

THE BOOK OF ESTHER

ERWIN KURTH

LIVING WAY
BIBLE STUDY



LWBS

LIVING WAY BIBLE STUDY

Welcome to Living Way Bible Study

Thank you for your order! It is our prayer that the Holy Spirit will use this study to help you grow in your knowledge and appreciation of our God and His Word. *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."* 2 Peter 3:18

WHO WE ARE

Living Way Bible Study, Inc. is an auxiliary of the Pacific Southwest District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS). All studies are written and/or edited by LCMS pastors. We have been providing studies to churches throughout the U.S. and Canada since 1982.

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These studies are available by email (pdf-file) or snail-mail (hard copy). For a *suggested* donation of \$1-per-lesson within a study (e.g., 23-lesson study of John is \$23) you receive an original of the study, from which you are then free to make copies for your class. Please honor our copyright of these materials.

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As a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization that relies solely on freewill donations, *additional donations are much appreciated* and enable us to continue to produce and promote the study of God's Word.

CONTACT US

If you have any questions or comments on this study or any part of it, please contact us. We are always eager to hear from "our students" and appreciate your comments.

May God bless you as you walk in His Living Way!

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LWBS Four-Step Method

Living Way Bible Study suggests this four-step method:

1. **PERSONAL** – The student prays for guidance from the Holy Spirit and answers the Personal Application (P.A.) questions at home using only the Bible (no commentaries).
2. **SMALL GROUPS** – The class meets for an opening and divides into small groups of 8–10 people. The small group leader guides the group through the P.A. questions, encouraging each to share their answers and discuss further as time allows.
3. **THE MESSAGE** – The lecture or message is given by a pastor or layperson who has researched the material and presents the study, giving personal insight and augmenting, but not duplicating, the author's comments.
4. **THE NARRATIVE** – The author's comments or narrative, along with the P.A. questions for the next lesson, are given out at the end of the class. At the next class meeting, before answering the P.A. questions, the small groups may choose to review the author's comments of the last lesson, and share what each has highlighted as meaningful or important.

Each lesson should be stapled together according to the number of the lesson in the right-hand corner of the page. The P.A. questions for the next week should be attached after the author's narrative for the current week, as they will be the home study for the next class session.

The first meeting of the class is an introduction to the study. Since the members of the small groups have no P.A. questions to discuss at the first meeting, they may use the time to get acquainted or to tell what they hope to receive by studying this course. At the first meeting, the lecturer presents background information about the course, using the Introduction lesson as a guide.

With this four-step method the student has the opportunity to study the particular section of Scripture covered by the lesson from four different approaches. This emphasizes the Bible text and gives the student an understanding and ownership for each section studied.



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What our Students are Saying...

Lakeside Community Lutheran Church (Webster, WI):

"Our Bible Study in Genesis is in full swing and I had to let you know so far it is a great success. We have been struggling for some time attracting people to our studies and finally I think we have hit the jackpot! We have a full house (room) of enthusiastic, constant participants, including MEN! Our lessons are animated to say the least and everyone participates fully. ... We have been using your studies since 2003 and really enjoy them as they are very precise and informative, easy to understand and uplifting."

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"Our breakfast Prayer Group again finds your studies helpful and rewarding."

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"Our group leaders are very pleased with the additional background information that is provided with Living Way courses."

Faith Lutheran Church (Sequim, WA): "Currently in our 10th year ...continue to be blessed... have between 70-90+ men and women... some are non-members of our church... use to plug new members in."

St. James Lutheran Church (Cleveland, OH): "...we greatly appreciate the ministry of Living Way Bible Study! They're all very good! ..."

Faith Lutheran Church (Sequim, WA): "I'm looking forward to our study that your ministry has blessed us with ... Your study allows one to go as deep as time permits or give the simplest most direct answer ... providing materials for us to become proficient in His living and active Word."

Holy Cross Lutheran Church (San Diego, CA): "The women...continue to enjoy the lessons you provide. We have had many lively discussions over the questions in the lessons."

Lakeside Community Lutheran Church (Webster, WI - ELCA):

"Your studies are excellent and we look forward to each study we undertake."

Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd (Olympia, WA - ELCA):

"We're starting into year 12!...We've been enjoying all of the studies and appreciate your service."

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church (Tacoma, WA): "Living Way Bible Study has been an excellent study that we have used for almost 30 years."

Bethany Lutheran Church (Long Beach, CA): "We are going on our 30th year in LWBS. Our group of about 40 really loves it and grows in our faith with each new study."

Crown of Life Lutheran Church (Sun City, AZ): "I used the Thessalonians study for the Ministry Staff Retreat (7 of us) and will be repeating a small portion of the study for a three week session with approximately 50 adults. The material is excellent and very helpful to me as I prepare to teach."



