

TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY



Esther

Esther challenges me. Vashti is ousted as queen because she refuses to degrade herself in front of her husband and his drinking buddies. Then a beauty pageant is held for the sole purpose of picking a new, and presumably more compliant, queen for Xerxes. Esther “wins” and so gains an honored position in the king’s harem. Now, had Esther been chosen because of her noble character, or intellect, or impressive wisdom, or her great courage, I think I would be more okay with this story. But those aren’t the things that won women a place in Xerxes’ love life. And so both Mordecai and Esther accept this arrangement, not knowing that it would soon require of her much more than external beauty. As it turns out, it’s a good thing that Esther has her foot in the palace door, because when Haman’s scheme involves wiping out all of the Jews, Esther is on the spot to save the day.

So, here is the challenge for me. At what point do we just accept the circumstances of our culture so that God can use us within that context? God seems to be much less concerned with the fairness of the setting of our lives than He is with the content of our lives. We can get so busy complaining about our limits that we miss our opportunities. Esther was compliant to a system that I object to. Like so many of us women she is a people pleaser and without a crisis, that may have been all that she ever dared to be.

But then she pulls out the courage and cunning to serve God within that system, risking not only disapproval, but even her life. It was her submission that put her in the position to courageously take a stand that saved many lives.

King Xerxes may have been her ruler and her master, the eunuch Shaashgaz may have been charged with her care along with the other concubines, but whose instructions did she choose to follow (2:20)? _____
Why? _____

Whose instructions do you listen to? _____

When called on to do something that she feared doing, what did she ask the Jewish people to do? _____

How was preventing the killing of the Jews a blessing and help to her “husband” king Xerxes? _____



“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”

2 Corinthians 4:7

READ:

- Esther

CHRONOLOGY:

- 483 to 472 BC
- Shortly before Ezra and Nehemiah

For Such a Time as This

I would never have dreamed that God would have used someone in Esther's situation to preserve the lives of His people. She seemed to have so little say about the events in her life. Drafted to become a concubine, even once she became the queen she was not allowed to initiate communication with her husband the king. This woman had no power, no rights, no voice. She seems to have little more substance than a pretty face.

But I should never underestimate the power of a woman's influence, even in what seems a powerless situation. How can we follow Esther's example in exercising a godly influence on the world around us?

- Esther found **courage** that defied her fears. Why did Esther at first protest against Mordecai's suggestion that she approach the king? (4:11) _____

What did she do to address those fears? (4:16) _____

- Esther waited patiently for the right timing. What are some of the ways she exercised **patience** and a sensitivity to the best timing? _____

- What are some ways that Esther showed **respect**?

To Mordecai? _____

To the king? _____

Even to Haman? _____

- Esther showed that **character** speaks more powerfully than circumstances. What did the king offer to Esther in 5:6? _____

What did Esther finally ask the king for? _____



"A crisis does not
make character, a
crisis reveals
character."
Oswald
Chambers

What are some ways our character is developed before a crisis arises?

What do you think was instrumental in the development of Esther's character?

How does the character Esther contrast with that of King Xerxes?

With Haman?

With Mordecai?

What difference does character make on our power of influence?

How does an understanding of God's Sovereignty make us more willing to take necessary risks?

What did Mordecai say God would do for the Jews even if Esther refused to help?

In what ways has your own character been tested in a crisis?

Queen Vashti

QUEEN VASHTI Esther 1

I wish I knew more about this remarkable woman who had the courage to stand up against the king. In my view, she was just drawing some healthy boundary lines for herself, not trying to initiate a mass revolt. The men involved, on the other hand, almost seemed panic struck by her behavior.

What were the king's advisors afraid of in 1:17,18?

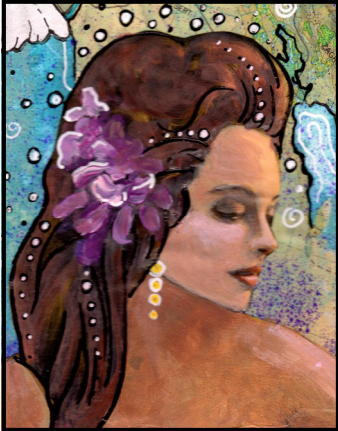
What does 1:20-22 say was the purpose of the king's edict?

What part do you think fear plays in the balance of male and female relationships and roles today?

