

OVERVIEW OF BOOK OF ESTHER

We arrive this morning at the **Book of Esther**. That means we can cross off 2 stacks of our OT books – the five books of the Law (Genesis thru Deut.) and the other 12 historical books – just leaving us with the books of poetry and the prophetical books.

Everybody loves a good dramatic production. Our two youngest children had the opportunity to play fun roles in some favorite family-friendly dramas at Toby's Dinner Theater in Columbia --- *Sound of Music*, *It's a Wonderful Life* [my personal favorite], etc. Nothing like hearing my little girl say, "*There's something wrong with Daddy.*" But I made sure she always knew that I was **Daddy #1**. We come this morning to probably the **best drama** in the Scriptures – the Book of Esther. This would make for a great theater production. I know that Sight and Sound has presented it in the past. I would like to see it.

Author: Unknown – so we can't give him credit – some argue for Mordecai, but more likely a contemporary who was familiar with both Jewish and Persian customs.

Historical Setting: [Read **Esther 1:1-3**] – locates the book historically – 3rd year of reign of **Ahasuerus**; ruled over a large area; known as **Xerxes** 485-465 BC – 20 year reign; story begins in **483 BC**;

We have already talked about where the book fits into the **Restoration Period**; between **Chaps. 6-7** of Book of Ezra; 33 years after the Temple has been completed; after the first expedition has returned to the land.

Takes place in Persia – Remember: some Jewish captives remained in Jerusalem -- maybe some godly ones stayed for various reasons; but most of the people who stayed would have been disobedient and unfaithful for not taking the opportunity afforded by King Cyrus to return and rebuild the Temple and then the walls and the city.

Chronological span of the book is 10 years – 483-473 BC;

Overview of the Story: God providentially uses both extraordinary and ordinary men and women to overcome seemingly impossible circumstances to accomplish His kingdom purposes.

(1-5) The Threat to the Jews

(6-10) The Triumph of the Jews

Chiastic Structure: (a lot of pairs – groups of two)

A The splendor of the Persian king + Two banquets [1:1-8] Vashti refuses the king's command

B Esther becomes Queen + Mordecai saves the king [1:9 – 2:23] from assassination

C Haman elevated to power [3:1-6] – demands people bow and show him respect

D Haman's decree to destroy the Jewish people [3:7-15]

E Esther and Mordecai's plan to reverse the decree [4:1-17]

F Esther's 1st banquet + Haman plans Mordecai's execution [5:1-14]

X - PIVOT: Haman humiliated & Mordecai exalted
[Read 6:1-14]

- F' Esther's 2nd banquet + Haman executed instead of Mordecai [7:1-10]
- E' Esther and Mordecai plan to reverse the decree [8:1-8]
- D' Mordecai's counter-decree to save the Jewish people [8:9-14]
- C' Mordecai elevated to power [8:15-17]
- B' Queen Esther and Mordecai save the Jewish people [9:1-19]
- A' Two feasts + The splendor of Mordecai [9:20 - 10:3]

I am borrowing a lot of material this week from **Bill McRae** – he is one of the 3 commentators that I have been featuring on my website that have taught an Overview Bible Survey course along the same lines as what we have been studying Sunday mornings – taking an hour on one book each lesson. [The other two are **Mark Dever** and **Ken Boa**] **Bill McRae** was instrumental in changing some of my views just this week on the book of Esther. You will have to decide if you agree with my new interpretation or not.

First, Six Problematic Questions:

1. Why is the name of God never mentioned? The usual Protestant view is that God is not mentioned in the Book of Esther. However, this may not be correct. It has been known for at least nearly 2000 years that the covenant name for God, Yahweh, or YHWH *does* appear no less than **four times**, and the name meaning "*I Am*" appears once in the text. These appear as *very* well hidden **acrostics**, as described by **E. Bullinger** in his "The Companion Bible". Complicated to explain these ... can't be positive these acrostics are intentional.
 - 1:20, the first letter of four consecutive Hebrew words form YHWH backwards.
 - 5:4, the first letter of four consecutive Hebrew words form YHWH forwards.
 - 5:13, the last letter of four consecutive Hebrew words form YHWH backwards.
 - 7:7, the last letter of four consecutive Hebrew words form YHWH forwards.
 - 7:5, the four Hebrew words for "Who is he, and where is he" form EHWH, "I am".

