

WOMEN IN THE
BIBLE
RUTH &
ESTHER

2020
SESSION
4

WOMEN IN THE
BIBLE
RUTH &
ESTHER

PART 1

The book of
Esther



Ruth & Esther

שני שידוך בשני ימים האבי אבדו צאדיק וצדיק
עניך ברכות ברכותן עליושע ברכותם אף ברכות
הפנען צופה פני דמשק: ראשד גלד ברכות ורחל ראשד
כארנפן מלד אסיר ברכותם: ברכותם וברכותם אברה
בתעננים: ואת קומהד דמקה דמקה וישודד אשכולות:
אמרתי אעלה בתמר אתה בסנסון ויהינא שידוך באשכולות
הנסן ויהי אשד בתפוחים: וחסד בין טוב ויחך דודי
למשדךם דובב שפתי ישנים: אני דודי ועלי השמחה
דודי נאא השדך ליה בברכים: נשכמה לכה
פרדה הנסן פתח: וצי הרמנים
לך: הדודאם ויהי

לע קטנה ושרים אין לה מדענשה לא חטו ביום שידוך
בה: אסיהמה היא נבנה עליה טירת כסף ואסיהמה היא
עליה לוח ארז: אי היתה ושרי במדענות או הוית
עניו כמציאת שמים: כרם הוה לשלמה בבצל המון נון
והכרם לנטרים איש יבא בשריו אלה כסף: כרמי שלי
לי האלה לך שלמה ומאמם לנטרים אחריו: הושתב
לם חברים מקשבים לקולך השמיעני: ברת דודי ודמה
לצבי או לשופר האלים על חרי בשמים:



2 TIMOTHY 3:16

16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.

17 that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped

Both are historical narratives



Both are central to a major feast



Both are about people



Contrasts

Ruth was a Gentile woman from a pagan country who married a Hebrew.

Esther was a Jewish girl who married a pagan Gentile king.



Contrasts

Ruth was a destitute widow.

Esther was an orphan.



Contrasts

Ruth was a migrant
to Israel.

Esther was an exile
from Israel.



Contrasts

Ruth was a Gentile
living among Jews.

Esther was a Jew
living among Gentiles.



Contrasts

Ruth was a proselyte.

Esther influenced
many proselytes.



Contrasts

Ruth gleaned
in a field.

Esther ruled
in a palace.



Contrasts

Ruth was poor.

Esther was rich.



Contrasts

Ruth was a proselyte.

Esther influenced
many proselytes.



Contrasts

Ruth became
grandmother to a king.

Esther was descended
from one king and
married to another.



Contrasts

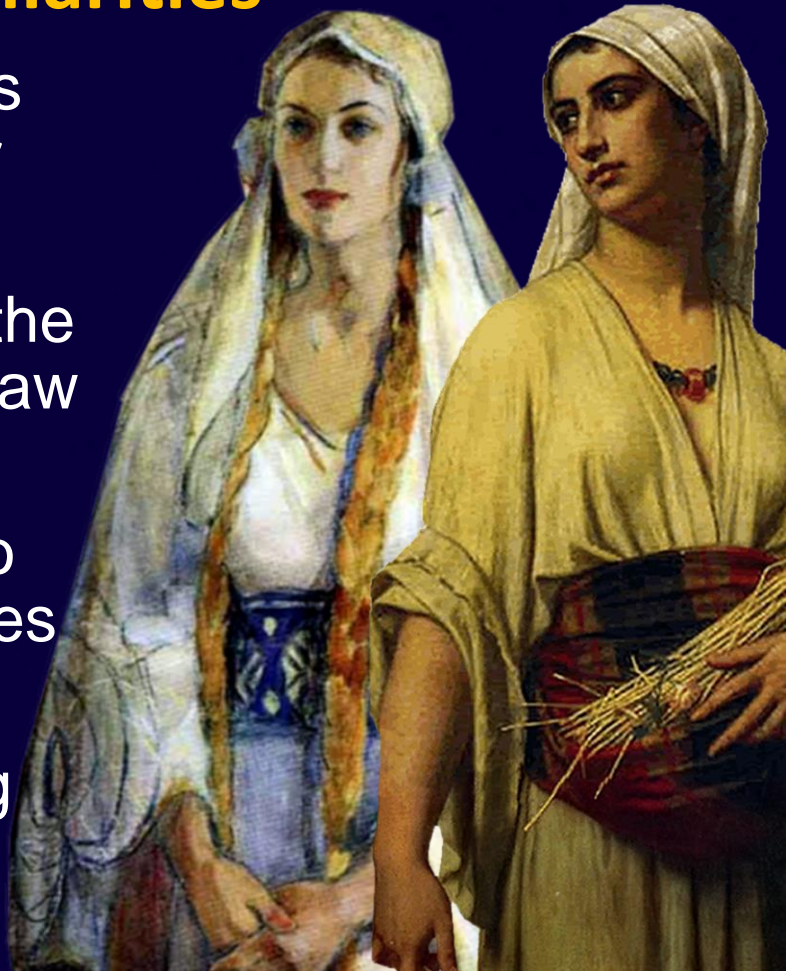
Ruth gave life.

Esther ordered death.



Similarities

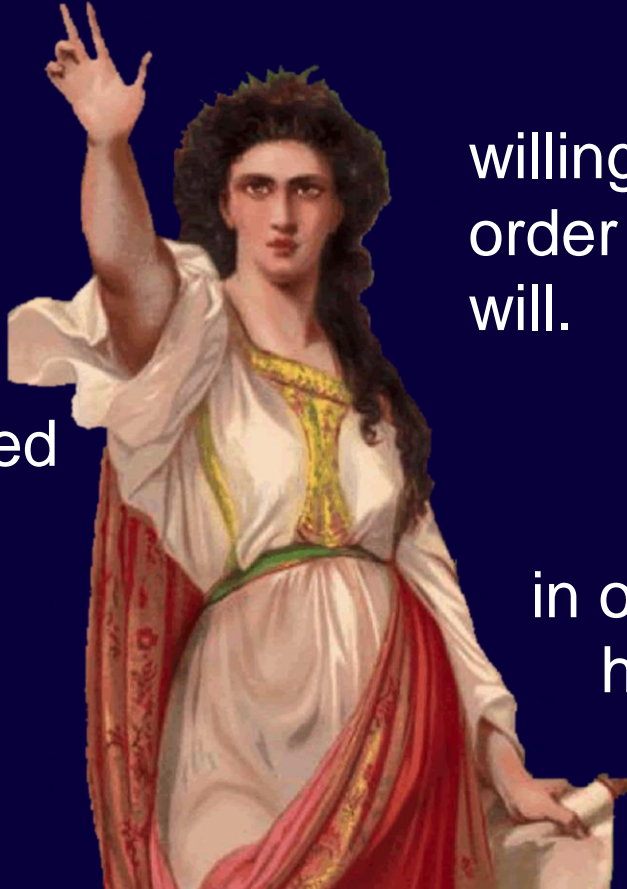
- Both were foreigners living in a land other than their own.
- Both found favor in the eyes of those who saw them.
- Both were taken into the homes of relatives
- Both had relatives who were a blessing others.



Both were women of integrity

Both were
submissive

Each dressed
in special
garments



willing to die in
order to do God's
will.

in order to make
her request.

