

The Return To The Land: A Survey of Ezra, Nehemiah & Esther

8 – A NEW QUEEN (ESTHER 1:1-2:23)

I. The Difficulty with Queen Vashti (Esther 1:1-22)

A. The Feast (Esther 1:1-12)

- Xerxes I was ruler of the 120 provinces of the empire which stretched from Ethiopia to India.

Historical Note: Ahasuerus (Xerxes I)

Xerxes I was the son of Darius the Great. He was ruler over the Medo-Persian Empire from 486-465 BC. Xerxes was a weak leader. He was overly reliant upon the advice of his courtiers and harem eunuchs, which is reflected by his actions and decisions in the Book of Esther. After violently suppressing a revolt in Egypt, he turned his attention toward invading Greece. After a series of setbacks and poor decisions, he suffered a humiliating defeat to the Greeks and returned home to Shushan. The Persians would never recover from this defeat and it started a decline that would lead to the conquest of Persian Empire by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C. In 465 BC, Xerxes and his son Darius were murdered by the commander of the royal bodyguard. Xerxes' other son, Artaxerxes, discovered the murders and executed the conspirators. He then became King Artaxerxes I.

- In the third year of his reign, he hosted a celebration for all of the Medo-Persian officials.
- During this 180-day celebration, the king showed the riches of kingdom and his splendor.
- When the celebration was completed, he hosted an addition 7 days of celebration for the people.
- Queen Vashti also hosted a feast for the women in the royal palace.
- On the 7th day of this feast, the king was drunk and wanted to show the queen to the people.
- Queen Vashti refused to come when the king's command came, which infuriated the king.

B. The Dilemma (Esther 1:13-22)

- The king asked advice from his wisest counselors, the seven princes of Persia and Media.
- The king wanted to know what should be lawfully done to Vashti since she refused to come.
- One counselor stated that Vashti did wrong to all of the leaders and people in the empire.
- The queen's behavior will become known and influence women to despise their husbands.
- They advised that a royal decree be made forbidding Vashti from coming to king.
- The decree would also strip Vashti of her position as queen and give it to another.
- When the decree is announced in the empire, all wives will honor their husbands.

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- The advice pleased the king and he issued it according to the Law of the Medes and Persians.

II. The Selection of Esther as Queen (Esther 2:1-20)

A. The Search for a New Queen (Esther 2:1-5)

- When the king's anger had subsided, he remembered Vashti and the outcome of the dilemma.
- So, the king's servants proposed that young virgins be brought into the king's harem.
- They were to be given into the care of the eunuch who served as the custodian of the harem.
- Under his care, the young women would be given beauty preparations.
- The young woman, who pleased the king, would become queen and the king agreed to the plan.

B. Esther is Taken (Esther 2:6-11)

- In the capital city of Shushan was a Jew named Mordecai, a Benjamite.

Historical Note: Mordecai

Mordecai was the great-grandson of a Benjamite named Kish, who was taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. He brought up his cousin Esther, whose parents had died. After the plot against the Jews by Haman the Agagite was exposed, Mordecai was made chief minister by Xerxes I. Mordecai is only mentioned in the Book of Esther.

- Mordecai was the great-grandson of a man named Kish, who was taken captive to Babylon.
- He had a cousin named Hadassah, who was also called Esther.
- When Esther's parents died, he raised her as his own daughter.
- Esther was very beautiful and she was taken to the king's palace to his harem.
- Esther pleased the chief eunuch and gained his favor.
- She was given more beauty aids than her ration, as well as maidservants to serve her.
- She was also moved to the best place in the harem.
- Esther had been warned by Mordecai not to reveal her family name or her people.
- Mordecai paced every day in front of the harem quarters for news of Esther.

C. Esther is Made Queen (Esther 2:12-20)

- After 12 months of preparation, each young woman took a turn to go to the king.

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- In the evening, she would go to the king with whatever she desired to take with her.
- In the morning, she would then be sent to the second house of the harem.
- She would not go to the king again unless he called for her by name.
- When it was Esther's turn, she only took what the chief eunuch advised.
- The king loved Esther more than all the other women, so that he made her queen.
- The king then hosted a great feast, the Feast of Esther, and proclaimed a holiday.
- At the time of a second gathering of virgins for the harem, Mordecai sat within the King's gate.
- At this point, Esther has still not revealed her family and people as Mordecai commanded.

III. The Plot against Xerxes I (Esther 2:21-23)

- As Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate, he became aware of a plot against the king.
- Two of the king's eunuchs became furious with the king and sought to kill him.
- Mordecai relayed the plot to Esther, who then told the king in Mordecai's name.
- After an inquiry confirmed the plot, the eunuchs were hanged and it was written in the records.