Correspondingly, no explicit mention of faith in God or obedience to God personally.

2. Why did the children of Israel never pray ... they were on the verge of national extinction; they fasted for 3 days – not necessarily a religious thing; usually prayer would be mentioned in combination with fasting – can't just assume prayer here
3. Why does the Word of God play no role in this drama? No reference to the Law of God or the sacrificial system. Look at the importance in Ezra and Nehemiah – tremendous contrasts between book of Esther and those other post-exilic books

4. Why did Mordecai and Esther remain behind in Persia? Seems like a negative reflection of their spiritual state not to want to return and pursue God's kingdom agenda in the Promised Land. Isaiah and Jeremiah had urged the yet-to-be-exiled nation to come out of Babylon – references with double fulfilment – both near term and then in the end times.

Isa. 48:20 *“Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! Declare with the sound of joyful shouting, proclaim this, Send it out to the end of the earth; Say, ‘The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob.’”*

Jer. 50:8; 51:6

Instead Mordecai and Esther assimilated into the pagan culture.

5. Why do Mordecai and Esther initially conceal their identity as Jews? When does God want us to hide our allegiance to Him?
6. If Esther was such a wonderful Jewish girl, how do you explain the fornication she committed in the first chapter of the book and her inclusion in the harem of the pagan king Xerxes – describing how she won the throne and became queen in **Chap. 1**
 - a. Nowhere in the book do we find mention of Esther's godly **character**. This is most unusual for a Jew. If the Bible teaches us anything, it tells us to judge a person in terms of their inner character, not according to their external beauty or charm.

So why is such a book even included in the Canon of Scripture?

Issues of Canonicity? I don't want to get into the weeds on this topic. Suffice it to say that from early times Jewish tradition has been agreed that Esther in one of the inspired books of Scripture. Not all commentators have been completely on board with this. At one point, **Martin Luther**, frustrated by some of the questions we have raised, exclaimed: **“I wish this book had never been written!”**

Protestants usually cite as the main criterion for OT canonicity some **prophetic authority** guaranteeing the divine inspiration of a book. However, Esther has no association with the prophets, unlike any other book of the Protestant OT canon. However, Esther was included in the canon by the Council of Rome (382) and by all subsequent streams of Christian thought.

The deciding factor regarding which book to accept as canonical must always have been **"What have the people of God always viewed about this book?"**

Regarding how the chief characters of Esther and Mordecai should be viewed:

The traditional view that I have been comfortable with since my Sunday School days does not really satisfactorily address these problematic questions we just listed. We are presented with a very idealized portrait of the heroine -- Queen Esther as a courageous, faithful Jewish believer who takes incredible risks to protect God's people against the threat of annihilation.

But what if Esther and Mordecai are not fervent believers but merely prideful unbelieving Jews who have a **nationalistic motivation** to save their fellow-countrymen? They can be used

providentially by God without being examples of spiritual maturity or even faith and obedience. Not many commentators take this position. One that does is the Hebrew scholar Bruce Waltke. But regardless, the **lessons** of the book really don't change.

Big Idea:

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD PROTECTS HIS PEOPLE AGAINST THREATS OF EXTERMINATION

J. Sidlow Baxter: The **purpose** of the book is to demonstrate the providential care of God over His people. It is vital to see this, for herein lies the living significance and permanent value of the book. The great thing here is the fact of **providential preservation** – “providential” as distinct from what we call the “**miraculous**.” We are meant to see providential *overruling* as distinct from supernatural *intervening*. . .

Amid the shadows God stands, keeping watch upon His own. He sees and knows and cares for His own. He may be out of their sight: but they are never out of His sight. “*He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.*” He may be invisible, but He is infallible. He may seem strangely silent, but He remains actively sovereign. He may be unsuspected; yet omnisciently, omnipresently, omnipotently, He guides and guards. Evil may be temporarily permitted, but ultimately it is frustrated. Behind a frowning providence God hides a smiling face.

