

Esther 1
July 25, 2021

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

In the opening scene of the book of Esther, King Xerxes appears to be the embodiment of power in this story. In verse one, we will discover that he ruled over the entire Persian empire comprised of 127 provinces, from India to Cush, or modern-day Ethiopia. The Persian empire dominated the world scene at that time and is in fact one of the greatest empires in all of human history. As king at that time, Xerxes had absolute authority. He never faced an electoral challenge, never had to answer the indictment of a special prosecutor, and never waited on a legislative body to enact his wishes. King Xerxes could do everything as he pleased when he pleased.

He was not only powerful but was also extraordinarily wealthy. He decides to throw a lavish celebration, which lasted for a full six months. Its food and wine knew no limit, and its posh decor of linen, gold, and marble was breathtaking. The feast served one purpose: to flaunt not only the wealth of the kingdom but the splendor of King Xerxes (Es 1:4). And interestingly, the feast was given early in the reign of King Xerxes, in his third year as king (Es 1:3). Make no mistake, the king was sending one message and one message alone, not only to those in his administration, but to everyone throughout the kingdom: I am king! My riches are vast, and my power unparalleled!

Transition: At the end of the feast he'd been throwing, he was completely drunk and “in high spirits” (Es 1:10). He had been a tremendous host to the entire kingdom, winning their affection with food and wine. And by his lavish hospitality, he was ensuring their loyalty as royal subjects. His final boast concerned the beauty of his wife, Queen Vashti. Nothing was missing from this picture of power and prominence: he had the greatest political influence of that time, wealth beyond measure, and now a wife for all to envy.

There was only one problem—she snubbed him! After King Xerxes went to such great lengths to display his power, he felt sure to be mocked for his impotence to rule in his own household. Little wonder he “became furious and burned with anger!” (Es 1:12). This was no simple domestic quarrel—it threatened to damage the image of power he worked so hard to create.

With that as our background, let's begin. Will someone read Esther Chapter 1?

BOOK:

Queen Vashti Deposed

1 This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces, Judah being one of them, stretching from India to Cush (Upper Nile region, present day Egypt, all of Sudan, and northern Ethiopia): ² At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, ³ and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his

nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present.

⁴ For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty. ⁵ When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest, who were in the citadel of Susa. ⁶ The garden had hangings of white and blue linen, fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and other costly stones. ⁷ Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king's liberality. ⁸ By the king's command each guest was allowed to drink in his own way, for the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man what he wished.

⁹ Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes.

¹⁰ On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carcas—¹¹ to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at. ¹² But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger.

¹³ Since it was customary for the king to consult experts in matters of law and justice, he spoke with the wise men who understood the times ¹⁴ and were closest to the king—Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan, the seven nobles of Persia and Media who had special access to the king and were highest in the kingdom.

¹⁵ "According to law, what must be done to Queen Vashti?" he asked. "She has not obeyed the command of King Xerxes that the eunuchs have taken to her."

¹⁶ Then Memucan replied in the presence of the king and the nobles, "Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes. ¹⁷ For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say, 'King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.' ¹⁸ This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen's conduct will respond to all the king's nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord.

¹⁹ "Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she. ²⁰ Then when the king's edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest."

²¹ The king and his nobles were pleased with this advice, so the king did as Memucan proposed. ²² He sent dispatches to all parts of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language, proclaiming in each people's tongue that every man should be ruler over his own household.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Power should be used for righteous purposes and not for self-gratification.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Es 1-4)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

These first four chapters of the book introduce us to the four main characters in the drama.

I. Ahasuerus the King (1)

As mentioned before, "Ahasuerus" was the title of the Persian ruler; his given name was Xerxes, and he ruled from 486 to 465 B.C. History tells us that he was an impulsive ruler, and we can see this displayed in the Book of Esther. Note how quickly the king gave great authority to Haman and then forgot what his decree involved! Note too how impulsively he put away his lovely wife, and then later regretted it.

