

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

COMMENTARY ON BOOK OF ESTHER

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD PROTECTS HIS PEOPLE AGAINST THREATS OF EXTERMINATION

Paul Apple (April 2021)

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

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?”*

This data file is the sole property of the author Paul Apple. However, permission is granted for others to use and distribute these materials for the edification of others under two simple conditions:

- 1) The contents must be faithfully represented including credit to the author where appropriate.
- 2) The material must be distributed freely without any financial remuneration.

This data file may not be copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of Paul Apple. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to:

Paul Apple, 304 N. Beechwood Ave., Baltimore MD 21228.

www.bibleoutlines.com

paulgapple@gmail.com

BACKGROUND NOTES

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.

Alistair Begg: Overview of Esther

Introduction:

What is the relevancy and impact of such a book about long ago events?

I. Big Picture

Need to step far enough back to get the perspective of what God is trying to accomplish in redemptive history – **Gen. 3:15** perspective

Not all about you

II. Big Question – Why is God not mentioned in the book?

Always working behind the scenes even when we are unaware

III. Big Idea – Providence of God – in control of all events and orchestrating everything to accomplish His agenda; can turn what seems bad at the time into something for His glory

IV. Big Deal – King thought he was a bigger deal than he was

John MacArthur:

The **author** remains unknown, although Mordecai, Ezra, and Nehemiah have been suggested. Whoever penned Esther possessed a detailed knowledge of Persian customs, etiquette, and history, plus particular familiarity with the palace at Shushan (**1:5–7**). He also exhibited intimate knowledge of the Hebrew calendar and customs, while additionally showing a strong sense of Jewish nationalism. Possibly a Persian Jew, who later moved back to Israel, wrote Esther. . .

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**).

Interpretative Challenges:

- Why no mention of God in the book?

- Why the apparent secular lifestyles of both Mordecai and Esther?

Gleason Archer Jr.: There is no other reasonable explanation for the historic fact of the **Feast of Purim** as observed among the Jews except that such a remarkable deliverance of the nation from extinction actually took place in history. There would have been absolutely no motive for manufacturing such a story as this unless it was based upon an actual occurrence. The name Purim is unimpeachably authentic, for the term *puru*, meaning lot, has been discovered in Assyrian inscriptions.

Laniak: The author of Esther surely intends to have the book read as history. The conventions of biblical historiography are evident as the book begins (with the phrases *vayhi bimey* in v. 1 and *bayyamim hahe* in v. 2) and at its close (“*are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia?*” in 10:2). Just as importantly, the basis for the celebration of Purim is the historic(al) moment (i.e., the two days in Adar) during which the Jews were delivered from their enemies. If the story does not report this historical incident with a certain measure of accuracy, then Purim is only a celebration of a legendary victory. . .

Criticism of the ethics represented in the Esther narrative is likely due to a misunderstanding of biblical ethics and biblical narrative. The moral code of the story is really a code of honor. Esther and Mordecai are champions of their people because they are loyal to them. They courageously resist an enemy who seeks their destruction, acting only in self-defense (as the author notes more than once). The Jews resist greed, refusing to take the spoils they deserve. The author insists that the Jews acted only within the boundaries of the law. Once every person in the empire was given the opportunity to take sides, the Jews were authorized to execute justice. The book of Esther portrays evil as a reckless reality successfully arrested by force and by law.

John Martin: The book takes place in the Persian period (539-331 B.C.) after many Israelites had returned from the Exile to the land of Palestine to rebuild the temple and set up the sacrificial system. Most Israelite captives, however, chose not to return to their homeland. They should have done so for Isaiah and Jeremiah had urged the yet-to-be-exiled nation to come out of Babylon (**Isa. 48:20; Jer. 50:8; 51:6**) after 70 years (**Jer. 29:10**) and return to the place where the Lord could bless them under the covenantal promises (**Deut. 28**) Esther and Mordecai had not returned to the land and did not seem interested in complying with the prophetic command to return. The Persian monarch mentioned in the Book of Esther is Xerxes (485-465), known from other sources as Ahasuerus, a strong, effective ruler. The events in this book occurred between those recorded in Ezra 6 and Ezra 7.

Breneman: The **genre** of the Book of Esther is historical narrative. As such, biblical narrative is characterized by the cooperation of three components: ideology (socioreligious perspective), historiography (use of historical persons and events in a narrative), and aesthetic appeal (its influence and persuasion of the reader).³⁷ Each of these three elements can be readily seen in Esther. The ideology is the orthodox faith of ancient Israel. The book is theological in that its primary purpose is to teach about God and his continuing relationship with his people. It is historiographical in that it is an account of historical persons and historical events as they occurred. It is aesthetic because it is full of drama and suspense and draws its readers to anticipate happenings and events that often are the reverse of what the reader expects.

A “**chiastic**” structure in the whole book, indicating a fine degree of literary art, has been observed. The pivotal point is the king’s sleepless night (**6:1–3**), around which the chiastic structure is built.

- A Opening and background (**chap. 1**)
 - B The king’s first decree (**chaps. 2–3**)
 - C The clash between Haman and Mordecai (**chaps. 4–5**)
 - D “*On that night the king could not sleep*” (**6:1**)
 - C’ Mordecai’s triumph over Haman (**chaps. 6–7**)
 - B’ The king’s second decree (**chaps. 8–9**)
- A’ Epilogue (**chap. 10**)

Chuck Swindoll: Much like the book of Ruth, this book stands as one of the most skillfully written biblical books. Using eight feasts to systematically build and resolve suspense, the author constructed the story chiastically—using a Hebrew literary device in which events mirror each other inversely. Early listeners to the story would have recognized significant events and followed the rising tension with understanding. . .

When events seemed out of control to Esther and Mordecai, when the king dictated ruin for their people, when evil was poised to triumph . . . God was at work. He worked through their dark days (Esther was taken to the harem [**2:1–16**]), their faithful obedience (Esther risked her life before the king [**5:1–3**]), and their victories (Esther revealed Haman’s plot and the Jews’ destruction of their enemies [**7–9**]). This message is clear: God is sovereign even when life doesn’t make sense. . .

Life can be hard. Difficult times happen, and pain cannot be avoided. When life doesn’t make sense, do you turn to God or away from Him? Let the book of Esther encourage you that God is always present. Jesus called us “*friends*” (**John 15:15**), and the Spirit is our “*Helper*” (**14:26**). Trust and obey, as Esther did. And watch God silently weave all events for His glory . . . and for our good.

Thomas Constable:

Literary Characteristics:

Esther demonstrates quite a bit of irony, satire, and recurring motifs. These motifs include drinking and banqueting, fasting, items of apparel, law and legality, and conflicts.

“More than just a structuring device, the banquet is the setting at which all the major events occur . . .”

The writer delighted in setting things forth in **pairs**. Esther twice concealed her identity. There are three groups of banquets: two given by Xerxes, two by Esther, and two celebrations of Purim. There are two lists of the king’s servants, two gatherings of women, two houses for the women, two fasts, two consultations by Haman with his wife and friends, and two unscheduled appearances by Esther before the king. There are also two investitures of Mordecai, two times Haman’s face was covered, two references to Haman’s sons, and two appearances of Harbona. Twice the king’s anger subsided, twice the writer said the Persian laws were irrevocable, the

Jews took revenge on their enemies on two days, and two letters announced the commemoration of Purim.

Interpretation:

One of the biggest problems connected with the Book of Esther is its proper interpretation. Four major schools of interpretation are common among Christians.

The allegorical interpretation denies the historical realities of the events. For example, the idea that Vashti was not a real woman, but that she represents the spirit of man that failed to submit to God's revelation and fell. Esther was not a real person either, according to this view. She represents the new spirit God gives man at regeneration.

The typical interpretation accepts the historical reality of the persons and events recorded; they really existed. But the interpreters in this school stress the typical significance of what these characters and events represent, according to the interpreter.

The prophetical interpretation views the characters and events as real, but its advocates believe they are prophetic previews of God's dealings with the Jews in the eschatological future: the Tribulation and Millennium.

The historical interpretation views the characters and events as real, and its advocates stress the timeless lessons the original readers would have learned from the book (e.g., the providence of God). I believe that this is the proper approach the reader should take to this book, as well as the other biblical historical books.

Divine Providence:

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**.

God proceeds on the basis of perfect knowledge: intimate, accurate, absolute knowledge (cf. **Ps. 11:4**).

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. We cannot contain revelation within reason. That is why it is impossible to bring all of revelation into a comprehensive philosophy. Philosophy is what is reasonable, but revelation goes beyond reason. Not that it is irrational; it simply transcends reason. Trying to contain all of reality within reason is like trying to pour the Pacific Ocean into a one-gallon jug. 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.

There are many arguments for the existence of God. The argument from providence is one of these, though apologists do not usually give it as much emphasis as some other arguments. The fact that human events are harmonizing with God's ultimate purposes, as He has revealed these in Scripture, testifies to God's existence. When people forget God, He still molds history and governs life in harmony with His purposes. We cannot escape God's hand; we only change our destiny. We become His friends or His foes by our attitude toward Him (cf. **Dan. 5:22-23**).

The great **application** of the message of this book is: **take God into account**. This is the essence of biblical wisdom, by the way. Trust Him and cooperate with Him or you will suffer destruction. God's providence may seem very impersonal and austere. However, **William Cowper** has reminded us that, "Behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face." **Romans 8:28** is perhaps the most concise word on the providence of God that the Scriptures contain. God will complete His plans. We determine our own destiny as we cooperate with His will or oppose it. Our choices affect our destiny, but they do not frustrate His plan.

Consequently, it is very important that we know God's plans and make them known to others. He has revealed His plans in His promises in Scripture. Therefore we should pay very careful attention to the promises of God. The biblical covenants are His big, comprehensive, formal promises. Even though many people in the world today ignore God, what He plans will become reality eventually. This fact should make us confident and optimistic in the present.

Joyce Baldwin: It is easy to see why the book is valued by Jews, who have suffered so much through the ages and have clung to the assurance implied by Purim that, however severe the

threat upon their race, they have a future. ‘God was not overt, His word not direct, and His face not revealed, still, behind the veil of purim, God’s providence towards His people, would uphold them against adversary and ideological force alike, as in Passover of old.’ No wonder the story has delighted and uplifted Jewish hearts, giving them hope even in the darkest days. It has played its part in maintaining what **Kenneth Cragg** refers to as ‘this transcendent quality of Israel’s assurance of right, ... which makes Palestinian struggle in any contrary sense so a priori unequal, short of a similar mystique of destiny.’ ‘Zionism proper ... has those very imponderables which ... Israel harnesses and urges so tenaciously ... sacred history, divine charter, mysterious destiny ... and the Holocaust.’ To this day, therefore, the annual reading of the book of Esther at Purim generates unfailing enthusiasm and keeps alive Jewish belief in God’s continuing providence, despite all the victimization. In Jewish eyes the book lives.

There are two conflicting world-views in the book, one represented by Haman, who believes in chance-fate and thinks that on this basis he can annihilate God’s people. In other words he is a practical atheist, and the writer portrays his world only to parody it. Put in a position of power he uses it to further his own ends, while at the same time giving the impression that he is concerned for the king’s interests (**3:8**). Not that he stands to gain by his ruse; money is no object and he is already second only to the king. Rather, his pique will find expression, and the outrage on his dignity will be avenged. The suffering intended is out of all proportion to the cause, but petty-minded self-importance can brook no opposition and makes no attempt to account for it. Haman takes for granted his own ability to engineer events and bring about his hostile intentions. He believes he can control history within the limits of his circumstances.

The other world-view also lays stress on human initiative. Mordecai urged Esther to approach the king; if she failed to make this move, dangerous as it was, her own life and the life of her people could be wiped out. Thus human responsibility continues to be prominent, but it is not isolated from the conviction that events are part of a pattern for which only the Lord God could be responsible. True, he is not named, but when Mordecai says to Esther, ‘*And who knows whether you have to come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*’ (**4:14**) he is revealing his belief in an overruling of history. Esther’s choice as queen had been no random chance, but the work of the Director of world affairs, so that through her this act of deliverance could be effected.

The book sets the two world-views in contrast, and shows by the outcome which is to be preferred. Whereas Haman was hung on his own gallows, Mordecai took Haman’s place of power (**8:2**). As for the Jews, despite the laws intended for their downfall, they were permitted to live and put to death their foes. The tables were turned; retributive justice was seen to be done. But it was the king who, in response to the information given by Harbona, said ‘*Hang him [Haman] on that*’ (**7:10**), and who promoted Mordecai to power. Human agents were the unwitting instruments of one who was the unseen Ruler of events.

Brian Branam: Where is God? Esther Overview

Don’t get fooled by the Sunday School version of the story as if Esther is some type of grand heroine throughout.

Initially both Esther and Mordecai are completely secular characters – living as if God is not in

charge of their lives. Contrast Daniel standing up to the king vs Esther operating from a mindset of How can I please the king? Contrast the mission of Nehemiah in calling the Jews to return and rebuild the Holy City and the temple of God vs Mordecai who stays in his comfortable job. It appears that both Mordecai and Esther have compromised and assimilated into Persian culture.

However, Esther gets transformed halfway through the book

You need to align yourself with the Providence of God and make His concerns your concerns so that you are actively and intentionally pursuing God's kingdom agenda.

Karen Jobes: The Doctrine of Divine Providence

Although there is not one tiny miracle found in the book of Esther, the cumulative result of a series of improbable events leads one to ponder the miraculous quality of the ordinary. As it has been said, "a coincidence is a miracle in which God prefers to remain anonymous." If, as the book of Esther implies, God interacts with individuals in such a way as to move history to the goal ordained by his eternal purposes, surely even the ordinary takes on a miraculous luster. In some ineffable way, ordinary human decisions cooperate with the divine plan. . .

The book of Esther is perhaps the most striking biblical example of the doctrine of divine providence. It invites us to reflect on God's continual superintendence of history and, therefore, his superintendence of human decisions and actions. Without any observable miracle or any detectable intervention by God, human decisions led to an outcome that God had promised many centuries before. This outcome was not only against all human expectation, but was the exact reversal of the expected outcome. This means that to whatever extent we wish to credit God for directing the events of the story, we must recognize that he was to that extent influencing the minds of those involved. . .

Using what the Bible teaches about God's relationship to and interaction with the universe, Christian theologians identify the three elements of divine providence as

- (1) the preservation of the existence of the universe and all life within it,
- (2) divine concurrence in human action, and
- (3) divine concurrence that moves history toward a planned end.

The story of Esther illustrates all three of these elements to some extent, but especially draws our attention to the latter two.

There is no way to understand the events told in the book of Esther as being of God without affirming the three elements of divine providence just outlined. If the book of Esther is understood as communicating truth about human nature and redemptive destiny in the form of story, surely the truth it communicates demands the claims of divine providence. How omnipotent is our God in all the earth!

Thomas Klock:

Let's get to know a little bit about the main characters to help us as we study:

Esther: Her Hebrew name was Hadassah, meaning "a myrtle tree"; like Daniel and his companions, she was given a Babylonian name, Esther, meaning "star." She was indeed a star of

guidance for her people to follow. We can learn lessons from her life such as keeping one's word, loving and clinging to our spiritual heritage despite it being despised, and serving God to the best of our ability, realizing God has put us in our particular world for such a time as this.

There is something we need to remember too about the beauty of this young woman: Her dark, exotic features marked her out, and she was thus chosen as a candidate for the king's favor, who, when he saw her for the first time must have been captivated by her physical charms. But through her beauty there shone a radiance of personality and character which enhanced her beauty and gave it distinction in the eyes of Ahasuerus.

[Herbert L. Lockyer, All the Women of the Bible]

Vashti: Although playing a short part in the story, hers is an important one. Her name means "beautiful woman." As queen, her treatment of the Jewish maidens under her was cruel, and she even possibly tortured some of them. Yet she did something no other woman had dared: She stood up against her drunken husband's orders to appear before him and his friends in nothing but her crown! She saw her character and personal dignity as more important than the cost of disobedience. Whether she was beheaded or banished isn't specified in the story, but she saved her integrity nonetheless. [ibid]

Ahasuerus: This name was the Hebrew form of the Persian word, and the Greeks changed that name to Xerxes. He was marked by a lack of backbone, and his character wavered with the winds of his emotions. All of his decisions were made based on this, to his cost. The latter part of his reign was marked by alcoholism and violent bloodshed, and he was ultimately murdered by two of his officers in 365 BC. [Herbert L. Lockyer, All the Kings and Queens of the Bible]

Haman: He is the villain of the story. His name means "well disposed," and so he thought of himself, but he was morally and spiritually bankrupt. He never considered following principle in promoting himself. "All of Haman's tragedy is condensed in his designation—he was the Jews' enemy. As the first great anti-Semite, he came to prove that they who curse the Jews are cursed by God." [Herbert L. Lockyer, All the Men of the Bible]

Mordecai: His name means "a little man," or "bitter bruising." He was just the opposite of this in character, and was just the opposite of Haman. He was non-compromising in the face of peril, he was an excellent adoptive father, he had a heart for the people, and God would ultimately elevate him because of these things. [ibid]

<https://www.biblestudytools.com/archive/old-testament/esther-introduction-to-study-11554869.html>

Frederic Bush: The theme of the whole then is: The festival of Purim, to be held on 14 and 15 Adar and established by the joint leadership and action of Mordecai, Esther, and the Jewish community itself, is to consist of joyful days of feasting and the sending of presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor as a perpetual, annual commemoration of the transformation from sadness to joy and from mourning to a holiday that marked the days following their deliverance from the terrible edict with which Haman sought to annihilate them. This deliverance from the threat of annihilation in the dangerous world of the diaspora, with its uncertainty and propensity for evil, was effected by the loyalty of Mordecai to both the Jewish people and the

king, the courage, shrewdness, and sagacity of Esther, both of whom willingly accepted roles of leadership in that world, and the reliable providence of God, demonstrating that a viable life for diaspora Jews is possible even in the face of such propensity for evil.

Tomasino: The final motif we will consider, reversal (or “peripety,” as it has come to be known), plays a very important role in the narrative. Several studies of Esther have focused on the role of reversal, and rightly so: since classical times, the significance of this narrative technique has been studied and appreciated. Aristotle believed reversal to be one of the most essential elements of the tragic genre. For Aristotle, it was the change of the fortunes of the hero from good to bad that truly aroused the interest and passions of the audience. We might suppose, then, that the reversal of fortunes from bad to good could be one of the most powerful elements of comic literature. How much better when combined with the reversal of fortunes for the villain! In the book of Esther, reversal makes us smile; it makes us cheer; but it also makes us look for the hand at work behind the scenes.

Most of these reversals center on the character of Haman. These include:

- Haman is exalted above all the courtiers (**3:10**); Mordecai is later awarded his office (**8:2**).
- Haman hatches a plot to kill all the Jews; instead, Haman himself is executed.
- The couriers go out swiftly to take word of the king’s decree against the Jews (**3:15**); the couriers go out swiftly to take word of the Jews’ reprieve (**8:14**).
- Haman erects a pike for the hanging of Mordecai (**5:14**); instead, he is hung on it (**7:9–10**).
- Haman believes that the king wishes to honor him (**6:6–9**); instead, he ends up honoring Mordecai (**6:11–12**).

Other reversals centering instead on Mordecai and the Jews:

- Mordecai tears his garments and dresses in sackcloth and ashes (**4:1**); Mordecai is dressed in royal robes (**8:15**).
- The Jews mourn on receiving word of Haman’s decree (**4:3**); the Jews rejoice on receiving word of the new decree (**8:17**).
- The Jews were to be slaughtered, killed, and destroyed by those who attacked them (**3:13**); the Jews were given permission to slaughter, kill, and destroy all who attacked them (**8:11**).

Karen Jobes: like the rest of the Hebrew Bible, the book of Esther has become the spiritual heritage of Christians, bequeathed to us by Jesus Christ (e.g., **Luke 24:27, 44–45**). The New Testament teaches that the Old Testament promises of future salvation were ultimately secured by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The deliverance of God’s people from Haman’s death decree assured the continuance of the Jewish nation from which their Messiah would come. That Messiah brought a deliverance from death not limited to escaping the holocausts of history, but a deliverance from the grave that inevitably awaits each of us, both Jew and Gentile alike.

The theme of the reversal of destiny takes the form of peripety in the book of Esther. However, the reversal of destiny is a major theme in biblical theology, spanning the entire Bible. God’s

plan to redeem a people from death is a reversal of expected outcomes for those he saves. Therefore, the cross of Jesus Christ is the pivot point of a greater peripety that spans all of history.

Because of our sin, we, like the Jews in exile in Persia, should expect only death and destruction. Our fate was reversed by the seemingly insignificant death of one man, Jesus of Nazareth. Dragging a cross through the streets to his death was not the outcome one expected when the long-awaited Messiah finally appeared in Jerusalem. Such a destiny was so unexpected that it has precluded in many minds even the possibility that Jesus was the Messiah. While the world may see the birth and death of Jesus as ordinary events, through that one man God was fulfilling the promises of his life-giving covenant. Against all human expectation, Jesus Christ took the death that was our destiny so that we could have the life that was his.