Both brought joy to Humankind

God redeemed Ruth to
perpetuate the line of the
Redeemer, the Lord
Jesus Christ.

God saved Esther to
protect the nation
and the People
through whom
the Saviour
would be born.



Ruth & Esther

על שדה כעסו ישרים תאמי צדקה צדקה
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לצבי או לשפר האלים על חרי בשמים:



The book of

Esther

Esther takes place during the reign of King Xerxes I, the fourth King of Kings of the Achaemenid (Persian) Empire, who ruled from 486 to 465 BC.



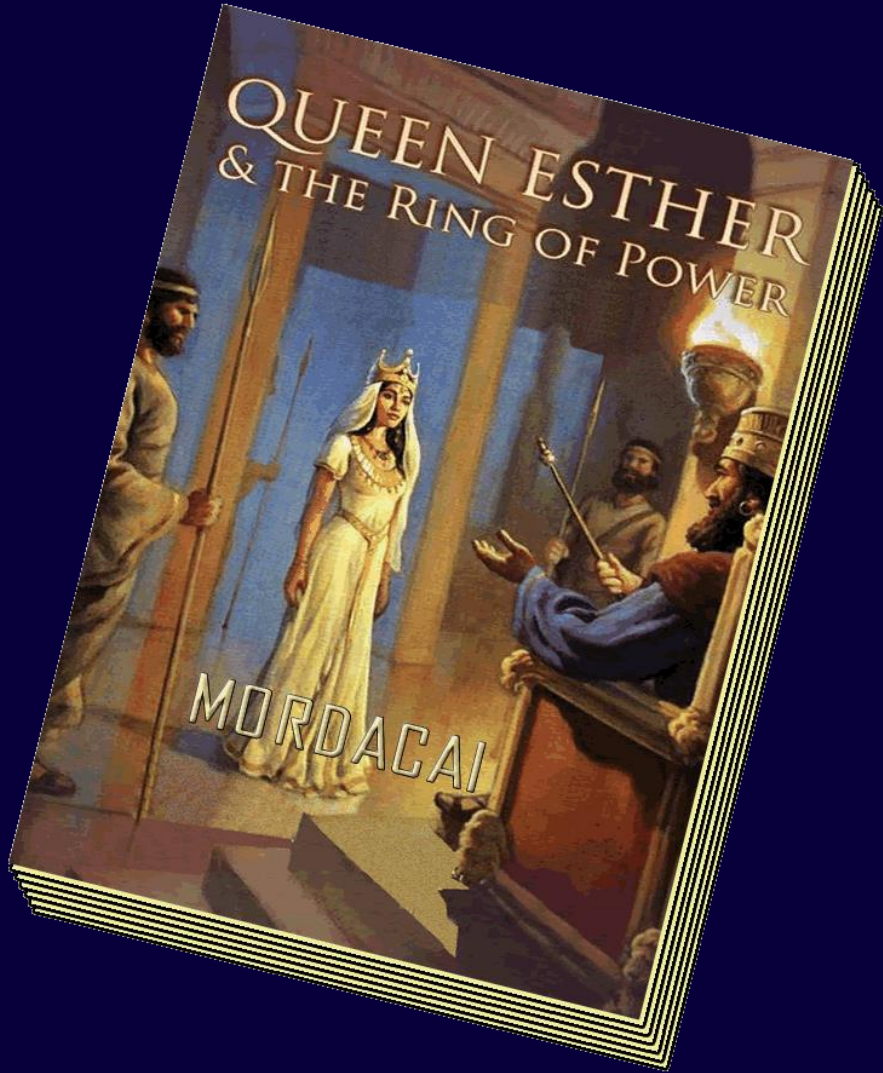
He is called by his title Ahasuerus in English bibles, taken from the Hebrew אַחַשְׁוֵרֹשׁ ('Achashverowsh).

Introduction

- One of only two Bible books named for women, many including Luther and Calvin have questioned why this book is in the Bible. After all:
 - It doesn't mention God;
 - It doesn't predict the Messiah;
 - It doesn't mention faith or worship;
 - It doesn't mention anything "religious";
 - There's no uplifting "moral of the story";
 - Is it merely a love story wrapped inside a palace intrigue set in ancient times, with murder thrown in, something for Barbara Cartland fans?

QUEEN ESTHER & THE RING OF POWER

MORDACAI



Cast of Characters

ESTHER



A young Jewish virgin

A poor orphan girl raised by her cousin Mordecai, willing to risk her own life to save her people. A Jewess of the Tribe of Benjamin.

XERXES



**King of Persia
486-465 BC**

Mighty king ruling the Persian Empire that included almost all of the known world (darn those nasty Greeks).

HAMAN



Grand Vizier (P.M.)

An Amalekite who is the ruthless and powerful grand vizier of Persia; seeks more wealth and power and loathes Mordecai with ancient hatred.

MORDECAI



**Local Jewish leader
and public servant**

Mid-range but influential public servant in Persia; cousin and legal guardian of Esther. A Jew of the Tribe of Benjamin.

Cast of Characters

ESTHER



Queen of Persia

Favoured wife and Queen of Xerxes, willing to risk her own life to save her people. A Jewess of the Tribe of Benjamin.

XERXES



**King of Persia
486-465 BC**

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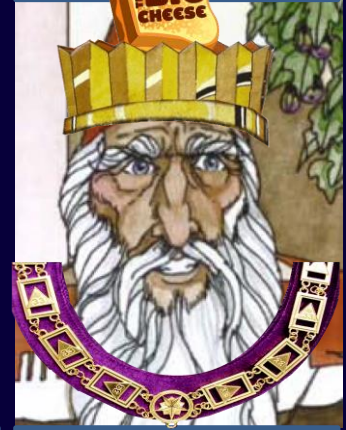
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Plot Summary

- Babylon falls to the Medes and Persians and the Exile is over, but few Jews want the hard yakka of a return to Jerusalem.
- Persian ruler (Ahasuerus) Xerxes plans to conquer Greece. To show his greatness, he asks Queen Vashti to dance for his drunk generals, but she tweets #metoo, so he sacks her.
- Years later, the desperate king holds a beauty contest is held to replace Vashti, and a young woman hiding her Jewish background miraculously wins and becomes the No. 1 wife and queen.
 - P.M. Haman (boo) orders all to bow to him; Esther's guardian Mordecai refuses. So evil Haman devises a plan to kill all Jews.
- Mordecai learns of the plot and informs Esther.
 - Esther outwits Haman and informs the king.
- Outraged, the king executes Haman but rules are rules, he can't undo his order to kill all Jews. So sorry.
 - But all is not lost; through her cleverness the Jews are saved.

Is Esther
even a
true story?

What we know

- **Fact.** Babylon fell to the Medo-Persians in 539BC.
- **Fact.** Ahasuerus Xerxes ruled Persia from 485-465BC.
- **Fact.** Historian Herodotus (486-425BC) wrote Xerxes planned to invade Europe (*The History*, Bk VII, sec. 8).
- **Fact.** The Persians were hard drinkers and often drank to excess (*Herodotus* 1:133; *Xenophon 'Cyrop.'* 8:8, § 11).
- **Fact.** Xerxes was a showoff. (*Herodotus*, many references).
- **Fact.** Invasion of 481BC was defeated in 479BC.
- **Fact.** Shushan was a major palace of Persian kings.
- **Fact.** Shushan's ruins were found in 1836; excavation begun by French archaeologists in 1851 continue.

