

# MENTOR



WEEK 1

# FOR LIFE

## “FOLLOWING ORDERS”

After WWII, the Allied powers called a military tribunal known as the Nuremberg Trials. Accused of crimes against humanity, including the holocaust, many Nazi's famously stated, "I was just following orders." Although this defense didn't hold up at Nuremberg, doing the right thing is often easier said than done—especially against powerful authorities.

In Esther 1, we meet the world's most powerful ruler at the time, Ahasuerus, king of the Persian Empire. "Ahasuerus" is the Hebrew form of the better-known Greek name, "Xerxes." Interestingly, the Hebrew pronunciation (pronounced *Ahashwerosh*), may be an ancient dad-joke making the pun, "King Headache." As we'll see in the coming weeks, the name fit. He had great power, yet acted unpredictably, impulsively, and sometimes, ruthlessly.

In this Week's passage, we'll see "King Headache" in all his glory. Additionally, this Week and next, we'll see consequences for refusing the king's impulsive order. This not only set the stage for the heroin of the story for whom the book is named, but also the danger she faced doing the right thing.

### ESTHER 1:1–12 (SELECTED)

<sup>1</sup> Now in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, <sup>2</sup> in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa, the capital, <sup>3</sup> in the third year of his reign he gave a feast for all his officials and servants... [for] 180 days. <sup>5</sup> And when these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in Susa, the citadel, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace... <sup>7</sup> Drinks were served in golden vessels, vessels of different kinds, and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king. <sup>8</sup> And drinking was according to this edict: There is no compulsion. For the king had given orders to all the staff of his palace to do as each man desired. <sup>9</sup> Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women in the palace that belonged to King Ahasuerus.

<sup>10</sup> On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded...the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, <sup>11</sup> to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at. <sup>12</sup> But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. At this the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

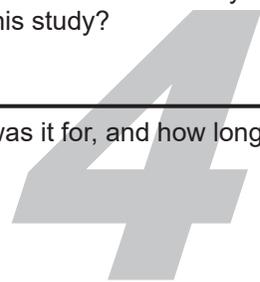
Every Week, this section will include bonus material—articles, videos, or other resources to aid you in your understanding of the Scripture, challenge you in your development, or to encourage you in your worship.

For example, it's good to ask the question, "Why isn't God's name mentioned in the book of *Esther*?" Scan the QR code for an intro to the book of *Esther* and a possible answer to the question of God's (seeming) absence.



## DISCUSSION

As we kick off the semester, who has God laid on your heart that you could invite to this study?



ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

1. What did the king do, who was it for, and how long did it last? (3–5)

2. What did the king do on the seventh day? Describe the condition and (most likely) his men. (8, 10a)

3. How did the Queen respond and how did the king react? (12)

4. What are the upsides or downsides to Vashti complying with the king's order?

INTERPRETATION

5. In your opinion, what's so bad about sin? Do you have a personal example?

APPLICATION

6. Has there been a time you personally surrendered to Christ's free gift of salvation? Describe your experience.

"I've always been a Christian." We hear it all the time, but if we're all sinful from birth, that can't be true. There must be a time of surrender. If you're unsure, talk to your Coach today!

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## STUDY NOTES

### PREGAMING

Jordan wore his 1982 championship North Carolina shorts under his Bulls uniform for every game. LeBron throws chalk in the air to pump up the fans. There are other pregame stories that include positioning equipment, eating the grass of the field of play, and one guy who drinks his own urine. There's some legitimacy to getting oneself pumped up and ready to play, not just physically, but mentally. However, some routines are downright bizarre.

The story of *Esther* picks up ***in the third year of [Ahasuerus'] reign. He gave a feast for all his officials and servants... [for] 180 days.*** This six-month long party corresponds with Xerxes' war council of 483 BC, held to plan for the Persian invasion of Greece. Xerxes was mustering the nobles, officials, military leaders, princes, and governors of the provinces in Susa to rally support for his military campaign against the Greeks. Here, they set goals, developed strategy, and assessed the readiness of soldiers, equipment, and supplies to achieve their goals.

The party was a pregame ritual designed to show Persia's might and wealth. After 6-months of partying, ***the king gave for all the people present in Susa, the citadel, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace.*** The citadel stood 120 feet above Susa's fortified palace complex. Such an architectural feat more than two millennia before the Industrial Revolution would have magnified Persian's military prowess.

Likewise, from the curtains, to the pillars, to the mosaics of precious stone, Xerxes' palace screamed fantastic wealth. Indeed, ***drinks were served in golden vessels, vessels of different kinds, and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king.*** It's not just that the wine flowed continuously, ***as [much as] each man desired.*** But, they weren't using red Solo cups. Even the drinkware showed Xerxes riches.

The party wasn't limited to the war council. ***Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women in the palace that belonged to King Ahasuerus.***

Xerxes' display of might and riches encouraged those preparing for war that Persia could not be stopped. No other nation could match their prowess. And, considering that Xerxes ***reigned from India to Ethiopia,*** there was no reason to suspect anything less than Persia's total dominance. In addition to the strategic value of Xerxes' display, his actions also illustrated his self-indulgence.

## MENTORS MUST FACE REALITY

After months partying, and another 7 days cutting loose, the story slows down and the narrative begins. ***On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded...the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at.***

Let's note the circumstances of the request. Xerxes was asking his wife to come into a room full of drunk men who would soon go off to war not knowing if they would return. The phrase, "*eat and drink, for tomorrow we die,*" comes to mind (see 1 Corinthians 15:32). At best, he was asking Vashti to enter into a degrading situation with a bunch of drunk men leering at her. At worst, many people believe that Xerxes' request was for Vashti to wear *only* her crown. Whatever the circumstance, the narrative makes it clear that this wasn't a safe place for Vashti to enter.

## REALITY INCLUDES RECOGNIZING SIN

***Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs.*** Most likely, this refusal was the right move. However, Xerxes held great power and wielded it unpredictably. ***The king became enraged, and his anger burned within him.***

Next Week, we'll examine the king's full response—which, thankfully, didn't result in anything truly tragic for Vashti. For now, the stage is set for God's ultimate deliverance.

Many lessons can, and will, develop from today's passage as we continue studying *Esther*. One major lesson from today's passage is the nature and power of sin. Sin is destructive making us forget that our actions have consequences. Also, like Xerxes when Vashti refused his ridiculous request, rage and anger often follow a heart of sin.

The really bad news is that all of us are sinful. Sin has corrupted our very nature (see Romans 3:23). The really, really bad news is that sin earns death (see Romans 6:23). But, the good news is that God isn't thwarted by our sin. In fact, God's name is never mentioned in the book of *Esther*, yet his strong hand is clearly seen in the deliverance of his people.

In the same way, maybe you've not yet seen God show up in your life. But, I hope as we continue our study, you will. Not only that, but that you surrender your life and eternity to the only One more powerful than any earthly ruler—to the One who conquered sin and can deliver you too!