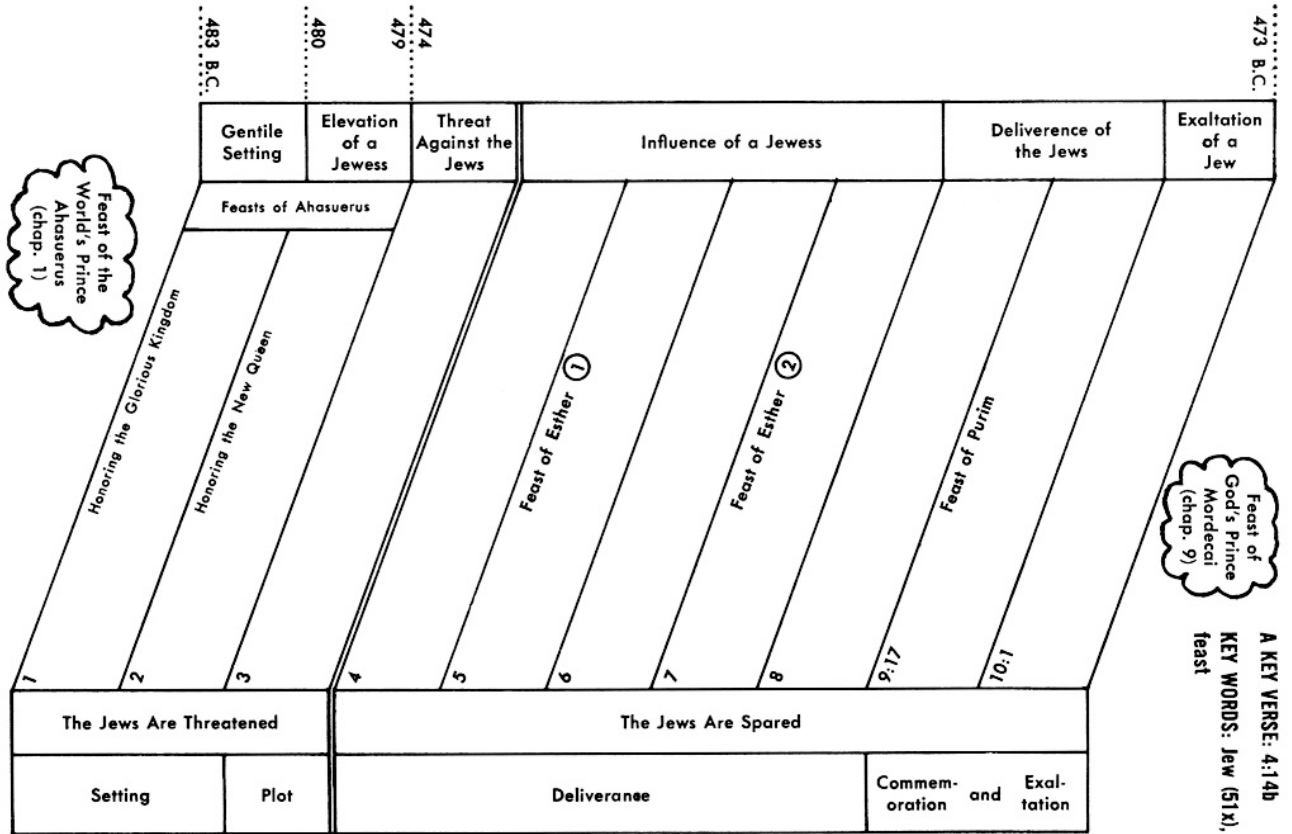
Christ's resurrection from the grave is the ultimate reversal of expected outcomes. Because of this great peripety, we who could expect only death have been given life, a life that is imperishable and eternal. There is no power that can wrest it from us. The episode in Israel's history from the Persian period is an illustration of the reversal of an expected outcome in history that resulted in life instead of death for God's people. Moreover, this deliverance from death was itself a necessary link in the chain of events that led centuries later to the ultimate peripety accomplished on the cross of Jesus Christ.

The major theological point of the book of Esther is that God fulfills his covenant promises through his providence. The major point of contemporary significance is that God unfolds his will for individual lives through that same providence. God continues to work through providence, through seemingly insignificant events, to call people in every age to himself. How did you come to know Christ? Perhaps someone invited you to a church service, or by chance you heard a radio program, or you picked up an evangelistic tract. God sovereignly controls events of history and flawed human decisions to fulfill his promise to save for himself a people. Once in Christ, God promises that we will "*be conformed to the likeness of his Son*" (**Rom. 8:29**). He uses the ordinary events of life, some happy, some quite tragic, to form Christ in us.

Wiersbe:

- I. Esther's Coronation – Chaps. 1-2
 1. The dethroning of Vashti – 1
 2. The crowning of Esther -- 2
- II. Haman's Condemnation – Chaps. 3-7
 1. Haman's intrigue – 3
 2. Mordecai's insight – 4
 3. Esther's intercession – 5-7
- III. Israel's Celebration – Chaps. 8-10
 1. A new decree – 8
 2. A new defense – 9
 3. A great distinction -- 10

Bruce Hurt:



OUTLINE OF ESTHER

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD PROTECTS HIS PEOPLE AGAINST THREATS OF EXTERMINATION

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

A. (1:1-22) PROVIDENTIAL REMOVAL OF THE PERSIAN QUEEN -- IMPRESSIVE DISPLAYS OF SECULAR OPULENCE AND DOMINION EXPOSED AS IMPOTENT AND FUTILE AS GOD’S PROVIDENCE WORKS OUT HIS OWN KINGDOM AGENDA

- (:1-4) Prologue – Historical Setting Showcasing the Glorious Kingdom of Xerxes
 - a. (:1-2) Majestic Reign of King Xerxes from the Capital of Susa
 - 1) (:1) Reigning Sovereign of Vast Kingdom = Ahasuerus
 - 2) (:2) Royal Seat at Susa
 - b. (:3-4) Magnificent Display of Kingdom Glory at Extended VIP Banquet
 - 1) (:3a) Impressive Milestone for the Banquet
 - 2) (:3b) Impressive Guest List = Key Military and Political Leaders
 - 3) (:4a) Impressive Display of Kingdom Riches and Success
 - 4) (:4b) Impressive Extended Duration of the Banquet
- 1. (:5-9) Fancy Party Time Hosted Separately by the Persian King and Queen –
Secular World Powers Boast of Their Opulence and Dominion
 - a. (:5) Imperial Banquet
 - 1) Lengthy Duration to Eat and Drink to Excess
 - 2) Unlimited Guest List Crossing All Social Strata
 - 3) Beautiful Royal Setting
 - b. (:6) Invaluable Adornments
 - 1) Ostentatious Drapes
 - 2) Opulent Couches on Gilded Pavements
 - c. (:7-8) Indulgent Drinking
 - 1) (:7a) Presentation in Unique Golden Vessels
 - 2) (:7b) Plentiful Royal Wine
 - 3) (:8) Personal Preference Regarding How Much to Drink
 - d. (:9) Independent Banquet for the Women Hosted by Queen Vashti
- 2. (:10-20) Family Tension Blows Up Into Kingdom Crisis and the Removal of the
Persian Queen – Secular World Powers Satirically Exposed as Impotent
 - a. (:10-11) The King’s Shameful Command
 - 1) (:10a) Drunken Loss of Self Control -- Judgment Clouded
 - 2) (:10b-11) Degrading Exhibition of Queen Vashti
 - b. (:12a) The Queen’s Stunning Refusal

- c. (:12b) The King's Burning Anger
- d. (:13-15) The King's Urgent Inquiry – What is to be Done to Queen Vashti?
 - 1) (:13-14) Appeal to the Wise Men for a Just Resolution
 - 2) (:15) Affront of Queen Vashti that Requires Punishment
- e. (:16-18) The Kingdom Crisis – Threat to Male Household Authority
 - 1) (:16) Exaggerating the Crisis – Counsel of Memucan
 - 2) (:17-18) Extrapolating the Impact of Queen Vashti's Refusal
- f. (:19-20) The Proposed Resolution = Replace Queen Vashti
 - 1) (:19a) Irrevocable Edict
 - 2) (:19b) Irreconcilable Edict
 - 3) (:20) Impactful Edict Kingdom-wide
- (:21-22) Epilogue – Reinforcing Male Household Authority – Mocking the Impotency of the Secular Sovereign
 - a. (:21) Commitment to Execute Memucan's Proposal
 - b. (:22) Communication of the King's Edict
 - 1) Scope of the Communication – Kingdom-wide
 - 2) Summary of the Communication – Husband Rules the Roost

B. (2:1-18) PROVIDENTIAL CROWNING OF ESTHER AS THE NEW QUEEN -- THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD SOVEREIGNLY WORKS BEHIND THE SCENES DESPITE THE OSTENTATIOUS EXCESSES OF PAGAN DESPOTS AND THE CULTURAL ASSIMILATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE

- 1. (:1-4) Providential Search for a Replacement Queen
 - a. (:1) Remembrance of the King Regarding Vashti
 - b. (:2-4) Recommendation to the King on Finding a Replacement Queen
 - 1) (:2) Seek Out Eligible Young Virgins
 - 2) (:3a) Segregate Them in the King's Harem
 - 3) (:3b) Shine Them Up for Their Audition
 - 4) (:4a) Select the One You Like Best to be Queen
 - c. (:4b) Response of the King
- 2. (:5-7) Providential Placement of Mordecai and Esther
 - a. (:5-6) Identification of Mordecai
 - 1) By Nationality
 - 2) By Location
 - 3) By Name
 - 4) By Ancestry
 - 5) By Tribe
 - 6) By Life Story
 - b. (:7) Identification of Esther
 - 1) By Name
 - 2) By Relationship
 - 3) By Tragedy
 - 4) By Good Looks
 - 5) By Upbringing
- 3. (:8-16) Providential Favor Shown to Esther
 - a. (:8) Supervised by Hegai in the Palace Harem

- b. (:9) Special Treatment Afforded to Esther by Hegai
 - 1) Preferred
 - 2) Pampered
- c. (:10) Secretive Regarding Her Jewish Ethnicity
- d. (:11) Surveillance by Mordecai
- e. (:12-14) Selection Process Detailed
 - 1) (:12) Year-Long Program of Beautification in Preparation
 - 2) (:13) Blank Check for Accessories
 - 3) (:14a) One Night Stand for the Purpose of Evaluation
 - 4) (:14b) Future Liaisons at the Pleasure of the King
- f. (:15-16) Strategic Opportunity Afforded to Esther
 - 1) (:15a) Prepped by Hegai
 - 2) (:15b) Praised by All
 - 3) (:16) Presented to the King
- 4. (:17-18) Providential Elevation of Esther
 - a. (:17) Coronation of Esther
 - 1) Supremely Loved
 - 2) Supremely Favored
 - 3) Supremely Crowned
 - b. (:18) Celebration of Esther's Coronation
 - 1) Great Banquet
 - 2) Grand Holiday
 - 3) Generous Gifts

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

- 1. (:19-20) Cover-Up of Jewish Ethnicity Despite Prominent Roles of Mordecai and Esther
 - a. (:19) Prominent Role of Mordecai
 - b. (:20) Private Cover-Up by Esther in Obedience to Mordecai
- 2. (:21-23) Providential Intervention of Mordecai to Foil Assassination Plot
 - a. (:21) Assassination Plot Devised
 - b. (:22) Assassination Plot Detected and Defused
 - c. (:23a) Conspirators Executed
 - d. (:23b) Incident Chronicled for Historical Purposes

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

- 1. (:1-6) The Conflict Leading to Haman's Commitment to Exterminate the Jews
 - a. (:1-2) Mordecai Reacts in Antagonism to Haman
 - 1) (:1) Elevation of Haman to Prominence in the Kingdom

- 2) (:2) Exception in the Respect Shown to Haman
- b. (:3-6) Haman Reacts in Antagonism to Mordecai
 - 1) (:3) Reason Requested for Refusal to Show Respect
 - 2) (:4) Report to Haman of Mordecai's Position
 - 3) (:5-6) Reaction of Haman
- 2. (:7-11) The Conniving to Develop a Campaign to Exterminate the Jews
 - a. (:7) Ascertaining the Timing of the Campaign
 - b. (:8-9) Argument to Obtain the King's Consent to the Campaign
 - 1) (:8) Case for Extermination
 - 2) (:9) Call for Action
 - c. (:10-11) Authorization for the Campaign
 - 1) (:10) Authorized via Royal Delegation of Decision-Making Power
 - 2) (:11) Authorized via Royal Mandate to Conduct the Campaign
- 3. (:12-15) The Communication of the Campaign to Exterminate the Jews
 - a. (:12) Drafting the Campaign Instructions in All Necessary Languages
 - b. (:13) Delivering the Documents Spelling Out the Destruction and Plundering of the Jews
 - c. (:14) Designating the Day to Implement the Campaign Kingdom-Wide
 - d. (:15) Disseminating the Communication
 - 1) Coordinating the Proclamation
 - 2) Contrasting Reactions

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

- 1. (4:1-17) The Providence of God Positions You and Calls You to Make a Difference for God's People
 - a. (:1-4) Providence Puts God's People in Desperate Situations
 - 1) (:1-2) Grief of Mordecai Over the Edict of Extermination of the Jews
 - a) (:1) Public Lament
 - b) (:2) Persian Legal Limitation
 - 2) (:3) Grief of the Jews Over the Edict of Extermination
 - 3) (:4a) Grief of Esther -- Despite Her Incomplete Knowledge of Current Crisis
 - 4) (:4b) Grief Cannot be Mitigated -- Garments Sent to Clothe Mordecai Rejected
 - b. (:5-9) Providence Sets the Stage for Momentous Action
 - 1) (:5-6) Hathach Responds to Esther's Charge to Seek Information from Mordecai
 - a) (:5) The Charge
 - b) (:6) The Connection
 - 2) (:7-8) Hathach Receives Detailed Information from Mordecai Regarding the Edict of Extermination
 - a) (:7) Crisis Summary
 - b) (:7b) Calculation of the Bribe
 - c) (:8a) Copy of the Edict

- d) (:8b) Call for Action
 - 3) (:9) Hathach Reports Back to Esther
- c. (:10-17) Providence Challenges God's People to Fulfil Their Calling
 - 1) (:10-12) Cautious Hesitancy of Esther to Step Up to the Plate
 - a) (:10) Intermediary Communication to Mordecai
 - b) (:11) Issues Complicating the Situation
 - c) (:12) Intermediary Communication to Mordecai
 - 2) (:13-14) Challenging Exhortation of Mordecai
 - (:13a) Prologue
 - a) (:13b) Reject the Temptation of Self Preservation
 - b) (:14a) Trust the Outworking of Divine Providence
 - c) (:14b) Embrace Your Calling by Leveraging Your Providential Opportunity
 - 3) (:15-17) Courageous Resolve of Esther in Stepping Up to the Plate
 - (:15) Prologue
 - a) (:16a) Courageous Resolve Supported by Corporate Fasting
 - b) (:16b) Courageous Resolve Supported by Personal Fasting
 - c) (:16c) Courageous Resolve Submitting to Divine Providence
 - (:17) Epilogue – Esther Now Calling the Shots
- 2. (5:1-14) The Providence of God Prepares the Way for a Reversal of Fortunes
 - a. (:1-2) Boldness – Providentially Gaining Access to the King
 - 1) (:1) Preparation for Approaching the King
 - a) Timing
 - b) Attire
 - c) Positioning
 - d) Opportunity
 - 2) (:2a) Positive Response from the King Regarding Safe Access
 - a) Extending Favor
 - b) Extending the Golden Scepter
 - 3) (:2b) Privilege of Approaching the King Realized
 - a) Accessing His Presence in Safety
 - b) Acknowledging the King's Sovereignty
 - b. (:3-8) Banquets – Providentially Greasing the Wheels for Her Appeal
 - 1) (:3-5) Request for an Initial Banquet for the King and Haman
 - a) (:3) Solicitation of Esther's Request
 - b) (:4) Substance of Esther's Request
 - c) (:5) Submission to Esther's Request
 - 2) (:6-8) Request for a Second Banquet for the King and Haman
 - a) (:6) Solicitation of Esther's Request
 - b) (:7-8) Substance of Esther's Request
 - c. (:9-14) Boasting – Providentially Gratifying the Ego of Haman
 - 1) (:9) Conflicting Emotions of Haman
 - a) High as a Kite -- Overjoyed
 - b) Low as a Snake – Overwrought
 - 2) (:10-13) Complaining to His Friends and Wife
 - a) (:10) Gathering a Sympathetic Audience

- b) (:11) Glorifying in His Position – Boasting
- c) (:12-13) Grating at the Lack of Respect Shown Him by His Nemesis
- 3) (:14) Constructing the Gallows to Hang Mordecai
 - a) Plot Proposed to Construct the Gallows
 - b) Plot Executed to Construct the Gallows

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

- 1. (:1-3) Providence Unexpectedly Brings the Past to Bear on the Present – Discovery that Mordecai Needs to be Honored for Past Deeds of Loyalty
 - a. (:1-2) Discovery of Mordecai’s Key Role in Foiled Assassination Attempt
 - 1) (:1) Reading the Historical Record
 - 2) (:2) Reporting on Mordecai’s Loyal Heroism
 - b. (:3) Question of Reward Raised
 - 1) Reward is Appropriate
 - 2) Reward Has Not Been Granted Yet
- 2. (:4-11) Providence Transforms Expected Honor into Intolerable Humiliation – Haman Put in a Bind and Forced to Honor Mordecai
 - a. (:4-5) Haman’s Intentions = Hanging Mordecai
 - 1) (:4) Haman Seeking the Execution of Mordecai
 - 2) (:5a) Haman Standing in the Court
 - 3) (:5b) Haman Summoned by the King
 - b. (:6-9) Haman’s Pride Leading to His Fall
 - 1) (:6a) Inquiry of the King Regarding Best Way to Honor Loyalist
 - 2) (:6b) Immense Ego of Haman
 - 3) (:7-9) Ignorant Judgment Rendered by Haman
 - c. (:10-11) Haman’s Humiliation
 - 1) (:10) Enduring Shame
 - 2) (:11) Eating His Words
- 3. (:12-14) Providence Sets in Motion Events that Rapidly Escalate Out of Control – Haman Headed for His Certain Demise
 - a. (:12) Haman Hurries Home to Try to Rescue His Life
 - 1) Mordecai Exalted
 - 2) Haman Humiliated
 - b. (:13) Haman Hurries to Obtain Counsel Regarding Salvaging His Life
 - 1) Seeking Counsel
 - 2) Receiving Counsel
 - c. (:14) Haman Hurries to Banquet with No Viable Options for Escape

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

- 1. (:1-4) Providence Leverages Divine Appointments on a Grand Scale
 - a. (:1) Intimate Setting for Divinely Planned Interaction
 - b. (:2) Invitation to Make Request on a Grand Scale

- c. (:3-4) Issue = Life vs. Death – Both Personal and Ethnic
 - 1) (:3) Dramatic Request
 - 2) (:4) Desperate Request
- 2. (:5-7) Providence Protects God’s People in Surprising Ways
 - a. (:5) Identification Demanded
 - b. (:6) Indictment Leveled
 - 1) Characterization of Wicked Haman
 - 2) Cowering of Terrified Haman
 - c. (:7) Implications Drive Various Responses
 - 1) Implications Drive the Response of the King
 - 2) Implications Drive the Response of Haman
- 3. (:8-10) Providence Destroys God’s Foes in Ironic Fashion
 - a. (:8a) Inappropriate Conduct – Governed by Providence
 - 1) Compromised Position
 - 2) Convenient Narrative
 - b. (:8b) Inexcusable Conduct – Governed by Providence
 - c. (:9) Impulsive Condemnation of Haman – Governed by Providence
 - 1) Suggestion of Available Instrument of Execution
 - 2) Simple Solutions are the Best Solutions
 - d. (:10) Ironic Execution of Haman – Governed by Providence
 - 1) Subverting of the Intentions of Haman
 - 2) Satisfaction of the King’s Anger

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

A. (8:1-17) PROVIDENCE TRANSFORMS DESPERATION INTO DELIGHT IN SURPRISING WAYS

- 1. (:1-2) The Surprising Rewards Bestowed by the King
 - a. (:1a) Surprising Reward of Property – Ownership of Haman’s Property Granted to Esther
 - b. (:1b-2) Surprising Reward of Power – Leadership Authority Granted to Mordecai
 - c. (:2b) Surprising Reward of Prestige – Stewardship of Haman’s Property Granted to Mordecai
- 2. (:3-8) The Surprising Request Granted by the King
 - a. (:3-6) Critical Appeal to the King
 - 1) (:3) Emotional Appeal
 - 2) (:4) Favorable Appeal
 - 3) (:5) Legal Appeal
 - 4) (:6) Personal Appeal
 - b. (:7-8) Calculated Approval Granted by the King
 - 1) (:7) Direct Action -- Haven’t I Done Enough Already?
 - 2) (:8) Delegated Action -- You Two Complete What is Necessary
- 3. (:9-14) The Surprising Reversals of the Previous Edict
 - a. (:9) Scripting of the New Edict

- b. (:10a) Sealing of the New Edict
- c. (:10b) Sending of the New Edict
- d. (:11) Substance of the New Edict
- e. (:12) Scope of the New Edict in Terms of its One Day Duration
- f. (:13) Significance of the New Edict
- g. (:14) Circulation of the New Edict
- 4. (:15-17) The Surprising Responses of Exaltation, Joy and Fear
 - a. (:15a) Surprising Response of Exaltation of Mordecai
 - b. (:15b-17a) Surprising Response of Joy – Both by the City of Susa and the Jews
 - 1) (:15b) By the City of Susa
 - 2) (:16-17a) By the Jews
 - c. (:17b) Surprising Response of Fear – Leading to Greater Jewish Influence

B. (9:1-32) PROVIDENCE LEADS US TO VICTORY OVER OUR ENEMIES AND CAUSES US TO CELEBRATE AS WE MEMORIALIZE GOD’S FAITHFULNESS

- 1. (:1-4) Power in the Persian Kingdom for the Jews and Mordecai
 - a. (:1-3) Rise of the Jews to Power as They Successfully Defend Themselves
 - 1) (:1) Summary of the Jewish Victory
 - 2) (:2) Operational Details
 - b. (:4) Rise of Mordecai to Power as His Reputation Expands
 - 1) Reputation Expands in the Royal House
 - 2) Reputation Expands in All the Kingdom
 - 3) Reputation Expands Exponentially
- 2. (:5-17) Purging the Enemy
 - a. (:5-10) Record of the Killing on Prescribed Day One
 - 1) (:5) Killing Summary
 - 2) (:6) Killing of 500 Men in Susa
 - 3) (:7-10a) Killing of Haman’s 10 Sons
 - 4) (:10b) Killing in the Context of a Holy War – No Seizing of Plunder
 - b. (:11-17) Record of the Killing on Extended Day Two
 - 1) (:11-12) Success on Day One Opens the Door for Extended Engagement
 - 2) (:13) Solicitation by Esther of Two Additional Objectives
 - 3) (:14-15) Success of Esther’s Two Objectives
 - 4) (:16-17) Success in the Surrounding Provinces
- (:18-19) Aside -- Differences in Days of Celebration
 - a. (:18) Celebration in Susa on 15th Day
 - b. (:19) Celebration in Surrounding Rural Areas on 14th Day
- 3. (:20-32) Purim Celebration Memorialized
 - a. (:20-25) Remembering the Reason for the Celebration
 - 1) (:20-23) Commanding the Celebration
 - 2) (:24-25) Calling Out the Treacherous Scheming of Haman and the Dramatic Reversal of Fortunes
 - b. (:26-28) Regulating the Celebration

- 1) (:26a) Naming the Celebration
- 2) (:26b-27) Instituting the Celebration
- 3) (:28) Perpetuating the Celebration
- c. (:29-32) Ratifying the Celebration
 - 1) (:29) Confirming the Celebration via a Second Letter
 - 2) (:30) Sending the Letter throughout the Kingdom
 - 3) (:31) Establishing the Customs Surrounding Purim Celebration
 - 4) (:32) Recording These Customs for Posterity

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

A. (:1) GREATNESS OF THE PERSIAN KINGDOM

1. Dominion on the Land
2. Dominion on the Coastlands

B. (:2) GREATNESS OF MORDECAI’S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1. Renowned for His Authority and Strength
2. Rewarded by the Respect from the King
3. Recorded for Posterity

C. (:3) GREATNESS OF MORDECAI’S REPUTATION

1. Great as Measured by His Boundless Popularity
 - a. With the King
 - b. With the Jews
 - c. With His Kinsmen
2. Great as Measured by His Beneficial Policies
 - a. On Behalf of the Jews
 - b. On Behalf of the Persian Empire

TEXT: Esther 1:1-22

TITLE: *PROVIDENTIAL REMOVAL OF THE PERSIAN QUEEN*

BIG IDEA:

IMPRESSIVE DISPLAYS OF SECULAR OPULENCE AND DOMINION EXPOSED AS IMPOTENT AND FUTILE AS GOD'S PROVIDENCE WORKS OUT HIS OWN KINGDOM AGENDA

INTRODUCTION:

Who really is in control on the world stage and in our own lives and destiny? This satirical treatment of the Persian Empire with its boastful presentation of riches and power borders on the ridiculous. A simple marital dispute on the public stage of a massive banquet erupts into a kingdom crisis that necessitates the deposing of the Queen -- paving the way for the ascent to the throne of Esther. The Providence of God is clearly at work behind the scenes as the manipulations of the most powerful man in the world are ridiculed and exposed as impotent. God will protect His people and accomplish His own kingdom agenda.

