

esther

it's tough being a woman

BETH MOORE



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To my wonderful daughters, Amanda and Melissa—

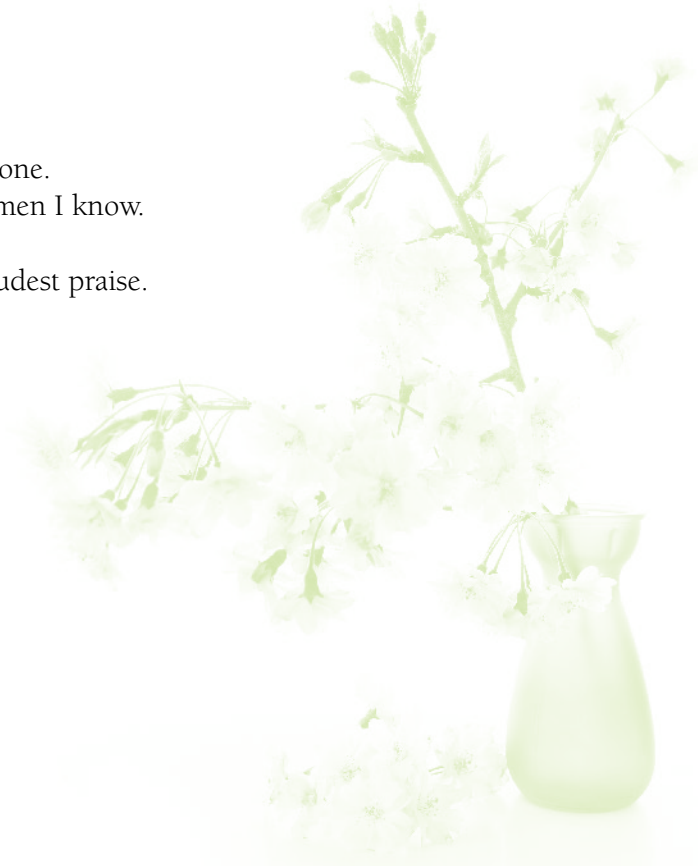
If what you hold in your hands is a book, then you are its bookends.

Melissa, your hard work came before every lesson I wrote.
Your brilliant research through countless resources in my behalf was incomparable.
Your scholarship was impeccable. Your love of Scripture, remarkable.
Every author on earth should be clamoring to take you from me.
Your sister is right. You are a rock star.

Amanda, your hard work came after every lesson I wrote.
Yours were the first eyes I trusted to read and work each lesson.
Your encouragement kept me going when the months grew long
and the process grew inevitably—appropriately—hard.
Your gentle spirit, sharp eye, and love for a word fitly spoken
make you irreplaceable in this ministry.
Your sister is right. You are a rock star.

Through the nine chapters that follow,
we three have worked as an indivisible team with one unwavering goal:
to see hearts explode with love for Christ
through the thrilling exploration of His Word.
I have waited all these years to dedicate
just the right Bible study to you.
None could have been more appropriate than this one.
You are, hands down, the two most wonderful women I know.
My darling Esthers.
Streams of mercy never ceasing call for songs of loudest praise.

No words big enough,
Mom



esther



About the Author

Beth Moore has written best-selling Bible studies on David, Moses, Paul, Isaiah, Daniel, John, and Jesus. Her books *Breaking Free*, *Praying God's Word*, and *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things* have all focused on the battle Satan is waging against Christians. *Believing God*, *Loving Well*, and *Living Beyond Yourself* have focused on how Christians can live triumphantly in today's world. *Stepping Up* explores worship and invites us to reach a new level of relationship and intimacy with God.

Beth has a passion for Christ, a passion for Bible study, and a passion to see Christians living the lives Christ intended. God bless you as you join Beth and explore *Esther: It's Tough Being a Woman*.

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Esther

FOREWORD

Welcome to Bible Study! Today marks the 82nd week I have spent obsessing over the Book of Esther. I'd give anything to embark on this journey with you, but my journey as research assistant ends where yours begins. I have a few things I'd like to leave you before I reluctantly turn the last page of a cherished chapter in my life.

