

THE KING'S FEASTS

Esther 1.1-9: Three Feasts that Speak Volumes of Problems in the Kingdom

Theme: Don't be a Vashti! Spend time with the King and get involved with what He is doing!

We've spent some time the last few weeks doing an overview of the Book of Esther.

- We looked at the history recorded in the book and talked about God's providential care of His people in spite of their lack of complete obedience to His command to return to the land after their captivity.
- Then we looked at the doctrinal application: Esther shows a prophetic picture of “those days” of transition from the Rapture of the Church to the Second Coming of Christ to establish the Millennium.
- And last week we spent some time with the personal application: The Book of Esther is a wonderful illustration of how we live a “victorious” and “spiritual” Christian life.
- Today, we're going to start our study of Chapter 1...

The Book of Esther starts out with a feast... three feasts, actually.

- In Esther 1.1-9 we see King Ahasuerus enjoying a time of peace and prosperity in his kingdom.
- But, in the midst of the celebrations, we get a glimpse of a problem between the king and his queen.

I. (v1-4) Peace in the Kingdom: A Feast for the Kingdom

A. (v1-2) The kingdom of Ahasuerus is enjoying a time of relative peace and safety.

1. There are no great wars. There are no major problems Ahasuerus has to deal with.
2. The setting for our story right now is a time of *peace*.

B. (v3) And King Ahasuerus wants to celebrate.

1. He has expanded his kingdom to include 127 provinces, and he has established his rule over them.
2. And so he invites the leaders of his kingdom to the capital city to celebrate.
 - a) He makes a feast for all his “princes” and “servants”—all those who rule with him in Shushan.
 - b) And he also invites “nobles” and “princes” from out in the 127 provinces.
 - c) It wouldn't be a stretch to say he had at least 2,000 people in attendance.
3. And the feast lasted for 180 days (six months)!
 - a) It could be that all the leaders arrived at once and stayed the whole six months.
 - b) Or, he could have staggered the celebration, bringing in the leaders in groups (so as not to leave the provinces without leadership for those six months).
 - c) Regardless, it's a big celebration!
4. Again, this feast speaks to us of one thing particular: Peace in the kingdom.
 - a) There are no great threats to the rule of Ahasuerus; he is reigning and ruling over the 127 provinces and the kingdom is united.
 - b) The king obviously feels very comfortable with his authority and so he has a celebration with all of the leaders from all of the provinces throughout his entire kingdom. It's a time of peace!

C. Personal Application: Remember that Ahasuerus pictures us, the soul.

1. And in Esther 1, Ahasuerus is still married to Vashti (he has not yet married Esther). So, we are seeing a picture of a lost man, still outside the “family of God.”
2. And what we see is a great picture of most lost people today (especially in Western society; and even more so in our community of Johnson County, KS): Peace!
 - a) Most lost people today live fairly peaceful lives (there are exceptions, but most people...)
 - (1) They grow up in decent households, get decent educations, work decent jobs, and live in decent neighborhoods.
 - (2) They don't experience very many earth-shattering problems.
 - b) And most people are fairly happy and content, even to the point of being quite generous.
 - (1) It's like Ahasuerus: He threw a cookout party for 2000 people that lasted six months!
 - (2) And most people in the U.S. are fairly generous, give to charity, volunteer, etc.
 - c) So, don't lose sight of the personal pictures and types: Ahasuerus is like many lost people...
 - (1) We are surrounded by folks like him: Wealthy, decent, and often generous people living relatively peaceful lives.
 - (2) But, they're still married to Vashti. (Before we get to Vashti...)

D. (v4) The King's Feast has Two Main Purposes:

1. The King wants to show his control: He wants to show all of the leaders throughout his kingdom that he is in control and all is well.
 - a) He is showing them all that there is peace and the kingdom is unified.
 - b) The message he wants to convey is simple: “*You can trust in me; you can follow me.*”
2. The King wants to show his resources: He also wants his leaders to know of the “riches” that he has at his disposal. Riches/Resources means he can move his army should he need to.
3. Why is this important?
 - a) Because it shows us that Ahasuerus is not some bumbling idiot that many commentators make him out to be.
 - b) Ahasuerus is a very strong leader of a very large kingdom. He is very apt at what he does.

E. [Review] In this feast, then, we see there is great peace in the kingdom (it's a unified kingdom).

II. (v5-8) Prosperity in the Kingdom: A Feast for the Capital

A. (v5) After the first feast for the whole kingdom, the king has another feast for Shushan.

1. Observe: This second feast is for all the people that lived in Shushan.
2. In the first feast (for all the leaders of all the provinces) we saw the element of peace. Now...

B. (v5-6a) This second feast speaks of the king's prosperity!

- Everything mentioned in these verse speaks of prosperity: The number of people invited, the place of the feast, vessels, the pillars... It all says: MONEY!

C. (v6b) And with prosperity comes comfort!

1. The “beds” of gold and silver were what we might call “recliners.” They were “seats” that allowed a person to recline at a table where he was eating.
2. Nice and comfortable to enjoy all the food wealth could provide!

