

Esther Chapter 1 – John Karmelich

1. What does the bible mean by submission? Practically speaking, how exactly do we submit? Why do wives have to submit to their husbands? After going through Chapter 1 of the book of Esther a bunch of times, that topic became the obvious title. I'll come back to it in a moment.
2. Welcome to a study of the Old Testament book of Esther. Let me give you some key facts first:
 - a) It is a short ten-chapter book. For my newcomers, the chapter breaks were added many centuries after it was written. My point is simply that this is a short book.
 - b) It is one of only two books in the bible that are specifically written about a woman.
 - c) There is a Jewish holiday specifically based on this book, called the "Feast of Purim".
 - i) I'll discuss that holiday when I get to the last lesson of this study.
 - ii) I'll share my favorite joke now, about most Jewish holidays: They can be summed up in three short sentences: They tried to kill us. We won. Let's eat. ☺
 - d) Most of you know that a group called the Babylonians once took the nation of Israel into captivity in its history. The Babylonians were later conquered by the Persians. A rough equivalent would be the Iranians (that is, "the Persians") conquering the Iraqis (that is, the "Babylonians"). Esther takes place during the time of the Persian Empire, which lasted for roughly two hundred years. This story takes place at a capital city of this empire.
 - i) While some Jewish people did go back to Israel before this story took place, most of them lived in this general area. The time was around 500 BC.
 - e) There are five key people in this book. The first is the king named Xerxes, who was the head guy of the entire empire. The main character is a girl named Esther, who we won't meet until Chapter 2 of this story. The third is Mordecai. He is an older cousin of Esther who raises her after her parents die. He is also a guard for the king. The fourth character is Haman. He is the villain of the story and we will meet him in Chapter 3. The fifth main character, who we will read about in Chapter 1 is the king's wife, Vashti.
3. Know that the book of Esther is also about how God works in the background. The two Jewish characters in this story are not among the Jews who went back to Israel after the captivity period was officially over. This book is about how God protects His people no matter where they are.
 - a) It is interesting to consider what Esther does not include: There is no mention of God, or any "biblical things". Many scholars over the centuries have questioned whether or not Esther belongs in the bible. Even Martin Luther, who started the Protestant reformation, was against including it. So if there is no mention of God or other biblical things, why is it here? The answer is that it is a wonderful example of how God works in the background of our lives for the sake of those willing to submit our lives to Him. In effect, this book is full of evidence how God manipulates our world for His glory.
 - b) I find that we don't usually see how God works things in our lives out except in hindsight. That doesn't mean we ignore Him as we go through life. It just means as we watch world history unfold, as well as the events of our lives, one can see how the "hand of God" was involved in working out life, ultimately for His glory.
 - c) It is also interesting to consider the book of Esther as if it was a chess game between God and Satan. Think of Satan saying to God, "check" when the villain of the story, Haman organizes a plot to kill all of the Jewish people living throughout the Persian Empire (which includes the land of Israel.) God responds with "checkmate" by having Esther become queen and by her actions, stopping this plot. (This idea this story as a chess game was taken from Chuck Swindoll's book on Esther).
 - i) In summary, Esther is a wonderful story about having the courage to stand up and do the right thing. It is about how God can use anyone for His glory. It is about how God works out the events of history and our lives ultimately for His glory.

4. OK John, let's suppose I've already read the book of Esther and know the story. Why should I study these lessons on this book? What is there to understand for the Christian by reading this?
 - a) First of all, it is not to be an expert in world history. I'm going to give a lot of historical facts in this lesson, not so much that we can learn more about world history, but simply as proof that the bible is the word of God and it is historically accurate.
 - b) It is not a requirement for a Christian to know the details of Esther in order to say, believe that Jesus died for our sins. It is as if the writer of the book of Esther assumes the reader is already someone who believes in God. Here is a story that teaches wonderful lessons on how to live our lives as believers in God based on how Esther and her cousin Mordecai view the God the bible. Because of their willingness to trust in God and submit to Him, He used them in a mighty way that has been studied throughout history.
5. Let me talk for a moment about who wrote the book of Esther. It is unsigned, so we don't know for sure. Speculation is Mordecai wrote it, as he had detailed knowledge as a guard of the palace where this story took place. This book is full of details that can be historically verified as well as other names that only someone who was living around that time would know.
 - a) Others speculate that Nehemiah wrote it, as he lived not long after this event, and he too worked in the king's palace during the time of the Persian Empire.
