

Esther 1

- Written between 460 B.C. (Ezra's return to Jerusalem) and 331 B.C. (Greek conquest of Persia)
- Author unknown
- Set in during reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes I), who ruled Persia from 486-465
- Susa, made capital of Persian Empire by Cambyses II (d. 522 B.C.) continually inhabited since 4200 B.C., settled since 7000 B.C.
- Themes:
 - The Remnant – preserved through the grace of God
 - Feasting: 10 Banquets
 - Purim – origins of this Jewish festival

Importance of Esther: famous Jewish scholar Maimonides wrote that when the Messiah comes, the Prophets and Writings will pass away, only Esther and Torah will remain

The Feasts of Xerxes (1.1-2.18)

1. The Royal Banquets (1.1-9)

Ahasuerus = Xerxes I

According to Herodotus (3.89), Xerxes' father, Darius I (522-486 B.C.), organized the Persian empire in 20 'satrapies' governed by 'satraps' (protector of the kingdom). 127 'Provinces'

2 Susa the Citadel – a high mound in the middle of the city where Darius I built his palace

First party – 180 days. Likely hyperbole. Who is invited? Who is not there?

Second party – a week. Who is invited?

8 the drinking – ancient sources (Herodotus 1.33, Josephus) describe the 'custom': whenever the king drank at Persian banquets, the guests drank. Here, guests did not need to wait upon Xerxes.

Third party – Queen Vashti's fiesta for the women

2. A Queen Puts Her Foot Down and Pays the Price (1.10-22)

10 seven eunuchs commissioned – what was their charge?

Lit. ‘when the king’s heart was good with wine’ – He was happily drunk!

Eunuch – the king’s most personal attendants, with access to the harem (see attachment)

12 A Refusal and the Response – What do you make of Queen Vashti’s response?

13-19 Counsel of ‘Wise Men’ – ‘sages who understood the times’ – court astrologers

14 ‘saw the face of the king’ – Think ‘Order of the Garter’ or an Executive Committee

Memucan and the Seven; ‘access to the king’s presence’

15 ‘according to law’ – the value of law and order in Persia. Contrast this ‘law’ to Torah

Up to this moment, what was Persian law re. a queen’s refusal to obey the king’s command?

20-22 The King’s Edict

20 ‘great as it is’ – not found in the LXX. The Septuagint edition of Esther contains **106 verses** not found in the Hebrew *Tanakh* (Bible)

22 ‘to each province and people according to its language’ – from India to Ethiopia

Compare the edict as written from that proposed by Memucan (1.19). What has changed?

Here, “the Persian Empire is ruled inexorably by law, but it is not a law that can bring much assurance or stability or justice to those who stand under its mandates. It is both irrevocable (and subject to) the will and whim of a weak and unstable despot who seems to care about little other than his own pride and pleasure.”
(Bush, *Esther Biblical Commentary* 355)