

BUILD-A-BELIEVER WORKSHOPS

Ezra Nehemiah Esther

People say to me, "How do you build a church?" You don't build a church, you build a believer. As a result, the church will build itself. (John MacArthur).

Esther Chapter One

"Confessions of a Persian Age Drama Queen"

Introduction

Donald Trump's TV show, *The Apprentice*, starts each episode by asking you, "What if you could have it all?" To help you imagine "having it all," the song *Money* is playing in the background while images of material luxury are flashed on the screen.

What if you could have it all? Jesus addressed the issue at least twice:

1. In Matthew 16:26 He said, **What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?**
2. In Mark 10:25 He said, **It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter in to the kingdom of God.**

Jesus said it; that settles it for most of us. Others are not so sure. *Maybe Christians are just bitter about not having it all!*

If you won't believe Jesus, then take a look at someone who really did have it all - King Ahasuerus of Persia. "The Donald," as Trump likes to be called, is a pauper by comparison. The opening verses of chapter one are a display of the king's immense power and invaluable possessions, revealed in a setting of intense pleasure. The closing verses of chapter one reveal problems in his palace.

There is a kind of forced-perspective in the way the chapter is written:

1. In verses one through eleven it's as if you are approaching the throne of King Ahasuerus. You are forced to look around at his world and are seduced by its splendor.
2. In verses twelve through twenty-two it's as if you are sitting on the throne with Ahasuerus. You are forced to look within, at his heart, and see it enslaved to natural passions.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 You Are Subtly Seduced By The World Around You, and #2 You Are Easily Enslaved By The World Within You.

#1 You Are Subtly Seduced By The World Around You (v1-11)

The books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther tell the story of the Jewish nation after the seventy year captivity in Babylon had ended. Their Babylonian captors had been defeated by the Medo-Persian empire. A decree was issued by the Persian king allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem and Judea. Ezra and Nehemiah tell the story of those Jews who returned to their land; the Book of Esther tells the story of those Jews who remained in Persia.

The events recorded in Esther take place chronologically somewhere between chapters six and seven of Ezra.

Esther 1:1 Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this was the Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia),

Esther 1:2 in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the citadel,

Esther 1:3 *that* in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants - the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces *being* before him -

Esther 1:4 when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days *in all*.

They partied for six months! The king probably didn't assemble all his leaders at one time; that would have kept them away from their duties too long. It's more likely that, over a period of six months, Ahasuerus brought the officers to Shushan on a rotating schedule.

Then, having consulted with them, the king would bring them all together for the seven-day feast so they could confer collectively.

Persia represents the material world to you. The world can be a place of beauty, wealth, pleasure, and power. The world is constantly asking you, “What if you could have it all?” If you are not careful, you are seduced by the world. Instead of living for spiritual realities, you settle for material trifles. You gain the world, but lose those things that are most important and meaningful.

As I suggested, the chapter is written in such a way that you are forced to walk through King Ahasuerus’ palaces on an approach to his throne. The subtle suggestion is that you, too, can sit enthroned – at least over your own smaller empire – and enjoy the best that the world has to offer. It is a technique recognized by salesmen everywhere!

In a sense, Ahasuerus was acting like a salesman. Historians say that he was drumming-up support for an invasion of Greece. He was selling his leaders on the potential invasion by demonstrating his power and majesty. Surely a man who had achieved all this could defeat the Greeks in battle.

Let’s take the stroll towards the throne and see what the world has to offer. - being changed to bring change -

Esther 1:5 And when these days were completed, the king made a feast lasting seven days for all the people who were present in Shushan the citadel, from great to small, in the court of the garden of the king’s palace.

Esther 1:6 *There were* white and blue linen *curtains* fastened with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars; *and the couches were* of gold and silver on a *mosaic* pavement of alabaster, turquoise, and white and black marble.

Esther 1:7 And they served drinks in golden vessels, each vessel being different from the other, with royal wine in abundance, according to the generosity of the king.

Words like ‘lavish’ and ‘extravagant’ come to mind. Art and architecture; culinary delights; horticulture; the finest craftsmanship; all these and more were on display. No detail was overlooked. The custom **wine vessels** symbolize the whole affair. Each person had a

custom made golden goblet. I'd like to think that they kept it as a souvenir! In their goblet they drank the royal wine that was normally reserved for the king. They held in their own hands a little part of the world's splendor, and drank it to their fill. Maybe you *could* have it all?

Verse eight adds an important commentary:

Esther 1:8 In accordance with the law, the drinking was not compulsory; for so the king had ordered all the officers of his household, that they should do according to each man's pleasure.

No one was forced to get drunk. You could have as much or as little as you desired.

Christians often portray the world only as a decadent den of iniquity. Our extremism might be justified in the long run, but we don't properly prepare people for the subtle seduction of the world when we exaggerate. The anti-drug campaigns of the late 1960's and early 1970's are a good example. *Reefer Madness* was shown each year in school. Take one hit of marijuana and the next thing you do will be to boil your baby on the stove.

Rather than using scare tactics, we ought to be honest and discuss the subtle seduction of the world. The world has its beauty and pleasure to offer – and it's not all bad. We can enjoy things in the world as long as we love the Lord more and keep material things in spiritual perspective.

Back to our story: King Ahasuerus had his guests right where he wanted them. Though not physically drunk on wine, their senses were intoxicated with the possibilities of having it all **according to** their own **pleasures**. He decided to go for the big close by bringing out Queen Vashti.

Esther 1:9 Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women *in* the royal palace which *belonged* to King Ahasuerus.

Esther 1:10 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus,

Esther 1:11 to bring Queen Vashti before the king, *wearing* her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials, for she *was* beautiful to behold.

