

## Esther Series

Revised – August 2010

Good News Bible Studies

Prepared by Mike Southwick

# Preparations

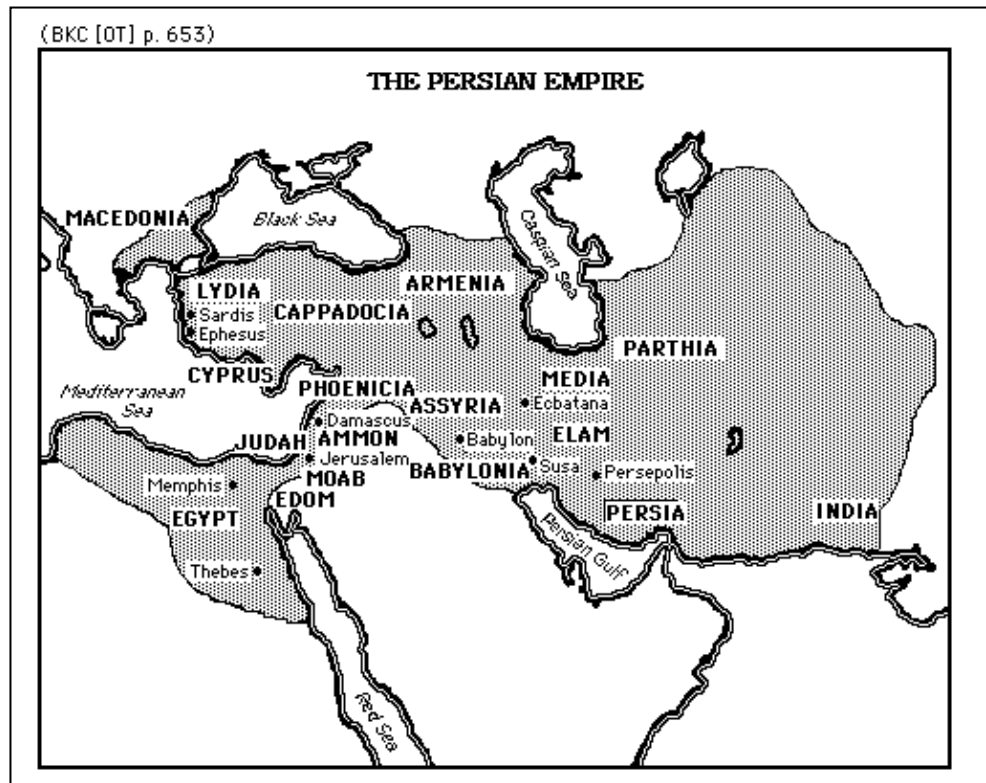
## *Esther 1*

### The Splendors of Persia (Esther 1:1-2)

1. The Persian Empire was very powerful and they controlled a large land mass; “Now it took place in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 Provinces” (Esther 1:1)
  - The territory ranged from what was then called \_\_\_\_\_ (modern day West Pakistan) to what was then called \_\_\_\_\_ (which included modern day Egypt, Sudan and Northern Ethiopia).
  - The large empire was broken up into \_\_\_\_\_ smaller “*provinces*” and each one had its own governor. \_\_\_\_\_ was one of the provinces under their rule.
2. The leader/ruler of the empire at the time was a dictator named **Ahasuerus** or **Xerxes** depending on which translation you have. (Esther 1:1)
  - With the later influence of the **Greeks** and the subsequent translation of the Old Testament (The Septuagint) you will see his name appear as **Xerxes** in most Greek history and writings as that is his “**Greek**” name.
  - **Ahasuerus** is the name used in **Hebrew/Jewish** writings. This is a transliteration of his **Persian name** which is **Khshayarsha**.
  - His reign lasted from 486 B.C. to 465 B.C.
  - He was well known as a builder/developer and vastly improved the palaces that were built by his father Darius I (the Great). He is responsible for consolidating the empire into what is described in Esther 1:1.

3. The writer tells us that Xerxes ruled from the “citadel in Susa” (Esther 1:2)

- The city **Susa** (or Shushan) was a known place in historical and archeological records. It was considered the \_\_\_\_\_ **palace** for Xerxes.
- Xerxes ruled from three other capital cities in the Persian Empire:
  - 1) Babylon
  - 2) Ecbatana
  - 3) **Persepolis** (Considered the summer palace and another prominent place from which he ruled)



- The term **citadel** is used to describe the **fortified palace complex** which was built above a city to defend it and help to keep it from being conquered.
- From the citadel or capital, the king would rule from a throne that was a symbol of power and authority.

