



May 8, 2016

Esther 1

*"The Dignity of Women"*

Pastor Gary Hamrick

The book of Esther provides the details about God's providential plan to rescue the Jews from extermination through the courageous obedience of a young Jewish woman named Esther. The book opens with the account of a drunken dinner party that King Xerxes of Persia threw for his military leaders, nobles, and officials. When he called for his wife, Queen Vashti, to entertain his guests by parading herself as a sexual object, she refused. She was deposed (and perhaps killed, although the Bible doesn't tell us what happened to her) for refusing the king's request. Why was she so willing to lose everything – her status, fame, fortune, crown, and perhaps even her life? The reason Vashti made this brave decision was to protect her dignity. In today's Mother's Day message, Pastor Gary introduces the book of Esther and tells the story of Queen Vashti in a message entitled, "The Dignity of Women."

### Historical Background

1. The book of Esther is one of two books in the Bible (Ruth is the other book) that are named for a woman.
2. The book of Esther is one of two books in the Bible (Daniel is the other book), which records the details of what life was like for the Jewish exiles who did not return to Jerusalem, but remained in Babylonia and Persia.
3. The location for the book of Esther is the Citadel of Susa, in Persia.
  - a. The modern-day location is called Shush, which is in Iran.
4. The year is circa 480BC.

5. The king of Persia is Xerxes and the queen of Persia is Vashti.
  - a. Xerxes is the Greek transliteration of his Persian name.
  - b. The King James Bible uses the name, Ahasuerus, which is from the Hebrew, Achashverosh.
  - c. Vashti was the granddaughter of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who besieged Jerusalem in 586BC.
6. The primary character in the book is Esther, who was a young Jewish woman whose parents had died, and whose older cousin, Mordecai, was raising her as his daughter.
7. Esther was her Persian name, which was derived from the principle female deity, Ishtar.
8. Esther's Jewish name was Haddasah, which means, myrtle.
  - a. [Esther 2:7](#) - *"Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died."*
9. The writer of the book is not known, however, it may have been Mordecai.
10. This book is the only book in the Bible in which God's name is not mentioned, but there is no doubt that God is seen throughout the book.
11. The origination of the Jewish Feast of Purim, which is the celebration of God's providential care for the Jewish people, is found in the book of Esther.
12. With regard to the timeline of the Old Testament, the book of Esther fits between [Ezra 6](#) and [Ezra 7](#), which has a gap of about 60 years.
  - a. The entire story of the Old Testament is found in the books of Genesis through Nehemiah, which means that every book that comes after Nehemiah goes back in time, except for Malachi, which is the last book of the Old Testament, in both time and placement within the Bible.
  - b. Esther (480BC) preceded Nehemiah (444BC).
    - i. The first of three waves of the Jews to return to Jerusalem from exile have already settled in the land.
    - ii. The story of Esther occurs between the first and second waves.

## The 7-Day Drinking Party

13. There were 127 provinces represented, so there were probably several hundred men who attended what Pastor Gary called a “Frat party!”
  - a. **Esther 1:4** – *“For a full 180 days he [Xerxes] displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty. When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days...”*
14. Pastor Gary commented on the fact that something was bound to go bad, especially when you consider the fact that there were several hundred men involved in a drinking party that lasted seven days!
15. Something significant did happen, even though it may not be evident on the surface.
16. **Esther 1:10-12** – *“On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him – Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carcas – to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at. But when the attendants delivered the king’s command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger.”*
17. When you look carefully at this situation, it’s obvious that Xerxes wanted to show off and parade his wife in front of his “drunk buddies” in order to gratify their lustful desires.
18. Vashti made a courageous decision to deny the request of the king, who at the time was the most powerful man in the world!
  - a. The Bible doesn’t record the details about what happened to Vashti, but it’s likely she was put to death because she defied the king.