D. (v7-8) And with the prosperity and the comfort... each person had his own liberty to choose.

1. The king was not only generous with his resources, but he was generous in his leadership.
2. Ahasuerus was not the big “dictator” that forced people to do things his way.
 - a) He provided wine (and “royal” wine at that! the “good stuff!”), but he allowed each individual to choose to drink or not.
 - b) Ahasuerus was a good leader, and a generous and decent person.

E. Doctrinal Application: We need to see ourselves (the Church today) in this picture...

1. (v2) Remember that we are seeing a doctrinal picture of “those days” in the Book of Esther.
 - a) “Those days” are the days of transition that lead up to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.
 - b) And “those days” begin with the Rapture of the Church, which we see in Esther 1.
 - c) So we can easily see the “Church of the last days” in this picture of the kingdom...
2. (Rev 3.14-17a) The Picture: The last church mentioned in the Bible (before a rapture of a believer; Rev 4.1) is the Church of Laodicea.
 - a) The last church is rich and increased with goods—peaceful & prosperous!
 - b) This is a church that has need of nothing—comfort!
 - c) This is the lukewarm church that “follows Christ” in her own way—she has “liberty.”
3. The days of Ahasuerus are just like the days we live in: Peace, Prosperity, Comfort, and Liberty.
 - a) We (at least in the West) are not experiencing any great persecution. There's peace.
 - b) Our prosperity is undeniable. It's not *at all* uncommon for churches today to have multi-million dollar buildings and pastors with salaries in the six figures!
4. But... there's a problem in the kingdom... and we get a glimpse of that problem in the next verse...

III. (v9) Problems in the Kingdom: A Feast for Vashti

A. This is the first mention of Vashti in the Book of Esther. What can learn about her here...?

1. First: Vashti is a *Gentile* queen.
 - a) Gentiles are just those who are not Jews. God separated His people (Israel) from all the rest, and all the rest are called Gentiles.
 - b) This is important to us (as we've seen before) because the Church is mostly made up of Gentiles. The Jews rejected Christ and the gospel, and so God sent the gospel to the Gentiles.
 - c) (Est 1.19) As we've mentioned before, the removal of the Gentile queen from the throne is a picture of the removal of the Gentile Church (the Bride of Christ) from the earth in the Rapture.
 - d) At that time, the nation of Israel (pictured in Esther) comes into the story as the center of God's attention and plan.
2. Second: *Vashti* (the name) means *beautiful woman*.
 - a) Vashti was a woman who was beautiful to look upon (she was physically attractive).
 - b) And this is exactly what God wants in the Church (Christ's Gentile Bride): Beauty!
 - (1) (2Cor 5.17) To that end he has made us all “new creatures” in Christ.
 - (2) (Php 3.20-21) He will also make our bodies new—beautiful to look upon like Christ's.
 - (3) (Eph 5.25-27) And today, through the Scripture and the work of His Spirit, God is conforming us to the image of Christ... He is making us like “Vashti” (beautiful).
3. And in this first mention of the beautiful Gentile bride of the king... what does she do?

B. Vashti made a feast of her own.

- Here, you have to ask yourself, “Why? Why did she have a feast of her own? Why didn't she go to the feast made by the king?”
1. The customs of the time.
 - a) Many will explain it away by saying that it was just customs of that people at that time.
 - (1) Like many middle eastern cultures of today, the women don't mix with the men.
 - (2) So, it's not at all uncommon to see the a feast for the women separate from that of the men.
 - (3) That's all good and well, except for...
 - b) (v5) The Bible clearly says that the King's feast was “all the people” in Shushan.
 - (1) (v3) The first feast for the leaders could most certainly have been a “men only” affair.
 - (2) (v5) However, the second is clearly for “all”: Men, women, and children. The King opened up the door of his palace and said, “Y'all come!”
 - c) So, we have to ask ourselves again: *Why did Vashti make her own feast for the women?*
 2. Vashti has some problems...
 - a) First, observe that the Bible says it was Vashti who made the feast, not the King.
 - (1) If it were according to the customs of society of that time, would it not have been proper for the king to make the feast and segregate the women apart from the men? Probably.
 - (2) But, this feast was Vashti's idea... it was Vashti's decision. She wanted it. She did it.
 - b) Second, think about what this implies (especially in picture and type).
 - (1) Queen Vashti does not want to be with the king... so she makes her own feast.
 - (2) Queen Vashti does not want to be among “all the people” invited to the king's feast... so she makes her own feast for those she prefers to be with.
 - (3) Vashti wants to be in her own little “social club” of people who are just like her.
 - (a) It's nice to be around people like me. I'm comfortable with that.
 - (b) Most people who are like me will generally get along with me (and me with them).
 - c) And this helps us to see a small hint of the problem in the kingdom: ***The problem is Vashti.***
 - And the problem with Vashti is that she does not want to be with the king, involved in what he is doing. She'd rather be with other people like her... doing what she wants.