## The King's Display (Esther 1:3-8)

1. The writer provides some insight as to the wealth and splendor that existed during the reign of Xerxes:
  - “In 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. And **he displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty for many days, 180 days**” (Esther 1:3-4)
    - 1) The sheer size of the empire (127 provinces) would require the support of an enormous government administrative system – so this was no small party!
    - 2) The writer doesn't tell us the purpose of the banquet but the timing does correspond with the historical account by the Greek historian Herodotus, in which he records Xerxes invasion of Greece (481 B.C). It was common for a king to have a great feast coinciding with a planning session with his military leaders to prepare for a great battle.
    - 3) The 180 day party served that purpose and allowed Xerxes to show off a bit
  - The writer also reveals the **lavish** furnishings and **liberal** pursuits found in the Persian culture (also confirmed by Herodotus the Greek historian):
    - 1) A second party was given that lasted seven days and appears to be geared toward the common people (both small and great).
    - 2) “There were hangings of fine white and violet linen held by cords of fine purple linen on silver rings and marble columns, on couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother of pearl and precious stones. Drinks were served in golden vessels of various kinds, and the royal wine was plentiful according to the king's bounty” (Esther 1:6-7)
  - It seems that partying and drunkenness was a way of life in this Persian culture
2. The writer introduces a new character named **Queen Vashti** who is the king's wife and she also throws a party for the women of the palace. (Esther 1:9)

## **The King's Dilemma (Esther 1:9-12)**

1. The king (Xerxes) had become pretty intoxicated after 7 days of partying and apparently ordered his servants (his “**seven eunuchs**”) to bring his wife to his party and put her on display for all to see.
  - “On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona (also mentioned later in Esther 7:9), Bigtha, Abagtha, Zether and Carkas, the seven eunuchs, who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, 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” (Esther 1:10-11)
  - The reference to these “**seven eunuchs**” would fit this period/era of history in that most kings would require the castration of his closest male servants to avoid the temptation of them sleeping with the queen and thus starting their own dynasty.
  - There is no indication that the king wanted to have Vashti expose herself and do anything immoral (this would not have fit that culture), but he was drunk and his request (though probably less than honorable) was not to be refused under any circumstances as we will soon see by his actions.
  - The writer tells us that Vashti was \_\_\_\_\_. The king admired her beauty and he apparently wanted to show her off to the entire kingdom.
2. A little background about **Vashti**:
  - Her name means; **best, beloved, desired one, or a lovely name by which to be known**. Her name translated in Greek was \_\_\_\_\_.
  - She was the mother of **Artaxerxes** (3<sup>rd</sup> son of **Ahasuerus/Xerxes**) who would later be responsible for the decree that permitted the Jews to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (Daniel 9:25)
3. **Queen Vashti** refused to parade herself in front of everyone (*some commentators conclude it was because she was pregnant*), and that action upset king Ahasuerus which will cause her to lose her crown and her official status as Queen. (Vs. 12)

### The King's Directive (Esther 1:13-22)

1. The stage was being set for the removal of **Queen Vashti** which would allow for Esther to be noticed and eventually become Queen herself...stay tuned!!
2. The refusal by **Vashti** to obey the command of the king was a serious matter in Persian culture as well as royal etiquette. It totally infuriated **King Ahasuerus** and he was not only rejected by his queen, but he also had a confidence problem and his leadership may have even been in question.
  - “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” (Esther 1:12)
  - The king was used to getting whatever he wanted and this refusal no doubt caused some public embarrassment for him.
3. The king consulted his wise men (magicians, seers, and/or other political figures) to determine what he should do about this problem:
  - “Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times – for it was the custom of the king to speak before all who knew law and justice and were close to him: Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, 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” – “According to the law, what is to be done with **Queen Vashti, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs?**” (Esther 1:13-15)
  - The role/influence of “wise men” within the government of the countries/empires of the Near East was pretty significant. This can be confirmed in the book of Daniel, as well as in the historical writings of Herodotus.
  - These “wise men” were like an inner council and some of the king’s closest advisors. Whatever edict that would be issued would hold the weight of the king and thus become law.
  - In the end, **Queen Vashti** will be \_\_\_\_\_ and lose her \_\_\_\_\_ status

4. The special counsel of wise men had additional concerns as to the impact of the decision by Queen Vashti so they determined a course of action (Esther 1:16-22):
- It was determined by the wise men that the actions by **Queen Vashti** might spur an uprising by the noble women of Persia toward their husbands/masters – so something needed to be done to stop what they determined to be utter chaos. (Esther 1:17-18)
  - They requested a decree to be issued by the king (which could not be repealed) that would **depose/remove** Queen Vashti from her royal position and that another woman would be sought and put in her place as the new Queen.
  - They tacked on a little addendum/clause to the edict that stated every man was to be the \_\_\_\_\_ of his household which probably was intended to squelch any possibility of a women's liberation movement for this period of history anyway.
  - The king issued the edict and the ruling was dispersed throughout the empire via the Persian version of the **Pony Express**. (Seriously!!)
5. Be careful what you wish for:
- I can't imagine that this edict/punishment caused the women to respect their husbands more – but it was their apparent intent even though a probable foolish course of action.
  - It seemed to have a remorseful affect on the king, for once his anger subsided, he seemed to really miss his beautiful Queen Vashti (Esther 2:1). It was (as the song says) “**too late to turn back now**”!
  - Personally, I think king Ahasuerus should have just apologized for attempting to bring dishonor to his wife but then it would not have opened the door for Esther to become Queen.
  - In the next chapter the writer will introduce the two main characters of the story which are; \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. We will also see how **Esther** is elevated to the status of the **Queen of Persia**.