

## Esther - Lesson One

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Have you ever wondered what impact your daily choices make on the 'big picture' of life? If so, the book of Esther will be a refreshing surprise for you! It is amazing how dramatic God can be as He sketches events onto the canvas of our lives through ordinary, everyday choices. No book reveals this truth more clearly than the book of Esther. It is the only book in Scripture that never mentions God's name but His fingerprints are everywhere. In fact, He is the most prominent character in the story.



## *The Pencil Sketch*

### **Esther 1; Ezra 1-6:**

*The theme of Esther pivots around the survival of the Jews from a planned holocaust at the time of Persian rule. If you were to look at a biblical timeline, the Book of Esther takes place between chapters six and seven of the Book of Ezra.*

1. Find a *comfortable* chair and read Ezra 1-6. In your own words, try to describe this troublesome time.

A helpful summary of Persian leaders and their biblical description will help solidify this time frame as we begin our study.

<i>Ruler</i>	<i>Scripture Reference</i>	<i>Description</i>
Cyrus 559-530 BC	2 Chr. 36; Ezra 1-6	Babylon's conqueror returne exiled people to their homeland. Permitted Jews to return to Judea.
Cambyses 530-522 BC		
Rule of Magi 522-521 BC		
Darius I 521-486 BC	Ezra 4:5; 5:6-7 Neh. 12:22 Hag. 1:1	Cyrus' successor. Ordered completion of Jerusalem temple at the government's expense.
Xerxes 486-465 BC	Esther	Invaded Europe twice and defeated by Greeks. Ruler during Esther's time.
Artaxerxes 465-425 BC	Ezra 7:1,21-26	Nehemiah was cup-bearer of this prominent ruler. Granted permission to rebuild Jerusalem wall.



4. From what you know about this book, try to match the correct name to its corresponding description. *Some may have more than one match.*

Ahasuerus

Vashti

Haman

Mordecai

Esther

God

- \_\_\_\_\_ Obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her
- \_\_\_\_\_ Raised his cousin as his own daughter
- \_\_\_\_\_ Beautiful queen who refuses the king's command
- \_\_\_\_\_ Greek name is Xerxes
- \_\_\_\_\_ Plots to destroy the Jews
- \_\_\_\_\_ A Benjamite living in Shushan
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hebrew name is Hadassah
- \_\_\_\_\_ Likes to issue edicts without thinking them through
- \_\_\_\_\_ Deposed as queen
- \_\_\_\_\_ Holds a feast to display his power
- \_\_\_\_\_ Risks her life to save the Jews
- \_\_\_\_\_ Discovers plot to kill the king
- \_\_\_\_\_ Is forced to honor Mordecai
- \_\_\_\_\_ Holds a feast for the women in the palace
- \_\_\_\_\_ Never mentioned by name, but always present

## *Celebration or Chaos?*

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### **Read Esther 1:1-10**

5. Chapter one opens with a parade of commotion, carousing and celebrities! Try to describe the palace garden and its decoration.

- a. What was the purpose for this extravagant banquet?

6. If you had been a part of this feasting, how would it have affected you? Would you be overwhelmed by the opulence or would you be un-influenced?



### *Personally Tailored*

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Take a moment to compare your wealth as a child of God to that of King Ahasuerus. List some of the riches you have in Christ today and those waiting for you in eternity. How does this inspire a heart of thanksgiving?



### *Shades of Character*

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### *Conflict of Wills*

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#### **Read Esther 1:11-12**

7. We're told that Queen Vashti also held a banquet separate for the women. What might be a reason for the separation of men and women?
8. Intoxicated by wine, Ahasuerus summoned Vashti "to show her beauty to the people" verse 11. Why would he make such a request?
- What was the law concerning drinking? Verse 8
  - Can you find any other Scriptures that describe the snares and pitfalls of drunkenness?

## *A Concrete Example*

### **Read Esther 1:13-22**

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9. Everyone needs advice at some point in time. In this intoxicated state, whom did the king seek for counsel?
  - a. In order to resolve the issue, what did they advise the king to do?
  - b. Do you think this was the wisest counsel?
  - c. Where does true wisdom come from? Proverbs 9:10
  - d. How can we attain wisdom? James 1:5
  - e. Are you in a situation seeking God's wisdom? If so, find someone in your group to pray with today.
10. What was unique about the royal decrees of the Medes and Persians?

11. Again, these 'advisors' suggested that the queen 'wronged' the king by refusing to come to him. Was she the one that was truly wrong? Try to explain your answer.

- a. What might have kept the king from admitting his mistake?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- b. Do you ever try to control or manipulate those you love for your own purposes?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- c.. What keeps you from admitting you're wrong and trusting God with the results?

12. How did Vashti respond to the king's summons?

- a. Why do you think she refused?



## *Personally Tailored*

*We may never have to make a decision as critical as Vashti's, but we will all pass through valleys of difficulty and heartache. Consider your life; how many things seem out of control for you? Which of these can be directly affected by a desire to change yourself or your lifestyle? What is beyond your control? What would you like to ask God about these problems? Try to write out an honest prayer, committing everything to His care and opening yourself to the change He wants to make in you.*

*Read Psalm 46.*

*What is God's word to us about an out-of-control world and situation?*

*Write out verse 5 and personalize it:*

13. Coming to verse 12, what was the king's response to her refusal?
  - a. Anger and intoxication are violent partners. Read Proverbs 20:1-2 and try to imagine the response of this king.

14. What do the following passages teach us about anger?

Psalm 37:8

Proverbs 15:18

Proverbs 25:28

15. Some have tried to share this story as an Old Testament version of The King and I, a story about a kind king and a holy girl. After reading this first chapter, do you think that is an accurate comparison?

- a. Based on what you've read about King Ahasuerus in Chapter 1, how would you describe his character and personality?
  
- b. What is the most challenging truth you have learned in this first chapter?

*With Vashti banished from the palace, there is a new job opening! At first, Esther doesn't seem to be palace material: from a common orphan to the palace life of a queen. She is scared and lonely, but still in the center of God's perfect plan. Again we see as God tailors our lives, if we are willing to seize the opportunities presented by His providential design...anything is possible!*