The Book of Esther

REVEREND ERWIN KURTH

7 Lessons

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Reverend Erwin Kurth

PRE INTRODUCTION

Contents
Date
Place in the Canon
Canon of the Old Testament
Canon of the New Testament
Personal Application – Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Four Important People Found in this Book
A Glimpse of Secular History
Esther's Role
Time Slot for the Story of Esther
Personal Application – Esther 1

ESTHER 1

Schedule of Approximate Dates and Events
Background Information and Surmises
Plenty of Feasting
Queen Vashti Infuriates King Xerxes
The Royal Husband Seeks Counsel
The Reaction to the Committee's Report
Vashti in Later Years
Headship, Not Lordship
Personal Application – Esther 2

ESTHER 2

Xerxes Regretfully Remembers Vashti
In Search of a New Queen
Mordecai and Esther
Elegant Girls are Brought to the Royal Harem

LESSON 1

5

6

LESSON 2

10

10

11

11

12

12

12

12

13

LESSON 3

15

15

15

16

I	A Long, Drawn-Out Routine	16
i	Esther Replaces Vashti as Queen	17
	Mordecai Reports an Assassination Plot	17
	Personal Application – Esther 3 & 4	18

1 ESTHER 3 & 4

1 Meet the Villain 20

1 The Date of the Massacre is Set by Lot 21

2 The Frightful Proclamation 21

2 Mordecai Bemoans the Lot of Jewry 21

3 Esther is Perplexed by Mordecai's Conduct 22

Esther's Response and Plan 22

Personal Application – Esther 5 & 6 23

6 ESTHER 5 & 6

7 Esther Has Initial Success 25

7 Haman Acts like a Manic-Depressive 26

8 The King Honors Mordecai 26

"It's an Omen!" Say Haman's Family and Friends 27

Personal Application – Esther 7 & 8 28

11 ESTHER 7 & 8

11 Esther Identifies Haman as the Archvillain 30

11 Haman's Fate is Sealed 30

12 Events Multiply Rapidly 31

12 Personal Application – Esther 9 & 10 33

12 ESTHER 9 & 10

13 Two Decrees Are in Effect 35

The Tables Are Turned 35

Fanatics Cling to Their First Resolve 36

"Any Further Requests, Queen Esther?" 36

How Things Fared in the Provinces 36

The Feast of Purim is Established 37

A Time of Peace 37

Characteristics of Esther 38

LESSON 4

LESSON 5

LESSON 6

LESSON 7



Author Information – Reverend Erwin Kurth

LWBS Courses: *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Co-author)

The Gospel According to Mark

The Acts of the Apostles

The Book of Ezra

The Book of Nehemiah

The Book of Esther

The Book of Job

The Book of Proverbs

The Book of Ecclesiastes

The Song of Solomon

The Gospel According to St. Luke (Co-author)

Graduated from Concordia Seminary – 1922

Sixty-five years in the ministry with the LCMS

Areas of particular interest are: Christian Stewardship and Bible study. Conducted seminars and workshops in the U.S. and Canada on *How to Run A Successful Every-member Canvas*

The Kurth-Zehnder Plan is still available in book form

Attended Biblical Seminary in New York City, NY

Fostered intensive Bible study and taught Bible study classes wherever he served as Pastor. These include LCMS churches in Montana, Nebraska, Minnesota, Brooklyn, NY, Fort Wayne, IN, Detroit, MI and California.

Conferred the Doctor of Divinity Degree from Concordia Seminary – 1960 Guest speaker on the International Lutheran Hour

Served as part-time Bible Instructor at Christ College Irvine, in Irvine, CA

Author of *Catechetical Helps* (Concordia Publishing House)

His life companion, Esther Pfothauer Kurth, has supported his ministry typing much of his longhand script

Our beloved author, Dr. Kurth, was called home to be with the Lord on October 22, 1989 at the age of 91 years.



The Book of Esther

REVEREND ERWIN KURTH

PRE-INTRODUCTION

CANON OF THE OLD TESTAMENT	2
CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT	2
PERSONAL APPLICATION – INTRODUCTION	3

“Esther is the last of the five Scrolls which are found in the Writings, the third division of the Hebrew canon. These five scrolls, the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther are read on special occasions during the year. Esther is the reading appointed for ‘Purim.’”

CONTENTS

“The Old Testament book of Esther tells the story of the deliverance of the Jews won by Esther under the Persians and gives reason for the institution of Purim: a symbol of heroic resistance against persecution. In the book, Esther has two names: (a) Esther, used when she is given her official Persian title as queen; (b) Hadassah (Hebrew “Myrtle”) which seems to be regarded as her Jewish name (Esther 2:7)” (The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible).

DATE

“Esther, a Jewess, became Queen of Persia 478 B.C. Esther saved the Jews from massacre 473 B.C. Chronologically, though this book comes after the book of Nehemiah, yet its events antedate Nehemiah by about 30 years. Esther, it seems, made possible the work of Nehemiah. Her marriage to the King must have given Jews great prestige. It is impossible to guess what might have happened to the Hebrew nation had there been no Esther. Except for her, Jerusalem might never have been rebuilt, and there might have been a different story to tell to all future ages” (Halley’s Bible Handbook) .