We live as aliens and pilgrims and even exiles in a secular world where God is ignored and the enemy boasts of its power and wealth and success. But behind the scenes, despite the seemingly hopeless political climate or absence of adherence to God's righteous standards, history moves forward according to God's timetable to accomplish His overall sovereign purposes. We are called to remain loyal to God's kingdom agenda; not to assimilate into pagan culture and become comfortable and invisible; and certainly not to despair of our ultimate triumph. God's Providence paints a beautiful picture that will ultimately be unveiled and appreciated.

Jobes: Through invisible and inscrutable means, God continues to move all of history to fulfill his covenant in Jesus Christ. He alone truly is the King of kings. The one who opposes Christ the King opposes God. To such a person, the Esther story stands as a warning that whatever ease and prosperity one might enjoy, whatever worldly power and position have been attained, ultimately there will be a reversal of fortune that will end in death and destruction.

For the Christian, the sovereign power of the Lord is of greatest comfort. Throughout every generation in every corner of the world, God rules supreme "*to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ*" (**Eph. 1:10**). To be in Christ is to be on the winning side of history, to be victors even in the face of life's greatest threats.

Tomasino: The first verses of the book of Esther introduce one of the primary themes of the book: kingship. More specifically, the book will address the relationship between the people of God and the powers of this world, a theme frequently addressed in postexilic Jewish literature and the NT. In Esther, we are introduced to the mightiest

king in the world at the height of his glory. Anywhere one looked, his wealth and power were evident. Even the Greeks, who hated him more than any man, were impressed with his splendor. Yet in the book of Esther, he is only the second power. His word has authority, but there is another Word that dictates human affairs, speaks through the mouths of counselors, gives favor to Jewish maidens, robs kings of sleep, and inspires terror in the enemies of God's people. In the book of Esther, there is a Power that is hidden from human eye that manipulates events in ways that even the world's greatest monarch cannot resist.

Duguid: The empire of materialism in which we live takes stuff desperately seriously. It wants us to study the empire's laws and learn how to get ahead by the empire's standards. It wants us to dream of six-month-long banquets in beautifully decorated gardens, and then to devote our lives to pursuing the dream. It is easy for us to be dazzled by the empire's ostentatious show, but it is empty of real power at the center. The empire of this world is a glittering hologram that has no real substance. To defend ourselves against the danger of being assimilated, we must learn to laugh at the empire. We must learn to laugh at those around us whose lives are wasted in pursuit of so many worthless goals, and to laugh at ourselves when we see our own hearts getting weighed on the empire's scale of values. What shall it profit a man if he can throw six-month-long parties with gold couches on mother-of-pearl pavements? How much more ridiculous are we, then, when we spend so much time and energy desiring a new sports car, or a great pair of shoes at the mall, or the latest home improvement in the mail-order catalog? Ultimately, it is all empty. The emperor's costly clothes are transparent, and what may be seen through them by the discerning eye is ridiculous. True value lies in the values of an altogether different empire.

(:1-4) PROLOGUE – HISTORICAL SETTING SHOWCASING THE GLORIOUS KINGDOM OF XERXES

A. (:1-2) Majestic Reign of King Xerxes from the Capital of Susa

1. (:1) Reigning Sovereign of Vast Kingdom = Ahasuerus

*“Now it took place in the days of Ahasuerus,
the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces,”*

Jobes: the introductory formula found in other historical books, such as Joshua, Judges, and Samuel. . . the author's introduction to the story suggests he intends for his readers to understand the ensuing story as events that actually happened.

Joyce Baldwin: Ahasuerus represents the Hebrew transliteration of the Persian name Khshayarsha, better known to us in the Greek form Xerxes.

Ray Stedman: Ahasuerus is not his name, it is his title, like the word "Czar" or "Shah" or "Pharaoh." There are several men identified in Scripture as Ahasuerus, not all the same man, because this is a common title. It means "*The Venerable Father*" and was an apt title for the king.

Wiersbe: His father was Darius I, and his grandfather was Cyrus the Great; so he came from an illustrious family. Ahasuerus ruled over the Persian Empire from 486 to 465 B.C. The empire was divided into twenty “satrapies,” which in turn were subdivided into “provinces”; and the king was in absolute control.

2. (:2) Royal Seat at Susa

*“in those days as King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne
which was in Susa the capital,”*

MacArthur: Susa, the winter residence, was one of 4 capital cities; the other 3 included Babylon, Ecbatana (**Ezr 6:2**), and Persepolis. The citadel refers to the fortified palace complex built above the city for protection.

Davis: Susa itself was considered to be a garden paradise, a capital truly fit for a king. It abounded in fruits and flowers and was particularly famous for a specific kind of lily from which the city received its name. This fortified city was surrounded by streams and mountains that added to its beauty and attraction as a royal citadel during the cooler months of the year (Susa was intolerably hot during the summer). Furthermore, the term *bīyrā(h)* (often translated “capital”) is best understood to mean “acropolis,” which in the Persian culture indicated an elevated palace complex within a city that was designed both to suggest the majestic grandeur of the king and to provide for his protection.

Mattoon: He had great power and control. There was one thing, however, he could not control and that was himself. As we will see, he was proud, greedy, impulsive, prone to temper tantrums, easily flattered and swayed. Traditionally he was considered a weak king controlled by eunuchs. He was noted for his insane attack on European Greece... Persian kings were known to flaunt their wealth as Xerxes does here. Kings would even wear jewels in their beards. Jewels were a sign of rank among Persian men.

David Thompson: Applications:

- 1) Key places of secular power still feature the sovereign presence and power of God.
- 2) No matter how powerful or protected one may be in a particular location, he is not covered and concealed from God.
- 3) No matter how powerful or glamorous one may temporarily be, without a proper focus on God, it will eventually wind up in ruins.

B. (:3-4) Magnificent Display of Kingdom Glory at Extended VIP Banquet

1. (:3a) Impressive Milestone for the Banquet

“in the third year of his reign,”

F. B. Huey Jr.: when Xerxes was established on his throne after quelling uprisings in Egypt and Babylon during the early years of his reign.

Wiersbe: What was the purpose behind the banquet for the nobles and officials of the empire? Scripture doesn’t tell us, but secular history does. The Greek historian

Herodotus (485-425 BC.) may refer to these banquets in his *History*, where he states that Ahasuerus was conferring with his leaders about a possible invasion of Greece. Ahasuerus' father, Darius I, had invaded Greece and been shamefully defeated at Marathon in 490. While preparing to return to Greece and get revenge, Darius had died (486 B.C.); and now his son felt compelled to avenge his father and expand his empire at the same time. Herodotus claims that Ahasuerus planned to invade all of Europe and "reduce the whole earth into one empire."

Deffinbaugh: Ahasuerus is the great king of the Persians, the one of whom Daniel had prophesied:

2 *"And now I will tell you the truth. Behold, three more kings are going to arise in Persia. Then a fourth will gain far more riches than all of them; as soon as he becomes strong through his riches, he will arouse the whole empire against the realm of Greece"* (**Daniel 11:2**).

No longer is this kingdom of peoples known as the Medes and the Persians (**Daniel 5:28; 6:8, 12, 15**); now it is the kingdom of Persia and Media (**Esther 1:3, 14, 18-19**), because Persia has now become the dominant nation.

2. (:3b) Impressive Guest List = Key Military and Political Leaders

"he gave a banquet for all his princes and attendants, the army officers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of his provinces being in his presence."

3. (:4a) Impressive Display of Kingdom Riches and Success

"And he displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty"

Wiersbe: It was important that Ahasuerus impress his nobles and military leaders with his wealth and power. When they saw the marble pillars, the gorgeous drapes hung from silver rings, the gold and silver couches on beautiful marble mosaic pavements, and the golden table service, what else could they do but submit to the king?

Breneman: Wanting to show what one possesses is natural but prideful (cf. **2 Kgs 20:13**). Herodotus was greatly impressed with the wealth of the affluent Persian king. Cyrus had conquered Babylon (539 B.C.) and ruled as far as the Aegean Sea. Cambyses conquered Egypt and added it to the empire. Darius I added northwest India as far as the Indus River and had organized the empire; thus Xerxes inherited an immense and powerful empire.

4. (:4b) Impressive Extended Duration of the Banquet

"for many days, 180 days."

Wiersbe: The king probably didn't assemble all his provincial leaders at one time; that would have kept them away from their duties for six months and weakened the empire.

It's more likely that, over a period of six months, Ahasuerus brought the officers to Shushan on a rotating schedule. Then, having consulted with them, the king would bring them all together for the seven-day feast so they could confer collectively.

I. (:5-9) FANCY PARTY TIME HOSTED SEPARATELY BY THE PERSIAN KING AND QUEEN – SECULAR WORLD POWERS BOAST OF THEIR OPULENCE AND DOMINION

A. (:5) Imperial Banquet

1. Lengthy Duration to Eat and Drink to Excess

*“And when these days were completed,
the king gave a banquet lasting seven days”*

At the end of the 180 day celebration the king hosted a special 7 day banquet. Here the guest list was expanded to include all kingdom members in the capital city.

2. Unlimited Guest List Crossing All Social Strata

*“for all the people who were present in Susa the capital,
from the greatest to the least,”*

3. Beautiful Royal Setting

“in the court of the garden of the king's palace.”

B. (:6) Invaluable Adornments

1. Ostentatious Drapes

*“There were hangings of fine white and violet linen
held by cords of fine purple linen on silver rings and marble columns,”*

2. Opulent Couches on Gilded Pavements

*“and couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement
of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and precious stones.”*

Frederic Bush: It is, however, in the highly circumstantial noun clauses (**vv. 6–8**) appended to the giving of the second banquet (**v 5b**) that the depiction of the opulence and extravagance of the royal court are primarily portrayed. The terse, exclamatory sentence-equivalents of **v. 6**, poetic in character, exquisitely express the wonder and amazement the narrator wishes us to feel at such magnificence and luxury (see **Fox**, 16–17). Fox nicely captures the feeling portrayed: “The exclamatory listing creates a mass of images that overwhelm the sensory imagination and suggest both a sybaritic delight in opulence and an awareness of its excess.” **Vv. 7, 8** underscore the extravagance of the serving vessels, the copiousness of the royal wine, and the freedom of the guests to drink as much as they pleased.

C. (:7-8) Indulgent Drinking

1. (:7a) Presentation in Unique Golden Vessels

“Drinks were served in golden vessels of various kinds,”

F. B. Huey Jr.: The Targum says they were the vessels taken from the temple in Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 B.C.

2. (:7b) Plentiful Royal Wine

“and the royal wine was plentiful according to the king's bounty.”

Not just common red wine; but the best quality wine which was ordinarily reserved for the king and his company

3. (:8) Personal Preference Regarding How Much to Drink

“And the drinking was done according to the law, there was no compulsion, for so the king had given orders to each official of his household that he should do according to the desires of each person.”

John Whitcomb: Usually the king pledged his guests to drink a certain amount, but now they could drink as much or as little as they desired.

Jobes: Within our modern culture we think of drinking as a social custom, often with negative connotations. However, the Greek historian **Herodotus** explains the interesting fact that the Persians drank as they deliberated matters of state (cf. **Est. 3:15**):

Moreover it is their [the Persians] custom to deliberate about the gravest matters when they are drunk; and what they approve in their counsels is proposed to them the next day by the master of the house where they deliberate, when they are now sober and if being sober they still approve it, they act thereon, but if not, they cast it aside. And when they have taken counsel about a matter when sober, they decide upon it when they are drunk.

This custom may seem bizarre to us, but the ancients believed intoxication put them in closer touch with the spiritual world. If Herodotus is right on this point, excessive drinking would have been an essential element of Xerxes' war council.

D. (:9) **Independent Banquet for the Women Hosted by Queen Vashti**

“Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus.”

Frederic Bush: Whatever may actually have been the case for a banquet for women in ancient Persia, the narrator clearly intends to present a sober and striking contrast between the ostentation and excesses of the banquets of the king and his male subjects and the modest celebration of Vashti and her female companions.

II. (:10-20) FAMILY TENSION BLOWS UP INTO KINGDOM CRISIS AND THE REMOVAL OF THE PERSIAN QUEEN -- SECULAR WORLD POWERS SATIRICALLY EXPOSED AS IMPOTENT

A. (:10-11) The King's Shameful Command

1. (:10a) Drunken Loss of Self Control -- Judgment Clouded by Inebriation

"On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine,"

The powerful king cannot even control himself; overcome with wine

Bruce Hurt: In a word the king was "smashed." He was under the control of wine, which prompted his request for Queen Vashti's appearance.

2. (:10b-11) Degrading Exhibition of Queen Vashti

a. (:10b-11a) Egotistical Demand

"he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, 11 to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown"

John Martin: It was a well-known practice then for young men who served the king to be castrated so they would have no illusions of starting their own dynasties.

b. (:11b) Egotistical Motivation

"in order to display her beauty to the people and the princes, for she was beautiful."

F. B. Huey Jr.: 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

B. (:12a) The Queen's Stunning Refusal

"But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs."

The powerful king cannot control the actions of his own wife

F. B. Huey Jr.: She probably did not choose to degrade herself before the king's drunken guests.

People have suggested various reasons for her refusal:

- It was a lewd display of exhibitionism (probably involving nudity)
- She was pregnant at the time
- She did not want to appear in an environment of drunken men

J. Sidlow Baxter: The king's order that Vashti (Vashti means 'beautiful woman') should come and immodestly display herself before a vast company of half-intoxicated revelers was not only a gross breach of Persian etiquette, but a cruel outrage which would have disgraced for life the one whom, above all other, the king should have protected. Vashti's refusal was courageous and fully justified: though we can well understand that such a public rebuff to one who was an absolute monarch, and vainglorious in the extreme, must have been as humiliating and exasperating as it was richly deserved.

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown: The refusal of Vashti to obey an order which required her to make an indecent exposure of herself before a company of drunken revelers was becoming both the modesty of her sex and her rank as queen; for, according to Persian customs, the queen, even more than the wives of other men, was secluded from the public gaze: and had not the king's blood been heated with wine, or his reason overpowered by force of offended pride, he would have perceived that his own honour as well as hers was consulted by her dignified conduct.

C. (:12b) The King's Burning Anger

"Then the king became very angry and his wrath burned within him."

The powerful king cannot control his own emotions

Deffinbaugh: Imagine how humiliating this would have been for Ahasuerus. His purpose in all of the festive events of the past six months was to impress his guests with his great wealth and power. He wanted faithful supporters when he began to wage war with Greece. And now, during the closing ceremonies of this six-month extravaganza, the king's own wife snubs him, refusing to honor or obey him and thereby embarrassing him before all of his guests.

D. (:13-15) The King's Urgent Inquiry – What is to be Done to Queen Vashti?

1. (:13-14) Appeal to the Wise Men for a Just Resolution

"Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times-- for it was the custom of the king so to speak before all who knew law and justice, 14 and were close to him: Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media who had access to the king's presence and sat in the first place in the kingdom—"

The powerful king cannot control his own kingdom judicial decisions

Frederic Bush: It is significant that both the opening narrative summary and the dialogue are expanded by long and detailed identifications, both by name and function, of the secondary personages who carry out the king's wishes. In a long and involved parenthetical comment at the beginning of the dialogue, the narrator gives

- (1) the names of the "sages who understood the times,"
- (2) their identity as "those who had immediate access to the king and occupied

the highest posts in the realm,” and

(3) the fact that in such a manner the king would customarily consult with “all those who knew law and justice.”

Such detailed information about these secondary characters adds markedly to the pomposity and pretentiousness of the scene, an effect clearly contributing to the farcical nature of the whole.

2. (:15) Affront of Queen Vashti that Requires Punishment

“According to law, what is to be done with Queen Vashti, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs?”

Frederic Bush: To hide his inadequacy to handle this situation, the king invokes standard court procedure (v 13b). He appeals to his closest and most important counselors—and thereby raises a domestic squabble to the level of a matter of state. These worthies, described in pretentious detail (v 14), demonstrate that they are not “sages” who “understand the times” (v 13a). Rather, they lose all their common sense and decorum in the hysterical assumption that Vashti’s disobedience will spark not only conjugal disrespect in general (v 17) but also rebellion in their own households (v 18; **Clines**, *The Esther Scroll*, 32)! Their solution is ironic. They decree for Vashti what she has already decided: she “shall not come again into the presence of King Ahasuerus” (v 19). Their decision to demand honor from their wives by an empire-wide edict would have actually achieved, of course, the dissemination of the very rumors about Vashti’s actions and the king’s embarrassment that they feared and sought to quash.

E. (:16-18) The Kingdom Crisis – Potential Threat to Male Household Authority

1. (:16) Exaggerating the Crisis – Counsel of Memucan

“And in the presence of the king and the princes, Memucan said, ‘Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but also all the princes, and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.’”

2. (:17-18) Extrapolating the Impact of Queen Vashti’s Refusal

“For the queen’s conduct will become known to all the women causing them to look with contempt on their husbands by saying, ‘King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in to his presence, but she did not come.’” 18 And this day the ladies of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen’s conduct will speak in the same way to all the king’s princes, and there will be plenty of contempt and anger.”

Bruce Hurt: Contempt (059) (*bazah*) is a primary root which means to accord little worth, to despise, to disdain, to hold in contempt. To despise means to look down on one with contempt or aversion; regard as negligible, worthless, or distasteful and may suggest an emotional response ranging from strong dislike to loathing. Contempt describes the state of mind of one who despises and shows lack of respect or reverence for something or someone and can include a willful disobedience to or open disrespect.

Deffinbaugh: We must pause to point out that the king and his advisors did not deal with the matter biblically. They have approached this situation from the standpoint of their eastern, chauvinistic culture, not from the principles of the Word of God. No doubt they saw women as inferior to men and thus to be used by men for their pleasure. As a result, the advice of the king's counselors was directed at maintaining the status quo, and was not in obedience to divine commands.

F. (:19-20) The Proposed Resolution = Replace Queen Vashti

1. (:19a) Irrevocable Edict

“If it pleases the king, let a royal edict be issued by him and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media so that it cannot be repealed,”

2. (:19b) Irreconcilable Edict

a. Banishment

“that Vashti should come no more into the presence of King Ahasuerus,”

b. Replacement

“and let the king give her royal position to another who is more worthy than she.”

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.

3. (:20) Impactful Edict Kingdom-wide

“And when the king's edict which he shall make is heard throughout all his kingdom, great as it is, then all women will give honor to their husbands, great and small.”

Constable: There is a large emphasis on "honor" (Heb. *yekar*) in this book (v. 20; et al.). Ahasuerus displayed it (v. 4), Haman wanted it, and Mordecai got it. It was a primary motive for much of the action that took place in this story.

(:21-22) EPILOGUE – REINFORCING MALE HOUSEHOLD AUTHORITY – MOCKING THE IMPOTENCY OF THE SECULAR SOVEREIGN

A. (:21) Commitment to Execute Memucan's Proposal

“And this word pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed.”

B. (:22) Communication of the King's Edict

1. Scope of the Communication – Kingdom-wide

*“So he sent letters to all the king's provinces,
to each province according to its script
and to every people according to their language,”*

MacArthur: The efficient Persian communication network (a rapid relay by horses) played an important role in speedily publishing kingdom edicts (cf. **3:12-14; 8:9, 10, 14; 9:20, 30**).

F. B. Huey Jr.: Xerxes ordered dispatches sent to every part of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in their own language, as many languages were spoken in the Persian Empire. He wanted to be sure that all his subjects who spoke different languages and used different written scripts understood the decree, even though Aramaic was commonly understood and used for state business in all parts of the empire from Egypt to India.

Duguid: In fact, the edict deconstructs itself, serving merely to publicize throughout the vast empire and in the language of every people group Ahasuerus's lack of authority in his own household. If it was meant to inspire respect for husbands and respect for Ahasuerus, its actual effect was surely the exact opposite. If he was afraid that the story of his impotence would spread through gossip, now his own edict has done its best to ensure that everyone would hear the story. Once again, at the same time as we are impressed by Ahasuerus's power, we find it hard to restrain a chuckle as he slams his sledgehammer down on a nut, and misses.

