

### King Xerxes of Persia Removes Queen Vashti

#### Esther 1

**Esther 1:1-9** - *“Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this was the Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia),<sup>2</sup> in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the citadel,<sup>3</sup> that in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants—the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces being before him—<sup>4</sup> when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days in all.<sup>5</sup> And when these days were completed, the king made a feast lasting seven days for all the people who were present in Shushan the citadel, from great to small, in the court of the garden of the king’s palace.<sup>6</sup> There were white and blue linen curtains fastened with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars; and the couches were of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of alabaster, turquoise, and white and black marble.<sup>7</sup> And they served drinks in golden vessels, each vessel being different from the other, with royal wine in abundance, according to the generosity of the king.<sup>8</sup> In accordance with the law, the drinking was not compulsory; for so the king had ordered all the officers of his household, that they should do according to each man’s pleasure.<sup>9</sup> Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women in the royal palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus.”*

#### Background Notes

In 586BC, the armies of the Babylonian Empire conquered and destroyed Jerusalem, and took many Jewish captives to Babylon. The Persian Empire came to power by defeating the Babylon in 539BC, and soon after that the Persian emperor Cyrus issued a decree that allowed the Jewish captives in Babylon to return to their homeland and rebuild their Temple.

About fifty thousand Jews returned to Jerusalem in 538BC, under the leadership of Zerubbabel. The account of this initial return is recorded in Ezra 1-6. However, many Jews did not return to Jerusalem. They had put down roots in the land of their captivity, and they preferred to stay there. Even when Ezra led a second return to Jerusalem in 458BC, most of the Jews remained in Persia. This second return is covered in Ezra 7-10.

The events in the book of Esther occurred from about 483BC to 473BC. This time period fits chronologically between the two returns of the Jews to their homeland. “King Ahasuerus” was most likely the Persian king Xerxes I, who ruled from 486BC down to 465BC. “Ahasuerus” is the Hebrew form of his name. The setting for the book was Susa, the capital city of the Persian Empire.

The book of Esther is the only book in the Bible that does not contain the name of God, but the hand of God is seen working behind the scenes in every chapter of the book. Thus the theme of Esther is “*providence*,” because God’s divine guidance and protection for His people, Israel, are evident throughout the book - even though the name of God is not mentioned.

The fact that God’s name is not found in Esther emphasizes the fact that the Jews residing in Persia were mostly secular Jews. They were not faithful in fulfilling their responsibility to return to Jerusalem, to worship at the House of the Lord. Jeremiah’s prophecy of freedom after 70 years of captivity indicated that the Lord desired His people to return home after the captivity. (See Jeremiah 25:12.)

In spite of their lack of commitment to return to Jerusalem and worship the Lord in His Temple, God was at work behind the scenes to accomplish His purpose for His people.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. God can use national events to accomplish His purpose.

In the third year of his reign, Xerxes gave his six-month banquet in Susa, his capital – call it the “Persian Expo.” All those who held high government office and military rank in the vast Persian Empire were in attendance. Most likely they used this time to plan and plot their strategy for Persia’s invasion of Greece, which took place 480BC.

Throughout the six months, Xerxes displayed the vast wealth and glory of his kingdom. He probably included parades to show off his military strength and hardware. At the end of the six months, Xerxes gave a second feast that lasted for another seven days. It was held in the royal gardens which were most elegantly furnished: “*There were white and blue linen curtains fastened with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars; and the couches were of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of alabaster, turquoise, and white and black marble*”(v6). The royal wine ran freely. Each person was allowed to drink as much as he wanted, but no one was forced to drink. At the same time, Queen Vashti gave a feast for the women.

Little did Xerxes know that God was in the process of accomplishing His purpose on behalf of His people, and that all this display of national pride and majesty was setting the stage and paving the way for Esther to become the new queen. When the very existence of the Jewish people would be threatened in the days ahead, Esther would be in place to save the day.

