

ESTHER

A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

STUDY TWO

There She Goes . . . Miss Persia!

Esther 1:1–2:7

God is a specialist in turning the mundane into the meaningful.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

Most days begin rather predictably: the alarm rings, we get out of bed, and then we flip on the light to start our morning routine. Yet God is a specialist in working His sovereign plan through the mundane . . . and even through the most secular of people and situations.

When King Ahasuerus (also known as Xerxes in the New Living Translation), intoxicated from much wine, ordered Queen Vashti to show her beauty to his guests, he met only her rejection. She refused to be paraded before a roomful of inebriated men (Esther 1:12).

In the passage for this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll see God working through the king's debauchery and marital breakdown to orchestrate a melodious movement of providence. God's plans can never be frustrated, no matter how carnal or godless the leaders of this world might be.



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SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

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PREPARE YOUR HEART

Does the depraved condition of our world discourage you? Do you wonder how the Lord can accomplish His purposes against such a strong tide of immorality? Share your heart with Him. Ask Him to reveal Himself through His Word and help you trust His power.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

As you open your Bible to *Esther 1:1–2:7*, keep handy our previous study, “God’s Invisible Providence,” to reference dates, Pastor Chuck’s book chart, or your notes on key terms in Esther. The curtain opens in Esther to reveal gluttonous revelers in the king’s palace gorging themselves at a weekslong banquet party. From this opulent scene, the author moves our gaze to an obscure home among a displaced people. The lens focuses on an orphaned Jew, who “was beautiful of form and face” (Esther 2:7 NASB). Read the passage to get an overview and write down your initial impressions. What reaction does the episode stir in you?



Observation: Unexpected Turn of Events

In observation, the first step in the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, engage your senses as you read the verses.¹ Make it fun. Make it real. Sense the emotion. Slow down and enter the world of the author. As you read the passage a second time, notice the designs on the gold goblets, touch the linen curtains on the silver rings, smell the perfumes, and feel the heartache of the young women taken from their homes.

Pay attention to the author’s words. In narratives like our passage, the author climbs up the literary ladder using abstract ideas, and then he steps down the ladder conveying concrete words. With the abstract, the author *reveals* his intent in writing and how he *feels* about the subject. With the concrete, the author *illustrates* his intent. Try to perceive the author’s intentions as you answer the following questions.

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A Glimpse Into a Persian Palace—Esther 1:1–9

Read *Esther 1:1–9*. In 1:1–3, we see a snapshot of the time and place of the book and then a description of the opulence of King Ahasuerus. How does 1:5–8 relate to 1:4?

Reread 1:9. Where was Vashti? What do you imagine her banquet was like?

A Royal Conflict and a Royal Edict—Esther 1:10–22

From Queen Vashti's elegant banquet with the women, the author leads us into the main hall and the king's wild party. According to *Esther 1:10–12*, what degrading command did Ahasuerus give his wife, Vashti? How did she respond? What emotions do you think she felt?

Since when does submission mean that the wife is a sexual pawn in the carnal desires of her husband no matter what they may be? It was never God's design that a wife submit to whatever extreme whims a husband may entertain. To carry out evil desires from his mind is to rob a woman of her dignity. To display her before a public that would have nothing in mind but lust is not submission; it's slavery. And it isn't right. I applaud Vashti for her courageous decision.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Memucan said that Vashti “wronged” the king—but wasn’t she the one wronged (Esther 1:16)? Jewish husbands honored their wives and would have been shocked by the king’s actions (see *Proverbs 31:13–20*). What faulty marital advice did he give the king in *Esther 1:13–20* after Vashti’s refusal? What is the irony and tragedy of this counsel?

How did the king respond in *1:21–22*?

A Lonely King and an Obscure Woman—Esther 2:1–7

Read *Esther 2:1–7*. “After these things” (Esther 2:1 NASB) probably refers to a time years later, after Ahasuerus’ humiliating defeat in the wars he waged against Greece in 480–479 BC. He returned from his failed campaign hoping to find solace at home but came back to an empty palace and a wrecked marriage. What did the king’s attendants propose to the king, and how did the king respond?

Of all the young women, the author turns the spotlight on one in particular—Esther. Write down what 2:5–7 reveals about Esther and her family.

God is moving. He’s touching lives. He’s shaping kingdoms. Just because they happen to be secular or carnal doesn’t mean He’s not present. He’s present and He’s at work. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Interpretation: How God Works

Sometimes interpreting a narrative is tricky because the author tells us what happens without giving the direct meaning. So we must look for clues. Clues may be summary statements, authorial commentary, or simply the space the author devotes to a topic.

