“God In The Shadows”

The author waives all copyright to this material, save to the extent that in accordance with Christian principles, full acknowledgement is made in any reproduction to its source and the author and the work is not sold for commercial profit.

All Scripture references are from the King James Version of the Bible

2011 Rev (Dr) Paul Ferguson
Calvary Tengah Bible-Presbyterian Church
Shalom Chapel, 345 Old Choa Chu Kang Road,
Singapore 689485
www.calvarytengah.com
The book of Esther is a fascinating and captivating book. Along with the book of Ruth, it is the only OT book named after a woman. The NT (along with the Song of Solomon, Obadiah, and Nahum) does not quote or allude to Esther.

This book is especially controversial in its inclusion in the canon of Scripture as the Name of God is nowhere to be found in this book. Every word of God is inspired and instructive for the saints of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). If the reader fails to be edified from reading this book, then the problem is in the reader not the Book. To the Jews were committed the oracles of God and the Church is instructed to receive the Old Testament Canon from their hands. The Book of Esther is an esteemed book of that canon that the Jews (and later the Apostles) passed on to the Church.

Jewish tradition points to passages such as, Deuteronomy 31:18, “And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought” to explain that God was hiding His face from the exiles who had not returned to Jerusalem in disobedience to His revealed will (Jer. 50:8; 51:6). Others point to the same truth in Isaiah 45:15, “Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour”.

Most commentators, however, believe that the primary reason the Name of God is not directly mentioned is to give a graphic and a classic illustration of the hidden workings of God in providence. This book is like an unsigned painting that makes us search for clues by thinking even more deeply about the artistic style of the artist.

DOCTRINE OF PROVIDENCE

The doctrine of providence means that God works within creation to manage all things according to the “immutable counsel of His own will” in order that they may accomplish the ends for which they were created (Westminster Confession of Faith, V, i). In English the word “providence” is made up from two Latin words - “pro” and “video” which when put together, literally meaning “to see before.”

The providence of God means that He not only sees whatsoever will come to pass but that He upholds all things, He governs and directs all events; in all time and in every circumstance for His own glory. All mankind is hemmed in by it. Man has no true foresight and knows not what a day will

---

1 This is why we believe the Masoretic Text underneath our King James Bible is the true text as it was the Hebrew Text received by the true Church from the Jews.
bring forth. Only God perfectly knows the future and only God has the power to act upon the basis of foreknowledge.

The Scriptures reveal God as not only here with us but also that He is everywhere, within and without, sustaining all things, and guiding every event in history to a glorious consummation. Almighty God rules nations, families, and also individuals. He works often hidden amid the shadows, undetected by so many but still at work weaving a cosmic tapestry in the lives of His saints to demonstrate His glory and power. Providence is the hand of God in the glove of human history. Only those who believed in the God of Scripture truly understand the might of God’s providential dealings.

EXAMPLES OF PROVIDENCE IN ESTHER

The discerning reader can detect the providential fingerprints of God revealed on every page of this book. This is effected through seemingly natural and insignificant means that are not discernible. Miracles, by contrast, are always visible demonstrations of supernatural power. By working in this hidden and mysterious way, God demonstrates His glory even more.

As Spurgeon said of this book it is, “a record of wonders without a miracle and, therefore, though equally revealing the Glory of the Lord, it sets it forth in another fashion from that which is displayed in the overthrow of Pharaoh by miraculous power.” Each providential event reflects God’s faithfulness to His people but appears as a reasonable, natural occurrence such as:

(1) Ahasuerus calls a banquet.
(2) Vashti refuses to be “displayed” at the banquet.
(3) Vashti was deposed for disobeying the king.
(4) The king agrees to search for a replacement queen
(5) Esther is born with great natural beauty and is selected as a possible candidate.
(6) The king favours Esther over all the other candidates.
(7) Mordecai “by chance” discovers a treasonous plot to kill the king.
(8) Esther happened to be queen at the right time and the right place to save her people. She obtained favour, despite fasting for 3 days - which does not help your beauty much.
(9) Ahasuerus suffers from insomnia the night before the planned demise of Mordecai and requests the reading the court chronicles. Providentially it fell at the right place.

However, when viewed through the lens of hindsight and Scripture, we see God silently directing each event in links of a chain of circumstances so as to produce an amazing accomplishment of His Sovereign will. For an
orphaned Jewess living in exile to become Queen of the world’s most powerful empire is impossible in the natural.

Joseph could understand something of this in Genesis 50:20. However, sometimes God does not reveal the reason why all the pieces of the jigsaw do not seem to fit as we walk here on earth (Hebrews 11:35-40). We have to remember that we are not the Master Potter – our Sovereign Wise God is. As Sidlow Baxter opines,

…if the story had specifically explained, in so many words, that it was God who was bringing about all those happenings which are recorded, the dramatic force and moral impact of the story would have been reduced; for above all, we are meant to see, in the natural outworking of events, how without violating human free will, and without interrupting the ordinary ongoing of human affairs, a hidden Power unsuspectedly but infallibly controls all things.

Providence is also accomplished through the actions of both good and evil men, to produce extraordinary results. Men can conspire to do evil yet God will always prevail in His Sovereign purpose. Throughout this book we see that the moment the wicked seem nearest to triumph is often just preceding their demise. Indeed, the very plans they had for others at times become the means of their downfall.

This revelation of God in a most wonderful interposition in ancient history for the salvation of his people will inspire our admiration and awe as, “The LORD is known by the judgment which He executeth” (Psa. 9:16). Esther gives us also a glimpse to the spiritual battles in the heavenlies between the efforts of Satan against the purposes of God and especially against His people. William S. Plumer put it like this:

God’s providence is powerful.... It is so powerful that it even brings good out of evil; making bad men and fallen angels to serve God’s designs, while they intend no such thing; giving the greatest efficiency to causes apparently the most contemptible; and infallibly securing the very best ends. ... All conspiracies and combinations against providence are vain.... He who rejects the mystery of providence must ever be in perplexity.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION TO US

Psalm 121:4 tells us that God, “shall neither slumber nor sleep.” The fact that He is not named and there is no direct communication from Him in this book is not significant. Clearly, God is the chief character and focus in the whole drama. Although He may appear at times invisible, God is always invincible. It is God who providentially ordered the lives of all the characters in the
book of Esther.

God’s providence is working out His Sovereign purpose for good in and through us. Indeed, the complexity of the providential ordering just to allow us to breathe each second is staggering. As the Psalmist says, “Whoso is wise and will observe these things” (Psa. 107:43).

In books such as Exodus, we see God revealed spectacular signs and wonders but in Esther He is revealed in His workings in an entirely different mode. However, both modes are just as much God and both are just as effective in accomplishing His Sovereign will. We may not be able to figure it all out as we need to stand on the truth of God’s promises and acknowledge that we are limited in our comprehension of the complexities of so vast a universe.

The providential control of every event and person reveal the Sovereign power and infinite wisdom of God both then and now. God is in no hurry and always on time as He proves in Esther. This gives us great comfort that our God will always preserve His Words and His people as He promised. None can stay His hand or retrain His Sovereign Will. The enemies of the Truth can never extinguish the candle, which God has lit. As John MacArthur explains,

What you have in Esther is not a whole lot of miracles. There is nothing like the Red Sea opening up and them walking across, or the walls of Jericho fall down, you don’t have any of that. You just have all kinds of interwoven circumstances as God works His will. He can do it through miracle or through providence….I do believe in miracles, but I believe in miracles in terms of Scripture. Today, I believe in the providence of God. I believe we are living in the day when God is doing things through His providence. I don’t see great, sweeping, supernatural invasions, but I see God’s providence accomplishing His will. This is providence.

This parallels the days we live in as God does the same for us. That is why we can be comforted and content by His natural orchestration of our every day lives. We may be young, insignificant, from an orphaned home, and living in hostile pagan circumstances like Esther, yet God can use us as much as the warriors like David and Joshua for His kingdom. God and God alone can do such things so He gets all the glory in our lives.

The Book of Esther practically challenges us in our own lives to actively decide and acknowledge the hand of God in our circumstances in life or alternatively dismiss those things as merely coincidence. It calls us to a life of walking by faith not by sight. God can use the lowliest and most insignificant person and by providence control the circumstances around them to allow them to be a mighty instrument of His salvation.

There are no blind impersonal forces at work in human history. We
must see God in the foreground of every single detail of our life from the
time, place and family we were born into and even till the time and place of
our death (Rom. 8:28-39). The “micro” as well as the “macro” details of our
life are subject to His purpose. Therefore, there is true meaning and purpose
to every aspect of your life. All of this needs to be submitted to God’s will.
CHAPTER ONE

The Glory of Man

(Esther 1:1-12)

The message of Esther reveals that God is ever present even when He seems absent. Each chapter must be seen in relation to the overarching theme of this book of God's Sovereign and wise providence. All of the events in this first chapter are part of God's providential workings before the time when He would raise up a deliverer for His people.

We see here not only the God whose hand not only turns the pages of history but writes that history too. God is at work in the shadows here to save His people far in advance using a most unlikely instrument in Esther. He gets all the glory by utilising an ungodly king of an ungodly government to accomplish his purpose.

The almost unbelievable set of circumstances and human actions in this book all point to a Divine Director behind the drama scenes. God frequently exercises His sovereign power and wisdom from behind the curtain. He can effectively work as much through circumstances and human events as He can through water from a rock and a pillar of fire.

Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus, (this is Ahasuerus which reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces:) That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace,

V1 - Ahasuerus (Hebrew transliteration of the Persian name) is thought by most commentators to be Xerxes I (Greek name). He ruled from ca. 486 to 465 B.C. (this book of Esther covers ca. 483–473 B.C.). Ahasuerus was no tin pot dictator of a banana republic as he ruled 127 provinces from Ethiopia to India. The Persian Empire would last for 200 years (536-331 B.C.) until conquered by Alexander the Great.

The story is situated around 50 years after the exiles had begun to return from captivity to Jerusalem. The first return was in 536 BC and was the largest of almost 50,000 persons. Many more stayed behind in exile. They may have been outside the will of God in waiting behind but they were not out of His loving care.

V2 - Shushan was a large city about 200 miles east of Babylon. It was thought to be the winter residence of Persian Kings.

In the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him: When
V3 – God bestows some wonderful providential blessings on men like Ahasuerus who know him not. As one writer states, “seldom do they who are entrusted with much power—and to whom is given the ability to do extensive good—use them in a holy manner, and for the glory of the Divine Giver.”

V4 - It seems that Ahasuerus intention was to display of the power, pomp, and wealth of his empire to impress all the attendees of his own greatness as king. No doubt he hoped this opulence would make his soldiers proud and his enemies afraid. Secular history suggests that he did this to obtain the allegiance of his leaders before he embarked on his crusade against the Greeks. He was said to have an army of between 1 and 2 million soldiers.

Both the books of Esther and Exodus detail how the devil utilised foreign powers in an attempt to exterminate the Jewish race. However, they also demonstrate the futility in opposing God who is always faithful to His covenantal promises. God’s promise to extinguish the Amalekites (Exod. 17:14; Deut. 25:17-19) and God’s promise to preserve the Jews (Gen. 12:1-3; 17:1-8) will always stand. This gives us courage and comfort today as God’s promises to keep His Words (Psa. 12:6-7) and His people (Matt. 16:18) throughout our age cannot be frustrated.

We may be discouraged by the power of the godless around us and the weakness of the godly. But we should heed the advice of F.B. Meyer,

Fit yourself for God’s service; be faithful. He will presently appoint thee... In some unlikely quarter, in a shepherd's hut, or in an artisan's cottage, God has His prepared and appointed instrument. As yet the shaft is hidden in His quiver, in the shadow of His hand; but at the precise moment at which it will tell with the greatest effect, it will be produced and launched in the air.

V5 – Ahasuerus adds another seven days drinking to the six-month banquet. The Persians were renown for their love of grandeur and pomp. The book of Esther reflects the transient glory of man. The greatness of Ahasuerus reflected in his lengthy feasts did come to an end and where now is all its glory? Mankind is awestruck at the largesse and grandeur of the wealthy and powerful, but we should see through its vanity with spiritual eyes.

The history of the world is the story of nations and empires that prospered and later turned to dust, some slowly others in a moment of time. For the most part all that can be witnessed is what is left of them in museums, in ruins and in a few ancient stone buildings.
Where were white, green, and blue, hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble: the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black, marble. And they gave them drink in vessels of gold, (the vessels being diverse one from another,) and royal wine in abundance, according to the state of the king. And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure. Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to king Ahasuerus. 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. 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. (v6-12)

V9 – The Persian culture was for the men and women to eat separately. This may somewhat explain Vashti’s reluctance to come to the men’s banquet later.

V10 – Herodotus the historian tells us that the Persians actually believed that intoxication took them closer to the spiritual world. Ahasuerus, in high spirits under the twin influences of alcohol and pride, requests his chamberlains (who may have been the keepers of his harem of women) to bring his “trophy” wife for the drunken guests to view “her beauty.” Wine has transformed him from a king to a pathetic spectacle ready for any folly. Drunkenness leads to further humiliation, painful rebuffs, irrational passions, shame, and regrets. How far this request of Ahasuerus was to go is not revealed but it seems probable that something was contrary to normal modesty and culture in Persian society for Vashti to reject this request.

It is notable that she was not given freedom of choice like the princes and nobles were accorded. The king’s drunken and selfish whims must be accommodated even if Vashti was protecting his honour by her refusal. Ahasuerus was a friend of nobody but himself. With great wealth does not come inevitably come wisdom.

ALCOHOL

Alcohol is often associated with immorality and reckless judgment in the Bible (e.g. Gen. 9:21; Gen. 19:32; 1 Sam. 25:37; 2 Sam. 13:28; 1 Kings 16:9; Isa. 28:7; 1 Cor. 5:11; Gal. 5:21; 1 Peter 4:3). It still is today. One drink can lead to an act of lust that brings a lifetime of regret. Alcohol destroys internally, externally and eternally! Proverbs 23:31-33 makes clear,

Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a
serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.