Fact: Jews celebrate their survival with an annual feast



PURIM

celebrating G-d's deliverance!

- Purim is declared in the book of Esther.
- “Pur” is Persian for “lot”; “purim” is the Hebrew word for “lots”.
- It celebrates the failure of Haman’s genocidal plot on the 14th day of the Jewish month of Adar.
- It’s 1 of 2 Jewish holy days related to casting lots.



Pur of Iahali,
high official of
Shalmanesser III
r. 858-823 BC

Two opposite Jewish holy days. (Yom Kippur = fast and pray. Purim = party.)



- **Yom Kippur** (Day of Atonement)
- The most solemn day of the year.
- A day of fasting and prayer.
- A focus on God's power and justice.
- Lots were cast to determine fate of sacrificial goat and scapegoat.

- **Purim**
- The most physical day of the year.
- A day of feasting and drinking.
- A focus on God's grace and mercy.
- Lot was cast by Haman to determine when to annihilate all Jews.



Yet they are complementary.

Yom Kippur

1 1/2
FOR G-D!

+

Purim

1 1/2
FOR YOU

=

G-d's harmony

COMPLETION

**G-D's power
and justice**

+

**G-D's grace
and mercy**

=

**Perfect balance
of His Majesty**

Tikkunei Zohar (Tikkun 21, page 57b) states:
“Purim is named after Yom Kippur, because in the future, the Jews will delight in [Yom Kippur] and it will change from [a day of] affliction [by fasting] to [a day of] pleasure.”

Lots



- Westerners throwing dice call on “Lady Luck.”
- The Israelites believed that God controls the outcome when lots *or* dice are cast:

The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD. (Pro. 16:33)

Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat. (Leviticus 16:8)

And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles. (Acts 1:26)

What does



mean?

Persian name used by Hadassah,
probably means “Star” but could be
derived from Ishtar (an ancient goddess).

Let’s examine this name closer.

The name(s) of Esther

- Esther's Hebrew name was Hadassah ("myrtle"), a plant with tiny flowers like stars in the night sky.
- Her Persian name Esther ("star") is a variant of *setarah* (star) and close to the Median word *astra* (myrtle).
- The name *Esther* is very close to *Ishtar* (Babylon's primary female deity), aka *Ashtoreth* in Hebrew.

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But wait, there's more!

- Esther in Hebrew is a compound of אסון ('*ason*; evil or harm) and תר (*tor*; tie or bind; dove), from the root תור (*tur*, to explore), so it translates **She Searches Out Evil**.

But wait, there's more!

“Something Hidden”

- The root סתר (*satar*, hide or conceal) and its derivatives סתר (*seter*), סתרה (*sitra*), and מסתר (*mistar*) all mean “hiding place”.
- So the foreign name Esther would have sounded in Hebrew like “**I Am A Hiding Place**” or “**I Am Hidden**”.
- In fact, five Bible verses use the Hebrew form אסתר to mean something hidden:
 - Genesis 4:14,
 - Job 13:20,
 - Psalm 55:12, and
 - Ezekiel 39:23 and 39:24.

So maybe there's
something hidden
within the book of

esther

Mordecai Bilshan (Hebrew)

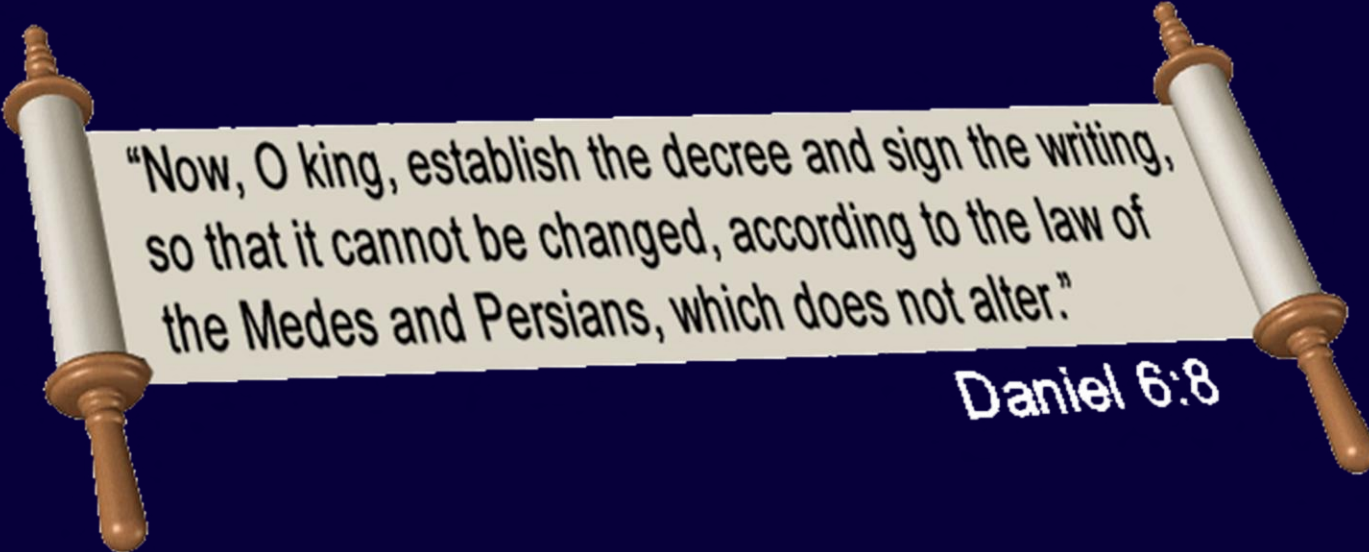
Marduk Belshunu (Babylonian)

𒌦𒍪𒍪𒍪𒍪𒌦 𒍪𒍪𒍪𒍪𒍪𒍪 (Akkadian)



- Mordecai's Hebrew name is close to that of the Babylonian chief god Marduk, probably deliberately.
- Several inscriptions from Akkadian tablets (above) found in Persopolis list a man named Marduk as "Prime Minister".

The Law of the Medes and the Persians

A scroll with a light beige background and a dark blue border, unrolled to reveal text. The scroll is held by two wooden rollers with a turned design. The text is written in a black, serif font.

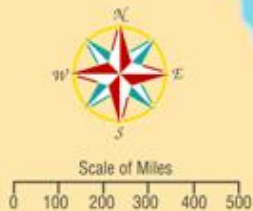
"Now, O king, establish the decree and sign the writing,
so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of
the Medes and Persians, which does not alter."

Daniel 6:8

A Royal Decree once issued cannot be altered,
even by the ruler who issued it.



The Medo-Persian Empire



Shushan (aka Susa)





Audience Hall in Esther's Day



this hypostyle hall with its porticoes featured 72 columns, each 65 feet high and weighing more than 25 tons.









DARIUS
THE MEDE;
CYRUS THE
GREAT



CYRUS
CAMBYES

DARIUS II

ESTHER

XERXES

ARTAXERXES

TRANS-EUPHRATES

Hey, they
can't do
that!

