

God At Work Behind The Scenes

Vanishing Vashti, the Case of the Reluctant Queen Esther 1

A. The Banquet and Open House of King Ahasuerus 1:1-9

1. The Banquet 1-3.

- a. The identification of the king: Now it took place in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, 1:1
- b. The opening banquet of the King
 - 1) The place of the banquet 1:2: {2} in those days as King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne which *was* at the citadel in Susa,
 - 2) The time of the banquet 1:3: {3} in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet
 - 3) The guests at the 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.

2. The Open House of the King 1:4

- a. The display of the King: {4} And he displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty
- b. The time involved: for many days, 180 days.

3. The concluding banquet of the King 1:5-8

- a. The length of the banquet 1:5: {5} When these days were completed, the king gave a banquet lasting seven days
- b. The guests at the banquet: for all the people who were present at the citadel in Susa, from the greatest to the least,

¹ This sermon was delivered by James T. Bartsch on Sunday morning, October 8, 2006 at Flint Hills Community Church, Cottonwood Falls, KS.

- c. The venue of the banquet: in the court of the garden of the king's palace.
- d. The furnishings for the banquet 1:6
 - 1) The hangings: *{6} There were hangings of fine white and violet linen held by cords of fine purple linen on silver rings and marble columns,*
 - 2) The couches: *and couches of gold and silver*
 - 3) The flooring: on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and precious stones.
- e. The drinks at the banquet 1:7-8
 - 1) The elegance of the goblets 1:7: *{7} Drinks were served in golden vessels of various kinds,*
 - 2) The plentitude of the wine: *and the royal wine was plentiful according to the king's bounty.*
 - 3) The freedom in drinking 1:8: *{8} The drinking was done according to the law, there was no compulsion, for so the king had given orders to each official of his household that he should do according to the desires of each person.*

4. The concurrent banquet of the Queen 1:9

- a. The hostess: *{9} Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for*
- b. The female guests: *the women in the palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus.*

B. The Queen Refuses to Attend. Queen Vashti's Refusal to be Displayed at the King's Banquet 1:10-12

- 1. **The condition of the King 1:10:** *{10} On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine,*
 - a. Alcohol. See Prov 23:29-35: *Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has contentions? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without cause? Who has redness of eyes? {30} Those who linger long over wine, Those who go to taste mixed wine. {31} Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it goes down smoothly; {32} At the last*

it bites like a serpent And stings like a viper. {33} Your eyes will see strange things And your mind will utter perverse things. {34} And you will be like one who lies down in the middle of the sea, Or like one who lies down on the top of a mast. {35} "They struck me, *but* I did not become ill; They beat me, *but* I did not know *it*. When shall I awake? I will seek another drink."

- b. Ephesians 5:18 "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit."
 - c. Alcohol reduces one's inhibitions. In other words, alcohol makes you more willing to do things that otherwise you would think are wrong or inappropriate. Why do people who are at a certain stage of drunkenness laugh at everything even though it's not funny? Why do you think guys want to get girls liquored up on a date? So they will be willing to go to bed when otherwise they might think it was inappropriate.
 - d. Several years ago I had an arthroscopic knee surgery. When I was out of surgery and going home, I was extremely outgoing and a bit noisy. I didn't realize it at the time, but later on, a woman who was working in the front office at the hospital also attended our church. The next Sunday when she saw me, she giggled and said, "You were higher than a kite." "I was?" "Yes you were." See, I didn't know that the pain-killer drugs they gave me would make me that way. If I had known that, I would have tried to calm down as I left the hospital. Pain killers, like alcohol, make us lose our inhibitions!
2. **The command of the King 1:11:** he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, {11} to bring Queen Vashti before the king with *her* royal crown
 - a. The purpose of the King: in order to display her beauty to the people and the princes, for she was beautiful.
 3. **The refusal of the Queen 1:12:** {12} But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs.
 4. **The Anger of the King:** Then the king became very angry and his wrath burned within him. *See the following Proverbs:*
 - a. (Prov 12:16 NNAS) A fool's **anger** is known at once, But a prudent man conceals dishonor.
 - b. (Prov 14:17 NNAS) A **quick-tempered man** acts foolishly, And a man of

evil devices is hated.

