

A King and His Limited Power

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[0 : 0 0] Go with me to Esther, chapter 1. Esther, chapter 1. We've been doing kind of a preliminary the last couple weeks to Esther.

Today we're beginning in chapter 1. Notice the title for today, A King and His Limited Power.

That's why I chose those songs. God is not limited in His power. God is all-powerful. He's the Lord of everything. Today we're going to learn about a king who thought he was everything, but he was not.

So we're going to learn about Ahasuerus in the Greek, Xerxes. You know him probably better by that title, Xerxes, from your history that you took in school.

Chapter 1, verse 1. And it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus. This is Ahasuerus that reigned from India even unto Ethiopia, over a hundred and seven and twenty provinces.

[1 : 1 6] That in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan, the palace.

In the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants, the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces being before him.

When he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honor of his excellent majesty, many days, even a hundred and four score. A hundred and eighty days, half a year.

He's showing off everything that he has. Verse 5. And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan, the palace, both unto great and small, seven days in a court of the garden of the king's palace, where there were white, green, blue hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars made of marble.

And the beds were of gold and silver upon a pavement of red and blue and white and black marble. And they gave them drink in vessels of gold.

[2 : 3 3] The vessels were diverse one from another. The royal wine in abundance, according to the state of the king. And the drinking was according to the law. None did compel.

For so the king was appointed all of his officers of his house that they should do according to every man's pleasure. Also Vashti, the queen, made a feast for the women in the royal house which belongeth to king Ahasuerus.

Let's have a word of prayer. Father, I pray right now that you would help us today as we look at this passage of scripture. Lord, we're going to cover a lot of different things today out of this passage.

I pray that you would help us understand that you rule and you reign in the affairs of men. You rule and you reign in the hearts and lives of people.

Lord, that you are in control. And Lord, help us to understand the necessity of following you, doing what you want, meeting your commands.

[3 : 40] Lord, that we may be blessed and we may glorify you. Lord, just give us this few minutes. May people be attentive.

May they hear. May they listen. May they take in the things that we talk about today. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. We mentioned in the last couple weeks that one of the strongest themes in Esther is God's providence.

We talked about the fact that God's providence, his pro beforehand video, knowing what to do, what needs to take place, knowing how to work.

So he's going to take this time and he's going to show us that he is working in situations before time in order to accomplish his will.

I was reminded as I was going over this this week, I'd used an illustration once before in a long time. And there was a missionary lady who was working in Africa.

[4 : 43] And she's there helping out and doing different things and, you know, helping with medical things and stuff like that. And there was a lady in wherever she was, what village she was in, that had a baby.

And the baby had a few little problems when it was born. And the missionary lady was like, oh, this was back a while. She was like, oh, if only I had a hot water bottle.

How many of you remember hot water bottles, you know? I was like, okay, yeah. You remember those things. Oh, if I just had a hot water bottle. I could help this baby by having that hot water bottle. It could be something I could use right about now.

And the baby had an older sister, not too much older, but older. And she was concerned about her baby sister. And she was watching everything that took place. And the missionary, in her prayer, said, Lord, I need a hot water bottle.

And Lord, could you send a, we need a baby doll for her sister. So she can take care of the baby doll while I'm taking care of the baby. And so they talked about, you know, she prayed about that.

[5 : 44] The very next day, a package showed up. And in the package was all kinds of different things that she needed. But there was a letter in there that said, I don't know why these things are in here, but I included a hot water bottle and a baby doll.

I don't know what you're going to do with them, but God impressed me to put these in here. And, you know, think about it. Back at this time, we didn't have Amazon. We didn't have a lot of things.

A lot of things came by ship. This package had been sent six months before it arrived. And yet in that package, it mailed, you know, shipped off six months earlier, was a hot water bottle and a baby doll.

God knows what we need when we need it. God's going to take care of it. That's his providence. He takes care of us. Babylon came in and captured the Jews. Took them to Babylon.

