusal of Vashti to come to the banquet (**v. 12**)
 - a. the “*seven eunuchs*” are men who have been “physically altered” so as to be rendered impotent
 - 1. **i.e.** they have no sexual appetites, and are (thus) able to serve the queen intimately
- 3. the reasons for *why* Queen Vashti refuses to come to the banquet
 - a. no reasons are given – although the reasons may be obvious
 - b. this woman *specifically* rejects the command of her husband *and* the emperor
 - c. she *undoubtedly* knows the potential consequences of this choice
 - d. however (**from our perspective**), her choice (an act of “free will”) would precipitate the rise of Esther – **IOW: God ordained for her to refuse, even though it was her choice to do so**

b. the outcome of her refusal

- 1. the response of the king to Vashti’s refusal to come to the banquet (**vv. 13-22**)
 - a. **note:** he does not issue a decree concerning her *on his own* – he consults his “*wise men*”
 - 1. Memucan (one of the seven princes; **see v. 3**) delivers the verdict as his suggestion
 - b. the issue *is not* the fact that Vashti refused to come to the party
 - 1. the problem was: what would happen in the empire if the wives of officials *everywhere* used Vashti as an example and started harboring contempt for their husbands at home (**gasp!**)
 - a. frankly, it sounds like Memucan *already* had this problem in his house!
 - 2. an edict (**the first of four**) declaring that all women must “*give honor*” to their husbands
 - 3. **humor:** attempting to *legislate* the honor of wives for husbands – **how is that enforced?**
- 2. the importance of the king’s response to Vashti
 - a. she is divorced and banished (although many Jews imply from **v. 19** she was executed)
 - b. **God ordained for Xerxes to banish his wife, even though it was his choice to do so**

III. The Crowning of Esther (Esther 2:1-18)

Content

a. the man behind her rising to queen

- 1. the biography and role of Mordecai (**vv. 5-8**)
 - a. Mordecai and Esther are Benjamites, the tribe intimately connected with the S kingdom of Judah
 - 1. “*Jecooniah*” exiled under “*Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon*” (**v. 6**; now under Persian control)
 - b. Mordecai is descended from “*Kish*” (**v. 5**)
 - 1. possibly a reference to the father of Saul, the first king of Israel
 - 2. which would explain the hostility of Haman, a descendant of Agag, king of the Amalekites
 - a. Saul was supposed to eradicate them, but his refusal cost him his throne (**1 Sam. 15**)
 - b. an ancient blood-feud still existed between these two peoples
 - c. Mordecai is Esther’s first cousin, she being the daughter of his uncle
 - 1. her Jewish name was “*Hadassah*” (“myrtle”); her Persian name is Esther (“star”)
 - 2. the book uses her Persian name because the events take place amongst those people (**e.g.** as Saul uses his Roman name Paul amongst the Gentiles in the NT)

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3. he raises her as his own daughter because she has been orphaned (v. 7)
 - d. Mordecai is instrumental in getting Esther into the king's new "queen" harem (implied in v. 8)
 1. she is outwardly beautiful – which is the *means* by which she qualifies for this harem
 2. **IOW:** the biography of these two Jews fits perfectly into the statement of 4:14
- b. the details of her rising to queen**
1. the king's "young men" suggest building a "queen" harem to choose a new one (vv. 1-4)
 - a. **careful:** do not import NT ideas of sexual morality into this story (i.e. progressive revelation)
 2. the "queen" harem was led by Hegai (a eunuch), and he found Esther to be worthy (vv. 8-11)
 - a. **note:** Mordecai instructed Esther to keep her ethnicity a secret (v. 10) – probably because he believed that her status as a "foreigner" or "exile" would taint her before the king
 - b. **note:** Mordecai keeps a vested interest in Esther as a part of this harem (v. 11)
 1. *why?* at this point, Mordecai has no reason to suspect any danger for the Jews, does he?
 2. probably because he has (at this point) purely **self-advancing** motives – she as queen would imply a special place for him in the eyes of the emperor
 3. the "queen" harem required a beautification period for each woman of twelve (12) months (v. 12)
 4. each member of the "queen" harem would be given a *single night* to "impress" the king (vv. 13-14)
 5. when Esther went to the king, her natural charm and beauty easily won him over (vv. 15-18)
 - a. **note:** another "feast" is given in v. 18 (second of at least five (5) in the book)
- c. the value of her rising to queen**
1. **chaps. 1-2** set the stage for the events to follow: **Esther in the right place at the right time**
 2. a series of *seemingly* disconnected events (a banquet, a lewd call, a refusal, a queen deposed, a beautiful foreigner living in the city, a shrewd Jew, a wise eunuch, etc.) all come together to place this **one specific woman in one specific place of power in anticipation of the events to follow**
 - a. the beautiful **choreography** of the providence of God over every detail
 - b. **application: all that is in your life right now has been orchestrated by God in his sovereignty to prepare you for what is coming – how are you reacting to it, both good and bad?**