- c. (Prov 14:29 NNAS) He who is slow to **anger** has great understanding, But he who is quick-tempered exalts folly.
- d. (Prov 15:1 NNAS) A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up **anger**.
- e. (Prov 15:18 NNAS) A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, But the slow to **anger** calms a dispute.
- f. (Prov 16:32 NNAS) He who is slow to **anger** is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.
- g. (Prov 19:11 NNAS) A man's discretion makes him slow to **anger**, And it is his glory to overlook a transgression.
- h. (Prov 19:19 NNAS) *A man of great anger* will bear the penalty, For if you rescue *him*, you will only have to do it again.
- i. (Prov 20:2 NNAS) The terror of a king is like the growling of a lion; He who provokes him to **anger** forfeits his own life.
- j. (Prov 22:24 NNAS) Do not associate with a man *given to anger*; Or go with a hot-tempered man,
- k. (Prov 24:17-18 NNAS) Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; *{18}* Or the LORD will see *it* and be displeased, And turn His **anger** away from him.
- l. (Prov 27:4 NNAS) Wrath is fierce and **anger** is a flood, But who can stand before jealousy? ²
- m. (Prov 29:8 NNAS) Scorners set a city aflame, But wise men turn away **anger**.
- n. (Prov 29:22 NNAS) An **angry** man stirs up strife, And a hot-tempered

² Prov. 27:4: Comment by Sid Buzzell, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*:

27:4. When a person is angry and furious he can be **cruel** toward others. His words and actions may cause others to cower in fear. But jealousy is even worse because it may include **anger** and **fury** and merciless revenge, as illustrated in 6:32-35. **Who can stand before jealousy?** is one of the few rhetorical questions in Proverbs.

man abounds in transgression.

- o. (Prov 30:33 NNAS) For the churning of milk produces butter, And pressing the nose brings forth blood; So the churning of **anger** produces strife.

C. The King Deposes the Queen 1:13-22

1. Consultation. The King consults with the seven princes of Persia and Media 1:13-15

- a. The qualifications of the consultants 1:13-14a
 - 1) They were wise men 1:13: *{13}* Then the king said to the wise men
 - 2) They understood the times: who understood the times–
 - 3) They knew the law and justice: for it was the custom of the king so *to speak* before all who knew law and justice
 - 4) They were close to the king 1:14a: *{14}* and were close to him:
- b. The identity of the consultants 1:14b: Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media
- c. The influence of the consultants: who had access to the king's presence and sat in the first place in the kingdom–
- d. The question of the King 1:15: *{15}* "According to law, what is to be done with Queen Vashti, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus *delivered* by the eunuchs?"

2. Advice. Memucan advises the king to depose Vashti as Queen in order to promote wifely respect for husbands throughout the realm 1:16-20

- a. His thesis: Queen Vashti has wronged the whole nation 1:16
 - 1) The King: *{16}* In the presence of the king and the princes, Memucan said, "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king
 - 2) The princes: but *also* all the princes

- 3) The peoples of the provinces: and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.
 - b. His reasoning 1:17-18
 - 1) The Queen's bad example will engender contempt among the common women of the empire toward their husbands 1:17: {17}
"For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women causing them to look with contempt on their husbands by saying, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in to his presence, but she did not come.'
 - 2) The Queen's bad example will engender contempt among the ladies of Persia and Media toward the King's Princes 1:18: {18}
"This day the ladies of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's conduct will speak in *the same way* to all the king's princes, and there will be plenty of contempt and anger.
 - c. His counsel -- let the King make a Law 1:19: {19} "If it pleases the king, let a royal edict be issued by him and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media so that it cannot be repealed,
 - 1) That Vashti be deposed: that Vashti may no longer come into the presence of King Ahasuerus,
 - 2) That the King choose another to be Queen: and let the king give her royal position to another who is more worthy than she.
 - d. His rationale -- the King's edict will cause all women throughout the kingdom to honor their husbands 1:20: {20} "When the king's edict which he will make is heard throughout all his kingdom, great as it is, then all women will give honor to their husbands, great and small."
- 3. Law. The king issues an edict deposing Vashti 1:21-22**
- a. The agreement of the King and his royal advisors 1:21: {21} *This* word pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed.

