

Series: Living in Exile; Sermon: A Strange Providence;
delivered by Josh Moody, senior pastor, on January 24, 2021

Bible text explored: Esther 1

Now in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, ²in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa, the citadel, ³in the third year of his reign he gave a feast for all his officials and servants. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were before him, ⁴while he showed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days, 180 days. ⁵And when these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in Susa the citadel, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace. ⁶There were white cotton curtains and violet hangings fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rods and marble pillars, and also couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and precious stones. ⁷Drinks were served in golden vessels, vessels of different kinds, and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king. ⁸And drinking was according to this edict: "There is no compulsion." For the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace to do as each man desired. ⁹Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women in the palace that belonged to King Ahasuerus.

¹⁰On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, ¹¹to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at. ¹²But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. At this the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him.

¹³Then the king said to the wise men who knew the times (for this was the king's procedure toward all who were versed in law and judgment, ¹⁴the men next to him being Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king's face, and sat first in the kingdom): ¹⁵"According to the law, what is to be done to Queen Vashti, because she has not performed the command of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs?" ¹⁶Then Memucan said in the presence of the king and the officials, "Not only against the king has Queen Vashti done wrong, but also against all the officials and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. ¹⁷For the queen's behavior will be made known to all women, causing them to look at their husbands with contempt, since they will say, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come.' ¹⁸This very day the noble women of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's behavior will say the same to all the king's officials, and there will be contempt and wrath in plenty. ¹⁹If it please the king, let a royal order go out from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be repealed, that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus. And let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. ²⁰So when the decree made by the king is proclaimed throughout all his kingdom, for it is vast, all women will give honor to their husbands, high and low alike." ²¹This advice pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed. ²²He sent letters to all the royal provinces, to every province in its own script and to every people in its own language, that every man be master in his own household and speak according to the language of his people.

Review and application:

Esther is a Bible book seldom preached from. Some hesitate about explaining an entertaining story that indulges in gallows humor. Another challenge is the way the unnamed “elephant in the room” is handled.

1. Is it really okay to laugh along with God? (See *Psalm 126:1-3* and *Psalm 2:4*.)
2. How extensive (*verse 1*) was the domain of this king?*.
How (*verses 2-9*) did the king use his winter capital to exhibit his unrivaled human power and wealth?
3. How (*verses 10-12*) did the “First Lady” stand up to the king’s drunken arrogance?
4. How (*verses 13-22*) did the empire’s bureaucrats propose to support their humiliated king?
5. Who—though not named in this passage—is really in charge?
(See *Colossians 2:8-10, 13-15*; *Philippians 2:9-11*.)
How, for us, should that realization transform today’s legitimate fears and anxieties into trust and quiet confidence?

*His name was transliterated in Hebrew as *Ahasuerus*, but he is now better known by the Greek transliteration, *Xerxes*, and is so rendered in the NLT and *The Message*, Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase.