

BOOK OF ESTHER
QUEEN VASHTI AND KING AHASUERUS
ESTHER 1:1-20

Introduction

The Book of Esther holds a high place in the sacred literature of the Jews, yet it is a book that has no mention of God

Martin Luther was said to have tossed the book into the river Elbe, saying that he wished it did not exist for “*it has too much of Judaism and a great deal of heathenish imagination.*”

However, in spite of the fact that God’s name is not mentioned here, it is evident that the hand of God can be seen throughout the book! We call this hand the “*Divine Providence of God.*”

According to Jewish history, **Vashti** was the **daughter of King Belshazzar of Babylon and the great-granddaughter of King Nebuchadnezzar**, the man who destroyed the first Temple in Jerusalem. The name “*Vashti*” is of Persian origin and means “*beautiful woman.*”

According to Jewish accounts, the night her father was murdered (as predicted by the famous “*writing on the wall*”), there was much bloodshed and looting in the palace. Amidst the confusion, **Vashti** was unaware of the death of her father and ran to his quarters where she was captured by **Darius the Mede**.

King Darius took pity on the young **Vashti** and gave her to his son **Ahasuerus** as a wife. When **Ahasuerus** became king over Persia, he and **Vashti** ruled over 127 provinces, which was the entire civilized world at that time.

The Bible does not corroborate the Jewish story of the origin of **Vashti**, but neither does it give us an alternative.

The name **Ahasuerus** comes from the Hebrew (*Achashwerosh*) which is a transliteration of his Persian name, *Khshayarsha*. In *Greek* this became *Xerxes*. and in *Latin*, *Assuerus*. He is known in history as *Xerxes I*.

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Esther 1:1-4

In the third year of his reign, we see that the powerful and wealthy **King Ahasuerus** hosted this extravagant half-year-long celebration for his noblemen and officers, all for the sole purpose, it seems, of displaying his wealth and honor.

We can tell from reading this that **Ahasuerus** must have been a very **prideful man**. In fact, his **pride** reminds us of the sins of **Nebuchadnezzar** and **Beltshazzar**, both whom God judged for their **pride**. As is usually the case, we see that **power and pride go hand in hand!**

Esther 1:5-9

We see here that the first half-year long celebration was followed by an even more elaborate seven-day feast for all the residents of the capital city of Shushan.

We also see that this second feast was distinguished by luxurious opulence, and that the personal preferences of everyone in attendance were fully accommodated.

In modern terms the king and his followers were “*partying*”. The king even ordered his people to do whatever they wanted. It was an “*if it feels good, do it*” atmosphere. (*Vs 8*)

According to *verse 9*, at the same time that the guys were partying, **Vashti** provided food and entertainment for the women of the court (though it may have been less “*exuberant*” than the men’s).

Esther 1:10-12:

Jewish tradition holds that **Ahasuerus** ordered **Vashti** to appear at the feast unclothed so that he could show off her beauty to his entire kingdom wearing nothing but the royal crown.

The Jews hold that this was a case of Divine justice against **Vashti**.

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They believe that God moved **Ahasuerus** to call **Vashti** to appear naked on the Sabbath as a punishment for her tradition of forcing Jewish girls to work before her on the Sabbath stripped of their clothing.

Again, this comes from **Jewish history and tradition** and does not appear in the text of the Scriptures.

What we do know is that **Ahasuerus**' request was a breach of custom. Eastern women lived in seclusion and such a request as he made while he was drunk amounted to a gross insult!

Many have criticized **Vashti** for refusing to appear at her husband's command and say that **Vashti** was one of the first in the "*women's liberation movement*."

However, I want us to consider the scene that was taking place here. Not only had the king and his cronies been partying for days, drinking large quantities of wine, but they had also been doing "*as each one desired*." This was no doubt a very wicked scene!

We can imagine men passed out on the floor, others laying in a drunken sprawl in the arms of palace courtiers. In his drunken stupor, the king called for the presence of his queen. He wanted to parade her before his followers, to display her beauty.

Vashti was a queen in a society that prized modesty in a woman above all else. What **Ahasuerus** demanded was a surrender of womanly honor, and **Vashti**, was unwilling to comply.

Some would say that, far from being the action of a rebellious woman, this was the action of a regal queen, refusing to display herself and her position to shame.

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It was the habit of a Persian king to have his queen beside him at a banquet, but when he wished to get drunk, he sent his queen away and called in the wives of inferior rank—the concubines.

We can see how **Vashti** must have been insulted by this breach of protocol!

Esther 1:13-18:

The king became enraged at **Vashti's** refusal—no doubt his pride and ego were wounded. Instead of addressing the issue with his wife, he turned to his lawyers! (He would have fit very well into our society, wouldn't he?)

The lawyers decided that **Vashti's** actions might go beyond the simple marital problems of the king, and might become a true national disaster!

If **Vashti** would not obey her husband, other women might not obey their husbands. They might, in fact, "*look with contempt on their husbands*".

These men feared that the noble women who heard of **Vashti's** refusal would suddenly rebel, not just against their husbands but against the state! **This seemingly small issue between a husband and a wife, in their minds, became a threat to the relationship of other husbands and wives and also a threat to the security of the nation!**

Esther 1:19-20:

In response to their perceived threat, the lawyers devised some new laws. Because that's what lawyers do!

First, **Vashti** was "*never again to come before*" the king...and secondly, her royal estate was to be given to another. The Jews believe that this meant that **Vashti** was given the death penalty.

According to Jewish tradition and historical accounts, when she refused his command, **Ahasuerus** had her beheaded at the advice of his minister **Memucan** (who some identify as being the same as **Haman**).

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The text that we have does not say specifically that she was executed, nevertheless, **Vashti's** removal did set the stage for **Esther's** appointment as queen, ultimately leading to the Jewish people's salvation from **Haman's** threat of annihilation in the **Purim story**.

There was also a second part to the decree: **that all women were to give honor to their husbands**.

What is interesting is that a pagan king, advised by pagan lawyers made this decree, yet this principle is a New Testament principle for Christian marriages.

Although, a wife need not and should not obey her husband in what opposes God's laws, the Bible is clear about the wife's duty to her husband and the husband's duty to the wives.

Ephesians 5:22—“Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.”

Colossians 3:18—“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.”

1 Peter 3:1-7

Conclusion

Vashti's disobedience was virtually unprecedented, but **Vashti's** disobedience and subsequent removal were in the Providence of God. God used this incident to bring **Esther** to the kingdom.

This shows us how **God works through the affairs of men to bring about His will!**

That's an important thing that we also need to remember as we approach the end of time!