A similar warning against intoxicating wine is found in Proverbs 20:1:

Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

As Albert Barnes comments,

Was any man ever made a better Christian by the use of wine? Was any minister ever better fitted to counsel an anxious sinner, or to pray, or to preach the gospel, by the use of intoxicating drinks? Let the history of wine-drinking and intemperate clergymen answer.

In the culture we live in, the problems and sin associated with alcohol have been well documented. Therefore, it is incumbent for believers to be extremely cautious in pushing for “liberty” in areas that are so tainted by association with sin. When we stand before God a consistent position of total abstinence from alcohol will not be one of those areas where we will be censured. Those who argue for social drinking will not be able to approach the same judgment with the same certitude of confidence on this issue. We must be extremely careful not to undermine anything that defines our testimony to the world. That is why Paul warned us in 1 Corinthians 10:23,

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.

Abstain from all appearance of evil. 1 Thess. 5:2

See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Eph. 5:15

Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time Col. 4:5

V12 – Ahasuerus is not accustomed to having his will defied. His circumstances only heightened his humiliation. This refusal reveals the stark reality that even the most powerful man on the planet cannot bind your conscience. The Law of the Medes and the Persians could not be revoked but it could be refused. Man’s power is not infinite and is always limited by a Sovereign God. As Luther famously illustrated at the Diet of Worms in 1521 when asked to recant his Reformation doctrines he replied, “my conscience is captive to the Word of God.”
The description of grandeur and power in these verses brings the careful reader to consider who is really in charge in this world? In this incident we are confronted with the shallow nature of man’s power and pomp. One woman at a party refused a request and the whole Persian Empire was rocked to the core. Despite the boastings of man, he is such a fragile creature. A tiny virus we cannot even see can destroy the strongest and healthiest in a few hours. Only an involuntary heartbeat or brainwave separates us from eternity.

The lust of Ahasuerus provoked by alcohol quickly leads to another unbridled passion of anger. Instead of humility at this demonstration of the limit of his power, his deflated pride leads to his famed fits of anger. Indeed, often a person under the influence of alcohol can go from drunken happiness to intense anger in just a few seconds. All the superficial fun and frivolity of the six-month feast is abruptly brought to a halt by the disobedience of his queen. This is a great humiliation as here is the king seeking to show off his power and he cannot even get his wife to obey him.

The reality is that the material benefits and power of such an empire can ultimately never satisfy the heart of man. Only God can bring true contentment and satisfaction in the heart of a man. The ultimate irony of human vanity is that the absolute monarch of the great Persian Empire is not able to govern himself. We may put a man on the moon, split the atom, use the latest gadget technology, but after 6,000 years man still cannot master his passions.

VASHTI: RIGHT OR WRONG?

The question of whether Vashti was right or wrong to refuse her husband’s request is hotly debated over. Some say she was right to protect her modesty and others that she should have submitted to her husband.

At this point we can simply conclude that the Bible does not give us enough information to make a definitive judgment on the issue. We should not seek to deduce lessons from Scripture that it does not definitively adjudicate on. The key application from this incident is the providential workings of God amidst the wrong actions and behaviour of sinful men and women.
CHAPTER TWO

The Folly of Man

(ESTHER 1:13-22)

The palace scene is a vivid picture of the glory of man, without a thought of God. Sadly, largess and indulgence cannot ultimately satisfy the human soul and carries with it many pitfalls. As the old saying goes, “first the man takes a drink and then the drink takes the man.” It is hard to feel sorry for a man who can give himself to months of shameless indulgence and self-promotion. When man is consumed by pride in his own glory then inevitably trouble follows. Man was created for the glory of God and to have dominion over creation. As Ray Steadman observed,

Man, as God intended him, was made to be a king. And in properly governing himself and the earth, which is his domain, he would be displaying the majesty and the glory and the power of the God who indwelt him. This is what man was intended to be, and this is what man has never forgotten. We wonder what it is that motivates men to climb to the top of Mount Everest. What is there on top of Mount Everest that people must organize expeditions, lay out small fortunes, and risk their lives in order to see it? Nothing! Just the other side of the mountain, as the old song says. Well, then, why do they go up there? Because man has never forgotten that he was given dominion over all the earth; he was told to master its forces; he was told to discover all its mysteries and secrets, and thus to display the majesty of the glory and might of the God who indwelt him. This is man’s function – man was made for the glory of God…..As we read this story in Esther, we find that this king, however, was not content to display the authority that was properly his. For as the party goes on, he seems to feel that the glory and majesty was of his own making. He was lifted up with pride and weakened by his own indulgence. He foolishly tries to pervert his own nature, in a sense, to satisfy his own evil ambition, and he sends for the queen to come and display all her beauty and glory before this crowd.

We can only but imagine the mortification of this proud monarch. Surrounded by cronies and powerful leaders, he is made look foolish by a woman, even if that woman is the queen. Vashti refused to appear before the king when summoned and now she will never again be allowed to appear before the king. She proved that although her body belonged to the
king, her will is still her own. It could have been that the presence of the other women at her feast empowered Vashti to believe that she had the right to refuse. Whether it was down to pride or to virtue is impossible to discern but she must face the consequence of her decision. The important point for the writer was that she did not appear, not why she did not.

Someone ironically observed that this king was particularly poor at selecting an obedient wife, “his first wife, Queen Vashti, refused to come to the King when summoned; his second wife, Queen Esther, went to the king without summons.” Indeed, many envy the wealthy and powerful but without God they are more to be pitied. The marriages of Ahasuerus are no model to emulate. The little rhyme is so true:

Money can buy a house but not home.  
Money can buy food but not appetite.  
Money can buy a bed but not sleep.  
Money can buy a book but not knowledge. 
Money can buy a clock but not time.  
Money can buy medicine but not health.  
Money can buy position but not respect.  
Money can buy blood but not life.  
Money can buy insurance but not safety.

This whole incident also exemplifies that a word spoken in anger or an act of intemperance can cause a lifetime of sorrow. The consequences of this invariably hurt those nearest and dearest to us. We all succumb so easily to the old saying, “Temper gets you into trouble. Pride keeps you there.” If a man is solely governed by his passions and pride, then the joys of life quickly dissipate.

By the end of this incident Ahasuerus will regret his haste. Once a man starts down a path of foolishness he no longer have control over what the results will be. As the Psalmist says, “man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish.” Ahasuerus would have been well advised to listen to the wisdom of a greater monarch who stated, “Blessed art thou, O land, when thy king is the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness?” (Eccl. 10:17).

Then the king said to the wise men, which knew the times, (for so was the king's manner toward all that knew law and judgment: And the next unto him was Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, which saw the king's face, and which sat the first in the kingdom;) What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law, because she hath not performed the commandment of the king Ahasuerus by the chamberlains? (v13-15)

V13 – It is difficult to discern whether the narrator is being sarcastic as to the qualities of these men as those who “knew the times” and “knew law and
"judgment." Ahasuerus consults his inner circle of wise men, (probably astrologers and soothsayers) to come up with a solution to this problem. It is commendable that he at least took some advice in the heat of his anger as, “in the multitude of counsellors is safety” (Prov. 11:14). As George Lawson commented,

Such was Solomon’s disposition. Although he was the wisest of men, he had old counsellors, whom he consulted in all his affairs. And it was the folly of his son Rehoboam, by which he brought unspeakable mischief on himself, and upon his people, that he forsook the old counsellors who had stood before his father, and hearkened to those young counsellors, that paid much more regard to their own passions, and the king’s, than to laws and judgement.

Many of these Eastern monarchs, who had no divine revelation, based their judgments on the views of men who professed to be able to foretell future events by the stars. From this they then framed laws for the empire. Often powerful men in history have turned to the occult world for guidance as they faced critical decisions. However, as believers we have the more sure Word of prophecy to guide us, as “Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth; that thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee?” (Prov. 22:20-21).

And Memucan answered before the king and the princes, Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people that are in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus. For this deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported, The king Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not. Likewise shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king’s princes, which have heard of the deed of the queen. Thus shall there arise too much contempt and wrath. (v16-18)

V16 - Memucan convinces the king that the situation is even graver than it first appears. He argues that Vashti’s conduct was not just an act of disobedience against the king, but it was an offence to all the princes and indeed all the people. This is because once her rebellion is known then other women will feel justified in rebelling against their husband’s authority. If the powerful king cannot command obedience by his wife then how could the ordinary husband? Ironically, today’s feminist movement believe they are a novel development when it is clear they have a long history!

If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, That Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she. And when the king’s decree which he shall make shall be published
throughout all his empire, (for it is great,) all the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small. (v19-20)

V19 - So Memucan recommends a display of royal power that is swift and sure. He suggested that a royal decree be made and that queen Vashti be deposed of her position. This suggestion is not a biblical response to the disobedience of Vashti. The law given on divorce does not permit such a light disavowal of this creation ordinance. We should note how much more just and greater are God’s laws than those of man. The likely consequence of Memucan’s proposal is an increase of tyrannical husbands and a rise in trivial divorces throughout the empire.

This proposed decree would be irreversible. To prevent any monarch becoming capricious, negligent or self-serving the Medo-Persian legal system imposed an unalterable law to which even the king himself was subject. This safeguard had a dangerous side effect that if an unwise law was passed it could never be amended or repealed. With fallible and depraved men involved this was a huge risk. All man-centred legal systems need stability and consistency but they also need to flexibility to change in light of the fallen condition of man. No time is seemingly taken by Ahasuerus for objective deliberation when the effects of wine had fully worn off on them all.

It is interesting that a secular leader here recognizes the principle that the conduct of prominent people has an influence on those around them. Also, Memucan recognized the need for wives to be in submission to their husbands. Now, whether he misapplied this in this instance could be debated, but the principle he espoused is a good one and a biblical one. We all affect others in the malignant circumstances of open sins, especially those we have been given responsible for by providence. As Christ warned, “Offences must needs come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh.” (Matt. 18:7)

And the saying pleased the king and the princes; and the king did according to the word of Memucan: For he sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man should bear rule in his own house, and that it should be published according to the language of every people. (v21-22)

V22 - Under the emotional reaction of the moment, the king accepted this suggestion which would bring him later much regret. He signs a decree that ironically will inform all the empire of his humiliation by a woman. Instead of strengthened he is made look foolish. It was a pyrrhic victory but ultimately would leave all involved suffering loss.
GOD’S FIRST STEP

One writer defined providence as, “God acting anonymously.” To comfortably come through the troubles of life we need to be anchored in belief in the mystery of providence of Almighty God. God cannot be predicted, advised, or pushed into one of man’s little philosophical boxes.

Despite the actions and plots of evil, we need to see how the plan of providence is quietly reached. A vacancy now arises for a queen the first step is taken for the ultimate purpose, which this book commemorates. The drunken party, the refusal of Vashti, and the reaction of Ahasuerus are all being used by providence for the glory of God. While men drink and forget God, they cannot escape the activity of providence in human life. However, we need to note what Campbell Morgan points out,

God did not make Ahasuerus drunk, and God did not put into his heart the unholy desire that Vashti should be presented to his drunken lords; but God is in the shadow while Ahasuerus and his crowd of lords indulge in their carousal, while Vashti declines to yield to the whim of the king; and He uses Esther for the deliverance.

Doubtless, the Jews living and prospering in Persia were oblivious to the significance of Vashti’s removal would have for their very existence. Sometimes the pieces of the jigsaw of life may seem insignificant to us now, as we know not what God is ultimately doing through them. The greatest events in human history have been generally produced by apparently insignificant causes. God’s providential work may appear hidden, but we should never make the error in thinking He is doing nothing. During the long time of the bondage in Egypt God seemed silent and anonymous, but He both saw and heard the cries of His people. Throughout it all God was executing a wise divine plan.

In this book of Esther we see our story behind the story, as this Persian drama reveals God working the same anonymous parallel manner in our lives (1 Cor. 10:11). Although we may not always see God, we can be sure that He never loses sight of us. What catches us by surprise never has the same effect on God, as He knows the end from the beginning.

When it seems that God is not active in human affairs, He may be most at work. He can bring great results out of small beginnings. When we face the unanswerable questions and difficult dilemmas of life we must simply stand on the rock of God Word and trust the God with the unknown future. This book of Esther should comfort us, enhance our worship, and strengthen our trust in our all wise and all loving God.
CHAPTER THREE

The Orphan Contestant

(Esther 2:1-10)

The preceding chapter leaves us in high drama and suspense. Vashti is one of the most tragic characters in this book. She seemed to have it all as the First Lady of Persia – looks, power, wealth, and security. However, she had a fatal weakness – it was all tied up to the wishes of one man. Yes, she was at the top of the tree but she perched perilously close to the edge. In one moment, she lost it all. She should have noted the advice of the Psalmist, “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help” (Psa. 146:3).

Chapter one also proves that the Lord knows of future needs and caters for it before it even arises. Before Haman plotted his evil genocide, God was at work preparing an unlikely candidate to deliver His people. The story will take many strange and bewildering paths but God will never lose His way. As Alexander Whyte wrote, “Only, let us take heed to note that the sacred writer’s whole point is this, that the Divine Hand was, all the time, overruling Ahasuerus’s brutality.” Remarkably the providence of God delivers His people in a most wonderful way without a single miracle. We see this throughout the Old Testament. This truth would have been a great encouragement for Jews living in this uncertain time, as it is for believers today. As one writer put it,

One would suppose that many of the dramas of the Old Testament were planned on very purpose to show how intimately things secular and things sacred, as we call them, are connected together; how entirely the minutest events are controlled by God, and at the same time how thoroughly the freedom of man is preserved. The meeting of two convicts in an Egyptian prison is a vital link in the chain of events that makes Joseph governor of Egypt; a young lady coming to bathe in the river preserves the life of Moses, and secures the escape of the Israelites; the thoughtful regard of a father for the comfort of his sons in the army brings David into contact with Goliath, and prepares the way for his elevation to the throne; the beauty of a Hebrew girl fascinating a Persian king saves the whole Hebrew race from massacre and extermination.

