

Esther 1:1-12

Esther 1:1-12 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 splendour of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days in all. (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. (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.

Questions On The Text

Who was Ahasuerus?

Verses 1-2: Ahasuerus was a Persian king (also known as Xerxes) who reigned over an empire that extended from India (modern day Pakistan) Ethiopia (today part of northern Sudan). He is described as sitting on his throne in Shushan (or Susa) the citadel. It was a fortified palace elevated 120 feet above the surrounding city. The two-fold purpose of such elevation was to protect the king as well as underscore his greatness.

What did Ahasuerus do?

Verses 3-4: Ahasuerus, who by this time had brought his empire under control, had also inherited immense wealth from his father Darius. He decided to celebrate with a special feast to which he invited all his officials. The banquet lasted almost six months during which time the king was able to show off all his riches.

What happened at the end of the feast?

Verses 5-8: Ahasuerus threw another feast in Shushan, lasting seven days, to which everyone in the city was invited. There was wine in abundance, and the description of the gold, silver, marble, etc., only serves to highlight the abundant wealth of the king.

What did Vashti do?

Verse 9: While King Ahasuerus was enjoying his banquet, his queen, Vashti, was throwing a banquet of her own for the women.

What did Ahasuerus do on the last day?

Verses 10-11: On the final day of the feast, Ahasuerus was in a state of alcoholic merriment (“merry” can also mean “drunk”). He sent seven eunuchs, officers of the king’s court, to fetch Vashti to his gathering in order to show off her beauty.

How did Vashti respond?

Verse 12: Queen Vashti refused to come at the king’s command. In those days, disobedience to the king was a dangerous occupation (see 4:11). It may be that Vashti had consumed enough alcohol herself to be filled with a false courage.

Or perhaps, as some believe, the king’s command for her to come wearing her crown meant that she was to come wearing *only* her crown. If so, her refusal to obey on the grounds of personal decency is perfectly understandable. However, we are not told Vashti’s inner thoughts. It is enough, from the author’s viewpoint, for us to understand the events that would lead to Esther’s becoming queen. Needless to say, the king was less than happy.

Further Questions For Discussion:

Do you think Ahasuerus had a problem with pride? Why?

What do you think of Ahasuerus’ command for Vashti to appear at his banquet to show her off?

Did Vashti respond in the best possible way?

Should wives submit to their husbands no matter what they are told to do? If not, in what circumstances should they refuse to obey?

Is it possible for a husband to abuse his authority? If so, give examples.