A. The banquet (vv. 1-12).

This royal affair was for the purpose of conferring with his chiefs and leaders in preparation for his war against Greece. Xerxes had put down a rebellion in Egypt and felt confident he could conquer the Greeks. The gathering lasted for 180 days; the huge banquet was at the end of that period. This was in Xerxes' third year, or 483 B.C. The Medes and Persians were in power as Daniel had prophesied (Dan. 2:36ff). The feast lasted for seven days (v. 5) in the king's beautiful garden. Of course, there was drinking, and each guest was permitted as much as he wanted. The women, following a Persian practice, had a separate banquet. Anxious to please his guests, Xerxes asked the queen to come to the men's banquet, but Vashti refused. (The name "Vashti" means

“beautiful woman.”) Vashti knew the king and his guests were under the influence of wine and that the banquet hall was no place for a woman, especially a queen.

B. The banishment (vv. 13–22).

The king was stunned by Vashti’s public refusal to cater to his whims. He turned to his wise men for counsel. (You will note in this book that Xerxes listened to the advice of many people. History tells us he was a “puppet” with several of his chiefs pulling the strings.) The men advised him to depose Vashti and make her a public example to the entire nation. The Persian “postal system” was perhaps the finest in the ancient world. It operated somewhat like the old pony express, with fresh horses and riders waiting at various points along the route. The king hoped that his decree would strengthen the homes of the land. Whether it did or not, nobody knows. We do know that he later regretted his decision.

Johnson, E. E. (1985). Nahum. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 701-703) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

1. THE KING’S 187-DAY CELEBRATION (1:1–9)

1:1. The account opens with the mention of **Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces ... from India to Cush** (cf. 8:9). Xerxes, called Ahasuerus throughout the Hebrew text of Esther (X-ref NIV), ruled the Persian Empire for 21 years from 485 to 465 B.C. He is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible only in Ezra 4:6 and Daniel 9:1. The vast extent of his empire has been confirmed by several outside sources which state the size of that empire in similar words (see the map “The Persian Empire,” near Ezra 1:1). Judah was one of the provinces over which the king ruled (cf. Neh. 1:2). “India” corresponds to present-day West Pakistan; “Cush” was a term for the upper Nile region which included present-day southern Egypt, all of Sudan, and northern Ethiopia.

1:2. **King Xerxes** had an elaborate palace in Persepolis as well as a winter **citadel** (palace) in **Susa** (cf. Neh. 1:1). Persepolis and Ecbatana (Ezra 6:2) were other major cities in the Persian Empire (see the map “The Persian Empire”, near Ezra 1:1). An inscription from the time of Xerxes’ son Artaxerxes noted that the palace was destroyed by fire sometime in Artaxerxes’ reign. Reference in Esther 1:2 to this citadel has been confirmed by archeological work at Susa. An author from a later period probably would not have known about the palace so it can be inferred that the author of this book was someone who was close to the events chronologically.

1:3–4. **In the third year of his reign** (483 B.C.) Xerxes **gave a banquet** to which he invited **his nobles and officials** as well as **military leaders ... princes**, and **nobles of the provinces**. Mention of these leaders fits the known fact that the Persian Empire had a large administrative system. Though not stated, this banquet probably corresponds to the great feast Xerxes gave when he was planning to invade Greece. According to Herodotus it took Xerxes four years to get ready for the invasion he launched in 481. (Herodotus’ four years would extend from the beginning of Xerxes’ reign in 485.) No doubt the **180 days** involved planning sessions in which all the provinces’ leaders were being prepared for the war effort, as well as being impressed with Xerxes’ **wealth** and **splendor**. The campaign was to be a costly affair.