Vashti, in one beautiful package, was everything Ahasuerus was trying to portray. She represented what the Persian material world had to offer. She was its beauty; she was its pleasure. If you were powerful enough, you could have her – or someone like her. Her appearance would speak volumes about the lifestyles of the rich and famous. It would put the exclamation point on the feasting.

As I indicated, the world has its beauty. God has given us all things to enjoy. But we must keep it all in perspective. The world appeals to our flesh to seduce us away from the things of God. We must remain vigilant.

One way to remain vigilant is to remember that the world, and thus the things in the world, are passing away. The splendid palaces and gardens and goblets of Persia are gone. Vashti was beautiful, but only for a season.

We must learn to see below the surface of the subtle seduction of the world. For example: The thing that most stands out to me are the [seven eunuchs](#) who served King Ahasuerus. The men closest to the king were always castrated. That way they could not have any children who would challenge the king for his throne. They were powerful men, in a worldly sense – having access to the king and all the privileges of his palace. But they were impotent.

Powerful, but impotent. **That** is what the world makes you! It seduces you; but when you think you are going to sit on a throne, and enjoy your own little kingdom, you find you've been rendered impotent. You become the servant of the things you hoped would serve and satisfy you.

The world says you can have it all, and be like a king. In the end, it demands everything from you, and you become its powerless servant. The world makes you a eunuch.

#2 You Are Easily Enslaved
By The World Within You
(v12-22)

Right at the very peak of his power, King Ahasuerus gets embarrassed by his queen.

Esther 1:12 But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command *brought* by *his* eunuchs; therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him.

We have no idea why Vashti refused. The point is that you can't ever really have it all!

Having come right up to the throne, we looked around at the world. Now we're going to look within – at the world within, at the heart. In the case of Ahasuerus, he was a slave to his **anger**. His anger represents all of the works of our flesh that are a part of the sin nature we are born with.

Right at this point, King Ahasuerus could have realized that his true enemy was not Greece, but the enemy within him. He didn't. He acted in ways to mask his sin and continue the charade of being satisfied by the things of the world.

He began by seeking some spiritual help:

Esther 1:13 Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times (for this was the king's manner toward all who knew law and justice, Esther 1:14 those closest to him *being* Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who had access to the king's presence, *and* who ranked highest in the kingdom):

It was spiritual help, but not biblical help. The description, **wise men who understood the times**, means these guys were occult astrologers. They practiced things like divination and sorcery and dream research in order to predict the future and give advice.

The world is filled with spiritual help that is not biblical. You know what that tells us? It tells us that most people realize the world is not enough! They realize that they can't have it all; or, if they could, it

would still not satisfy. Sadly, people settle for man-made religions and philosophies that are by definition doomed to failure.

Here is their best advice:

Esther 1:15 “What *shall we* do to Queen Vashti, according to law, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus *brought to her* by the eunuchs?”

Esther 1:16 And Memucan answered before the king and the princes: “Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also all the princes, and all the people who *are* in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.

Esther 1:17 For the queen’s behavior will become known to all women, so that they will despise their husbands in their eyes, when they report, ‘King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in before him, but she did not come.’

Esther 1:18 This very day the *noble* ladies of Persia and Media will say to all the king’s officials that they have heard of the behavior of the queen. Thus *there will be* excessive contempt and wrath.

Esther 1:19 If it pleases the king, let a royal decree go out from him, and let it be recorded in the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it will not be altered, that Vashti shall come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she.

Esther 1:20 When the king’s decree which he will make is proclaimed throughout all his empire (for it is great), all wives will honor their husbands, both great and small.”

These guys really knew how to keep women in their place! They were the original model for the male chauvinist. Submission was *decreed* rather than *agreed*.

- being changed to bring change -

If you are married, what is your concept of submission? Is it agreed upon? or is it decreed? Husbands are called upon to lead their wives with love; wives are called upon to love being led. You should agree upon these principles. If you have to decree submission, some one or both of you is not in synch with God's wonderful plan for marriage.

How would the punishment of Vashti make the Persian women love their husbands more? Are love and respect qualities that can be generated in hearts by a decree?

This was just stupid. It always amazes me how stupid smart people can be!

Their advice reveals their heart. They were mean; they were vindictive; they were cruel; they were selfish. The best spiritual advice that human religion and philosophy can give is always flawed because it comes from the sin nature. Only God can offer mercy and grace.

Esther 1:21 And the reply pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan.

Esther 1:22 Then he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province in its own script, and to every people in their own language, that each man should be master in his own house, and speak in the language of his own people.

Memucan probably got a book deal - *Memucan's Marriage Manifesto* His talk show, *Memucan's Mastery of Marriage*, was must-see TV for husbands dealing with insubordinate wives. It sounds funny... **But this is what we do today with those dispensing stupid advice.**

Ahasuerus was a slave to the world within him. It made the world around him all the more dangerous. When the world appeals to your flesh, and you have only religion and philosophy to guide you... You are a slave – no matter that you are seated on a throne.

When you become a Christian, God gives you a new nature. The Holy Spirit lives within you, giving you power to say “No!” to the flesh and “Yes!” to obeying God.

- being changed to bring change -

The Word of God gives you a new and proper perspective on the world around you. You are in the world, but not of the world. You can enjoy much of it without being seduced by it. You are passing through it to your home in Heaven.

God is seated on the Throne. You are happy to let Him sit there. You are His servant. *But you're not a eunuch!* Instead, you are His elect, and are filled with His power – His spiritual power.

The world attempts to seduce you. It won't succeed if you remember you have a Lover in Jesus and are betrothed to Him. He'll return for you at any moment. Be ready.