 - b) The truth is, no one knows for sure. I would bet on Mordecai, but again we don't know.
6. Now let me talk a little about Chapter 1 of the book of Esther. As I stated in my introduction, this chapter gets into the specific issue of "submission". This chapter gives some examples of what God desires of us in terms of our submission before Him as well as submission to each other.
 - a) To explain, first know that Esther herself is not mentioned until the second chapter of the book. Chapter 1 is about the fall of the queen of Persia named Vashti. She is an innocent victim in this story. She gets dethroned from being queen for failing to obey a king's bad order of wrongful submission. We'll discuss what that order was later in this lesson.
 - i) Remember that God judges all people fairly. If what she did in this chapter was the right thing (and I believe it was), God will judge her accordingly.
 - b) The point is whether it was fair or not, God wanted her out of the way so Esther could be the main character of this story. In Chapter 1, Vashti gets dethroned and possibly killed for failing to obey a king who was drunk when he gave an unfair submission order.
 - i) Just like in real life, innocent people get hurt, sometimes for God's plan to take place. The story of Queen Vashti is one of multitudes of stories of people who were innocently hurt in order for God's will to be done. If there was no judgment, for our lives this world we be a very unfair place to live in.
 - c) One of the main issues that I am going to discuss in this chapter is about wives submitting to husbands. This is a concept practiced in the Old Testament and explained in the New. The important idea to get across here is that such a concept does not mean that a wife is to blindly do whatever the husband orders her to do. To use a simple example, if a husband demands that his wife steal or murder for him, such a command does not have to be obeyed because it violates God's laws for our lives.
 - i) In this chapter, the king in a drunken state demands that the queen parade around in front of his guests to show off her beauty. Know that for a woman to go around unveiled in that society in public was considered a sin. To obey a drunk husband and then giving a sinful command is not an example of biblical submission.
 - ii) So what is submission? It is about accepting the husband's decisions as authority when it comes to family decisions. Even if the wife thinks something is a bad idea, the point is the husband is accountable to God. A wife has to trust that God will deal with whatever bad decisions the husband has made. It is a way of learning to think, "It is not my job to fix my husband, but it is God's job." What if my husband is not a believer? The answer is to know that God is aware that you are a believer and He will also guide your husband for your sake and His sake if we trust Him.

7. Time to start: Esther Chapter 1, Verse 1: This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush:
- a) In the King James translation (and others) instead of the word Xerxes, the word used for the Persian king's name is Ahasuerus. That is a transliteration from the original language. To put it simply, Ahasuerus is a title for a king, much like the title "Pharaoh or Caesar". The king's actual name is Xerxes. If you read through history books or even "Wikipedia", this guy is listed under "Xerxes the First" or simply "Xerxes I".
 - i) OK, now that we all know that bit of historical trivia, why should I care? Simply because this is one of the main characters in the story.
 - b) The next bit of historical information to learn is to grasp how big was this empire. It went from Egypt on the west end to India on the east end. The word Cush is an ancient title for Egypt and the Sudan region. The empire also went north to include most of what is today Iran and Iraq as well as Israel.
 - i) Roughly a century earlier, the Babylonians conquered the nation of Israel and most of them were deported over 1,000 miles away to what is today, Iraq. At this time, over a hundred years later, Jewish people were all over this empire. During the time of Daniel, (before Esther) the Persians (again "think Iran") conquered Babylon (again "think Iraq"). Therefore, those Jewish people that lived in the Babylonian Empire had their descendants living as part of the Persian Empire.
 - ii) To give you an idea of the size of this empire, it was estimated there were roughly 1,000,000 Persians and 18,000,000 people living in this empire. This empire was divided up into "provinces". As of the time of Esther, there were 127 provinces.
 - iii) One more bit of trivia about the Jewish people as of this date. This was written after the time that the order was given that Jewish people may return to the land of Israel if they desired. That is what the book of Ezra focused on. Again, most Jewish people chose to remain where they were and didn't go back to Israel. The book of Esther took place before the command was given to rebuild the City of Jerusalem, which is the focus of the book of Nehemiah. In effect, the book of Esther takes place between "Chapter 6 and Chapter 7" of the book of Ezra.
 - c) OK, enough background trivia. Time to get on with our story.
8. Verse 2: At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa,³ and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present.
