

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

AUGUST 27TH-28TH, 2022 // BOOK OF ESTHER

## AUTHORSHIP AND HISTORY

Scholars are unsure of who authored Esther, but many Jewish and Christian theologians believe it was Mordecai.

- This book would have been written around 400 B.C., about 20 years after King Xerxes' reign. The events covered in Esther would have been between 486-465 B.C.

## A DIFFICULT PIECE OF HISTORY TO STUDY

There are some critics that believe this story isn't historical, but just folklore because there is no extrabiblical evidence of these people.

- There are very few historical documents mentioning specific people from this era of the Persian Empire, but Esther lines up quite well with what historians know of this time.

## PURPOSE AND THEMES

Everyone has flaws and is prone to selfishness, but God can use **unlikely vessels**.

- We have hope because God is **sovereign**.
- **Evil will become a victim of its own devices**, and justice will eventually prevail.
- Believers must strive to **balance our loyalty to God and life within a pagan society**.

## UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURE

We have a tendency to impose modern culture on historical societies, and we often miss the overarching lessons.

- **Though culture changes, the evil and foolishness that entraps people have always been the same. We must look for the pitfalls to avoid throughout history.**

## EXTRAVAGANCE (ESTHER 1:1-9)

### A BIBLICAL MISTAKE?

Ahasuerus is the Hebrew name for King Xerxes. The author says he was over 127 provinces, which history tells us only 31 existed during this time.

- The 127 mentioned could include all subregional divisions between what is modern Pakistan to Northern Sudan.

## TWO CONTRASTING CULTURES

The author sets the stage for events that contrast two very different cultures: the **selfish decadence** of the Persians and the **humble wisdom** of the Jews.

- **These have always been the 2 choices of humanity: to promote our desires or humble ourselves to the desires of God.**

## A 6-MONTH PARTY

For 180 days, Xerxes had a feast for the "nobles and officials" to display his "glorious wealth" and "splendor of his greatness."

- Though boasting was a component, the feasts were probably political posturing as well to show off how strong he was before going to war with the Greeks.

## "THERE ARE NO RESTRICTIONS"

After the 180-day feast, Xerxes had a 2nd party that lasted a week where citizens of the city "from greatest to least" could indulge in the decadent atmosphere and drink excessively.

- This would've been extreme **debauchery. Imagine unlimited access to unlimited pleasure.**

## THE QUEEN WAS HAVING HER OWN PARTY

Queen Vashti also had a "feast for the women of King Ahasuerus's palace." Persian women were known for being just as indulgent as men when it came to wealth, materialism, sex, and drinking.

- More than likely, the author omits the details of Vashti's party out of respect for women.

## REFUSAL & RESPONSE (ESTHER 1:10-15)

### "FEELING GOOD FROM THE WINE"

At the end of the 2nd party, Xerxes commanded the eunuchs (castrated men that often guarded women's living areas) to bring Vashti to him so he could "show off her beauty" to everyone.

- For 6 months, Xerxes bragged about his wealth; now, he wanted to show his most prized possession—his queen.

## NO

The most powerful and wealthy man on earth stood before his guests and was denied by his wife. Xerxes "became furious and his anger burned within him."

- To the man that had it all, the stunned silence or subtle gasps from the party goers must've severely damaged his **pride**.

## THE SOURCE OF ALL SIN

In response to Vashti's refusal to obey, Xerxes consulted "the wise men" to discuss the ramifications of this embarrassing situation. In authoritarian empires, **rulers rarely ask for personal advice out of hubris**. So, Xerxes framed his problem as a legal one.

- **Pride stunts resolution and reconciliation.**

## THE FOREST THROUGH THE TREES

So, we have a king that had conquered most of the known world but couldn't resolve a domestic dispute with his wife.

- We can easily fall into a similar trap. **We can have successful careers, education, notoriety, beauty, etc. but miss the most important things in life.**

## A DECREE (ESTHER 1:16-22) THE WOMEN WILL GO CRAZY!

Vashti hadn't broken any laws, but she damaged the king's ego. So, a decree was passed because "the queen's action will become public knowledge to all the women and cause them to despise their husbands."

- **Exaggeration and fear are common tactics to control and shift blame.**

## "CONTEMPT AND FURY"

Xerxes' so-called wise men **used hysteria to convince** the king that the "noble women of Persia and Media" would be contemptuous and full of fury by the end of the day.

- An irrevocable decree that Vashti be replaced was passed because they thought this would ensure the good behavior of all wives.

## THE "MASTER OF HIS OWN HOUSE"

It's ironic that an insecure man who engages in drunken parties to flaunt his power, wealth, and wife and who cannot settle a simple domestic dispute passes a decree telling men to be the "master of [their] own house."

- **Is this not the same perverted idea of masculinity we have in America today?**

## LET'S NOT FORGET THERE WAS ANOTHER PARTY

Before we focus exclusively on the failures of men in Persian culture and ours, we must remember the women were throwing a party on the other side of the palace.

- **Men and women may have unique roles, but both have a responsibility to live righteously and lead with integrity.**

## THE DANGER OF "NO RESTRICTIONS"

- In ch. 1, we see the fallout of the unbridled pursuit of pleasure and excess. We also see that intoxication opens up doors that damage us and the people around us.
- God loves us and wants good things for us. **The commands and principles of the Word are guardrails to protect us from destruction.**

## THE DANGER OF PRIDE/HUBRIS

- When we are arrogant or prideful, our judgment is impaired because our egos are fragile, and in this lack of judgment, we fail to seek and listen to godly counsel.
- **In our pride, we also tend to miss the most important things in life because we are focused on ourselves.**

## THE DANGER OF HYSTERIA

- When we're not tethered to Jesus we have to rely on our abilities. Since we will always come up short, **our lack of dependency on God produces fear and hysteria.**
- There will always be insecure, power-hungry, and evil people that will exploit others with fear and exaggeration.

## THE DANGER OF IRRESPONSIBILITY

- It is also very easy to blame shift and point out the sins and flaws of others, but **we must remember we're all responsible for our actions and we will be held accountable.**
- We live in a culture today that refuses to take **personal and societal responsibility**. This is not God's plan for us.

## THE DANGER OF HYPOCRISY

- **If we're to address the evil in the world, we must first address the evil in us.** If we refuse to address the evil in ourselves, it will lead to destruction.
- We must learn through the Spirit and God's Word to live in **humility, self-control, honesty, responsibility, and dependency on Jesus.**