

Sunday, August 18

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Esther 1:1 - 3:15

1 **1** These events happened in the days of King Xerxes, who reigned over 127 provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia. **2** At that time Xerxes ruled his empire from his royal throne at the fortress of Susa. **3** In the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. He invited all the military officers of Persia and Media as well as the princes and nobles of the provinces. **4** The celebration lasted 180 days—a tremendous display of the opulent wealth of his empire and the pomp and splendor of his majesty. **5** When it was all over, the king gave a banquet for all the people, from the greatest to the least, who were in the fortress of Susa. It lasted for seven days and was held in the courtyard of the palace garden. **6** The courtyard was beautifully decorated with white cotton curtains and blue hangings, which were fastened with white linen cords and purple ribbons to silver rings embedded in marble pillars. Gold and silver couches stood on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and other costly stones. **7** Drinks were served in gold goblets of many designs, and there was an abundance of royal wine, reflecting the king's generosity. **8** By edict of the king, no limits were placed on the drinking, for the king had instructed all his palace officials to serve each man as much as he wanted. **9** At the same time, Queen Vashti gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes. **10** On the seventh day of the feast, when King Xerxes was in high spirits because of the wine, he told the seven eunuchs who attended him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas— **11** to bring Queen Vashti to him with the royal crown on her head. He wanted the nobles and all the other men to gaze on her beauty, for she was a very beautiful woman. **12** But when they conveyed the king's order to Queen Vashti, she refused to come. This made the king furious, and he burned with anger. **13** He immediately consulted with his wise advisers, who knew all the Persian laws and customs, for he always asked their advice. **14** The names of these men were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan—seven nobles of Persia and Media. They met with the king regularly and held the highest positions in the empire. **15** "What must be done to Queen Vashti?" the king demanded. "What penalty does the law provide for a queen who refuses to obey the king's orders, properly sent through his eunuchs?" **16** Memucan answered the king and his nobles, "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but also every noble and citizen throughout your empire. **17** Women everywhere will begin to despise their husbands when they learn that Queen Vashti has refused to appear before the king. **18** Before this day is out, the

wives of all the king's nobles throughout Persia and Media will hear what the queen did and will start treating their husbands the same way. There will be no end to their contempt and anger. **19** "So if it please the king, we suggest that you issue a written decree, a law of the Persians and Medes that cannot be revoked. It should order that Queen Vashti be forever banished from the presence of King Xerxes, and that the king should choose another queen more worthy than she. **20** When this decree is published throughout the king's vast empire, husbands everywhere, whatever their rank, will receive proper respect from their wives!" **21** The king and his nobles thought this made good sense, so he followed Memucan's counsel. **22** He sent letters to all parts of the empire, to each province in its own script and language, proclaiming that every man should be the ruler of his own home and should say whatever he pleases.

2 1 But after Xerxes' anger had subsided, he began thinking about Vashti and what she had done and the decree he had made. **2** So his personal attendants suggested, "Let us search the empire to find beautiful young virgins for the king. **3** Let the king appoint agents in each province to bring these beautiful young women into the royal harem at the fortress of Susa. Hegai, the king's eunuch in charge of the harem, will see that they are all given beauty treatments. **4** After that, the young woman who most pleases the king will be made queen instead of Vashti." This advice was very appealing to the king, so he put the plan into effect. **5** At that time there was a Jewish man in the fortress of Susa whose name was Mordecai son of Jair. He was from the tribe of Benjamin and was a descendant of Kish and Shimei. **6** His family had been among those who, with King Jehoiachin of Judah, had been exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. **7** This man had a very beautiful and lovely young cousin, Hadassah, who was also called Esther. When her father and mother died, Mordecai adopted her into his family and raised her as his own daughter. **8** As a result of the king's decree, Esther, along with many other young women, was brought to the king's harem at the fortress of Susa and placed in Hegai's care. **9** Hegai was very impressed with Esther and treated her kindly. He quickly ordered a special menu for her and provided her with beauty treatments. He also assigned her seven maids specially chosen from the king's palace, and he moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem. **10** Esther had not told anyone of her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had directed her not to do so. **11** Every day Mordecai would take a walk near the courtyard of the harem to find out about Esther and what was happening to her. **12** Before each young woman was taken to the king's bed, she was given the prescribed twelve months of beauty treatments—six months with oil of myrrh, followed by six months with special perfumes and ointments. **13** When it was time for her to go to the king's palace, she was given her choice of whatever clothing or jewelry she wanted to take from the harem. **14** That evening she was

taken to the king's private rooms, and the next morning she was brought to the second harem, where the king's wives lived. There she would be under the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch in charge of the concubines. She would never go to the king again unless he had especially enjoyed her and requested her by name. **15** Esther was the daughter of Abihail, who was Mordecai's uncle. (Mordecai had adopted his younger cousin Esther.) When it was Esther's turn to go to the king, she accepted the advice of Hegai, the eunuch in charge of the harem. She asked for nothing except what he suggested, and she was admired by everyone who saw her. **16** Esther was taken to King Xerxes at the royal palace in early winter of the seventh year of his reign. **17** And the king loved Esther more than any of the other young women. He was so delighted with her that he set the royal crown on her head and declared her queen instead of Vashti. **18** To celebrate the occasion, he gave a great banquet in Esther's honor for all his nobles and officials, declaring a public holiday for the provinces and giving generous gifts to everyone. **19** Even after all the young women had been transferred to the second harem and Mordecai had become a palace official, **20** Esther continued to keep her family background and nationality a secret. She was still following Mordecai's directions, just as she did when she lived in his home. **21** One day as Mordecai was on duty at the king's gate, two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthana and Teresh—who were guards at the door of the king's private quarters—became angry at King Xerxes and plotted to assassinate him. **22** But Mordecai heard about the plot and gave the information to Queen Esther. She then told the king about it and gave Mordecai credit for the report. **23** When an investigation was made and Mordecai's story was found to be true, the two men were impaled on a sharpened pole. This was all recorded in *The Book of the History of King Xerxes' Reign*.

