

CHAPTER 1

Several things in this chapter itself are very instructive and of great use; but the design of recording the story of it is to show how way was made for Esther to the crown, in order to her being instrumental to defeat Haman's plot, and this long before the plot was laid, that we may observe and admire the foresight and vast reaches of Providence. "Known unto God are all his works" before-hand. Ahasuerus the king,

I. In his height feasts all his great men (v. 1-9).

II. In his heat he divorces his queen, because she would not come to him when he sent for her (v. 10-22). This shows how God serves his own purposes even by the sins and follies of men, which he would not permit if he know not how to bring good out of them.

<700>ESTHER 1:1-9

THE FEAST OF AHASUERUS

Which of the kings of Persia this Ahasuerus was the learned are not agreed. Mordecai is said to have been one of those that were *carried* captive from *Jerusalem* (<700>Esther 2:5, 6), whence it should seem that this Ahasuerus was one of the first kings of that empire. Dr. Lightfoot thinks that he was that Artaxerxes who hindered the building of the temple, who is called also *Ahasuerus* (<1500>Ezra 4:6, 7), after his great-grandfather of the Medes, <2000>Daniel 9:1. We have here an account,

I. Of the vast extent of his dominion. In the time of Darius and Cyrus there were but 120 princes (<2000>Daniel 6:1); now there were 127, *from India to Ethiopia*, v. 1. It had become an over-grown kingdom, which in time would sink with its own weight, and, as usual, would lose its provinces as fast as it got them. If such vast power be put into a bad hand, it is able to do so much the more mischief; but, if into a good hand, it is able to do so much the more good. Christ's kingdom is, or shall be, far larger than this,

when the kingdoms of the world shall all become his; and it shall be everlasting.

II. Of the great pomp and magnificence of his court. When he found himself fixed in his throne, the pride of his heart rising with the grandeur of his kingdom, he made a most extravagant feast, wherein he put himself to vast expense and trouble only *to show the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty*, v. 4. This was vain glory, an affection of pomp to no purpose at all; for none questioned the riches of his kingdom, nor offered to vie with him for honour. If he had shown the riches of his kingdom and the honour of his majesty, as some of his successors did, in contributing largely towards the building of the temple and the maintaining of the temple service (^{<ARB>}Ezra 6:8, 7:22), it would have turned to a much better account. Two feasts Ahasuerus made: —

1. One for his nobles and princes, which lasted *a hundred and eighty days*, v. 3, 4. Not that he feasted the same persons every day for all that time, but perhaps the nobles and princes of one province one day, of another province another day, while thus he and his constant attendants fared sumptuously every day. The Chaldee paraphrast (who is very bold in his additions to the story of this book) says that there had been a rebellion among his subjects and that this feast was kept for joy of the quashing of it.

2. Another was made for *all the people, both great and small*, which lasted *seven days*, some one day and some another; and, because no house would hold them, they were entertained *in the court of the garden*, v. 5. The hangings with which the several apartments were divided or the tents which were there pitched for the company, were very fine and rich; so were the beds or benches on which they sat, and the pavement under their feet, v. 6. Better is a dinner of herbs with quietness, and the enjoyment of one's self and a friend, than this banquet of wine with all the noise and tumult that must needs attend it.

III. Of the good order which in some respects was kept there notwithstanding. We do not find this like Belshazzar's feast, in which dunghill-gods were praised and the vessels of the sanctuary profaned, ^{<ARB>}Daniel 5:3, 4. Yet the Chaldee paraphrase says that the vessels of the sanctuary were used in this feast, to the great grief of the pious Jews. It was not like Herod's feast, which reserved a prophet's head for the last

dish. Two things which are laudable we may gather from the account here given of this feast: —

1. That there was no forcing of healths, nor urging of them: *The drinking was according to the law*, probably some law lately made; *none did compel*, no, not by continual proposing of it (as Josephus explains it); they did not send the glass about, but every man drank as he pleased (v. 8), so that if there were any that drank to excess it was their own fault, a fault which few would commit when the king's order put an honour upon sobriety. This caution of a heathen prince, even when he would show his generosity, may shame many who are called Christians, who think they do not sufficiently show their good housekeeping, nor bid their friends welcome, unless they make them drunk, and, under pretence of sending the health round, send the sin round, and death with it. There is a woe to those that do so; let them read it and tremble, ~~2015~~ Habakkuk 2:15, 16. It is robbing men of their reason, their richest jewel, and making them fools, the greatest wrong that can be.

2. That there was no mixed dancing; for the gentlemen and ladies were entertained asunder, not as in the feast of Belshazzar, whose wives and concubines drank with him (~~2012~~ Daniel 5:2), or that of Herod, whose daughter *danced before him*. Vashti feasted the women in her own apartment; not openly in the court of the garden, but *in the royal house*, v. 9. Thus, while the king showed the honour of his majesty, she and her ladies showed the honour of their modesty, which is truly the majesty of the fair sex.

~~2010~~ ESTHER 1:10-22

VASHTI DIVORCED

We have here a damp to all the mirth of Ahasuerus's feast; it ended in heaviness, not as Job's children's feast by a wind from the wilderness, not as Belshazzar's by a hand-writing on the wall, but by his own folly. An unhappy falling out there was, at the end of the feast, between the king and queen, which broke of the feast abruptly, and sent the guests away silent and ashamed.

