

Sermon Discussion

11 July 2021

Read Esther 1:1-22

Dig Deeper

In the English Bible, Esther appears adjacent to Ezra-Nehemiah and with the historical books, but in the Hebrew Bible it is **one of five short books** (the so-called Megillot) that appear toward the end of the biblical writings.

Ahasuerus, or Xerxes, is famous in secular history for two things: his defeat at the hands of the Greeks, and his building of the royal Persian palace at Persepolis. In 481 B.C. he took about 200,000 soldiers and hundreds of ships to Greece to avenge his father Darius' loss at the battle of Marathon (490 B.C.). However, he too suffered defeat. His soldiers lost the battle of **Thermopylae** to the Spartans, the battle of Plataea, and the Greeks destroyed his navy in the battle of Salamis.

The Persian kings castrated many of the men who served the king and his family (v. 10) so they could not have sexual relations with the female members of the royal court and start dynasties of their own.

The **counsel of seven** (v. 13-14) continued in existence for at least 25 years after this event (see Ezra 7:14). These men were cabinet-level officials in the government. The king's advisers feared that Vashti's rebellion would lead to a popular women's liberation movement and to a revolution among the aristocratic wives particularly (v. 17-18).

1. The concept of providence can elicit a number of different reactions. How would you describe your understanding of providence? How does it make you feel?
2. Providence is God's unseen hand that rules all things according to his good purposes. Which aspect of that definition is hardest for you to believe? Read Romans 8:28-30. Romans 8:28 has often been used insensitively in the midst of suffering or pain. What hope does the verse provide? What is the basis for such a hope?
3. Are you, like Ahasuerus, ever tempted to declare your own glory and greatness instead of God's? Why is this dangerous?
4. Ahasuerus wanted to show off Vashti for his benefit rather than hers. In what ways do we use people for our good rather than theirs? How can we avoid using others to their detriment and to our benefit, and why should we?
5. God used Ahasuerus's wretchedness and Vashti's rebellion to open the door for Esther's future reign. What does this tell you about His sovereignty and providence?

Application & Prayer

- Tracing the line of providence is difficult in the moment, but fruitful in hindsight. Looking back in your own life, how can you see God's hand? Think particularly of his presence in the ordinary.
- Spend some time in confession telling God the areas of your life where you are making sinful choices. He already knows, but confession is for us. It's how we acknowledge our sin before God.
- What will it look like this week for you to turn to God first?