God can use national events to accomplish His purpose, then and today. God used a Roman census to accomplish His plan for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem, in accordance with Micah’s prophecy. Every four years we have a national event in our own country - we elect the president. Do you think God can work behind the scenes to bring the right person into

office to be there when terrorism strikes, or some other national crisis takes place? The answer is obvious. God can use national events to accomplish His purpose.

## 2. God can use domestic squabbles to accomplish His purpose.

Esther 1:10-22: *“On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, <sup>11</sup> to bring Queen Vashti before the king, wearing her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials, for she was beautiful to behold. <sup>12</sup> But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king’s command brought by his eunuchs; therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him.*

*<sup>13</sup> Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times (for this was the king’s manner toward all who knew law and justice, <sup>14</sup> those closest to him being Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who had access to the king’s presence, and who ranked highest in the kingdom):<sup>15</sup> “What shall we do to Queen Vashti, according to law, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus brought to her by the eunuchs?”*

*<sup>16</sup> And Memucan answered before the king and the princes: “Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also all the princes, and all the people who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. <sup>17</sup> For the queen’s behavior will become known to all women, so that they will despise their husbands in their eyes, when they report, ‘King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in before him, but she did not come.’ <sup>18</sup> This very day the noble ladies of Persia and Media will say to all the king’s officials that they have heard of the behavior of the queen. Thus there will be excessive contempt and wrath. <sup>19</sup> If it pleases the king, let a royal decree go out from him, and let it be recorded in the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it will not be altered, that Vashti shall come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she.<sup>20</sup> When the king’s decree which he will make is proclaimed throughout all his empire (for it is great), all wives will honor their husbands, both great and small.”*

*<sup>21</sup> And the reply pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan. <sup>22</sup> Then he sent letters to all the king’s provinces, to each province in its own script, and to every people in their own language, that each man should be master in his own house, and speak in the language of his own people.”*

When Queen Vashti refused to come at the king’s command to be put on display at his banquet, Xerxes was furious. In the emotion of the moment, he followed the advice of his seven personal counselors, and banished Queen Vashti from the royal courts. These counselors were concerned that when word of Vashti’s conduct rippled out, all the women of the empire would despise their husbands, as Vashti had done! *“For the queen’s behavior will become known to all women, so that they will despise their husbands in their eyes, when they report, ‘King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in before him, but she did not come’”(v17).*

Furthermore, these counselors thought that an edict from the king would force all wives to honor their husbands! Verse 20: *“When the king’s decree which he will make is proclaimed throughout all his empire (for it is great), all wives will honor their husbands, both great and small.”* Well, I’m sorry, guys – respect doesn’t work that way! It looks like Xerxes didn’t pick the most intelligent counselors, right? Of course these men may have had a hidden agenda, of giving Persian men a legal ground for an easy divorce.

As a result of his domestic squabble with the queen, King Xerxes issued the edict and removed Queen Vashti. Little did Xerxes know that God was working behind the scenes to prepare the way for Esther to become the new queen.

Can God use domestic disputes to accomplish His purpose today? Of course He can. Some of you have read John Grisham’s novel, *“The Testament.”* In that book a family was squabbling over the family inheritance. In the end, the money went to missions - the Lord’s work! While that book is fiction, it is true to life. God can work through family disputes over money (and through other family events) to accomplish His purpose. God can use domestic squabbles to accomplish His purpose.

## **Practical Application**

### **Read the book of Esther when you are discouraged.**

Why should we read the book of Esther when we’re discouraged? After all, the name of God is not even mentioned once in the entire book! But that’s exactly the point. Although the *name* of God is not in the book of Esther, the *hand* of God is seen in every chapter of the book.

During times of crisis in your life, have you ever felt that God has forgotten about you? Have you ever felt that He has left you stranded and alone? Listen - God is always there – He’s with you at all times. Hebrews 13:5 provides wonderful reassurance of His presence with us: *“God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’”*

You may not have “felt” His presence. He may not have been “upfront.” But He was there all the time, working behind the scenes on your behalf.

Just as it was in the book of Esther, so it may be at times in our lives as believers. Read the book of Esther when you’re discouraged.