Babylon's going to be captured by the Persians. God knew all of this. Remember, we talked to the last couple weeks. God mentioned Cyrus by name 150 years before he took over as king of Persia.

[6 : 51] God knew what they were going to need. Because Cyrus was going to send people home. Back to Jerusalem so they could rebuild the temple. God will use even wicked people to accomplish his purposes.

He was not limited. Ahasuerus thinks he rules everything. I mentioned this before. He thinks he rules everything, but God is really in charge. God is doing his work.

So today, I want to look at Ahasuerus. And I want us to see some things about him. The first thing I want you to see is the realm of his empire.

The realm of his power. He had a vast empire. But everything he had was finite and controlled by the hand of God.

He did not get to have all of these things because he was so great. He got to have all these things because God allowed him. Notice I have up the word there, analyze. Let's look, first of all, geographically.

[7 : 53] You notice what we read there just a few minutes ago? 127 provinces. All the way from India to Ethiopia. Think about how big that is.

Think about how massive that is. It was the largest kingdom empire at that time. Or up until that time. And he had control of it. How did he have control? Because militarily, they were far superior to everybody else.

You know, it's interesting. We've been doing a Bible study in the men's group on Daniel. And we're in that place now. Daniel's giving, you know, the prophecies and things. And when Daniel gives a prophecy about Persia, he uses a bear.

A bear. Bears are kind of, you know, they're kind of awkward. They kind of lumber around. They kind of, you know. And if they want to get anything, they just basically take their paw and go, and do whatever.

That was Persia. They were big. They just kind of lumbered around. And they were so big that they could get anything they wanted. They could, you know, basically take over anything.

[8 : 58] We talked about the fact that Xerxes, the Greek name, took over, you know, the battle of Thermopylae and Salamis. And when he went into those battles, he had an army of 100,000 men, 1,000 ships that he went into those battles with.

But on top of that, if he had needed more, he had a standing army of 1.5 million. He just bowled you over.

He didn't need to be finessing about it and stuff. He'd just come in and take over. And that's the kind of army he had. So that's how he could have all that geography.

Also, monetarily. Monetarily, when they went in and they took over a place, they basically took all the gold in the sewer. Everything like that. Precious stones, everything.

So he had collected from everybody all of those different things. And now, here he is. He's showing it off at this feast. Verses 3 and 4, you don't have to look there at the moment, but he kind of gives a rundown of what he did.

[10 : 04] Verse 4, when he had showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honor of his excellent majesty many days. 180. The purpose of this feast was to show off everything that he had.

He's doing it, some believe, because he wanted to convince those in leadership that they needed to go to war with Greece once more. And so he's trying to show them off, this is all we've got.

This is what we've done. He said, we can do this, no problem whatsoever. So he's showing off these things to try to convince them of that. He puts on display all the different things.

You know, Solomon, who was one of the greatest kings ever, he talks about this. Proverbs chapter 23, verses 1, 2, and 3. It's up on the screen.

He says, when that king starts putting on a show, like Ahasuerus is doing, look out.

[11 : 18] He wants something. He's after something. And that's what exactly was happening. He wanted them to be ready to go to war, to follow him. He is shown in that feast that he gave, 180 days they were there.

The one feast was seven days straight ahead. He also showed it through the material things that he had. Verses 6 and 7, he talks about all the things he had in the palace there, all the different things he had on display, and things like that.

Archaeological studies have shown that Shushan was probably one of the most unique, most extravagant palaces there ever was. He just had everything that anybody could ever want.

And when a wicked ruler puts on that display, he says, look out. Be careful. They're after something. How about prophetically? Analyze prophetically.

We talked about Daniel. Daniel prophesied about Persia being the great bear. Daniel chapter 7, verse 5. And behold, another beast, a second, like to a bear.

[12 : 21] And it raised up itself on one side, and it had three ribs in the mouth of it, between the teeth of it. And they said thus unto it, arise, devour much flesh.

And that's what Persia did. They just took over and over and over everything. 127 provinces. You know, it still amazes me. Because when you think India to Ethiopia, that is such a vast piece of real estate.