First, this is not a typical study because Esther is not a typical book. Unique in character and contribution to the canon, Esther is an amazing narrative complete with tragedy and triumph. You'll encounter intrigue, ambiguity, and excess, all in theatrical form. The thread of mystery that runs through the story will leave your mind spinning. If you frequently end a portion with more questions than you started, you'll know you're on the right interpretive track.

Second, Esther neither mentions the name of God nor gives us explanations on how we might live the Christian life. Be assured of many timely words in Esther, but the most significant things we learn will likely concern the nature of God and His activity in human history. Esther calls us to think beyond our individual lives. The book provides a greater and more awe-inspired view that will strengthen our individual lives and deepen our personal relationships with God.

Third and most importantly, I hope you will take Esther personally. You may wonder what Xerxes' extravagant empire has to do with our lives. Esther relates the dramatic preservation of Persian Jews in the face of annihilation. The threat should hit close to home since not even 70 years ago six million Jews were murdered in Nazi Germany. Esther concludes with the establishment of the Feast of Purim, still wildly and joyously celebrated by Jews all over the world. The significance of the book, however, should not be left exclusively for the Jews.

In light of Jesus we read Esther not as strangers but as fellow citizens of God's household. Haman threatened to annihilate the people of God. If the Persian Jews had been annihilated, our Savior Jesus Christ never would have been born. Let that sink in; and please feel free, if not obliged, to take Haman's offense seriously.

I have been privileged to spend the past year and a half poring over the Book of Esther and among the first to read this Bible Study. I believe it's a God-given and culturally-relevant *supplement* to the inspired text of Esther. Knowing the author fairly well, I can assure you that each of these Bible Studies was written to bring us back to the Scriptures, never to replace or overshadow them. They're meant to exalt the power of God through the biblical text. I hope they remind you afresh of the wonder of Holy Writ these next 10 weeks. No other book is like the Bible, for it alone has the ability to accurately convey God's nature and character. It alone was meant to nourish our souls, for "we are not to live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).

Cheers to the only Wise God, the Lord Jesus Christ who gives us hope, and the Holy Spirit who empowers us!

With love and respect,
Melissa Moore Fitzpatrick
Research Assistant to Beth Moore

THE WHOLE MEGILLAH

An Introduction to the Study of Esther

What greater joy could I have than to welcome you to an adventure with God in His Word? The best page-turner on my nightstand never thrilled me like the book God breathed. If this is your very first in-depth journey through His Word, I offer a wonderful warning: You may be about to start something you can't stop. The Bible differs from anything else you'll ever study. Penned by God Himself in perfectly timed progressive revelation over hundreds of years and sixty-six books, it is far more than history or literature. It is a divinely-inspired meeting place where God reveals Himself and invites us into relationship.

Scripture cannot come without effect to the receptive soul. God is up to something profound in your life or you wouldn't be holding this Bible study in your hands. He not only desires to teach you but to transform you. His Word is living, healing, restoring, enlightening, directing, and empowering. It invades every part of our lives if we'll let it. Nothing except salvation has had a more profound effect on this former pit-dweller's life. I'm simply not who I was, and that's one reason I'm so passionate about Bible study. I make you this promise: You will never waste a moment you spend with an open heart in God's Word.

The Bible is unique, so to say Esther is unique within its pages might suggest the distinctive adventure we have ahead. Before we discover the book's placement in the hearts of the Jewish people, let's consider its placement in the Jewish Bible, traditionally called the *Tanakh*. The word *Tanakh* is an acronym for three words representing its three sections:

Torah (pronounced *to-RAH*)—The Books of Moses, also called the Law

Nevi'im (pronounced *neh-VEEM*)—The Book of the Prophets

Ketuvim (pronounced *KET-to-veem*)—The Writings

To find Esther, we'd open the Jewish Bible to the *Ketuvim* or *Writings*. Five books comprise this section: Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and, lastly, Esther. This collection of books is known as *The Five Scrolls* or, in Hebrew terminology, the *Megillot* (pronounced *MEG-eh-lote*).