I. It was certainly the king's weakness to send for Vashti into his presence when he was drunk, and in company with abundance of gentlemen, many of whom, it is likely, were in the same condition. *When his heart was merry with wine* nothing would serve him but Vashti must come, well dressed as she was, with *the crown on her head*, that the princes and people might see what a handsome woman she was, v. 10, 11. Hereby,

1. He dishonoured himself as a husband, who ought to protect, but by no means expose, the modesty of his wife, who ought to be to her *a covering of the eyes* (⁰²⁰¹⁶Genesis 20:16), not to uncover them.

2. He diminished himself as a king, in commanding that from his wife which she might refuse, much to the honour of her virtue. It was against the custom of the Persians for the women to appear in public, and he put a great hardship upon her when he did not court, but command her to do so uncouth a thing, and make her a show. If he had not been put out of the possession of himself by drinking to excess, he would not have done such a thing, but would have been angry at any one that should have mentioned it. When the wine is in the wit is out, and men's reason departs from them.

II. However, perhaps it was not her wisdom to deny him. *She refused to come* (v. 12); though he sent his command by seven honourable messengers, and publicly, and Josephus says sent again and again, yet she persisted in her denial. Had she come, while it was evident that she did it in pure obedience, it would have been no reflection upon her modesty, nor a bad example. The thing was not in itself sinful, and therefore to obey would have been more her honour than to be so precise. Perhaps she refused in a haughty manner, and then it was certainly evil; she *scorned to come at the king's commandment*. What a mortification was this to him! While he was showing the glory of his kingdom he showed the reproach of his family, that he had a wife that would do as she pleased. Strifes between yoke-fellows are bad enough at any time, but before company they are very scandalous, and occasion blushing and uneasiness.

III. The king thereupon grew outrageous. He that had rule over 127 provinces had no rule over his own spirit, but his *anger burned in him*, v. 12. He would have consulted his own comfort and credit more if he had stifled his resentment, had passed by the affront his wife gave him, and turned it off with a jest.

IV. Though he was very angry, he would not do any thing in this matter till he advised with his privy-counsellors; as he had seven chamberlains to execute his orders, who are named (v. 10), so he had seven counsellors to direct his orders. The greater power a man has the greater need he has of advice, that he may not abuse his power. Of these counsellors it is said that they were learned men, for they *knew law and judgment*, — that they were wise men, for they *knew the times*, — and that the king put great confidence in them and honour upon them, for they *saw the king's face and sat first in the kingdom*, v. 13, 14. In the multitude of such counsellors there is safety. Now here is,

1. The question proposed to this cabinet-council (v. 15): *What shall we do to the queen Vashti according to the law?* Observe,

(1.) Though it was the queen that was guilty, the law must have its course.

(2.) Though the king was very angry, yet he would do nothing but what he was advised was according to law.

2. The proposal which Memucan made, that Vashti should be divorced for her disobedience. Some suggest that he gave this severe advice, and the rest agreed to it, because they knew it would please the king, would gratify both his passion now and his appetite afterwards. But Josephus says that, on the contrary, he had a strong affection for Vashti, and would not have put her away for this offence if he could legally have passed it by; and then we must suppose Memucan, in his advice, to have had a sincere regard to justice and the public good.

(1.) He shows what would be the bad consequences of the queen's disobedience to her husband, if it were passed by and not animadverted upon, that it would embolden other wives both to disobey their husbands and to domineer over them. Had this unhappy falling out between the king and his wife, wherein she was conqueror, been private, the error would have remained with themselves and the quarrel might have been settled privately between themselves; but it happening to be public, and perhaps the ladies that were now feasting with the queen having shown themselves pleased with her refusal, her bad example would be likely to have a bad influence upon all the families of the kingdom. If the queen must have her humour, and the king must submit to it (since the houses of private persons commonly take their measures from the courts of princes), the wives would be haughty and imperious and would scorn to obey their husbands, and the

poor despised husbands might fret at it, but could not help themselves; for the *contentions of a wife are a continual dropping*, ^{<1093>}Proverbs 19:13; 27:15; and see ^{<1209>}Proverbs 21:9; 25:24. When wives *despise their husbands*, whom they ought to reverence (^{<4083>}Ephesians 5:33), and contend for *dominion* over those to whom they ought to be in *subjection* (^{<4181>}1 Peter 3:1), there cannot but be continual guilt and grief, confusion and every evil work. And great ones must take heed of setting copies of this kind, v. 16-18.

(2.) He shows what would be the good consequence of a decree against Vashti that she should be divorced. We may suppose that before they proceeded to this extremity they sent to Vashti to know if she would yet submit, cry *Peccavi* — *I have done wrong*, and ask the king's pardon, and that, if she had done so, the mischief of her example would have been effectually prevented, and process would have been stayed; but it is likely she continued obstinate, and insisted upon it as her prerogative to do as she pleased, whether it pleased the king or no, and therefore they gave this judgment against her, that she *come no more before the king*, and this judgment so ratified as never to be reversed, v. 19. The consequence of this, it was hoped, would be that *the wives would give to their husbands honour*, even the wives of the *great*, notwithstanding their own greatness, and the wives of the *small*, notwithstanding the husband's meanness (v. 20); and thus every man would bear rule in his own house, as he ought to do, and, the wives being subject, the children and servants would be so too. It is the interest of states and kingdoms to provide that good order be kept in private families.

3. The edict that passed according to this proposal, signifying that the queen was divorced for contumacy, according to the law, and that, if other wives were in like manner undutiful to their husbands, they must expect to be in like manner disgraced (v. 21, 22): were they better than the queen? Whether it was the passion or the policy of the king that was served by this edict, God's providence served its own purpose by it, which was to make way for Esther to the crown.