The Book of Esther says nothing about Xerxes' invasion of Greece, but other sources state that he wanted to avenge his father's defeat at Marathon near Athens. Xerxes' immense fleet defeated the Greeks at Thermopylae but was defeated at the famous Battle of Salamis in 480 B.C. and the Battle of Plataea in 479. He had to retreat home. Esther gained the favor of the king in, 479 B.C. the seventh year of his reign (2:16). This would have been after his defeat by Greece. Thus, these events recorded in Esther fit the facts known from secular sources.

1:5–9. At the end of the 180 days Xerxes gave another **banquet**. This one lasted **seven days** for **people** in **Susa**. Both great and small were invited. The descriptions of the decor of the king's palace **garden** (vv. 6–7) add to the feeling that the writer had firsthand knowledge of the setting and the occasion. Perhaps Mordecai was among the guests at the seven-day banquet. **Linen ... silver**, and **marble**, and **other costly stones** are known to have been used in Persia, and Persian **couches** (cf. 7:8) of **gold and silver** were referred to by Herodotus. **Blue** and **white** were the royal colors (cf. 8:15). Drinking vessels (**goblets**) of expensive material were a Persian luxury. The feast was livened by the fact that any **guest** could **drink in his own way**, that is, he could drink as much or as little as he desired. In other words the king was liberal with the **wine**. Meanwhile **Queen Vashti** was giving a separate **banquet for the women**. Separate banquets were not unusual in that culture.

2. VASHTI DEPOSED (1:10–22)

1:10–12. **Xerxes** told his **seven eunuchs** (cf. 6:14) **to bring ... Vashti** into his banquet hall so that **her beauty** could be admired by the male guests. **But she refused to come**. One of the eunuchs named here is referred to later (**Harbona** in 7:9). This order was given **on the seventh day**, that is, the last day of the feast which had turned into a drunken party. The mention of "seven eunuchs" serving the king fits the era in which the account took place. It was a well-known practice then for young men who served the **king** to be castrated so they would have no illusions of starting their own dynasties.

Vashti's refusal is not explained by the author. There is no implication that the king wanted her to do anything immoral or to expose herself. Perhaps she simply did not wish to be in mixed company at that time. It has been suggested that if this queen was Amestris, perhaps she refused to go to the banquet because she was pregnant with Artaxerxes, who was born in 483. Regardless of the reason for her refusal, her action was a breach of etiquette. **The king** was used to getting whatever he desired whenever he desired it. Therefore, her response made him **furious** (cf. 7:7).

1:13–15. **The king** consulted **wise men** about what he should do. These **seven men had special access to the king** and were the ones who knew the **law** well. Herodotus has confirmed the fact that this use of wise men was a feature of ancient Near Eastern courts. Throughout the ancient Near East wise men played important roles in governments (e.g., Daniel's position in the Babylonian and Persian Empires). The crime the **queen** had committed was that she disobeyed a **command** of the king. Obviously, **the king** and queen did not share an emotionally intimate relationship. This was true of **Xerxes** and the women in his harem. This is again apparent later when Esther noted to Mordecai that she had not even seen the king for a month and was afraid to ask to see him (4:11).

1:16–22. **Memucan**, one of Xerxes' wise men, suggested that he have the **queen** deposed (v. 19) so that other noble **women** (v. 18) of the empire (and in fact **all the women**, v. 20) would not follow Vashti's example and **despise their husbands** (v. 17) and the empire be filled with female **disrespect and marital discord** (v. 18). It is difficult to see how this punishment would cause the women of the empire to **respect their husbands** but that was the idea behind the decree. This is

partially explained by the fact that the men had been drinking heavily (v. 10). (The words “if it pleases the king” occur nine times in the OT, seven of them in the Book of Es.: Neh. 2:5, 7; Es. 1:19; 3:9; 5:4, 8; 7:3 [“your majesty” is lit., “the king”] 8:5; 9:13.)

The idea **pleased the king and his nobles** so an edict was sent throughout the empire in various languages (cf. 3:12), stating **that every man should be ruler over his own household**. A vast relay communications system, something like an ancient pony express, made it possible to spread news throughout the empire quickly (cf. 3:13; 8:10). This bit of information helps set the stage for the rise of Esther.