PLACE IN THE CANON

“Esther is the last of the five Scrolls which are found in the Writings, the third division of the Hebrew canon. These five scrolls, the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther are read on special occasions during the year. Esther is the reading appointed for Purim.”

“Both Jews and Christians were slow to admit Esther to the canon. The early Jewish comments on the text show their concern to make the religious aspect of the book more apparent. They add references to God’s purpose, and prayers by Mordecai and Esther (Apocryphal)” (The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible).

CANON OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

“The canon of the Old Testament accepted by the Protestants today was very likely established by the dawn of the second century A.D., though after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in 70. The precise scope of the Old Testament was discussed among the Jews until the Council of Jamnia (c.90). This Hebrew canon was not accepted by the early church, which used the Septuagint. In spite of disagreements among some of the church fathers as to which books were canonical and which were not, the Apocryphal books continued in common use by most Christians until the Reformation. During this period most Protestants decided to follow the original Hebrew canon (39 books) while Rome, at the Council of Trent (1546) and more recently at the First Vatican Council (1869-70), affirmed the larger “Alexandrian” canon that includes the Apocrypha” (Concordia Self-Study Bible).

“Conditions had to be fulfilled before each book was canonized separately. The first was survival. When books had to be copied laboriously and expensively on papyrus or parchment, no work could survive for a few centuries unless it attracted readers.”

“We saw that prophecy ceased shortly before 200 B.C., and no inspired book could be written except by a prophet. The canonization of the Law is identified with that of the whole Hebrew Bible. We may fix the closing of the canon by the canonization of the writings, ca. A.D. 90.” (The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible)

CANON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

“At the beginning of the third century the canon of the New Testament had unquestionably come into being and there is wide agreement about its constituent parts. Minor areas of disagreement still remained until the end of the fourth century... when the list of twenty-seven books was given the sanction of councilor authority in North Africa, first at a council held in Hippo in 393 and again at the Third Council of Carthage held in 397, with Augustine present at both of them. Canon 39 of the later council decrees that ‘apart from the canonical scriptures, nothing may be read in the Church under the name of divine scriptures.’ After a list of books of the Old Testament, the canon goes on as follows: ‘of the New testament: of the gospels, four books; of the Acts of the Apostles, one book; epistles of Paul the apostle, thirteen; of the same, to the Hebrews, one; of Peter the apostle, two; of John, three; of James, one; of Jude, one; the Apocalypse of John, one book.’”

“These were the first councilor pronouncements to be made anywhere on the limits of the New Testament canon; and it is to be noted that they did not come until the end of the fourth century, and were the decisions of provincial synods, not of ecumenical council. The canon was determined by usage, by the common consent of the Christian community, testing the books in its daily life over centuries; not by formal authority” (The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible).

PERSONAL APPLICATION – INTRODUCTION

Blessed Lord, You speak to us through the Holy Scriptures. Grant that we may hear, read, respect, learn, and make them our own in such a way that the enduring benefit and comfort of the Word will help us grasp and hold the blessed hope of life everlasting, given us through our Savior Jesus Christ... Amen.

1. Give your thoughts on the sentence: "It is impossible to guess what might have happened to the Hebrew nation had there been no Esther."
 2. What was the concern about admitting *The Book of Esther* to the Old Testament Canon?
 3. What did the Jews do to make *Esther* more acceptable to them?
 4. How early was the Old Testament canon, that is accepted by most Protestants, established?
 5. Discuss the conditions given before an O.T. book of the Bible was canonized.
 6. Which canon did most Protestants follow and how many books are in this canon?
 7. Which canon do Roman Catholics follow? Give names and dates.
 8. When was the canon of the New Testament finalized?
 9. How many books are in the New Testament and at what two councils were they sanctioned?
 10. Discuss how the N.T. canon was determined.
 11. What personal introspection can you add to these historical facts about the establishment of the canon of the Holy Bible?
-

12. Briefly summarize each of the following references: 2 Timothy 3:16

2 Peter 1:21

1 Corinthians 2:13

Isaiah 40:8

Matthew 5:18

1 Peter 1:25

Hebrews 4:12

2 Timothy 2:9

Proverbs 30:5-6

John 17:17

Isaiah 55:11



A GLIMPSE OF SECULAR HISTORY	6
ESTHER'S ROLE	7
TIME SLOT FOR THE STORY OF ESTHER	7
PERSONAL APPLICATION – ESTHER 1:1-22	8

“Queen Esther was an instrument in the hand of God to save the remnant of Israel, the tribe of Judah, from extermination.”

Two books of the Bible have women's names: Ruth and Esther. Though the word “God” does not appear even once in the book of Esther, yet His overruling providence is so manifestly present that we might title the book: “The Workings of Providence.” The book of Esther also offers an historical account of the origin of the Feast of Purim, observed by universal Jewry to this day.

