

W **NOTABLE**
Women

OF SCRIPTURE

BY KEN GURLEY

Notable Women of Scripture

by Ken Gurley

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Vashti: Virtue on Trial

*This deed of the queen shall come abroad
unto all women (Esther 1:17).*

Vashti quietly packed her meager belongings. Absent from her luggage were the costly cashmere robes and the variegated silk garments typical of the Median royalty. Gone too were the pearls from the Persian Gulf with their soft, translucent luster and the crown jewels that blazed incandescently when light danced across their surfaces.

Her sandaled feet shuffled scratchily across the marble floor as she slowly, but with a resolute air, assembled the remnants of her life from the past several years. Keepsakes of little value to anyone but herself were carefully stowed to recall the years when she had lived and reigned as the premier Persian beauty of her day. Unconsciously, she sighed.

Servants nearby, trained and dedicated to the service of Vashti, impulsively stepped forward then stopped abruptly as if they had encountered an invisible barrier.

Their lady had asked to be left alone with nothing but her memories and internal fortitude. Still, it pained them to be so close to their beloved lady and unable to help her in any way.

Vashti surveyed the belongings deposited randomly in a small heap at her feet where they would soon be taken to her new address outside the palace walls. The clothes, mementos, and few personal effects lying before her represented her life, both what was spent of it and what was left of it. With dark, tearless eyes she scanned her palace chambers, making certain that nothing remained that was rightfully hers.

She spied her reflection in the mirror. Tall, elegant even in the homespun dress of peasants, Vashti possessed a bearing and presence that awed even herself. Her raven black hair framed a light olive complexion, offset by dark eyebrows and even darker eyes and eyelashes. She doubtlessly qualified to be called Vashti, which means "the best," or in modern Persian is translated a "beautiful woman." She represented what was best and beautiful in the splendid palace of Shushan.

Vashti stared into the mirror as though she were looking at a total stranger trying to find some point of reference, some recognizable characteristic where she could say, "I know you." Her gaze fixed on the ribbon about an inch in width that encircled her forehead. Violet in color, it was the sign of royalty worn only by those with access to the Persian throne. It was an emblem of what Vashti had been, but what she was no longer. She could not step into the presence of King Ahasuerus, her former husband. He had divorced her; she was no longer queen.

Vashti noticed that her hands started to raise as if

they had a will of their own. Intrigued, she stared as her long, manicured fingers firmly fastened themselves on this violet band and released its hold upon her forehead. The faint imprint it left on her skin was a mute testimony in Vashti's eyes of what she had been. With careless diffidence, she allowed the violet ribbon to fall from her fingers to the emerald green floor, where it lay in vivid contrast.

"Now, that is odd," Vashti wondered aloud. "I don't feel any less a queen than before."

The spell broke. Melancholy loosed its clammy hold on her usual ebullient spirits. The corners of her mouth slowly turned upward, and with a radiant smile on her face, Vashti gracefully turned and exited the palace.

Vashti's Fall from Grace

Vashti's story isn't complicated, but neither is it comforting. In Grimms' fairy tales, everyone lives happily ever after, but that is not always so in real life. The message of Vashti's life is testimony to the fact that right doesn't always seem to win in this present world, that good does not necessarily triumph in the short run, and that speaking the truth is seldom welcomed. Contrary also to modern romantic notions, this is a story of how wounded pride unbridled through intemperance can cause irreparable damage to a relationship.

King Ahasuerus was the proud husband and surprisingly the arch villain in Vashti's story. His identity in secular history is alternatively suggested to be Xerxes, Artaxerxes, or even Darius. His empire stretched from the Nile River to India. Though Ahasuerus ruled the 127 provinces of the Persian Empire, his inability to rule his own passions resulted in his loss of Vashti, the best treasure