Matt Keller: The Uncomfortable Truths of Esther

Most people assume that Esther is an iconic heroine – worthy of praise, adoration, and emulation. Therefore, the idea that Esther was a sinful young woman who compromised with the world in which she lived and intentionally made choices that betrayed covenant commitment to Yahweh is simply offensive and unthinkable.

But what does the Scriptural record teach?

We must read Esther with the knowledge that she and Mordecai had no idea what would happen in the future – that God would use them as His instruments to influence Xerxes and save His people.

“*who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*”

The Hebrew word translated “*you have come*” means *to attain* or *to gain with great effort* or through some inherent quality. This implies that Esther wanted to be queen and did what was necessary to become queen without truly knowing or understanding God’s greater purpose for gaining the throne. In fact, Esther pleased Hegai (the man in charge of the harem) and worked to win the favor of those with whom she came into contact. Esther was not forced into her circumstances. She was an active and willing participant in the competition to become the new queen. When it says that Esther was “*taken*” into the king’s palace and into his harem it does not mean abducted against her will but only **transported** into a new location or state. One should not overinterpret the passive voice of the verb here.

In **2:12-15**, the sexual aspect of gaining the king’s favor is clearly stated. Her evaluation was based on much more than external beauty, but on performance in the bedroom. Look at the result in **vs. 17**:

“The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found favor and kindness with him more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.”

Given the sensual atmosphere created by the author’s description of the period of preparation and the competition Esther faced, the reader can hardly avoid wondering just how she won Xerxes in just one night with him. Did God give her favor with Xerxes? The text does not explain it that way [although that was certainly a key part of the equation]. However, it is certain that because this young Jewish virgin apparently did whatever it took to please a lascivious pagan king, she won the position of queen, through which she later saved the whole of her nation, the nation from which the Messiah later came.

<https://experiencecrosspointe.church/blog/2023/05/02/the-uncomfortable-truths-of-esther>

What was at stake in the extermination of God’s people?

- Need to preserve the **Messianic line** that would produce the promised Savior.

Key Verse:

Esther 4:14 *“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father’s house will perish.*

And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?”

Now let’s spend the rest of our time working our way through the details of the storyline of the drama – and then we will close with a few practical observations about God’s Providential Workings.

Five Main Parts of a Drama:

- **Introduction** – time, place, speakers, set the scene
- **Rising Action** – opposing forces of good and evil introduced
- **Climax** – leading to the surprising reversal of the situation
- **Falling Action** – events leading to the end of the story
- **Catastrophe** – between forces of good and evil
- Epilogue**

I. Introduction (Chaps. 1-2) – Setting, Main Characters, Esther replacing Vashti as Queen

[We already covered the Historical Setting in the opening verses of Chap. 1]

A. The Persian Court and Queen Vashti’s Removal (Chap. 1)

- King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) holds a lavish feast.

Contrasted with the more modest and restrained feast Vashti hosted for the women

Look at the ostentation display of wealth designed to impress everyone present

Vs. 11 Some Jewish sources interpreted the order to mean that she was to appear nude, except for her crown.

At the very least this was a degrading demand smacking of **exhibitionism** in the context of a drunken orgy

- Queen Vashti refuses to appear before the king; she is deposed. Displayed the courage to maintain her dignity; quite a bold move to rebuff the king in front of his assembled guests; shows the outrageous nature of his command
- A search begins for a new queen.
Vs. 19 – Warren Wiersbe: The king didn't immediately replace Vashti. Instead, he went off to invade Greece, where he met with humiliating defeat; and when he returned home, he sought solace in satisfying his sensual appetite by searching for a new queen and filling his harem with candidates. The women in his empire were not only to be subservient to the men, but they were also to be "sex objects" to give them pleasure. The more you know about Ahasuerus and his philosophy of life, the more you detest him.

B. Esther's Rise to Queenship (Chap. 2)

- Esther, a Jewish orphan raised by her cousin Mordecai, is included in the beautiful virgins selected to audition for the role of replacement Queen after Vashti was deposed

Charles Spurgeon: 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.