Laniak: Most commentators find in this chapter a sardonic parody on the Persian monarchy, a satire laced with irony. There is an exaggerated sense of pomp and protocol as the seven eunuchs carry the king's request to the queen, as another seven nobles discuss how he should solve his personal problem through legislation, and as a major law is written in every language and delivered in haste to decree that every man should be ruler over his own household (v. 22). The raw power and efficiency of the Persian legal system is put to work in the most delicate and domestic of affairs. Ironically, what the king (and his male advisers) wants most is not available by fiat, written or otherwise.

2. Summary of the Communication – Husband Rules the Roost

*“that every man should be the master in his own house
and the one who speaks in the language of his own people.”*

Karen Jobes: The author of Esther is revealing the workings of worldly power and mocking its ultimate inability to determine the destiny of God's people.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What do you learn about the character of King Ahasuerus from this chapter?
- 2) What does this text contribute to our understanding of the workings of the Providence of God?
- 3) Why did the king turn to his circle of wise men counselors for input rather than deciding upon how to handle the incident with the Queen on his own?
- 4) In what way is this ancient Near-Eastern view of male headship in the home consistent and/or inconsistent with biblical NT teaching on the subject?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ferguson: 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.

David Thompson:

(:1-9) EVEN WHEN THE ONE IN CHARGE IS POWERFUL, PROSPEROUS, DRUNK AND OBNOXIOUS, GOD IS STILL SOVEREIGNLY IN CONTROL, CARING FOR HIS PEOPLE AND WORKING OUT HIS WILL.

Don't be surprised if some of the people who you work for are people who behave in many godless ways. Don't be surprised if their lives are lives of drunken debauchery. God is still in your plant. God is still in your company, He is still on your job. God is looking out for you and caring for you no matter how wild or bizarre. That is the story of Esther.

(:10-22) NO MATTER HOW WILD OR BIZARRE THE SURROUNDING WORLD AND CONTROLLING POWERS MAY APPEAR TO BE, GOD IS STILL WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES CONTROLLING ALL THINGS AND CARING FOR HIS PEOPLE.

God can use things positive or negative, things spiritual or unspiritual, things good or bad, things moral or immoral to accomplish His sovereign purposes. . .

Vashti found herself in a real dilemma: she had to refuse herself and her integrity or she had to refuse her husband and Persian law. Regardless of the reasons, to blatantly refuse to obey a king's command during O.T. times was a very serious crime for anyone, even a king's wife. . .

[King and his counsellors viewed the Queen's refusal from the following perspectives:]

- 1) The queen's rebellion was a wrong against the king. **1:16a**
- 2) The queen's rebellion was a wrong against other leaders. **1:16b**
- 3) The queen's rebellion was a wrong against all people. **1:16c**
- 4) The queen's rebellion will promote a feminist rebellion. **1:17-18**

There are many lessons to learn from this section.

- 1) God can work out His sovereign plan even with godless leadership.
- 2) God can work out His sovereign plan even with rebellious people.
- 3) God can work out His sovereign plan even in the midst of wild judicial decrees.

- 4) God will raise His people to His ordained positions.
- 5) God will care for His people no matter what the power or circumstances.

Brian Borgman: Political Parody and Providence

Chapter serves a very simple purpose – setting the table with incredibly elaborate detail to explain how Esther will become Queen; there is political humor and parody and satire – designed to teach theology for those living in exile

vv. 1-9 – the Glory and Splendor and Excess of the King

Identity and background of the king – Xerxes

Massive kingdom – from northern Sudan to South Pakistan on modern map;

Everything about this chapter is designed to impress;

Susa is one of 4 Persian capitals; miserably hot in the summer; Nehemiah had been there and probably Daniel;

When Xerxes came to power, had to put down a couple of rebellions; one from Egypt;

Banquet was rallying preparation for Persia going to war with Greece;

180 day display of opulence and wealth and success;

Cf. Queen Elizabeth celebration of anniversaries;

Stunning décor – designed to capture your attention and impress;

Drinking party;

Queen Vashti throws her own party; probably not her real name – means “Beautiful”

Reveals life of excess and power; this is the world in which we live

vv. 10-20 – Mighty Persian Empire shaken to its core and brought to its knees –

not by an invading army – but by a wife

“*merry with wine*” = understatement; drinking for 7 days

Fetches his trophy wife; rabbis say that command was to come out wearing nothing but the crown; probably not true; but asking of her something offensive = putting her on display and parade her in front of all his drunken friends;

Vashti does the unthinkable; absolutely stunning; Refuses!

Think of the absolute power these ancient kings wielded;

Reason to say no – Possibilities:

1) simple matter of maintaining her own dignity

2) prudent move on her part to protect the king based on past experience in the Persian Empire – Queen and all of her harem being paraded in front of drunken men; led to embarrassing situation

Esther will not defy the king but will influence him for the good of the kingdom

King is now embarrassed in front of his friends; not used to anyone telling him No;

Family matter now becomes a national crisis

vv. 13-20 – Bring in the clowns

chapter designed to be humorous; to make you laugh;

empire now in chaos – but not really;

gets some sound marriage advice from his 7 advisors;

What law is there that relates to the Queen telling the King No?? This is now the main issue of the kingdom

Here conduct will be the inspiration for showing contempt in the hearts of wives to their husbands everywhere;

We can see an entire industry springing up – with T-shirts, etc:

- “Remember Vashti”
- “Just say No”

Banish Vashti from the presence from the king because she refused to come into the presence of the king – irony here;

Strip her of her crown; give it to somebody more worthy (who won’t tell their husband “No”);

Result of this transition will be impactful – women everywhere will honor their husbands – once we pass this irreversible edict;

If my wife tells me “No”, can I exile her??

vv. 21-22 – “*pleased the king and the princes*” – law is published throughout the land; every man is master of his own house;

Require their language to be spoken – the very empire that mandated non-compulsion in drinking, now mandates men to be head of household – manifested by which language is spoken in bi-lingual homes;

These are all Babylon Bee headlines – see how ridiculous is this king who seems to be so much in control but is not in control at all;

Empire and its power are built on sand; mere “No” from wife brings the empire to its knees;

Why is it necessary for Jewish people living in exile to hear this and see this picture painted with elaborate detail in such satirical ways?

Those who live in exile face twofold temptation:

- **Assimilation** to the culture; accommodate yourself so you don’t stand out;; only 3 children thrown into fire in Daniel; rest assimilated; life in exile can seem to be relatively comfortable
- **Despair** – look at this world in which we live and it seems that the kingdom has all the power, not the exiles; God’s people always feeling powerless; Why go back to Judea – Xerxes still rules there also

This world is not our home; we will still be exiles at the end of the day;

Christian think if only they could move to a state that is more conservative ... can’t escape this world

Mocking the kingdom; there is a sanctified reason *The Babylon Bee* exists = function of satire = showing the ridiculous side of life

We don't need to assimilate; we don't need to despair; resistance is not futile!
God setting the table here for rise of Esther.
Every detail is under the Providential control of God of Exodus.
God Himself is quietly orchestrating the deliverance of His people.
God rules, but not like Xerxes. His kingdom is not like the kingdom of Xerxes.
God reminds us what it is to belong to His kingdom even though we live as exiles
governed by fools.

Ligon Duncan: The Lord Reigns

What do you do when it seems like God is not there?
Where is our God?
Conspicuous absence of name of God, of supernatural, of prayer in the book.
Sometimes this is how we feel in our circumstances when things are going badly and
we don't see God showing up.

The presence of absence is not the same as the absence of presence.

God's ceaseless sovereign activity lies behind everything that takes place.
His hand is everywhere.

Book is bracketed by feasts – one kind held for one set of reasons to another kind.
From the empty to the substantial; from the counterfeit to the genuine ...

vv.1-3 -- Virtually limitless power of this king – rules a vast empire.
vv. 4-8 – Vast possessions of this king
note of satire is prominent

Another feast for the common citizenry of the capital city – all the grandeur and glory
and opulence; designed to stun and leave you speechless

vv. 7-8 -- Wine is flowing freely
the absence of a rule (legislating how much to drink) requires a law

King wants total control; given himself to pursuit of outward glory

Exposes how empty and truly limited the king's power really is;
Vs. 11 – see how the king views his wife = another possession; crowning possession;
literally a trophy wife; show her off before the leering stares of his generals to make
himself look good; towering ego;

Power and might and influence and riches, etc. exposed as empty;
His wife shrugs off a command from the most powerful man in the world;

Overcome with a temper tantrum; no rule over his own spirit; he was enraged;
Vashti has to go; never again allowed into the king's presence;
Royal command -- Every man must be master in his own household – laughable!

Absurdity of human muscle flexing its power at problems it cannot control;
Vanity, impotence and insecurity of this king

Applications:

- View the world and its values from a new perspective; stop being so easily dazzled by the trappings of earthly wealth and prestige and power; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of things; true value lies in an altogether different empire
- View God's Providence with renewed patience; Puritan quote: "Providence is like a Hebrew word – best read backwards" – don't conclude that God is not really involved just because you can't right now see what He is doing or discern His purposes; God is working even in the avarice and lust and greed of the King
- Makes us long for a different kingdom and a better king; absurdity of life lived for wrong values; longing for Jesus – a king who came not to be served but to serve and give His life a ransom for many; loves his people; calls us to come to Him out of completely different motives; Why refuse to come to Him?

Breneman: Vashti's courage must be acknowledged. She defied her king and her husband by refusing to shame herself in public. Whatever else may be said of her, she was brave. She was willing to give up her status and position as queen in order to do what was right. Her dignity was more important than her place in society. Her act of courage in refusing to present herself before the king is equaled by that of Esther, who entered the king's presence without permission (5:1). Both Vashti and Esther made plain that the king was not in charge; rather, human dignity and all things right were in charge. The king suffered from his obsession with manipulative power while Vashti and Esther exhibited the power of rightness. Ultimately the question of authority is at stake. As **McConville** has expressed it, "What or who really controls what happens in the world?" Who should be obeyed, when, and at what cost? It is not the power of humans that should be adhered to but rather the will of God. "Earthly authority, alas, leads too readily to pride; those who bear it in wisdom know it is rightly accompanied by humility."

TEXT: Esther 2:1-23

TITLE: *PROVIDENTIAL CROWNING OF ESTHER AS THE NEW PERSIAN QUEEN*

BIG IDEA:

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD SOVEREIGNLY WORKS BEHIND THE SCENES DESPITE THE OSTENTATIOUS EXCESSES OF PAGAN DESPOTS AND THE CULTURAL ASSIMILATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION:

When it seems like God is absent; when it seems like God is silent; when it seems like God has lost control of world events – be assured that His sovereign providence continues to pull the strings. This text is not primarily about the rightness or wrongness of the motivations and actions of Esther and Mordecai – although those can certainly be debated. This text is not primarily about sexual exploitation or selfish lust – although much can be said on those subjects. This text is intended to highlight the working of the Providence of God in the most pagan-dominated setting imaginable. Here you have all of the excesses of the powerful Persian king on display. You have God's people hiding their connection to their covenant God. Yet God is still in control as He elevates Esther and Mordecai to prominent positions where they will be able to impact the protection of the Jewish nation and of the Messianic seed. The present seems chaotic; but the future is assured.

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 distills 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.

Constable: The fact that God placed Esther in a position so she could deliver her people—even before they were in danger—shows His far-reaching providence at work for His chosen people. This revelation would have been a great encouragement to the Jews of the postexilic period, as it has been to all believers since then.

Stan Anderson: The second chapter begins, “*After these things,*” which refers to the things that happened in chapter 1. We see the hand of God working in the glove of history, and as chapter 2 unfolds we see further evidence of God's sovereignty and His providence. Sovereignty is God's control over all things. Providence is God's working in all the details and events to accomplish His will. God uses bad things, good things, big things, and little things to carry out His plan. **J. Vernon McGee** defines God's

providence as “the means by which God directs all things, both animate and inanimate, seen and unseen, good and evil, toward a worthy purpose, which means His will must finally prevail.”

Jobs: The story of Esther and Mordecai shows the wonderful chain of events God used to fulfill his covenant promise to his people. Therefore, the book of Esther has theological implications for the church today. God continues to work through providence to fulfill the promises of his covenant with us in Jesus Christ. Through providential circumstances people have the opportunity to hear and respond to the gospel of Jesus. Through providential circumstances Christians are “*conformed to the likeness of his Son*” (**Rom. 8:29**), and through providence God is directing all of history toward its close in the return of Christ. . .

This is where the silence about Esther and Mordecai’s character and spiritual fidelity becomes a powerful encouragement. Regardless of whether they always knew what the right choice was or whether they had the best of motives, God was working through even their imperfect decisions and actions to fulfill his perfect purposes.

Duguid: Yet we see in this chapter more than just the bitter fruit of disobedience. We also see God’s ability to turn our disobedience—and the sour fruits of our parents’ sins—to his own glory and his people’s good. Ahasuerus and his cronies meant their edict purely for the satisfaction of the king’s selfish pleasures. Mordecai and Esther found themselves impaled on the horns of a dilemma because of their earlier compromises with the empire. They found it much easier to comply with the empire’s wishes than to resist assimilation—and which of us can be sure that we would have charted a different course? Yet God’s hand hovers over every detail, moving the pieces into the place he has determined—even through their sin and compromise—in order to achieve his own good purposes.

I. (:1-4) PROVIDENTIAL SEARCH FOR A REPLACEMENT QUEEN

A. (:1) Remembrance of the King Regarding Vashti

“After these things when the anger of King Ahasuerus had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her.”

MacArthur: Most likely during the latter portion of the king’s ill-fated war with Greece (ca. 481-479 B.C.).

Bruce Hurt: **Remembered** - Three things:

- (1) Vashti (her beauty),
- (2) Vashti's refusal to obey and
- (3) His decree against her banishing her from his presence, a decree which was irreversible.

Now, as to the providential workings of God behind the scenes, let me ask a hypothetical question - What if the decree was not irreversible? The way the text reads

certainly suggests that Ahasuerus would have "re-crowned" Vashti, for he remembered her (especially her great beauty). But then he also remembered her disobedience and his indissoluble decree! (see that "little detail" in **Esther 1:19**) If the decree could have been reversed, the events of the rest of **chapter 2** would not have transpired! Esther a Jew would not have been exalted to a position of prominence and influence by the greatest ruler of the day! Details, details! Oh, how big are the little details in the hands of our marvelous, omniscient, omnipotent Divine Director!

B. (:2-4) Recommendation to the King Regarding Finding a Replacement Queen

1. (:2) Seek Out Eligible Young Virgins

*“Then the king's attendants, who served him, said,
‘Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king.’”*

2. (:3a) Segregate Them in the King's Harem

“And let the king appoint overseers in all the provinces of his kingdom that they may gather every beautiful young virgin to Susa the capital, to the harem, into the custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the women;”

F. B. Huey Jr.: Fathers apparently did not voluntarily present their daughters as evidenced by the king's appointment of officials to search for the candidates.

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.

3. (:3b) Shine Them Up for Their Audition

“and let their cosmetics be given them.”

4. (:4a) Select the One You Like Best to be Queen

“Then let the young lady who pleases the king be queen in place of Vashti.”

C. (:4b) Response of the King

“And the matter pleased the king, and he did accordingly.”

II. (:5-7) PROVIDENTIAL PLACEMENT OF MORDECAI AND ESTHER

A. (:5-6) Identification of Mordecai

1. By Nationality

“Now there was a Jew”

Constable: The writer mentioned Mordecai 58 times in this book, and seven times identified him as a Jew (**2:5; 5:13; 6:10; 8:7; 9:29, 31; 10:3**). Obviously, this is a story in which ethnicity is important.

2. By Location

“in Susa the capital”

3. By Name

“whose name was Mordecai,”

4. By Ancestry

“the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish,”

Wiersbe: His ancestor, Kish, was among the Jews taken to Babylon from Jerusalem in the second deportation in 597 B.C. (**2 Kings 24**). Cyrus, King of Persia, entered Babylon in 539 and the next year gave the Jews permission to return to their land. About 50,000 responded (**Ezra 1-2**). In subsequent years, other Jews returned to Israel; but Mordecai chose to remain in the Persian capital.

Tomasino: The genealogy given here may be a list of Mordecai’s immediate ancestors, or it may be selective, going back to his more illustrious ancestors.⁴⁰⁰ In Hebrew, the phrase “*son of*” may mean either direct biological offspring, or a more distant descendant (as in Jesus being called “*Son of David*”). If Kish and Shimei are more distant ancestors, then they likely tie in Mordecai with the line of Saul, the first king of Israel. Saul was also a Benjaminite, son of a man named Kish (**1 Sam 9:1**). The name Shimei, too, is associated with the house of Saul (**2 Sam 16:5**). Mordecai’s forebears who are named in the text might not be the same people mentioned in the books of Samuel, but it is not impossible. There can be no question, however, that the allusion to Saul is deliberate.

5. By Tribe

“a Benjamite,”

6. By Life Story

“who had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the captives who had been exiled with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had exiled.”

Jobes: he author also uses the **passive voice** to explain why Mordecai and Esther were living in Susa. The Jews had been “*carried*” into exile (**2:6**). Esther had been “*taken*” into Xerxes’ harem, just as the Jews had been taken into exile. Regardless of how she felt about it or whether she cooperated, Esther was at the mercy of a ruthless pagan king, just as her people were. The use of the passive voice is appropriate in this story,

for it expresses life from the perspective of being caught up in and swept along by circumstances beyond one's control.

Levenson: The contrast between the situation of Mordecai and Esther and that of Ahasuerus and Vashti could not be bolder. While the Persians are aristocrats living amid legendary opulence, exercising power worldwide, and partying with abandon, the Jews are kingless and in exile, where they have been driven by a foreign conqueror. In fact, v. 6 employs the root for exile (*glh*) in four distinct constructions, lest the full measure of the Jewish plight be overlooked.

Laniak: Like the Jews without king and land, Esther is without parents, living in a foreign land and hiding under a foreign name. There is another contrast in these biographies. Within the context of the Jewish community, Mordecai's genealogy is impressive while Esther's is marginal. The exiled Jews in 597 B.C., with Jehoiachin (v. 6), were from the upper classes. Mordecai had an inherited status in his own culture that was, perhaps, the basis for a measure of status in the Diaspora: Mordecai [sat] at the king's gate—that is, he was a royal official (vv. 19, 21).

Andy Wilson: The question that arises about Mordecai at this point is why he and his family didn't return to Palestine under Cyrus' decree.

1. Perhaps he had gotten comfortable living in Susa.
2. Perhaps he enjoyed some of the benefits of living in the most important city in the empire.
3. Whatever the reason, the fact that he remained in Persia meant that he was faced with a considerable amount of pressure to blend into his surrounding culture.
4. And that, as we will see in a few moments, is exactly what he did.

B. (:7) Identification of Esther

1. By Name

“And he was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther,”

David Strain: Esther's two names actually suggest the challenge facing the people of God in exile – to which world does she really belong? There are two Esthers. There is Hadassah, child of the covenant, citizen of the kingdom of God. And Esther, the pretty Persian girl, about to be swept up into a maelstrom of sorrow and responsibilities she did not know she would ever be called upon to face. How do they relate to one another? Can they be reconciled? That's a dilemma, actually, that every member of the covenant community continues to face even to this day. If we are Christians, we are called to live and be in the world but not of it.

2. By Relationship

“his uncle's daughter,”

3. By Tragedy

“for she had neither father nor mother.”

4. By Good Looks

“Now the young lady was beautiful of form and face,”

5. By Upbringing

*“and when her father and her mother died,
Mordecai took her as his own daughter.”*

Jobs: These verses that identify Mordecai and Esther as Jews are essential for understanding the contemporary significance of the book. The book shows how against all odds, the fate of a marginalized people within a hostile world is reversed. These marginalized people not only survive, they rise to power within that world. There are clearly two sides pitted in conflict in the story, Mordecai and Esther versus Haman. One side will be victorious; the other will be destroyed. The author shows that powerful worldly forces are working against Mordecai and Esther.

III. (:8-16) PROVIDENTIAL FAVOR SHOWN TO ESTHER

A. (:8) Supervised by Hegai in the Palace Harem

“So it came about when the command and decree of the king were heard and many young ladies were gathered to Susa the capital into the custody of Hegai, that Esther was taken to the king's palace into the custody of Hegai, who was in charge of the women.”

B. (:9) Special Treatment Afforded to Esther by Hegai

1. Preferred

“Now the young lady pleased him and found favor with him.”

2. Pampered

a. With Cosmetics and Food

“So he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and food,”

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. The one who pleased him the most would become his wife. Because of the providence of God, Hegai gave Esther “*special treatment*” and the best place in the house for her and her maids.

b. With 7 Choice Maids

“gave her seven choice maids from the king's palace,”

c. With Luxury Accommodations

*“and transferred her and her maids
to the best place in the harem.”*

Breneman: After thirty-one verses of narrative covering a significant period of time, Esther is finally in the harem of the king. We still have not seen her or heard from her. The narrative builds in intensity. And yet, why is she coming to the court? We anticipate that she will replace Vashti, but for what purpose? Simply to be queen is not enough. The author has cleverly disguised the purpose of Esther's slow rise to the court in "pomp and circumstance."

C. (:10) Secretive Regarding Her Jewish Ethnicity

*"Esther did not make known her people or her kindred,
for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make them known."*

Jobes: While the attempts made by interpreters throughout history to exonerate Esther and Mordecai are understandable, they dilute the message of the original Hebrew and its power. The divinely inspired author chose not to reveal Esther's reaction to being taken into the harem or Mordecai's motives for commanding Esther to conceal her identity. It is natural to pass judgment on these two, whether positive or negative, but in doing so we may miss an important point. This **deliberate silence** is part of the message. Regardless of their character, their motives, or their fidelity to God's law, the decisions Esther and Mordecai make move events in some inscrutable way to fulfill the covenant promises God made to his people long ago.

D. (:11) Surveillance by Mordecai

"And every day Mordecai walked back and forth in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and how she fared."