And India at that time would have included Pakistan. So that whole area, he controls it all. It's amazing.

Then, how about scripturally? Scripturally. The Bible says some things about rulers who reject God.

Whenever you put a worldly ruler up against God, God wins every time. You remember back in the early history of Israel? Pharaoh, they're in Egypt, up against Pharaoh.

[13 : 27] You remember the story of Moses and Pharaoh and the ten plagues and the Red Sea. Pharaoh didn't make out so good on that contest, did he? How about you come up closer to this time of Persia, and you have Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar was going up against God, and he's going, I'm God myself. And God says, oh yeah? Nebuchadnezzar winds up out in the field eating like an animal, eating grass and stuff.

Until he came to the point where he acknowledged who God was, he stayed out there. And then God brought him back. How about Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Belshazzar?

He's the one that had the big party. He had a big party too and stuff. But then the handwriting came on the wall, and Persia walked in to the city underneath the gates, coming in the waterways.

See, whenever you're going to put yourself up as being superior to God, being better than God, don't care about God, God says, okay, if you want to be that way about it, I have a solution.

[14 : 34] I have a way of taking care of this. You know, we need to realize that everybody, everybody is going to bow before God.

Philippians 2, 9-11. Philippians 2, 9-11. Wherefore, God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Everyone should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. But I am Ahasuerus. I am Xerxes. I own all of this property.

I am in control of everything. God says, oh yeah, Jesus Christ is Lord. He is in charge. You know, there used to be times when people would stand up for what they believed.

George Washington, when he gave his Thanksgiving proclamation in 1789, he said this, whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humble to implore his protection and favor.

[15 : 54] But a lot of people today, they don't want to give God any credit whatsoever. Our attitude today is not what's right, but what works.

Pragmatism. That's the motive of the day. What works? We need to be living according to what's right, what God has for us. Persia's power was great, but it was no match for God.

And then, this passage shows us some more things about Ahasuerus himself. It gives us some revelation about this wicked ruler.

Some revelation about this wicked ruler. He had a wicked heart. Look at verse 10. We read through 9. Look at verse 10 there, Esther chapter 1. On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded those seven guys, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, to bring Vashti, the queen, before the king with the royal crown, to show the people and the princess her beauty, for she was fair to look on.

He wanted him to bring the queen into the room where he has all the men, these 127 provinces, these leaders, these people who work for him, these military leaders and others, I want you to bring the queen in here so she can parade around and just show off how beautiful she is.

[17 : 32] Remember he said he made himself merry with wine? He'd been drinking for seven days. He showed some things about his heart that day.

He had an adulterous heart. He had an alcoholic heart. He had an angry heart. He had an arrogant heart.

He's showing off for these people. And like, I got all of this stuff. I got all of this land. Oh yeah, and by the way, look at her. Can you imagine bringing your wife into a room full of drunk men?

And that's what he was trying to do. And he's so drunk, so caught up in himself, that he makes this illicit command.

Dana? And he makes this command to bring her in and wants her to parade around in front of these guys.

[18 : 39] And why did he do it? Well, first of all, notice it was encouraged by alcohol. He's made himself merry with the wine that he has had, it says.

He's in high spirits. He's feeling, oh yeah, I'm good. I feel good. I'm in control. I'm good. I'm true. I've got it. I'm everything. But he can't control himself.

He controls all this territory and stuff, but he can't control himself. Proverbs 16, 32. He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty.

And he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh the city. He says, look, if you can control yourself, you're better than a guy who's got a 2.5 million army.

If you can control yourself, you're better than someone who's conquered all this land. If you can control yourself, you have accomplished a great thing. God says, you learn to take care of yourself first.

[19 : 43] Proverbs 25, 28. He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down and without walls. He says, if you can't control yourself, if you can't rule over yourself, you're in trouble because you're going to be taken over.

Think back to Jericho. He marched around the city seven days. The walls fell, and what did they do? They walked in and took it over. He says, someone who can't control himself, someone who can't control himself is just like that.