- Two groups of women involved in the king's harem
 - Group of virgins under the control of Hegai who were groomed for 12 months before being brought into the king's bedroom

Warren Wiersbe: Hegai had a year-long "**beauty treatment**" to prepare each woman for the king. It included a prescribed diet, the application of special perfumes and cosmetics, and probably a course on court etiquette. They were being trained to do one thing – satisfy the desires of the king.

- Group of concubines who had already been with the king – now under the control of Shaashgaz; they could be summoned again as the king wished

Anthony Tomasino: there can be little doubt that most readers would have found the procedure rather offensive. The fact was, the king was taking all the most beautiful women from the entire empire, spending only a single night with most of them, and then sequestering them away from the company of men. What a waste! While many women might have found the life of luxury that these young ladies would receive to be enviable,

the male audience would surely have found this arrangement distasteful. The king was taking all the best women for himself, leaving only those women who were not deemed “*beautiful*” for the rest of the men in the empire to fight over. We can assume that the author is satirizing the self-indulgence of the Persian Empire.

- Esther chosen as the new Queen – this was 4 years after Vashti was deposed
- Mordecai uncovers a plot to assassinate the king and reports it through Esther.

Bruce Hurt: Do you see the subtle allusion to providence? What if Mordecai had not been seated at the king's gate on this particular day? He would not have overheard the assassination plot. He would not have saved the king's life. He would not have been recorded in the king's chronicles as the one responsible for saving King Ahasuerus' life. When one has a proper understanding of divine providence as defined by the Scripture, it becomes clear that absolutely nothing happens by **chance**. God is in the every detail of our life. This truth intertwined with the truth that God is good and seeks good for His children should encourage our faith, and give us perseverance and hope (cf **Ro 15:4**).

- The incident is recorded in the royal chronicles.

II. **Rising Action (Chaps. 3-5)** -- opposing forces introduced – Mordecai and Haman; the Exciting force begins = the activity that will lead to the crisis

A. **Haman's Promotion and Plot (Chap. 3)**

- Haman is promoted and demands show of respect; Mordecai refuses to bow.

Mordecai was a Benjamite descendant of Saul; Haman was an Agagite – Remember that Saul received orders to kill all the Amalekites, including their king Agag. But he disobeyed (**1 Sam. 15:7-9**). Eventually Samuel hacked Agag into pieces. This was the background of the hatred between the Jews and the descendants of Agag. So Mordecai's actions were motivated by tribal loyalties, not adherence to covenant law.

John Whitcomb: 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**.

Ray Stedman: In every life there is this satanic principle at work. It is called in the New Testament, “*the flesh* .” It lives for but one purpose, reflected here in the story of Esther -- **in order to exalt itself**. It never enjoys life more than when people are bowing and scraping in front of it. It is forever seeking status and position in the eyes of others. You know well this feeling, don't you? It appears to us as a trusted friend, just as Haman appeared to King Ahasuerus as one he could trust. And yet Haman's true purpose was to **advance himself** and to see that everyone bowed low before him. So we treat this strange invader in our lives as though he were a friend -- we promote him and advance him. Isn't it interesting that we are not ashamed of our **pride**? We boast of it, we trust it,

we regard it as an essential to life. We think that this principle, which demands that we think of ourselves first, is the very essence of living -- if this were destroyed, we would lose all. **Thus we may recognize the Haman in our lives.**

- Enraged, Haman plots to exterminate all Jews and gains the king's approval.
3:7 Haman plots for a year to eliminate all of the Jews in the Persian Empire; **casts lots** (Purim) until he determines the best day to have them exterminated; envy, vengeful spirit

Frederic Bush: With a series of innuendos, half-truths, and outright lies, Haman has made the case that this unnamed people is omnipresent and lawless, and hence constitute an insidious threat to the king's welfare. Finally, before the king can even conjecture whether it really is not in his interest to let this people continue to exist, he learns that it will be immensely in his interest to have them destroyed. Haman blatantly appeals to the king's venality and greed with an **enormous bribe**: if the king will issue a decree for their destruction, he will pay ten thousand talents to the royal treasury. [huge sum – either hyperbole or includes the plunder that would be taken from all of the exterminated Jews]

- A decree is issued for their destruction.