FOUR IMPORTANT PEOPLE FOUND IN THIS BOOK

Ahasuerus (Hebrew form of the name, **Xerxes**). He was king over the 127 provinces of the Persian Empire, 486-465 B.C.

Esther Incognito Jewish maiden who became queen and consort of Xerxes, eventually delivering her people from annihilation.

Mordecai Cousin and foster-father of Esther. At his direction Esther, his ward, risked her life by asking her royal spouse to give the Jews a fighting chance. On the day set for the holocaust she pleaded for the king to save their lives, families and possessions.

Haman Chief executive of the king; envious, prideful, and villainous. He concocted a plan to liquidate not only the one Jew he hated most (Mordecai), but as many throughout the land as possible.

Four Persian kings and their beneficent activities in behalf of Israel are recorded in the Bible.

Cyrus 558-529 BC Founder and first king of the Persian empire. Cyrus was a humane ruler who permitted captives to return to their respective homeland. Moreover, he encouraged the Hebrews to construct a temple (later called Zerubbabel's temple) on the site where once stood the temple of Solomon. He did more; he

returned the temple treasures and precious articles which Nebuchadnezzar had carted away seventy years earlier and laid it on the conscience of the general public to contribute to the support and welfare of the emigrants, (Ezra 1:1-10).

Darius

521-486 BC

When the legal right to build the temple was challenged by neighboring enemies, the Jews appealed to Darius to correct the situation. Darius had researchers go through the archives until, at last, they located a copy of the original permit granted by Cyrus. Thereupon, Darius issued a decree that no further hindrances dared be put in the way of building the temple—on pain of death (Ezra 5:6 - 6:12).

Ahasuerus

486-465 BC

He is briefly mentioned in Ezra 4:6 and, of course, quite fully in the Book of Esther. He chose Esther to replace Vashti as his queen. He succeeded his father Darius and “ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush” (Ethiopia) (Esther 1:1).

Artaxerxes

465-425 BC

Son and successor of Xerxes. He allowed Ezra to go to Jerusalem to inaugurate reforms among the people of Judah and Benjamin (Ezra 7-10). Twelve years later, he granted his cupbearer Nehemiah two leaves of absence; one, to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem and two, to reestablish conformity to the Law of Moses as transmitted by the Sovereign Lord (Nehemiah 2:1ff).

Note: We have learned of the activities of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes in behalf of the Jewish people. However, we scarcely learned anything (except for Ezra 4:6) about Xerxes or Ahasuerus. We shall soon learn a good deal more about him as we study the Book of Esther, for he was her royal spouse. Before proceeding, however, let us delve a bit into secular history.

A GLIMPSE OF SECULAR HISTORY

The Persian empire was a vast domain of land, extending all the way from the Indus River westward to the Mediterranean Sea. It included Palestine and then South to the Northeast portion of Africa. One would fancy that such a gargantuan expanse of territory would satisfy the desires of any ruler. But not so! Darius had his sight set on a portion of Europe beginning with Greece.

A Persian army was dispatched to Greece and eventually encamped on the plain of Marathon, twenty miles from Athens. The Athenian army of 10,000 men plus 1,000 warriors from Plataea was greatly outnumbered, but Miltiades employed a clever strategy and routed the Persian army. This occurred in 490 B.C. The strategy was for the central section of the Greek army to feign a retreat, while the two massive flanks encircled them in a pincers movement.

Note: A runner from Marathon brought the news of victory to Athens. What a fast race he ran. Part of the Olympiad today is the so-called marathon race, first included in the Olympic games at Athens in 1896 and standardized in 1906 at 26 miles, 385 yards.

Ten years later, Xerxes sought to subjugate Greece and specifically to punish Athens for the humiliation at Marathon. However, Themistocles had persuaded the Athenians to build a formidable navy which, if successful in destroying the Persian cargo fleet that carried warriors to operate on land, would leave the foot-soldiers stranded and without replenishment of supplies.

Xerxes reached Greece with a gargantuan army and navy. The land force was temporarily halted by 300 Spartans at the narrow pass of Thermopylae, but the Persians moved on to pillage Athens. However, in the straits off the Island of Salamis, not far from Athens, the Greek navy with its short, maneuverable vessels readily rammed the Persian ships and drove them away. Xerxes had to beat a retreat to his citadel of Susa. Thus the threat of tyranny over an incipient democracy, fostered by Greece, was thwarted. This event in 480 B.C. turned the tide of history in favor of human dignity and rights. Strangely enough, the time came when the Greeks reversed the process. Under Alexander the Great, they vanquished the Persians. That was in 328 B.C.

*Haman had to be foiled in his wicked plan.
Esther was chosen to do just that.*

The story of Esther took place between the return of Xerxes after his defeat at Salamis and his assassination by the captain of his bodyguard. He was succeeded by his son, Artaxerxes.