All of the lives in this book have been recorded for our edification and instruction. This is not so we can hide behind their sins, but so we can
be warned about them. The greatness of this book is that it explains for us what God is doing when He is silent. Doubtless, God gave it to us to build our faith amidst the confusion of life. When we face the trials of life the silence of God should now make sense. We can all understand the implications of history but none of us can make sense of the future now as,

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope (Rom. 15:4).

It seems three years had passed since the deposing of Vashti in the third year of Ahasuerus' reign (Est. 1:3), as Esther was not brought before the king until the seventh year of his reign (Est. 2:16). It is thought that during this interval, Ahasuerus suffered a humiliating defeat by the Greeks in the Battle of Salamis in 480 BC and the Battle of Plataea in 479 BC. This war was the beginning of the end for the Persian empire.

Despite heavily outnumbering the Greeks, his Persian army was routed and his wealth greatly affected. He returned home in shame with his ego dented and disconsolate. Probably, the proud monarch longed for comfort and his thoughts were directed to his former favourite Vashti.

_V2 – In a drunken rage, Ahasuerus deposed his queen in a fit of anger and for three lonely years lived without a queen. Yes, he had many women to satisfy his lust in his harem but what he longed for was the comfort and love that only a wife could bring. Like so many sinners, Ahasuerus did what he liked but when he faced the consequences of his action he found he did not like what he did it. These absolute monarchs are greatly envied by men but his restless soul reveals the vacuous nature of such a life. These men had been round Ahasuerus long enough to know that when he is depressed or angry, it was dangerous for them all. They had their own self-serving agenda, as they knew very well that if Vashti was received back was done it would likely cost them their lives. No doubt they also were aware that the sensual passions of the king could easily overrule any Persian protocol at their peril._
V4 – Everyone was in the contest by virtue of being born in the empire. This “Miss Persia” contest proposal appealed to the sensual desire and ego of Ahasuerus, who alone would conduct this pageant by being the judge and the winner! We are told, “The thing pleased the king, and he did so.” That was the sum total of the moral judgment by Ahasuerus – he did what suited him. The plan involved this man to simply spend a night with each of them and then select the one that pleased him best. It is ironic that after removing Vashti for disobedience and claiming that her estate should be given to one “better than she” (Est. 1:19) that the only requirement for a new Queen was beauty, youth, and virginity.

This is no heart-warming romantic “Cinderella” or “Beauty and the Beast” story. Each woman would allow this lustful king to take advantage of her for one night in the forlorn hope he would favour her. If they failed, they would be doomed to a life forgotten in Ahasuerus’s harem without hope of a loving husband and family forever. The carnal self-indulgence and selfishness of Ahasuerus should also be noted, especially as he was so interested in family values in the first chapter!

Although many would doubtless feel this was a “once in a lifetime” opportunity for an orphaned Jewess, this would be especially undesirable for Esther. She would have to live amidst the trappings of paganism all of her days separated from her covenant people. Even if she won, she would be married to a capricious and unfaithful husband who had already proven capable of ruthlessly divorcing one wife.

V5 – Was Mordecai living in disobedience in not returning with the other exiles? Certainly the Scriptures revealed of God promises to bring them back and their prophets urged their return (Jer. 50:8; 51:6). However, we cannot simply jump to the conclusion that it was possible for every exile to go back, even if they desired. Some may have been servants whose masters refused their release. Others may have had financial problems or even careless spouses or parents that made it impossible for them to return. Esther was an orphan and Mordecai may have been supporting other relatives in the same position. Certainly, he must be commended for taking care of the burden of Esther.

Who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle’s daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter. So it came to pass, when the king’s commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was brought also unto the king’s house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women. (v6-8)
The question must also be faced concerning whether Esther was right to go and take part in this contest to win the affections of Ahasuerus. Even if we accept that the Hebrew verb “was brought” can be interpreted to mean she was taken against her will, that does not mean she should have gone any further. The Scriptures clearly taught that a Jew could not marry a pagan uncircumcised Gentile (Deut. 7:1-4), have a sexual relationship with a man who was not her husband (Exod. 20:14), and eat unclean food (Lev. 11:46-47). Esther did all three. In fact, it was impossible to think of a worse candidate for a husband than that of Ahasuerus, whose foul temper and womanising was legendary.

Daniel and his three friends had proven that the Law of God should be obeyed in exile no matter what the cost. Indeed, Vashti had demonstrated that the King’s law cannot break a person’s will and conscience. As Lawson says, “Esther saved the Jews, but by being in a situation to do so, Esther transgressed the Law of her God.” We are not permitted to break the least of the commandments of God. We are not to do evil that good may come from it.

Mordecai was also culpable as her adopted father and advisor. He seems to make no effort to secure her exemption from this contest. Some have speculated that he may have allowed Esther to go forward in order to further his own personal ambitions. Others, somewhat more favourable, argue that he saw this as a providential way to put a Jew in a prominent position like Daniel. However, no solution is even given in the narrative to this question but whatever his motive it is never right to do wrong. There is no hint of commendation for Mordecai in this incident, although it is clear he does care for her (v11). Spurgeon observed,

We cannot commend Mordecai for putting his adopted daughter in competition for the monarch’s choice—it was contrary to the Law of God and dangerous to her soul in the highest degree. It would have been better for Esther to have been the wife of the poorest man of the house of Israel than to have gone into the den of the Persian despot. The Scripture does not excuse, much less commend, the wrong doing of Esther and Mordecai in thus acting, but simply tells us how Divine Wisdom brought good out of evil, even as the chemist distils healing drugs from poisonous plants. The high position of Esther, though gained contrary to the wisest of laws, was overruled for the best interests of her people.

In mitigation there are a number of factors that should be considered before condemning Esther. We do know that the wishes of females were usually not taken much into consideration in eastern marriages. Also, Esther was probably still an innocent teenage girl snatched from the safety of her sheltered home, which would not make her a natural candidate for bravery.
Unlike Daniel who was brought into captivity from Jerusalem she could have been a third generation exile. We know that Daniel had been clearly taught the Word of God whereas Esther may have known little of it. As an orphan she could have grown up assimilated into the Persian culture, language, and non-kosher lifestyle.

And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, which were meet to be given her, out of the king's house: and he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the house of the women. Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew it. (v9-10)

V9 – Clearly, resistance is not high on Esther’s agenda. She soon adapted to her surroundings and prospered. This is not because of her godliness but because providence is working for her (Dan. 1:9). Many movie stars win the hearts of men, but not because of their godly character. Indeed, we have no explicit evidence of her having a righteous character in this book. This assistance by Hegai may have given her a head start in the beautification process over the other contestants.

V10 – Although some say there was hostility towards the Jews at this time, it is not clear why Mordecai instructed this. The Persians generally were tolerant to other racial and ethnic groups in the empire. Indeed, the beauty contest was from all the women in the empire. Also, Mordecai did not hide his Jewish identity before Haman.

The suspicion must be that Mordecai advised her this to aid her chances of winning. For if he wanted to harm her chances, the implication is that they could have reduced her chances or eliminated her selection by revealing her nationality. Although it is good that Esther is obedient to the instructions of her adopted father, there are limits to how far we must obey. Esther’s identity was tied to her faith and she had no biblical mandate for hiding her faith. Israel was meant to be the witness of the gospel to the nations. By contrast, Daniel never hid his faith, even to the king (Dan. 6:5, 20). As Moore states, “the impression remains that Esther’s Jewishness was more a fact of birth than of religious conviction.”

There is also the contrast between other exiles. Ezra had a zeal for the law of God (Ezra 7:10) and Nehemiah had a longing for Jerusalem but we do not see these characteristics in Esther (Neh. 1:4). Indeed, Nehemiah seems to imply a spiritual failure in the exiles in Persia (Neh.1:7). However, it must also be stated that she was much younger than either Ezra or Nehemiah and that she did reveal her Jewish identity when it was needed to save her people (Est. 7:3, 4). There is a hint that both she and Mordecai may have had a deeper faith than is evident in the first reading of this book (Est. 4:16).
CHAPTER FOUR

Miss Persia

(Esther 2: 11-23)

At the beginning of chapter two, Esther is oblivious to her future – no doubt she was happily growing up in obscurity as a teenage girl in the house of Mordecai. That peace would soon be shattered. She could never have imagined the deposing of Vasti would have set off a chain of events that would immortalise her name.

Despite the attempts of many commentators to promote Esther as an example of godly character we should not be so quick to assume this. There was now be no opt out from the laws of God in exile, as Daniel proved. Deffinbaugh points out, “Why are we happy to see Esther on the throne, even though she has misrepresented her nationality and kin, is living outside the promised land, and is married to a heathen king, the winner of a contest which included sleeping with the king?” He adopts an extremely critical tone, which is worth citing,

Ezra and Nehemiah are the account of the godly Jews who returned to the promised land and who sought to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple amidst great difficulty and opposition. Esther, on the other hand, is an account of those who became too attached to the land of their sojournings and thus disobeyed God by not returning when it was not only allowed, but commanded. It is in the light of the rest of the Old Testament Scriptures that we can see the Book of Esther for what it is and appreciate its unique message and contribution. While Ezra and Nehemiah focus on the return to the land by the faithful remnant, Esther depicts the fate of those who remain in the land of their captivity. We should not expect Mordecai and Esther to be godly Jews, for they are living in disobedience. No wonder there is no mention of God, and no wonder that Esther’s Persian name is the name of a heathen God, Ishtar.

Why has God inspired and preserved this book as a part of the Old Testament canon? What does it have to say to us? First, it is a warning to those of us who live our lives not as “strangers and pilgrims,” but as citizens of an earthly realm, as mere worldlings (see 1 Peter 1:1ff.). Second, it warns us not to forget where our “home” is and to live in a way that makes us eager to leave this world and go home. It cautions us about getting caught up in what the world views
as success, so that we actually rejoice over Esther’s rise to power and prominence and prosperity no matter how she got there. Third, it teaches us that even when we are unfaithful, God remains faithful to His Word and to His covenant promises.

The Book of Esther is about the sinfulness of those Jews who did not return to the promised land and about God’s providential care of His people, not because of the sins of His people, but in spite of them. Sadly, God is not mentioned in Esther, because God is not thought of in Esther. These “people of God” lived their lives as though there was no God. They were practical atheists, seeking to get ahead or to survive by their own wits and cunning, rather than living by God’s Word and trusting Him to deliver them by His power. The book does not flatter the Persian Jews, nor should it. But it does too often describe us and the condition of our cold hearts. Heeding the lessons learned from the Book of Esther should help us forsake the cares of this world and cling to Him who has prepared the way to the next.

Esther is not listed in Hebrews 11 with the heroes of the faith. We will certainly not be singing “Dare to be an Esther!” Esther and Mordecai apparently had chosen to adopt the dress, customs, and practices of their Gentile neighbours. Had they followed the Jewish dietary requirements and marriage laws their nationality would be immediately obvious to all. Esther’s progress in one world required the denial of her identity in another world. Such a pressure to assimilate and conform we can all identify with as too often we succumb to the same pressure. Many believers try to be secret disciples.

There are many disturbing things about God’s people in exile as represented in the Book of Esther. However, God is working silently His perfect plan through this sins and failures of the characters. God will overlook the unfaithfulness of Esther and Mordecai to use them for His ultimate purpose. Wiersbe observes,

When you consider the backslidden state of the Jewish nation at that time, the disobedience of the Jewish remnant in the Persian Empire, and the unspiritual lifestyle of Mordecai and Esther, is it any wonder that the name of God is absent from this book? Would you want to identify your holy name with such an unholy people?

*And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women’s house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her. Now when every maid’s turn was come to go in to king Ahasuerus, after that she had been twelve months, according to the manner of the women, (for so were the days of their purifications accomplished, to wit, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odours, and with other things for the purifying of the women;) (v11-12)*
V11 - Mordecai is worried about her and rightly so. Esther is in a precarious and dangerous position now. Doing wrong will never generate peace of mind. Alone from her adopted father, must have been especially difficult for young Esther. No doubt her companions in the harem were not the easiest of companions to live alongside with all the insecurities and petty jealousies that come with such a beauty contest. She must have had many long hours of dreary loneliness and unhappiness during these twelve months.

V12 – It took a long time to prepare for this date! The Persians were famous for their aromatics and spices, which were Persia’s major export. No expense is spared as the king wanted to add to his collection of living dolls with another trophy wife. Some say the 12-month period was also to ensure that they were not with child. This attraction based upon the flesh is the opposite of the Christian ideal, “In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.” (1 Tim. 2:9-10)

V14 – This is no romantic tale. They were being trained to do one thing - satisfy the unrestrained sensual desires of a pagan king. For such a guardian of family values, this man does not live up to the ideals of marriage. It also shows what a corrupting society for exiled Jews to bring up their children.

V15 – Hegai knew what the king liked, and, being partial to Esther, aided her advancement. In commendation, she does appear willing to take advice.
V17 – It seems that this compromise has worked, but the consequences will come back to haunt both of them in the future. In a few years the bubble will burst. Arguably, the failure to disclose her Jewish identity will cost both Mordecai, her people, and herself much anguish.

Again we should not overlook the providence of God here. Even though Esther was beautiful, the capricious king could have preferred another or through cunning another less attractive competitor could have won his heart. Chance is not a doctrine that belongs not to the believer’s creed. As a voluntary agent, Ahasuerus fulfilled the will of the One who he knew not. God works through His enemies, including the devil and his angels, as well as God works through the actions of His people. As Thomas Watson says, “God always has a hand in the action where the sin is, but he never has a hand in the sin of the action.”

