



On the screen is a photo of a piece of tapestry – it’s the image of a crown stitched and weaved in fine detail with threads of different colors – adorned with gold, and silver, and pearls. In the right hands, it displays incredible workmanship, and some of the world’s finest museums collect tapestries like this and display them as beautiful works of art – as masterpieces.

Now, here is the back side of this same piece of tapestry.



If you notice, the back side shows something of the image, but it’s a jumbled mess. It’s full of loose ends, and frayed edges, and knots. It looks like I did it. While the front side looks beautiful and finished, the back side looks ugly and tangled. We are meant to see the front side of the tapestry, not the back, but the truth is – you can’t have the front without the back.

This morning we are beginning our study through the Old Testament book of **Esther**, where we see the creative handiwork of God’s providence as He saves His people from sure destruction, and for our benefit, God takes us to the back side of His handiwork where we see the chaos, the jumbled lives, the knotted relationships, and the mistakes made by a handful of people that God skillfully uses to accomplish His divine purpose.

I mentioned God’s providence to you, and I think I need to explain that before we move on because this story of Esther is all about God’s providence. That word “*providence*” means *to see before*, it speaks of *foresight*, and when that word is applied to God it takes on much greater meaning because God not only looks

ahead and sees our choices and our actions beforehand – whether they be good or bad, right or wrong – but somehow, somehow, God weaves them together, like weaving a tapestry to carry out His perfect will.

Now, as you may know, in the book of Esther, God is not mentioned one single time which prompted some to question why this book was even included in the Bible. God is not mentioned – not once; however, as we will see in our study over the next several weeks, just because God is not mentioned does not mean He is absent – instead, in this story, God is sovereignly and silently working behind the scenes, weaving the choices and the actions of a few people with an invisible hand to accomplish a much greater purpose. The book of Esther belongs in the Bible, and the whole story speaks to the same truth found **Romans 8:28** where the Apostle Paul tells us,

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

God gave us the story of Esther to remind us that even though we often only see what appears to be the back side of God's handiwork in this world, He is always present, He is ever faithful, and He is working for our good whether we realize it or not. Even though on this side of heaven we tend to only see the back side, God is creating a masterpiece, and one day as promised, we will see it.

Now, before we begin, I need to set the stage for this story of Esther with some history.

Many, many years before this story, civil war had broken out amongst God's people in the Promised Land which resulted in two divided kingdoms – the Northern Kingdom referred to as Israel and the Southern Kingdom referred to as Judah. Neither kingdom was following God, both fell into sin, and as a consequence, they were allowed by God to be taken into captivity.

At first, the Assyrians took the people of Israel into captivity and then over 100 years later, the Babylonians, who were the new bullies on the block, pushed their way into the Promised Land, destroyed the city of Jerusalem to include their temple, and they took the people of Judah into captivity.

For seventy long years, the people of Judah were exiled to Babylon and held in captivity, until the Babylonians were overpowered by the Medes and Persians who were under the rule of Cyrus the Great.

Cyrus was the king of the Persian Empire – an ancient Iranian Empire, and he became sympathetic towards the Jewish people who had been in captivity for such a long time, and so he permitted the Jews to return to their homeland to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and their temple. Over time, three groups of Jews made the journey back home to Judah to rebuild their city and their temple, but surprisingly many of the Jews chose to remain. They seemed content to stay right where they were, to homestead in a foreign land – a land not their own, and it's with these people who remained in Persia that the stage is set for this story – a story which probably occurred sometime around 483 BC.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to the Old Testament book of **Esther** and we will begin with **Chapter 1, verse 1**.

¹Now it took place in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, ²in those days as King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne which was at the citadel in Susa, ³in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his princes and attendants, the army officers of Persia and Media, the nobles and the princes of his provinces being in his presence. ⁴And he displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty for many days, 180 days.

Cyrus was the first king of Persia, but after he had come and gone, as well as a few others, it was his grandson **Ahasuerus** who became the reigning king of the Persian Empire. Now, your Bible may refer to this king as Xerxes, and that's simply what the Greeks called him – so we are still speaking about the same king here, who at the time, we are told, is in his winter palace located in the Persian city of **Susa**, which today would be located in the Southwestern region of Iran.