E. (:12-14) Selection Process Detailed

1. (:12) Year-Long Program of Beautification in Preparation

"Now when the turn of each young lady came to go in to King Ahasuerus, after the end of her twelve months under the regulations for the women-- for the days of their beautification were completed as follows: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and the cosmetics for women—"

Tomasino: The idea of six months of cosmetic treatments to prepare for a single night with the king is ridiculously indulgent. Myrrh was an expensive spice with many different applications, and was not typically wasted. (Among other uses, oil of myrrh was the principal ingredient in the oil used for anointing the Israelite tabernacle and priests [Exod 30:23].) The "perfumes" mentioned here might have included frankincense, cassia, or aloe. They might have been applied in a number of fashions, most commonly as a liquid, or worn as a sachet. There is no logical reason, however, for these perfumes to be applied for a full six months. **Albright** suggested that the perfumes were burned as incense, and the fumes allowed to pervade the skin and hair. In any case, the treatments seem like a classic case of excess.

Matthew Henry: Even those who were masterpieces by nature must yet have all this help from art to recommend them to a vain and carnal mind.

2. (:13) Blank Check for Accessories

“the young lady would go in to the king in this way: anything that she desired was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace.”

3. (:14a) One Night Stand for the Purpose of Evaluation

“In the evening she would go in and in the morning she would return to the second harem, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines.”

4. (:14b) Future Liasons at the Pleasure of the King

“She would not again go in to the king unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.”

Baldwin: For the majority what awaited them was more like widowhood than marriage. Though each girl in turn moved from the house of Hegai to that of Shaashgaz once she had become a concubine, there was no guarantee that the king would remember her by name and call for her even once more. Quite apart from the emotional deprivation this entailed, were not young men in their villages deprived of wives by the king's greed? The prestige of living in the royal palace was small compensation for the king's neglect, though girls with a passion for luxury could no doubt indulge it to the full.

F. (:15-16) Strategic Opportunity Afforded to Esther

1. (:15a) Prepped by Hegai

“Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai who had taken her as his daughter, came to go in to the king, she did not request anything except what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the women, advised.”

David Strain: The truth, however, is that Esther has been manipulated and abused, she has been emotionally, psychologically broken; Esther's a victim. So we don't need to amend the text to clean it up. We don't need to scold Esther as though she were an ambitious, modern starlet trying to sleep her way to a position of influence. Rather, we need to read these words with grief and empathy, recognizing in this story a tale that has been told and continues to be repeated all over the world in every culture and in every age.

But as we take all of that in, the ugliness and the pain of it, imagine being Mordecai, watching the daughter of your heart taken away by the king's men to live in the harem as one of his concubines, the horror and the pain and the ugliness of it, we need to see that despite it all, God is at work to build His kingdom.

Duguid: Through all of this lengthy procedure Mordecai had been keeping a watchful eye on his cousin, advising her along the way. He daily visited the court of the harem to find out, doubtless through intermediaries and messengers, news of what she was doing

and what was being done to her (Esth. 2:11). He was the one who advised her to keep secret her Jewish identity—not because the empire was inherently anti-Semitic, but because, in his opinion, one could never be too careful in a place like Susa. He knew the way the empire operated. Walls have ears and information is power. Even after she became queen, it was because of Mordecai’s command that Esther kept her ancestry quiet: “*Now when the virgins were gathered together the second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate. Esther had not made known her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had commanded her, for Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him*” (Esth. 2:19–20). Here, indeed, was a woman who knew her place, perhaps because Mordecai’s command fitted perfectly her natural temperament. Her motto was “Blend in like a chameleon, don’t stand out in any way, and we can survive and even thrive, in spite of the empire.”

2. (:15b) Praised by All

“And Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her.”

Deffinbaugh: I fear that Esther was a strikingly beautiful young woman, and the favorable response she gained was the result of her appearance more than of her character. My conclusion is inferential, I grant, but I must at least point out that nowhere in the book do we find mention of Esther’s 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 character, not according to their beauty or charm.

3. (:16) Presented to the King

“So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus to his royal palace in the tenth month which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.”

IV. (:17-20) PROVIDENTIAL ELEVATION OF ESTHER AND MORDECAI

A. (:17) Coronation of Esther

1. Supremely Loved

“And the king loved Esther more than all the women,”

2. Supremely Favored

“and she found favor and kindness with him more than all the virgins,”

3. Supremely Crowned

“so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.”

B. (:18) Celebration of Esther’s Coronation

1. Great Banquet

“Then the king gave a great banquet, Esther’s banquet, for all his princes and his servants;”

2. Grand Holiday

“he also made a holiday for the provinces”

MacArthur: Probably refers to a remission of taxes and/or release from military service.

3. Generous Gifts

“and gave gifts according to the king's bounty.”

C. (:19-20) Cover-Up of Jewish Ethnicity Despite Prominent Roles of Mordecai and Esther

1. (:19) Prominent Role of Mordecai

“And when the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate.”

Whitcomb: The purpose of this second gathering is not explained, but it must be remembered that Xerxes (like Solomon) was a polygamist and was constantly adding to his harem.

2. (:20) Private Cover-Up by Esther in Obedience to Mordecai

“Esther had not yet made known her kindred or her people, even as Mordecai had commanded her, for Esther did what Mordecai told her as she had done when under his care.”

V. (:21-23) PROVIDENTIAL INTERVENTION OF MORDECAI TO FOIL ASSASSINATION PLOT

A. (:21) Assassination Plot Devised

“In those days, while Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's officials from those who guarded the door, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.”

Wiersbe: It's possible that this assassination attempt was connected with the crowning of the new queen and that Vashti's supporters in the palace resented what Ahasuerus had done. Or perhaps these two men hated Esther because she was an outsider. Although it wasn't consistently obeyed, tradition said that Persian kings should select their wives from women within the seven noble families of the land. These conspirators may have been traditionalists who didn't want a “commoner” on the throne.

Bruce Hurt: Do you see the subtle allusion to providence? What if he 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**).

B. (:22) Assassination Plot Detected and Defused

“But the plot became known to Mordecai, and he told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name.”

Breneman: As the Targums interpret, Mordecai’s discovery of the plot was by God’s design, not by Mordecai’s wisdom. This verse is one of the pivotal verses in the book because it brings Mordecai into the good graces of the king and foreshadows his reward and exaltation in **6:1–14**. As a Jew, Mordecai could have let the plot continue and taken a chance on having a new king. Such action, however, would have proven harmful to Esther’s role as queen (also cf. **Jer 29:7; 1 Tim 2:2**). Therefore, in the interest of his adopted Esther and the fate of the Jewish people, Mordecai foiled the plot of the would-be killers.

C. (:23a) Conspirators Executed

“Now when the plot was investigated and found to be so, they were both hanged on a gallows;”

Whitcomb: They were probably either crucified or impaled alive (cf. **7:10**).

D. (:23b) Incident Chronicled for Historical Purposes

“and it was written in the Book of the Chronicles in the king's presence.”

McConville: At the end of **chapter 2**, then, even before the entry of Haman to the scene, there are two major factors in the situation which will ultimately stand the Jews in good stead: Esther is queen, and Mordecai, quite independently, is in favour.

Laniak: The scene ends with a recording of these events in the book of the annals in the presence of the king (**v. 23**). One of the motifs in Esther is writing. Usually it is law that is written (as it has been in **1:19** and will be throughout **chapters 3, 8, and 9**), but here (and in **chapter 10**) it is history that is written. Law, in Esther, is written to (dis-)empower certain persons (based on gender or race), while history is written to preserve certain persons (based on their actions). In the case of the officers, their evil deeds are forever sealed in the book. For Mordecai, this written record guarantees eventual reward.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why was Esther willing to submit to this process and marry a pagan king?
- 2) What evidences are there in this passage of the working of divine providence?

3) Why did Mordecai have Esther hide her ethnicity?

4) 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? (Deffinbaugh)

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: If Mordecai and Esther were passing themselves off as Persians, they certainly weren't keeping a kosher home and obeying the laws of Moses. Had they been following even the dietary laws, let alone the rules for separation and worship, their true nationality would have quickly been discovered. Had Esther practiced her Jewish faith during her year of preparation (2:12), or during the four years she had been queen (2:16 with 3:7), the disguise would have come off.

Swindoll: There is a beautiful message here for anyone who has ever experienced brokenness, for anyone who has ever been crushed by life, for anyone who has ever felt that his past is so discolored, so disjointed, so fractured that there is no way in the world God can make reason and meaning out of it. We are going to learn some unforgettable lessons from Esther. Here was a little girl who must have cried her heart out at the death of her parents, bereft and orphaned, yet who years later would become key to the very survival of her people, the Jews. God and God alone can do such things— He, in fact, does do such things, working silently and invisibly behind the events of history...

God's plans are not hindered when the events of this world are carnal or secular. His presence penetrates, regardless, even the godless banquet halls of ancient Persia. He is not limited to working in the Christian family. He is as much at work in the Oval Office as He is in your pastor's study. He is as much at work in other countries of the world, like Iran or China or the Middle East, as He is in America. To doubt that is to draw boundaries around His sovereign control. When we do that, we can easily stop caring about our involvement in the larger events of life outside our comfort zone and familiar territory; and when that happens, we stop becoming salt and light to the world. God is at work. He's moving. He's touching lives. He's shaping kingdoms. He's never surprised by what humanity may do. Just because actions or motives happen to be secular or carnal or unfair, it doesn't mean He's not present. Those involved may not be glorifying Him, but never doubt it, He's present. He's at work...

God's hand is not so short that it cannot save, nor is His ear so heavy that He cannot hear. Whether you see Him or not, He is at work in your life this very moment. God specializes in turning the mundane into the meaningful. God not only moves in unusual ways, He also moves on uneventful days. He is just as involved in the mundane events as He is in the miraculous.

Deffinbaugh: Something is drastically wrong with God's people as represented in the Book of Esther. We should not delight in Esther's "success" in becoming queen; we should be distressed. Consider the Book of Esther in the light of these important observations, which come from the rest of the Old Testament.

(1) From the very beginning of God's dealings with the patriarchs and then with Israel, God promised to dwell among His people in the promised land of Israel, and specifically in the temple in Jerusalem. . .

(2) When the people of Israel sinned and were thrust out of their land, they were to look toward Jerusalem and the temple and pray to the Lord (see **1 Kings 8:33-53**).

(3) While God indicated that the nation Israel would sin and be driven from the promised land and taken captive in a foreign land, He also promised that He would bring them back to the land of promise:

*1 "So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind in all nations where the Lord your God has banished you, 2 and you return to the Lord your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, 3 then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you. 4 "If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. 5 "And the Lord your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers" (**Deuteronomy 30:1-5**).*

(4) The prophet Isaiah did instruct the Israelites to settle themselves in Babylon for a 70 year sojourn, but then they were to return to the promised land. . .

(5) In captivity, the righteous did not forget their land or the temple but yearned for it:

*1 By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down and wept, When we remembered Zion. 2 Upon the willows in the midst of it We hung our harps. 3 For there our captors demanded of us songs, And our tormentors mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." 4 How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? 5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, May my right hand forget her skill. 6 May my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, If I do not remember you, If I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy. 7 Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom The day of Jerusalem, Who said, "Raze it, raze it, To its very foundation." 8 O daughter of Babylon, you devastated one, How blessed will be the one who repays you With the recompense with which you have repaid us. 9 How blessed will be the one who seizes and dashes your little ones Against the rock (**Psalms 137:1-9**).*

(6) While in captivity, those who were godly purposed not to defile themselves but to live according to their faith and the Word of God:

8 But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself (Daniel 1:8).

The first chapter (and more) of Daniel gives an account of Daniel's diligence in remaining faithful to his God. The events of Daniel 1 are a dramatic contrast to Esther 1 and 2 in which Esther conceals her identity and lives as though she were a Persian.

(7) At the end of 70 years, God moved in the heart of Cyrus to make a decree that all the Jews could return to their land, just as the prophet Jeremiah prophesied. . .

(8) 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

Brian Borgman: (2:1-18) Bad Decisions and Divine Appointments

Danger: Don't let preaching of free grace excuse bad decisions; same thing can be said about preaching sovereignty and divine providence – so my sinful decisions are all part of God's plan; so I guess what I did wasn't all that bad . . .

Decisions that completely lack any biblical integrity; yet we will see how God uses all of this to establish His purpose; danger of qualifying this sermon to death and killing it;

God is still at work; even using us in our failures; His purposes cannot be thwarted even in the face of our own wickedness; this truth is meant to help us after the fact in retrospect, not beforehand.

vv. 1-4 – Some regrets and sensual decisions;

“*after these things*” – King trapped by his own decision; this is a full 3 years after the vanquishment of Vashti; unsuccessful attempt by Persia against Greece; king's anger begins to wear off; remembers Vashti with some regret and uneasiness over the whole situation; maybe he desired to have her again; trapped by his own irrevocable law; A depressed king would make lives miserable for his servants; came up with idea to make king happy; servants appeal to the king's own carnal appetites – driven by lusts and desires; whatever pleased the king is what kept the kingdom going

Women uprooted from their homes and relationships; ones who didn't make the cut shut up in perpetual widowhood after losing their virginity

vv. 5-7 – Mordecai and Esther introduced to us;

Mordecai ends up being the hero of the story in many ways; a Jew = a Judean; name is Babylonian from state god; we are never given his Hebrew name; has access to the citadel; higher up in the Persian govt.; famous ancestors; from the family of King Saul; Shimei cursed David – Solomon instructed to take him out; Mordecai himself probably not carried away himself in the exile – antecedent is a reference to family tree – telescoping of the ancestors;

Hadassa = myrtle wood – depicts Lord's forgiveness and acceptance of His people; her pagan name = the Persian star named after goddess; Mordecai would have been substantially older than Esther

vv. 8-11 – Esther joins the beauty contest

no implication of force other than by the decree of king itself;
poise and charm win the king's favor; contrast with actions of Joseph and Daniel under pagan kings;
bright, intelligent, beautiful; granted favor

vv. 12-14 -- Further preparations; incredible beauty treatments for 12 months; they could fancy themselves up with whatever they pleased – clothing and jewelry and makeup, etc.

then relegated to another harem for concubines in the king's stables – cruelty of the whole system to satisfy king's lust

vv. 15-16 – submissiveness of Esther; spends her night with the king

vv. 17-18 – unequal yoke in Susa; wins the heart of the king and ends up becoming queen; shown off by the king who loved big parties; impulsive, carnal, wicked king; naïve for us to come to the Bible and think that everyone is an example for us to follow; compromises of biblical integrity on part of both Mordecai and Esther – impossible to maintain their heroism in these early chapters despite their later actions

- No resistance to the king's edict – **2:8** – goes to Susa with all the other young virgins; cf. how parents of Moses resisted edict of king; or Daniel and his friends defying Nebuchadnezzar with courage
- **Vs. 9** – Esther takes the food that is served her; cf. **Daniel 1:8**
- **Vs. 10** – compromise of faith in hiding heritage; keep things hush-hush; her Jewishness stood in the way of sitting on the throne
- **Vs. 16** – compromise of morality – goes in and sleeps with the king; forfeits her virginity – cf. Joseph; **Gen. 39:9** – willing to pay the price
- Compromise of marriage – **Deut. 7** forbids marriage with heathen nations – king or no king

As God's servants we are never exempt from obedience to God's laws; which of us has not made sinful decisions out of convenience or pressure

The invisible hand of providence is so powerful and sovereign that even our bad decisions end up being part of His divine appointments and purposes;

This is not meant to comfort us before we make a bad decision; We are under divine compulsion to make decision of principle and obedience every time regardless of the consequences to us. We have made foolish choices and sinful decisions and compromised biblical integrity. What do we do? Just live a life of regrets and What Ifs?? There will be regrets but no despair that we have thwarted the purpose of God; Our God is big enough and powerful enough – in spite of our failures God has accomplished his will; **Rom. 8:28**

We serve a God for whom there are no "What Ifs."

God will work mightily through Esther and Mordecai; He will preserve the Messianic line; even though people don't always live the way they should; at the end of the day God uses us in spite of us; God will be glorified and He will overrule

David Thompson: vv.1-11

NO MATTER HOW WILD OR BIZARRE DECISIONS OF LEADERSHIP SEEM TO BE, GOD IS STILL WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES CONTROLLING ALL THINGS AND CARING FOR HIS PEOPLE AND MOVING PEOPLE WHERE HE WANTS THEM TO BE.

This was a highly organized, immoral beauty pageant that was designed to surround the king with the most beautiful women in the world so he could have a series of one night stands and name one of them his new queen. If you were a father with a virgin daughter that was beautiful, you had no say in the matter. If the overseer picked your daughter, she was destined to go to Susa for the hedonistic purpose of pleasing and pleasuring the king.

We would never expect to find God sovereignly working out His plan and program in such a promiscuous and sensual environment. We would never expect God to be sovereignly overseeing these godless decisions. But God was overseeing this and was sovereignly working behind the scenes in order to work out His plan in preserving and caring for His chosen people, Israel. . .

vv. 12-18

EVEN WHEN A BELIEVER HAS NOT OBEYED GOD AND FINDS HIMSELF IN COMPROMISING SITUATIONS, WHICH DO NOT PLEASE GOD, GOD IS STILL SOVEREIGN AND HE WILL ALWAYS WORK OUT HIS PROGRAM IN ORDER TO CARE FOR HIS PEOPLE.

There is no question that Mordecai and Esther had compromised their testimonies and themselves. They were living in a foreign land rather than in Jerusalem. They were not witnessing or testifying of their nationality or their relationship with God (2:10). They were in attendance at pagan parties which featured heavy drinking and immorality. Esther had entered a pagan, immoral pageant which cost her, her virginity. The story is, in many ways, the story of a believer not obeying the righteous Word or will of God. But God was still behind the scenes carefully watching, monitoring and controlling all things, moving and directing according to His sovereign plan.

vv. 19-23

GOD SOVEREIGNLY DIRECTS AND WORKS IN CRISIS SITUATIONS AND IN THE RESPONSES OF HIS PEOPLE IN ORDER TO WORK OUT HIS FUTURE PROGRAM.

There is no question that Mordecai saw this plot as something that could hurt Esther. If King Ahasuerus were killed, it could mean Esther would be removed and they might find themselves in a perilous position. Certainly Mordecai wanted to protect Esther and himself, so he reported this plot to Esther, who told the king. . .

If you are in the family of God, you are the most cared for person in this universe. No matter what crisis you are facing, no matter how bizarre or negative the circumstances, God is sovereignly caring for you.

Jerry Thrower:

I. MAN DOES NOT DO THINGS GOD'S WAY! (Vs. 1-4)

Isaiah 55:8-9--"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways

my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Here we see the best laid plans of man to replace the queen. I'm sure that they actually believed that this was their plan, but God had his own plan! But as we said before, **Proverbs 21:1**—*"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will."*

II. GOD MAKES PLANS IN ADVANCE! (Vs. 5-7)

A. Mordecai Was A Jew Working In The Palace. (vs 5)

B. Mordecai And Esther Were There By Providential Design. (vs. 6)

C. Mordecai Was A Dear Man. (vs. 7)

The words "brought up" means to "nourish." He took responsibility for a child that was not his own! He was Esther's cousin but raised her as if she were his own daughter!

III. GOD EXERCISES HIS WILL THROUGH MAN'S PLANS! (Vs. 8-20)

The Lord used the plan of man to fulfill His Will even though none of these people knew what the future held for the Jews.

A. We See Esther's Splendor! (vs. 8-9)

B. We See Esther's Secret! (vs. 10-11; 20)

C. We See Esther's Sprucing Up! (vs. 12)

D. We See Esther's Simplicity! (vs. 13-15)

She could ask for whatever she desired, but she required no more than what had been appointed to her.

E. We See Esther In The Spotlight! (vs. 15b-19)

IV. GOD PUTS HIS SERVANTS IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME. (vs. 21-23)

A. The Plot! (vs. 21)

B. The Prevention! (vs. 22)

C. The Putting Down! (vs. 23)

Breneman: Throughout the narrative of chap. 2, the hand of God is understood to be the force behind the development of the story. The author was in no way claiming that the events herein were from human hands but that the course of events was understandably at the direction of a power larger than this story. The first readers of Esther must have been amused at the reading of the text as they realized this important truth. The people were oppressed. Since there was no chance for a Jew to become king, Esther was brought into the royal court to become queen. As Joseph was introduced to the court of the Pharaoh and Daniel to the court of Nebuchadnezzar, Esther came to the court for a similar purpose. Joseph's leadership meant food for his famine-stricken family and their eventual prosperity. Daniel's leadership led to a new status of acceptance of Jews in Babylonia. Esther's leadership would yield similar results. The common element in all three is that it was God who brought about these results.

TEXT: Esther 3:1-15

TITLE: *PROVIDENCE ALLOWS GOD'S PEOPLE TO COME UNDER SEVERE ATTACK*

BIG IDEA:

SATAN'S GOAL IS NOTHING LESS THAN THE EXTERMINATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION:

The age-old conflict between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman is manifested here in the anti-Semitism of the Agagite Haman. Satan is acting behind the scenes in this conflict initiated by the prideful refusal of Mordecai to bow down to his nation's arch-enemy. The tension mounts as the king becomes an unwitting pawn in Haman's plot to exterminate the Jews. But God is still in sovereign control and working behind the scenes to eventually turn the tables on this arrogant foe.

Spurgeon: The Lord's wisdom is seen in arranging the smallest events so as to produce great results. . . Everything, the most minute, as well as the most magnificent, is ordered by the Lord who has prepared His throne in the heavens, whose kingdom rules over all. The history before us furnishes proof of this.

Karen Jobes: Whether we like it or not, we often feel caught in circumstances beyond our control. Life is full of seemingly insignificant events that in retrospect we recognize as changing the course of our lives. Every new day brings circumstances and decisions, and we cannot know how one event will lead to another. Only God knows the end of a matter before it has even begun. The author of Esther is demonstrating the workings of divine providence. God works mysteriously, patiently, and inexorably through a series of "coincidental" events and human decisions, even those based on questionable motives and evil intents. All of the "chance" events in life are really working toward the end that God has ordained.