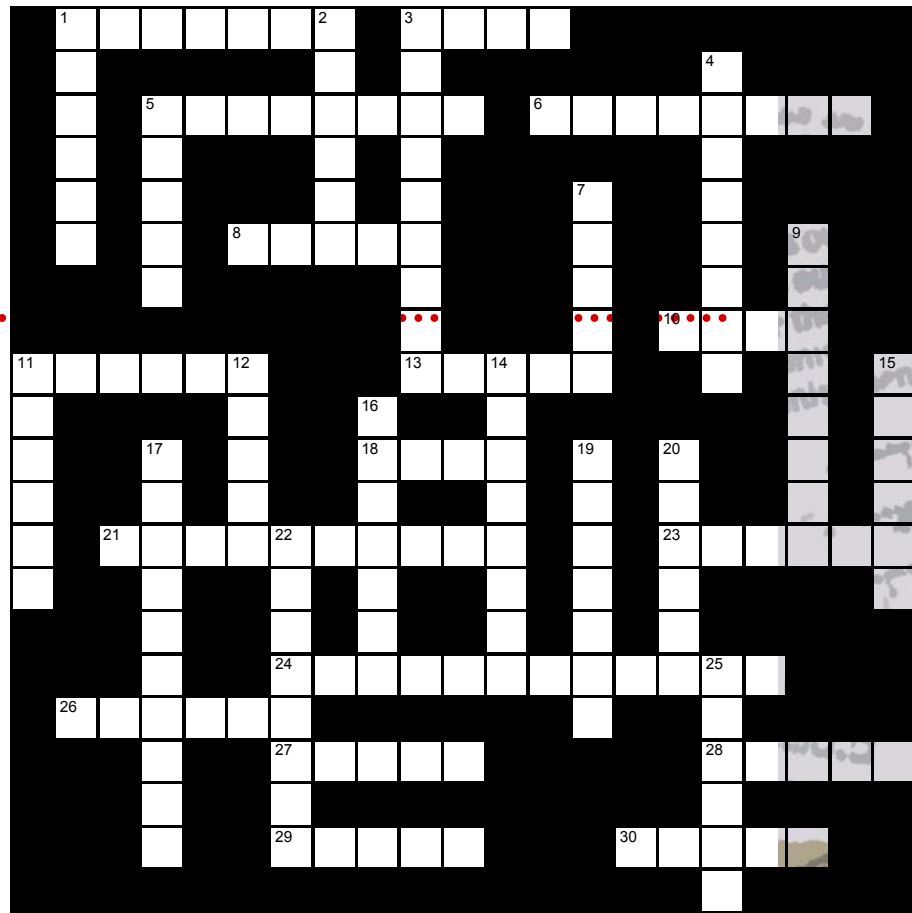
What affect should that awareness have on our behavior as women?

Are there times when a wife should not submit to her husband's wishes?