C. Vashti shows us a doctrinal picture of the Church in the last days before the Rapture.

1. (Rev 3.17a, 20) Churches today have this appearance of spirituality (they're called “churches” or “Christians”) but they don't want to be with the King involved with the King in what He is doing.
 - a) **Where** is the King, our Bridegroom, today?
 - (1) Obviously Christ is in the third heaven, but where is He today by means of His Spirit?
 - (2) (John 12.32; 16.7-8) The King is out there, in the world, among “all the people.”
 - b) **What** is our King doing out there among all the people?
 - (1) He is convicting sinners of sin, righteousness, and judgment in order to draw all men to himself for salvation.
 - (2) Our King came to this earth to seek and to save lost sinners (Luke 19.10; 1Tim 1.15), and He is still doing that same work by His Spirit.

- c) What does the King *want* of His Gentile Bride?
- (1) (2Cor 5.17-21) He would like us to be with Him, involved in what He is doing.
 - (2) But, no... the queen makes her own feast... separate from the King... The King is on the outside, not invited to Vashti's private little party.
 - (a) She makes a feast that looks like the King's (she meets in a place she calls a “church”).
 - (b) There she does what she wants, rather than getting involved in what the King is doing.
2. Today, churches (like Vashti) don't want to be with the King, out among “all the people.”
- a) We have been given a Great Commission by our King: To be disciples so that we can make disciples of all nations.
 - b) And our King has made a “great feast” (all spiritual blessing: Eph 1.3; eternal and abundant life: John 10.10) and He has invited “all the people.”
 - God, through Jesus Christ, has opened up the doors of His palace and said, “Y'all come!”
 - c) The King, our Bridegroom, wants us *with* Him, *involved* in *doing* what He is doing.
 - (1) (John 17.18) He is out in the world (among all the people), and that is where He wants us.
 - (2) (1Cor 1.17, 23) The King wants us out among all the people to seek and save the lost through the *preaching of the Gospel*.
 - d) But, what do churches want today (i.e., what does Vashti want)?
 - (1) Churches today want their own little social club “just for me.”
 - (2) Most churches today certainly do *not* want to submit to the King... to *know* Him through His Word and *serve* Him through the preaching of His Word.
 - (a) Most churches tell stories in their little topical sermonettes on Sunday mornings. They don't teach the Bible through expository preaching.
 - (b) Most churches would rather have Easter Egg Hunts and Christmas Eve Vigils instead of evangelizing door to door or out on the streets (preaching the gospel to the lost).
 - (3) Summary & Conclusion: Our situation today is just like we see in Esther chapter 1...
 - (a) There's *peace* in the kingdom—nobody wants to kill us (there's no great war against Christians today).
 - (b) There *prosperity* in the kingdom—just look at the “church” buildings and the cars parked in their huge parking lots!
 - (c) And that peace and prosperity has brought great *comfort* to those in the kingdom.
 - i) It's funny (sad)... As Christians—followers/imitators of Christ—we are called to a life of *sacrifice* (to sacrifice our comfort for others just like Christ did for us).
 - ii) But, what is the one thing we so often cling to? Our comfort.
 - I'm not comfortable passing out tracts...
 - I'm not comfortable going door to door...
 - I'm not comfortable street preaching...
 - I'm not comfortable in a church that meets in a school and doesn't have programs for my kids, my wife, my teens, my dog, and my grandma.
 - I'm not comfortable putting forth that much effort to actually read the Bible, study the Bible, grow in prayer, and... then teach someone else.

(d) Do you see our problem today: Vashti wants her own feast...

- i) Christ is on the outside and she is on the inside; she prefers to be with others like herself rather than to be with the King. *She's lost her first love.*
- ii) *And she's lost the mission.* The King is out in His feast with all the people... but Vashti doesn't want to be there... with the King, doing what He is doing. She prefers her own party with her own people (people like her).

Conclusion:

For those who do not know Christ as their Lord and Savior:

- It could be that you have peace, prosperity, and comfort in your life (welcome to Johnson County!).
- But, you need to know that you are outside the family of God. And there's only one way in...
 - ✓ You need to get Vashti off the throne! *Repent of your sins...*
 - ✓ And you need Esther (a new spirit; the new birth). *Place your trust in Christ and follow Him.*

For those of us who do know Christ:

- We should ask ourselves:
 - ✓ Where is the King and what is doing today?
 - ✓ Where are we and what are we doing?
- Spend time with the King; build a desire to be with Him (read your Bible and pray; learn of Him).
 - ✓ (Luke 6.40) To be a Christian is to be a follower of Christ—a learner of Him (to be like Him).
- Then get out there with the King and get involved in what He is doing among all the people.
 - ✓ (Luke 14.25-33) We need to sacrifice our comforts to be where we need to be (we need to be with Jesus Christ) and to do what we need to be doing (making disciples; preaching the Gospel).