

QUEEN VASHTI: FROM ANOTHER VIEW

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Introduction

Once our teacher asked us to look out from the window and to tell him what we have seen, then we the students reported what we have seen out there one by one. Some saw trees and mountains far away, birds in the air, while the others saw houses, vehicles and electric wires which are near. We looked out from the same window, but our views and visions were so dissimilar. Yes, we all have our own perspectives and emphasis in everything.

Likewise, when we read the first chapter of the Book of Esther, we see that King Ahasuerus was getting angry with queen Vashti and was replaced by Esther, because Queen Vashti did not obey the order of her husband King Ahasuerus, which is to answer the call of her husband and show her beauty to the people and the princes. As mentioned earlier, if we only look from one view, we may blame Queen Vashti as proud and disobedient for she had refused the call of the king, but if we observe from another angle, we may find that Queen Vashti was neither rebellious nor proud, rather she was a brave queen and a person who loved dignity.

The feast

Ahasuerus was a great king who reigned over 127 provinces, from India to Ethiopia. In the third year of his reign, he made two kinds of feasts. One was for all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, and it lasted for one hundred and eight days. The other feast was for all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both great and small, which lasted for seven days, in the court of the garden. People who attended at this feast seemed to be happy and find pleasures (vv. 1-8). Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women in the royal house, not openly in the court of the garden (v. 9). Thus, while the king showed the honour of his majesty, she and her ladies showed the honour of their modesty, which is truly the majesty of the fair sex.

The order of king

In verse 10-11, we see the order of King Ahasuerus. It reads like this:

On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on (KJV).

Here we see that Ahasuerus got drunk (*the heart of the king was merry with wine*), and he wanted to please his guests by showing the beauty of his wife. And he sent those chamberlains

(eunuchs) to bring her. We need to note that the queen also made a feast for the women, and it seemed that they would too be happy with themselves. The king never called her while he was in sober, but he commanded the servants to bring her only after he was intoxicated with wine. He should have asked her to be present there politely as she is his wife, but he commanded the servants *to bring her forcefully*.

Besides that he wanted to show off his wife's beauty, the text does not say exactly how she was told to appear, only that she was to wear her royal crown. But given the king's drunkenness and the fact that all his male guests were likewise intoxicated, the assumption has often been that Vashti was commanded to show herself in the nude – wearing only her crown.

The Queen's refusal

But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him (v. 12).

Vashti dared to decline his husband's order because she knew that he was drunk. She refused to debase herself before the king and his drunken friends, choosing to value her dignity above submitting to her husband's wish. She did not want to use her beauty or sexuality to advance herself pleasing the proud king. She might already know that the king would be very angry and even deposed her from the throne, but she dared to lose all her advantages in order to teach her foolish husband a lesson.

Another assumption tells that queen Vashti at first tried to defend the life and honour of her husband, thinking that if the guests saw her and thought her beautiful, they would want to lie with her, and they would kill the king, and if they saw her and thought her ugly, the king would be disgraced because of her. If this is true, we may say that the queen loved her husband very much and would do anything to save his dignity and majesty.

Reflection

From the above assumption and perspective, we may say that queen Vashti was a person who loved dignity, and a brave queen who dared to lose all her credit even her royal crown for the sake of retaining the honour of herself and her husband, and to teach him a lesson.

In our society today, there are some people who do not give any concern to the dignity of others for the sake of finding their own glory. Like king Ahasuerus, they seek their own happiness and advantages neglecting the others. They misused their power, they do not care the feeling of other fellow human beings. Many people are involved in corruption, fraud, lying, oppressing other people, etc. as they are intoxicated by the lust of materialism, worldly riches and fame. So, we need to act like queen Vashti by challenging these immoral measures. We must act out to keep peace, dignity, freedom, equal opportunity, respect one another, etc., among all human beings, rich or poor alike.