Vs. 10 -- Here we have an ancient use of the **autopen** method of governing. The king took off his signet ring and let Haman call the shots.

B. Mordecai's Appeal and Esther's Resolve (Chap. 4)

- Mordecai mourns and urges Esther to intervene.
- Esther hesitates but agrees to help after fasting for three days.

We immediately assume that **fasting** includes godly prayer, but that is not necessarily the case. Oftentimes children of believers in subsequent generations lose the vitality of their faith but maintain the outward form of some of their religious observances. In effect, this could be just a **ritual** employed before important decisions.

Vs. 11 -- **Anthony Tomasino:** The final revelation offered by Esther, that she had not been called to the king's chamber for thirty days, may be the most intriguing comment made here. The phrase "*come unto the king*" surely implies sexual concourse. In one night of passion, Esther had made such an impression on the king that he had chosen her to be queen over all others. But now, the king and Esther have been married for several years. The passion is waning. Has the king grown tired of his queen? Certainly, the king had other wives, and Esther could not expect to share his bed every night. . . It may imply that Esther had fallen out of the king's favor, which could explain her reluctance to appear before him unannounced.

- Famous words: "*For such a time as this...*"

This is the strongest statement in the book that Mordecai may have had some sense of God's providential working. But it also is consistent with a nationalistic fervor for helping one's own people.

There are **watershed moments** in every person's life where you are faced with critical decisions regarding **fulfilling your God-given calling**. Esther faces just such a circumstance in this pivotal chapter regarding the destiny of God's chosen people. The providence of God has led the nation into desperate circumstances where they face an edict of extermination because of the wicked scheming of Haman in the Persian court. The providence of God has also positioned Mordecai and Esther to play key roles in the preservation of God's people – whether they are aware of God's working or not. But the responsibility still lies with Esther to choose to step forward courageously and intervene on behalf of her Jewish nation. In keeping with my love for the NCAA Basketball Championship and its Final Four tournament ending, I have entitled this pivotal incident “**One Shining Moment**.”

Mark Dever: Any ambiguity surrounding the rightness of the actions of Mordecai and Esther only heightens the fact that the **real deliverer** of God's people is the gracious sovereign Himself.

C. Esther's Strategic Approach (Chap. 5)

- Esther invites the king and Haman to a banquet.

Anthony Tomasino: This section is well defined, distinguished from those that precede and follow by setting and characters. The preceding section (4:1–17) focused on the interaction **between Mordecai and Esther**, and took place mostly outside the palace. This section (5:1–8) focuses on the interaction **between the queen and the king**, and is set entirely in the palace. The section that follows (5:9–14) moves outside the palace, and focuses on **Haman**.

- She delays her request, inviting them to a second banquet.

It is possible that Esther is being transformed during this crucial time into a heroic figure of immense courage and even faith. She takes some time to gather her courage to act. One cannot explain for certain her motivation to delay her request. Certainly the providence of God is at work in allowing time for the events that follow.

- Haman prepares gallows for Mordecai at wife's suggestion, still enraged at his defiance.

Vs. 9 – *Pride goes before a fall.* That famous proverb was never more true than in the experience of Haman. Once home, Haman gathers his wife and friends and boasts of his exalted position. (v. 10-11)

Reversal is the key motif of this crucial section. Haman has no idea that when he constructs the gallows out of hatred for Mordecai, he is actually preparing for his own demise.

Cf. **Rom. 2:5** “*Because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed*”

J. Sidlow Baxter: Two Main Movements: In the first five chapters everything is leading up to the crisis-point in the drama. Events move quickly toward the threatened disaster, until, at the end of **chapter v.**, the very gallows are prepared for Mordecai, and it seems as though nothing can avert the impending tragedy. Then, with **chapter vi.**, there comes a sudden turn in the story. The crisis has been providentially anticipated, and is now overruled. The tables are turned. God's people are both saved and avenged. Threatened tragedy gives place to triumph and blessing. The black clouds break apart; the sun bursts through; the earth is green again; and there is a song of prosperity.