ESTHER'S ROLE

Queen Esther was an instrument in the hand of God to save the remnant of Israel, the tribe of Judah, from extermination. The Messiah was foreordained to come from the tribe of Judah which was scattered throughout the Persian empire.

The prophecy clearly stated: "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Genesis 49:10). "For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah" (Hebrews 7:14a). "Salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22b). "Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah,

the Root of David, hath prevailed..." (Revelation 5:5, KJV).

Haman was determined to wipe out the Jews in the 127 provinces of the Persian empire. If successful, he would have frustrated God's redemptive purposes. This did not dare happen. Haman had to be foiled in his wicked plan. Esther was chosen to do just that.

That's the reason why the Book of Esther is included in the Old Testament canon (the list of books of the Bible officially accepted by the church as genuine).

The Book also renders an account of the origin of Purim, Feast of Lots, celebrated by international Jewry to this day. It commemorates the deliverance of the Jews by Esther from a general massacre plotted by Haman (Esther 9:22).

TIME SLOT FOR THE STORY OF ESTHER

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 515 B.C. | completion of the Temple under Zerubbabel. |
| 490 B.C. | defeat of the Persian army by the Greeks on the plain of Marathon. Darius was the Persian King at the time (521-486 B.C.). |
| 480 B.C. | defeat of the Persian navy by the Greeks off the Island of Salamis. Xerxes was the king at the time (486-465 B.C.). He made the Jewish maiden Esther his queen and consort. |
| 458 B.C. | which was 57 years after the completion of "Zerubbabel's Temple." Artaxerxes, son of Xerxes, was the Persian monarch (465- 424 B.C.). Ezra and Nehemiah were the recipients of his royal favors (See Ezra, chapter 7-10 and continuing in the Book of Nehemiah). |

PERSONAL APPLICATION – ESTHER 1:1-22

Pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you prepare to read the first chapter of the Book of Esther. Contemplate its content, reflect on the questions and supply the answers in the spaces provided below.

Esther 1:1-9

1. The Hebrew form of the name Xerxes appears in the first verse of Esther and in Ezra 4:6. What was that name?

2. Describe the extent of the Persian empire and give the number of provinces or states over which Xerxes ruled?

3. Of the four capitals of the Persian empire, which one is mentioned in chapter one?

4. In the third year of his reign, Xerxes arranged for the governors (regional directors), military men, and other officials and nobles to meet with him in consecutive groups during a 180-day period. Give several reasons why you think he might wish to confer with them.

5. After the six months period of business meetings was over, Xerxes thought it well to express his appreciation to the men of Susa, rich and poor alike. He gave them an extended banquet. List the factors which were unusual or distinctive to this event.

6. Lest the women be overlooked, who provided a banquet for them?

Esther 1:10-12

7. What unbecoming request did Xerxes make of his Oriental queen on the seventh day of dining and wining?

Why did the king make this request?

8. What was the king's reaction to Vashti's response?

Esther 1:13-22

9. Whom did the king consult concerning Vashti's rejection of his mandate?

10. What question did the king place before his committee of seven experts?

11. The committee considered the king's question and delivered its reply through its chairman, Memucan. Of what was Vashti declared guilty?

12. How might Vashti's behavior influence the women of the provinces?

13. What royal action did the committee propose through its chairman?

14. What salutary effect would such a decree have upon all women, according to the Committee's viewpoint?

15. How was the decree published?

16. Read Ephesians 5:21-6:4 and Colossians 3:18-21. How do you interpret these Scripture texts in today's relationships from the position of:
Singles?

Wives?

Husbands?

Children?

Parents?



PLENTY OF FEASTING – ESTHER 1:1-9	11
QUEEN VASHTI INFURIATES KING XERXES – ESTHER 1:10-12	11
THE ROYAL HUSBAND SEEKS COUNSEL – ESTHER 1:13-15	12
THE REACTION TO THE COMMITTEE'S REPORT – ESTHER 1:21-22	12
VASHTI IN LATER YEARS	12
HEADSHIP, NOT LORDSHIP	12
PERSONAL APPLICATION – ESTHER 2	13

SCHEDULE OF APPROXIMATE DATES AND EVENTS

- 486 B.C. Xerxes, son of Darius, occupied the Persian throne and reigned from 486-465 B.C.
- 484 B.C. Xerxes arranged to meet with officials, nobles, and office-holders of the realm. They arrived in groups, one after another, during a 180-day period. The purpose was manifold; presumably
- to impress upon them the vast wealth of the kingdom and the splendiferous efficiency of his rulership;
 - to hear reports on the current state of affairs in each of the 127 provinces, to take counsel and to suggest appropriate action, particularly against those thought to have criticized the State;
 - for the king to manifest sumptuous hospitality to his subordinates and to arouse within their unconscious a sense of dependence on His Royal Highness for further favors; and finally,
 - to make plans for the future, including an attack on Greece. (A quote from the Concordia Self-Study Bible: "The gathering may have been to plan for the disastrous campaigns of 482-479.").
- 482 B.C. Queen Vashti was deposed because of her insubordination to her royal spouse.
- 480 B.C. Xerxes lost the naval battle at Salamis and the Persians withdrew from Greece.
- 478 B.C. Esther became queen and replaced Vashti (2:16-17).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND SURMISES

Xerxes ruled over a vast empire, extending all the way from the western part of India to the Mediterranean Sea (including Palestine, of course) and

southward to Egypt and Ethiopia (1:1).