We cannot help but be amazed at the power of providence to lead Ahasuerus to favour an orphaned Jewess amidst the beautiful women of all the great empire. Every instrument that God uses for the advancement of His great plan will be perfectly fitted with the requisite gifts, even if this is immediately not aware to the person or those around them.

V18 – In the superficial world of Persia, when the tyrant is happy everyone benefits. Esther is no role model – obtaining tax relief is not a legacy to be proud of. Yet her sin and compromise would not prevent the grace of God using her life later.

V19 – Even though Esther is now the Queen, this man is still seeking sensual pleasures elsewhere. She should have heeded the warning of Vashti that this is not a secure position. Undoubtedly Esther was much admired and envied for winning the “Miss Persia” contest, but it would not bring her lasting happiness.

It also proves, once again, that the things of this world do not bring lasting satisfaction. As Proverbs 25:28 states, “He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.” Ahasuerus could conquer great cities but not his own character.

In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king’s gate, two of the king’s chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those which kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hands on the king Ahasuerus. And the thing was known to Mordecai, who told it unto Esther the queen; and Esther certified the king thereof in Mordecai’s name. And when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out; therefore they were both hanged on a tree: and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king. (v21-23)

V21 – Evil often arises silently and unexpectedly as “In those days.” The closing verses are far from incidental but describe another silent providential act of God drawing a thread together in His greater plan. God has both Esther and Mordecai in the position where He wants them. We are not told
how Mordecai gets this confidential information or why the plot even came about. Some speculate that it was linked to the removal of Vashti, and her replacement by a non-Persian bride.

V22 - Mordecai probably informed Esther, as he would have been worried about her welfare in any assassination. She may have been murdered also and, in any event, would be deposed as Queen. Although Esther does tell the king and gave credit to Mordecai, she still does not reveal her Jewish identity.

There is no protection from death even for a supreme monarch. As one writer said, “uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.” Ahasuerus would survive this time but he would eventually be assassinated. The life of kings is in the hand of God also.

V23 - The Persians were said to impale those on a tree who committed such capital offences. The ingratitude by Ahasuerus would be providential. Good deeds are not always immediately rewarded. Joseph extended kindness to the chief butler but two years passed before providence would bless him.

In spite of what outward appearances suggest, God is working silently in everything. This apparent injustice will redound later to the glory of God and the benefit of His people. God’s timing is always perfect and He would use this incident to reward Mordecai at a more important moment for the saving of his life. God is the master craftsman, weaving a masterpiece through lives with what seem to be insignificant threads. As Matthew Henry commented, “No step is yet taken towards Haman’s design of the Jews’ destruction, but several steps are taken towards God’s design of their deliverance, and this for one.” Spurgeon preaching on providence picks up another pertinent example of a foiled plot,

Paul goes into the temple, and the Jews rush upon him in a moment to kill him. They drag him out of the temple, and the doors are shut against him. They are just in the very act of killing him, and what is to become of poor Paul’s life? Five minutes longer and Paul will be dead, when up comes the chief captain and delivers him. How was it that the chief captain knew of it? Very probably some young man of the crowd who knew Paul and loved him, ran to tell him. But why was it that the chief captain was at home? How was it that the ruler was able to come on a moment’s emergency? How was it that he did come at all? It was only just a Hebrew, a man that was good for nothing, being killed.

How was it that he came, and when he came the streets were full; there was a mob about Jerusalem? How did he come to the right street? How did he come at the exact nick of time? Say, “It is all
chance!” I laugh at you; it is providence. If there be anything in the world that is plain to any man that thinks, it is plain that God, “Overrules all mortal things, And manages our mean affairs.” But mark, that the running of the youth, and his arrival at the precise time, and the coming of the chief governor at the precise time, just proved the punctuality of Divine providence; and if God has a design that a thing shall happen at twelve, if you have appointed it for eleven, it shall not happen till twelve; and if he means it to be delayed till one, it is in vain that you propose any earlier or any later. God’s punctuality in providence is always sure, and very often apparent.
At the end of chapter two, Esther and Mordecai seem comfortable in their respective positions. More than five years had passed (cf. Esther 2:16 and 3:7) since her elevation. Like Lot in his initial years in Sodom, it seems they have prospered in their disobedience. However, danger will come when they do not anticipate it in another strange twist.

After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him. And all the king's servants, that were in the king's gate, bowed, and reverenced Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence.

V1 – “After these things” introduces a new character into this drama called Haman. He will personify everything God hated,

These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren. (Prov. 6:16-19)

This unworthy man is promoted to effectively prime minister by Ahasuerus, who has previously shown himself to be weak and gullible. Walter Savage Landor wisely observed, “When little men cast long shadows, it is a sign that the sun is setting.” The contrast with the end of chapter two is notable as Mordecai is overlooked for promotion.

This world is not a fair place. Success does not always come to the most deserving. Life and suffering are synonymous. Probably Haman was promoted by his cunning intrigue and flattery. Whenever Haman’s name is read out in the synagogue the Jews stamp their feet and declare, “may his name be blotted out.”

V2 – Why did Mordecai refuse to bow down? Was it because he was a Benjamite of the tribal lineage of King Saul that he was especially affronted to bow to a proud Amalekite? Was he worried about honouring one whom God has cursed? Has he now found some convictions at last?
Many have written noble reasons why Mordecai refused to bow. However, up to this point he has not shown any desire to honour the Word of God. He did not prevent Esther being an idolatress or non-kosher to win her position. Certainly, he was not so proud of Esther’s Jewish identity. He also did not love the Jewish faith so much that he was willing to return from the exile.

It was not some scruple about honouring a man but a battle of wills, as Mordecai later was content to let Haman honour him in this way (Esther 6:10-11). Even Esther shows she is willing to bow to Ahasuerus. Nowhere in the text is there any suggestion that bowing down would be an act of worship. Dr John Whitcomb pointedly observes,

Although later writers have asserted that ‘Persian kings assume divine honours . . . no such claim on the part of the kings is found in the Persian monuments.’ (Paton, p. 196) Daniel had no problem saying to Darius the Mede: ‘O king, live forever!’ (Dan. 6:21; cf. Neh. 2:3 for Nehemiah’s homage to Artaxerxes). It is therefore preferable to conclude that Mordecai’s actions be seen ‘as an expression of Jewish national spirit and pride rather than adherence to Exod. 20:5.’

The probable reason for Mordecai’s refusal was because his pride was offended by the promotion of a proud Amalekite Haman when he felt he deserved such advance. Like his fellow Benjamite Saul, was he seeking to look spiritual by focusing on trivial issues? Deffinbaugh is even more scathing in his assessment,

The book might be more properly called the Book of Mordecai: he is the one who seems to enter her in the contest for queen; he instructs her to keep her identity a secret; he still exercised authority over her rather than her husband, the king. But most of all, Mordecai brought the entire Jewish race into grave danger because of his stubborn pride and rebellion—not because of his righteousness. Haman did not even know about Mordecai until the king’s servants drew his rebellion to this official’s attention. Even when rebuked, Mordecai would not submit or show respect. Even the one good thing he did (inform the king of the plot to kill him) seems to have been an act of self-interest; he was protecting Esther and his interests by saving the king’s skin.

It is bad enough that Mordecai was wicked and endangered his own people. But his hypocrisy in doing so is even worse. In the midst of his sin, he sought to sanctify it so it looked like righteousness. And it worked! It still works today, because Christians are still not only defending him, but are holding him up as a model for all of us to follow.
One thing is certain is that no glory will go to man in this story – all glory will be to God for the deliverance of the Exiles. Men will act for evil objectives, but God will turn it for good.

Then the king's servants, which were in the king's gate, said unto Mordecai, Why transgressest thou the king's commandment? Now it came to pass, when they spake daily unto him, and he hearkened not unto them, that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew. And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath. And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had shewed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai. (v3-6)

V3 – This seems to imply that he relayed to them his reasons for refusing to bow was related to his Jewish heritage. This explains why the servants highlighted his ancestry in their report to Haman.

V5 – We see here the pride of the depraved heart of man here. Haman had everything he wanted but he still craved more. Considering he was an ethnic minority, this man should have been humbled with his incredible rise to power among the Persians. True greatness is always magnanimous.

Instead, Haman is not merely irked by this perceived slight but is “full of wrath.” Providential blessing often brings out the worst in people. Daniel was humbled by his promotion whereas Haman was empowered in his pride.

V6 – This again reveals the depravity of man’s heart. One man slighted him and Haman wants to wipe out a whole race of innocent people. The devil took advantage of the proud passions to work through his diabolical plan of extermination of the whole chosen race.

History reveals that hatred and power are a lethal combination. We should never underestimate the power of revenge on those slighted. The key to Haman’s animosity is his ancestry. The Holy Spirit continually reminds us in this book that he was an “Agagite.” Doubtless, the prejudice had passed down the generations.

Before we condemn Haman we need to ask ourselves whether we are easily offended? Do we plan to get even someday? We find that the spirit of Haman is in all of us.

In the first month, that is, the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar. And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries. (v7-9)
The superstition of Haman in casting lots for a “lucky day” is used by God to providentially give the Jews time for deliverance to be wrought. “The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord” (Prov. 16. 33). It also gives space for the Exiled Jews to repent of their failures and compromises. Haman probably enjoyed the panic of the Jews as they contemplated their assumed pogrom over the next 12 months. The IVP Bible Background Commentary, Old Testament, commented about this date.

Passover, the greatest celebration of deliverance of the Israelites, was celebrated on the fourteenth of Nisan. The edict was written on the thirteenth of Nisan, so it began to be distributed on the fourteenth. Thus, just as the Jews were celebrating deliverance from their great enemy of the past, the Egyptians, they were learning of a new plot from a new enemy.

The irony in this superstition of lots is that few Christians truly seek God’s will in their decisions. Haman thought this would bring him luck but God would work through the delay to destroy this man. Haman’s biggest mistake as “the Jews’ enemy” (v10) was to take on God. As Vernon McGee says, “the Jew has attended the funeral of every one of the nations that tried to exterminate him.” We cannot help but notice the overtones of men like Hitler in this incident. Haman should have heeded the advice of a more powerful ruler than him,

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? (Daniel 4:34-35)

V8 – Racial prejudice, wounded pride and superstition combined to unleash this demonic plan. After determining that the gods approved his devilish strategy, Haman uses a mixture of truth, lies and exaggerated half-truths to manipulate the weak Ahasuerus. When a master surrounds himself with servants like Haman, the master becomes in reality the slave in this relationship.

Like his spiritual father the devil, Haman reveals that he is a murderer and a liar (John 8:44). In this conversation Haman shows why he was such a dangerous foe for the Jews. Cleverly, he does not mention:
(1) Amalekite prejudice
(2) Personal slight by Mordecai
(3) Name or numbers of the Jews

Haman as a cunning political operator pressed the right buttons to appeal to the King’s:

(1) Pride – pleas that these people keep not the king’s laws. This was an exaggeration as it was only Mordecai that refused to bow.
(2) Convenience – promises that he would deal with it.
(3) Greed – Ahasuerus was short of money after the Greek war.
(4) Security – Haman pretends he is only interested in the security of the king. He paints the Jews as rebellious – a loaded charge at a time when the Persian empire was weakened. The Jews had proven to be good citizens and many like Daniel had held high office faithfully. Satan inspired similar accusations against Christ Himself (cf. Luke 23:2) and the early saints (Acts 16:20-21; 24:5).

Unlike the previous incident over Vashti the king does not seek objective counsel. Perhaps this reveals a crisis in his ruling authority and relationship to his trusted advisors.

The devil strikes here at seemingly the optimum moment when the king is most vulnerable with a carefully chosen instrument Haman. However, God will delineate the wisdom of His great providence as the timing will be perfect for God to accomplish many objectives through this one incident. Haman will learn the truth of, “Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?” (Isa. 29:15).

V9 – 10,000 talents may be as much as two-thirds the annual revenue of the kingdom according to the Greek historian Herodotus. It is unlikely that this referred to Haman’s personal wealth. The sheer amount of money illustrates the intensity of the hatred of Haman.

This is probably an indication of the great wealth of the exiles, which he hoped to plunder from them. It may also explain why so many did not want to return to derelict Jerusalem (Jer. 29:4-7). God had warned them of the consequences of being drawn into such a materialistic spirit (Deut. 28:62-68).

And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews’ enemy. And the king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee. Then were the king’s scribes called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and there was written according to all that Haman had commanded unto the king’s lieutenants, and to the governors that were over every province, and to the rulers of every people of every province.
according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language; in the name of
king Ahasuerus was it written, and sealed with the king’s ring. And the letters were sent
by posts into all the king’s provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews,
both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of
the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey. The
copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all
people, that they should be ready against that day. The posts went out, being hastened by
the king’s commandment, and the decree was given in Shushan the palace. And the king
and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed. (v10-15)

V11 – This seems to be the typical oriental way of bargaining (Gen. 23). The
king was short of money and doubtless Haman knew this was a powerful
attraction. It was his most powerful weapon for getting the king’s
acquiescence. True to his character, Ahasuerus is going to act first without
much thinking and will later regret this act of rashness. In his greed,
Ahasuerus gives Haman a blank cheque on the basis of his vague words.

There was no objective investigation or seeking the impact of such a
decision on the harmony of the empire. Ahasuerus investigated ruthlessly a
plot against his life but shows no interest in the fate of hundreds of
thousands of his subjects. So much for Ahasuerus’s devotion to family
values and social cohesion that he professed in chapter one!

Ahasuerus claims, “The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them
as it seemeth good to thee.” Both men forgot that these were God’s people and
only He could decide their future.

Before we criticize too quickly we must examine ourselves also. Have
the Hamans of our age been talking to us recently? Do we accept
unsubstantiated gossip without critical thinking? How often are we fooled
by the thinking and advice of the world around us? Do we “try the spirits” (1
John 4:1) like true Bereans?