III. Climax (Chaps. 6-7) --the whole story is reversed – What a difference a day makes!

A. The King Honors Mordecai (Chap. 6)

- The king, unable to sleep, reads the royal chronicles.

“Could not sleep” is literally, *“The sleep of the king fled.”*

F. B. Huey Jr.: The entire chapter shows how a series of seemingly trivial circumstances fit together to overrule the evil intentions of Haman (e.g., the king happened to be unable to sleep; he happened to ask that the royal annals be read to him; Haman happened to be in the palace).

- He realizes Mordecai was never rewarded for saving his life.
- Ironically, Haman is forced to honor Mordecai publicly.

Anthony Tomasino: After the long buildup, the actual procession takes but a single verse. Each of the elements in the preceding section are repeated, allowing us to feel Haman's humiliation, as each honor that he had dreamed of possessing is bestowed on Mordecai instead. Haman causes Mordecai to ride on a horse *“in the city square.”* This phrase apparently refers not to the citadel, but to the larger city below. The king's intention is that the honoree is to be seen by as many people as possible. Of course, it also makes Haman's humiliation **extremely public**.

B. Esther Exposes Haman (Chap. 7)

- At the second banquet, Esther reveals her Jewish identity.
- She pleads for her people's lives and exposes Haman's plot.

Thomas Constable: Esther was in a very dangerous position. Not only did she now identify herself with a minority group that Haman had represented to the king as subversive, but she also accused one of his closest confidential advisers of committing an error in judgment. Nevertheless she appealed to the king to do what was in his best interests.

- The king is enraged, and Haman is executed on the gallows he built for Mordecai.

Joyce Baldwin: The king's departure enabled Haman the opportunist to make one last bid for an escape from his alarming danger. Having estimated that he stood no chance

of mercy from the king, he decided to beg his life from one whose life he had threatened, and from a member of the Jewish race which he had scorned. But had she not chosen to request his company, and might she not soften towards him? In the momentary relief of tension caused by the king's departure he would turn his charm on the queen; the irony is evident.

David Thompson: Haman was an evil enemy of God's people. For a while, he appeared to have the upper hand. For a while, he appeared to be on top of the Persian world. He wanted the Jews exterminated and appeared to have everything going his way. But Haman overlooked one key factor: the sovereignty of God! No one will ever fool God, no one will ever beat God and no one will ever get away with harming His people. God will ALWAYS see to it that the enemies of His people are punished.

IV. **Falling Action (Chap. 8)** -- natural fall of events leading to the final catastrophe

A. The Reversal Continues

- Esther is given Haman's estate; Mordecai is promoted.

Reward of property to Esther. *Gave the house of Haman to Queen Esther*

Reward of power to Mordecai – second use of the autopen feature of government.

*Took off his signet ring which he had taken away from Haman,
and gave it to Mordecai*

Reward of prestige -- “*And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.*” **Vs. 2b**

- A new decree is issued, allowing Jews to defend themselves and even go beyond that in wiping out their perceived enemies. Planning what will happen 9 months in the future

Problem: impossible to just reverse an irrevocable decree

The personal deliverance of Esther and Mordecai was certainly significant. But the larger issue remains = the fate of the Jewish people as a whole. God's promises about blessing those who bless His covenant people and cursing those who curse them certainly prove out in this context. The ironic reversals of fortune continue as the working of divine providence leads to some surprising developments.

No time to deal with the ethical dimensions of this apparent genocide exacted by the Jews.

Vs. 13 – significance of the term “*vengeance*” – provides some moral justification for the slaughter – presupposes a prior wrong, some offense to which the avenging party is responding – directed against anyone who would follow Haman's initial decree and attach the Jews on that specific day – the thirteenth of Adar. Not a blank check for continued violence.

- Joy and celebration spread among the Jews.

V. Catastrophe (Chap. 9) -- between forces of the Jews and the forces of Babylon

A. The Jews Prevail Over Their Enemies

- On the appointed day, the Jews successfully defend themselves.
- In Susa, 800 enemies are killed (500 and then 300), including Haman's ten sons, but they don't lay hands on the plunder
Jews kill another 75,000.
- The two day feast of Purim is instituted to commemorate their deliverance.