*projectus
interruptus*



Haggai Zechariah

ZERUBBABEL

Ezra 1-6

537 BC

foreign
wives



ESTHER

Esther 1-12

483-471

EZRA

Ezra 7-10

458 BC

Death
to Jews!



NEHEMIAH

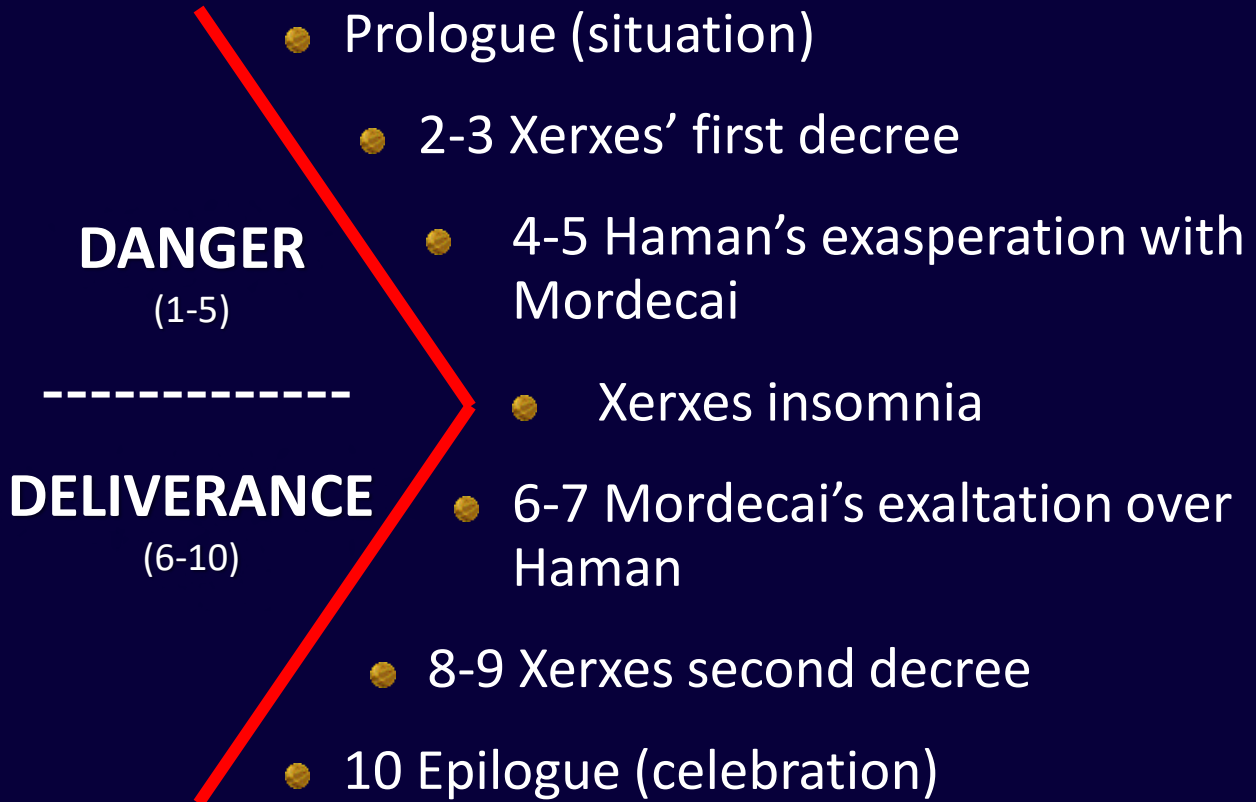
Nehemiah 1-13

444 BC

Part of Nehemiah's Wall



The literary structure



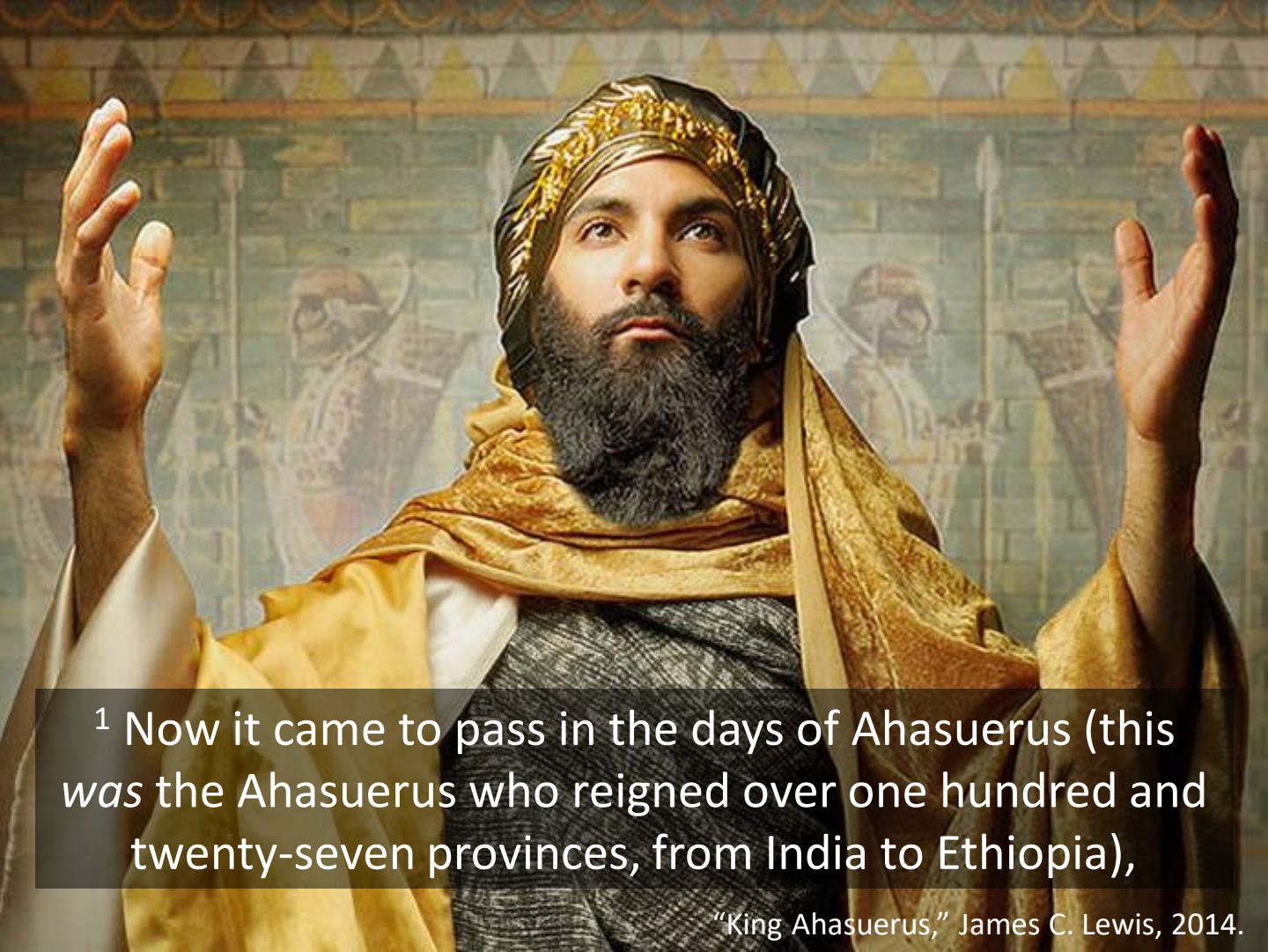
The book of

Esther

Chapter 1



"King Ahasuerus," James C. Lewis, 2014.