The devil and whatever is going to come in and take over. And they're going to control you, and there's nothing you can do about it. The combination of the alcohol and the lust, and it just, he started making demands on other people.

He started showing off. He started doing all kinds of things. I've gotten myself in trouble. I haven't covered this topic in a long time, but I've gotten myself in trouble before covering this topic.

But alcohol can be dangerous on so many levels. It can cause so many problems. Let me show you some things, what God said about it.

[20 : 51] You know, I know people always come back, well, God, you know, Jesus created wine out of that. I'm one of those that believes that that wine was different than the wine we have today. I don't think it was the same thing. Because, why do I think that?

Let me show you. When the nation of Israel was coming out of Egypt and heading for the Promised Land, and as they're going through and they're getting ready to go in the Promised Land and everything, Deuteronomy 29.6, Ye have not eaten bread, neither have ye drunk wine or strong drink, that ye might know that I am the Lord your God.

God says, I haven't allowed you to have any of that. And I'm looking at it going, you have not eaten bread. What does that got to do with all of this? And then, Jared tells me, there at the jail, guys like to hoard bread and use it and they can make, they make their own little wine and juice and stuff out of it and use it to make their own little, their own little hooch and stuff.

So, yeah, they keep an eye on the bread and stuff that these guys get. It's like, really? They really, they could use that mind for good, but no, they could use it to, you know, how can I make some drink? And God says, look, neither have you drunk wine or strong drink that ye might know that I am the Lord your God.

Keep your focus where it belongs on God. When he set up the priesthood, he told Aaron and his sons, you know, they were going to be the priests and control the, the tabernacle and the, you know, later the temple and stuff.

[22 : 29] In Leviticus, where he gives all the different laws and stuff, here's what he said, Leviticus 10, 8 and 9. And the Lord spake unto Aaron, saying, Do not drink wine nor strong drink thou nor thy sons with thee when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation lest ye die.

It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. He says, don't do it lest ye die. You say, well, it says, when you go into the tabernacle, Christian, what's your body?

Temple of the Holy Spirit. Right? There was another thing they had. Remember the Nazarite vow? Samson took it and there were others who took it.

John the Baptist for a while. The Nazarites, they're talked about in Numbers chapter 6. Listen to verses 1 through 4. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the Lord, catch that, to separate themselves unto the Lord, he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink and shall drink no vinegar of wine nor vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes or dried.

All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree from the kernels even unto the husk. And he says, Look, if you're separating yourself unto me, don't do it.

[24 : 14] And besides that, when we start drinking too much stuff, what happens? People get drunk. And he's got all kinds of things about being drunk. You know the easiest way to avoid getting drunk?

Never take the first drink. Don't drink it. Proverbs 20, verse 1. My favorite verse on this topic that so many people try to find out a way to ignore it. Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

I lost some people preaching on this subject one time because I made a comment about this verse. It says, Whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

If I was to say is not wise to you, what could you come up with for a synonym? I came up with the word stupid. And I said that.

Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging, and whosoever is deceived thereby is stupid. Oh, I lost some people on that one. They were gone the next week, went to a different church. It says, it's not wise.

[25 : 23] You know, what does that mean? You're not wise. So, anyway, Proverbs 21, 17. He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man.

He that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich. He says, look, you start putting your, in all these other things, he says, you know what? And here's the king, Ahasuerus, and he's giving himself over to wine.

Basically, for the last six months, they've just been having a big party. But this particular last seven days, he says, everybody can have whatever they want, as much as they want. What happens when you do that?

It changes your personality, it changes the way you look at things. Look at verse 12 of chapter 1 here, Esther. Esther chapter 1, verse 12. But the queen, Vashti, refused to come to the king's command by his chamberlains.

Therefore, was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him. He was under that fluid of alcohol that he's not thinking about what he's asking.

[26 : 41] And when she calls him on it, he's mad. He's upset. When she refused to come and make a spectacle of herself, he's outraged.