3 1 Some time later King Xerxes promoted Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite over all the other nobles, making him the most powerful official in the empire. **2** All the king's officials would bow down before Haman to show him respect whenever he passed by, for so the king had commanded. But Mordecai refused to bow down or show him respect. **3** Then the palace officials at the king's gate asked Mordecai, "Why are you disobeying the king's command?" **4** They spoke to him day after day, but still he refused to comply with the order. So they spoke to Haman about this to see if he would tolerate Mordecai's conduct, since Mordecai had told them he was a Jew. **5** When Haman saw that Mordecai would not bow down or show him respect, he was filled with rage. **6** He had learned of Mordecai's nationality, so he decided it was not enough to lay hands on Mordecai alone. Instead, he looked for a way to destroy all the Jews throughout the entire empire of Xerxes. **7** So in the month of April, during the twelfth year of King Xerxes' reign, lots were cast in Haman's presence (the lots were called) to determine the best day and month to take action. And the day selected was March 7, nearly a year

later. **8** Then Haman approached King Xerxes and said, “There is a certain race of people scattered through all the provinces of your empire who keep themselves separate from everyone else. Their laws are different from those of any other people, and they refuse to obey the laws of the king. So it is not in the king’s interest to let them live. **9** If it please the king, issue a decree that they be destroyed, and I will give 10,000 large sacks of silver to the government administrators to be deposited in the royal treasury.” **10** The king agreed, confirming his decision by removing his signet ring from his finger and giving it to Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. **11** The king said, “The money and the people are both yours to do with as you see fit.” **12** So on April 17 the king’s secretaries were summoned, and a decree was written exactly as Haman dictated. It was sent to the king’s highest officers, the governors of the respective provinces, and the nobles of each province in their own scripts and languages. The decree was written in the name of King Xerxes and sealed with the king’s signet ring. **13** Dispatches were sent by swift messengers into all the provinces of the empire, giving the order that all Jews—young and old, including women and children—must be killed, slaughtered, and annihilated on a single day. This was scheduled to happen on March 7 of the next year. The property of the Jews would be given to those who killed them. **14** A copy of this decree was to be issued as law in every province and proclaimed to all peoples, so that they would be ready to do their duty on the appointed day. **15** At the king’s command, the decree went out by swift messengers, and it was also proclaimed in the fortress of Susa. Then the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city of Susa fell into confusion.

1 Corinthians 11:17 - 34

11 17 But in the following instructions, I cannot praise you. For it sounds as if more harm than good is done when you meet together. **18** First, I hear that there are divisions among you when you meet as a church, and to some extent I believe it. **19** But, of course, there must be divisions among you so that you who have God’s approval will be recognized! **20** When you meet together, you are not really interested in the Lord’s Supper. **21** For some of you hurry to eat your own meal without sharing with others. As a result, some go hungry while others get drunk. **22** What? Don’t you have your own homes for eating and drinking? Or do you really want to disgrace God’s church and shame the poor? What am I supposed to say? Do you want me to praise you? Well, I certainly will not praise you for this! **23** For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord himself. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread **24** and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me.” **25** In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an

agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this to remember me as often as you drink it.” **26** For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord’s death until he comes again. **27** So anyone who eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. **28** That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup. **29** For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God’s judgment upon yourself. **30** That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died. **31** But if we would examine ourselves, we would not be judged by God in this way. **32** Yet when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned along with the world. **33** So, my dear brothers and sisters, when you gather for the Lord’s Supper, wait for each other. **34** If you are really hungry, eat at home so you won’t bring judgment upon yourselves when you meet together. I’ll give you instructions about the other matters after I arrive.

Psalms 35:17 - 28

35 17 How long, O Lord, will you look on and do nothing? Rescue me from their fierce attacks. Protect my life from these lions! **18** Then I will thank you in front of the great assembly. I will praise you before all the people. **19** Don’t let my treacherous enemies rejoice over my defeat. Don’t let those who hate me without cause gloat over my sorrow. **20** They don’t talk of peace; they plot against innocent people who mind their own business. **21** They shout, “Aha! Aha! With our own eyes we saw him do it!” **22** O LORD, you know all about this. Do not stay silent. Do not abandon me now, O Lord. **23** Wake up! Rise to my defense! Take up my case, my God and my Lord. **24** Declare me not guilty, O LORD my God, for you give justice. Don’t let my enemies laugh about me in my troubles. **25** Don’t let them say, “Look, we got what we wanted! Now we will eat him alive!” **26** May those who rejoice at my troubles be humiliated and disgraced. May those who triumph over me be covered with shame and dishonor. **27** But give great joy to those who came to my defense. Let them continually say, “Great is the LORD, who delights in blessing his servant with peace!” **28** Then I will proclaim your justice, and I will praise you all day long.

Proverbs 21:19 - 20

21 19 It’s better to live alone in the desert than with a quarrelsome, complaining wife. **20** The wise have wealth and luxury, but fools spend whatever they get.