

Esther 1:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred and fourscore days.

Analysis

When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred and fourscore days. The extraordinary duration—180 days, half a year—emphasizes the feast's magnitude and purpose. The Hebrew verbs "shewed" (harot, הָרֹאֶה) literally means "to cause to see," suggesting deliberate display rather than casual celebration. This was political theater designed to demonstrate imperial resources and secure loyalty through overwhelming displays of wealth and power.

The description layers superlatives: "riches" (osher, עֲשֹׁר), "glorious kingdom" (kevod malkhuto, כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ), "honour" (yekar, יָקָר), and "excellent majesty" (tiferet gedulato, תִּפְעָלָת גְּדֻלָּתוֹ). This piling up of terms for splendor, glory, and magnificence reflects both Persian royal ideology and the author's literary technique of emphasizing excess and pride. The king's self-glorification contrasts sharply with God's hidden but effective providence throughout the book.

The 180-day duration likely involved rotating delegations rather than continuous feasting with identical guests, allowing representatives from all 127 provinces to witness imperial glory. This interpretation aligns with administrative logistics and Persian practice of receiving provincial delegations. The extended timeline demonstrates both the empire's vast resources and the king's priorities—lavish display rather than efficient governance.

Historical Context

Persian royal ideology emphasized the king's role as manifestation of divine glory and cosmic order. The Behistun Inscription and other royal texts describe kings in terms similar to Esther 1:4, claiming unprecedented wealth, power, and divine favor. Archaeological evidence from Persepolis reliefs shows tribute-bearers from throughout the empire presenting gifts to the king, visualizing the kind of display described here. The Apadana reliefs depict delegations from 23 nations bringing tribute, illustrating the imperial glory Xerxes sought to display.

Greek historians, despite their bias against Persia, acknowledged Persian royal wealth as extraordinary. Herodotus describes Xerxes' military mobilization as the largest force ever assembled, requiring resources that only such a wealthy empire could sustain. The Persepolis treasury tablets document enormous gold and silver reserves, confirming biblical descriptions of Persian wealth. Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* and *Anabasis* describe Persian royal luxury, including elaborate banquets, magnificent palaces, and ostentatious displays of wealth.

The timing—third year of Xerxes' reign, 180-day feast, followed by the Greek invasion—suggests this gathering served to mobilize resources and secure commitment for the upcoming military campaign. The vast expenditure on this feast may have strained imperial finances, partly explaining Xerxes' later need to replenish the treasury and vulnerability to Haman's offer (3:9) to pay for eliminating the Jews.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does the contrast between Ahasuerus's self-glorification and God's hidden providence challenge our understanding of true greatness?

2. What does this passage teach about the relationship between impressive appearance and genuine spiritual significance?
3. How should believers evaluate resource allocation between impressive display and genuine kingdom priorities?

Interlinear Text

וַיִּשְׁמֹן יָם	וְרַב יָם	יָמִים:	וְגִדּוּלַת וְ	תִפְאָרֶת	וְיָקָר
and fourscore	many	days	majesty	of his excellent	and the honour
H8084	H7227	H3117	H1420	H8597	H3366
וְיָאֵת מַלְכוּת וְ	כֶּבֶד וְדָ	עַל שָׁר	אֶת	בְּהִרְאֹת וְ	
kingdom	of his glorious	the riches		When he shewed	
H4438	H3519	H6239	H853	H7200	
וְיָאֵת מַלְכוּת וְ	כֶּבֶד וְדָ	עַל שָׁר	אֶת	בְּהִרְאֹת וְ	
even an hundred	days				
H3967	H3117				

Additional Cross-References

Job 40:10 (Glory): Deck thyself now with majesty and excellency; and array thyself with glory and beauty.