V15 – The great contrast here is seen in the reaction of these two groups –
difference and fear. Haman demonstrates the callous heart of the wicked
by drinking merrily knowing the fate awaiting tens of thousands of innocent
persons.

Providentially now the exiled Jews will learn not to trust in the
Empire or riches. They will discover that their only hope is truly in God. As
Deffinbaugh observed,

It should not come as a surprise that things would go so badly for
those Jews who refused to return to Jerusalem and Judah. After all,
God had long before warned that those who rebelled against His laws
would live in constant danger (Deut. 28:62-68).

Haman thought he had won but God already had two people in
place, Esther and Mordecai that would be the instruments for his
humiliation and downfall. In less than 3 months Haman would be hanged,
literally, on his own gallows. He would learn that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.
Since the fall, the devil has sought to destroy God’s redemptive plan. Haman was Satan’s latest instrument in this ongoing struggle. One writer observed,

Esther could be compared to a chess game. God and Satan (as invisible players) moved real kings, queens, and nobles. When Satan put Haman into place, it was as if he announced “Check.” God then positioned Esther and Mordecai in order to put Satan into “Checkmate!” Ever since the fall of man (Gen. 3:1–19), Satan has attempted to spiritually sever God’s relationship with His human creation and disrupt God’s covenant promises with Israel. For example, Christ’s line through the tribe of Judah had been murderously reduced to Joash alone, who was rescued and preserved (2 Chr. 22:10–12). Later, Herod slaughtered the infants of Bethlehem, thinking Christ was among them (Matt. 2:16). Satan tempted Christ to denounce God and worship him (Matt. 4:9). Peter, at Satan’s insistence, tried to block Christ’s journey to Calvary (Matt. 16:22). Finally, Satan entered into Judas who then betrayed Christ to the Jews and Romans (Luke 22:3–6). While God was not mentioned in Esther, He was everywhere apparent as the One who opposed and foiled Satan’s diabolical schemes by providential intervention.

In Esther, all of God’s unconditional covenant promises to Abraham (Gen. 17:1–8) and to David (2 Sam. 7:8–16) were jeopardized. However, God’s love for Israel is nowhere more apparent than in this dramatic rescue of His people from pending elimination. “Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep” (Ps. 121:4).

When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry; And came even before the king’s gate: for none might enter into the king’s gate clothed with sackcloth. And in every province, whithersoever the king’s commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. (v1-3)

V1 - Mordecai knew every detail of the plan (even the sum of money in v7). His possession of the decree demonstrated he was literate and must have
had powerful connections. The fact that he was the primary catalyst for Haman’s malice must have greatly enhanced his grief.

It is commendable that he did not use his powerful connections to flee the empire but acted to save the lives of others. There may have been as many as fifteen million Jews in the empire. The sackcloth and ashes were the traditional Eastern way of demonstrating great grief or repentance (Jonah 3). Was he feeling both? Did he begin to pray for guidance as to what to do next? Mordecai’s first difficulty was to communicate with Esther and then get her to take him seriously.

V2 – The king must be hidden from the reality of the real world of suffering, even if it is only superficially.

V3 – We see part of God’s great providential plan unfolding. The exiles are not so consumed with materialism now. Suffering has a way of bringing people together whereas materialism tends to drive them apart. This is true even amongst the people of God.

So Esther’s maids and her chamberlains came and told it her. Then was the queen exceedingly grieved; and she sent raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take away his sackcloth from him: but he received it not.

Then called Esther for Hatach, one of the king’s chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her, and gave him a commandment to Mordecai, to know what it was, and why it was. So Hatach went forth to Mordecai unto the street of the city, which was before the king’s gate. And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and of the sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king’s treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them. Also he gave him the copy of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, to shew it unto Esther, and to declare it unto her, and to charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people. (v 4–8)

V4 – This exemplifies the isolation of Esther’s position. She lost so much when she cut herself off from the Covenant people of Israel. We must, however, commend her care and respect for Mordecai.

V7 – Mordecai does not exaggerate, but is factual. We should never exaggerate the facts to manipulate people. That is the methodology of the Hamans of this world. He emphasized the importance of this by sending a copy of the decree and by issuing Esther a “charge” to go to the king.

And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai. Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai; All the king’s servants, and the people of the king’s provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or women, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days. And they told to Mordecai Esther’s words. (v9–12)
V9 – This servant had an awesome responsibility even if he did not know it. Tens of thousands of lives hung on his effective delivering of the message from Mordecai.

V11 – Esther reminds Mordecai of the reality of life, as she has not been called into the presence of the king for 30 days. Doubtless he has not been without other company. This ungodly marriage is no partnership of equals or an eternal romance. Esther exists simply for the whims of her sensuous husband.

Her first response is not outright refusal, but it is tied up more with the fear of man rather than God. The king has proven with Vashti that he is a capricious and ruthless man toward his leading lady for breaches of etiquette.

Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? (v13-14)

V13 – Although Esther was accustomed to following Mordecai’s instructions, it is interesting that Mordecai does not use his parental authority here when he gives this turning point in history speech. This is a difficult moment for him, as he cannot read Esther’s body language but is simply relying on the communication of a third party. Most commentators accept that Mordecai shows courage and high moral character here. His words imply link to the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:3).

Critics of Mordecai still point out that there is still no prayer, no invoking of God’s Name, and that he is still seeking human solutions through Esther. They also point out that even apostate Jews were proud of their link to Abraham (John 8:39) and they even fasted (Matt. 6:16). Courage is not a virtue exclusively for faithful saints as many unbelieving Jews showed this throughout history. Deffingbaah remains sceptical,

Why are Christians so inclined to embrace Esther and Mordecai as model saints, examples of faith and godliness?.....because they err in assuming that people recorded in Scripture are all godly. And so wayward prophets like Jonah are “sanctified” by a misreading and mishandling of the text. Ruth’s mother-in-law Naomi is embraced as a kind and loving woman rather than a grouchy and bitter old woman. Jacob is viewed as a pious man of faith rather than as a deceiving, self-seeking, con artist. And Esther and Mordecai are just one more example of reading the Bible through rose-colored glasses, seeing people in a way that makes us feel comfortable.....yet another reason why we fail to understand this book and its message. That
reason is simply our being taken in by the hypocrisy of Esther and Mordecai, because we assume that if the right forms are present, the right function is present as well. We assume that there was repentance because the Jews mourned in Susa and all of the Persian empire. We also assume that because there was fasting, there must also have been prayer. Since Mordecai spoke of the possibility that Esther’s position as queen might prove to be the means of the Jew’s deliverance, we automatically assume Mordecai had faith in God and in His providential care of His people.

Notwithstanding the criticism, there does seem to be a change of emphasis here by Mordecai. His primary focus appears not to be in Esther’s position but the God standing in the shadows. He also shows more interest in the salvation of the other Jews rather than simply pleading for his own life. In addition, trusting in God’s sovereignty does not obviate human responsibility or planning. Both aspects of this doctrine are wonderfully integrated. As John Calvin wrote,

This means that we are not at all hindered by God’s eternal decrees either from looking ahead for ourselves or from putting all our affairs in order, but always in submission to his will. The reason is obvious. For he who has set the limits to our life has at the same time entrusted to us its care; he has provided means and helps to preserve it; he has also made us able to foresee dangers; that they may not overwhelm us unaware, he has offered precautions and remedies. Now it is very clear what our duty is: thus, if the Lord has committed to us the protection of our life, our duty is to protect it; if he offers helps, to use them; if he forewarns us of dangers, not to plunge headlong; if he makes remedies available, not to neglect them.

Mordecai seems to grasp the following attributes of God:

(1) Justice (v13) – it is not obvious how retribution could have come upon Esther in her protected position except God intervened. After all her identity as a Jewess was hidden.

(2) Promises of God (v14a) – There seemed to be no obvious hope from any external deliverer so he must be alluding to the Abrahamic Covenant.

(3) Providence of God (v14b) – this classic statement, “who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” implies that Mordecai is awakening to this Providential attribute (Gen. 50:20).

Mordecai does not deny the human difficulties that Esther faces. He seems to have anticipated the temptation for her to ignore her God-ordained duty
by articulating that God works through human instruments but if they disobey, He will work through others. Man's disobedience will never defeat the settled purposes of God.

God is not at the mercy of Esther neither is He in a hurry here. He has His own timetable. He has infinite ways of delivering His people. There are five years between Chapters 2:16 and 3:7. God's preparation has been made many years in time.

Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish. So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him. (v15-17)

V15 – Mordecai’s eloquence and theological directness produces the right result. Now is the time for Esther to stand up and be counted. This is a terrible dilemma for a young girl to find herself in. She has never known pressure like this and faces two unappealing choices:

(1) Probable Death at the hand of Ahasuerus; or
(2) Permanent Exclusion from her Covenant People.

In fairness Esther rises swiftly to the occasion. She is not without flaw but now acts boldly and wisely by seizing the initiative. Esther is not just a trophy doll for Ahasuerus but is now living up to the noble calling of a Queen. This is her finest hour.

Although prayer is not mentioned it is surely implied by the corporate fasting. Extraordinary moments require extraordinary actions. Certainly, fasting would not help her appearance so must have had a spiritual dimension. Probably the five years that had now passed had opened her eyes to the emptiness and unhappiness of life with Ahasuerus cut off from her people.

It is interesting that she states here maidens would fast with her. Where they Jews? Had she now witnessed to them? She acknowledges the danger, “so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law” but true courage acts in spite of fear. Only fools act rashly without fear. Fearfulness is understandable in this context but not cowardice or disobedience. She was willing to do her duty and leave the consequences to God. Esther knew there was a higher law than the law of Ahasuerus.

The final words “if I perish, I perish” echo Jacob in Genesis 43:14. It was tempting for her to be indifferent behind the palace walls. She stands to lose everything yet she does not flinch in her duty. We are not to live simply for ourselves. May be Esther pondered now her extraordinary providential rise to the throne and saw the Hand of God bringing her for this occasion.

We are not indispensable to God's plan, but we are responsible to
obey it. Esther and Mordecai knew their theology but they did not live up to it until the crisis hit. It is at this point that we all tend to make a choice of God over mammon. There is no reward for mere theological beliefs that are not accompanied by theological deeds.

God uses frail vessels of clay like Esther and Mordecai to work out His purposes. It is the only material He has available, as there is no perfection found in man.

Am I a soldier of the cross,
   a follower of the Lamb,
and shall I fear to own his cause,
   or blush to speak his name?

Must I be carried to the skies
   on flowery beds of ease,
while others fought to win the prize,
   and sailed through bloody seas?

Sure I must fight if I would reign;
   Increase my courage, Lord.
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
   Supported by Thy Word.
CHAPTER SEVEN

A Banquet fit for a King

(ESTHER 5: 1-14)

Esther and Mordecai had a sharp awakening in chapter four. It appears to make them and the Jewish exiles think in a more spiritual manner. Often God does this to His people.

Esther purposed after the 40 hours of fasting to go in before Ahasuerus and plead for her people. We must commend her courage and wisdom. She did not have to do this, as she was shielded behind the palace gates. The risks were not insignificant in her action and she was not ignorant of them (4:16). This is her finest hour so far in this story.

To approach Ahasuerus was particularly difficult and fraught with danger because:

(1) Esther has to break the law in which the penalty for doing so is death.
(2) Esther has to admit that she has been deceiving Ahasuerus about her ethnic background for five years.
(3) Esther has to persuade the proud Ahasuerus to effectively reverse an irreversible law – in so doing he will lose a huge amount of promised revenue.
(4) Esther has to oppose and overcome one of the most cunning and powerful foes in Persia – Haman.
(5) Esther has to lead Ahasuerus down a path in which he will inevitably lose face.

Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king’s house, over against the king’s house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house. (v1)

V1 – Esther changes her apparel and carefully prepared herself to face Ahasuerus. There is no contradiction between believing in the Sovereignty of God and being wise about such details. 40 hours of fasting would not aid her physical appearance in the natural, but it would spiritually. Esther now understands that the latter is the most significant.

It is interesting that she recognizes that coming before a king requires her to be presentable – a fact that many ignore today when coming before the King of kings in the Lord’s House. Esther does not rush presumptuously in but remains demure at a discrete distance. She knows she has to violate protocol but she wants to do it in the least obvious manner.
And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre. Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom. (v2-3)

V2 – This is a tense moment for Esther and, humanely speaking, she is at the mercy of the whims of the capricious Ahasuerus. However, we must never overlook that the king’s heart is in the Hand of God (Prov. 21:1). God holds both the life of Esther and Ahasuerus in His Hand (Dan. 5:23). No Ahasuerus has ever intimidated God or frustrated the Almighty’s purposes. Ahasuerus may rule Persia but God will show that He is really in control.

V3 – Such a breach of royal protocol probably led the king to surmise that Esther required help with a very important matter. Hence, the hyperbolic gesture of a blank cheque up to half of his kingdom. Such a response must have greatly encouraged Esther.

And Esther answered, If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him. Then the king said, Cause Haman to make haste, that he may do as Esther hath said. So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared. (v4-5)

V4 – Why did Esther procrastinate? Did she lose her nerve and miss this golden opportunity? I do not think so as in v4b she makes clear that her request is tied up with a banquet she had previously “prepared” for him. She was setting a well planned trap for the cunning Haman, as she knows what she will ask of the king will be exceedingly difficult for him to grant. A number of suggestions have been made for her delay:

(i) She is aware that Ahasuerus has been caught off guard her so she needs to present her request at a more favourable point.
(ii) Persians loved banquets so this would be a good place to make her request when he is relaxed. Esther did not have any miracle signs to persuade him.
(iii) Ahasuerus will lose money and face in this request – so, it would be better to do it away from the public court in the presence of important palace officials.
(iv) There are less potential distractions in a private setting.
(v) Delay will show Ahasuerus that her request is very important to her. It will also illustrate that she is meek in not bolding demanding her rights when he first made her an offer to assist.
(vi) May be God revealed this to her during the fasting.
(vii) It will give Haman a false sense of security and unnerve him at the critical moment.