- a) The king of this Persian Empire was in Susa, where this story takes place. Note that Susa was just one of several capital cities. The point of these verses is that the king organized a big meeting for the officials that ruled over all 127 provinces. Also know that the Medes and the Persians were two separate groups that "co-ruled" over this empire.
 - b) Again, we have a lot of actual historical facts to cross-reference with this event. The short version is the king was preparing for war. There is a famous war that took place against certain Greek cities that were rebelling against the Persian Empire. According to Greek history, the Persians organized a multi-million man army and navy to attack these Greek cities. The interesting thing is that the Persians lost the battle badly. The empire would not end for roughly another hundred years, but this war was a major loss to the empire.
 - i) For you movie buff's, the movie "300" (1997) is roughly based on that war.
 - ii) So why am I telling you all of this stuff? Because this banquet for the Persian leaders was preparation to make plans for that war.
 - c) So why are all of these bits of historical trivia in the bible? Mainly to give a background setting as to what was God's plan for the Jewish people during "historical events". It is a way of saying, "God is in the background working out His plans for mankind through the events of history". Remember God is not mentioned in Esther. However, as one studies this book, one can see the hand of God work throughout the story. Meanwhile Verse 4.

9. Verse 4: For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty.⁵ When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest, who were in the citadel of Susa.⁶ The garden had hangings of white and blue linen, fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and other costly stones.⁷ Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king's liberality.
- a) Remember that this "180 days" was not a big party. It was a planning meeting to organize a large army in preparation for war. At the end of the 180 days, the king gave a big seven-day banquet. Visualize a large group of guys getting together to plan a war. After lots of planning and discussing strategy and the necessity for this war, it was "party time".
 - b) The reason all of these materials are listed is to show the vast wealth of the empire. It is as if to say to all of these participants, "Look at the physical benefits one receives for being a part of this empire. We can't let the Greek's change that. If you want all of these riches to continue, come join me in my campaign to conquer these rebellious Greeks."
 - c) So where did all of this wealth come from? Part of it was the fact that this Empire ruled over a large area of land and brought back materials to the king. A contributing factor was that the Babylonians captured and "sacked" God's temple in Israel that was full of gold. The Persians inherited much of that gold that was in or part of that temple.
 - d) The underlying issue of all of these materials is of course you may think that having lots of stuff is "it" in life. However, God has other plans. One has to remember that the heroes of our story (Esther and her cousin Mordecai who raised Esther) lived in this city. That means Mordecai benefited simply from being a servant in this city. Remember that our main characters were not among the Jewish people who went back to Israel, but lived in this city and effect served that king. The main purpose of all of these details is to help us understand what was the setting that our main characters had to live around.
 - i) All of these details about the setting of the banquet give support to the idea that whoever wrote Esther had detailed knowledge of the Persian Empire at that time and location. That gives support that either Mordecai or another official probably with a Jewish background wrote this book.
10. Verse 8: By the king's command each guest was allowed to drink in his own way, for the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man what he wished.
- a) To put it simply, the king and the men who were organizing and planning this war got really drunk. Visualize a bunch of guys preparing for months for war. Then when the plans were finally set in place, the whole group has a big party where they all sit around, tell stories to each other and, well, "get stoned out of their minds" with alcohol.
 - b) Meanwhile, it's time to meet the other main character of Chapter 1 of this book.
11. Verse 9: Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes.
- a) When all of these men traveled to Susa for this planning meeting, they did bring their wives and their children along. The point here is while the men were having their own seven day "drunk fest", the women had their own party. It is my personal guess that while the men's party was drunk and lewd, the woman's party was more proper.
 - b) Here is where the plot thickens, beginning in the next verse:
12. Verse 10: On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him--Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carcas--¹¹ to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at.
- a) Imagine a bunch of men sitting around getting drunk. There were probably at some point comparing stories about the women in their lives. I visualize a drunken king standing up and saying, "You want to see beautiful? Let me parade my wife around for all of you".

- b) The verse mentioned seven eunuchs by name. To those who don't know what a eunuch is, it is a man who has had "surgery" so he can't have children. (I'll leave the thought of that procedure to one's imagination ☺). So why are these seven eunuchs listed by name? I think it is to show that whoever wrote Esther, did have detailed knowledge of the inner workings of the king's palace at that time. We don't read of any more details about these eunuchs, so it is best to let it go at that. Let me put it another way: If a bunch of men are having a big party, there has to be servants there to keep bringing the drinks.
