





The Banquet of Queen Vashti, from the 1617 Scroll of Esther from Ferrara, Italy

Wise Prepared Cruel Cowardly

Brave Rash Loyal Respectful

Strong Humble Honourable Proud

Self-Indulgent Vulnerable Ambitious

Generous Respected Self-Controlled

Secretive Persecuted Anxious Shrewd

Prayerful Caring Calm Independent

King Xerxes ruled over the 127 territories in his kingdom. They reached from India all the way to Cush. Here is what happened during the time Xerxes ruled over the whole Persian kingdom. ² He was ruling from his royal throne in the fort of Susa. ³ In the third year of his rule King Xerxes gave a feast. It was for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media were there. So were the princes and the nobles of the territories he ruled over.

⁴ Every day for 180 days he showed his guests the great wealth of his kingdom. He also showed them how glorious his kingdom was. ⁵ When those days were over, the king gave another feast. It lasted for seven days. It was held in the garden of the king's courtyard. It was for all the people who lived in the fort of Susa. Everyone from the least important person to the most important was invited.

⁶ The garden was decorated with white and blue linen banners. They hung from ropes that were made out of white linen and purple cloth. The ropes were connected to silver rings on marble pillars. There were gold and silver couches in the garden. They were placed on a floor that was made out of small stones. The floor had purple crystal, marble, mother-of-pearl and other stones of great value. ⁷ Royal wine was served in gold cups. Each cup was different from all the others. There was plenty of wine. The king always provided as much as his guests wanted. ⁸ He commanded that they should be allowed to drink as much or as little as they wished. He directed all his servants to give his guests what they asked for.

⁹ Queen Vashti also gave a feast. Only women were invited. It was held in the royal palace of King Xerxes.

¹⁰ On the seventh day Xerxes was in a good mood because he had drunk a lot of wine. So he gave a command to the seven officials who served him. They were Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Karkas. ¹¹ King Xerxes told them to bring Queen Vashti to him. He wanted her to come wearing her royal crown. He wanted to show off her beauty to the people and nobles. She was lovely to look at. ¹² The attendants told Queen Vashti what the king had ordered her to do. But she refused to come. So the king became very angry. ¹³ It was the king's practice to ask for advice about matters of law and fairness. So he spoke with the wise men who understood what was going on at that time. ¹⁴ They were the men closest to the king. Their names were Karshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memukan. They were the seven nobles of Persia and Media. They were the king's special advisers and the most important men in the kingdom.

¹⁵ "You know the law," the king said. "What should I do to Queen Vashti? She hasn't obeyed my command. The officials told her what I ordered her to do, didn't they?"

¹⁶ Then Memukan gave a reply to the king and the nobles. He said, "Queen Vashti has done what is wrong. But she didn't do it only against you, King Xerxes. She did it also against all the nobles. And she did it against the people in all the territories you rule over. ¹⁷ All the women will hear about what the queen has done. Then they won't respect their husbands. They'll say, 'King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought to him. But she wouldn't come.' ¹⁸ Here is what will start today. The leading women in Persia and Media who have heard about the queen's actions will act in the same way. They'll disobey all your nobles, just as she disobeyed you. They won't have any respect for their husbands. They won't honour them.

19 "So if it pleases you, send out a royal order. Let it be written down in the laws of Persia and Media. Those laws can never be changed. Let the royal order say that Vashti can never see you again. Also let her position as queen be given to someone who is better than she is. **20** And let your order be announced all through your entire kingdom. Then all women will have respect for their husbands, from the least important to the most important."

21 The king and his nobles were pleased with that advice. So he did what Memukan had suggested. **22** The king sent messages out to every territory in the kingdom. He sent them to each territory in its own writing. He sent them to every nation in its own language. The messages announced that every man should rule over his own family, using his own language. Later, the great anger of King Xerxes calmed down. Then he remembered Vashti and what she had done. He also remembered the royal order he had sent out concerning her.

² At that time the king's personal attendants made a suggestion. They said, "King Xerxes, let a search be made for some beautiful young virgins for you. ³ Appoint some officials in every territory in your kingdom. Have them bring all these beautiful young women into the fort of Susa. Put them in the special place where the virgins stay. Then put Hegai in charge of them. He's the official who serves you. He's in charge of the women. Let beauty care be given to the new group of women. ⁴ Then let the young woman who pleases you the most become queen in Vashti's place." The king liked that advice. So he followed it.⁵ There was a Jew living in the fort of Susa. He was from the tribe of Benjamin. His name was Mordecai. He was the son of Jair. Jair was the son of Shimei. Shimei was the son of Kish. ⁶ Nebuchadnezzar had forced Mordecai to leave Jerusalem. He was among the prisoners who were carried off along with Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin had been king of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylon.

⁷ Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah. He had raised her because she didn't have a father or mother. Hadassah was also called Esther. She had a lovely figure and was very beautiful. Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter. He had done it when her father and mother died.

⁸ After the king's order and law were announced, many young women were brought to the fort of Susa. Hegai was put in charge of them. Esther was also taken to the king's palace. She was put under the control of Hegai. He was in charge of the place where the virgins stayed. ⁹ Esther pleased him. He showed her how happy he was with her. Right away he provided her with her beauty care and special food. He appointed seven female attendants to help her. They were chosen from the king's palace. He moved her and her attendants into the best part of the place where the virgins stayed. ¹⁰ Esther hadn't told anyone who her people were. She hadn't talked about her family. That's because Mordecai had told her not to.

¹¹ Mordecai tried to find out how Esther was getting along. He wanted to know what was happening to her. So he walked back and forth near the courtyard by the place where the virgins stayed. He did it every day.

¹² Each young woman had to complete 12 months of beauty care. They used oil of myrrh for six months. And they used perfume and makeup for the other six months. A virgin's turn to go in to King Xerxes could come only after a full 12 months had passed. ¹³ And here is how she would go to the king. She would be given anything she wanted from the place where the virgins stayed. She could take it with her to the king's palace. ¹⁴ In the evening she would go there. In the morning she would leave. Then she would go to the special place where the king's concubines stayed. She would be put under the control of Shaashgaz. He was the king's official who was in charge of the concubines. She would never return to the king unless he was pleased with her. He had to send for her by name before she could go to him again.

¹⁵ Mordecai had adopted Esther. She had been the daughter of his uncle Abihail. Her turn came to go in to the king. She only asked for what Hegai suggested. He was the king's official who was in charge of the place where the virgins stayed. Everyone who saw Esther was pleased with her. ¹⁶ She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal house. It was now the tenth month. That was the month of Tebeth. It was the seventh year of the rule of Xerxes.

¹⁷ The king liked Esther more than he liked any of the other women. She pleased him more than any of the other virgins. So he put a royal crown on her head. He made her queen in Vashti's place. ¹⁸ Then the king gave a feast to honour Esther. All his nobles and officials were invited. He announced a holiday all through the territories he ruled over. He freely gave many gifts in keeping with his royal wealth.

He made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver Isaiah 49:2



Early Third Century Painting of Esther and Mordecai

Based on the events in the story so far, what would you say was a defining characteristic of each of the 4 characters?

(Xerxes, Vashti, Mordecai & Esther)

Where do you see God's hand up to this point in the story?

Where do we see oppression and injustice today?