Mathews, K. A. (1998). The Historical Books. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 190–194). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

The Book of Esther is named after its heroine. Esther used her prominent position as queen of Persia to save the Jewish people from destruction. “Esther” is probably derived from the Persian word *stara*, meaning *star*. Some scholars have related it to “Ishtar,” the Akkadian goddess associated with the planet Venus. Esther’s Hebrew name was “Haddassah,” meaning *myrtle* (Esth. 2:7).

In the Greek and English versions, Esther is the last book in the collection of Historical Books. In the Hebrew arrangement of the Old Testament, the book is one of the five *Megilloth* (*rolls* or *scrolls*) occurring in the third and final section (the *Kethubhim* or *Writings*) of the Hebrew Bible. The book’s plot includes the origins of the Jewish festival of Purim. Esther is traditionally read upon that annual celebration (Adar 14 and 15).

The Greek translation has five additions to the Hebrew (and English) text. These additions to Esther supplement the narrative and make the book more religious in tone (see below). Jerome’s Latin Vulgate removed the additions and placed them at the end of the book. Luther also separated the additions by placing them with the Apocryphal books.

The author of the book cannot be known. The author probably used sources available from the period. The story mentions the use of royal archives (2:23; 6:1; 10:2). And Mordecai, a key figure in the story, is said to have recorded some events (9:20, 23, 29–32). Some interpreters have speculated that the author was a Persian Jew.

The date of writing is difficult to determine. The setting of the story is the fifth century B.C. in the reign of the Persian king Ahasuerus (1:1), who is commonly identified with Xerxes I (485–464 B.C.). Scholars have suggested dates of authorship ranging from as early as the fifth century B.C. to as late as the Maccabean period (second to first centuries B.C.). A date of about 400 B.C. coincides well with the linguistic evidence and the author’s excellent knowledge of Persian life.

History and Literary Genre. The reliability of the Book of Esther as a historical witness has been challenged. In more recent years many scholars have recognized that it has a historical nucleus. Some of these same scholars believe that the literary genre of Esther is historical novel or historical romance. The Book of Esther, as the argument goes, has the properties of legend and fiction. Internal oddities include Mordecai’s age (at least 124 years old if he indeed were deported by Nebuchadnezzar; see 2:6; 3:7) and other questionable exaggerations (for example, 1:4; 2:12; 5:14; 9:16). It is argued that the story’s protagonists and the incidents related cannot be corroborated outside the Bible. Furthermore, the Greek historian Herodotus (*History* VII, 114) identified Xerxes’ queen as Amestris, not Vashti or Esther.

However, scholars who esteem the book as a reliable historical witness have answered that it shows an accurate and detailed knowledge of Persian life, law, and custom. Archaeological information about the architecture of the palace and about Xerxes' reign harmonizes well with the story's depictions. The occasion of the banquet in the third year (1:3) corresponds to the remarks of the Greek historian Herodotus (*History*, VII.8) that Xerxes convened his leading men in that year to plan a campaign against Greece. Also, the name of a court official, *Marduka* (Mordecai?), has been attested in Persian tablets from this time. While it is not possible to identify with certainty this figure as Mordecai, the name gives the story a ring of authenticity.

As for the incongruities, evangelicals answer with alternative explanations. For example, the Hebrew text can be interpreted to mean that Mordecai's ancestor Kish was deported by Nebuchadnezzar (2:6). As for Amestris, some have attempted to equate the names of Esther and Amestris on a linguistic basis, but this has been questioned. Others have accounted for the discrepancy by suggesting that Xerxes had more than one queen or that Amestris was queen during the four years between the removal of Vashti and the wedding of Esther (1:3; 2:16).