Each of the scrolls is read publicly in synagogues at certain times of the year but, of the five, none is dearer to the Jew than Esther. In fact, it is commonly called the *Megillah* or "the Scroll, par excellence." Every word is read aloud in synagogues during Purim. In fact, the long public reading inspired a figure of speech. You'd use the figure of speech if you were late meeting someone after class and said, "Beth had to give us the whole *Megillah*!"

So, here you have it, Beloved and we won't complete the journey until we've studied the whole *Megillah*! Don't worry though. You're not likely to get bored. We are about to have one of the best times of our lives. I promise we won't read all 10 chapters in one sitting. Quite the contrary, we'll have the joy of taking one brief segment of Scripture at a time, poring over it, musing over it, and learning what on earth to do with it. When we turn the last page, you will know this fascinating story like the back of your hand. You'll also find your own story within it ... if you're willing. I'm game. Are you? Then let's get started!

Beth

week one

A Royal Mess

Enter Vashti, the crowned Queen of Persia. Think of the most beautiful woman you've ever seen, and don't act like you don't notice because we're probably more aware of the appearance of other women than men are.

Principal Questions

1. What was the timing and political climate of the story Esther would soon enter?
2. In Esther 1, who attended Xerxes' banquet?
3. From your perspective, for what three possible reasons might Vashti have refused King Xerxes' order?
4. What did Memucan advise the king to do?
5. How might the thought that "it's tough being a woman in another woman's shadow" have proved especially true for wives all over Persia?

Day One



This Is What Happened

TODAY'S TREASURE

"This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush." Esther 1:1

"There is something delicious about writing the first words of a story."¹ Perhaps the anonymous writer picked by God to pen the words of Esther thought something similar to Rene Zellweger's opening line in the movie *Miss Potter*. At first glance, the genesis-words to Esther's story don't seem delicious at all. Not even noteworthy. *This is what happened*. So what? "But, although it seems perfectly natural to open a narrative in this manner, it is actually rare. Biblical narratives commonly begin with 'it happened' but omit 'in the days of.' On the other hand, prophetic writings are often introduced as having occurred 'in the days of King. ...' The Book of Esther unfolds, however, with the two intertwining. The result according to some scholars is an opening 'more like the opening of a folktale, with the aura of "Once upon a time, in the days of the great and glorious Ahasuerus, King of the vast Persian empire." ' "²

Esther resembles the opening of a folktale because it tells such a great and true story. Indeed, God's love of a great story is extravagantly evident in the narrative that makes up over 40 percent of the Bible.

In *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* Fee and Stuart note the crucial difference between the biblical narratives and all others because inspired by the Holy Spirit, "the story they tell is not so much our story as it is God's story—and it becomes ours as he 'writes' us into it. The biblical narratives thus tell the ultimate story, a story that, even though often complex, is utterly true and crucially important. Indeed, it is a magnificent story, grander than the greatest epic, richer in plot and more significant in its characters and descriptions than any humanly composed story could ever be."³

According to Fee and Stuart, how do biblical narratives such as Esther differ from all others?

Open your Bible and your mind to the Book of Esther. Invite every sense of your imagination to be kindled with color, texture, scent, and sound until you can smell the fear, then hear the cheer. There on the sacred page God overtook a human hand and scripted a young woman's story into His own.

For information on end-notes, see page 224.

Ahasuerus

the Hebrew name for Xerxes

There on the sacred pages of Esther God overtook a human hand and scripted a young woman's story into His own.

esther

Marvelously, even miraculously, as you and I spend the next nine weeks with Him in the pages of Esther's story, God will write something new and unexpected of our own into His. Your personal story written into God's epic annals of human history will be different because you chose to meet Him in 10 of the most distinctive chapters of His Word.

Principal Question

If once upon a time, what was the time? Read Esther 1:1-3 and write in the margin everything you can glean about the timing and political climate of the story she would soon enter.