¹ Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this *was* the Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia),

“King Ahasuerus,” James C. Lewis, 2014.

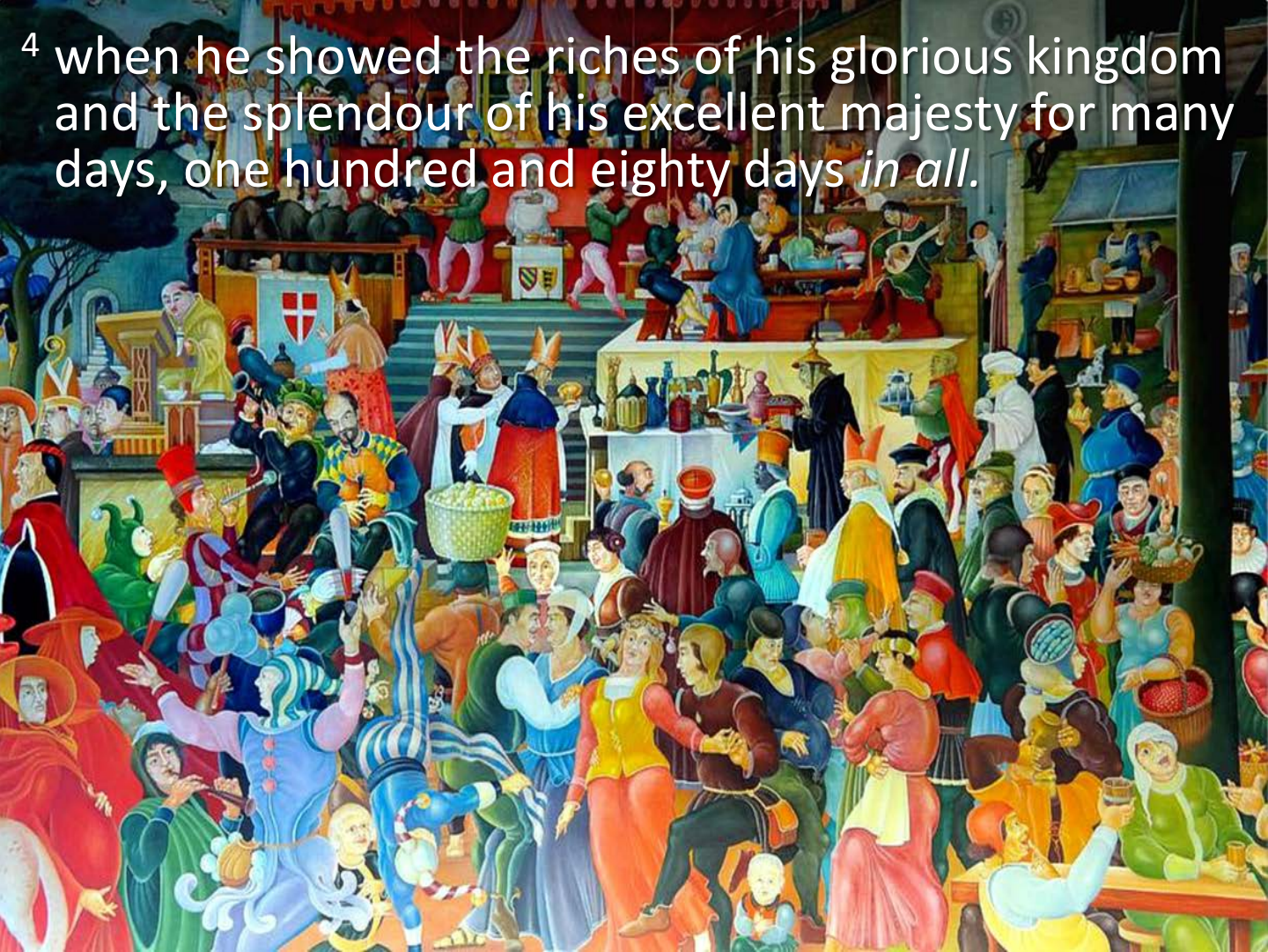
² in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne
of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the citadel,