You know, people do foolish things when they're angry. People do weird things when they're angry. Proverbs 14, 17. He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly, and a man of wicked devices is hated.

A man is angry dealeth foolishly. He asks stupid things of people. And that's exactly what Ahasuerus did. He's asking his wife to come in and be a spectacle in front of all these men.

No man in his right mind is going to do that. But he did. James chapter 1, verse 20. For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

If you're dealing in anger, if you're dealing in things and you're angry about it and irate about it, stop. Just stop because nothing good is going to come out of it.

[27 : 52] He says, the righteousness of God is not accomplished by anger. It's not going to happen that way. You know, the problem with all of those men in there, all those people who he was their boss basically, you know, he's the king, he can have them put to death, whatever.

They're going to go along with it because of who he is and because of the immoral culture that they live in. The immoral culture that they live in. Pagan cultures have always objectified women.

I mean, you look at the cultures even today in the world that do not believe the Bible, do not believe in Jesus Christ, do not, they objectify the women that live in their cultures.

That's been true historically. Jesus came and Jesus elevated women. Jesus brought them up. When you read about the disciples and them going around, you always still read about Mary Magdalene and Mary and Martha and Mary his mother and others that were, you know, they were important people in what was taking place there.

He doesn't objectify them. He doesn't make use of them. He says, look, you're an important part of what's going on here. Paul wrote to the church at Galatia.

[29 : 12] We just finished studying Galatians, right? Galatians chapter 3, verse 28. There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither bond nor free. There is neither male nor female.

male, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. You're all one. You're all on the same level. You know, when you hear the phrase, you know, the ground is level at the foot of the cross.

It doesn't matter who you are. We all come to Jesus the same way. It doesn't matter who you are. Jesus loves everyone who comes to this cross. He loves them all and wants to see the best for them all.

See, people all over the world today, they objectify women. I mean, you watch the commercials on TV. Who do they use? Why don't they use babies to sell alcohol?

You think, no, let's put a pretty girl in there. And ancient Greece was no exception. They did the same thing. Men, Christian men, be so very careful.

[30 : 22] When we allow things to come into our life, immoral things to come into our life, when we have pornography and other things that come into, he says, your wives are the ones who are going to suffer for it. They're the ones who are going to bear the brunt of the things that you're doing and the things that take place.

You know, there's so much corruption, sexual corruption in our world today. We need to be so very careful and we allow Christ to rule and reign in our life.

Christian men should be the most virtuous, the most respectful of the women that are around them. I'm so tired, kind of, a little off topic, but on it.

I'm so tired of Christian men who think, well, you know, my wife's supposed to submit to me and therefore I can treat her any way I want to.

that's not what it says. Read the thing. Understand the thing. Read it in context. Your wife should be the best friend you have.

[31 : 23] She should be your most important confidant. She should be the one that you go to when you've got things going on in your life. The two of you should talk about it. But too many men say, she's a woman.

Eh, what does she know? You know, some men realize that, you know what, your wife is probably the best sounding board you have.

Listen to what she has to say. And I'm saying all this because Bonnie told me to. Just kidding. Just kidding. When you consider the wickedness that was there, when you consider the degradation that was there, when you consider the whole culture that was there, the fact that God is going to use a young orphan woman to be the hero of this story, I think it shows that God has a sense of humor.

I have her just standing up there and I'm powerful and I can do this and I can do that and I can do that and my wife over there asks that, she doesn't mean anything. Hey, bring her in, let her pray around. Oh, I got control of her too. I got it all.

And God says, you know what? I think we should use a young orphan woman to mess this whole plan up. I think God has a sense of humor.

[32 : 46] You know, God's going to use Esther in some tremendous ways. He's going to do some great things through her. And as we continue to study on, I'm going to stop here for today.

I've got more about this but I'm going to stop here for today. I want us to stop and think. Are we following God with all of our hearts? Not following what alcohol says, not following what culture says, not following what my will says, not following what I think, but am I following what God has for me?

There's a song I want us to sing this morning. Turn to page 475.