- i) The plot point being made here is that the king gave the order for the queen to come parade around in front of the men.
 - ii) History is full of speculation at that point. Some stories say that the queen was ordered to parade around naked for the guys. Again, I visualize a bunch of guys sitting around telling stories of beautiful women they have encountered. Then I picture a very drunk king saying, "You want to see beauty? Let me show you beauty. Get Vashti over here". The details are also left to our imagination.
13. Verse 12: But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger.
- a) Here is where the plot thickens. When the servants of the king went to go fetch his wife, she refused to obey his order. One possible reason seven eunuchs were sent was to show the seriousness of the order given by the king.
 - b) Remember that the king was drunk at this time. When the queen refused to obey this command, the king went into a violent rage. Personally, I don't blame the queen for not obeying the command. Imagine the danger the queen felt having to enter this room full of very drunk men. The queen may even have understood that this was a death sentence to disobey the command, but she correctly feared for her life anyway, to enter that location.
 - c) OK, it's time to come bring up the topic of wives and obedience. To start this discussion, one has to understand that to disobey a king's order was a death sentence. That applied to the queen as well as the commoner's. As bad as the order was, it was literally a death sentence to disobey that order.
 - i) Let me describe what the New Testament says about wives and obedience: "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything." (Ephesians 5:23-24 NIV).
 - ii) There are a lot of people who think that Paul was a male chauvinist because he wrote this passage about the wives being obedient to their husbands. If anything, Paul is tougher on men, because he held men to a higher standard. The next line of Ephesians says that husbands out to love their wives as much as Jesus loved the church. This is Paul saying in effect, "Women, let your husbands be the leaders of the household and let the men loves their wives more than they love themselves."
 - iii) Before I discuss what submission is and is not, let me start with the men. The way a husband should properly (biblically) treat a wife is to constantly show one's wife how much he loves her and cares for her. Many martial arguments can be avoided simply if the man thinks, my wife's rights are more important than mine. Even if I think I am right in this situation, I will let her have her way and say I am sorry.
 - a) I know that in my own life I could have saved lots of grief if I could learn to love my own wife as much as Jesus loved the church.
 - iv) To put it another way, women would be much more willing to be submissive to their husbands, if the husbands acted in way like Jesus would with his disciples. Think of the arguments that could be avoided if a man simply thinks, "I love my wife so much, that I will concede the point about how I acted here just to have peace in our relationship". If men can learn that peace is better than being right, it will bring many an argument to an end.

- d) OK, now that I've beaten up the men for several paragraphs, it is time to talk about the tough topic of women and submission. It is easy for wives to say, "Well, if my husband acted like the way God wants him to act, it would be easy to submit to him." I could just hear many women say, "But you don't know what a mess my husband is. How is it I am to submit to his will, when he is such a jerk all the time?"
- i) The idea is to remember the fact that one's husband is "God's problem, not yours." Yes the wives have to live with them every day, but one forgets that God has to live with us men as well. When a husband makes a decision that I (speaking as if I was a wife) don't like, the easy thing to do is to lash out at my husband. The hard part is to say or think, "I can't fix him or change him. He is God's problem".
 - ii) I am reminded of a line from the movie, "My big fat Greek wedding". Here is the advice one wife gave to a bride to be: "The husband is the head of the family, but the wife is the neck. The neck can turn the head." That means submission as the husband's authority is final, but the wife can influence what He does. It is the idea that a wife can question or influence a family decision, but at the same time, a wife has to accept the man's decision as final. I have to admit, that movie line is one of the best definitions of submission that I have heard.
 - iii) Let me try this one more way: If two people are together, one has to lead. I am reminded of a joke where a guy was questioning two women who were dancing together: The question was, "When you two slow dance together, who leads? Do you decide that ahead of time? The idea of that joke is that someone has to lead, and for better or worse, God has picked the men to be the family leaders.
 - iv) What about abusive situations? This does not apply. What about when a husband asks to do something that is illegal or sinful? This does not apply. When it does apply to is the concept of surrender of our wills. Just as the man is accountable to God with his life, so is a wife accountable to trusting her husband for his decisions.
 - v) One more tacky reference and I'll move on. I was once taught that one should go into a marriage with their eyes "wide open" and stay in a marriage with one's eye's "half shut". I remember a famous pastor was talking to his daughter prior to her getting married. He said, if you want to back out, I will support you all the way until you say "I do". After that, I will do all I can to save the marriage and for you my daughter to honor your husband as being in charge of your life.
