

# ESTHER: A WOMAN OF STRENGTH AND DIGNITY

## There She Goes . . . Miss Persia!

*Esther 1:1–2:7*

SEARCHING  
THE  
SCRIPTURES

STUDY



### LET'S BEGIN HERE

Most days begin rather predictably: the alarm clock rings, we get out of bed, and then we flip on the light to start our morning routine. Yet God is a specialist in working His sovereign plan through the mundane . . . even through the most secular of people and situations.

When King Ahasuerus (also known as Xerxes in the New Living Translation), happy from much wine, ordered Queen Vashti to show her beauty to his guests, he met only her rejection. She refused to parade herself before a roomful of inebriated men (Esther 1:12).

In this study, Chuck Swindoll teaches us how God orchestrated this moment of marital friction into a melodious movement of providence to exalt an ordinary Jewish woman. We'll gain wisdom and confidence knowing that God's plans can never be frustrated no matter how carnal or godless the leaders of this world may be.



### YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

In this *Searching the Scriptures* study on [Esther 1:1–2:7](#), we will observe how the author moves our gaze from the royal family of the Persian Empire to an orphaned Jew, who “was beautiful of form and face” (Esther 2:7 NASB). You may want to grab your copy of our previous study, “God’s Invisible Providence,” to reference dates, Chuck’s book chart, or your notes on key terms in Esther.

## Quotable

*God is a specialist in turning the mundane into the meaningful.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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### Searching the Scriptures Tip

The narratives in the Bible can be a feast for our senses. In his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*, Chuck tells us how to study the Bible using the method he's employed throughout his ministry. The steps are observation, interpretation, correlation, and application. In observation, he encourages us to read with our eyes, ears, nose, hands, and tongue. Engage all your senses! Make it fun. Make it real. Sense the emotion. Slow down and enter the world of the author. As you observe *Esther 1:1–2:7*, notice the designs on the gold goblets, touch the linen curtains on the silver rings, smell the perfumes, and feel the heartache of the young women taken from their homes.



### Observation: Reading Slowly

When we observe what the Bible says, we pay attention to the author's words—repeated words, conjunctive or disjunctive words, conceptual words, sensory words, and contrasting words. With these studies we want to help you read slowly and carefully as you observe God's Word. In narratives like our passage, authors use abstract ideas and then convey concrete words. With the abstract, the author *reveals* his intent in writing and how he *feels* about the subject. With the concrete, the author *illustrates* his intent.

### A Casual Glimpse into a Persian Palace—*Esther 1:1–9*

Read *Esther 1:1–9*. Verses 1–3 provide a snapshot of the time and place of the book and describe the characteristics of King Ahasuerus' reign. How do verses 5–8 relate to verse 4?

Read 1:9. Where was Vashti?



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### A Royal Conflict and a Royal Edict—Esther 1:10–22

In this section of the passage, the author described even more specifically the events of the king's party. Read Esther 1:10–22. What did Ahasuerus command, and how did Vashti respond?

What did Memucan advise the king to do after Vashti's refusal?

How did the king respond?

### A Lonely King and an Obscure Woman—Esther 2:1–7

The author then introduced the main character by connecting her story with the story of King Ahasuerus. Read *Esther 2:1–7*. What did the king's attendants propose to the king, and how did the king respond?



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Lastly, the author turned from the subject of all the young women being brought to Ahasuerus' harem to one woman in particular—Esther. Write down what verses 5–7 reveal about Esther.



### Correlation

We correlate a passage by comparing it with others in the Bible—in this case, the book of Esther with the book of Proverbs. While reading this first part of Esther, we may think, *Where is God?* But notice how the king made his decisions. He listened to Memucan and to nameless attendants (Esther 1:21; 2:4). Their advice pleased Ahasuerus, and he acted according to his pleasure. Even though no one can comprehend “all that goes on in the king’s mind” (Proverbs 25:3), “The king’s heart is like a stream of water directed by the LORD; / he guides it wherever he pleases” (21:1). God directed Ahasuerus—despite the king’s carnal desires—and influenced the outcome for His renown and for the good of His people.



### Interpretation: Understanding Clearly

Once we’ve read the author’s words, we then seek to understand what they mean. Because we likely live in a culture different from biblical cultures, we must avoid imposing our modern-day opinions on the Bible. Rather, we must try to think as the author thought. Sometimes interpreting a narrative is tricky because the author portrayed what happened without giving the direct meaning. So we must look for clues. Clues may be summary statements, authorial commentary, or simply the space the author devoted to a topic.