Frederic Bush: Indeed, if the purpose of our narrative had been simply to relate how the victory occurred, the story could well have ended here. But this is not its purpose. . . The narrator has a more important agenda, one that goes beyond this story of the resolution of the threat to the life of the Jewish community. This dramatic and overwhelming deliverance must be perpetually memorialized with an **annual celebration**.

Epilogue (Chap. 10) – Greatness of Mordecai

A. Mordecai's Legacy

- Mordecai is elevated to second in command to the king.
- He continues to work for the welfare of his people.

Timothy Laniak: While Esther is responsible for courageous intervention during a particular moment of crisis, Mordecai is praised in the end for his ongoing intermediary role on behalf of the Jews. **Continuous advocacy** is the basis for Jewish security in the Diaspora. Throughout the story, Mordecai is identified as "*the Jew*." He represents the Jews in what he does and in what he says. He "stands" for them. There is evidence that, until the turn of the era, the other name for Purim was "**Mordecai's Day**" (2 Macc. 15:36).

- The book closes with a note on his greatness and peace for the Jews.

Here our short story concludes with this Epilogue extolling the greatness of Mordecai. Here was a little known Jew who was surprisingly elevated to a position of prominence in the Persian Kingdom by the Providence of God. Ironically, his promotion came at the expense of his scheming enemy Haman. Mordecai's administration was effective in advocating for the welfare of the Jewish community and protecting their well-being. Contrary to being a threat to the Gentile kingdom, Mordecai advanced the overall status of the Persian dominion as well. This is a picture of how believers can function in a pagan culture and how God can work behind the scenes in accordance with His providence to advance His overall kingdom agenda. He is able to protect His elect from desperate threats and malicious opposition and bring surprising blessing and prosperity.

Providential Care seen throughout the book:

No **Coincidences** in the working of God's plan for history and for redemption.

Large doors swing on small hinges; the very course of history is determined by the smallest particulars

Thomas Constable: Esther reveals three things about divine providence.

First, it reveals the **method of providence**.

It shows that even though people do not acknowledge God's presence, He is always at work. His control becomes especially clear at the end of the book (**10:3**). Events turned around completely from the way they were at the beginning of the book. Instead of being in peril, the Jews were now at peace. God not only rules over the major issues in life, but He also uses the apparent trivialities of life to accomplish His purposes. Some of these "trivialities" were: the king's decision to summon Vashti after he got drunk, Vashti's refusal, Haman's hatred for Mordecai, the king's insomnia, and the record his servant read to him. God's providence is all-inclusive. That is part of its method. No person or detail of life escapes God's control (**Rom. 8:28**): all individuals and all events.

Second, Esther reveals the **principles of providence**. 3 are listed here:

- God proceeds on the basis of perfect knowledge: intimate, accurate, absolute knowledge.
- Another principle of His providence is His undeviating righteousness. God's providence works in harmony with man's freedom. It never coerces people. The king made his own decisions; God did not compel him to act as he did. Haman plotted his own intrigues, made his own arrangements, and built his own gallows. The same was true of Mordecai and Esther. Yet the sphere in which they made their decisions was God's sovereignty (cf. Acts 17:28a). Haman built his gallows for Mordecai, but God hanged Haman on it.
- A third principle of God's providence is that of absolute power. God is great enough to give people genuine freedom and yet cause things to turn out the way He wants them to. God causes human freedom to contribute to His divine purpose. We cannot comprehend this truth completely. . . There is much that is known only by God (**Deut. 29:29**).

Third, Esther reveals the **results of providence**.

On the human level, there are two results.

- To those who recognize divine providence comes great confidence and courage.
- However, to those who do not, come panic and punishment.

We can see this most clearly in the characters of Esther and Mordecai, and in Haman. On the divine level, the result of providence is that God progresses toward His ultimate goal. Throughout all of Scriptural history we see this identical, mighty, behind-the-scenes movement. The message of this book is that God is, and that God acts through history to accomplish His purposes—regardless of whether humans acknowledge Him or not.

