

# **The Book of Esther**

## **Lesson 1**

Welcome to the book of Esther! This Old Testament narrative is one of the most sublime and mysterious books of the Bible. For example, King Xerxes of Persia is mentioned 190 times in the 167 verses of Esther, while God is not mentioned at all, not even once. There are no references to prayer, forgiveness, love, Old Testament ceremonial sacrifices, the covenant, the Law, the temple or Jerusalem. Yet the providential, sovereign hand of God in the affairs of men is written all over this book.

The account of Queen Esther, her older cousin Mordecai and the fate of the Jewish people throughout the Medo-Persian Empire is a tightly woven story, full of intrigue, irony and suspense. The events of this historical narrative form the basis of a major Jewish festival that commemorates God's mighty deliverance of His people from certain death and annihilation, a holiday that is celebrated annually to this day. And while these events continue to bring glory to God, they also offer hope and encouragement to His people today, that when we are confronted with hardship and persecution, we can also expect God to work sovereignly through providence to bring about our ultimate deliverance.

The author of the book of Esther is unknown. However, scholars generally agree that the book was in all likelihood written by a Jew (some suggest Mordecai, one of the main characters), sometime between 465-424 BC. It covers a span of 10 to 20 years 486 to 465 BC during the time of King Xerxes (Ahasuerus in Hebrew) ruled the Medo-Persian Empire from the capital in Susa, located approximately 150 miles north of the Persian Gulf.

As you begin, would you take a moment to pray and ask God to help you gain insight and understanding of His Word?

## **A King's Banquet – A Queen Deposed**

1. Read Esther 1:1-22.
  - A. Who are the two main characters in the narrative?
  
  - B. How would you describe each of them?
  
  - C. Who are some of the other individuals mentioned in chapter 1?
  
2. Read Esther 1:1-4.
  - A. Consult a Biblical map of the time of the Medo-Persian Empire and generally describe the boundaries of the kingdom.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - B. From where does King Xerxes reign?

C. What does he decide to do?

- (1) When in his reign does he decide to do it?
- (2) For whom does he decide to do it?
- (3) For how long does he decide to do it?
- (4) For what purpose does he decide to do it?
- (5) From a footnote or your knowledge of ancient history, what may have been an unstated purpose of King Xerxes for displaying his wealth at such length?
- (6) From Deuteronomy 8:17-18 and 1 Chronicles 29:12-13, what was to be the King's attitude toward wealth? What is ours to be?

3. Read Esther 1:5-12.
  - A. After the 180-day period, what does the king decide to do?
  - B. Who is invited?
  - C. How long is the banquet to occur? What is your perspective on the length of this banquet?
  - D. From verses 5-8, describe the setting and the festivities of this banquet. How does the King show his generosity to his guests?
  - E. From verse 9, what does Queen Vashti decide to do?
4. From verses 10-12:
  - A. What happens on the seventh day?
  - B. How does Queen Vashti respond to the King?

C. Do you think her response was appropriate? Please explain.

D. What was the King's response?

E. Do you think his response was appropriate? Please explain.

5. Read Ephesians 5:22-32. How are kings and queens, and by way of application, husbands and wives, to respond to one another?

6. Read Esther 1:13-18.

A. From verses 13-15, what does the King decide to do?

B. From verses 16-18, what concerns do the counselors raise to the King?

(1) Since the King and Queen occupy high visibility positions, are these concerns legitimate? Why or why not? Are there others factors to be considered?

- (2) Do “lines of authority” (whether public or private), the example one sets, and the kind of public or private behavior have any impact upon society as a whole? Please explain.
  
- (3) From the Bible, history or current society, can you identify individuals or couples who have influenced society for good or ill? Who are they? What were/are their characteristics and actions? What made/makes their influence upon society so powerful?

C. Read Romans 13:1-5, Titus 3:1, 1 Peter 2:13 and 1 Timothy 2:1-3.

- (1) How are we to respond to governing authorities?
  
- (2) Why?

- (3) Read John 19:1-11.
- (a) How does Jesus acknowledge the principle expressed in Romans 13:1-5, Titus 3:1, 1 Peter 2:13 and 1 Timothy 2:1-3?
  
  - (b) Read Matthew 28:16-20. Since all authority in Heaven and earth has been given to Jesus, why do you think He responded to Pilate as He did? What applications for your life might be drawn from the above passages?
- (4) What are the consequences for rebelling against those in authority?
- (5) From Acts 4:5-21, describe what is occurring and under what conditions it is permissible to disobey authorities.

D. Romans 13:3-4 reads: “For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from the fear of the one in authority? Then do right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.” Read Exodus 14:10-18 and Joshua 10:40-42. From these or other Bible passages, is war ever justifiable? Why or why not?

7. Read Esther 1:19-22.

A. What recommendation is made to the King?

B. From verse 19, what is unique about the “laws of Persia and Media”?

C. Is this a good principle of government? Why or why not?

D. How do the King and his nobles respond to the recommendations?

E. What does the King do? Please record any actions of the King that stand out to you?