Look at the space the author devoted to the king’s banquet in *Esther 1:5–8*. What did the author emphasize here?



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Lest we think the queen was with Ahasuerus, the author revealed in Esther 1:9 that Vashti gave a banquet for the women. A historian named Herodotus, who lived in the same century as Esther, shared that a Persian once boasted to him, saying, “It is our custom in Persia to get our wives and mistresses to come and sit with us in the dining-room.”<sup>1</sup> What then are possible reasons for the king and queen to have given separate banquets in this book?

Sometimes the outcome of the event contains the reason for the author including the event itself. After the king listened to Memucan’s advice (Esther 1:16–20), what do we now learn about Vashti? Before reading ahead to chapter two, what do we now learn about Ahasuerus?

In Esther 2:16–17, Ahasuerus coronated Esther as queen in his seventh year of reign (c. 479 BC). So it took Ahasuerus four years from his edict against Vashti to find another queen. When Ahasuerus returned from his campaigns against Greece around 480 BC, he came back looking for a wife. In a sentence or two, record why the author included this information in Esther 2:1–4.

How do verses 1–4 relate to verses 5–7?



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The author could have simply written, “There was a young Jew named Esther who lived with her cousin Mordecai,” but he connected Mordecai and Esther with the exile. Remember the significance of the exile? The kingdom of Judah rejected God’s Word and did evil in God’s eyes, so God used Babylon to sack Jerusalem and exile the Judeans into slavery (2 Chronicles 36). Even through this act of judgment, God planted the seed of deliverance (Esther 2:5–6) for His people almost one hundred years after He exiled them. In God’s judgment and discipline, there’s still mercy.

In Esther 1:1–2:7, the author explained how Esther became a Persian queen. Remember that God’s name is not mentioned once, but His Spirit blew through the halls of the Persian courts and even revealed Himself in the whims of the king. Reflect on and record how God worked through Esther up to this point in the story.

### **Application: Receiving Personally**

In application, we allow “the Bible’s truths to grip us in areas that need attention and call us to action.”<sup>2</sup>

### **God’s Work in the World**

In Esther 1:1–2:7, we witness God working in the secular events of the Persian royals and through the carnal advice of the king’s servants. Have you recently been tempted to think God is absent in the judicial system of your land or in the dictates of the earth’s leaders? How may the book of Esther alter your understanding of God’s providence in our world? Perhaps you may even take a moment to pray for your government’s leaders.



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### God's Purposes in Moral and Marital Failures

We also witness God's purposes unfolding despite a king's sinful actions toward his queen. Sometimes we're tempted to think God can't use us because of our past. Do you think this? Do you dismiss people because of their failings? Write down what you've learned and what needs to change from any moral failure that comes to mind. Also, consider how you can encourage and restore those who've fallen morally.

### God's Lowly People in High Places

Chuck encourages us with the fact that God can exalt any ordinary Christian to a position of influence. Do you doubt God's ability to do great things with your life? No matter your background, education, or societal status, God has given Christians supernatural power to shine His light in a dark world. Some He will call to great positions in the world's eyes, but He calls us all to express His selfless love—something far greater and more powerful than being queen of Persia.



#### *Searching the Scriptures* Wrap-up

Write one sentence to *summarize* this lesson.

Write down one thing to *remember* about God.



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Write down one way you can *respond* to God's Word.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, thank You for recording Your sovereign ways in the book of Esther that we may see Your sovereign wisdom. Your providential hand still grips the vicissitudes of our world, moving some left and others right. I ask for an open heart to receive the lot You've chosen for me, for wisdom to do what I ought to do, and for courage to do what I know to do. I trust You and love You. In Jesus' name, amen.*

#### ENDNOTES

1. Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey De Sélincourt and John Marincola (New York: Penguin, 2003), Kindle 5803.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2016), 161.



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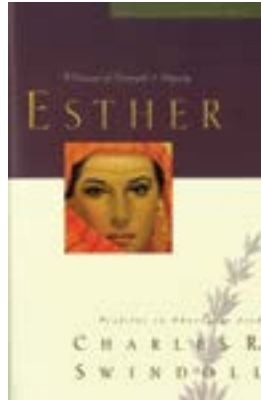
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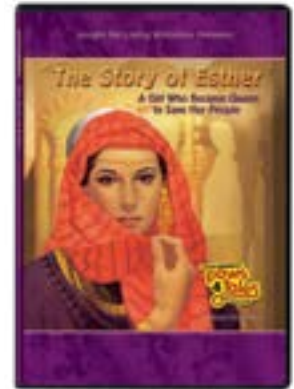
Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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