

God's Providence: The Deposition of Queen Vashti

Esther 1:1-22 Rev. Donghyeok Kim

Ahasuerus Becomes King

Over the past two weeks, we have looked at the history of the Ancient Near East. The Southern Kingdom of Judah fell into idolatry, eventually lost its nation, and was taken captive to Babylonia. From that point on, national protection was gone, and their lives became a struggle for individual survival. Unlike other nations, holding a monotheistic faith while living in captivity in a foreign land was by no means easy for the Jewish people. Other nations had little resistance to serving other gods, because they often cross-worshipped them, and their gods did not forbid serving other deities or making idols. In fact, since their own gods were all idols anyway, being taken to another country posed no major issue for them.

However, the Jews were different. First of all, their God had no physical image, and Yahweh God strictly forbade worshipping foreign gods. Therefore, they always had to live in volatile, explosive situations. Furthermore, a nation that could understand and protect their faith no longer existed.

Thus, even in Babylonia, the threat associated with refusing idolatry always followed them. The Persian Empire was not much different—though it was an improvement compared to the Babylonian Empire.

Persia experienced consecutive defeats in its wars with Greece. After King Darius was defeated at the Battle of Marathon, the task of conquering Greece was passed down to his son, King Ahasuerus. Therefore, as soon as Ahasuerus became king, he held a banquet to strengthen internal unity. That banquet lasted for a full six months. This was because the banquet served a heavy political purpose in preparation for the critical war to conquer Greece, so not a single moment could be neglected. Moreover, to invite all the governors, officials, military commanders, and nobles from every region of the vast Persian Empire in order, that amount of time was truly necessary. In other words, it wasn't that everyone came at once and partied for six months, but rather that so many people came in shifts over six months. This is a clear example of how vast and wealthy the Persian Empire was.

The Bible explains that Persia was a great empire encompassing 127 provinces from India to Cush. And Ahasuerus reigned from the citadel of Susa. Today, the ruins of the Susa Palace are located at the southwestern end of the Zagros Mountains in Iran. Excavations began in the 1800s, revealing that it was an important city in the Elam region. Tremendous artifacts from various eras have been excavated, among which was the Susa Palace of the Persian era.

It was only natural for such a massive empire to conduct a six-month banquet to mobilize the collective strength of the entire empire in preparation for war. Afterwards, Ahasuerus also held a seven-day banquet for the people of Susa who had served and labored for the event. It was an astonishingly splendid and beautiful feast.

King Ahasuerus had a queen named Vashti. She seems to have been a queen of extraordinary beauty—even her name carries the meaning of "beauty." Perhaps because the king was in high spirits from the feast, he suddenly felt a desire to show off his queen. So the king summoned Vashti to come to the banquet and display her beauty before the people and officials.

Vashti's Refusal

However, for reasons unknown, the Bible records that she refused to obey. Generally, it is common knowledge that emotional changes occur more frequently in women than in men. This does not happen because women are inferior to men, but because God created men and women differently. Men generally have a greater interest in rational judgment, while women generally care more about emotional aspects. This manifests as a strength when raising children or helping those in need. Women easily empathize, which possesses an amazing power to heal and comfort the emotional wounds of others. On the other hand, men generally have lower empathy and tend to prioritize evaluating situations along with immediate interests.

For whatever reason, Vashti disobeyed King Ahasuerus's command. Since no one can truly know the inner details of a marital relationship, we cannot make definitive assertions, but Vashti's refusal of King Ahasuerus's command may have stemmed from an arrogant heart. We can find clues pointing to this when we look at the discussion that followed.

The King's Anger

The king, intoxicated with wine, likely had a very simple thought: he wanted to boast of his wife's beauty, the mother of the nation. So, in high spirits, he issued the order to bring the queen forth. In Jewish Talmudic records, one reason given for Vashti's refusal is that she was ordered to appear naked. However, looking at the Biblical account where she was instructed to come in full royal attire, that was likely not the case. The king simply wanted to show off his queen to the officials and people to establish his authority. But when she refused his command, his delight turned into burning rage.

Consulting the Wise Men

Thus, no matter how physically beautiful his wife was, the king could not tolerate being despised. He called together the wise men of the empire and asked how to handle this situation. These wise men were likely legal experts. Those who knew the laws of the empire gathered to discuss how to understand and resolve this matter. Even

as king, he could not simply depose the queen on a whim; there had to be a clear legal basis.

The Debate (Legal Justification for Deposing the Queen)

Therefore, the legal experts presented several grounds for deposing the queen. First, she sinned against the king. Disobeying the king's command was a grave offense—a major crime that could even carry the death penalty. Second, she sinned against all the officials and the people. Neither the officials nor the common people had many opportunities to see the queen, and they too likely wanted to see her beauty. Yet, she openly disappointed them all.

Above all, a scene unfolds where the legal scholars worry that the framework of the nation might collapse. Nations are built upon basic order, a system that operates similarly across all times and places. The foundation of Confucianism is also *Susin-Jega-Chiguk-Pyeongcheonha*—the principle that one must cultivate oneself, manage one's household, govern the country, and bring peace to the world. The absolute foundation of this is a stable family. For a family to stand firm, there must be order: the husband is the head, and when the wife obeys the husband, the family stands firm, which in turn stabilizes the nation. This was a debate filled with the philosophy of statecraft. In other words, Queen Vashti's wrong was perceived not merely as creating domestic discord or despising her husband, but as an act that brought disorder to the entire nation. For the Persian Empire, which was on the verge of war, this was something that could not be allowed to happen.

In fact, Persia must have felt immense pressure due to repeated failures in its Greek campaigns. Therefore, they absolutely had to conquer Greece in this upcoming major campaign. That is why King Ahasuerus went to great lengths to tighten internal control and foster unity. But right in the middle of this, the queen herself poured cold water on his efforts. They judged that if this incident were brushed under the rug, it would be difficult to hold the initiative in the upcoming war.