If it can be shown that the author intended the book to be read as a literary fiction, it should be interpreted accordingly as one would a parable or allegory without doubting its inspiration. However, if the author intended it as historically verifiable, interpreters should treat it as a reliable account of the Persian Jews. The author indicates that the book should be read as historical when he invites his readers to verify this account by consulting Persian annals where the story's events (and more) can be found (10:2). This is the same kind of invitation found among the histories of Kings and Chronicles. Unless there is compelling evidence otherwise, the trustworthiness of the account should be the interpreter's guide.

Esther without "God." Esther is the only book in the Hebrew Bible that does not mention God's name. Also absent is any reference to the law, Jewish sacrifice, prayer, or revelation. It is the only book of the Old Testament absent from the Dead Sea Scrolls. Opinion about the book's religious value has varied. Luther considered it worthless. The famous Jewish scholar Maimonides (twelfth century A.D.) set it beside the Torah in importance. The book's canonical status has been disputed by Jews and Christians.

One explanation for the book's "secular" nature is that a Jewish author took the story almost verbatim from an official Persian record that omitted God's name. Others have suggested that the author was more concerned about the Jewish people as a nation than their religious practices. However, official records (for example, the Cyrus Cylinder and Moabite Stone) are known to have invoked or referred to deities without reservation. There is no reason the name of Israel's God would have been offensive to Persian religion. Old Testament literature does not make the modern dichotomy between secular concerns and religious ones when describing historical events.

A better explanation is that the absence of religious language best suited the author's theological purposes. The author expressed his theology through the vehicle of story, arranging the events and dialogue to accentuate that theology. He omitted Israel's religious distinctives because he wanted to veil God's presence. The author believed in God's sovereignty, but that God's intervention is expressed through human instrumentation.

The author did not directly speak of God's participation; rather, he only hinted at God's presence. He did this through the characters who recognized divine intervention in their lives (4:15–16b). The mention of fasting and the wearing of sackcloth and ashes (4:1–3; 4:16; 9:31) imply that the Jews worshiped since prayer commonly occurred with fasting in the Old

Testament. The author perceived that God effectively orchestrated the salvation of the Jews, but he did not want God's actions to be obvious.

Another way the story shows God's hand is by reversing the expected outcome of the events. Human intrigue, manipulation, and simple coincidence are the overt explanations for the dramatic changes in the story's conclusion while covertly God is at work. The story's structure further enhances the author's theme of reversals. By omitting reference to religious activities, the author commented on the spiritual status of the Jews living in the Diaspora. These Jews were the ones who did not volunteer to return to Jerusalem as part of the "remnant" through whom God would work again (Ezra 1:4; 9:8–9). Though their faith was fragile, God remained faithful to His covenant by preserving them.

Theme. God worked behind the scenes to save the Jews from destruction by exalting Esther as queen of Persia and turning the tables on their enemies (4:14; 9:1).

- I. Vashti's Demotion (1:1–22)
- II. The King's Decree (2:1–3:15)
- III. Haman Threatens Mordecai (4:1–5:14)
- IV. Mordecai Defeats Haman (6:1–7:10)
- V. The King's Decree (8:1–9:32)
- VI. Mordecai's Promotion (10:1–3)

Purpose and Theology

1. The book's primary theological purpose is God's subtle providence in the life of His people. While Ezra-Nehemiah tells how the exiles fared in Jerusalem, the story of Esther answers what happened to those who stayed behind. The author showed through unexpected reversals in his characters' lives how God superintended the deliverance of the Jews. The theme of reversal is best illustrated by the careers of Haman and Mordecai (7:10–8:2) and the Jews' triumph instead of extermination (9:1).

2. The book also explains the origins of the festival of Purim (*lots*) the Jews celebrated annually on the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar (3:7; 9:26). While the casting of lots appeared to seal their doom (3:7), the lots became their reason for celebration (9:23–26). The Fast of Esther in Jewish tradition precedes Purim to commemorate the fasting that precipitated their victory.

