



LESSON ONE: YHWH “TURNS” A KING’S HEART (THOUGH HE DOESN’T KNOW IT) (ESTHER 1)

HOOK :

***Pray the following prayer just before you read Esther chapter 1:

¹⁸Open my eyes so I can truly see the marvelous things in your law!

³³Teach me, O LORD, the lifestyle prescribed by your statutes,
so that I might observe it continually.

³⁴Give me understanding so that I might observe your law,
and keep it with all my heart.

³⁵Guide me in the path of your commands,
for I delight to walk in it.

³⁶Give me a desire for your rules,
rather than for wealth gained unjustly.

³⁷Turn my eyes away from what is worthless!
Revive me with your word!” (Psalm 119:18, 33-37)

BOOK:

1. Now read Esther chapter one. As you read observe and take note of any names, places, or length of days. What do these historical “markers” reveal about the “life situation” behind the Book of Esther? What do you remember about King Xerxes of Persia? Get a map out: Where was the Empire of Persia? (From the upper Nile to the Indus Valley)

2. Now read Esther chapter one a second time. Put yourself in the “shoes” of each major character (Xerxes [Ahasuerus], Queen Vashti, the men who have been partying for six months + 7 days, Xerxes’ advisors, the married men who are told to “rule” their families “like Xerxes.”

3. Finally, turn to 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 and Ezra 6:14-16. These are the events that occurred just a few years before Xerxes and Esther showed up. If you had been a part of the “Diaspora” (those Jews who were dispersed throughout the Babylonian / Persian empire when Israel / Judah had been conquered) do you think you would have returned to Jerusalem or would you have remained in a pagan land (Remember it’s been 70 to 100 years since your family had been near Jerusalem)?

4. For what reasons do you think the Diaspora stayed dispersed?

LOOK:

1. From verses 1 – 8, what kind of a man was Xerxes? Why?
2. From verses 9 – 11, what did Xerxes demand from Vashti and what was her reaction? Why do you think Vashti replied the way she did?
3. From verses 12 – 22, how did Xerxes respond to Vashti and what were the outcomes of his reaction?
4. In verse 10, the New English Translation (NET Bible / <https://lumina.bible.org/bible/Esther+1>) states, “*King Ahasuerus was feeling the effects of the wine.*” How would this condition have affected his decision-making?
(Herodotus, a Greek historian who chronicled Greek / Persian conflicts wrote that Persian men in general, “. . . made important decisions while drunk and validated them once they were sober.” (IVP Bible Background Commentary, p. 484).
5. Proverbs 21:1 says, “*The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.*” We all know what happens next in chapter 2 and following. How did God turn the heart of Xerxes without him knowing it?
6. Why do you think the entire first chapter of a book about Jewish deliverance from the hands of anti-Semites never mentions God or a follower of God?

TOOK:

1. Now read Psalm 2. Why was this Psalm important for the Diaspora in Esther’s time and for believers today?
2. Read Isaiah 40:21-31. How do these words from Isaiah challenge us as we deal with a “crazy” political and cultural time in our world?
3. Share a situation in your life that is not making sense and how your group can encourage you to keep a Biblical perspective about it.
4. Try to memorize the verse below:

OH, THE DEPTH OF THE RICHES
AND WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD!
HOW UNSEARCHABLE ARE HIS JUDGMENTS
AND HOW INSCRUTABLE HIS WAYS!
ROMANS 11:33