## Biblical Submission

19. Pastor Gary said: “Biblical submission always has a caveat. In terms of a marriage, and a wife submitting to a husband. What this means is, that submission has to be because a husband is operating in a godly, Christ-like way, because ultimate submission is [unto] the Lord, in whatever order or structure of leadership or authority you find yourself in: government, church, your job, [or] the family. Ultimate submission is unto the Lord... Biblical submission is not blind obedience... Ladies, if your husband is acting in an un-Christ-like way or

asking you to do something that is un-Christ-like or unbiblical, [then] you do not have to do what he says or follow where he leads... [You should determine whether or not it's] consistent with [your] higher responsibility and loyalty and allegiance to [your] Lord Jesus."

- a. **Ephesians 5:22** - *"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord."*
- b. **Colossians 3:18** - *"Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord."*

20. In the New Testament, the Greek word for submission is hupotasso,<sup>1</sup> which comes from two words: hupo and tasso.

- a. Hupo means, under, and tasso means, to arrange in an orderly manner.

21. Biblical submission simply means that God has ordained a proper order in which the family should function.

22. In God's ordered structure for the family, he has appointed husbands, who are called to provide loving, Christ-like leadership.

- a. Husbands don't need to make every decision for their family.
- b. Every decision a husband makes will not always be right.
- c. Husbands are not better than their wives.
- d. Leadership sometimes requires that husbands do the loving, considerate things, even when those decisions are not always convenient or popular.

23. The Bible teaches us about the importance of mutual submission in every relationship.

- a. **Ephesians 5:21** - *"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ."*

24. Even when a person has a position of leadership or authority, that person should often defer to the wishes of others.

25. Being in a position of authority should not mean that you always get your way, because there should be mutual submission.

26. **Esther 1:16-20** - *"Then Memucan replied in the presence of the king and the nobles, 'Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes. For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say, 'King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.' This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen's conduct will respond to all the king's nobles in the same way. There will be no end of*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas/hupotasso.html>

*disrespect and discord. Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she. Then when the king's edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest.' "*

27. Queen Vashti did not do anything wrong when she refused to follow the demands of her husband, King Xerxes; she did what was right in that she refused to be exploited as a sex object and ogled by a horde of drunken men.
28. Pastor Gary encouraged single women to end any relationship with a man who is robbing them of their dignity.
29. Pastor Gary challenged men to never exploit, abuse, disgrace, or use any woman, because in doing so they would be robbing women of their dignity, as well as sinning against both women and God, who created women in his image with inestimable worth.
30. Men must honor women and treat them with the dignity they deserve.
31. Jesus treated women in gracious and loving ways.
  - a. Jesus treated the woman at the well with grace and dignity.<sup>2</sup>
  - b. Jesus treated the woman caught in the act of adultery with grace and dignity.<sup>3</sup>
32. **Galatians 3:28** - *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, **male nor female**, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* (Emphasis added)
33. Men and women are equal in importance, value, and significance in the eyes of God.
34. The ministry of women as recorded in the Bible is remarkable!
  - a. Women ministered to and supported Jesus and the disciples during Jesus' three-year ministry.
  - b. Women were standing at the foot of the cross of Jesus, when the disciples were nowhere to be found.
  - c. Mary, Jesus' mother, was there at the cross when Jesus told John to take care of her.
  - d. Jesus first appeared to women on the day of his resurrection.

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<sup>2</sup> John 4:1-26

<sup>3</sup> John 8:1-11

- e. Jesus first entrusted the message of the resurrection to women.
35. There are many noteworthy women in the Bible who were bold, strong and courageous, wise and discerning, anointed, and faithful, including: Sarah, Jochebed, Miriam, Rahab, Deborah, Ruth, Hannah, Esther, Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary of Bethany, and her sister Martha, Lydia, Priscilla, and Phoebe.
- a. These women disobeyed kings when necessary, defied rulers, defeated enemies, spoke prophecies, overcame adversity, led a nation, and served churches in the name of God.

### Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Esther 1:1-9](#) to provide the foundation for this study.
3. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments regarding biblical submission. (See #19 above)
4. Read and discuss [Ephesians 5:22](#) and [Colossians 3:18](#).
5. What are some of the ways you have seen the Lord bless you because you follow his ordained structure for marriage and family?
6. Provide an overview of Pastor Gary's message outline (See #21 through #33) for further discussion.
7. Spend time talking about the exceptional women of the Bible. (See #34 and #35).
8. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).