

## Queen Vashti

### *Esther 1:8-19*

**1:8** And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure. **1:9** Also **Vashti the queen** made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to king Ahasuerus. **1:10** On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, **1:11** To bring **Vashti the queen** before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on. **1:12** But **the queen Vashti** refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him. **1:13** Then the king said to the wise men, which knew the times, (for so was the king's manner toward all that knew law and judgment: . . .

**1:15** What shall we do unto **the queen Vashti** according to law, because she hath not performed the commandment of the king Ahasuerus by the chamberlains? **1:16** And Memucan answered before the king and the princes, **Vashti the queen** hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people that are in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus. **1:17** For this deed of **the queen** shall come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported, The king Ahasuerus commanded **Vashti the queen** to be brought in before him, but she came not. **1:18** Likewise shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king's princes, which have heard of the deed of **the queen**. Thus shall there arise too much contempt and wrath. **1:19** If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, That **Vashti** come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she.

### *Esther 2:1-4, 17*

**2:1** After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered **Vashti**, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her. **2:2** Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king: **2:3** And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the palace, to the house of the women, unto the custody of Hege the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women; and let their things for purification be given them: **2:4** And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of **Vashti**. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so.

**2:17** And the king loved **Esther** above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of **Vashti**.

### a pair of queens?

In world history, Vashti is an important woman named Amestris, the mother of King Artaxerxes of Persia. In the Bible, however, she is overshadowed by Esther who replaced her. Esther is mentioned more than any other woman in the Bible, other than Sarah, but Vashti disappears quickly.

That said, the removal of Vashti is an important part of the story. She was removed for refusing to obey King Ahasuerus (1:12), but the greater reason was because God's planned to use Queen Esther to save the Jewish people from their enemies. God is never mentioned directly in Esther, but his leading is evident everywhere.

## negatives

Most modern readers are quick to criticize King Ahasuerus for the way he treated Queen Vashti. Moreover, modern commentators often excuse Vashti's refusal to come before the king. Perhaps she was sick or pregnant at the time. Or perhaps she refused to come because she knew that drunken men would have acted lewdly. Some even suggest that the king commanded his beautiful queen to come to his feast as a nude dancer, wearing nothing but a crown (1:10-11). There would be many more lines in the A section below if these suggestions were added. For sure, King Ahasuerus behaved improperly, but was he really that bad?

Modern readers are less likely to suggest that there was a problem with Queen Vashti. Therefore rarely (if ever) do study Bible notes suggest that she may have lacked a good reason to refuse to obey the king. Her pride may have been involved. This is especially plausible because ancient historical sources show that she was the mother of the next king, Artaxerxes. As such, she may have believed that she deserved to be treated better. Indeed, she did deserve better, but she still could have and should have humbled herself.

The B section lines below show that there were various factors involved.

*Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).*

<b>A</b>	<b>( ) King Ahasuerus treated Vashti poorly.</b>
A-1	( ) He treated her like an object (1:10-11).
A-2	( ) He did not bother to talk with her privately (1:10-13).
A-3	( ) He reacted too quickly (1:12-22) and later regretted it (2:1).
A-4	( ) He was angry (1:12, 2:1), and anger is always sinful (Eph. 4:26).
A-5	( ) He was drunk (1:10) and foolish, much like Nabal (1 Sam. 25:36).
<b>B</b>	<b>( ) There were several negative contributing factors.</b>
B-1	( ) The feasting was excessive (1:3-10, 2:18).
B-2	( ) There were only men at the king's feast (1:5, 9).
B-3	( ) The feasts were political, designed to promote loyalty.
B-4	( ) There was little Jewish influence in Babylon (2:5, 10:1-3).
B-5	( ) Memucan naturally sided with the angry king against Vashti.
B-6	( ) It was easy for the king to find a new and better wife (1:19, 2:1-18).
B-7	( ) The feast was a national event, rather than just a local one (1:3, 5).

## positives

Since God himself worked behind the scenes to replace Vashti with Esther, making excuses for Vashti's lack of submission is probably a mistake. It is far better to think carefully about the subject matter actually found in Esther chapter one. What is the chapter about (C lines) and how does it fit with the rest of the book (D lines)?