The year was 483 B.C., the third year of Xerxes' reign and the thirty-fifth year of his privileged life. His route to the throne is significant to our story. He was not the first son of Darius I, but he was the first son born to Darius after being crowned king. Xerxes' veins were plump and purple with a double portion of royal blood. His mother was Atossa, the daughter of a ruler who, among Gentiles, could hardly have had more Jewish significance in the era encircled by his crown. The first part of the Book of Ezra records the identity and actions of the man Atossa called "Father" and Xerxes called "Grandfather."

Please read Ezra 1:1-2:1. Look to the end of the segment first. What had happened to the Israelites according to Ezra 2:1?

Who is the king identified and quoted in Ezra 1? (Circle one.)

Cyrus

Belshazzar

Nebuchadnezzar

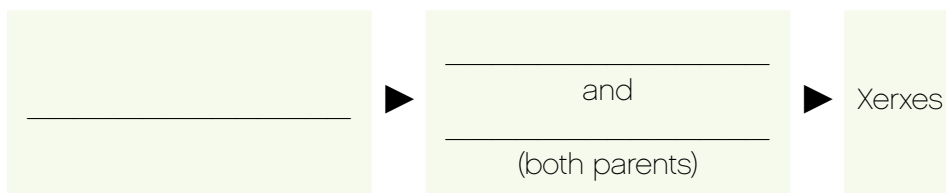
Artaxerxes

What tremendous significance did his actions have on the Israelites?

Cyrus the Great was born into conditions that would ultimately turn to his titanic political favor. His mother was a Mede and his father a Persian, making him a palatable choice to blend a Medo-Persian people. With shocking ease in 539 B.C. Cyrus conquered Babylon, the home of exiled Israelites. He then issued the decree in Ezra 1 that allowed the exiles to return to Jerusalem. Some never returned, a fact that becomes pivotal to the story of Esther. Many historians through the centuries explain away Cyrus's apparent benevolence as a simple and wise political move to garner the favor of foreigners.

Regardless of why Cyrus thought he issued the decree, how does Isaiah 44:24-28 explain his actions?

As we return to Xerxes' "once upon a time," recap the three royal generations leading up to our time frame in Esther 1:1.



The Greek historian Herodotus wrote *History of the Persian Wars* only 25 years after Xerxes' reign. Although we don't have adequate parallel sources to verify everything he wrote as completely accurate and unbiased, his writings shed colorful light on the king and kingdom in Persia during the "once upon a time" of Esther. According to Herodotus, Xerxes was not just tall, dark, and handsome. He was the tallest and most handsome Persian of all. And a spoiled playboy at that. If you, like most of us, wish you had a godly outlet for gazing at the lifestyles of the rich, famous, and shockingly overindulgent, you'll want to stay tuned. Lean over here closely while I whisper: *I will too*.

In all the gazing, don't forget to look for something of yourself within these pages. At first glance, Xerxes' and Esther's lives and stories may seem to have little to do with yours, but if that were true, the Book of Esther might be the solitary Old Testament case where Romans 15:4 simply doesn't apply.

In our introductory session we talked about this verse. Whether or not you could join us, concerning Esther, what does Romans 15:4 mean?

 Beloved, what are you hoping for as you begin this Bible study?

Don't forget to look for something of yourself within these pages.

Personal Question

Has a negative event or a near-eternal wait recently made you lose hope about something important to you? Do you have any natural reasons to think that whatever your "once upon a time" might have been, it can never be now?

Remember the first words of Esther, "this is what happened during the time of Xerxes," and their similarity to "once upon a time, in the days of the great and glorious Ahasuerus"? I learned in my research that those Hebrew words *wayhi bime* occur five times in Scripture. Brace yourself for a moment. Without exception all "introduce impending catastrophe or doom."⁴

Our first reaction may be the thought, *Then who wants a great story? Forget once upon a time!* But I'd like to suggest that the nature of life on planet Earth swirls a certain air of impending catastrophe in every hospital nursery in the world. Stick with me here a moment because this perspective could make you feel better instead of worse.

esther

When we trust our lives to the unseen but ever-present God, He will write our lives into His story and every last one of them will turn out to be a great read. With a grand ending.