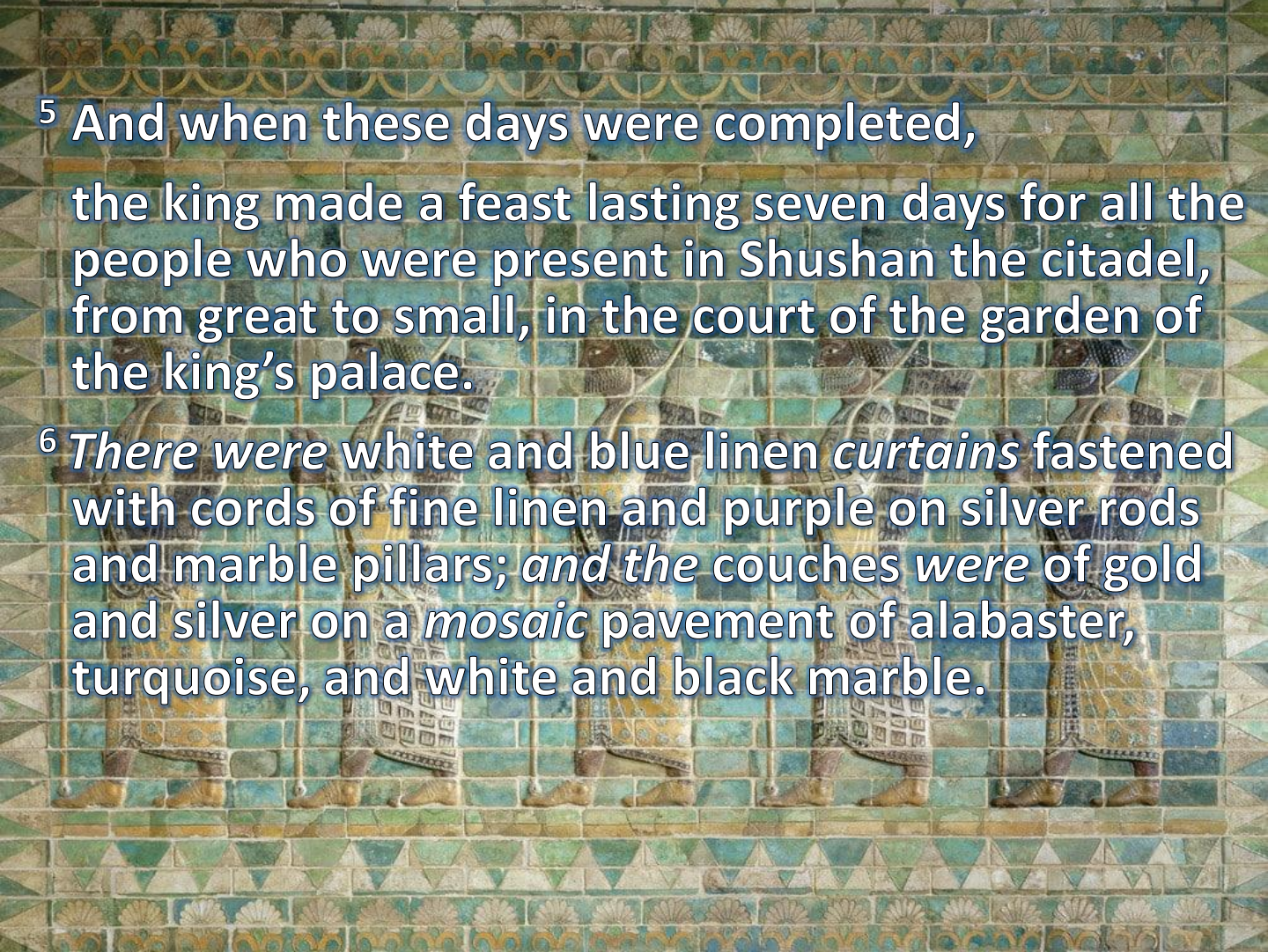


³ *that* in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants—the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces *being* before him—



4 when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendour of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days *in all*.

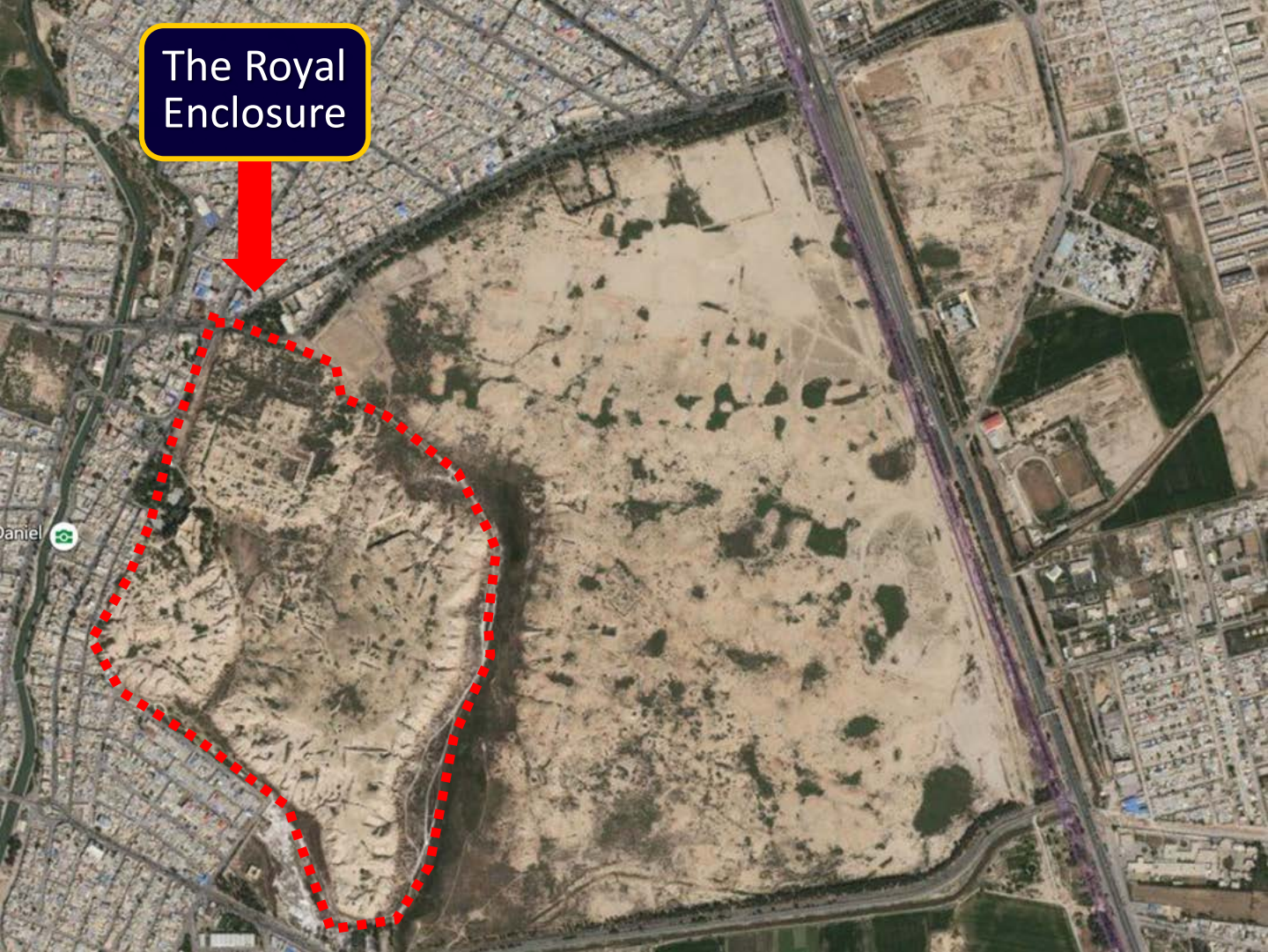




⁵ And when these days were completed,
the king made a feast lasting seven days for all the
people who were present in Shushan the citadel,
from great to small, in the court of the garden of
the king's palace.

⁶ *There were* white and blue linen *curtains* fastened
with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods
and marble pillars; *and the couches were* of gold
and silver on a *mosaic* pavement of alabaster,
turquoise, and white and black marble.