Ahasuerus was a very powerful king – he referred to himself as the great king, the king of kings, and it was under his reign that the Persian Empire became the largest the world had ever seen, stretching from modern-day Libya in Africa all the way over to Pakistan in Asia.

Now after three years on the throne, Jewish history tells us that Ahasuerus wanted to invade Greece out of revenge from a previous defeat involving his father King Darius at Marathon near Athens in 490 BC, but before he invades Greece, Ahasuerus meets with key civic leaders, the military commanders, and the “who's who” in his empire to engage in several planning sessions and to build support for the war effort.

Also, during this time, we are told in our passage, the king throws a huge party to impress these leaders – a party that occurred over a period of **180 days**. Now, I don't think all these leaders were at this party for six straight months, otherwise, nothing would get done – instead, it was more likely that these leaders were rotated in and out so they would not be kept from their official duties.

Anyway, the king was as proud as a peacock – strutting his stuff, and apparently there was a lot of stuff to strut as we will see beginning with **verse 5**.

⁵ When these days were completed, the king gave a banquet lasting seven days for all the people who were present at the citadel in Susa, from the greatest to the least, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. ⁶ There were hangings of fine white and violet linen held by cords of fine purple linen on silver rings and marble columns, and couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and precious stones. ⁷ Drinks were served in golden vessels of various kinds, and the royal wine was plentiful according to the king's bounty. ⁸ The drinking was done according to the law, there was no compulsion, for so the king had given orders to each official of his household that he should do according to the desires of each person. ⁹ Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus.

At the end of the 180 days, Ahasuerus throws another party – a seven-day party, and it's at this party that the king brings everybody together, both great and small from the palace, and apparently the venue was a sight to see.

There were colorful linens of fine cloth hanging from marble columns. The pavement in the garden court was made from precious stones, other shiny things, and marble. There were couches made of gold and silver, and the wine was served in various kinds of golden goblets, and of course, it was the very best of wine.

By the king's command, everyone was allowed to drink without compulsion or limit. Usually at Persian feasts, guests would only drink as the king drank, but here the people of Susa are told to drink as much as they wanted. It was an open bar for the men, and while all of this was going on, **Queen Vashti** was hosting a separate party in the royal house just for the women by themselves, which would have been normal in that day and culture.

So, there are two parties going on, and then the king does something that changes everything.

Let's read on beginning with **verse 10**.

¹⁰ On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus,¹¹ to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown in order to display her beauty to the people and the princes, for she was beautiful.

On the last day of the party, Ahasuerus, who is now drunk as a skunk, wants to show off his beautiful wife to the other drunks at the party, and according to Jewish tradition, this all came about from an argument amongst the men at the party as to which country had the most beautiful women. So, in an effort to settle the argument once and for all, the king decided to put **Queen Vashti** on public display with her **royal crown**, and he commands the **seven eunuchs** to go get her.

So, the eunuchs take off but they come back empty-handed for we are told in **verse 12**,

But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. Then the king became very angry and his wrath burned within him.

Queen Vashti openly defies the king, which would have definitely raised some eyebrows in that day and culture, but her reason for doing so is not given to us. Maybe Vashti was too dignified and too modest to entertain a bunch of drunken men. Maybe, as some Bible scholars suggest – she was pregnant at the time and did not want to expose herself, or maybe as others interpret the Hebrew language, Vashti was commanded to come to the party completely naked wearing only her **royal crown**, which would have been a huge scandal, and would easily explain her defiance.

Whatever the case may be, Queen Vashti wanted no part of it, she wasn't going to be paraded around like a piece of meat, and so she courageously refused her drunken husband in front of the partygoers.

For 187 days, Ahasuerus who reigns over the massive Persian Empire, the ruler over the known world at that time, the king who has been trying to impress everyone with his power and splendor and majesty and great wealth – in one drunken command, in one fell swoop, is publicly humiliated by the queen.

The king looks bad, he's used to getting what he wants – but not this time, and he's livid. He's furious.

Apparently, Ahasuerus was known for his irrational temper and his blind fits of rage. For example, in his upcoming military campaign against Greece, he ordered a bridge to be built over a channel of water which separates Greece and Turkey;

however, upon completion of the bridge, just before he was able to use it, a storm came and completely destroyed it. This angered the king so much that he ordered his officers to give the sea three hundred lashes as punishment, and then he sent soldiers who threw shackles into the sea to bind it and to stab the waves with red-hot pokers. Then after all of that, the king had all the builders of the bridge beheaded.

