

Book Study on Esther

Vashti is Banished

Esther 1:16-22

Dr. Bill Gilmore

Oakleaf Baptist Church, Orange Park, Florida

Sunday, February 16, 2020 PM

Introduction

The last time we studied the book of Esther we studied about King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) wanted to prove that Babylonian women were more beautiful than any other women in the world. He sent for queen Vashti, his wife to present herself before all the men at his party. She was appalled by his request and refused to present herself. The king began to ask his advisors what he should do about her rebellion. This is where we are picking up on the story tonight.

Let's pick up here in verse 16

Bible

Est 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.

- Josephus (historian) says:
 - She was obeying the Persian laws by not going
“But she, out of regard to the laws of the Persians, which forbid the wives to be seen by strangers, did not go to the king
 - The King was furious (sending several messengers to compel her to come.)
and though he oftentimes sent the eunuchs to her, she did nevertheless stay away, and refused to come, till the king was so much irritated, that he brake up the entertainment, and rose up, and called for those seven who had the interpretation of the laws committed to them, and accused his wife, and said that he had been affronted by her, because that when she was frequently called by him to his feast, she did not obey him once.
 - The King then asks his counselors what to do
He therefore gave order that they should inform him what could be done by the law against her. So one of them, whose name was Memucan
- One counselor, Memucan, speaks up, he really knows how to play the king here:
Memucan, said that this affront was offered not to him alone, but to all the Persians, who were in danger of leading their lives very ill with their wives, if they must be thus despised by them; for that none of their wives would have any reverence for their husbands, if they had" such an example of arrogance in the queen towards thee, who rulest over all." Accordingly, he exhorted him to punish her, who had been guilty of so great an affront to him, after a severe manner; and when he had so done, to publish to the nations what had been decreed about the queen. So the resolution was to put Vashti away, and to give her dignity to another woman."¹
 - Memucan purposefully makes this issue out to be a huge deal to the king!
 - He charges that she had done wrong to the king
 - He charges she had done wrong to all the princes
 - He charged she had done wrong to all the people of the kingdom

¹ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/history/flavius-josephus/antiquities-jews/book-11/chapter-6.html>

- Memucan really knows how to play the king here:
 - There are three different views as to why Memucan wished to be revenged upon Vashti.
 - According to one, Vashti would strike him back and forth on the face with her shoe. In consequence, Memucan says (Esth. 1:16): “Queen Vashti has committed an offense not only against Your Majesty,” that is, she acted unjustly towards him, as well, and because of this he wanted a severe punishment to be inflicted upon her.²
 - The symbolic act of throwing a shoe at somebody, as a sign of deep loathing and disgust. It is considered to be an extreme act within middle eastern culture.³

Est 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.

Est 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.

- The second view as to why Memucan wished to be revenged upon Vashti.
 - The second midrashic direction has Memucan wanting to be avenged because Vashti did not invite his wife to the women’s banquet. And so he says (Esth. 1:17): “For the queen’s behavior will make all wives despise their husbands.” He speaks in general language and not in a personal tone, because he did not include himself and his wife in this statement.²
 - Memucan cast a fear of insurrection by all the princes of the land’s wives against them. Remember they were at the party with Vashti. We must fear the disrespect and our anger that will follow.
 - If you leave this unchecked, our wives will all disrespect us
 - We will be angry with our wives
 - We will be angry with you because you let this go unchecked.

Est 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.

- Altering the Medes and persian law:
 - *Dan 6:15 “Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is, That no decree nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed.”*
 - Literally, and it shall not pass away; that is, it shall remain as a precedent, and be a permanent law for such matters in the empire. On the proverbial inviolability of the laws of the Medes and Persians, compare the marginal references. It originated, probably, in a desire to enhance in the national mind the sacredness of law, and also to forestall capricious and hasty changes in administration.⁴
- The third view as to why Memucan wished to be revenged upon Vashti.
 - According to the third position, Memucan had a daughter and wanted Vashti to be deposed so that his daughter could marry Ahasuerus. Therefore he says (Esth. 1:19): “And let Your Majesty bestow her royal state upon another who is more worthy than she,” hinting at his own daughter (Esth. Rabbah 4:6).²

² <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/vashti-midrash-and-aggadah>

³ <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Throw%20a%20shoe>

⁴ Whedon, Daniel. "Commentary on Esther 1:19". "Whedon's Commentary on the Bible". <https://www.studydrive.net/commentaries/whe/esther-1.html>. 1874-1909.

- *Lets look at Memucan's strategy:*
 - *Vashti is removed from the presence of the king*
 - *Vashti is removed from a royal status*
 - *Vashti would be put to death, as it is the obvious succession of events for someone who rebels against the king.*⁵
- The importance of the law not being altered made Memucan feel as if all of this would not come back on him if Vashti were to be able to achieve restoration with the king.

Est 1:20 And when the king's decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all his empire, (for it is great,) all the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small.

- All the wives too are included, for they are all “to give honour to their husbands, both to the great and small.” Well, the great, the really great, will get the honour easily, and could do very well probably without the helpful edict. Where there is real greatness, which, in Christian speech, we may translate into real goodness, it is the wife’s joy to render what it is the husband’s pride to wear. But the honour is to be given “both to the great and small!” “Ay, there’s the rub.” If this insurrectionary torch should go through the land, what will become of the small ones?--the selfish, the spiteful, the meddlesome, the rude, the mean, the silly, the helpless, the good-for-nothing? They are all to have honour! As if a decree could really get it, or keep it from them. Wouldn’t the better plan be, in that case, and in many a case besides, that the small shall try to grow larger? Let them be ashamed of their littleness, and rise out of it into something like nobleness. Let them love and help their wives, and care for their children, and honour will come as harvest follows sowing. But unless they do something like that, one fears that all the edicts that can be devised and promulgated will leave them as it finds them--“small.” (A. Raleigh, D. D.)⁶
 - And does not this history teach us that the great law of domestic happiness is love?⁶
 - The harmony in a home is proportionate to the love that is expressed.

Est 1:21 And the saying pleased the king and the princes; and the king did according to the word of Memucan:

- Pity but itching ears should have clawing counsellors. Memucan was a fit helve for such a hatchet; and his advice fit lettuce for such lips. What marvel that such a smooth counsellor pleased the king, when as he had before given place to two such bad counsellors - Wine and Anger?⁷

Est 1:22 For he sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man should bear rule in his own house, and that it should be published according to the language of every people.

- The new law was declared in every province
- The new law was decreed in every language known in the kingdom
- Instruction was given for every man to rule his house and not let a woman rebel against him
- Every person should understand this decree in their native tongue so that there is no confusion.
- Taking the words exactly as they stand, they can only mean that in a house where two or more languages are used, from the presence of foreign wives, the husband is to take care that his own language is not supplanted by any of theirs. This is intelligible enough, but is perhaps rather irrelevant to what goes before.⁸

⁵ Commentary of the Dubner Maggid on the Book of Esther, Jacob ben Wolf Kranz

⁶ Exell, Joseph S. "Commentary on "Esther 1:20". The Biblical Illustrator. <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/tbi/esther-1.html>. 1905-1909. New York.

⁷ Trapp, John. "Commentary on Esther 1:21". John Trapp Complete Commentary. <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/jtc/esther-1.html>. 1865-1868.

⁸ Ellicott, Charles John. "Commentary on Esther 1:22". "Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers". <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/ebc/esther-1.html>. 1905.