Deffinbaugh: **Whitcomb** comes very close to saying that Mordecai is a stubborn, willful, rebellious Jew, whose refusal to show deference to Haman is nothing less than sin:

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**.'

I believe this is what the author wants us to conclude. There is nothing pious about Mordecai's attitudes and actions. Neither he nor Esther are model saints. They are much more like Jonah than like Daniel. God does not spare His people because of Mordecai or Esther's faith or faithfulness. He does so in spite of their willfulness and sin. To sanctify the actions of Mordecai and Esther, we must distort the text. . .

I. (:1-6) THE CONFLICT LEADING TO HAMAN'S COMMITMENT TO EXTERMINATE THE JEWS

A conflict develops when two parties react in antagonism to one another

A. (:1-2) Mordecai Reacts in Antagonism to Haman

1. (:1) Elevation of Haman to Prominence in the Kingdom

a. Promoted Him

“After these events King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite,”

When it seems that you have been overlooked like Mordecai who was passed over for this promotion; just remember that God is still at work.

Frederic Bush: Whatever its origin and original sense may have been, the term Agagite is here intended as a most significant ethnic identification. Agag was the king of the Amalekites defeated by Saul and put to death by Samuel (**1 Sam 15**), and the OT tradition univocally stressed the bitter and unrelenting enmity that existed between the two peoples. Amalek is presented as the preeminent enemy of Israel. Thus, the conclusion of the story of the attack of the Amalekites upon Israel in the wilderness (**Exod 17:8–16**) notes, “*Yahweh will have war with Amalek from generation to generation,*” and the book of Deuteronomy avows, “... *you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you must not forget*” (**25:19**; cf. also **1 Sam 15:2–3**).

Further, not only were the Amalekites Israel's ancient and inveterate enemies, but Agag himself is so portrayed in **Num 24:7**. This ethnic identity of Haman is doubtless also intended by the narrator to be connected with that of Mordecai, for Mordecai's patronymic identifies him as a descendant of the Benjaminite Kish, and Saul, another direct descendant of Kish, defeated Agag, king of the Amalekites. The patronymics of these two protagonists, then, subtly indicate that both men are heirs to a longstanding and bitter tradition of ethnic enmity and antagonism. Indeed, the manner in which Haman is identified in the book signals him to be the pre-eminent enemy of the Jews.

Breneman: Thus Haman became a prototype of all anti-Semitic leaders who want to destroy the Jewish people.

b. Advanced Him

“and advanced him”

Constable: This story pictures Haman as having all seven of the characteristics that the writer of **Proverbs 6:16-19** said the Lord hates: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren. Nevertheless, Ahasuerus advanced Haman to the highest government position in the empire—under the king.

c. Established His Authority

“and established his authority over all the princes who were with him.”

2. (:2) Exception in the Respect Shown to Haman

a. Universal Homage

“And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman; for so the king had commanded concerning him.”

b. Lone Exception = Mordecai

“But Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage.”

Frederic Bush: But, why would the fact that Mordecai was a Jew be sufficient reason for either Mordecai's refusal or Haman's monstrous pride? Clearly, the former cannot relate to Mordecai's religion or temperament, and that the latter results from Haman's ethnic hatred is made clear by the reason the narrator gives (*“they had told him who Mordecai's people were”*). The only thing in the context that makes both these reactions reasonable is the subtle allusion to the ancient tribal enmity between Jews and Amalekites. Mordecai's action is one of ethnic pride. He simply would not bow down to a descendant of the Amalekites (cf. **Deut 25:17-19**). Haman's reaction is unmistakably motivated by racial hatred so callous and senseless that, beside it, Mordecai's pride pales to insignificance.

Karen Jobes: Interpreters throughout the ages have offered explanations for Mordecai's refusal. It is known from other sources that in general, Jews did bow to pagan officials of the Persian court. It was not a religious act but one of court protocol, much as moderns still curtsy or bow to the British queen. This suggests that Mordecai's refusal was not religiously motivated, but personal and specific to Haman. However, interpreters have been quick to exonerate Mordecai's behavior by ascribing a religious motivation. In the Greek version of the story, Mordecai explicitly says that it was not from hybris or arrogance that he refused to bow to Haman, but that he might not give the glory due to God to any man. Some interpreters have suggested that Haman, being a pagan, wore an emblem of an idol on his garment to which Mordecai refused to pay homage.

Breneman: We should conclude that Mordecai had both religious and political reasons for adamantly not bowing down to Haman.

B. (:3-6) Haman Reacts in Antagonism to Mordecai

1. (:3) Reason Requested for Refusal to Show Respect

“Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, ‘Why are you transgressing the king's command?’”

Frederic Bush: In this context it is much more a challenge than simply a question;

Duguid: Mordecai presumably recounted the history of his people to the other servants of the king when they challenged him over his repeated refusal to bow to Haman. This rationale explains why, when they finally reported him to Haman for his insubordination, Mordecai’s Jewishness was a key element of their report.

Laniak: **Esther 3**, then, presents a pitting of ancient rivals against each other. It is clear that the conflict that is about to erupt is one rooted in ethnic rivalry—a rivalry that is understood biblically to date back to the earliest days of the conquest (**Exod. 17:8–16**). That passage ends ominously: *“The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation”* (**Exod. 17:16**). The two rivals in Esther represent their respective communities as federal heads. Ethnic hostilities begin to boil in ways that the other members of the court half expect (**3:4**). Mordecai has explained his behavior in terms of his Jewishness.

2. (:4) Report to Haman of Mordecai’s Position

“Now it was when they had spoken daily to him and he would not listen to them, that they told Haman to see whether Mordecai's reason would stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew.”

Mordecai does exactly what he told Esther not to do – disclosed that he was a Jew – by the providence of God

McConville: Mordecai’s action, then, is probably to be explained by his refusal to be subservient, as a Jew, to the ancient enemy. The point is, in any case, that he perceived obeisance to Haman to be impossible in view of his higher loyalty. He was thus in the same position that Daniel was in when an embargo was laid upon prayer to God (**Dan. 6:6–9**). Daniel must yet pray (**Dan. 6:10**); and Mordecai must be faithful too to the God of his fathers, and the present generation of his people.

3. (:5-6) Reaction of Haman

a. (:5) Rage

“When Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage to him, Haman was filled with rage.”

Joyce Baldwin: Until the question was put Haman had not noticed Mordecai, but he reacted with furious resolve, and could tolerate no insubordination. Though filled with fury Haman calculated that he could wreak vengeance not only on Mordecai but also on all his race, who could turn out to be equally stubborn in their opposition to him. The narrator plays on the similarity of sound between Haman and *hēmâ*, ‘wrath’.\

Borgman: “filled with rage” – one commentator notes: “Hell has no fury like an Amalekite scorned.”

b. (:6a) Restraint

*“But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone,
for they had told him who the people of Mordecai were;”*

c. (:6b) Revenge

*“therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews,
the people of Mordecai, who were throughout the whole kingdom
of Ahasuerus.”*

Constable: Evidently Haman was anti-Semitic even before Mordecai offended him, and he used this offense as an excuse to exterminate the Jews.

II. (:7-11) THE CONNIVING TO DEVELOP A CAMPAIGN TO EXTERMINATE THE JEWS

“conniving” - Calculating, scheming, shrewd; cooperating secretly, especially with harmful or evil intent;

A. (:7) Ascertaining the Timing of the Campaign

“In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, Pur, that is the lot, was cast before Haman from day to day and from month to month, until the twelfth month, that is the month Adar.”

Prov. 16:33

Frederic Bush: He begins by relating the casting of lots to determine the most propitious day for the annihilation of the Jews. Though determined by lot, the day chosen seems maliciously ironical. The number 13 was considered unlucky by the Persians and the Babylonians, while the thirteenth day of the first month, the day on which the edict decreeing the Jews’ destruction was dispatched (v 12), is the day preceding Passover, the commemoration of the deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

Karen Jobes: To determine the propitious time for an attack on the Jews, Haman consults the pur (pl., purim) or lot. Archaeologists have unearthed samples of purim, which were clay cubes inscribed with either cuneiform characters or dots that look almost identical to modern dice. “Casting the lot” literally meant throwing the dice. But unlike their modern use, the ancient lot was used not for gambling but for divination. It was a way of asking the gods for answers to questions about the future. . .

Passover commemorates the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, the event that constituted the founding of God’s covenant people as a nation. It celebrates the existence of the Jews as a people and their special relationship to God. The joy of this holiday is turned

to sorrow in Persia when the decree is delivered on Passover, calling for their annihilation simply because they are Jews. The coincidence of the decree with Passover is tragically ironic, but serves to heighten the glory of the subsequent deliverance and links it to the ancient covenant of Sinai. . .

To the Jewish reader, Haman's casting of the pur and the resulting edict of death on Passover eve would be profoundly ironic, suggesting the critical question: "Would God still deliver his people, now in exile in Persia, even though they had violated the very covenant in which he promised protection?" In other words, the knowledgeable reader would be asking whether the covenant with Yahweh, celebrated by Passover, was still in effect for the Jews of Persia. Because the remnant of Jews who had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple were nevertheless still under Persian rule, their fate, too, was being cast in faraway Susa.

Ray Stedman: This is nothing but the rankest superstition! All superstition is a form of fear, and fear is the enemy of faith. Fear is the opposite of faith. Superstition, then, is a sign of distrust of God. Why is it that whenever we acknowledge that our business has been good, or our health has been good, we like to knock on wood? We really do it to frighten away the jealous spirits which we think may take our prosperity away. We distrust the gods. It's strange, isn't it, how many Christians resort to these superstitious practices? They smile and joke when they do them, but down underneath there is a lingering suspicion that they had better do them or they might bring bad luck. This is simply fear of the jealousy of God. The tempter has planted in our hearts the feeling that God is not really interested in our welfare, that we must take care of all things ourselves. We have begun to distrust the goodness of God.

B. (:8-9) Argument to Obtain the King's Consent to the Campaign

1. (:8) Case for Extermination

a. Vague Identification of the Target Constituting Them as a Threat to the Kingdom

"Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, 'There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom;'"

b. Irrelevant Information Designed to Raise Suspicion

"their laws are different from those of all other people,"

Breneman: Today God's people are different and must recognize their distinctiveness. "Their customs are different," or "their laws are different," explains that their emphasis on the law, God's revelation in the Mosaic Torah, made them different. Our basis of authority and our priorities mold our customs. If we take seriously the authority of God's Word and allow his ethical principles to form our customs, we will be different from those who live by different authority (e.g., human reason, humanism) or ethical principles.

c. Outright Lie Claiming Insurrection

“and they do not observe the king's laws,”

d. Unjustified Conclusion Seeking Extermination

“so it is not in the king's interest to let them remain.”

Frederic Bush: Here Haman reveals himself as a shrewd, clever, and malignant slanderer. He begins by suppressing the identity of the people, speaking simply of “*one people*,” a usage that insinuates that this people (or the issue of their annihilation) is insignificant. Yet they are “*scattered and unassimilated among the peoples in all the provinces*” of the empire. “*Scattered ... in all the provinces*” is not only hyperbole but is made into an accusation by the addition of the word “*unassimilated, separate*,” referring to their different social and religious customs; i.e., they are everywhere, a different, sinister, and ubiquitous presence. From innuendo and half-truth he moves to outright, yet blatantly false, accusation (**8c–d**). . . Haman is able to slide from the charge that the Jews’ *dâtîm*, “*laws/edicts*,” i.e., their religious and social regulations / customs, are different to the charge that they do not obey the king’s *dâtîm*. The first is true, but also true about every other people group in the empire, a diversity upon which the Persians prided themselves. The second, as a generality, is a blatant lie, for the actions of the Jews as a people throughout the book are thoroughly law-abiding. By using the same word, Haman implies that the first provides the grounds for the second. Haman then appeals to the king’s racial superiority and fear, “*It is not in the king’s interest to let them be*,” implying that their very existence is detrimental to the king’s honor and welfare. Thus, 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 (indeed, a figure so large that it can only be satiric hyperbole).

McConville: The attack is a masterly propaganda exercise. Haman has persuaded the king of three major untruths:

- that he is best fitted to be Prime Minister, though we know Mordecai is;
- that the Jews should be destroyed, though we know the queen herself is Jewish;
- that the Jews do not benefit the king, though we know that they do.

The one who is committed to untruth utterly convinces the dull and credulous king, who wields the power.

2. (:9) Call for Action

a. Issue the Decree

*“If it is pleasing to the king,
let it be decreed that they be destroyed,”*

b. Intake the Bribe

“and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who carry on the king's business, to put into the king's treasuries.”

Huge sum = 60% of the annual revenue of the kingdom

Karen Jobes: Haman then appeals to the king's need to replenish the treasury depleted by Xerxes' disastrous war with Greece. **Herodotus** reports that the annual revenue of the Persian empire under Xerxes' father, Darius, was 14,560 thousand talents. This revenue was generated by receiving tribute (i.e., taxes) from the satrapies. Haman's offer to provide ten thousand talents of silver (about 300 tons) represents a substantial contribution to the royal coffers. Haman may have thrown out an exaggerated figure of ten thousand talents to sell his idea. Presumably, whatever revenue he promises will come by plundering the possessions of those killed (cf. **3:13**).

Constable: This sum could not have come out of Haman's pocket; it was too large. He must have meant that the plunder taken from the Jews would be huge.

C. (:10-11) Authorization for the Campaign

1. (:10) Authorized via Royal Delegation of Decision-Making Power

“Then the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.”

Borgman: presidential pen; blind to Haman's agenda; does not ask: Who are they? Why are they dangerous? What have they done?

Joyce Baldwin: The king, presuming that the scattered people in question were distant aliens, hostile to his cause, handed over his royal authority to Haman. His signet ring was the seal of executive power, recognized throughout the empire. Haman had a free hand to put into effect his far-reaching plot. The author ominously repeats his full title, but adds the enemy of the Jews.

2. (:11) Authorized via Royal Mandate to Conduct the Campaign

“And the king said to Haman, ‘The silver is yours, and the people also, to do with them as you please.’”

III. (:12-15) THE COMMUNICATION THOROUGHOUT THE EMPIRE OF THE CAMPAIGN TO EXTERMINATE THE JEWS

A. (:12) Drafting the Campaign Instructions in All Necessary Languages

“Then the king's scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and it was written just as Haman commanded to the king's satraps, to the governors who were over each province, and to the princes of each people, each

province according to its script, each people according to its language, being written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king's signet ring.”

B. (:13) Delivering the Documents Spelling Out the Destruction and Plundering of the Jews

“And letters were sent by couriers to all the king's provinces to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to seize their possessions as plunder.”

Tomasino: The combination of three words of destruction is certainly designed to convey a sense of utter annihilation.

C. (:14) Designating the Day to Implement the Campaign Kingdom-Wide

“A copy of the edict to be issued as law in every province was published to all the peoples so that they should be ready for this day.”

Frederic Bush: The edict is an order for the destruction, slaughter, and annihilation of all the Jews, young and old, women and children, and the plundering of their property on one day, the thirteenth of the twelfth month (v 13). But to discover the agency of this extermination we must read between the lines, for it is presented only indirectly through the command that the edict is *“to be promulgated as law in every province and publicly displayed to all peoples, so that they might be ready for this day”* (v 14). With this, the invidious and horrific extent of Haman’s evil plan finally becomes clear. He will use the general background of human tribal and racial enmity, dislike, and suspicion, prompted by the specific motivation of greed in the prospect of plunder and booty, to set the whole general populace to the task of exterminating the whole Jewish race. Furthermore, the genocide will not take place for eleven months. This will both prolong the agony of the Jews (there is no possibility of escape within the Persian empire, for it effectively comprises the known world [Bardtke, 325]) and permit ample time for the intensifying of anti-Jewish feeling (Clines, 298) and preparations for the attack (v 14c).

D. (:15) Disseminating the Communication

1. Coordinating the Proclamation

“The couriers went out impelled by the king's command while the decree was issued in Susa the capital;”

2. Contrasting Reactions

a. Unconcerned Reaction of the King and of Haman

“and while the king and Haman sat down to drink,”

b. Confusion and Consternation of the City of Susa

“the city of Susa was in confusion.”

Tomasino: Here, four different scenes are cleverly woven together: the couriers hastening to deliver their message; the decree being published in the Citadel of Susa;

the king and Haman sitting down to banquet; and the lower city (probably where a larger population of Jews resided) in a state of confusion. The hastening has nothing to do with a need for alacrity, since the decree is not to be enacted for nearly a year; rather, haste is due to the fact that the couriers are doing the king's business, and must carry it out with their best ability (cf. **1 Sam 21:8**). The decree was formally proclaimed in the citadel, where the more prominent and connected people lived. In the rest of the city, there were apparently rumors that left people with questions and uncertainties. Surely this was no groundswell of sympathy for the Jews, but the response of the populace to rumors that seemed nearly unbelievable. In stark contrast with the commotion all around, the king and Haman have settled down for another banquet. Once again, the cluelessness of the monarch is highlighted without a word being explicitly said about it.

Laniak: Verse 15 dramatically illustrates the effect of this pronouncement on its authors and its objects. Haman and the king sat down to drink (note the banquet motif) with an obvious sense of satisfaction that yet another vexing problem had been solved (so also in **Gen. 37:25**). In contrast to the callous calmness in the court, the city of Susa was bewildered (anxious and agitated). This is a very alarming edict in the capital, for apparently relatively few of its inhabitants share the anti-Semitism that the edict calls for (**9:15**). How easy it is for those in power to make a decision in a moment that permanently alters the lives of those in their control.

The inhabitants of the capital do not understand the meaning or context of this new edict. Neither does the king. Even Haman does not realize what he has just done. The next time he sits with the king to drink, it will be at a feast prepared by Esther—a feast that will begin to overturn his wicked plans.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What do you feel is the motivation for Mordecai's refusal to bow down to Haman?
- 2) How could this personal and political conflict involving just one man escalate into a national campaign to wipe out an entire ethnic group of people?
- 3) When has the Providence of God allowed you to come under severe attack because of your connection to Christ and what was the ultimate outcome?
- 4) What do you make of the contrast between the indifference of the King and of Haman vs. the consternation of the nation pictured at the end of the chapter?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Frederic Bush: Fox divides the second scene into two different scenes:

- (1) vv 7–11, entitled “Haman gets permission to exterminate the Jews,” and
- (2) vv 12–15, entitled “Haman’s decree is issued.”

However, vv 12–15 do not really portray new persona or a new venue. They but describe the **implementation** of the decree the king has granted Haman to issue in vv 7–11. These two pericopes are **different episodes of one scene**. They are tied together both by the decree and by the fact that the date set for the annihilation of the Jews in the second episode (v 13) is the date that is determined by lot at the beginning of the first (v 7). Yet, though they are not separate scenes, they are separate episodes of one scene, whose division into episodes is indicated by the difference in content. The first episode consists almost entirely of the brief dialogue between Haman and the king. The second one relates in brief compass the dissemination of the edict and concludes with a note regarding its immediate effect, namely, that confusion reigned in the city of Susa (v 15d).

Tomasino: The other mystery is why Haman rose to prominence so quickly. Classical authors note that the Persian kings greatly honored those who did them a service. The fact that Haman’s promotion comes so quickly after the assassination attempt had been foiled might well make the reader wonder if there is some connection between the two events: did Haman receive a reward that should have been Mordecai’s? The suggestion is even more intriguing in light of the fact that later, Mordecai receives a reward that Haman thought should be his (**chap. 6**), perhaps a case of dramatic reversal. If such is the case, it might well give credence to the theory that Mordecai’s refusal to honor Haman was a case of “sour grapes,” as we will consider below. . .

Paton (197) finds Mordecai’s conduct inexplicable and attributes it to arrogance. Likewise, Baldwin (76) sees Mordecai’s act as one of “pigheaded pride.” They offer no reason, however, for why Mordecai felt he should be above Haman. Bickerman, however, suggests that Mordecai might have been suffering from “sour grapes”: Mordecai was jealous because Haman received a promotion that he thought was his due. There is much to commend this theory. First, there is the placement of the episode immediately after the story of Mordecai’s intervention on behalf of the king. It is fresh in the reader’s mind that Mordecai had received no reward for his heroic act. It might be considered a biblical trope that when Jews do favors for foreign kings, they are rewarded with a promotion, as in the case of Joseph (**Gen 41**) and Daniel (**Dan 2 and 5**). The parallel to Joseph is especially striking, since Esther’s narrator has used language that clearly alludes to the Joseph story (Levenson, 68; Laniak, 221). The narrator and audience might have known not only these stories, but others of similar vein, conditioning them to expect that Mordecai’s actions would have been rewarded with a similar promotion—but instead the promotion goes to Haman. Of course Mordecai would have been offended. Also, the fact that Mordecai refuses to explain his behavior gives the impression that he is pouting over a perceived injury. Finally, there is the fact—typically overlooked—that even before the Jews are empowered to defend

themselves, Mordecai receives the office vacated by Haman (**Esth 8:2**). His promotion appears to be part of the reversal motif, representing the righting of a wrong. If this narrative is truly “balanced,” this act could be the correction of an earlier injustice, and implies that Mordecai should have received the office that had been given to Haman. It should also be noted that Mordecai receives Haman’s office right after a eunuch reminds the king of Mordecai’s aid to the king (**Esth 7:9**).

Most scholars, however, have not been persuaded by Bickerman’s proposal. Rather, the most widely accepted interpretation (by Ehrlich, Meinhold, Moore, Fox, Bush, Laniak, and others) is that Mordecai refused to bow to Haman because of the **ethnic antagonism between Jews and the Amalekites**. Many have argued that Mordecai’s revelation that he was a Jew (**3:4**) was his explanation for refusing to bow. The text, however, implies that Mordecai did not answer when the other officials asked why he would not bow, so there is little reason to conclude that “*he had told them he was a Jew*” was his explanation for his obduracy—it was background information that he had already given them. Nor would the fact that he was Jewish have served as an explanation for his behavior, since his coworkers would have had no reason to know of the enmity between Jews and Amalekites. Rather, what the text states is that they were curious if Mordecai’s behavior would be tolerated “because he was a Jew.” The implication is that Jews were somehow treated differently than other people. We have already seen that Mordecai believed it would be detrimental to Esther’s bid to become queen if it were known that she was a Jew. Perhaps Mordecai felt he had been passed over for the promotion and his service overlooked because he was a Jew. Perhaps the narrator assumed that his audience, who may have experienced some prejudice living in the Gentile world, would draw that conclusion. On the other hand, the text also implies that the Jews were different from other people, as Haman’s wife Zeresh will later acknowledge (**6:13**). Mordecai’s colleagues were interested in seeing if Mordecai could get away with insubordination because he was a member of an ethnic group that was subject to prejudice and yet apparently lived a “charmed life.”