Notice the space the author devotes to the king's banquet in *Esther 1:5–8*. What point was the author making to his Jewish readers?

According to the historian Herodotus, who lived in the same century as Esther, Persian men flaunted their extramarital affairs. One Persian husband boasted, "It is our custom in Persia to get our wives and mistresses to come and sit with us in the dining-room."² What then are possible reasons for the king and queen to have given separate banquets?

Queen Vashti refused to let her shameless husband bring shame on her. What do we know about Vashti? Based on his edict in *1:19–22*, what do we now know about Ahasuerus?

Ahasuerus' failed campaigns against Greece must have humiliated the proud king. He came home humbled and looking for the consolation and support that only a wife could bring. In a sentence or two, record why the author included this information in *2:1–4*.

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In [Esther 2:5–7](#), the author mentions the reason Mordecai is living as a foreigner in Persia. Remember the significance of the exile? Almost one hundred years earlier, the kingdom of Judah rejected God's Word and did evil in God's eyes, so God used Babylon to sack Jerusalem and exile the Judeans into slavery (2 Chronicles 36). Even through this act of judgment, God planted the seed of deliverance in Mordecai's family line. In God's judgment and discipline, there's still mercy.

In [Esther 1:1–2:7](#), the author introduces Esther. Remember that God's name is not mentioned once, but His Spirit blows through the halls of the Persian courts, working through the whims of a godless, arrogant king. Reflect on and record how God had been working to this point in the story.

This is the beauty of the Christian life. This is the wonder of God's sovereignty. He works in these remarkable ways, moving and pushing and changing minds until he brings—even (let me say it) out of the most carnal and secular of settings—a decision that will set our course anew. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Exploring Our God

While reading this first part of Esther, we may wonder, *Where is God?* But notice how the king made his decisions. He listened to Memucan and to nameless attendants ([Esther 1:21; 2:4](#)). Their advice pleased Ahasuerus, and he acted according to his pleasure.

What does [Proverbs 25:3](#) say about the whims of a king?

A king's subjects never know what a king may think or do. However, what does [Proverbs 21:1](#) say about God? What reassurance does this truth offer you?

God directed Ahasuerus—despite the king's carnal desires—and influenced the outcome for His renown and for the good of His people.

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Don't worry. Get the big picture. Put your anxieties on hold. God is at work. If He is able to move the heart of the king like little channels of water coming from the reservoir, then, believe me, He's able to reshape and re-channel lives that right now you think are long gone, lost, and calling their own shots.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: God at Work in Your Life

Does God work in the world for *our* good? Yes, He does! Here are three principles from our passage to remind you of how He moves in the events of your life.

First, *God's plans are not hindered when events are secular or carnal*. His light shines brightest in dark places. Have you been tempted to think the corruption in the world dims God's influence? How might Esther alter your understanding of God's providence?

Second, *God's purposes are not hindered by moral or marital conflicts*. That's so encouraging! God worked through the king's debauchery and broken marriage to accomplish His will. Sometimes we assume God can't use us because of our past. Do you disqualify people, even yourself, because of failure? How has God turned a bad situation into something good and hopeful in your life? Also consider how you can encourage and restore those who've fallen morally.

Third, *God's people are not excluded from high places because of handicap or hardship*. By all human odds it was a million-to-one chance that Esther, a foreigner and an orphan, would rise to become queen. Do you exclude yourself from thinking God can use you? Share with the Lord your desire to do His will through your weaknesses.

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No matter your background, education, or societal status, God has given you supernatural power to shine His light in a dark world. Some Christians He will call to great positions in the world's eyes, but He calls all of us to express His selfless love wherever we are—something far greater and more powerful than being queen of Persia.

Reflective Wrap-Up

Write one sentence to *summarize* this lesson.

Write down one thing to *remember* about God.

Write down one way you can *respond* to God's Word.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for recording Your sovereign ways in the book of Esther that we might see Your sovereign wisdom. Your providential hand still grips the vicissitudes of our world, moving some left and others right. I ask for an open heart to receive the lot You've chosen for me, for wisdom to do what I ought to do, and for courage to do what I know to do. I trust You and love You. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"
2. Herodotus, *The Histories*, Book Five, trans. Aubrey De Sélincourt and John Marincola (New York: Penguin, 2003), Kindle 5803.

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and revised by Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 1989, 2018, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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