

## March 5

**Scriptures:** Read Esther 1 & 2

**Key Verse:** “The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight...; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen...” (Esther 2:17)

### Overview

The Persian king Ahasuerus, also known as Xerxes, held a great feast for all his nobles in his palace at Shushan, one of the main cities of the kingdom. For a period of six months, Ahasuerus proudly showed all the nobles the splendour of his kingdom. His honoured guests probably travelled around at his expense, viewing his vast kingdom and participating in meetings to plan Persia’s military efforts for expansion. At the end of the six months, Ahasuerus held an extravagant feast which providentially led to a change in the events of history.

At the feast, there was no limit put on the amount of wine the men could drink. It appears that this seven-day feast was an extended drunken party in celebration of the king’s greatness. As Ahasuerus had shown off the beauty of his kingdom with pride, he now wanted to show off his most beautiful queen, Vashti. Her name was descriptive of her beauty, meaning “the best”. Ahasuerus himself was intoxicated when he ordered her to present herself at the party (1:10-11). She had been entertaining the women at a separate feast. She probably refused the king’s order because she felt it inappropriate and feared for her dignity in the midst of those drunken men, including her husband. Suddenly, the joy of the party disappeared, and it ended in a divorce. The way their joy quickly vanished shows how the joy of the world is so temporal, but believers in the Lord Jesus have a deep-rooted joy that lasts despite any circumstances (cf. Proverbs 15:15).

Ahasuerus’ anger led to drastic measures. He who controlled one hundred and twenty-seven provinces throughout Asia and Africa (1:1) could not control his own temper (Proverbs 16:32; 25:28; 14:29; 19:11; Ephesians 4:31-32). He followed the advice of his “wise men”, probably astrologers and lawyers. They felt that Vashti’s defiant example would cause the women of the kingdom to disrespect and disobey their husbands. To ensure that the man remained the head of the household and that the king continued to receive respect, Ahasuerus divorced Vashti, thus taking away her position as queen. The women throughout the Persian kingdom were to learn that they could not get away with disobeying their husbands.

This event may seem unfortunate, but through it all, God was working to save His people from extinction, and thus preserve the line from which the Messiah would come (cf. 3:6). Esther, a very beautiful Jewess, lived in the very city where these events took place, Shushan. Her elder cousin Mordecai, a Benjamite, exhibited true religion by lovingly taking her in and raising her as his own daughter when she became orphaned (James 1:27). They may well have been descendants of king Saul (2:5; cf. 1 Samuel 9:1; 1 Chronicles 8:33). Shushan must have had a large Jewish population that had been placed there by Nebuchadnezzar when he led thousands of people from Judah into captivity. Nehemiah also lived in Shushan and later served as cup-bearer to Ahasuerus’ son Artaxerxes.

According to the plan of the wise men, many beautiful young virgins were found, so that from among them the king could choose a queen to replace Vashti. Esther's sweet spirit, quiet nature, and rare beauty gained her the immediate favour of the eunuch in charge of the king's harem. Most importantly, she gained the favour of Ahasuerus himself. Mordecai had wisely told Esther to conceal her nationality. It is possible that he had a premonition from the Lord that this would be best, for if it was known that she was a Jewess, there may have been prejudice against her. That day, a humble, subservient orphan girl was transformed into the queen of Persia, the most powerful kingdom in the world. Esther came to have a great influence on the king, but this was all in the plan of the Lord (Romans 8:28). God had not abandoned His people; though they were being punished in the Exile, He still loved them and intervened into the course of history for their good.

Because of Mordecai's love and concern for Esther, he remained close to the palace, so he might have some communication with her. Before the close of chapter two, we are told that he overheard the conspiracy to assassinate Ahasuerus. God had providentially arranged for Mordecai to be in the right place at the right time. In Esther's report to the king, which was recorded in the royal chronicles, she made sure to give the credit to Mordecai. He had acted with loyalty to the king, though he was a captive and though it appeared his action would go unappreciated (Romans 13:1-4; 1 Timothy 2:1-4). At this point in the story, this event seems insignificant, but it later becomes a crucial point in the story. The Lord had everything in control, just as He does for us, His people today.

### **Prayer**

Lord, You have never abandoned Your people, so we know You'll never abandon us. Thank You for Your infinite love. We need You every day.