It is also worth noting that Mordecai’s refusal to bow was not only an insult to Haman, but to the king as well. After having just saved the king’s life, he is now deliberately insubordinate. This fact further supports the theory that Mordecai is responding to an apparent snub. Mordecai is not just stubborn; he is angry at the king.

David Thompson: vv. 7-15

WHEN A BELIEVER DOES WHAT IS RIGHT, THERE WILL BE THOSE IN HIGH PLACES WHO WILL HATE THEM AND WANT TO GET RID OF THEM AND EVEN WHEN THIS HAPPENS, GOD IS STILL IN SOVEREIGN CONTROL.

COMPONENT PART #1 – The timing of attacks against God’s people is sovereignly determined by God. **3:7**

COMPONENT PART #2 – The people responsible for the attacks against God’s people will manipulate others. **3:8-9**

COMPONENT PART #3 – Those in highest positions of authority may be temporarily swayed to make the wrong decision. **3:10-11**

COMPONENT PART #4 – Those who hate God’s people will incorporate all key people to be involved in the same hate. **3:12-14**

COMPONENT PART #5 – The people react to the attack against God’s people. **3:15**

Ray Stedman: There's such a principle of evil at work in every human heart. In the kingdom over which you reign, there is a "*Haman*" who is an "*Agagite*." Just as the solar system is a vastly expanded duplicate of what goes on in the atom, so, in effect, the history of the world is a vastly expanded duplicate of what goes on in an individual human life. 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.

Brian Borgman: The Politics of Hate and Providence

It will be the infallible outworking of God’s hand that will be at center stage . . .

The war between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman;

Haman is introduced as the villain; Mordecai got passed over;

Everybody kneels and shows him respect – but that is by the command of the king; as sign of respect, not worship; probably not inherently respected; Haman is full of himself – brand new chariot; Mordecai harangued every day for not bowing down; What’s your problem? Are there really bowing exceptions?

Ex. 17 – Amalekites fight against Israel in the wilderness; Aaron and Hur hold up the arms of Moses; **vs. 13** – *‘I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek’*

Deut. 25:17ff – Amalek did not fear God; *blot out the memory of Amalek ...you must not forget ...*

King Saul commanded in **1 Sam. 15** to execute this order from God to wipe out the Amalekites, the enemy of God; fails to kill King Agag; Samuel hacks up the king; God takes the kingdom away from Saul;

Mordecai has innate animosity towards Amalekites; Haman only exists because Saul failed to do his job; “bowing to Haman was a bridge too far” (**Duguid**); Mordecai knows the history and so does Haman

Sleeper cells in your kingdom; very ambiguous language as Haman explains situation to the king; untrue – Mordecai will have more loyalty to the king than Haman ever will – he is a slick politician; anti-Semitism and evil prejudice – hating someone because they

belong to a different group than yours; king easily manipulated by an invented problem; Not simply an ethnic issue that goes back a long time; Haman stands as a Jew-hating, Anti-Christ; to want to destroy the Jewish nation is a satanic agenda to stop the entrance of the Messiah into the world; cf. Herod Jewish Purge Day scheduled – put it on your calendar; right to kill any Jewish person you know and you can plunder and keep their property = financial incentive; 11 month waiting period; people put into a panic and King and Haman sit down to drink a few beers; king is superficial and shallow

Applications:

- 1) God is at work in seemingly ordinary events of life – but without massive displays of power; providence does not just extend to the good things in life, but the hard and painful things as well; this war that is going on has not ceased – **John 15** – Christian live in a world that is incredibly hostile to us because of Jesus; usually a hated, persecuted minority; war on Christians in America is increasing
- 2) God wins in the end so we win

Deffinbaugh: [I think his view paints Mordecai in too negative of a light and overlooks the significance of God's command to blot out the Amalekites – which in part, lay behind the unwillingness of Mordecai to bow down.]

A series of fatal failures brought matters to the low point of **chapter 3** of Esther. First, the king had failed by showing the same wisdom and discernment found in **chapter 1**. In chapter 1, the king heeded the wise counsel of his noble princes. In **chapter 2**, he acted on the advice of his valets. Now in **chapter 3**, he acts on the sole counsel of Haman. He gives this man complete authority so he can pass laws which the king has never even read (he has the king's signet ring). The king will later be shocked by the law Haman passed, with his permission. In effect, the king pronounced the death sentence on an entire race, a race not even identified other than in vague, general terms. The king failed to honor a man whose actions saved his life and his kingdom, and he handed that kingdom over to Haman, who intended to kill Mordecai and his entire race. One comes away with the distinct impression that the king's dullness is the result of his distraction with women (**2:19**) and his possible abuse of wine (**3:15**). From a merely human point of view, the king makes some very foolish mistakes in our text. . .

Of course, Haman is a wicked man. It is not at all difficult to see that he is arrogant and proud and that he hates not only Mordecai, but all Jews. He deceives his king and manipulates him, abusing his power. He seeks the destruction of an entire race. Who can say anything good about this wicked man? Surely he contributes to the chaos and confusion.

But my focus is on **Mordecai**. I am especially interested in him because he seems to be the central figure of the entire Book of Esther. 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 as we see in this comment:

“In the characters Esther and Mordecai we find examples of how to live the obedient life. Like Joseph and Daniel in foreign courts, so Esther and Mordecai were obedient to God’s direction and plan. Esther was a model disciple of God we should imitate. She constantly did the right thing, made the right decision, and said the right words. Esther embodied faith.” (Breneman)

Here is a warning for us. Let us beware of being just like Mordecai, practicing sin in the name of Christianity. Many of us who name the name of Christ have angered others because we were not acting like Christians. But when we defend our actions as being Christian, the unbelieving world sees our hypocrisy and concludes all Christians are like us. Not only do we bring a reproach on ourselves, we bring a reproach on the name of Christ.

This is exactly why Peter wrote these words to Christians centuries ago:

11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. 12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, 14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. 15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. 16 Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. 17 Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king (1 Peter 2:11-17).

This is exactly what Mordecai refused to do. He was living in Persia, but his behavior was not excellent among these heathen, like Joseph and Daniel and others had been. His behavior did not exhibit respect for those in authority. He used his Jewishness as a “*covering for evil.*” When we suffer for such sin and folly, we then try to console

ourselves by saying we have suffered for righteousness' sake. Peter has something to say about this in the verses which immediately follow:

18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. 19 For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. 20 For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.
(1 Peter 2:18-20).

We should consider how we imitate Mordecai by sanctifying our sin with seemingly righteous labels. We continue to live out the same fleshly characteristics we had as unbelievers, but we change the label on what we are doing. We are pushy and self-seeking, labeling this “zeal for the Lord.” We pursue selfish inclinations, tendencies, and activities, and call this “exercising our spiritual gift.” We give someone a “piece of our mind” and call it admonition. We try to get even by crying out for church discipline.

We draw attention to ourselves by acting as though we were crusaders, eager only to preserve the pure truth. We call domineering “spiritual leadership,” and we call spineless passivity and inaction “submission.” In order not to run the risk of losing face or friendships, we do not rebuke those in sin but take pride that we are showing “unconditional love.” We cover up the expression of our hostility by labeling it “righteous indignation.”

We seek to counsel others, not because we care so deeply about them, but because it is a pretext for probing into those secret areas of their lives we would not otherwise have the license to explore, satisfying our own curiosities. We tell others what to do, not so much because God has commanded it and we are exhorting them to obey, but because we love to give our own opinions and direct the lives of others.

We preach in a way that criticizes others and challenges their leadership and contributions to the faith to draw attention to ourselves. We talk about discipleship, but in reality, we are simply persuading men to follow us and not our Lord. We talk about prayer requests, which are sometimes merely a pious label for gossip. We say we are preserving purity by separating ourselves from others, but we may really be creating schisms, which the Lord and His apostles condemn and prohibit.

Christians are to be different from unbelievers. We are to be pious in contrast to the lifestyle of the pagans. When you look at the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit, you will discover we are to be different not just by attacking the world, but by living in the world with grace and gentleness and kindness. We are to be different; but we are to be different “like God” is different. Our Lord submitted Himself to earthly authorities, and so should we. Our Lord was gracious and compassionate, and so should we be. Our Lord did rebuke and He did attack, but this was not the rule; it was the exception. Let us give serious consideration to those sins we have sanctified in our

lives, rather than casting them aside as wretched and filthy and offensive both to God and to men.

Before concluding this lesson, I must emphasize that while the dire circumstances of the Jews are the result of the sins of men, they are also the result of the providential hand of God, causing "*all things to work together*" not only for His glory, but also for the good of His people. The story is not yet over. When it is, we will see that while men meant this for evil, God meant it for good. But it is all too clear that no credit goes to men. All the glory goes to God, as it should.

TEXT: Esther 5:1-14

TITLE: BOLDNESS, BANQUETS AND BOASTING

BIG IDEA:

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD PREPARES THE WAY FOR A REVERSAL OF FORTUNES

INTRODUCTION:

It is one thing to know the right thing that God wants you to do. It's quite another thing to boldly step out in faith and do it. Here we see Esther breaking out of her passive role of hiding her Jewish ethnicity and taking the initiative to come uninvited into the king's presence at tremendous risk in order to lobby for the preservation of her people. The providence of God continues to work in the background while Esther acts on her responsibility to take action at the bequest of Mordecai. Meanwhile Haman shows his true colors of pride and malice and tremendous ego as the narrator uses delays and the tension of the plot line to prepare for the great reversal of fortunes that will soon be unveiled.

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.

Chi Alpha Christian Fellowship: All heroes have their defining moment, the moment they were born for, trained for, and, in many cases, have been waiting for. As we begin our Bible study today in **Chapter Five**, Esther's move toward the throne room places her right there with so many other courageous men and women who have died standing up for their faith. Esther walks with courage, trust, and the unshakable faith that may not have come immediately, but arrived just when she needed it. Her last statement in **Chapter Four, verse sixteen** sets the stage for today, "...if I perish, I perish." Esther has decided to move, to say yes to her God-given destiny and make an appeal on behalf of the Jews to God and Xerxes.

Laniak: Suspense fills the air at this halfway point in the story as Haman prepares to celebrate his presumably enhanced status and Esther prepares for a decisive confrontation with him before the king. The queen is clearly "fattening him for the kill," at the risk of her own life. Before any resolution takes place, Haman's anger at Mordecai will deepen. Ironically, Mordecai's own status will begin to rise before the final banquet ever takes place.

Breneman: **Chapter 5** is filled with irony and surprise. There is irony in that what was believed to have been a banquet in "honor" of Xerxes and Haman was a foreshadowing

of Haman's fall. There was surprise in that the banquet was merely a delaying tactic to bring about subsequent events.

I. (:1-2) BOLDNESS -- PROVIDENTIALLY GAINING ACCESS TO THE KING

A. (:1) Preparation for Approaching the King

1. Timing

"Now it came about on the third day"

Whitcomb: The third day of the fast, which probably lasted forty hours (4:16).

Karen Jobes: A Jewish midrash on this scene points out that "Israel are [sic] never left in dire distress more than three days." In this midrash, the "miracle" of deliverance through Mordecai and Esther is compared to events in the lives of Abraham, Jacob, and Jonah, which also involved three days (cf. **Gen. 22:4; 31:22; Jonah. 1:17**). It links this miracle to the Jewish tradition that the dead will "come to life only after three days" from the start of the final judgment. This idea is based on **Hosea 6:2**: "*After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.*"

2. Attire

"that Esther put on her royal robes"

3. Positioning

"and stood in the inner court of the king's palace in front of the king's rooms,"

Joyce Baldwin: Esther knew she had to act on her resolve without further delay, and appear before the king.

Klock: When Esther "put on her royal robes," the phrase literally meant, "*put on her royalty.*" We too will have a meeting with our King one day. **Amos 4:12** warned Israel to "*Prepare to meet your God!*" in a negative sense, in fear and trepidation. No doubt Esther had fears, but she allowed faith in God to be her best preparation to meet this human king. What are some ways we can prepare to meet our heavenly King, helping us to be ready on that day? (Read: **John 15:4-8; 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18; Romans 10:17; Colossians 3:16, 17; 2 Timothy 2:15**)

4. Opportunity

"and the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room, opposite the entrance to the palace."

Intimidating presence of the majestic King of Persia in the most impressive setting imaginable

B. (:2a) Positive Response from the King Regarding Safe Access

1. Extending Favor

“And it happened when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, she obtained favor in his sight;”

Whitcomb: A remarkable evidence of the fact that *“the king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Prov. 21:1).*

Karen Jobes: The transformation of Esther’s character from a person of “weak character” to one with “heroic moral stature and political skill” proceeds from that defining moment when she decides to identify herself with God’s covenant. Esther is referred to by name thirty-seven times in the story. In only fourteen of those references she is *“Queen Esther.”* All but one of those fourteen references to her as “Queen Esther” occurs after **5:1**. Esther assumes the dignity and power of her royal position only after she claims her true identity as a woman of God.

2. Extending the Golden Scepter

“and the king extended to Esther the golden scepter which was in his hand.”

C. (:2b) Privilege of Approaching the King Realized

1. Accessing His Presence in Safety

“So Esther came near”

2. Acknowledging the King’s Sovereignty

“and touched the top of the scepter.”

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown: This was the usual way of acknowledging the royal condescension, and at the same time expressing reverence and submission to the august majesty of the king.

II. (:3-8) BANQUETS -- PROVIDENTIALLY GREASING THE WHEELS FOR HER APPEAL TO THE KING

A. (:3-5) Request for an Initial Banquet for the King and Haman

1. (:3) Solicitation of Esther’s Request

“Then the king said to her, ‘What is troubling you, Queen Esther? And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it will be given to you.’”

Esther did not just charge forward in clumsy fashion and make her appeal immediately. She recognized the importance of waiting for the proper timing and proper circumstances.

2. (:4) Substance of Esther’s Request

“And Esther said, ‘If it please the king, may the king and Haman come this day to the banquet that I have prepared for him.’”

3. (:5) Submission to Esther's Request

*"Then the king said,
'Bring Haman quickly that we may do as Esther desires.'
So the king and Haman came to the banquet which Esther had
prepared."*

B. (:6-8) Request for a Second Banquet for the King and Haman

1. (:6) Solicitation of Esther's Request

*"And, as they drank their wine at the banquet, the king said to Esther,
'What is your petition, for it shall be granted to you.
And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be done.'"*

F. B. Huey Jr.: The offer of half the kingdom was probably an example of Oriental courtesy that was not intended to be taken too literally (cf. **Mark 6:23**).

2. (:7-8) Substance of Esther's Request

*"So Esther answered and said, 'My petition and my request is: 8 if I
have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant
my petition and do what I request, may the king and Haman come to the
banquet which I shall prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the
king says.'"*

Joyce Baldwin: Esther's intuition told her that her strategic moment had not yet come.

Wiersbe: the Lord restrained Esther from telling Ahasuerus the truth about Haman. While there may have been fear in her heart, I don't think that's what held her back. The Lord was working in her life and directing what she said, even though she wasn't aware of it. God was delaying the great exposure until after the king had honored Mordecai.

Frederic Bush: she uses the second conditional clause in a manner significantly different from the way she used it before. Its subject is not now the invitation to the banquet, as in scene 2. Rather, its subject here is the infinitival phrase that follows. She says, literally, *"If granting what I ask and fulfilling my request pleases the king, let him ... come to the banquet."* Unmistakably, with Esther's subtle restatement of the invitation, the king's future compliance (which he can hardly now refuse) has become virtually a public pledge to grant her unstated request! This careful and subtle development in the two dialogues demonstrates that Esther is not stumbling blindly in the dark, inexplicably inviting the king to two unneeded banquets, dangerous because of the time they consume, and it demonstrates that the narrator has not clumsily introduced a development that leaves his readers stumbling blindly in the dark, wondering what is going on. Esther is shrewdly and subtly pursuing a well-designed plan, by which she has maneuvered the king into committing himself in advance.

McConville: Two important things are achieved, however, by Esther's tactics (for tactics they are, rather than a crisis of confidence). The first is that those of us who are enjoying the story are well served, for dramatic tension is piled on by the delay in confronting the king with the truth. This is more than just a literary device, however. For on the psychological level, secondly, the tactics have their own plausibility. Esther, in fact, is plotting to produce the circumstances which will ensure the desired outcome to her request. She does this by introducing Haman to the scene. The king had certainly not bargained for this. Haman may be his favourite, but he can hardly want him around just at the moment. Esther's introduction of Haman, therefore, serves not only to have him conveniently placed for exposure when the propitious moment comes, but to begin to provoke frustration in the king against him. Notice, furthermore, how Esther's first dinner is for the king (v. 4). Her second, however, is for the king and Haman (v. 8). There is just a hint here that Esther's purpose is to sow a resentment in the king's mind, and have him think that this Haman was staking too big a claim both in the kingdom and in his wife's esteem.

Tomasino: There is certainly, then, a calculated element in Esther's actions. But we need not rule out the literary aspects. It is probably significant that Esther's banquets will occur in a pair, just like the other strategic banquets of the narrative: the two banquets of Xerxes in **Esth 1**; the two banquets of the Jews in **Esth 9**, and these two banquets given by Esther in **Esth 5** and **7**. The Jews celebrated their deliverance with two banquets, so it is only fitting that their deliverance is brought about in the course of **two banquets**.

III. (:9-14) BOASTING -- PROVIDENTIALLY GRATIFYING THE EGO OF HAMAN

A. (:9) Conflicting Emotions of Haman

1. High as a Kite -- Overjoyed

"Then Haman went out that day glad and pleased of heart;"

Joyce Baldwin: Haman was overwhelmed with a sense of his own importance at being the only guest at the royal table. That this was to happen a second time was the climax of his boast to his circle of friends.

2. Low as a Snake -- Overwrought

"but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, and that he did not stand up or tremble before him, Haman was filled with anger against Mordecai."

Before Haman was angered that Mordecai did not bow down before him. Now he finds Mordecai sitting and is angered that he does not show respect by standing up.

Wiersbe: Malice is that deep-seated hatred that brings delight if our enemy suffers and pain if our enemy succeeds. Malice can never forgive; it must always take revenge. Malice has a good memory for hurts and a bad memory for kindnesses. In **1**

Corinthians 5:8, Paul compared malice to yeast, because, like yeast, malice begins very small but gradually grows and finally permeates the whole of life. Malice in the Christian's heart grieves the Holy Spirit and must be put out of our lives (**Eph. 4:30-32; Col. 3:8**).

The insidious thing about malice is that it has to act; eventually it must express itself. But when you shoot at your enemy, beware! For the ammunition usually ricochets off the target and comes back to wound the shooter! If a person wants to self-destruct, the fastest way to do it is to be like Haman and cultivate a malicious spirit.

B. (:10-13) Complaining to His Friends and Wife

1. (:10) Gathering a Sympathetic Audience – Biding His Time

“Haman controlled himself, however, went to his house, and sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh.”

2. (:11) Glorifying in His Position -- Boasting

“Then Haman recounted to them”

a. His Prosperity

“the glory of his riches,”

b. His Posterity

“and the number of his sons,”

c. His Prominence

“and every instance where the king had magnified him,”

d. His Preeminence

“and how he had promoted him above the princes and servants of the king.”

Bob Deffinbaugh: Once home, Haman cannot wait to bask in the glory that is his. His home is his palace, and there his wife and friends willingly stroke his ego. This pompous pagan savours the moment, taking this occasion to sit among his family and friends and boast of his own glory. He recounts *“the glory of his riches”* (**5:11**). One cannot help but wonder how many times before this has been done. But the buzz of this moment in the sun is too much for Haman; he has to tell it again, no doubt in great detail. He boasts in the glory which he gains from his ten sons. And he recounts all the instances in which the king has honored him, this banquet being one of his great moments of power and glory. He speaks of the way the king has exalted him above all his peers. And finally he boasts of the banquet he has just attended and the one he will attend the following day. What glory is his. He seems ready to burst with pride.

3. (:12-13) Grating at the Lack of Respect Shown Him by His Nemesis

a. (:12) Exalted by the King and Queen

“Haman also said, ‘Even Esther the queen let no one but me

come with the king to the banquet which she had prepared; and tomorrow also I am invited by her with the king.”

- b. (:13) Embittered by the Lack of Respect from Mordecai
“Yet all of this does not satisfy me every time I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.”

C. (:14) Constructing the Gallows to Hang Mordecai

1. Plot Proposed to Construct the Gallows

“Then Zeresh his wife and all his friends said to him, ‘Have a gallows fifty cubits high made and in the morning ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on it, then go joyfully with the king to the banquet.’”

Whitcomb: Haman ordered the workmen to construct in his own courtyard (7:9) a seventy-five foot gallows, in order that it might be seen from afar, probably even from the palace.

Wiersbe: Was it like the Western gallows, a device for hanging a person by the neck until death? Or was it a stake on which a human body was impaled? The Persians were known for their cruel punishments, one of which was impaling live prisoners on sharp posts and leaving them there to suffer an agonizing death.

2. Plot Executed to Construct the Gallows

“And the advice pleased Haman, so he had the gallows made.”

John Martin: Haman undoubtedly felt that with Mordecai gone there would be no organized opposition from the Jewish camp. He would be freed from his enemy forever. Here the tension in the Haman-Mordecai conflict reached its peak. From this point on it was relieved little by little through circumstances that had already been set in motion. As the events unfold, the reader is reminded of seemingly insignificant or forgotten events that the skillful narrator had previously mentioned but had not highlighted. God was sovereignly at work behind even such a hateful act as building a gallows (cf. **Acts 2:23; 4:27-28**).

Breneman: Haman did not realize he was preparing his own doom, and he was not alone in preparing his own downfall. The Bible teaches that all are guilty of the same sin: *“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”* (**Rom 2:5**).