- e) OK John, interesting lecture. What does it have to do with Queen Vasti? Did she violate this rule of not submitting to her husband or not? This question has been debated among scholars for millenniums. My personal view is that if any husband asks his wife to parade around in front of his friends while being drunk, the wife should not have to obey that order. Yes it cost her title and possibly her life. I'll argue she did the right thing.
- i) As an epilogue, we'll read in the next chapter that the king later regretted the decision he made about her at this moment in time.
 - ii) Going back to historical records, this king and queen had a son together and that son became the next king of the Persian Empire. Maybe one of the reasons the king regretted the decision to eliminate her was because of their mutual son.
 - iii) It may help here to understand a little bit about Persian law. Once the king makes a decision to do something, he is not allowed to change his mind. Any law made during this empire was "non-revocable". That is key issue later in this book.
14. Verse 13: Since it was customary for the king to consult experts in matters of law and justice, he spoke with the wise men who understood the times¹⁴ and were closest to the king--Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan, the seven nobles of Persia and Media who had special access to the king and were highest in the kingdom.
- a) Speaking of dealing with "non-revocable" laws, this leads to the next issue of this chapter. Here we have the king's top advisers consulting with the king about the queen.

- b) So why are these seven men listed here by name? Part of the answer is to show that the writer of Esther had intimate knowledge of what was going on in the king's court. It is also to show it is not the same names as the seven eunuchs named earlier in the chapter.
 - c) For what it is worth, the number seven in the bible is associated with "completeness". Just like the fact the God finished working on the seventh day, whenever one sees seven of something in the bible, it is usually a sign of something being "complete". Earlier, we probably had the complete number of eunuchs who were in charge of the banquet. Here we have the complete number of "head guys" who have direct access to the king.
 - d) Now I want you to notice the phrase, "wise men". This is not a bunch of men who are considered to be smart. This was a special classification of people. If you are familiar with the book of Daniel, there were "wise men" in that book as well. Think of them as a bunch of men who have detailed knowledge of the Persian Empire. They are trained to help the king make good decisions about how to run the Empire.
 - i) Also remember again that any decision made by the king is non-revocable. That is why having "wise men" around is to help the king with decisions.
 - ii) The question of the moment is "What shall we do with Queen Vashti? She refused to obey the command to parade around in front of the king when ordered to.
15. Verse 15: "According to law, what must be done to Queen Vashti?" he asked. "She has not obeyed the command of King Xerxes that the eunuchs have taken to her."
- a) In effect, this is the first recorded story of "women's liberation" in the bible. For these men, the issue was about submission. Remember that while the leading men of the entire Persian Empire were gathered for six months to plan a war, their families traveled with them. The point is what Queen Vashti did, would quickly and easily be known around the entire empire based on this large gathering.
16. Verse 16: Then Memucan replied in the presence of the king and the nobles, "Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes. ¹⁷ For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say, 'King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.' ¹⁸ This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen's conduct will respond to all the king's nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord.
- a) To set the scene here, visualize the king talking to his top advisors. That would be the seven "wise men" mentioned earlier. One of these "wise men" (I'll discuss how wise he actually was in a moment) said that "if we don't do something about her, word would get out around the entire empire that women don't have to obey their husbands."
 - b) The fear of these men is not that women need to "stay home and be pregnant". The fear is that that they would not obey the husband's authority as head of the household. In effect, this is about biblical submission. This comes back to the idea that someone has to lead, and the question is effect, "Do the men lead in the families or not?"
 - c) So is the concept of women being equal with men a bad thing? That is not the issue at all here. This is not about whether or not a woman can do what a man can do. Even in the historical records of the Persian Empire, there have been women who have done great things. The issue is not equal rights. The issue is who will lead the family? John, are you saying a woman can't lead a family better than her husband? No. My point is that God called men to lead and when they fail to do so, women often have to step up.
 - i) To use Christian churches as an example, there are many churches that have women leaders and women elders. I find that often it is case simply because of a lack of men willing to step up and take on those roles. I am well aware of the fact that the bible calls on men to lead. I know of many churches that have ordained women pastors and ordained women elders. Often I find it is that case, simply due to a lack of men willing to step up and be a leader in that organization.