- b. The King's kingdom wide edict 1:22
 - 1) The extent of the edict
 - a) To every province: {22} So he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province according to its script
 - b) To every people: and to every people according to their language,
 - 2) The content of the edict
 - a) Every man should be the master of his own house: that every man should be the master in his own house
 - b) The language of the husband should be the prevailing language of the house: and the one who speaks in the language of his own people.

D. Principles to Remember

1. What lesson can we learn about Marriage?

- a. We have here a clear case of marital discord.
 - 1) The text states that Ahasuerus' heart was merry with wine after 7 days of drinking. We know that consuming too much alcohol lowers one's inhibitions. This is not a good sign.
 - 2) So in a state of evidently too much wine, presumably, with lowered inhibitions, Ahasuerus gives an order. This order is for his wife, the Queen, to appear. Now since she had been giving a banquet for the ladies, it seems safe to assume that, ordinarily, these banquets were not co-ed affairs. Is it possible that Vashti was uncomfortable coming to a banquet comprised of men, a great many of whom were inebriated?
 - 3) Whatever the case, because the text does not say, Vashti did not come.

- b. Here is something we know for sure. God’s Word commands husbands to love their wives the same way that Christ loves His Church. Christ showed his love for the church by dying on the cross to save people from the penalty for sin.
 - 1) (Eph 5:25-30) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, {26} so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, {27} that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. {28} So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; {29} for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church, {30} because we are members of His body.
 - 2) Since Ahasuerus was soused with wine, it seems doubtful that he was acting in the best interests of his wife. It is clear that he wanted to show her off, like some trophy of his.
- c. We also know that Vashti did not submit to her husband, the King, and his command. We know that God expects wives to submit to their own husbands in everything, just as the Church does to Christ.
 - 1) (Eph 5:22-24) Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord. {23} For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself *being* the Savior of the body. {24} But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives *ought to be* to their husbands in everything.
- d. It’s a two-way street: (Eph 5:33) Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must *see to it* that she respects her husband. (May I point out that the word for “respects” in the original language is the word “fear.”) She should fear to contradict her husband, fear to disobey him.

- e. I attended a conference on Domestic Abuse some time ago. During a discussion period at the end of one of the sessions, the subject of wives submitting to their husbands came up, and a number of women began to discuss the subject with disdain and vitriol. Finally, I could take it no longer. I spoke up and said something like this, "The Bible clearly says that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the Church. It also says that wives are to submit to their husbands in all things as the Church does to Christ. Whenever you have a marriage in which either the husband does not love his wife the way Christ loved the Church, and / or you have a wife who does not submit to Christ as the Church does to Christ, you have an unhappy or ineffective or a broken marriage." It is a two-way street.
- f. When we have a husband who does not love his wife like Christ loved the Church, and when we have a wife who does not follow her husbands instruction as the church is to follow Christ, we have marital discord.
- g. Furthermore that marital discord is a detriment to society. When the fabric of a home begins to fall apart, the nation begins to fall apart. A breakdown in the home endangers the solidity and the safety and the viability of a nation. You can see that in our own nation, the United States, today.

2. The Sovereignty of God:

- a. But in the final analysis, Esther 1 was not written to us to tell us the evils of alcohol. It was not written to us to tell us the evils of anger. Nor was it written to us to tell us the evils of marital discord.
- b. Esther 1 is all about God using a drunken king and an insubmissive, vanquished queen to bring in a new queen whom God will use to save His people.
- c. As we work our way through the book of Esther, we will discover that Esther is about the Sovereignty of God in protecting His people.
 - 1) (Psa 115:3) But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.
 - 2) (Dan 2:20-21) Daniel said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, For wisdom and power belong to Him. {21} "It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding.

- 3) (Dan 4:34-35) "But at the end of that period, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored **Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. {35}** "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'
- 4) (Jer 31:37) Thus says the LORD, "If the heavens above can be measured And the foundations of the earth searched out below, Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel For all that they have done," declares the LORD.
- 5) (John 10:27-28) "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; {28} and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.

God is the All-Powerful Monarch who controls Kings and removes Queens to protect His people. Are you under His protection? Are you one of God's people?

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