3. The idea of wealth and power is pervasive in the story with its focus on the Persian court (1:1–9; 3:1–2; 10:1). However, the power of Esther (5:1–3; 7:7) and Mordecai (6:11; 9:4; 10:2), acquired because of their loyalty to the king, triumphed over their Persian enemies. Whereas the Jews were helpless before their Gentile lords, in the end the magistrates feared and honored the Jews (8:17; 9:2).

The moral is that power should be used for righteous purposes and not for self-gratification. Mordecai, for instance, recognized that Esther's power was a gift to be used for her people's deliverance (4:14). Abusive power became Haman's noose (5:11–14; 7:10), whereas Mordecai used authority to help his people (8:7–8; 10:3).

Finally, the book is a parody on Gentile domination. Mighty Xerxes, draped in royal splendor, is depicted as a weak, easily manipulated monarch who was ill-informed about the events of his own kingdom. The prerogative of Gentile authority—the irrevocable law of the Medes and Persians—entrapped the king and ultimately brought down Gentile authority (epitomized in Haman). True power is found in the virtues of loyalty, honesty, and fasting in worship of God.

4. God rewards loyalty. Vashti's disloyalty is contrasted with Esther's loyalty to the king and her people. Another contrast is the bumbling Haman, who was hanged for his conspiracy (7:3–10), while Mordecai was honored for saving the king from assassins (2:21–23). Mordecai, in particular, exemplifies loyalty to the Jewish tradition. He functioned as Esther's Jewish conscience (4:12–14), and as a "Jew" (3:3) he refused to pay homage to Haman the "Agagite" (3:1–2; 5:9). Mordecai attempted to hide their Jewish extraction, but he learned in the end that the revelation of Esther as a Jewess gave them the upper hand (2:10, 20). The story shows that those of the Diaspora could be faithful to their heritage while living as honorable citizens of a Gentile state.

5. Another recurring theme is the contrast between festival and fasting. The story begins with Xerxes' elaborate seven-day feast, which ultimately resulted in Esther's appointment as queen. Later, Esther's two feasts resulted in the death of the Jews' archenemy Haman. Finally, Mordecai established the Feast of Purim, enjoyed by Jews and Gentiles for generations to come (8:15, 17; 9:17, 19, 26–28).

The foil for this feasting is Jewish fasting, which was the author's way of expressing this people's commitment to their religious heritage (4:1–3, 16). Fasting preceded feasting in the case of Esther's approach to the king (4:16), and thus fasting was also commemorated as part of their Purim (9:31). Their fasting, the outward expression of their trust in God, precipitated their victory and celebration.

6. Finally, the story addresses the problem of social and religious bigotry. Haman's anti-Semitism was frightfully expressed when he swore he would not rest until he rid himself of "that Jew Mordecai" (5:13). The Jews are warned by this story not to escape their heritage. In fact, their spiritual heritage preserved them as a people.

VASHTI'S DEMOTION (1:1–22)

The Persian King Khshayarsha was known as Ahasuerus in Hebrew and Xerxes in Greek. He is commonly identified with Xerxes I (485–464 B.C.), who is remembered for his devastating naval loss to the Greeks at Salamis in 481. The Greek historian Herodotus described his kingdom as consisting of twenty provinces and extending from India to Ethiopia.

The king convened a royal reception in his third year (483 B.C.) at Susa of Elam (modern SW Iran), which was the winter resort of the Persian kings (Neh. 1:1; Dan. 8:2). Archaeological work has uncovered the elaborate royal palace of the city.

The assembly Xerxes called lasted for 180 days, during which he displayed the splendor of his wealth. It culminated in a seven-day feast of luxurious dining and drunkenness. The opulence of the Persian court is described to indicate the vast resources and power of the king.

In a drunken stupor, the king called for Queen Vashti to "display her beauty" before his guests. Her refusal, probably out of decency, threatened the king's reputation. At Memucan's advice, the king deposed her. Xerxes' action is a parody on Persian might, for the powerful king could not even command his own wife.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Es 1:1-22). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.