His father, Darius, had worked out an efficient system of managing a vast domain such as Persia. Not only did his son Xerxes adopt the system, but so did Alexander the Great after he had vanquished the Persians.

The system was basically this: The empire was divided into 127 geographical provinces, with a governor over each. Contiguous provinces were united into dominions, called satrapies, over which twenty satraps exercised rule. The chain of command ran from the king to each satrap and on to each governor down to the slave populace. The report system followed the same route except in reverse, from the governor to the respective satrap and on to the king.

Matters that needed attention or adjustment could thus be readily handled, such as, replacing an inept, corrupt, or deceased governor; gathering in full quota of taxes; conscripting men for the army and navy; allaying tensions and squelching uprisings; maintaining law and order according to the tyrant's concept of "justice"; and annexing foreign territories to the empire. Xerxes had his sight set on Greece.

Those in power were chiefly concerned with perpetuating themselves in office and, to that end, followed the notorious dictum, "The public be damned." That's the way with tyrants and their ilk. The sad part is, there is no mechanism to vote them out of office.

In "the ancient world...we find the same conditions: a despot enthroned, whose whims and passions are the determining factor in the state, a wretched populace; a great priestly organization to which is handed over the domain of the intellect." – Edith Hamilton in *The Greek Way*.

PLENTY OF FEASTING – ESTHER 1:1-9

Two things loomed large in the mind of Xerxes; to tighten his hold on the empire and to enlarge its borders by annexing Greece. Accordingly, in the third year of his reign, he had the "top brass" meet with him in sections, one after the other, during a six-month period in order to crystallize plans.

It was unthinkable for the satraps, governors, military leaders, princes, and nobles to be absent from their posts of duty for 180 days hand-running. Therefore it must be assumed they arrived consecutively in groups.

After that, Xerxes thought it well to express his appreciation to the men of Susa, rich and poor alike, who had served the VIP's so efficiently and satisfactorily. He gave them an extended banquet.

The distribution of food and drink must have been an all-day operation to satisfy so many guests. No limit was placed on the number of drinks an individual wished to imbibe. The festivities were held in the King's park where a great tent had been erected. Gorgeous hangings were suspended from silver rings attached to marble pillars. Couches of gold and silver stood on purple colored tiles. Jewels were copiously displayed. The golden wine-goblets were handmade, each different from the other and therefore quite expensive. What an extravagant exhibition of Oriental opulence, power, and grandeur.

Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes (1:9). Feasts are prominently featured in the Book of Esther. We assume Xerxes must have provided the many banquets for the various groups which visited him during a six-month period. We learned of the outdoor barbecue he furnished, lasting seven days (1:5). Later on, we shall hear of the two private dinners Esther arranged for Xerxes and Haman (5:1-8, 7:1). Finally, in chapters 8-10, the Feasts of Purim are recorded.

QUEEN VASHTI INFURIATES KING XERXES – ESTHER 1:10-12

On the final day of the week-long festivities, "when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine," he issued an order through his seven eunuchs that Queen Vashti appear at the stag party so that he could show off her beauty. With consideration for her royal standing, she was not expected to perform, but she was bade to appear, wearing her royal robes and crown and with her face unveiled. What elegant beauty to behold! Xerxes figured his heart would proudly beat like a triphammer against his chest wall.

But Vashti deemed the request unbecoming to her high position as queen. She regarded it as an effrontery to her womanhood. She adamantly refused to come. The king

waxed furious.

THE ROYAL HUSBAND SEEKS COUNSEL – ESTHER 1:13-15

In a so-called “man’s world,” insubordination on the part of a woman must definitely be dealt with, especially when the act of defiance involves a prominent personage and is witnessed by many.

Xerxes took action. He rounded up experts in the area of law and order, customs and traditions. It was a formidable group, tried and tested on previous occasions, advisers close to the king and trusted by him. He wanted to know, “What shall we do concerning Queen Vashti? What is your legal advice?”

Memucan spoke for the committee (1:16-20), saying in effect:

“Queen Vashti is guilty of three wrongs.

1. She brazenly insulted not only the king and his officials but every man in the realm.
2. She set a bad example for women to follow, especially the sharp-witted wives of the nobility.
3. She stirred up potential trouble in every household of the land.

If Vashti gets away with dishonoring her husband, won’t every woman cast aspersions upon the masculinity of her mate and won’t there be spawned repeated vendettas between husbands and wives?”