- ii) Of all the "debatable" issues within Christianity I have to admit, the issue of women leaders, teachers and elders doesn't bother me as much as other things. That is because I know that someone has to fulfill these roles, and if there is a lack of male leadership, women will step up to the plate and fulfill these roles. I have seen too many men complain about women leading in church, but when it comes down to doing something about it, the men don't step up and lead as they should.
 - d) OK John, so what does all of this have to do with our story? First, remember that these "wise men" and leaders of this empire, were not Jewish. Yet, somehow they did get the idea that men were to be the leaders of the family. They see the action of Queen Vashti as a breakdown of that leadership. Again, whether or not what Queen Vashti did has been debated throughout history. The fear here (deservedly so or not) is whether or not the family structure would suffer based on what the queen did at this point.
 - i) In many ways, I see this as a classic overreaction by a government bureaucracy. I was correctly taught many years ago that when a big organization tries to fix a problem, they often "use a sledgehammer, when a screwdriver is all they need." The point is about over-reacting to a problem is the issue here.
 - ii) In hindsight, the best reaction this group would have would be to write a decree something like, "When it comes to ruling over one's family, the male is to lead. However, if a male is drunk or doing something harmful or potentially harmful to his wife, she should not have to be in submission to that decision. However, if the men are just trying to do what they believe is right, the wives are to respect that decision as the leader of their family."
 - e) I'd like to pause and talk for a moment about families where there is no male leader, or if the wife is divorced. The bible does not say one has to be married. Even when it comes to divorce, I don't believe one is condemned to hell for getting divorced. The issue is about who God calls to be a leader in families between men and women.
 - i) What I am saying here is that if there is no male figure to run the household, then the women is to make the best decisions possible. I'm not saying a woman with a child has to immediately run out and go get married again. I am just saying that God ordained marriage so that the men are to be the leaders. Even in this ancient society that was not Jewish, they understood that concept.
 - ii) What is interesting to consider is that if one looks at crime statistics, young men, who don't have a good father figure in their lives, commit most crimes. Statistics on this issue run across racial lines. In other words, statistically speaking, crime has nothing to do with race, but is mostly about men who lack good male role models growing up as how to properly act. In effect, it is about a breakdown of the family structure in society and crime is often the result of that breakdown.
 - f) Meanwhile these "wise men" are still deciding what to do with Queen Vashti.
17. Verse 19: "Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she.²⁰ Then when the king's edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest."
- a) Remember how I said that governments traditionally give orders that over react to their problems? Here is a perfect example. Instead of just saying that the queen has to obey her husband outside of potentially abusive situations (like when he is drunk), this group of "wise men" issue a decree that all women throughout the empire have to obey their husbands when they give an order.
 - b) These verses sort of make me wonder if the "wise men" had problems being leaders in their own household and now create this order for all women to obey their husbands.

- c) It is interesting to consider how difficult it would be to carry out this order. First, think about the issue of multiple languages and the vast size of this empire. This order not only has to be communicated throughout the empire, but the message has to be translated into every language that is used throughout this large territory.
- i) Next think about how difficult it would be to enforce this law. Does this mean there would be a police force that goes house to house to see whether or not wives are actually obeying their husbands in their family? What if a husband is complaining that his wife won't listen to him? Does he now go to the town official and say to them, "My wife won't obey me? What is to be her punishment? Personally, I see the humor in the concept of trying to practically enforce this decree.
 - ii) Again, remember that in this society, laws are not revocable. Therefore, once the king makes this decree, it is permanently on the books.
 - iii) So why did the king agree to this order? After all, he knew he was drunk at that time and when he sobered up, he must have reconsidered it. Again the bigger fear was about the breakdown of the family structure. This is not a "Jewish thing", but simply a fear that the natural order of the family structure was breaking down. The king overreacted to this problem and issued this decree throughout the land.
- d) OK John, this is all interesting very ancient history. How does it affect me? It is about understanding why God commands men to lead. It is not that God considers men to be better than women. It is simply about the fact that someone has to lead.
- i) So why not let every family decide for themselves who should lead? Why does men have to be the leader in every situation that involves men and women? Do we do it this way, simply because "God says so?" I suspect that the reason God ordained it this way, is simply because He knows what is best for our society.
 - ii) Again, I think of the statistics about crime in our society. In most cases men who commit crime lack good father figures in their lives. Those statistics show that racial background is not a factor. Of course there are exceptions, but for the most part, that is the common ground among men who are in jail.