Indeed, in the Persian histories recorded by Herodotus, the queen of King Ahasuerus is depicted as wielding immense power. Although the name and circumstances differ from the biblical record, the existence of such records demonstrates that the queen played a crucial role in the empire.

The Decree Forbidding Vashti from Coming Before the King

Ultimately, through a royal decree, Vashti was forbidden from ever coming before the king again. Though phrased diplomatically, she was deposed from her position as queen. Had she been a commoner, she would have faced immediate execution or imprisonment, but because she was queen, she likely received an honorable punishment rather than physical detention. However, she had effectively lost her status as queen.

Decision to Select a New Queen

At that time, national law did not permit the king to remain alone. Having deposed the queen, he had to welcome a new one. Thus, today's passage concludes with the national decision to select a new queen.

The Beginning of God's Plan of Salvation

We do not know why Queen Vashti suddenly dug her own grave. We do not know whether she was simply unwise or if there was some other reason unknown to us. Perhaps she just felt like rebelling that day.

When we look at historical mistakes, they often don't stem from grand plans or profound reasons. Frequently, a decision made simply based on the mood of the day leads to catastrophic outcomes, because human life hinges on the state of the human heart. Suppose someone takes a job interview and fails. We tend to feel deeply discouraged and lament our incompetence. But there is no need for that—it might simply be that the interviewer was in a bad mood that day. Most things in this world are decided by people, so circumstances can change drastically depending on a person's mood and state of mind.

Did Queen Vashti not know what would happen if she disobeyed the king's command? Of course she knew. Then why did she do it, knowing her position was at stake? Because people cannot fully explain why it happened, they simply think it occurred by chance. But we Christians do not think that way. God, who moves even the human heart and mood, brought this about with a clear purpose and intent. He moved the queen's heart so that she did not wish to obey the king, and He caused the king to suddenly want to show off his queen. In other words, this was not a random coincidence.

When I moved to Washington, I started working as a cleaner to make a living. The income was quite decent, and the hours were great—I could just finish in the morning and come home—so I was fairly content with the work. But suddenly, that cleaning job came to an end. Had it not been forcibly stopped, I might still be doing that work today. At the time, it felt shocking, almost like a disaster. However, the apartment manager suddenly deciding not to renew the contract was no accident. God's providence and plan were in the midst of it.

People experiencing such events might write them off as bad luck, or in the opposite case, view it as being lucky. But Christians must not see things as luck or chance; we must discover God's providence. "Why did God allow this to happen to me? What am I called to do in this moment within God's will?"—this is what we must carefully discern.

Vashti's refusal of the king's command became the very starting point that would save countless lives in the future. Worldly historians dismissed this event as a minor

incident, leaving it out of secular records. But for those who hold God's plan in their hearts, this event shines as a pivotal turning point, which is why it is recorded in the Book of Esther.

In Genesis 37:11, when Joseph shared his dreams, his ten brothers were merely jealous, but Jacob kept the matter in mind. Among the countless events that happen to us—things we could easily brush off saying "I was just unlucky!" or "Bad luck!"—we as Christians must keep these series of events in our hearts to understand their meaning and recognize God's providence. Hallelujah!

Pastor's Column

TMI (Too Much Information)

Visiting South Korea after eight years, it's clear that the country is now truly a fully developed nation. Cutting-edge technology is applied everywhere, making daily life incredibly convenient.

When I landed at Incheon International Airport, everything was state-of-the-art and meticulously maintained. It felt as though the entire space was managed with zero tolerance for flaws—as if even the slightest imperfection would be a major crisis. Cars drove by freshly washed and gleaming, while road signs flashed in bright, vibrant colors.

Everything was perfect, yet strangely, I felt uncomfortable. What was it? What was making me feel so uneasy? I had experienced a similar sensation during my visit eight years ago: an overwhelming flood of information rushing into my sight all at once. Road signs, painted lane markings, billboards—wherever I looked, every single space was packed tight. It felt as though leaving a space empty was considered a mistake. Even the vacant patches of land along the highways were filled with solar panels to ensure no space went to waste. Building windows were densely covered with advertisements, and traffic enforcement and surveillance cameras were stationed at every turn.

In contrast, America feels empty. The land is wide open, and there is space between buildings. Those open spaces are naturally filled with grass or greenery. That's why I never felt suffocated there—there was room to rest. Perhaps that's also why America felt so quiet and boring when I first arrived; my brain, which had been overworked processing endless streams of data in Korea, was suddenly left with far less information to handle.

At the end of the trip, I arrived at the airport with an anxious heart to check my bags. Every time a suitcase was placed on the scale, my heart pounded, fearing I might have overpacked and would need to take items out. Overpacking is much like forcing things into a space without proper organization. The real problem arises when you have to unpack. Once you've crammed everything together just right, reopening the bag makes it nearly impossible to restore that precarious order.

As I traveled throughout Korea, I found myself wishing, if given the authority, to tear everything down and start from scratch. I felt a strong urge to strip away the overwhelming road signs and redesign them with simplicity. I wanted to push back the tightly packed buildings and organize them neatly. Even in the newly built planned cities, rather than feeling simple and orderly, I sensed a design philosophy driven solely by the determination to process as much as possible.

Too much information exhausts us. The more signs there are on the road, the easier it is to lose our way. Sometimes, simplicity brings us peace. The same is true for our faith. Rather than striving for complexity or trying to excel at everything, it is often far better to live simply and faithfully with our eyes fixed solely on God. Korea is undoubtedly an advanced nation, but for someone simple like me, it feels a bit too complex to live in—though, of course, it has many wonderful things as well.