Unless you've lived in a place I've never found, with all your heart's desires met and without a soul who annoys you, Job was pretty accurate when he said, "Man [or woman] born of woman is of few days and full of trouble" (Job 14:1).

Case in point: I often run into people who tell me they've been prompted to pray for me "lately" and invariably ask, "Has anything been wrong?"

Beloved, *something* is always wrong! I still live in the real world where I get my feelings hurt, go to funerals, get rejected, catch stomach viruses, and age overnight. Life here is full of trouble whether in a sky-high mountain of small annoyances or an earth-splitting canyon of crisis. There's no escaping it until we escape these mortal bodies. But here's the good news. I also learned that in all five occasions where those same Hebrew words were associated with impending catastrophe, "the ending to each story is happy, but before that happy ending is realized, much grief occurs."⁵

I think we know the part about "much grief," but in the weeks to come I'm hoping for us to grasp that no life is free of troubles, regardless of religion, race, or nation. In fact, as Job said, every life is full of it. When we trust our lives to the hand *and pen* of an unseen but ever-present God, He will write our lives into His story and every last one of them will turn out to be a great read. With a grand ending. And not just in spite of those catastrophes. Often because of them. Don't just wait and see. Live and see.

Day Two Pitch a Royal Party



TODAY'S TREASURE

"For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty." Esther 1:4

Mind your watch today because we've got a party to attend and don't want to be late. Esther's the wrong book for a Bible student too pious for a party. Seven of Esther's ten chapters refer to somebody throwing a party. That's not to say all of the festivities will be fun. Not all parties are, even when we pretend to the contrary and eat our weight in onion dip. We can count on some drama, however, and if you have my kind of taste, that's your kind of fun anyway.

Just in case you still aren't sure you can relish a plate of Bible study served up with a side of amusement, maybe the following quote will offer permission: "The Book of Esther is by any standards a brilliantly written story,

to be savoured—even chuckled over. The reader who wishes to learn may mix business and pleasure here.”⁶ Beautiful words to any sanguine! May they be intriguing words to all of us until the story line captivates us enough to agree.

What do you think the writer meant about savoring and chuckling over Esther?

The study of God’s Word is serious business to me. He made it my lifeline. Medicine for my broken mind. Salve to my wounded soul. But God also made it one of the sheerest delights of my entire life. Encounters with Christ on the pages of Scripture have run the gamut with me. How many times in one paragraph of Scripture have I been rebuked only to be restored in the next? How many times have I sighed with reluctant acceptance over one portion and swung to heights of exhilaration in the next?

You may know exactly what I’m talking about, or you may never have experienced anything more than a stale read of a stiff, archaic book that you opened mainly because good people are supposed to read the Bible. If reading Scripture has been more like law than life to you, you are twice the candidate for the study of Esther. You’re about to find out about mixing business and pleasure on the pages of the world’s most sacred text.

Please read Esther 1:1-8.

Before we bask in the scene, let’s see if we can determine the occasion. A closer look at who was present at the “banquet” in verse 3 can offer some clues.

Who was in attendance?

At this point in Xerxes’ reign, Greece was the only part of the world that wasn’t already under his thumb. The history books, the evening news, and our own personal experience suggest how wildly obsessed we can become over something tauntingly unattainable. Xerxes wanted Greece, and he needed enormous support to get it.

Since the timing corresponds with the great war council of 483 B.C., a number of scholars suggest that Xerxes may have thrown a 180-day expo of his vast wealth and power “to inspire Persians with confidence in preparation for the massive—and ultimately disastrous—military campaign against Greece ... which began in the same year as the banquet (483 B.C.).”⁷ According to the Greek historian Herodotus, Xerxes promised copious rewards to those who would help him take Athens, and the excess he placed on exhibit was to prove he could make good on the promise.⁸

The study of God’s
Word is serious
business to me ...
and one of the
sheerest delights of
my entire life.

Principal Question

esther

If you look closely in verses 3 and 4, you'll find two time references to Xerxes' festivities. To what does each refer?

