

**"Full Egos & Empty Souls" - Esther 1:1-22**  
**Wednesday 8/29/18 - Jeff Lyle**

---

**I. The King of Persia (1-8)**

**A. Power - [1-2] – “Now in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, [2] in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa, the citadel...”**

The story of Esther begins without any mention of her nor her God. The historical context involves a pagan king who is sitting atop his hour of glory. Military conquest had brought him power and position with very little rebellion throughout the empire. He had never known a difficult day in his life, being the son of a king. His more commonly known name is Xerxes and he became king in his mid-thirties. His life was one of luxury, power and ease.

**B. Prosperity [3-4] – “In the third year of his reign he gave a feast for all his officials and servants. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were before him, [4] while he showed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days, 180 days.”**

As we might expect, an uncontested rule across a growing empire led to great personal wealth for the king of Persia. With political savvy, he luxuriously honored his military leaders who enforced his authority across 127 provinces. This passage makes note of a three-month, lavish celebration which ingratiated his military to the king. Imagine the cost of a non-stop feast which was planned with the purpose of drawing attention to the great wealth and glory of the king of Persia. The expense would have been staggering.

**C. Pomp [5-8] – “And when these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in Susa the citadel, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace. [6] There were white cotton curtains and violet hangings fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rods and marble pillars, and also couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and precious stones. [7] Drinks were served in golden vessels, vessels of different kinds, and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king. [8] And drinking was according to this edict: “There is no compulsion.” For the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace to do as each man desired.”**

Showing further political brilliance, the king also shared the wealth with his subjects. Rather than inciting class warfare by only blessing the elite and privileged in his close circles, the king

**"Full Egos & Empty Souls" - Esther 1:1-22**  
**Wednesday 8/29/18 - Jeff Lyle**

---

ensured a happy constituency by throwing a lavish week-long feast for all of the people from the least to the greatest. They were allowed to celebrate on his tab for a full week in the king's outdoor courts. The king allowed everyone to benefit from his own prosperity and spared no expense in giving his subjects a temporary taste of royalty with all of the pomp of noble celebration. Décor, furniture, wine and the finest dinnerware was made available for all the people to experience. This king had learned much about royal rule and shrewd politics in his life.

**II. The Queen of Persia (9-15)**

**A. Note her benefit [9] – “Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women in the palace that belonged to King Ahasuerus.”**

The focus moves from King Xerxes onto Queen Vashti. She was a chosen bride with no history given. Her short biography is only viewed through who she was in relation to her husband, the king. It is clear that the women of the king's court were kept separate from the men. That common practice of gender segregation facilitated the opportunity for the queen to host her own lavish party. Not the subtle description of the location of the festive event. It is specifically stated that her feast was held in the palace that belonged to the king. She had no property of her own. She was privileged in their culture, but she was not allowed an independent identity apart from her husband. In his eyes, the palace was his property. We discover very soon that he viewed his wife as also being property belonging to him.

**B. Note her beauty [10] – “On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded...the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, [11] to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at.”**

Not surprisingly, as a day of drinking drew long, the king decided to show off his wife to the men in his company. He commanded his servants to bring Vashti to his presence so that all the men might ogle her. Some commentators hint at the possibility that the king, when he commanded her to wear her crown, meant that the crown was the only thing she should be wearing when she stood before the men. It may very well be that he summoned her to come and disrobe before all of them, keeping only her crown as a covering. Without controversy, the Scripture describes her as beautiful and

**"Full Egos & Empty Souls" - Esther 1:1-22**  
**Wednesday 8/29/18 - Jeff Lyle**

---

pleasing to the eyes. This is the nature of unredeemed males: to objectify women in order to please their most base appetites. The highest ranking woman in the Persian Kingdom was nothing more than an objectified target of lust to drunken men.

**C. Note her backbone [12] – “But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. At this the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him. [13] Then the king said to the wise men who knew the times...the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king's face, and sat first in the kingdom [15] “According to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti, because she has not performed the command of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs?”**

Queen Vashti was unwilling to be intentionally objectified. Many scholars reason here that there must have been a cause for her to refuse the command of the king to appear before him. It was very normal protocol for a queen to obey her husband as the king of the land. Because of this, some surmise that she was told to come nude, wearing only the requested royal crown, and that she would not allow herself to be humiliated before a room of intoxicated males. When Xerxes learned of her refusal, he was enraged to be shamed by his wife in front of his court officials and servants. Cold as ice, the king asked his advisors what the legal penalty was that he could enact against the queen. He did not regard her as a woman to be cherished but, rather, as a woman to be banished.

### **III. The Culture of Persia (16-22)**

**A. Male dominance was unquestioned [16] – “Then Memucan said in the presence of the king and the officials, “Not only against the king has Queen Vashti done wrong, but also against all the officials and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.”**

One of the king's advisors elevates the situation by making it into a cultural disaster. Queen Vashti's refusal to obey her husband is amplified into the status of a potential catalyst to disorder in the kingdom. Her refusal to obey the king is then seen as an act of wrongdoing against the systems in place which govern the roles of men and women in daily life.

**B. Female subservience was enforced [17] – “For the queen's behavior will be made known to all women, causing them to look at their husbands with contempt, since they will say, King Ahasuerus**

**"Full Egos & Empty Souls" - Esther 1:1-22**  
**Wednesday 8/29/18 - Jeff Lyle**

---

**commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come."**

Men, who firmly held all the position, power and control seek to immediately suppress the possibility of Vashti's example serving as a catalyst for other women to step out of their place within Persian culture. What looks like power is actually little more than fear. If women were emboldened to resist the unrealistic demands of their husbands, what would happen to the men's power-base? The reader can almost sense the tension rising in the room as the men nod at each other in agreement. Women were now being viewed as potential enemies of the social order.

**C. Societal norms were protected [18] - "This very day the noble women of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's behavior will say the same to all the king's officials, and there will be contempt and wrath in plenty."**

The worst possible scenario for the men is forecast. They do not wish for their women to gain any ground. Plans would need to be made.

#### **IV. The Misogyny of Persia (19-22)**

##### **Misogyny-**

**"hatred, dislike, or mistrust of women, or prejudice against women."**

**A. The king objectified his queen [19] - "If it please the king, let a royal order go out from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be repealed, that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus. And let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she."**

In a twenty-minute drunken business meeting, Queen Vashti's fate is decided by a group of men. She is banished by royal decree, robbed of her title as Queen of Persia and set aside to be replaced by someone more pleasing to the man on the throne. This is the essence of misogyny: women are treated with the deepest contempt when they no longer serve the purpose assigned to them by men in power who only value them in light of what they offer the man himself.

**"Full Egos & Empty Souls" - Esther 1:1-22**  
**Wednesday 8/29/18 - Jeff Lyle**

---

**B. The men oppressed their wives [20-22] – “So when the decree made by the king is proclaimed throughout all his kingdom, for it is vast, all women will give honor to their husbands, high and low alike. [21] This advice pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed. [22] He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, that every man be master in his own household and speak according to the language of his people.”**

With the king's signature, an empire-wide decree is given to reinforce the power structure which was already in place. Every man must be obeyed by his wife as her master. This is the sad stage upon which Esther would soon be introduced to the reader. Male dominance, absent of love, decreed as the law of the entire land.