PUZZLE PAGE



Clues



Across

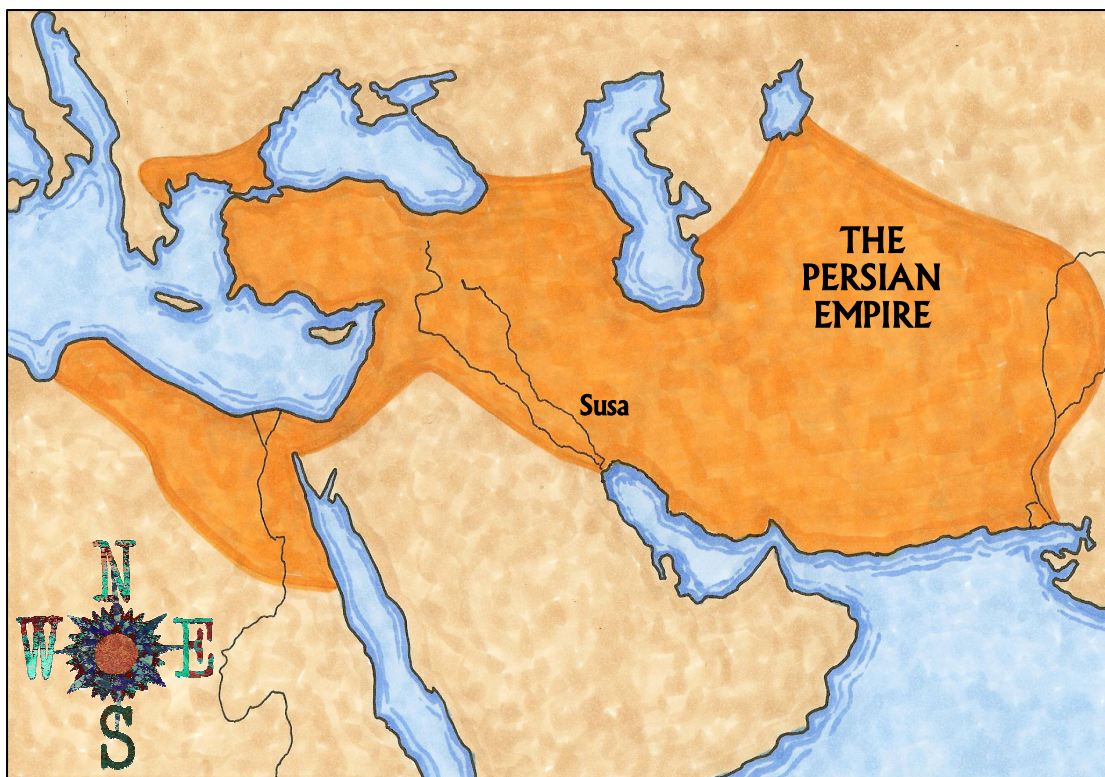
- 1 Esther prepared one for the king and Haman (7)
- 3 where the story of Esther takes place (4)
- 5 Mordecai asked Esther to go into the king's _____ (8)
- 6 Esther's tribe (8)
- 8 Mordecai refused to do this before Haman (5)
- 10 Haman wanted to destroy all of them (4)
- 11 in charge of the king's women (6)
- 13 given a position higher than all the other nobles (5)
- 18 month chosen by lot (pur) to carryout Haman's plan (4)
- 21 an order was given to _____ the Jews (10)
- 23 the king gave his _____ ring to Haman
- 24 Mordecai saved the king from this (12)
- 26 King of Persia at the time of Esther (6)
- 27 number of maids assigned to Esther (5)
- 28 Jewish holiday still observed to celebrate the deliverance of the Jews (5)
- 29 Esther was brought in to the king's _____ (5)
- 30 penalty for appearing before the king unsummoned (5)

Down

- 1 the quality for which Esther was chosen for the harem (6)
- 2 months of beauty treatments before a turn with the king (6)
- 3 those wearing this were not allowed into the king's gate (9)
- 4 What happened to Vashti (8)
- 5 Mordecai wanted Esther to do this for the lives of the Jews (5)
- 7 position the king gave to Esther (5)
- 9 Esther came to hers for such a time as this (8)
- 11 Esther was given Haman's (6)
- 12 Esther won his favor (5)
- 14 Esther's cousin (8)
- 15 the month Esther first went to the king (6)
- 16 Haman built this for Mordecai (7)
- 17 Mordecai exposed one against the king (10)
- 19 to celebrate the selection of Esther as queen (7)
- 20 previous queen of Persia (6)
- 22 Esther's other name (8)
- 25 what her parent's death left Esther (6)