So, this king is off his rocker in anger, he's a mean drunk, and he goes to his counselors who were also likely drunk to solve his little marriage problem.

This is an accident waiting to happen. Let's follow along beginning with **verse 13**.

¹³ Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times—for it was the custom of the king so to speak before all who knew law and justice ¹⁴ and were close to him: Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media who had access to the king's presence and sat in the first place in the kingdom —

¹⁵ “According to law, what is to be done with Queen Vashti, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs?”

¹⁶ In the presence of the king and the princes, Memucan said, “Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but also all the princes and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. ¹⁷ For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women causing them to look with contempt on their husbands by saying, ‘King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in to his presence, but she did not come.’ ¹⁸ This day the ladies of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's conduct will speak in the same way to all the king's princes, and there will be plenty of contempt and anger. ¹⁹ If it pleases the king, let a royal edict be issued by him and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media so that it cannot be repealed, that Vashti may no longer come into the presence of King Ahasuerus, and let the king give her royal position to another who is more worthy than she. ²⁰ When the king's edict which he will make is heard throughout all his kingdom, great as it is, then all women will give honor to their husbands, great and small.”

Ahasuerus calls in his seven counselors, which were likely astrologers who foolishly looked to the stars for advice – or if the truth be told – these are the guys who tell the king what he wants to hear.

They knew how to flatter the king, they knew how to work the king, and instead of honoring the dignity and the prudence of Queen Vashti or telling the king he was a

stupid drunk who needs to sober up – the first thing they do is to exaggerate the issue, and in essence, this is what they tell the king,

“Vashti has done wrong – not only to you O king, but also to the entire Persian Empire, and when the partygoers return home and tell everyone what the queen did to you, the consequences will be disastrous for everyone else. All the wives in the empire will disobey their husbands, and then all the other women will follow suit and rebel against the men. This will start a woman’s liberation movement, and we can’t have that. This will be hell on earth for the men, life will cease to exist as we know it, and we will all have to turn in our ‘man cards’ to the women.”

These counselors exaggerated the issue – we might say, “*they made a mountain out of a mole hill*” which is what we tend to do, and then they offer the king their great solution. Kick the queen to the curb and find yourself a better woman, for by doing this, you will strike fear in all women, they will give **honor to their husbands**, they won’t rebel against the men, and there will be peace in every home in the empire.

It's amazing what a bunch of drunks can come up with when they put their heads together, and beginning with **verse 21** we are told the outcome.

²¹ This word pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed. ²² So he sent letters to all the king’s provinces, to each province according to its script and to every people according to their language, that every man should be the master in his own house and the one who speaks in the language of his own people.

Well, Ahasuerus agreed to the advice of his counselors and Vashti was removed as queen. Then the king sent messengers throughout the empire to issue a royal decree that said – **every man should be the master of his own house**, or said another way, every man should act just like the king.

What a stark contrast to the advice that the Apostle Paul gave to husbands in **Ephesians 5:25** where he said,

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

Chapter 1 of Esther is a confused and tangled mess, but I need to remind you that thus far in this story, what we are seeing is the back side of this tapestry, where behind the scenes, God will use the choices and the actions of a few to eventually save His people in a masterpiece of work.

So, how does this apply to you and me? In our own confused and tangled lives, we may question where is God and what is He doing. In our jumbled lives full of knots and loose ends and frayed edges, we may be wondering if God is working in our lives.

The answer is, somehow, someway – believe it or not, God is weaving it all together in a tapestry of life, ordering and organizing every detail to accomplish a masterpiece only He can create. Maybe not now, but someday it will all make sense.

Maybe not now, but one day, as promised, it will all be revealed to us – so for now, on this side of heaven, we can only trust that the invisible hand of God is at work in our lives on our behalf.

Source Material:

The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament – Walvoord & Zuck
Through the Word, Esther – Jonathan Ferguson
Charles R. Swindoll, Esther: A Woman of Strength and Dignity (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997)
John F. MacArthur Jr., The MacArthur Bible Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), Es 1:12.
Daniel Schaeffer. “Dancing With a Shadow: Making Sense of God’s Silence.” (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1995) pp. 29-30]
The Bible Exposition Commentary, Old Testament, Joshua-Esther – Warren W. Wiersbe
Enduring Word – David Guzik