

Who was Vashti in the Bible?

Vashti in the Bible was the wife of King Xerxes (or Ahasuerus in many translations). King Xerxes and Queen Vashti of Persia figure in the story of Esther, a beautiful Jewish girl living in Ahasuerus' kingdom, and her cousin, Mordecai, who had raised her after the death of her parents. Both Esther and Mordecai were descendants of Jews who had been exiled to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar along with the defeated King Jehoiachin of Judah. The Bible's story of Queen Vashti is set in about 480 BC.

In Esther 1 a great feast is being held for the men of Susa, the citadel from which Xerxes reigned over a large region of the ancient world from India to Ethiopia to Asia Minor. The feast lasted for 180 days, during which time Vashti hosted a banquet of her own for the women. On the seventh day of the feast, a drunken King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to put on her royal crown and come stand before the people, so that everyone could see her beauty (Esther 1:10-11). Queen Vashti, for reasons of her own, refused to come, and King Xerxes was angry (verse 12)—his own wife was defying him in front of all the men of Susa. The royal wise men advised the king that Vashti's humiliating behavior could not go unpunished because, if the king let the incident slide, all the women in the kingdom would have contempt for their husbands, thinking, "If Queen Vashti can get away with disrespecting her husband, so can I" (verses 16-18).

King Xerxes responded to the situation by sending out a royal edict saying that a) Queen Vashti was never going to be allowed to come before him again, and b) the king would give her crown to another woman worthier than she (Esther 1:19-21). So Queen Vashti was banished, and a search began for a new queen to replace her. Many beautiful virgins were chosen from the kingdom and among them Esther, the Jewish girl. In God's providence, Esther was eventually made queen in Vashti's place. She was the right person in the

right place at the right time, for it was through Esther's exalted position in the palace that God later preserved His people from annihilation.

According to the Aggadah (or Haggadah), a book of Jewish tradition and folklore, Vashti was the daughter of the Babylonian king Belshazzar. The night that Belshazzar was killed (Daniel 5), Vashti was captured by the conquering Persians and given to Xerxes as a wife. According to various legends, Vashti's refusal to appear before the king was due to modesty (she was told to appear nude), fear for her husband's life (she figured she would be mobbed by the drunken crowd and the king would be killed), loathing for her husband (whom she considered to have non-royal blood), or the fact that she herself had leprosy. Another tradition says that Vashti was not simply banished from the king's presence but was executed. It's important to note that none of these details are in the biblical account, and there is no way to confirm their veracity.

The book of Esther is the only book in the Bible that does not mention God at all. But He is there nonetheless, evident in His divine providence. Every aspect of the story of Esther, from Queen Vashti's disobedience to Haman's wicked motives to Esther's beauty to Mordecai's wisdom, work together to save the Jewish people. The hand of God is evident throughout the book, which teaches a powerful lesson: even the actions of the wicked are governed by God in a master plan to do good for His chosen people and for all who trust in Him (see Romans 8:28).