(viii) Providence working to delay as chapter six will be significant in highlighting God’s Sovereign power.

And the king said unto Esther at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed. Then answered Esther, and said, My petition and my request is; If I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition, and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do to morrow as the king hath said. (v6–8)

V6 – Ahasuerus knew she did not risk her life for a dinner date.

V8 – Postponing again her request was risky as Ahasuerus’s benevolent mood could change. He is not the type who likes to wait. However, it would heighten his curiosity and interest, whilst demonstrating further her meekness. The more the king repeatedly assures her he will grant her request will make it increasingly difficult for the monarch to back out when she finally does.

Also there was always the danger that Haman would learn of her relationship to Mordecai and discern her real motive. However, Haman would be so inflated in pride that he will be off guard when confronted. Her reason for delay allows God to work behind the scenes in the next chapter and that is what is really significant.

Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai. Nevertheless Haman refrained himself: and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife. (v9–10)

V9 – We see a great picture here of the pride of man. Haman is on cloud nine believing the sky is the limit of his ambitions. The expression “that day” would unknown to him be his last of joy. Human happiness is transient and often constructed on shaky foundations.

Mordecai had now returned to work. Was he confident that God was at work? Despite Haman’s evil decree, Mordecai still is not intimidated by Haman. This “but” here in verse 9 of the stubborn refusal of Mordecai destroys the temporal joy of Haman. A bigger man would have ignored it, but a man’s size is seen by the significance of the things that irritate him. As one writer put it,

Haman couldn’t stand the thought of this one man’s refusal to obey him. Like a bubble, the more an ego swells the more fragile it becomes. By this point, Haman’s ego was so inflated—and fragile—that Mordecai’s action drowned out the applause of the crowd. Those
who live like Haman, in deliberate pursuit of self-importance, will live perpetually on Haman’s emotional roller coaster. Soaring high when honored, bottoming out when not, Haman and all those like him will forever be enslaved to the whims of others. They can never have the security of joy and peace that Jesus promises us in His kingdom.

V10 – Haman calls his friends to boast about himself. It is interesting that there is no mention of God in his thinking (N.B. the pronoun usage of “his” and “him” throughout). The pride of sinful man likes to focus on his wealth, position, and family. It is especially inflated by comparisons in a public manner. The Persians particularly admired those who had many sons. We tend to forget as the Puritans said, “Our father was Adam, our grandfather was dust, and our great-grandfather was nothing.”

And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to morrow am I invited unto her also with the king. Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate. (v11-13)

V12 – The fact that Haman was invited to this private banquet fed his pride and confidence. To his mind both the king and queen regarded him higher than the rest. Seemingly he was now set for life. Other than the king and servants, it was unusual for any man to be in the presence of the queen. What Haman does not know is that this banquet will be the means of his death. One of life’s paradoxes is that the way up is often the way down. He will learn the truth of Psalm 7 concerning the wicked man,

He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate. (Psalm 7:15-16)

V13 – This is a profound illustration of the dissatisfaction of the things of this world. There is always a fly in the ointment. We may think such people have everything from our outward observation, but they are often the most miserable people on the earth. One of our great problems is we weigh things with the wrong scales.

Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and to morrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made. (v14)

V14 – This shows the dangers of having ungodly friends and an ungodly wife – e.g. Solomon’s wives, Jezebel, Job’s wife. Two wives are working at
either end of this drama – Esther and Zeresh. Only one of them has God on her side.

These ungodly advisors bolstered a pride that was already gigantic, as well as suggest a wicked plot for Mordecai that will rebound on Haman. Faithful friends and spouses led us to see the truth of ourselves and warn of the dangers of pride. Doubtless, knowing the demise of his mortal enemy Mordecai will allow him to fully savour the glory of being at the queen’s second banquet the following day.

These 75 feet gallows were no doubt intended to send a message of how important Haman was and the consequences of slighting him. It shows his arrogant presumption over the sovereignty of God by constructing them before he even comes to Ahasuerus. Such a huge monument to his pride would be a suitable instrument for his demise.

Never had things looked so dark for the children of God outwardly. Suspense is heightened, as the curtain closes upon yet another scene. Will evil prevail? However, the greater the evil the greater will be the effect of the deliverance. The greater glory also will be reflected on God.

The message from Esther is that the plan of God always succeeds, even without thunder and lightning. The seemingly invisible God is always invincible. If God be for us then no one can stand against us. John Newton said well so long ago in his hymn,

\begin{quote}
Fading is the worldling's pleasure,  
\textit{All his boasted pomp and show;}  
\textit{Solid joys and lasting treasure}  
\textit{None but Zion's children know.}
\end{quote}
CHAPTER EIGHT

Royal Insomnia

(Esther 6: 1-14)

When things start to go bad for us, they often get worse. This is true for Mordecai as he is seemingly only hours away from a humiliating and certain death. However, at the 11th hour God will step in. This chapter is dedicated to the glory of a Sovereign God. When no one else seems to care, God proves that He does. Too often we are impatient but God is not in a hurry. When He seems absent, He is just as invincible. Man’s extremity is always God’s opportunity.

It seemed that Mordecai’s observation had gone unrewarded and was now forgotten. While he slept, God would bring deliverance in the strangest of circumstances. The compassions of the Lord never fail and are truly new every morning. As Wiersbe says, “if Mordecai was ever puzzled because the king promoted Haman but ignored him, he would soon find out that God had not made a mistake.”

Things looked bleak for the Jews. The king is a Gentile and his closest advisor is the cunning and powerful Haman. There is nothing so well planned that God cannot overturn. As the Psalmist said, “The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect” (Psa. 33:10). He will get the greatest glory in this incident but He will do so in accordance with the ordinary laws of nature. The Puritan Richard Sibbes put it well,

Nothing so high that is above His providence; nothing so low that is beneath it; nothing so large that is bounded by it; nothing so confused that God can order it; nothing so bad that He can draw good out of it; nothing so wisely plotted that God can disappoint it.

On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’s chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus. (v1-2)

V1 – Momentous events often hang on seemingly insignificant trivialities. God can do extraordinary things through ordinary events. The king’s insomnia by an unseen influence shows that even his thoughts are in the Hand of God. Of all nights to suffer from insomnia, this is the night! Sometimes God achieves His purpose by sending a monarch to sleep and guiding his thoughts then. Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar would experience
this very thing. Other times God can accomplish His designs by simply keeping a man awake.

Ahasuerus’s choice of reading materials is surprising also. God can direct that also. With the diverse range of entertainment available to such a monarch, the tedious records of the chronicles would be the last thing to seek for. We can only but marvel at the workings of a special providence in this chapter:

(1) Insomnia of the king
(2) King's choice of entertainment
(3) Servant’s choice of passage to read
(4) Delay in rewarding Mordecai
(5) Timely arrival of Haman

We should never forget that God is in charge of the schedules of our lives. Joseph was two years in prison and it seemed that God had forgotten him. But just the right time God brought him out. Moses was forty years at the backside of the desert seemingly discarded. But God called him forth just at God perfect timing.

And the king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him. And the king said, Who is in the court? Now Haman was come into the outward court of the king's house, to speak unto the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him. And the king's servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in. (v3-5)

V3 – The Persian kings were known for rewarding those loyal to them. The king is touched by a nobler sentiment now as he hears of this forgotten incident. Unbeknown to Mordecai, he who had been a “nobody” to Ahasuerus suddenly became his pressing priority.

V4 – This is to be a day of great surprises for Haman. Haman may have stayed up all night planning this move and supervising the construction of the gallows. His haste actually precipitated his utter humiliation. It is no coincidence that Haman enters the king’s court at just that moment. If he had arrived later the king would have sent someone else to honour Mordecai. How wonderful God’s timing always is! As Guzik observed,

If this book of Esther shows us anything, it shows us that God manages the affairs of men, even without their knowledge. God knows what He is doing, and in the courts of heaven there are no coincidences or surprises….Esther wasn’t lucky to be queen; Mordecai wasn’t lucky to have overheard the assassination plot; it wasn’t luck or chance that made Haman enter the royal courts at this
time with this heart. It was God; we don’t say praise the luck.

Haman may have mastered his wealth and servants but he cannot master himself. That will be his ultimate downfall. He personified the warning of Micah, “Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand” (Micah 2:1).

So Haman came in. And the king said unto him, What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour? Now Haman thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself? And Haman answered the king, For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king’s most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour. (v6–9)

V7 – Invited to advise the king in such an intimate setting could only have stoked the inflated ego of Haman. Doubtless he strutted in like a peacock. Haman was intoxicated with vanity and blinded by pride. It seemed a day of double blessing – Mordecai dead and he honoured. Ahasuerus hid the identity of Mordecai in just the same way Haman had done so to the king over the Jews. Haman is beginning to reap what he sowed.

Haman could not have thought of anything more imaginative to promote self. It was said that the Persians regarded the royal robe as having magical properties. Haman had money and power so what he craved was to be honoured like the king. Maybe he thought it would allow him to be Ahasuerus’s successor. We are never satisfied with the things of this world. Without God’s peace it is all ultimately vanity.

Then the king said to Haman, Make baste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king’s gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken. Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour. (v10–11)

V10 – It is hard not to smile at this prospect. These words must have been gravel in his mouth. For a whole day Haman was the servant of Mordecai and must sing his praises. The man he had boasted to others he would see hang was now the one he had to honour. The great irony is that Haman first started his murderous plots after Mordecai refused to bow down to him. Although Haman ignored it, this was a providential opportunity for repentance.
V11 — Haman was master of duplicity so he probably hid his anger well before Ahasuerus. It is bad enough that Mordecai is honoured but Haman is the one having to do it publicly.

And Mordecai came again to the king’s gate. But Haman hasted to his house mourning, and having his head covered. And Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends every thing that had befallen him. Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him. And while they were yet talking with him, came the king’s chamberlains, and hasted to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared. (v12-14)

V12 — Mordecai returns to his position again. There was no boasting and attempts to improve his position with the king. We could only but imagine what Haman would have done if the position had been reversed.

V13 — No word of repentance or acknowledgement by this proud man that he had brought this on himself. If God humbles you, pay attention.

V14 — Haman’s return home is not so triumphant now. This public humiliation was a bitter pill to swallow. His grief now contrasts with Mordecai’s previous grief.

The Persians were extremely superstitious so doubtless saw this as a bad omen. Bad counsellors are equally bad comforters. Perhaps they were also familiar with Genesis 12:1-3 or God’s curse on the Amalekites in Exodus 17:14. It is a pity his family and friends had not been so wise in their previous advice to Haman. He should have been reminded from God’s Word, “Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?” (Prov. 6:27) and “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18)

God is always faithful to His covenantal promises. The eighteenth century German emperor, Frederick the Great asked his personal physician, Zimmermann: “Zimmermann, can you name me a single proof of the existence of God?” Zimmermann succinctly replied, “Your Majesty, the Jews!” Throughout the centuries of persecution, discrimination, and genocide, God has preserved His people.

Swindoll wisely observes, “in the final analysis, God will have His way. He’s not impressed with earthly kingdoms and personal towers, with pride and prestige and wealth and fame. He’s impressed with a humble heart that comes to Him on His terms.” Ultimately, every one who rebels against the face of God will be brought down before Him – in this life or the next. It may be night and silent, but providence never sleeps and is always working together for good to them that love God.

God on His saints looks watchful down
His ear attends their cry
The wicked sink beneath His frown
Their very name shall die
But He, at length, the just will crown
With victory and joy!
CHAPTER NINE

A Time To Speak

(Esther 7: 1-10)

We now find the drama heightened at this point in the narrative. The plot is filled with danger, hesitation, courage, and deliverance. Esther is now having to stand in the gap for her people (Eze. 22:30). If she had refused this calling, she would have missed out on the blessing of being an integral part of redemptive history, but God would have found another way to complete His plan. There is an obvious parallel here between the life of Ruth and Esther. Both women yielded to God to work through them and both played a significant role in redemptive history.

Haman is on the downward spiral rapidly to destruction. His star is falling in the palace, but little did he know that this would be his last meal. God’s longsuffering with Haman should have led him to repent – circumstances, his closest advisors, and even his wife warned him of the imminent danger. Blinded by his repulsive pride and arrogance, humility is not a word in Haman’s vocabulary.

Depravity blinds man to presume on God's grace, “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Eccl. 8:11, cf. Romans 2:4-5). The pathway to hell and destruction is often replete with windows of opportunities to escape by repentance.

Doubtless Esther had rehearsed her speech many times. It is probable she prayed much as she fasted. It is sad that it takes a crisis in our lives before we consider spiritual things. Others may be unfaithful to their promises but never God. As Isaiah put it,

But Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. (Isa 49:14-15)

So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. And the king said again unto Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom. (v1-2)
V1 – Solomon tells us in the third chapter of Ecclesiastes that there is a time to keep silent but there is also the right time to speak. Somehow Esther discerned that this was the time. Did she sense the Hand of providence in the events of that day with the elevation of Mordecai? Now is that moment with Haman unnerved, Ahasuerus curious and charmed, and after God had providentially reminded the king of the faithfulness and loyalty of his Jewish subjects. Also Ahasuerus had promised three times his help to Esther so it would not be easy for him to back out of this commitment.

Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage. (v3-4)

V3 – No doubt her heart was beating fast. She knew her whole nation’s future and her own hung in the balance. For the first time she will publicly identify with her people. We see Esther’s wisdom in how she approached the king here. She is not just a pretty face! Tactfully she is not presumptuous but respectful to her chauvinistic husband with “If I have found favour in thy sight, O king.”