 - iii) Remember that to live the Christian life is about submitting to His will. It is about thinking and saying in effect, "I believe the bible is the Word of God and I will use it as my authority of how to best live out my life." The issue of letting men be the leaders in a family (when a male leader is there) is an example of following what God desires for our society. It was true for the Persian Empire and it is true for us living today as well. Therefore, a wife submitting to her husband's will is also about trusting in God's decision as to how a household is to function.
- e) Meanwhile, we left these "wise men" writing an irrevocable law that all women are to respect their husbands. As an example of this law, Queen Vashti was to be deposed and a new queen was to be put in place for what she did.
- i) Was it fair for the Persian leaders to dethrone the queen? No. As I have stated earlier, sometimes God allows bad things to occur ultimately for His glory.
 - ii) Remember that a purpose of this story is to show how Esther rose to be queen of this empire. In order for Esther to be queen, the current queen had to be removed. God allowed this tragedy to occur in order for Esther to become the next queen.
 - iii) Again, this doesn't excuse Vashti's removal as queen. That is why I take comfort in the fact that God will judge all people fairly. Even if my interpretations about the actions of the king and queen, I can sleep well at night knowing that there is a God who will judge all people fairly, based on how they have lived their lives.
 - iv) Sometimes we just have to remember that eternity is a whole lot longer than the time frame of our lives on earth. Therefore, even if the king and these "wise men" did the wrong thing, there is a God who is still in charge of the world who works to "right the wrongs" that people commit.

18. Verse 21: The king and his nobles were pleased with this advice, so the king did as Memucan proposed. ²² He sent dispatches to all parts of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language, proclaiming in each people's tongue that every man should be ruler over his own household.
- a) These last two verses are simply about the execution of the king's order. I picture the king and the wise men debated about the decision. Apparently the council of this man named Memucan won out and the law was decreed.
 - b) The irrevocable order by the king was translated into all the languages of the empire, and I suspect men on horseback then delivered the message throughout the empire.
 - c) I was thinking about what it would be like for a typical commoner to read this. I visualize all the men of a town gathering around in a public square. Then a king's messenger reads this decree. The decree is in effect that all women must obey their husbands and that the husbands must rule over their wives.
 - d) So how should men react to this? Should they go beat their wives? Of course not. Should they go home and just tell their wives that they are in charge? That is probably how they reacted. I then picture most wives laughing and saying, "You want to lead? Here is the laundry that needs to be done. You can start by leading the family to wear clean clothes." The husband then says something stupid like, "I order you to do the laundry." Then the fight begins over who should do what chores. ☺
 - i) The point is simply that God calls men to lead. It doesn't mean dominate. It just refers to making the decisions over what should be done and who should be in charge of different aspects of running the family.
 - e) In this story, we don't get the results of this decree, other than the fact we do learn that the queen lost her role and possibly her life based on it. The story is here to remind us of the biblical principal that men are to be in charge. The challenge of pastors, priests and bible teachers is to explain exactly what that does and does not mean. Hopefully, I have done some of that here by explaining what is, and is not biblical submission.
 - f) Let me end with some final comment about submission:
 - i) I have watched some marriages survive simply based on the principal that a wife made the decision to be submissive to her husband without asking him to change. It is the realization by a wife that the husband is God's problem and not hers.
 - ii) I have also watched men learn to love their wives as much as Jesus loved the church. It is amazing to see what God can do when people simply think, "It is not up to me to fix or change my spouse. It is up to me just to trust God to guide my life and my spouse is His problem, not mine." The first step in fixing any problem is always about turning the issue over to God. From there, one can get help and even confront one's spouse on what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Learning to live by biblical standards is not for His sake, but for ours.
 - iii) Am I perfect at this? Hardly. I do learn what is the right thing to do, simply by studying my bible and learning what God expects of me. He never demands perfection of us. He does demand that we trust Him and rely upon His power in order to make a difference in our marriages and the world around us.
 - a) That reads like one of my closing prayers. Speaking of which:
19. Heavenly Father, it is difficult to deal with the biblical issue of submission. That is because we naturally desire to do our will and not yours. We don't want to turn our spouses, children or parents over to You, but we instinctively want to fix them ourselves. Help us to remember that we have You as our "power source" to guide our lives. Help us to remember that You not only know what is best for our lives, but that You desire to guide us for Your glory. Help us to let go of our fears and trust You to work our way through our lives. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.