

Esther 1:21-22

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/esth/esth-1/esther-121-22/>

Ahasuerus approves of Memucan's counsel. A message goes to every province of Persia in every language of its citizens, informing the people that Vashti is no longer queen, as well as declaring that men are the master of their own house.

In the previous section one of the wise men proposed an elegant political solution to Queen Vashti's defiance of the king's command to dishonor herself by performing for the men attending his lavish banquet. The proposal shifted the framing from "the king has been offended" to "all the men of Persia have been offended" and proposed a solution that immediately took Vashti out of the public view, without any abusive retribution to her person, while elevating something new for the people to be interested in: the selection of a new queen.

The king heard this proposal, and liked it:

This word pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed (v 21).

Now the king has a "cherry" to put on the top of his extensive, 180-day festival apparently intended to gain loyalty from his princes, and enthusiasm to carry out his policies. The "cherry" is that for the princes attending the festival as well as for men all over the vast Persian Empire, there will be an edict stating that every man should be the *master in his own house* (v 22).

At this point in history, each man was already the authority of his own house. So in one respect, this edict was a statement of existing fact. But in another way, this could be seen as cleverly playing to the egos of the men as well as to the importance of the wives, particularly the extent to which they appreciated their husbands. In this respect, it was a politically shrewd maneuver.

This plan seems both to pivot away from the king's drunken indiscretion in asking his queen to perform for the city's men, and also to raise morale among the male populace, among whom he will soon be conscripting a massive army to invade Greece. Thus now the princes and men of Susa will be honored by the king, and the king will decree that they should all be honored in their homes.

This word pleased the king and the princes, indicating that the king, along with his closest advisors and leaders, saw the political wisdom of the proposal. It elegantly pivoted away from the risk that the king's honor would diminish (which would be a threat to his position). It avoids the king reacting against the queen in a manner that was brutal, which would make him look weak. However, he would also look weak if he did nothing.

But now this episode is framed as the king acting decisively on behalf of all the men in his kingdom—men whom he would be asking to sacrifice treasure and lives for his ambitious impending campaign against Greece.

The plan was then implemented, *so he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province according to its script and to every people according to their language, that every man should be the master in his own house and the one who speaks in the language of his own people* (v 22).

That *he sent letters to all the king's provinces*, was likely consistent with the practice of new laws that went into effect in Persia—they would be announced throughout the kingdom. Thus this edict also becomes a culture-setting campaign. The *letters* were sent throughout the entire empire, to *all the king's provinces*. This shows that Persia was well-organized, with a deliberate governing structure.

It also shows that it was incredibly diverse, with many languages, with many forms of writing (*script*). The basic issue of the campaign was that *every man should be the master in his own house* (v 22).

That this plan was (apparently successfully) carried out could indicate a general insecurity among the men of Persia as to whether they were respected by their wives.

Scripture is consistent in advising women that the primary way they can love their husbands is by giving them respect—showing the deep-seated need (and attendant insecurity) that men have to be respected by the women in their lives. An example is:

“Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband.”
(Ephesians 5:33)

It is supportable to assert that one of the greatest fears men have is the fear of female rejection. It appears that Adam was with Eve when she was tempted and fell, and failed to intervene. As it states that Eve “gave also to her husband with her” and he ate as well (Genesis 3:6). Apparently Adam not only was fearful of intervening, but also of not eating (and displeasing Eve). Thus it seems this deep-seated need for female respect is a matter of design.

The plan proposed by the king's advisor Memucan appears to show deep insight into human nature, diplomacy, politics, and culture, justifying the description of he and his six companions as being “wise men who understood the times” (Esther 1:13). The plan appealed to all men, regardless of rank or status. And because the edict was attended without any consequences for noncompliance for women, it was in a sense acknowledging the high importance men place on being affirmed by women. In one respect, the edict was also a backdoor compliment to women as well.

In addition to the empire-wide edict proclaiming that *every man should be the master in his own house* it also added *and the one who speaks in the language of his own people* (v 22). It would seem an overly-obvious and irrelevant-to-the-main-point comment for the king to assert that people ought to speak their native language, as this translation seems to indicate. Another way this can be translated provides possible insight:

“...and every man should bear rule in his own house, and that *it* should be published according to the language of every people.”

It would seem that the main point is that the king’s command that *every man should be the master in his own house* is intended to be heard as well as spoken in the native language spoken by each person residing in the Persian Empire. The point seems to be that each person hear and understand the message.

In these verses, we observe the far-reaching consequences of a singular act of defiance in the royal court in refusal to an ill-founded, drink-induced demand of the king upon his queen, and the influence that wise advice can have upon the events of history.

This episode is set in a time after the Jews began to migrate back to Jerusalem. Their return began under Ezra in the reign of Xerxes I/Ahasuerus’s grandfather, Cyrus (Ezra 1:1). Only some Jews initially returned, many remained behind and continued to live in their new homes in Babylon. It has been about fifty-five years since Ezra led the first Israelites back to Jerusalem, but many Jews still remain in Babylon and other parts of the Persian Empire.

We will discover that God will use these circumstances to orchestrate salvation for those of His people who stayed behind and did not return to the Promised Land.

Biblical Text

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