She makes it sound as if it is in the king’s interest to intervene by focusing first on the danger to her life. After all, Esther is the king’s beloved wife so it would be a great loss of face for her to be killed by a trick perpetrated unwittingly on the monarch.

V4 - Esther makes no reference yet to Haman or even her race yet, as she wants to stimulate the king’s pride and arouse his anger. She just emphasizes that their genocide had been plotted. Did she remember Nathan’s indirect strategy with David? Likely she hoped the king would speak in judgment without having to consider the question whether it was easier to appoint a new prime minister or a new wife! This strategy probably had the advantage of deceiving Haman as to her target, thereby preventing him distracting the king or intervening.

Esther’s words were deliberate and carefully chosen. She backs up her request with reasons. As Ahasuerus regards all his subjects (including his wife) as mere servants of his, then Esther makes clear that servitude would be acceptable. It must always be seen that his interests triumph their personal freedom.

V4b – Esther subtly brings to Ahasuerus’ attention the financial loss by the genocide as “the king’s damage.” There is very little point pushing him on the moral wrong of genocide of a subject people, as clearly he does not believe so. She is attempting to rouse the passions of the king based on his financial losses and pride.
Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so? And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen. (v5-6)

V5 – The strategy worked wonderfully and the astonished king demands the name of the perpetrator.

V6 – If he was surprised by her request, then he is just as surprised to learn of the culprit. She speaks directly and candidly of this man as an adversary and a wicked man. No doubt there was a temptation to blame the foolishness and rashness of Ahasuerus in Haman’s plot, but Esther wisely deflects all the blame on Haman alone. Everyone looks for scapegoats, especially proud tyrants.

And the king arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath went into the palace garden: and Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king. Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther was. Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the word went out of king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face. (v7-8)

V7 - Ahasuerus is now furious because of his loss of face in being outwitted by Haman into sponsoring the murder of his wife without proper investigation. He may have been under the influence of wine when led into the plot. Perhaps he even remembered the great loyalty and faithfulness of the Jews like Mordecai. Someone must pay for this humiliation and the king does not intend it to be him.

Haman is dumbfounded for a time and does not anticipate his danger until it is too late. However, he is cunning enough to recognise the danger signs for him of the king’s extreme mood changes. After all he had manipulated the king’s passions in the past for his own ends. Still the proud man makes no repentance and seeks only for the mercy of Esther.

The irony here is that the man who was so angry because one Jew refused to bow to him has in the space of a few days prostrated himself before Mordecai and Esther. Haman’s wife’s prediction is being realized (6:13). From being a proud peacock he shows himself a whimpering coward.

V8 – Ahasuerus exaggerates Haman’s prostration to fabricate a rape claim (like Haman did to the Jews). This gives the king a convenient excuse to execute Haman and save face. Although some criticize Esther for not intervening to save her adversary, Haman is too dangerous a man to let live. Also, he has not shown any sign of true repentance.

And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who spoken good for the king, standeth.
in the house of Haman. Then the king said, Hang him thereon. So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified.(v9-10)

V9 – Haman must have boasted of the great gallows in the palace courts he was constructing to deal with Mordecai. These words rebounded on him for his own destruction. God has planted the chamberlain to speak at just the right moment. Some see this intervention by Harbonah as ironical coincidence – the truth is there is no such a thing as coincidence in the vocabulary of the believer.

V10 – The impulsive king characteristically acted swiftly. Ultimately Haman is going to reap the fruits of what he sowed. He will be hung literally upon his own gallows, which he had constructed based upon the imaginations of his pride. All his wealth and influence could not save him. As the Psalmist warned,

> Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him. (Psa. 49:16-17)

This principle of reaping and sowing is all over the Scripture. Pharaoh drowned the Israelites males and one day God drowned his whole army, Jacob deceived his father and his sons deceived him, David sowed the seeds of adultery and murder in his home and his sons reaped this against him.

Haman woke up one day the prime minister of Persia with all the trappings of wealth and power and died the same day in shame on a gallows he constructed for others. He went from a banquet to the gallows in a few short steps. A Sovereign God is always pouring out His wrath in retribution to those who sin again Him.

CONCLUSION

It seemed that things had gone silence in the heavens, but God is still at work in the stillness. He is the hidden helm turning the ship beneath the waves. The book of Esther is a book of perfect timing. What is impressive is not what Esther did or did not do but what God does. The Jews were not spared because of good fortune or the quick thinking of Esther or Mordecai. It was all about God’s faithfulness to His covenantal promises.

All the threads that providence is weaving can suddenly come together to bring about God’s desired and determined end. Ahasuerus may have been the most powerful man in the known world, who could alter nation’s histories at a whim. However, all his actions were all divinely arranged by God to achieve perfectly God’s greater purpose. As Swindoll observed,
We can see the movement of God’s hand throughout the lives of Esther and Mordecai. We can see His moving in the heart of King Ahasuerus. We can see Him as He works His own will even through the wicked plots of Haman.

The book of Esther is not simply an entertaining story, but also is instructive about how our God works in the world. We may be tempted to see Satan’s plans as invincible and unstoppable as we read this book of Esther, but God proves that He can override even the most complex of plots.

The truths of Psalm 73 are graphically illustrated in the life and demise of Haman. Victory often comes only at the point of apparent defeat. The Cross seemed hell’s greatest victory but proved to be its greatest defeat. God is God and He will not share His Sovereignty with any creature. To cite Swindoll again,

Don’t ever try to convince me that some situation in this life is absolutely permanent. God can move in the heart of a king. He can move an entire nation. He can bring down the once-impenetrable Iron Curtain. He can change the mind of your stubborn mate. He can move in the affairs of your community. He can alter the decisions of presidents and prime ministers and present-day kings and dictators. No barrier is too high, no chasm too wide for Him, because He is not limited by space or time, by the visible or the invisible.

Trapped in our limited perspective of time and finite understanding we may lose our orientation in the fogs of life, but not God. We panic and issue snap judgments on our circumstances. Discerning God’s fingerprints in the silence is what spiritual maturity is all about. The wise reader of Esther is led to the obvious conclusion that these circumstances did not just happen, but were wonderfully orchestrated by an unseen power. Not everyone can behold this for as Deffinbaugh wrote,

God is the ultimate manifestation of skill. He is a wonder to behold as He works. But His work can only be seen through the eyes of faith. The Christian, whose spiritual eyes have been opened, watches God work with wonder and amazement. The unbeliever sees the same results but fails to recognize what has been done as God’s work. When God works providentially, His will and His purposes are perfectly accomplished, but those without faith do not see His handiwork as anything more than the result of natural forces, of great human skill at best. Many look at the deliverance of the Jews in
Esther and see no more than the cleverness of Esther at manipulating the king.

We must believe in advance what we can only discern truly with the benefit of eternal hindsight. Any other practice adopted will lead to envy, cynicism and bitterness with our circumstances. Habakkuk suffered from this till God reminded him to live by faith not by sight. It shows every reader to follow Paul’s advice prayerfully,

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God (1 Cor. 4:5).

God can still be trusted! He is still on His throne!

*God is still on the throne,*  
*And He will remember His own;*  
*Tho’ trials may press us and burdens distress us,*  
*He never will leave us alone;*  
*God is still on the throne,*  
*He never forsaketh His own;*  
*His promise is true, He will not forget you,*  
*God is still on the throne.*
CHAPTER TEN

Tears Turned to Joy

(Esther 8: 1-17)

The previous chapter reminded us that we should never mistake God’s silence for His absence or indifference. He is not a blind watchmaker who merely winds things up and leaves things to run their natural course. Even in His unseen work in the shadows, every now and then He breaks His silence and we are forced to acknowledge Him. Romans 8:28 seems a simple verse to grasp but it takes a lifetime often to truly begin to understand it. We often forget that God always writes the last chapter on every incident.

The history recorded here is not incidental to our lives today. It reveals that God is always faithful to His promises, that He is always working, and that He has diverse ways to crush His enemies and achieve His sovereign purposes. No obstacle of man can hinder God. No darkness is impenetrable to Him. There may be many Hamans in your life, but God can easily deal with the most cunning and dangerous of them.

This eighth chapter will begin with tears but will end with joy. Only God can do this! It trumpets there is hope in God in every circumstance of life. We live under the shadow of the Almighty and He can take care of all our needs.

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance. (Psa. 42:5)

On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman the Jews’ enemy unto Esther the queen. And Mordecai came before the king; for Esther had told what he was unto her. And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman. (v1-2)

V1 – This gesture by Ahasuerus was likely an apologetic one, as normally a condemned man’s estate reverts directly to the king under Persian law. Esther then seems to have appointed Mordecai over Haman’s estate to administer it on her behalf.

Haman tried to have it all and he lost it all! All those years of cunning planning and effort is now shown to be empty. As Guzik observed, “He had climbed the ladder of success, but it was leaning against the wrong building!”

The king now discovered that Mordecai was now his relative by marriage, which probably explains his trust in him. It also shows Esther and
Mordecai did not need to conceal the matter of their relationship from the beginning. Ian Duguid speculates that it was even a pragmatic mistake,

Perhaps if Esther had revealed her Jewishness and her connection to Mordecai back in chapter 2, the whole threat to the Jewish community could have been circumvented. The king might even have promoted Mordecai to the rank of vizier at that point, after he had uncovered the attempt on the king’s life, and Haman might never have risen to power at all.

V2 - Mordecai tried so hard to advance himself and Esther. Yet if he had just waited on God’s will and timing it would surely have come. The way of a transgressor is always harder than obeying the revealed will of God. Mordecai may have missed God’s best by not returning to Israel, but God can still use him despite his failures. In grace, the Lord reverses the roles with Haman.

With Mordecai in possession of the king’s signet ring, the Jews are in a powerful position. “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just” (Prov. 13:22).

And Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews. Then the king held out the golden sceptre toward Esther. So Esther arose, and stood before the king. (v3-4)

V3 – The noble work of Esther is not yet fully done. Haman is gone but the consequences of his sin remain unresolved. His edict hangs over the Jews like the proverbial sword of Damocles. Sin survives the sinner! An evil father can educate an evil son to do more damage after the father’s demise. Today innocent people are still suffering the consequences of what dead evil people did. Even believers often we do not repent quickly enough and the consequence of sin follow on in other generations.

Esther is now weeping for her people. Her focus is now on others rather than herself. Before she disowned them but now she is a changed woman. At least she comes to this point – many never do! To her credit, she is not satisfied just because her immediate family are free from apparent danger and in powerful, wealthy positions. Often in our materialistic world can get so enamoured with our physical blessings that we lose sight that people all around us are heading for a lost eternity.

And said, If it please the king, and if I have favour in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the king’s provinces: For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred? (v5-6)
V5 – Despite her recent betterment by the king, Esther is not presumptuous here also. She may have righteous justice on her side, but that does not lessen her duty of discretion to her God-ordained authority. Beauty and modesty are a powerful combination. Incidentally, it is a good lesson for all believers in approaching the King of kings.

Esther could have basked in her newly acquired riches and influence but her abiding concern now is for others. As queen she was now safe, but her heart is tender for her people. The natural tendency of the depraved heart often leads a man or woman to selfishly overlook the precarious situation of others. Esther may not be able to do everything to save her people but she can do something. And she does that!

However, it is notable that she does not appeal to the Word of God as the moral basis for assistance from the king. The only foundation for her plea is that it would make her life unbearable. Notwithstanding that defect, God honoured it.

V7 – The folly of the irrevocable Persian laws are seen here in this incident. The depraved nature of man does not fit well with such supposed infallibility. Nevertheless, this neutralization of the first edict is providentially better that revoking the law. Now the enemies are permanently destroyed and the Jews will be enriched financially. The uneven playing field has just been leveled at one stroke. The tables are beginning to turn in favour of the Jews. No doubt their enemies had sneered and taunted them during the months since the original edict.

V8 – From being just a trophy wife, this shows the depth of trust the chauvinistic king now has in his wife. Both Esther and Mordecai showed haste and great wisdom in how they handled this power to assist their people. This new decree would allow them the right to defend themselves. It was truly life-saving.
for their life, to destroy, to slay and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey. Upon one day in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, namely, upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar. The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people, and that the Jews should be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. (9-13)

V10 – Mordecai had learned from Haman the effectiveness of this type of advertising of the law. It would be useless to pass a law to assist the Jews and then not get the message to them.

V11- Esther and Mordecai seem to have replicated the original edict in their wording, doubtless to highlight their parallel nature. Some have criticized Esther and Mordecai for responding in such a perceived harsh measure.

However, the critics fail to note that, unlike Haman’s decree, this one was only for those who first attacked the Jews. They will be the architects of their own destruction if they attack the Jews. The Jews were not permitted to simply take preemptive unilateral action against any suspected aggressor. Haman’s decree, by contrast, was indiscriminate and unrelated to the moral character of the victims. Likely Esther and Mordecai hoped that it would simply serve as a warning to deter would be attackers.

So the posts that rode upon mules and camels went out, being hastened and pressed on by the king’s commandment. And the decree was given at Shushan the palace. And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple: and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad. The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour. (v14-16)

V15 – The depression and gloom of the Persian exiles will soon lift. Symbolic of this is that the man who once was robed in sackcloth in mourning for his people is now dressed in the finest of attire.

True joy does not simply emanate from feeling but from a true knowledge of what God has done and will do. For “When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth: and when the wicked perish, there is shouting” (Prov. 10:11). The joyless worship of many Christians sadly reveals a barrenness of spiritual knowledge of God and His Works. The words of the Psalmist ring true in this chapter,

Wait on the LORD, and keep His way, and He shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. (Psa 37:34-36)

And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king’s commandment and his decree came, the Jews bad joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them. (v17)
V17 – The Persians understood the underlying message of the seemingly contradictory decrees – the king is in favour of the Jews. No longer did the Jews have to slip around the Empire in fear, but they could openly rejoice in their ethnicity. Instead of insults they are now perceived as objects of honour. Their unrestrained joy in the streets of Shushan must have been a great encouragement to Esther and Mordecai in the palace.