Map



PERSIAN EMPIRE

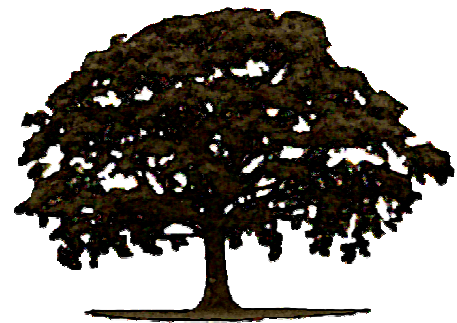
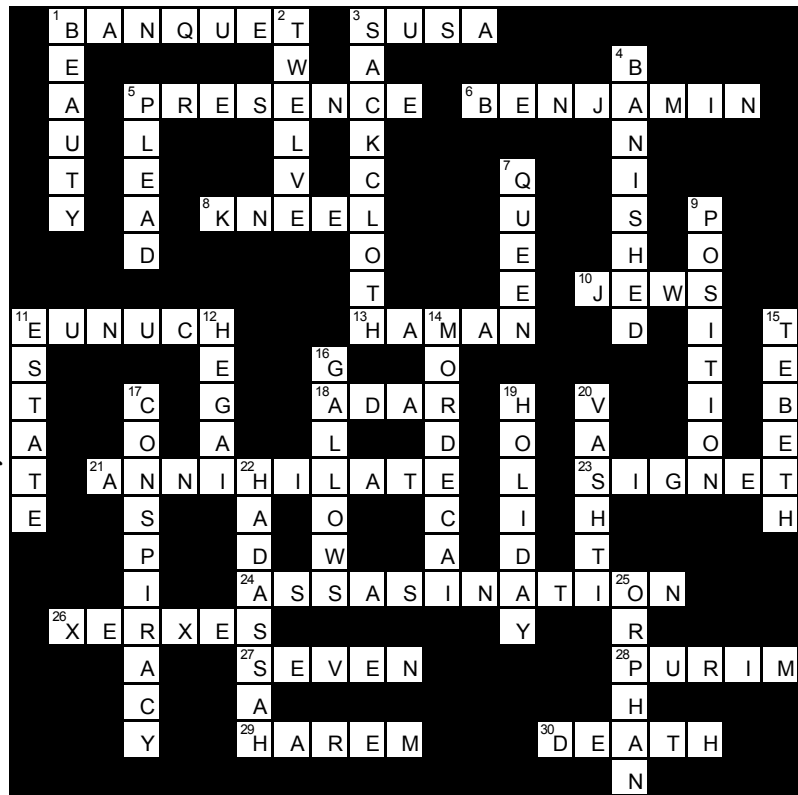
The Medes and the Persians were two closely related tribes in the area of Mesopotamia. The Medes came to be a recognized nation during the days of the Assyrian Empire. In an alliance with the Chaldeans, the Medes helped overthrow the Assyrians. The last king of the Medians had a daughter who married a Persian and their child was **Cyrus** the Great who, on Persia's behalf, revolted against the Medes and established the Persian Empire. The Persians attacked the Babylonians whose last king was Nabonidus, who we met in Daniel as the absent king who left his son Belshazzar in charge until his return to meet the Persian threat. Babylon was taken without battle and its inhabitants greeted Cyrus as their liberator. An important archaeological find, the Cyrus cylinder claims that Cyrus restored the dilapidated dwellings and cared for the people of Babylon. Cyrus is also known for his practice of placating the gods of his subjects and we read in Ezra how he permitted the Jews to return to the Holy Land (Ezra 1:2-4).

Cyrus was succeeded by his son Cambyses II who conquered Egypt, but is known for little else. While he was away an imposter posed as his brother and claimed the throne. Cambyses II died before he could reclaim it. **Darius** and six other nobles exposed and overthrew the imposter. Darius was a contemporary of Haggai and Zechariah, and supported the Jewish effort to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 6:11-15). Excavations in Susa have uncovered a large statue of Darius. It must have still stood in Esther's day. Darius was also responsible for the organization of the empire into districts governed by satraps (Daniel 6:1). His son was **Xerxes I**, also known as Ahasuerus. We read about him in the book of Esther and in Ezra 4:6. Xerxes reigned for twenty years and then was killed by the captain of the bodyguard in a palace plot. This man who should have belonged only in the history books, gained a place in the Holy Scripture because of the young Jewish woman who he took a fancy to. (Hoerth, Mattingly, and Yamauchi 109-118)

Puzzle answers:

PURIM Esther 9:18-32

One of the most joyous of Jewish feasts is Purim, celebrated in the month of Adar (usually March). The 13th of Adar was the date chosen by Haman by lot or “pur” for the extermination of the Jews, so their survival is celebrated on the 14th. The holiday is preceded by three days of fasting to remember the fast that Esther called for in anticipation of her meeting with the king. On the day of Purim there is feasting and a reading of the book of Esther, accompanied by booing and hissing whenever Haman’s name is read. Gifts are given and food is delivered to the poor. (Rich) As Christians, what significance does this celebration have? _____



Down Victory Road
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Sources:

WANT TO READ WHAT I READ?

PERSIAN EMPIRE p. 6

Hoerth, Alfred J., Gerald L. Mattingly, and Edwin M. Yamauchi. Peoples of the Old Testament World. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004.

PURIM p. 5

Rich, Tracey R.. "Purim." Judaism 101. 10 Sep 2007 <<http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday9.htm>>.