The Royal
Enclosure



Courtyard of the
Garden of the
King's Palace

Garden

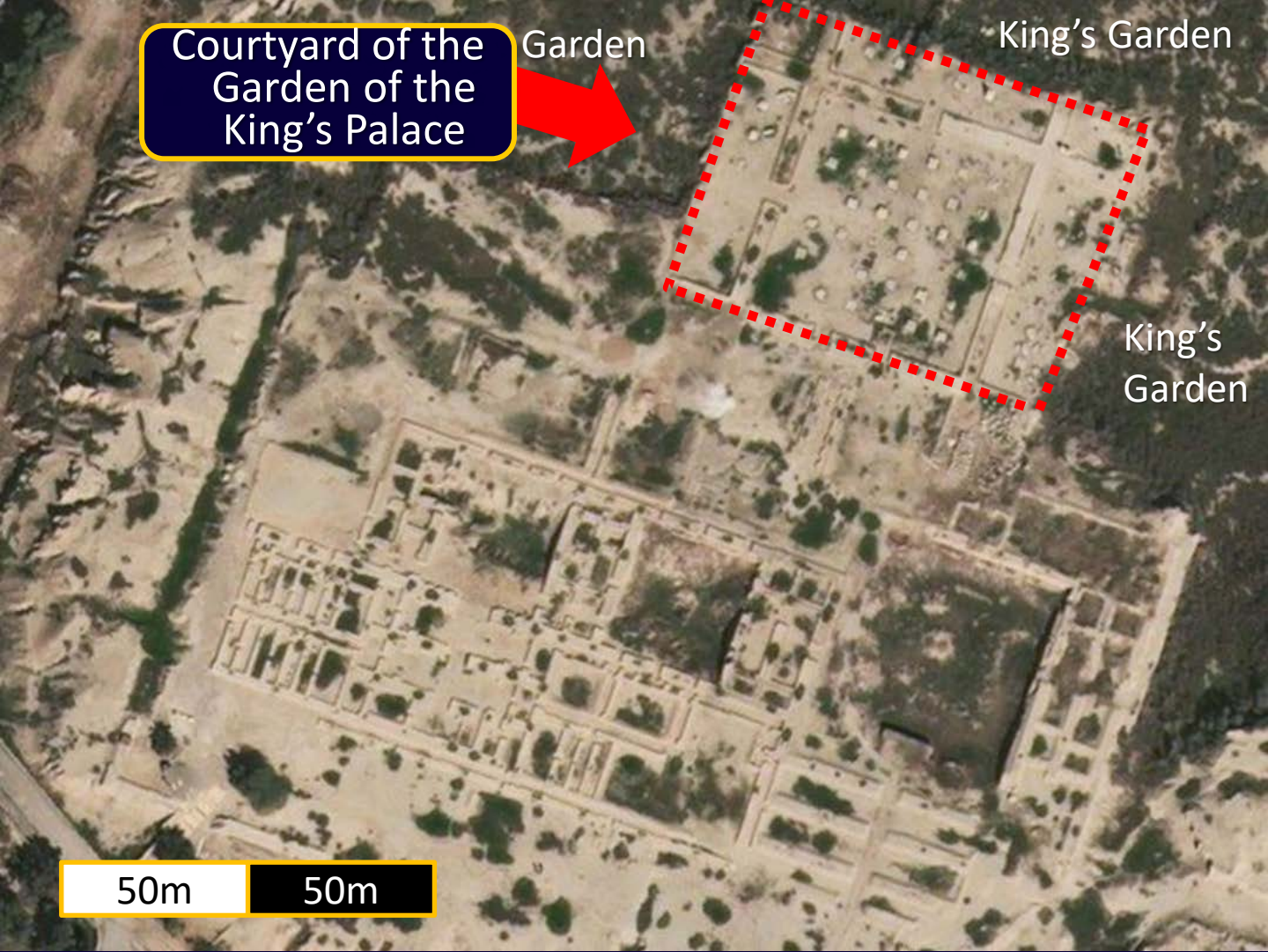


King's Garden

King's
Garden

50m

50m



The Court of the Garden
of the King's Palace



The Court of the Garden



- This grand audience hall had 36 Persian pillars of marble each topped with colossal ornamental pillar tops called capitals carved into the form of two kneeling bulls.
- The capital is 4 meters tall. A reconstructed capital (L) is in the Louvre in Paris.
- The columns beneath it stood 17 meters meaning the ceiling was 21 meters high (70 feet)!



⁷ And they served drinks in golden vessels, each vessel being different from the other, with royal wine in abundance, according to the generosity of the king.

⁸ In accordance with the law, the drinking was not compulsory; for so the king had ordered all the officers of his household, that they should do according to each man's pleasure.

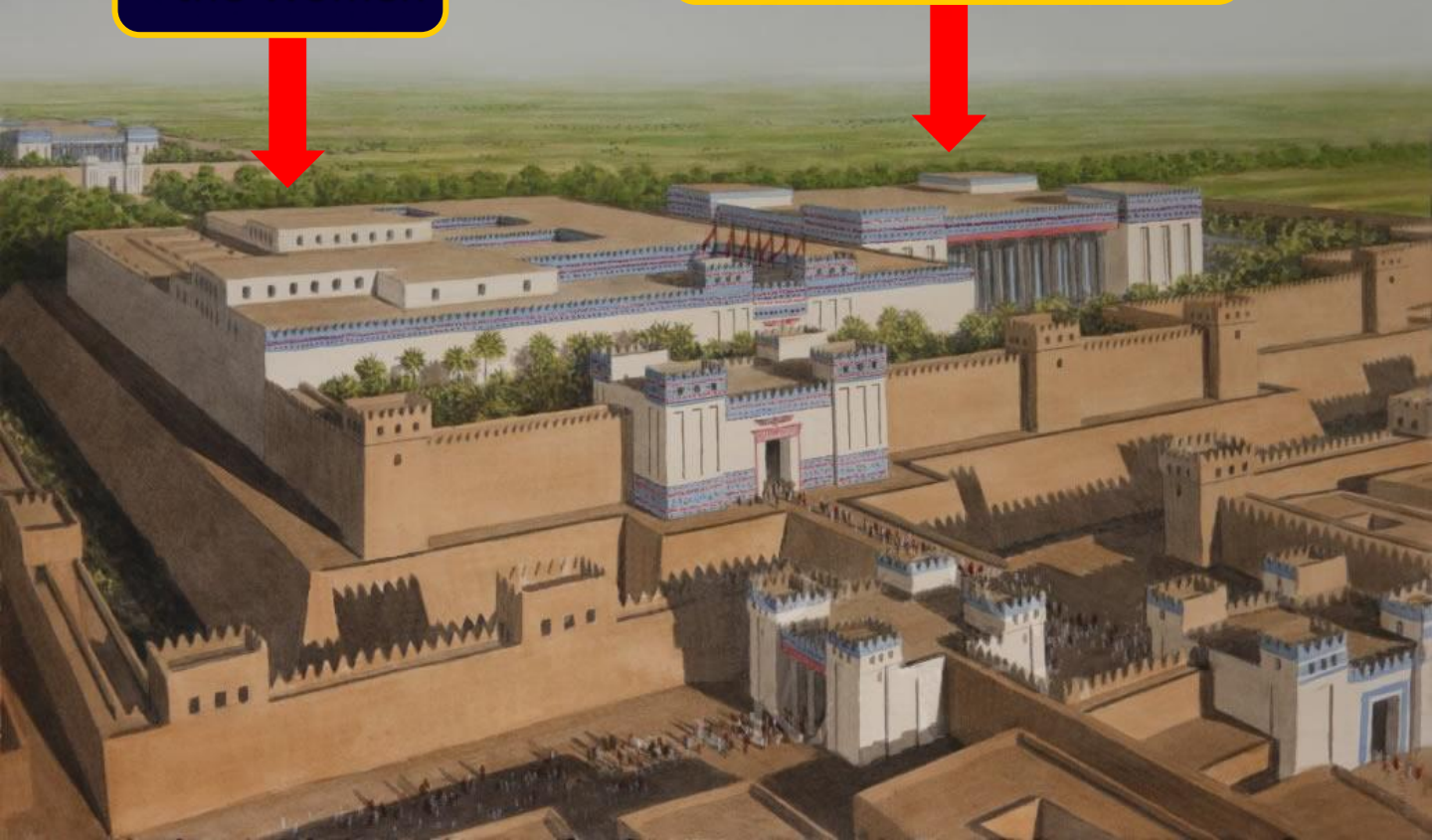


⁹ Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women *in* the royal palace which *belonged* to King Ahasuerus.