The seven-day public party was probably the culmination of the 180-day exhibit. Imagine how exhausting a seven-day party would be, particularly after the drama of tearing through our closets, trying to decide what to wear. Think how our feet would kill us because we'd choose cute over comfortable shoes. But if you could stand those three-inch heels, you were in for a sight.

Relish this quote by Michael V. Fox in his commentary on Esther. "The opening scene is unusually expansive for biblical narrative. Instead of reporting actions and words, the author scans the venue like a cinematographer, moving at a leisurely pace and describing in lavish detail what one present in the palace would have witnessed."⁹

I love Fox's comparison of the text's perspective to a movie-maker. Long before the movie projector married the big screen and manipulated our imaginations, there were books like Esther. Imaginations have to be exercised to be tantalized, and the reward was infinitely richer.

Read verses 5-8 once more, but this time read it like a cinematographer would have you see it. Imagine the scene in high definition and the camera moving just as Fox described: slowly, deliberately from one angle to the next. Let your mind's eye fix on one dimension then another. Take your time, mixing business with pleasure. Imagine the colors and the textures. Enter into one of the highest-budget sets in the entire world of Scripture.

List in the margin some details you would have found most impressive had you attended the great garden party of King Xerxes.


The original language is far more impressive than our English translations. Fox says the description in verses 6-7 is an unusual Hebrew form, a single long exclamation-like sentence that conveys the *narrator's* wonder and creates a mass of images that overwhelm the senses.¹⁰ *Word Biblical Commentary* nods in agreement with the following translation of the portion: "Oh, the white and violet hangings of linen and cotton, held by white and purple cords of fine linen on silver rods and alabaster columns; the couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, alabaster, shell-marble, and turquoise! And, oh, the drinks that were served . . . in royal style!"¹¹

Freeze-frame on those drinks for a moment. Imagine serving your guests beverages out of glasses that were different on purpose! Until our recent remodel, no two of my glasses were alike either—but not because of the finery of my kitchen. The glasses we'd received for wedding gifts had long disappeared and been replaced by the strangest concoction of table-surprise you've ever seen. But I've seen a few houses in my day that wouldn't put a sippy cup

with the dog-gnawed lid on the table for anything in Texas. You know the kind. When, as *Word Biblical Commentary* says, all that will come out of your mouth is “Oh!”

One of my coworkers and I saw an “Oh!” kind of home not long ago. I’d been invited to speak at a dinner party given by the gorgeous—and, at the risk of causing bitterness, *godly*—wife of a professional athlete. I have been in some beautiful homes in my day, but I have never in my life seen anything like that one. Had the Holy Spirit not shown up, I don’t think I could have picked up my jaw enough to utter an intelligible word.

The experience was much more fun because my girlfriend was with me. We caught each other’s eye a few times with expressions that said, “Are you believing this?” God completely stole the show, but He left us with some asides that still make us laugh. For instance, just before we left that evening, our good-humored host, amused by our poorly hidden giddiness, knew she’d send us over the edge by asking, “Would you girls like to see my closet?” We nearly jumped out of our pumps. Oh, the shoes! Oh, the purses! Oh, the capris! We were like two six-year-old girls leaving Cinderella’s castle in a pumpkin—squealing like mice all the way home.

 Describe a time when you toured an estate or attended a party that left you saying something like, “Oh, the _____!”

Personal Question

No doubt it was even more fun if you had an unspoiled girlfriend with you to share it. Now, let’s take our experiences, throw them together, and multiply the grandeur by 100 and maybe we’ll grasp the scene of Xerxes’ garden party. The Persians were famous for their luxurious gardens. In fact, our word *paradise* comes from the same word they used for their gardens, *paradeisoi*. Rather than picture well-manicured yards, most Persian royal gardens were more like “large parks with trees, wild animals, and sources of water.”¹²

Amid the beauty, the exiles who remained in Susa also may have had a constant reminder of defeat. According to Hebrew *midrash*, the marble pillars in verse 6 had been removed from Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem and carried off by Nebuchadnezzar as part of the spoils almost a century earlier.¹³

The professional athlete’s wife used her mansion to showcase God’s glory. King Xerxes threw a party to display his own. Incidentally, Xerxes didn’t earn an ounce of his fortune. He inherited it from dear old dad, Darius. We’ll soon discover that Ahasuerus was “Exhibit A” of what happens when everything is handed to you in a golden goblet. Still, he had it and he chose to flaunt it.