This is a fascinating insight into why God seemingly delayed His intervention (Rom. 8:28). God often brings about a glorious deliverance by a way that seems to lead to destruction. It allowed Him to receive the maximum glory from these events and it worked perfectly as “the fear of the Jews fell upon them.” Even Haman’s wicked designs redound to the glory of God. A Sovereign wise God always causes the wrath of man to praise Him. Also, it proves that His promises are always faithfully fulfilled. It appears that these events remarkably led to a revival of true religion amongst the Gentiles.

It is interesting that we do not read of souls converted when the Exiles were at ease and enriching themselves in disobedience at the start of this book. Now even the pagan Gentiles can see that God was a faithful God. An interesting observation is that when Esther hid her Jewish identity the Jews suffered but now when she conquers this fear many of the Gentiles want to become Jewish. So often we fear to stand for God because of perceived obstacles when the consequence may be diametrically opposite.

When the saints of God are right spiritually then this always has an effect on those around them. When the Church was continuing steadfast in the Apostles doctrine then we are told the Lord added daily unto the Church (Acts 2:42-47). The man that walks right with God will always bring forth his fruit in season (Psalm 1).

CONCLUSION

This may be an old story, but the truths live on. “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psa. 30:5). God delights to save His people when they need Him the most. What may a day truly bring forth if we just trust God! The applications of His delivering grace may differ in every case, but all the saints are recipients of it.

A classic example was William Orcutt Cushing, who was born in 1823. Although raised by Unitarian parents, he was wonderfully converted and became a pastor in New York. After his wife died, his voice failed him forcing him to resign from the pastorate. After pleading, “Lord, still give me something to do for Thee,” he was led to write more than 300 hymns. One of the most famous was the classic Under His Wings which was inspired by meditation of Psalm 17:8 through his personal suffering. Cushing found grace at the hour of his need under the shadow of the Almighty.
Under His wings I am safely abiding,
Though the night deepens and tempests are wild,
Still I can trust Him;
I know He will keep me,
He has redeemed me, and I am His child.

Under His wings, under His wings,
Who from His love can sever?
Under His wings my soul shall abide,
Safely abide forever.
CHAPTER ELEVEN

Day of Reckoning

(Esther 9: 1-32 & 10:1-3)

Nearly nine months have passed between chapters eight and nine. God reversed the tables on the Jews in seemingly impossible circumstances – God and God alone can do such things. He gave them a greater weapon than merely the sword – the “fear of them” (cf. Deut. 2:25). Too often we forget that the spiritual weapons are more powerful than the secular.

Now in the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king’s commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution, in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them, (though it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them;) The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt: and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people. (v1-2)

V1 - The fateful day arrived. As a result of the depravity of mankind, it would be too much to expect the day to pass off without incident. Sin is easy to engage in but the consequences are harder to obliterate. But God proves faithful. Haman’s “lucky” day is not so fortunate for him or his supporters.

And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputie, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater. Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them. (v3-5)

V3 –The tables are turned but the Jews acted with restraint. They defended themselves but no further. No women or children were slain of their enemies. They not only mastered their enemies but they mastered themselves (the latter is the hardest). Their motive was not for personal gain.

It demonstrates that they spiritually had grown and were different from their enemies. Just because we have the right to do something does not always mean it is the best thing to do. A good testimony is of greater usefulness than simply enforcing your personal rights.
And in Shushan the palace the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men. And Parsbandatha, and Dalphon, and Aspatha, And Poratha, and Adalia, and Aridatha, And Parmashia, and Arisai, and Aridai, and Vajezatha, The ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews, slew they; but on the spoil laid they not their hand.

On that day the number of those that were slain in Shushan the palace was brought before the king. (v6-11)

V6 – The fact that there were so many killed in Shushan is indicative of the hatred for the Jews still. Haman still had his supporters, especially amongst his close friends and family that benefitted from his rise to power. One can only wonder what would have happened if the second law had not been passed.

And the king said unto Esther the queen, The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the palace, and the ten sons of Haman; what have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? now what is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: or what is thy request further? and it shall be done. Then said Esther, If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews which are in Shushan to do to morrow also according unto this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows. And the king commanded it so to be done: and the decree was given at Shushan; and they hanged Haman's ten sons. (v12-14)

V12 – Ahasuerus is now showing that he increasingly respects the opinion of his wife. Esther is becoming more like a Proverbs 31 woman now.

V13 – Esther now is proving to be a woman of strength and wisdom. Probably she felt that a further day was needed at Shushan to rout all of the Jews enemies, as it was there that Haman's influence would have been very powerful.

The request to hang the bodies of his sons is not spite but an act of needful deterrence. These men had no doubt the same spirit of arrogance and malice toward the Jews. Hanging was a sign of curse and shame (Joshua 8:29; 10:26). God promised He would deal with Amalek and He did! Saul's disobedience did not deflect Him from that purpose.

For the Jews that were in Shushan gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and slew three hundred men at Shushan; but on the prey they laid not their band. But the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of their foes seventy and five thousand, but they laid not their hands on the prey, (v15-16)

V16 – By careful avoidance of greed, all attention could then be focused on the greatness of God's deliverance. Did they remember Abraham's example in Genesis 14:22-23? It was a wise gesture of meekness as later the Persians could have accused them of enriching themselves by genocide.

On the thirteenth day of the month Adar; and on the fourteenth day of the same rested they, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. But the Jews that were at Shushan assembled
V17 – This “Pur” (v26) signifies a lot. This is not an inappropriate name for the feast of Purim, but serves more as a note of irony as,

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

God had reversed Haman’s lot or “Pur”. They celebrated God’s deliverance, even though we do not read of God’s explicitly sanctioning this festival. Certainly we do not read of divine disapproval shown of the thanksgiving festival.

This gives us a biblical precedent for the celebration of other spiritual days of blessing to believers such as the day we were saved or the Christmas season. However, at such times we need to ensure that the primary focus is on God. When attention is directed on self, this grieves the Holy Spirit. There is nothing wrong with meaningful tradition, as long as it does not become mere traditionalism.

Today the feast of Purim is largely a secular feast. The Jews attend the synagogue to hear the book of Esther and wave rattles and stamp their feet when Haman’s name is read out.

V22 - Giving gifts to others, especially those who have much less, is a good way of recognising God’s grace to you. Only God could turn, “from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day.” Often believers in a new generation forget the struggles of the past and the faithfulness of God to their forefathers. Many are like the Athenians who Luke tells us, “all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing” (Acts 17:21).

Celebrations are useful if lessons are learned from it. Monuments and anniversaries give perspective to our fast paced lives. When we reflect on God’s grace in this way to us, it increases our faith in Him (Psalm 136). It prevents us being swept along in a rootless and insignificant existence. Too often the focus of our memories are those who have hurt us in the past, the
difficulties we faced, and wrong decisions of the past. However, it is good for our families to celebrate the past grace of God to us.

And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them;
Because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is, the lot, to consume them, and to destroy them; But when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked device, which he devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. Wherefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. Therefore for all the words of this letter, and of that which they had seen concerning this matter, and which had come unto them, The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so as it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to their writing, and according to their appointed time every year; And that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed. Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority, to confirm this second letter of Purim. And he sent the letters unto all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth, To confirm these days of Purim in their times appointed, according as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had enjoined them, and as they had decreed for themselves and for their seed, the matters of the fastings and their cry. And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book. (v23-32)

V31- They did not forget the spiritual significance of this. It was more than a Jewish Mardi Gra. It is always good never to let the festive override the reflective and spiritual. True spiritual dedication should emanate from the time of celebration. Although critics point out that there is no mention of God, worship, God’s Word, it seems the fasting implies a spiritual element.

CHAPTER TEN

And the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea. And all the acts of his power and of his might, and the declaration of the greatness of Mordecai, wherunto the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? (v1-2)

V1 – Perhaps this is a good reminder that the kingdoms of men are not utopia nor should be seen as the solution to our problems. Ahasuerus reduced the taxation burden when Esther became queen and now he reverses this policy. His kingdom was of this world and would pass away.

For Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed. (v3)

V3 – Who would have thought that a despised Jew from a subjugated race could become the second most powerful man in the Persian empire? It also reveals the sovereignty of God as who would have chosen the flawed
Mordecai and Esther to be instruments of deliverance? God is surprising in His choices. He chose a murderer and aged shepherd to deliver His people from Egypt; He chose a rebellious prophet to bring the Gospel of repentance to the city of Nineveh; and He chose a murderer and blasphemer to be the Apostle to the Gentiles.

There is a deliberate contrast in the reactions of the king and Mordecai to the new political developments. Doubtless there was a temptation for Mordecai to be puffed up like Haman. However, Mordecai is not selfish now. He is making a better end that his beginning in this story. This is a good ending to his biblical biography.

No longer is Mordecai ashamed of his race nor is he self-absorbed. The office that was once used to persecute the Jews now protects and provides for them. Instead of a foe, a friend sits looking out for their needs. It is a good example of what Paul taught,

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. (Gal. 6:9-10)

CONCLUSION

This book has drama, intrigue, romance, plots, and war. This is not simply an entertaining story for children, but an educational tale of Hebrew history. This book has been inspired and perfectly preserved for a purpose (2 Tim. 3:16-17). This book should always be read and interpreted through redemptive history and the entire biblical framework.

People like to recall that God’s Name is never mentioned in this book. Yet His fingerprints are all over it. While the events of this book seem to be under human control, the discerning reader sees God’s divine hand directing the events and lives of both saints and sinners. The book of Esther teaches us many wonderful truths about God:

(1) God’s faithfulness to His promises. He used the lives of Esther and Mordecai so that we can have a Saviour and a Bible. God always proves faithful to His Word. Should it not be so for us also?
(2) God’s Sovereignty over the affairs of men. It is seen by His ability to achieve His purposes through all men - obedient, or disobedient. In the end God always wins! It does not matter the odds.
(3) God’s wise providence – Haman, Ahasuerus, even Esther and Mordecai are simply pawns in God’s overriding purposes. God is the central character in this drama and proves that He actively intervenes in history. Those without the spiritual spectacles of faith fail to
discern God’s handiwork, but view all events as products of natural forces or great human skill.

(4) God’s perfect timing. The discerning reader can see the criticality of the timing of every event and order in the story. Unlike us, God is not in a hurry and is not a slave to the human clock.

We also see the painful consequence of compromise in this story. Esther and Mordecai are far from heroes of the faith in many aspects of their lives. They set the wrong example in many areas. Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel give much better patterns to emulate. However, God uses imperfect people. That does not excuse their imperfections but it gives us all hope.

Too often we lionize the men and women of Scripture forgetting it begins in grace, is sustained by grace, and is perfected in grace in every life. Esther and Mordecai grew through their circumstances. For instance, she was a timid, compromised young woman at the beginning but emerges a woman of courage, wisdom, tact, and sacrifice.

This is a great story because its great focus is about a great God. He gets all the glory in the deliverance of His people in this book. The story is truly of the greatness of God and a warning about being too impressed with the greatness of men. The amazing preservation of God of His chosen people throughout the centuries is truly a testimony to His Sovereign wisdom and power. One writer put it well,

The maintenance of the Jewish national existence, while they have for ages been scattered among other nations and yet have been perfectly distinct from them, is as strange a thing as a river running through the ocean, and refusing to mingle with the surrounding mass of waters.

God brings triumph out of seemingly tragedy. Our faith is edified as we see God working through and in control of the mundane events of Esther and Mordecai’s lives. The immortal, invisible, all-wise hand of God is always working behind the scenes of our lives, hidden from human eyes.

This beautiful message should give us great peace that God is in control of ours also. Despite the obstacles He always has His way. In our crises of life we can sometimes imagine that He is distant or unconcerned when He is working quietly to preserve His people and His Words all along. Like the many cogs in a complex piece of engineering, we cannot understand the many wheels of providence He is turning at the same moment of time to accomplish what He wants. Man is not competent to discern such a God who can multiply the wisdom and goodness of providence in such harmony.

Too often we misjudge providence. We look down our spiritual noses because we do not see thunder and lightning but that does not mean His
work is any more effective. Yes God has used mighty miracles and armies to accomplish His purposes. But He is not limited to those strategies.

It takes eyes of faith to see and discern His working in the shadows also keeping watch over us, “for we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). We often see links in the chain but only God can see the end from the beginning. As one writer put it,

Like Joseph, we may ultimately understand in this life why God allows events to transpire as they do (Genesis 50:20). Or like many Old Testament saints, we may never be able to put the puzzle together this side of heaven (Hebrews 11:35-40). But that’s okay. We are not the tapestry-makers. God is.

The book began with King Ahasuerus as the prominent figure highlighting his power and might. It ends with the earthly monarch fading out of the picture and God as the chief focus of power and might. Such a story illustrates that the glory and power of man is merely temporal. But the power of God is infinite and His purposes alone stand eternal.

Such a wonderful story as this book invites our confidence and encourages our hopes. Let us continue to walk on in faith of the truth of “God in Control.”

**He Maketh No Mistake**

*My Father’s way may twist and turn,*  
*My heart may throb and ache,*  
*But in my soul I’m glad I know*  
*He maketh no mistake.*

*My cherished plans may go astray,*  
*My hopes may fade away,*  
*But still I’ll trust my Lord to lead,*  
*For He doth know the way.*

*Though night be dark and it may seem*  
*That day will never break,*  
*I’ll pin my faith, my all in Him,*  
*He maketh no mistake.*

*There’s so much now I cannot see,*  
*My eyesight’s far too dim;*
But come what may,
I’ll surely trust And leave it all to Him.

For by and by the mist will lift
And plain it all He’ll make;
Through all the way, though dark to me,
He made not one mistake.

(A. M. Overton)