

Esther 1 – Thursday, November 30th, 2017

- We completed the book of Nehemiah last week, and begin in the book of Esther, as we continue our study through the Bible.
- By way of an introduction to Esther I think it would be good to mention a few things as it relates to what we're in store for here.
- Esther records what happened to those who remained in Persian captivity not returning under Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah.

- There are ten chapters in the book of Esther, and I'm personally of the belief that it's one of the most powerful stories of all time.
- The book of Esther is chiefly about a beautiful Hebrew woman who God in His divine providence raises up to deliver the Jews.
- Esther means Venus, the morning star, which is the nature of who Esther was as a light during a dark time in Israel's history.

One commentator of this said; "Venus, the morning star ...sheds its light after all the others stars have ceased to shine, and while the sun still delays to rise. Thus the deeds of Queen Esther cast a ray of light forward into Israel's history from a dark time."

- The events that are recorded in the book of Esther took place between the events recorded in the book of Ezra chapter 6 and 7.
- The book of Esther is the last of twelve historical books we have in the Bible and the seventeenth book in the Old Testament.
- Perhaps this would be as good of a time as any to revisit how the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament are arranged for us.

#1. The Pentateuch - 5 books - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy

#2. Historical Books - 12 books - Joshua, Judges, Ruth, First Samuel, Second Samuel, First Kings, Second Kings, First Chronicles, Second Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.

#3. Poetic books - 5 books - Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon

#4. Prophetic books- 17 books –

- Major Prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel

- Minor Prophets - Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

- There's one more thing I want to mention about the book of Esther, and it has to do with something that is very peculiar about it.
- Namely, that of how the book of Esther is the only book in the entire Bible that doesn't once mention the Lord or God by name.
- While speculation abounds, I believe it speaks to how God is at work in our lives, even when it seems He's silent in our lives.

- I suppose you could sum up the book of Esther with two words about God, absent the name of God: sovereign and providence.
- In other words, the sovereignty and providence of God are replete throughout the book, even though the name of God is not.
- This because, what God does in and through Esther is not done by way of a miracle; rather, it's done by way of His providence.

1 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), 2 in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the citadel, 3 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—4 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.

- The chapter begins by telling us about how King Ahasuerus has this feast to display the riches and splendor of his majesty.
- It lasted for six months, and it's believed the reason he did this was to garner the leaders support to wage war against Greece.
- This because Persia suffered defeat at the hands of Greece, and King Darius, the father of Ahasuerus never avenged Persia.

5 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. 6 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. 7 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. 8 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. 9 Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women in the royal palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus.

- Here we're told about a second feast, this one lasting for seven days, and it was for the citizens of the capital city of Shushan.
- It's interesting to note that this at this feast, all the men could drink as much as they wanted, as drinking was not compulsory.
- It's also interesting to note that Queen Vashti had a feast exclusively for the women separate from the king's feast for the men.

10 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, 11 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. 12 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.

- Couple of thoughts on this very interesting turn of events, the first of which has to do with what we're told about Ahasuerus.
- Specifically in verse ten about his heart being merry with wine, which is another way of saying that the king was very drunk.
- The reason I point that out is because were he not so under the influence of alcohol, he may not have made this request.

- The second thought has to do with Queen Vashti's refusal of the King's command, knowing full well this could mean her death.
- This of course leads to much in the way of speculation as to why she would defy the king knowing it carries the death penalty.
- One thought is that it was because it went against Persian protocol. Others suggest she may have been pregnant at the time.

- I would suggest that we know the real reason for her refusal and it was that God, in His providence, put this in Vashti's heart.
- As such, God is orchestrating everything behind the scenes, as it were, as He now choreographs every step in His sovereignty.
- God is about to have the queen deposed, as we're about to see, in order that He may raise up Esther, for such a time as this.

13 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, 14 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): 15 "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?"

- I really don't know if it's possible to overstate how serious of a problem this is for the king who has now been totally humiliated.
- It's not just that he's been humiliated, it's his wife the queen who has humiliated him before all the subjects under his command.
- If this weren't bad enough, the king has lost the confidence of his men, especially given the fact that they're about to go to war.

16 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. 17 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.' 18 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.

- Clearly, and perhaps rightly, these men are now very concerned that their wives will follow suit as a result of what Vashti did.
- As we'll see next, in seeking to keep their wives in submission to them and respect for them, they get the king to issue a decree.
- This is a textbook case of wanting the right thing, but going about obtaining it in the wrong way, which is exactly what they do.

19 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. 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." 21 And the reply pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan. 22 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.

- The chapter ends with the king's irrevocable decree, that all wives will honor their husbands as the masters of their own house.
- The problem with this is honor and respect cannot be forced, it must be earned, and we're told in the New Testament how it is.

Ephesians 5:21-33 (NIV) — 21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—30 for we are members of his body. 31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." 32 This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.