I outlined this book of Esther around this theme of Divine Providence:

**I. (1:1 – 2:18) PROVIDENCE CONTROLS WHO IS IN AUTHORITY –
ESTHER PROVIDENTIALLY REPLACES VASHTI AS QUEEN**

**II. (2:19 – 7:10) PROVIDENCE CONTROLS LIFE AND DEATH – WHO WINS AND
WHO LOSES —
MORDECAI PROVIDENTIALLY OVERCOMES HAMAN**

A. (2:19-23) PROVIDENCE ORCHESTRATES EVENTS IN THE PRESENT TO PREPARE
FOR THE FUTURE —
MORDECAI PROVIDENTIALLY FOILS ASSASSINATION PLOT AND EARNS FUTURE
FAVOR FROM THE KING

B. (3:1-15) PROVIDENCE ALLOWS GOD’S PEOPLE TO COME UNDER SEVERE
ATTACK —
SATAN’S GOAL IS NOTHING LESS THAN THE EXTERMINATION OF GOD’S PEOPLE

C. (4:1 – 5:14) PROVIDENCE USES STRATEGICALLY PLACED PEOPLE FOR
MOMENTOUS INTERVENTION —

D. (6:1-14) PROVIDENCE WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES –
GOD DEMONSTRATES HIS SOVEREIGN CONTROL EVEN WHEN THE WICKED
IMAGINE THAT THEY ARE IN CONTROL.

E. (7:1-10) THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD LEVERAGES DIVINE APPOINTMENTS,
PROTECTS GOD’S PEOPLE AND DESTROYS GOD’S FOES

**III. (8:1 – 9:32) PROVIDENCE CONTROLS THE DESTINY OF GOD’S PEOPLE —
ISRAEL PROVIDENTIALLY ESCAPES HAMAN’S ATTEMPT AT EXTERMINATION**

**(10:1-3) EPILOGUE – PROVIDENCE CONTROLS ONE’S ULTIMATE LEGACY —
GREATNESS OF MORDECAI EXTOLLED**

Review **Big Idea**:

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD PROTECTS HIS PEOPLE AGAINST THREATS OF
EXTERMINATION

CONCLUSION:

The book of Esther is definitely worthy of a theater production, but I don’t think I would want
my daughter starring in the key role.

APPENDIX:

Mark Dever: Applications:

- **Be comforted in your trials;** God does not abandon His people

John Flavel: “He who observes Providence will never be long without a Providence to observe” 17th century Puritan preacher known for his book “**The Mystery of Providence**”

Look back over your life and think of God’s Providence in small details and impact they had. Everything from the most minute to the most grandiose is ordered by the Lord whose kingdom rules over all.

- **Be courageous in your obedience**
Don’t become complacent
- **Be confident** – God has placed you where you are

Ken Boa: Applications:

- A clean vessel – many unlikely candidates to be used as instruments of God;
- God uses obscure people – examples of dramatic deliverances;
- Serving in a pagan world – form of govt. irrelevant to following God;
- The risks of faith

Sermon by Spurgeon:

<https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/providence-as-seen-in-the-book-of-esther-2/#flipbook/>

- I. First, we shall learn from the narrative that GOD PLACES HIS AGENTS IN FITTING PLACES FOR DOING HIS WORK. The Lord was not taken by surprise by this plot of Haman; he had foreseen it and forestalled it.
- II. Secondly, the Lord not only arranges his servants, but HE RESTRAINS HIS ENEMIES.
- III. Next we will notice that GOD IN HIS PROVIDENCE TRIES HIS PEOPLE
- IV. But we must pass on to note, fourthly, that THE LORD S WISDOM IS SEEN IN ARRANGING THE SMALLEST EVENTS SO AS TO PRODUCE GREAT RESULTS.
- V. Our next remark is THE LORD IN HIS PROVIDENCE CALLS HIS OWN SERVANTS TO BE ACTIVE.
- VI. Now must we close our historical review with the remark that in the end THE LORD ACHIEVES THE TOTAL DEFEAT OF HIS FOES AND THE SAFETY OF HIS PEOPLE.