“Our committee recommends that Your Majesty issue an irrevocable decree that Vashti be deposed for insubordination, that she come no more before the king, and that her throne be declared vacant until a worthier woman than she be found.”

THE REACTION TO THE COMMITTEE’S REPORT – ESTHER 1:21-22

The king and his nobles were pleased with the advice given (1:21). They believed such a proclamation, written in plain language and in each subject’s mother tongue, would have a salutary effect upon the people, setting

them straight, once and for all, as to who is the lord of a household.

VASHTI IN LATER YEARS

Whatever incipient feminist movement there was in Vashti’s action, it was stopped in its track. Later, however, she regained power and influence. About the time of her removal, being great with child by Xerxes, she gave birth to Artaxerxes who eventually became his father’s successor. She “was able to reassert her power and to exercise a controlling influence over her son” (Concordia Self-Study Bible).

HEADSHIP, NOT LORDSHIP

Every organization has a head: e.g., president of a country or corporation, director of a campaign, chieftain of a clan or tribe, principal of a school, and father of a family.

“So far as Christian households are concerned, the position of the husband over against his wife is not one of absolute authority, but of headship, with the example of Christ held before all spouses at all times” - Paul E. Kretzmann. (Ephesians 5:21-33; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Timothy 2:11-15).

The husband is not to lord it over his wife and treat her like a sister to her own children, as some of the ancient Greeks did. Nor should he overemphasize the first words of the Latin saying: “Primus” (First), but ponder faithfully the next two words, “-inter pares” (among equals).

“Husbands, love your!” wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it... So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church” (Ephesians 5:25, 28, 29, KJV).

Not lordship but headship.

PERSONAL APPLICATION – ESTHER 2

*Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you examine the lives of the people
in the Book of Esther and to guide you in your daily walk.*

Esther 2:1-4

1. Four years after Vashti had been deposed and a year after the Persian fleet had been defeated at Salamis, Xerxes was in a particularly doleful mood. On what previous happening did his mind dwell?

2. What proposal did his personal attendants make to help him snap out of his melancholic state?

3. How was the beauty contest carried out?

4. Who would choose the replacement for Vashti?

5. How did Xerxes react to the proposal of his advisors?

Esther 2:5-11

6. In the next three verses two new characters are introduced. Give their names and list something you learn about them.

7. Under whose care were the young and exquisite virgins placed when they arrived at the king's palace in Susa?

8. How did the eunuch in charge of the virgins show special favors to Esther?

9. Why had Esther not revealed her nationality to anyone?

10. How did Esther's foster-father check each day on her well-being and what was happening to her?

Esther 2:12-18

11. How was a maiden beautified, over a twelve-month period, before being presented to His Royal Highness?

12. In the evening the virgin left from the hall for her rendezvous with the king. In the morning, however, to which part of the harem was she directed to go and why?

13. Why wasn't it necessary for Esther, before going to the king, to ask for additional adornment to her attire and make-up?

14. Why did King Xerxes choose Esther above the other virgins to succeed Vashti as queen?

15. As the drama unfolds, how do you see God working in the lives of these people?

16. How did Xerxes celebrate the occasion?

Esther 2:19-23

17. The harem of virgins, whose companionship Esther had enjoyed for one entire year, were gathered together for a second time. All that time Esther had kept her nationality a secret from everybody. Why?

18. While Mordecai sat at the king's gate he observed and recognized two men who were government employees. He overheard them plotting the assassination of the king.

To whom did Mordecai relay this information and how did it reach the ears of the king?

What happened to the two conspirators?

Who got the credit for disclosing the plot?

How was the incident recorded?

19. Compare the human behavior and incidents in this chapter to modern-day behavior and happenings. List similarities and differences.

Similarities:

Differences:



ELEGANT GIRLS ARE BROUGHT TO THE ROYAL HAREM – ESTHER 2:8-11	16
A LONG, DRAWN-OUT ROUTINE – ESTHER 2:12-14	16
ESTHER REPLACES VASHTI AS QUEEN – ESTHER 2:15-18	17
MORDECAI REPORTS AN ASSASSINATION PLOT – ESTHER 2:19-23	17
PERSONAL APPLICATION – ESTHER 3 & 4	18

“The recollection of this incident will later give the sacred drama a surprising and wondrous twist. Remember it!”

XERXES REGRETFULLY REMEMBERS VASHTI – ESTHER 2:1

“After these things,” i.e., after the deposition of Vashti and the defeat of the Persian fleet at Salamis, Xerxes felt inexpressibly lonely, dejected, and forlorn. “He remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her.” He regretted his impulsive action. If only he had not acted so precipitously in a moment of anger, she would be here now to converse with him, mayhap counsel and comfort him.

However, the decree could not be revoked. It was written in the laws of Persia and Media, “which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes” (1:19a).


IN SEARCH OF A NEW QUEEN – ESTHER 2:2-4

The king’s personal attendants hit upon an idea which, they felt, would indeed lift the king’s spirits out of despondence and, incidentally, keep him from wreaking vengeance upon the legal experts who had counselled him to get rid of Vashti.

