

The Book of Esther

Lesson 1: The King's Feast and Vashti Deposed -- Esther 1:1-22

Picture the most extravagant party you can imagine, and then keep going, because you will not catch up to this one. For a hundred and eighty days, King Ahasuerus throws open the treasures of his empire to the nobles and officials of a kingdom that stretched from India to Ethiopia, a hundred and twenty-seven provinces under one crown. White and blue linen hangs from silver rings on marble pillars. Couches of gold and silver rest on a pavement of red and white and precious stone. The wine flows in golden vessels, no two alike, and the royal command is simple: drink as much as you want, no limits, no restraint. This is not a celebration so much as it is a performance, six months of one man showing the world how big he is.

And here is what is strange and wonderful about the book you are opening tonight. From the first verse to the last, the name of God is never mentioned. Not once. You will read every chapter and never find the word God, never find the Lord, never find a single prayer printed on the page. It would be easy to conclude that He is absent, that this is just palace intrigue and human ambition spinning on its own axis. But you would be wrong. God is not named in Esther because He does not need to be named to be at work. His fingerprints are everywhere, even in a drunken throne room, even in a king's wounded pride. Sometimes the hand of God is most clearly seen precisely where His name is never spoken.

So watch carefully what happens at the end of the feast. On the seventh day, when the king's heart is merry with wine, he sends for Queen Vashti to come and display her beauty before the gathered men, for she was fair to look on. She refuses. We are not told why, and the text does not rush to explain her. What we are told is that the most powerful man on earth, the man who could spend half a year flaunting his wealth, suddenly cannot make his own wife come to his banquet. His anger burns. His advisers panic. And a decree goes out across the empire that will reshape one woman's life and, though no one in that room could see it, begin to clear the way for another.

That is where you and I come in. Because the truth is, most of our lives are not lived in throne rooms or printed in headlines. Most of our days unfold in places where God's name is never spoken aloud, in offices and kitchens and waiting rooms where it feels like everything is just human decisions colliding with human pride. Esther was written for exactly those days. It was written so that you would learn to trust the God you cannot see, the God who is moving even when the page is silent, even when the powerful are reckless and the outcome looks like chance. Pull up a chair at this banquet. There is far more going on here than a party gone wrong.

Group Discussion: Esther 1 tells a story crowded with wealth, wine, and power, yet God is never once named in the entire book. As a group, where in your own community or workplace do you

find it hardest to believe God is at work, and what would it look like to trust His unseen hand there?

Personal Reflection: King Ahasuerus spent six months displaying everything he owned and everything he could command. Where in your own life do you find yourself wanting to be seen, to display your success or status, and what is that hunger really asking God to give you that only He can?

Read Esther 1:1–22

Study Questions

1. The book of Esther never mentions God by name, yet it is included in Scripture as inspired and profitable. What does this teach us about how God works in the world and why we can trust His providence even when His hand is unseen?
2. Ahasuerus poured six months and the wealth of an empire into being admired. Where do you spend your time, money, or energy trying to be admired, and what would change if you measured those things differently?
3. The feast was marked by limitless drinking, with the king's heart merry with wine when he made his fateful command. What does Scripture teach about the way excess and drunkenness cloud judgment and dishonor God, and how is this displayed in the king's conduct?
4. When have you made a decision under the influence of strong emotion, fatigue, or appetite that you later regretted, and what guardrails could help you avoid acting from a clouded heart?

5. Vashti was created in God's image with dignity that the throne room seemed to forget. What does the Bible teach about the worth and dignity of every person, including women, and how does that truth confront the way she was treated?
6. Think of someone you are tempted to treat as merely useful to you rather than as a person made in God's image. What is one concrete way you could honor their dignity this week?
7. The king's advisers feared that one woman's refusal would unravel order in every home in the empire, and they responded with a sweeping decree. What does this reveal about the difference between control imposed by power and the godly order God designs for marriage and the home?
8. Where are you tempted to use control, pressure, or fear to get the response you want from people, especially those closest to you, and what does godly leadership look like instead?
9. Esther opens with a flawed pagan king, drunken feasting, and an impulsive decree, and yet this is the very stage on which God will set Esther in place to save His people. What does this opening chapter teach us about how God's sovereign providence works through flawed people and broken circumstances to accomplish His purposes, and how does this point us toward the God who later worked through a Roman cross to redeem the world?

10. Looking back over the whole of Esther 1, name one specific way the Lord is using this passage to form you, whether in your handling of pride, your treatment of others, your trust in His unseen hand, or your willingness to honor Him where His name is never spoken.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Proverbs 16:18, pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall; Proverbs 20:1, wine is a mocker and strong drink is raging; Genesis 1:27, God created humanity male and female in His own image with dignity; Romans 8:28, God works all things together for good for those who love Him; Romans 15:4, the things written before were written for our learning

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