In the long run, it was a great blessing that various sins and human limitations were exposed, since these demonstrate the need for God. Some problems are listed as negative contributing factors on the previous page (B) while others are listed below (D).

The kingdom of Persia was a truly great one, and this is emphasized from the beginning. (*There were 127 provinces, 1:1.*) Yet, its size and diversity were also a problem, requiring multiple sub-rulers (1:14) and the translation of edicts into many languages (1:22). Because of this the king was very dependent on his many assistants.

Historians believe that Ahasuerus was preparing to invade Greece as the feasts in chapter one were held. A few years later, despite the greatness of his kingdom and army, he was humiliated by the Greeks. It is good to focus on the human limits seen in the chapter.

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

<b>C</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Esther chapter one deals with important subjects.</b>
C-1	<input type="checkbox"/> The chapter is about authority.
C-2	<input type="checkbox"/> The chapter is about love and marriage.
C-3	<input type="checkbox"/> The chapter is about wives being submissive to husbands.
C-4	<input type="checkbox"/> Memucan's points (1:16-18) are exactly like Peter's (1 Pet. 3:1-7).
C-5	<input type="checkbox"/> The chapter is about one of the largest kingdoms that ever existed.
<b>D</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <b>The Vashti incident (chapter one) is an important part of Esther.</b>
D-1	<input type="checkbox"/> The chapter is long and full of details.
D-2	<input type="checkbox"/> The incident shows that women were not in charge.
D-3	<input type="checkbox"/> The incident shows that the king was not totally in charge.
D-4	<input type="checkbox"/> Memucan's advise shows that the rulers feared losing control.
D-5	<input type="checkbox"/> The chapter shows that the kingdom was too large (1:1, 14, 22).
D-6	<input type="checkbox"/> God was active in the chapter, even though He is not mentioned.
D-7	<input type="checkbox"/> The incident helps show how a Jewish orphan girl became queen.

## worksheet answers

Although submission to authority is a key topic in Esther chapter one (C-1, C-3), Memucan's points about wives submitting to their husbands (1:16-18) are somewhat different from Peter's points in 1 Pet. 3:1-7. The Persian leader never mentioned God or the importance of husbands honoring their wives as Peter did. Line C-4 is incorrect.

There is much about submission in marriage in the first chapter of Esther, but love is never mentioned (C-2). Moreover, there is no clear evidence in chapter one that King Ahasuerus loved Queen Vashti, since he treated her like an art object (A-1). Yet, he may have regretted quickly divorcing her in his anger (A-3, 2:1). Still, love is only mentioned in 2:17, and that is toward Esther.

Line A-4 is only partly correct. It is incorrect to say that anger is always sinful. Various verses, including Eph. 4:26, show that it is proper to be angry at evil. Yet, at the same time, Eph. 4:26 also shows that it is important to get over anger quickly. The drunken king did not do so. Thus, he was somewhat like foolish Nabal in 1 Sam. 25:36 (A-5).

The king's advisers probably thought that it would be easy for Ahasuerus to find a new and better queen (1:19), but doing so actually required God's leading (2:1-18) even though the Lord is not directly mentioned (B-6, D-6).

## So what?

King Ahasuerus was not totally in charge (D-3), even of himself. In his drunkenness (1:10) and anger (1:12) he was unable to fully control himself, let alone others. Moreover his huge and diverse kingdom (C-5) was too large for him to control (D-5). His servants repeatedly had to tell him what to do (1:13-22, 2:1-4).

The rigid nature of the laws of the Persians and the Medes also made it difficult for the king to do as he wished. He remembered the negative decree made against Vashti (2:1), but he could not change it (1:19). Another rigid decree was a problem later as well, but it was overcome through an additional decree (8:5-17). There was no way that such could have been done regarding Vashti.

The most important point on the worksheets and in the book of Esther as a whole is about the Lord being in charge. His control is demonstrated in various ways. In chapter one, it is seen through the various limitations that even the great king, Ahasuerus, had to deal with. He was not really in charge (D-3); God was (D-6).

Finally, what about Vashti? Was she rebellious? Perhaps she was. Was she also undone by situational factors? Superficially speaking, various things were involved, but the bottom line is that the Lord removed her.

## applications

*Apply the points which you believe are most important or seem most useful.*

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