Fill in the blank according to verse 4: “He displayed the vast _____ of his _____ and the _____ and _____ of his _____.”

esther

For those of us who are familiar with God's Word, those descriptions are chilling. We are accustomed to stringing together words such as *splendor*, *glory*, and *majesty* for God alone. Xerxes would have done well to have rolled himself up in a scroll of Psalm 49 and stayed there until his ego shrunk, but his chance has come and gone. Ours hasn't.

Our culture's mountain-high-piece-of-the-pie premium on riches is not so different from ancient Persia's, and the wealth around us can become as intoxicating as Xerxes' royal wine. As we place today's lesson under a post-modern bulb's light, let's pour over the timeless words of Psalm 49:6-20.

In the margin list every reason in the psalm why prioritizing wealth and strutting riches are wastes of precious time.

Ascribing to God
His measureless
worth will never be
a waste of time.

I can tell you something that will never be a waste of time: ascribing to God His measureless worth. Oddly, the most freeing thing we can ever do is to abdicate the throne of our own miniature kingdoms. Our status is infinitely higher as a servant in God's kingdom than a ruler in ours.

Conclude by writing in your own words Psalm 96:4-6.

Day Three Saying No to a King



TODAY'S TREASURE

"Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger." Esther 1:12

In our previous lesson the cinematographer's camera moved from the mosaic pavement to the marble pillars as we were visually enticed into the extravagant surroundings of Xerxes' seven-day banquet. But the best part of a party is not the location; it's the people. Today the camera shifts from fabrics to faces and where you have people—particularly intoxicated ones—you have problems.

In any good drama it takes at least two spoons to thicken the plot. That's exactly what we'll have today as a second character appears on the royal scene. If a fire gets turned up under a thickening plot, however, something's liable to boil over. This is a mess you won't want to miss.

Since we have the luxury of taking nine weeks to study the 10 chapters of Esther, our Scripture reading will often overlap to keep our context clear. Please read Esther 1:1-12. After you've read the entire segment, settle on verses 7 and 8. At first glance, the snapshots revolving around the wine don't seem significant, but we'll soon see that they suggest more than meets the eye.

In the margin list everything these two verses tell you about the wine.

The custom among ancients such as the Persians dictated that attendees of royal banquets raised their glasses at the invitation of the king. Xerxes forewent the custom and essentially offered an open wine bar. One translation of Esther 1:8 reads, "The drinking was according to the rule: let there be no restraining."¹⁴ In other words, Xerxes' only rule for drinking was that there would be no rule at all. Without the insight of scholars and historians, we might assume he was simply generous. Consider another perspective:

"Although the king's declaration might appear to be an act of grace, it is in fact a subtle sign of weakness. Whereas other Persian rulers demanded unyielding adherence to this custom, Ahasuerus, perhaps being unsure of his power base, finds it necessary to relax this custom as part of his efforts to win the favor of his people."¹⁵

Xerxes was like a high school kid having a party while his parents were away and letting his guests do as they pleased because he was too insecure to lay down the law. Unfortunately, you and I don't have to be an adolescent to fall to the same temptation. Like Xerxes, all we have to do is act like one. Trying to win favor at the risk of smart boundaries is as tempting among coworkers as students. Imagine the pressure had you and I tried to be impressive for a solid seven days of entertaining. What an embarrassing prospect!

Just about the time we're getting bored with Xerxes and his drink-a-thon, a new character enters the narrative.

List everything you learn about her and can also infer about her based on verses 9-12, starting obviously with her name and position.

Enter Vashti, the crowned Queen of Persia. Think of the most beautiful woman you've ever seen, and don't act like you don't notice because virtually every woman does. We're probably more aware of the appearance of other women than men are.