What could be more universally arresting and more intriguing to the monarch himself than a beauty contest of the highest order? The brightest and best of maidens, perhaps one from each of the 20 satrapies or one from each of the 127 provinces—lithe of limb, burnished of mind, gracious of manner—were to be chosen and sent to the harem of the citadel of Susa into the care of the king’s eunuch, Hegai. He was responsible for scheduling the ablutions, the beauty treatments, the daily dietary fare and exercises. “Then let the girl who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti. This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it” (2:4, NIV).

MORDECAI AND ESTHER – ESTHER 2:5-7

The historic drama presents a conflict between two nationalities: Jew and Gentile. Mordecai, plus his cousin and adopted daughter, Esther, represent the one side, whereas Haman, the villain, represents the other.



Mordecai's identity as a Jew was well known at the capitol in Susa where he was engaged as a top official, perhaps as a scribe or accountant. He was free to move about; for instance, he walked outside the harem in the palace compound and communicated with a eunuch on the inside concerning Esther's well-being (2:11), or he sat at the king's gate without exciting suspicion, and eavesdropped on the private conversation of two would-be assassins (2:21).

His identity as a Jew was an open secret, but not so in the case of Esther, his ward. Twice he forbade her to reveal her racial identity (2:10, 20).

Mordecai could boast of his ancestry. He was a Benjaminite of the lineage of King Saul. His great-grandfather Kish had been carried away into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar.

Mordecai's orphaned cousin was the daughter of his deceased uncle and aunt. Her Hebrew name was Hadassah (Myrtle), but, among the Persians, she was known as Esther (star). The Greek designation for the planet Venus was Aster.

Esther was lovely of form and figure and features; obedient to her foster-father Mordecai who, she knew, had her best interests at heart. On her part, she was willing, if need be, to sacrifice herself for the sake of her nation.

ELEGANT GIRLS ARE BROUGHT TO THE ROYAL HAREM – ESTHER 2:8-11

The king's decree to conscript beauties had been circulated, with the result that many girls were brought to the citadel of Susa and assigned to the care of the chief eunuch Hegai. Esther was among them.

The director of the harem was ecstatic over the radiance and modesty of one girl in particular: Esther. He immediately ordered that she receive beauty treatments and that she eat specially prepared food. Patently, she did not insist on a kosher diet. To do so would have disclosed her nationality. Mordecai had warned her twice not to reveal her nationality in order to safeguard her against the fangs of racism.

Moreover, the chief eunuch had seven maids attend to her every wish and to keep her company. These eight were assigned to the best apartment of the harem.

Mordecai made a practice of walking every day near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was getting along. No one stopped him or ordered him away, for, after all, he was a prominent official in the Persian government.

A LONG, DRAWN-OUT ROUTINE – ESTHER 2:12-14

In order to prepare a girl for spending her first and possibly her last night with the king, she had to undergo a twelve month period of preparation. She was massaged for six months with oil of myrrh to render her muscles supple.

During the next half-year, various kinds of perfumes and cosmetics were tried to obtain the best possible combination and hoped-for exotic effect.

ESTHER REPLACES VASHTI AS QUEEN – ESTHER 2:15-18

Before going to the king for the night, a maiden was allowed to ask for any additional ornament wherewith to give a final touch to her fetching appearance. However, when Esther's turn came, she asked for nothing extra. She was willing to trust Hegai's judgment. All the others in the harem agreed that she was flawlessly attired.

King Xerxes fell in love with Esther at first sight. He made her his queen. "And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials." And he demonstrated his joy by declaring a national holiday and distributing gifts with regal abandon. The date when this occurred is recorded in 2:16, somewhere near 478 B.C.

"Esther became queen four years after Vashti's rejection (1:19) and one year after Xerxes' defeat at Salamis in 480 B.C." (Walter R. Roehrs).

MORDECAI REPORTS AN ASSASSINATION PLOT – ESTHER 2:19-23

As previously noted, Esther strictly obeyed Mordecai's instruction to keep her Jewish roots a secret. Not even her royal spouse, King Xerxes, knew she was a Hebrew.

It happened one day that, as Mordecai sat at the king's gate, he overheard two of the king's officers, guardians of the doorway, plotting to assassinate Xerxes. He dutifully reported the conspiracy to Queen Esther who, in turn, relayed it to her royal spouse, at the same time mentioning the names of the two conspirators. She casually added that she got the information from one of the civil service officers, a man by the name of Mordecai.

The king ordered the report investigated and, sure enough, it was found to be true. Subsequently, the two men were hanged by the neck until dead.

All this was recorded in the official registry. The name of Mordecai was listed as the man who uncovered the plot and patriotically transmitted it through the queen to the king.

Note: The recollection of this incident will later give the sacred drama a surprising and wondrous twist. Remember it!