The House of
the Women

The Court of the Garden
of the King's Palace

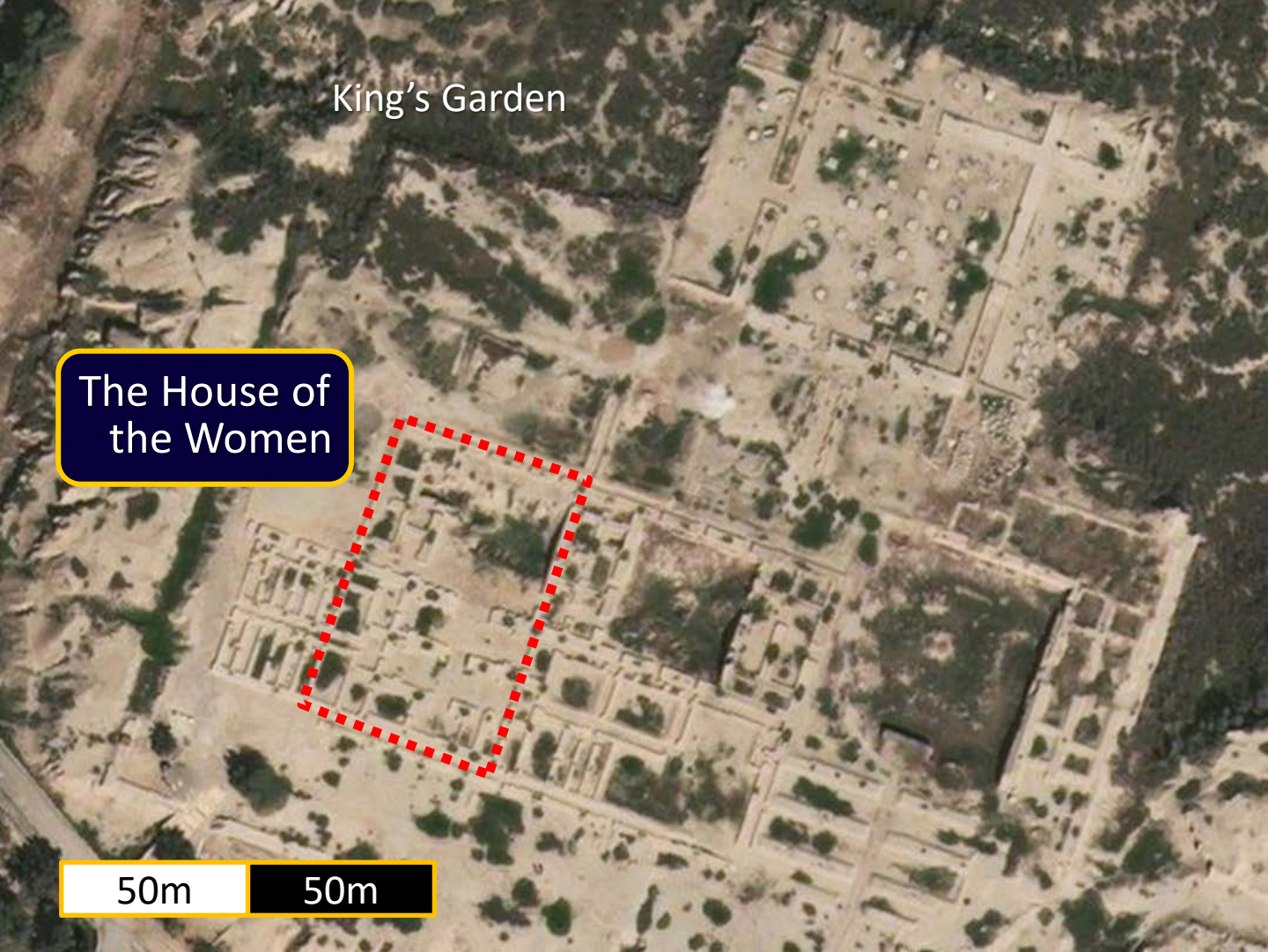


King's Garden

The House of
the Women

50m

50m



¹⁰ On the seventh day, when the heart of the king
was merry with wine,



he commanded

- Mehuman (“faithful”),
- Biztha (“booty”),
- Harbona (“ass-driver”),
- Bigtha (“in the wine-press”),
- Abagtha (God-given”),
- Zethar (“star”), and
- Carcas (“severe”),

seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, ¹¹ to bring Queen Vashti before the king, *wearing* her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials,

We seem to be missing
some of our members!



*for she was
beautiful
to behold.*

Muriel Wilson as Queen Vashti
by Henry Bullingham,
photogravure by
Walker & Boutall, 1897



¹² But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command *brought* by *his* eunuchs; therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him.



¹³ Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times (for this *was* the king's manner toward all who knew law and justice, ¹⁴ those closest to him *being*

- ❖ Carshena (“illustrious”),
- ❖ Shethar (“a star”),
- ❖ Admatha (“a testimony”),
- ❖ Tarshish (“yellow jasper”),
- ❖ Meres (“lofty”),
- ❖ Marsena (“worthy”), and
- ❖ Memucan (“dignified”),



the seven princes of Persia and Media, who had access to the king's presence, *and* who ranked highest in the kingdom):

¹⁵ “What *shall* we do to Queen Vashti, according to law, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus *brought to her* by the eunuchs?”

¹⁶ And Memucan answered before the king and the princes:

“Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also all the princes, and all the people who *are* in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.



¹⁷ For the queen's behavior will become known to all women, so that they will despise their husbands in their eyes, when they report, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in before him, but she did not come.'

¹⁸ This very day the *noble* ladies of Persia and Media will say to all the king's officials that they have heard of the behavior of the queen. Thus *there will be* excessive contempt and wrath.



Indoor gossip," John Frederick Lewis, 1873.

¹⁹ If it pleases the king, let a royal decree go out from him, and let it be recorded in the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it will not be altered,



that Vashti shall come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she.

Queen Vashti deposed" by Alexandre Cabanel, 1880.

²⁰ "When the king's decree which he will make is proclaimed throughout all his empire (for it is great), all wives will honor their husbands, both great and small."

²¹ And the reply pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan.

²² Then he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province in its own script, and to every people in their own language, that each man should be master in his own house, and speak in the language of his own people.



Whoever heard of a 6-month party?



And in the Bible! What gives?

Interlude between Chaps. 1 and 2

- Remember Michael's prophecy about the fourth king, Xerxes, becoming strong through his riches and stirring up all against the kingdom of Greece?
- Xerxes wanted to avenge his daddy's Darius's defeat at Marathon in 490 BC, and invested three years in preparation. He raised an army of over 1,000,000 and a huge navy. He built a boat bridge over the Hellesport.
- The six months "party" involved detailed planning with all of his generals and senior officers.
- With that done, they let off steam for one week.
- This was all about conquering the rest of the known world!

A Witness Account

- Herodotus claims that Ahasuerus planned to invade all of Europe and “reduce the whole earth into one empire”: “My intent is to throw a bridge over the Hellespont and march an army through Europe against Greece, that thereby I may obtain vengeance from the Athenians for the wrongs committed by them against the Persians and against my father.”

[Herodotus, *The History*, Book VII, section 8.]

- The king’s uncle, Artabanus, strongly opposed the plan, but the king persisted and convinced the princes and officers to follow him.
- it took the first four years of Xerxes’ reign to get ready for the invasion he launched in 481 B.C. No doubt the 180 days involved planning sessions in which all the provinces’ leaders were being prepared for the war effort.

Greco-Persian Wars 499-479 BCE



Greek troops rushing forward at the Battle of Marathon, Georges Rochegrosse, 1859.