Laniak: Haman has now twice concocted plans that will backfire on him. The date that was set to witness the widespread destruction of the Jews will become the day for executing those who hate the Jews. This gallows, intended to single out Mordecai as first among those executed for being Jews, will make Haman first among those executed for opposing Jews. Before either of these reversals takes place, however, Haman will fall prey once again to his self-centered intentions as he leads Mordecai in a

procession of honor that he intended for himself.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some of the steps we should take in trying to achieve success in some critical venture?
- 2) How do self-control and restraint benefit Esther in her appeal to the king?
- 3) What lessons do we learn here about pride and ego?
- 4) What insights can you glean from this passage about the sovereignty of God and human responsibility?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Tomasino: **Reversal** is the key theme of this section. Like the book as a whole, it is constructed chiastically, but several of the elements are the antithesis of their antecedents, rather than synonyms:

- A: The king spares Esther (5:1–2)
- B: Esther requests the king and Haman come to a banquet (5:3–5a)
- C: Esther requests that the king and Haman come to a second banquet (5:5b–8)
- D: Zeresh counsels Haman to kill Mordecai (5:9–14)
- E: The king observes that Mordecai was not honored (6:1–3)
- F: Haman counsels the king on how to honor a benefactor (6:4–9)**
- E': The king orders Haman to honor Mordecai (6:10–11)
- D': Zeresh counsels Haman that he cannot defeat Mordecai (6:12–14)
- C': Esther requests that the king spare her people (7:1–6a)
- B': Haman requests that the queen spare his life (7:6b–8a)
- A': The king condemns Haman (7:8b–10)

There is also a strong contrast drawn between this episode and the story of Vashti in **chapter 1**. Both queens have violated the law, but the circumstances are oddly inverted. Vashti had risked her life by refusing to come before the king when she was summoned. Esther now risks her life by coming before the king without being summoned. Vashti's failure to appear incited the king's wrath; Esther's unexpected appearance elicits his favor. Vashti's insubordination will result in an attempt to put all women in their place; Esther's insubordination, if successful, will result in the deliverance of all the Jews. There is more danger in what she is doing than that of the typical uninvited supplicant. Vashti had been deposed from office because she had not shown the king his proper

respect, and Esther had been made queen because she seemed like someone who would “know her place.” Her actions now might shatter that carefully constructed persona. She will no longer be seen as the utterly submissive wife.

Duguid: That having been said, however, it was not Esther’s subtlety alone that ultimately transformed the situation. God used Esther’s subtlety, to be sure, but he also used Mordecai’s stubborn refusal to bow and Haman’s self-centeredness to bring each protagonist to the exact place where he wanted them. Regardless of her intent, Esther’s invitation to Haman puffed up his pride. Mordecai’s presence at the gate when Haman went home, and his continued refusal to bow the knee, pricked Haman’s happy mood. The counsel of Haman’s wife and his friends in response to his inner turmoil led him to build the massive gallows and seek an audience with the king early the next morning. All of these events were necessary for the unfolding of God’s plan. If Esther jumped the gun, as it were, and presented her request too soon, the king’s memory of Mordecai’s act in saving him would not yet have been stirred. Nor would the gallows yet have been constructed on which to hang Haman with such perfect poetic justice. It was undoubtedly God’s plan for the whole scenario to play out the way it did, so that he could bring the individual conflict between Haman and Mordecai to its perfect denouement before the wider conflict was also resolved.

Notice that God’s plan in this case was worked out without thunder and lightning, or a parting of the sea in order to save his people. No one was delivered from a fiery furnace or miraculously preserved in a den of lions. God’s work here is every bit as subtle as Esther’s. It proceeds by unobtrusively nudging each of the characters in the story to behave exactly in accord with their own wishes and temperaments, while at the same time they do exactly what he has decreed.

So God’s plan proceeds in the world around us. It goes forward, not in spite of our desires and inclinations, whether sinful or righteous, but precisely through shaping us to be the people we are. A little girl once asked: “If God is in control of everything, does that mean that he plays with us, like we play with the dolls in the dolls’ house?” The answer is yes and no. Yes, God is in control of all things and he works all things according to his holy will for his glory and our good (**Rom. 8:28**). However, we are not passive and helpless in this process, like the dolls in the dolls’ house. On the contrary, we do exactly according to our own desires and temperaments. God’s sovereignty operates in such a way that our freedom and responsibility to act are not compromised, yet the end result is still exactly what God has purposed from the beginning. Just as Esther, Mordecai, Haman, and Ahasuerus were not compelled to act contrary to their wills, but still did exactly what God had planned, so too we are never mere robots, yet we see God accomplishing his purposes in and through us. It was this truth that led the apostle Paul to write: “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure*” (**Phil. 2:12–13**). What is more, God achieves his perfect goals not just through our best intentions and most self-sacrificing acts, but even through our greatest sins and compromises.

Paul Ferguson and Bob Deffinbaugh: Esther's 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.

David Thompson:

vv. 1-8 -- ESTHER ULTIMATELY ACCOMPLISHED HER OBJECTIVE FROM A HUMAN PERSPECTIVE BECAUSE OF HER PREPARATION, HER PLAN AND HER PATIENCE.

There is no question that God was behind this whole plan; but from a human perspective, Esther does everything right in order to make her sales pitch and accomplish her objective.

Here is a textbook example of how to succeed in any area of life, including spiritually. Here is the right way to win when the stakes are high. . .

There are many lessons to be learned from this text:

- 1) Before battle we should carefully prepare ourselves spiritually and physically.
- 2) Before we make requests we should make ourselves look as presentable as possible.
- 3) Before making requests we should purpose to do something the leader likes.
- 4) There are times when confrontations should be made in the presence of the opponent and the leader.
- 5) God's timing will always wind up being the best timing.
- 6) The highest stake of all is eternity. It is worth risking everything for, including your very life.

vv. 9-14 -- NO MATTER HOW POWERFUL, EVIL AND HATEFUL A LEADER MAY APPEAR TO BE, GOD IS STILL IN SOVEREIGN CONTROL AND IN HIS TIME AND IN HIS WAY THIS REALITY WILL BE SEEN AND THE ONE WHO IS EVIL WILL BE DESTROYED.

In these verses, Haman, God's enemy, appears to be in total control and Mordecai, God's faithful servant, appears to be in the worst possible state. However, appearance is not reality. The reality is Mordecai, who is right with God, is the one in the best state and Haman is about to be destroyed. . .

Emotions prove nothing. One may feel as if he is right with God and be heading toward His damnation. Haman felt like he was secure and was happy as a lark and little did he

know in less than 24 hours he would be executed. . .

There are several practical lessons we learn from this passage:

- 1) Appearances aren't necessarily reality.
- 2) Those not right with God are usually controlled by their emotions and ego.
- 3) Godless people will be angered by the very presence of godly people.
- 4) The proud will be humbled.
- 5) Even when things appear to be the worst for God's people, the reality is God is still in sovereign control.

TEXT: Esther 4:1-17

TITLE: ONE SHINING MOMENT

BIG IDEA:

PROVIDENCE POSITIONS YOU TO LEVERAGE YOUR GOD-GIVEN CALLING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION:

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. But the responsibility still lies with Esther to choose to step forward courageously and intervene on behalf of her Jewish nation. In keeping with the current context of the NCAA Basketball Championship, I have entitled this message "One Shining Moment."

Breneman: This is the central section in the book. With the fate of the Jews sealed in the edict of Haman, Esther was challenged to confront the king courageously and ask for help. This is what she was brought to the court to do (4:14): to deliver her people. God is not mentioned explicitly, but his providential care is evident.

Whitcomb: The promises of God, the justice of God, and the providence of God shine brilliantly through the entire crisis, so that the mere omission of His name obscures nothing of His identity, attributes, and purposes for His chosen people and for the entire world of mankind.

Tomasino: The previous episode focused on Haman and his negotiation with the king; this one focuses on Mordecai and his negotiation with the queen.

Duguid: In a sense, the whole Book of Esther is similarly about the one character who never appears on stage, never speaks, and is never actually spoken to: God. Nowhere is that more true than in chapter 4, where Esther must place her life in the hands of the unseen, unheard, and unrecognized God. The fate of the whole community lies in the balance. . .

"How can people who confess an orthodox creed week after week so easily and completely lose track of the implications of that theology whenever problems emerge in daily life?" Mordecai's world-view may have been based on a solid theology, but he had difficulty connecting that theology to the issues of everyday life. If we know people, and the motions of our own hearts, we will not have to travel back to ancient Susa for examples of this phenomenon. In times of crisis, for all our orthodox theology,

our own first response is frequently the whimper of resignation or human strategy rather than the bark of robust faith in God. We believe in God, but in practice react to life's crises as if we were virtual atheists. . .

Esther therefore had to act as well as to fast. She needed to take her life in her hands, risking everything for her people. She did so without any explicit promises from God to protect her, or to bring about a successful conclusion to her mission. The question, "Who knows if you have risen to royal position for just such a time as this?" could just as well have been answered in the negative as the positive. There was no voice from heaven commanding Esther to act, no burning bush to convince her of God's call, no miraculous signs that she could perform to persuade the king to let her people go. Perhaps God would remain hidden and allow many of his people to die, including Esther herself, as he has on other occasions in history. There are no guarantees of success when we stand up for God, if success means getting what we want.

Yet at another level, Esther's success was guaranteed. God had committed himself to maintain a people for himself, not so that they could be comfortable, but so that they could bring him glory. No matter what sinful paths had led Esther to where she was, she was undeniably now in a position to give God glory by publicly identifying with her people and, if necessary, laying down her life through that identification. She could glorify God by perishing as well as by convincing the king. It was up to God how to glorify himself through Esther's obedience, whether by delivering the people through her or allowing her to be martyred in his service, but he would be glorified one way or another.

I. (:1-4) PROVIDENCE PUTS GOD'S PEOPLE IN DESPERATE SITUATIONS

A. (:1-2) Grief of Mordecai Over the Edict of Extermination of the Jews

1. (:1) Public Lament

"When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly."

Constable: The absence of any reference to prayer in verse 3 may be significant. Prayer normally accompanied the other practices mentioned (cf. **2 Kings 19:1-4; Joel 1:14**). Perhaps many of these exiled Jews had gotten so far away from God that they did not even pray in this crisis hour. However, the basis of this argument is silence, and arguments based on silence are never strong. Fasting does connote a strong but veiled appeal to God for help (cf. **v. 16; 9:31**). Probably the absence of reference to prayer was designed to help the reader view the events taking place on the horizontal (earthly) plane alone and thereby appreciate God's providence at work.

Frederic Bush: "*sackcloth*," refers to a garment of coarse cloth of goat or camel hair, possibly a loincloth. The ashes were usually sprinkled on one's head. These actions are appropriate for expressing grief, anguish, lament, and humiliation over calamity and bad news of all kinds (e.g., Joseph's disappearance, **Gen 37:29**; military defeat, **1 Sam**

4:12; 2 Sam 1:2; rebellion, 2 Sam 15:32; rape, 2 Sam 13:9; siege and threat of attack, 2 Kgs 18:37; as well as mourning for the dead (cf. Gen 37:34 with 37:29).

Breneman: “*Wailing loudly and bitterly*” shows Mordecai’s intense grief over the edict. In the West we tend to keep our emotions to ourselves, but in Oriental society it was common to show one’s grief. Mordecai was a man of strong feeling as well as strong convictions. One should not hide one’s concern in crisis situations.

2. (:2) Persian Legal Limitation

*“And he went as far as the king's gate,
for no one was to enter the king's gate clothed in sackcloth.”*

Bob Deffinbaugh: It seems Mordecai’s mourning is not quite normal. I would have expected him to mourn privately rather than publicly. I wonder if Mordecai was not a leader among the Jewish people, and his public mourning was the cue for the rest of the Jews to join him in mourning. I also wonder if Mordecai did not station himself before the king’s gate in an effort to get the king’s attention as a kind of official protest.

B. (:3) Grief of the Jews Over the Edict of Extermination

“And in each and every province where the command and decree of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay on sackcloth and ashes.”

Breneman: The scene of Mordecai’s mourning was duplicated all over the empire by Jews who heard about the edict. This verse is the low point in the narrative. Certain death was unavoidable except for the coming of a deliverer and liberator.

C. (:4a) Grief of Esther – Despite Her Incomplete Knowledge of Current Crisis

*“Then Esther's maidens and her eunuchs came and told her,
and the queen writhed in great anguish.”*

Frederic Bush: Esther’s distress can only be occasioned by the grief and anguish expressed by the actions and attire of Mordecai and the Jews of Susa. Her distress cannot be occasioned by the coming annihilation of the Jews, for, as the sequel shows, she does not yet know of Haman’s terrible decree. Obviously, however, from the force of the verb, she believes that Mordecai’s attire and actions mean that something very serious has transpired.

D. (:4b) Grief Cannot be Mitigated -- Garments Sent to Clothe Mordecai Rejected

“And she sent garments to clothe Mordecai that he might remove his sackcloth from him, but he did not accept them.”

Bob Deffinbaugh: Could it be Mordecai was an embarrassment to Esther so that she tried to quickly silence him? She sent clothing to her step-father, hoping to persuade him to put an end to his mourning. But Mordecai was not dissuaded.

II. (:5-9) PROVIDENCE SETS THE STAGE FOR MOMENTOUS ACTION

A. (:5-6) Hathach Responds to Esther's Charge to Seek Information from Mordecai

1. (:5) The Charge

“Then Esther summoned Hathach from the king's eunuchs, whom the king had appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was.”

Tomasino: While Mordecai had managed to learn of the king's decree and even the negotiations involved, Esther is ignorant of the proceedings. It is obvious that she is living a sequestered life in the palace, insulated from the troubles of life outside the women's quarters. The contrast between the informed and uninformed is important in this scene, as indicated by the repeated use of the word “to know” (יָדָע, *yd'*).

2. (:6) The Connection

“So Hathach went out to Mordecai to the city square in front of the king's gate.”

B. (:7-8) Hathach Receives Detailed Information from Mordecai Regarding the Edict of Extermination

1. (:7) Crisis Summary

“And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him,”

2. (:7b) Calculation of the Bribe

“and the exact amount of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews.”

Laniak: The mention of the money had been, for the king, a sign of loyalty and generosity. For Esther, however, it is a signal of the alarming scope of Haman's plan and the depth of his resolve.

3. (:8a) Copy of the Edict

“He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict which had been issued in Susa for their destruction,

Breneman: Mordecai even sent Esther a copy of Haman's edict so she could see for herself the seriousness of the situation; he was not exaggerating. Mordecai told Esther what to do; he urged her to go before the king and plead for her people. Now she would have to make known her Jewishness. Mordecai “urged” her to make this strategic and hard decision. In the community of faith, Christians must support one another in making difficult decisions.

4. (:8b) Call for Action

- a. Action Based on Assessment of the Desperate Situation
“that he might show Esther and inform her,”
- b. Action Requiring Urgent Access to the King
“and to order her to go in to the king”
- c. Action Involving Passionate Pleading for Royal Intervention
“to implore his favor and to plead with him for her people.”

C. (:9) **Hathach Reports Back to Esther**

“And Hathach came back and related Mordecai's words to Esther.”

III. (:10-17) PROVIDENCE CHALLENGES GOD’S PEOPLE TO FULFIL THEIR CALLING

A. (:10-12) Cautious Hesitancy of Esther to Step Up to the Plate

1. (:10) Intermediary Communication to Mordecai

“Then Esther spoke to Hathach and ordered him to reply to Mordecai.”

2. (:11) Issues Complicating the Situation

- a. Physical Danger of Approaching the King Uninvited
“All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live.”

Bob Deffinbaugh: Those who hasten to see Esther as a hero should ponder **verses 9-12**, for she is certainly not quick to take up the cause of her people. The principle reason is her own safety. I do not see the same spirit in Esther evident in Daniel’s three friends.

- b. Preferential Denial of Access and Favor

“And I have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days.”

Frederic Bush: Once again the narrator leaves us to surmise the reason behind Esther’s objection (apart from the threat to her life). Her hesitancy should perhaps not be regarded as a sign of cowardice, for crucial to her response is that she has not been called into the king’s presence for thirty days, a fact doubtless unknown to Mordecai (**Clines**, 301). Her hesitancy, then, is not only because she doubts she would survive to make the appeal but also because she questions the efficacy of her appeal to the king, since her favor with Ahasuerus is apparently at a very low ebb.

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. Also, she had her own living quarters in the palace, and queens did not regularly dine with the king. But a full month without sexual relations, or even friendly conversation? It may imply that Esther had fallen out of the king’s favor, which could explain her reluctance to appear before him unannounced.

Joyce Baldwin: Access to the king was strictly controlled, as everyone knew. Like every head of state Ahasuerus needed to be protected both from attempts on his life and from vexation with people’s problems. Not that he sat days at a time in isolated splendour on his secluded throne. He gave audiences, at his own discretion and by his personal invitation, but even his wife had no right of approach. Like everyone else she appeared between the columns of the throne room at her peril.

3. (:12) Intermediary Communication to Mordecai
“And they related Esther’s words to Mordecai.”

Duguid: Because we are familiar with the end of the story, we are apt to see the answer to this question as obvious. Would Esther be in such a position of royalty if God had not raised her up? But given the nature of Esther’s rise to prominence through an ethically doubtful marriage to a pagan and the concealing of everything distinctly Jewish about her lifestyle for the past five or six years, the question is real. It is as if someone who has risen up the corporate ladder by shady manipulation of the books, along with neglecting his family and any connection with the church, were to be asked to stand up at a board meeting for his faith over a crucial issue. His response might well be, “Could God really use someone like me after everything I’ve done—or failed to do?” The surprising answer in Esther’s case is yes! God’s providence works through all kinds of sinners (which, after all, is the only material he has available).

B. (:13-14) Challenging Exhortation of Mordecai

(:13a) Prologue
“Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther,”

1. (:13b) Reject the Temptation of Self Preservation
“Do not imagine that you in the king’s palace can escape any more than all the Jews.”

David Thompson: Mordecai does not tell Esther what she wants to hear. He doesn’t pacify her, appease her or water things down. He takes a strong stand for God and, ultimately, it will be that which will cause Esther to do the same.

2. (:14a) Trust the Outworking of Divine Providence

*“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.”*

Frederic Bush: Wiebe (CBQ 53 [1991] 413–15) proposes that the clause is not a statement but a **question**. The fact that the clause has none of the regular Hebrew interrogative particles is not a serious impediment, since interrogative clauses often are unmarked in BH, doubtless signaled by a rising intonation (in addition to the references for such unmarked questions cited by **Wiebe**, 414, n. 20, cf. GBH § 161a; IBHS § 18.1.c n. 1). Indeed, such unmarked questions are more frequent in LBH texts, such as Esther, than in SBH (**Wiebe**). In context the question is a positive rhetorical question, which intends thereby to make a strong negative statement (on such “questions,” see **Driver**, JANES 5 [1973] 107–14; esp. **Hyman**, HS 24 [1983] 17–25). The problems occasioned by taking **14b** as a statement, are completely relieved by recognizing that it is **a positive rhetorical question expressing a strong negation**. Mordecai is not postulating that deliverance will arise for the Jews from some mysterious, unexpressed source. Rather, by affirming that Esther is the only possible source of deliverance for the Jews, he is attempting to motivate her to act. With this understanding of the text, the reason for the demise of Esther and her family, including Mordecai, is not some unknown cause at which we can only guess. On the contrary, the cause is clear and unequivocal: the threatened annihilation of the Jews.

Tomasino: Another important concept Mordecai introduces in this speech is the indestructibility of the Jews. Deuteronomy hints at this notion: God promises that after He has scattered and destroyed the nation of Israel, He will regather and bless them, if they repent of their evils (**Deut 30:1–10**). The idea that Israel will never be utterly forsaken is developed as a theme by the prophets, beginning with **Amos 9:8**: “*Look, the eyes of my Lord Yahweh are on the kingdom of sin, and I will destroy it from the surface of the earth. However, I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, declares Yahweh.*” The idea that God will preserve a remnant—not necessarily because of their righteousness, but because of His faithfulness—recurs frequently in the prophetic corpus (**Isa 10:20–23; Jer 50:18–20; Ezek 11:13–21; Mic 5:7–15; 7:8–20**).

3. (:14b) Embrace Your Calling by Leveraging Your Providential Opportunity

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

Baldwin: Without explicitly spelling out in detail how he came to his convictions, Mordecai reveals that he believes in God, in God's guidance of individual lives, and in God's ordering of the world's political events, irrespective of whether those who seem to have the power acknowledge him or not.

Thomas Klock: In **Esther 4:14** we see the principal theme of the book, which is that God takes care of and delivers His people, but He doesn't always show us how until the right time. All of the things that Esther had experienced up to that moment (including being taken away from her people), and all that seemed negative as well as positive

happening to her, had worked together to place her in such a setting for such an appropriate time and season for her to make a difference.

Breneman: At this moment Esther's life purpose was at stake. God had guided in her being chosen queen. In the biblical perspective election is for service, not just for one's own benefit. Being liberator of her people was more important than being the queen of Persia.⁶ Mordecai's statement reveals a deep conviction of God's providence, a belief that God rules in the world, even in the details of the nations and in the lives of individuals. Mordecai told Esther, "*If you remain silent, ... you ... will perish*" (v. 14). In a crisis situation such as this, there was no neutral position. Failure to decide brings personal loss and misses the opportunity to fulfill God's purpose. In God's providence each person has a unique task.

David Thompson: The primary emphasis of the argument Mordecai uses is God is sovereign and can do whatever He wants with or without you; but by virtue of the fact He has allowed you to be in this position at this time, you are responsible and accountable to God to do what is right. We will never get people to obey God by lowering the perspective of how great God is. Obedience comes when people begin to realize how sovereign and majestic God really is.

C. (:15-17) Courageous Resolve of Esther in Stepping Up to the Plate

(:15) Prologue

"Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai,"

1. (:16a) Courageous Resolve Supported by Corporate Fasting

"Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day."

Tomasino: Fasting often accompanied prayer, to demonstrate the deep concern of those making petitions to Yahweh (**2 Sam 7:6; 12:16–22; Ezra 8:21, 23; Jon 3:3–8**). In Esther's case, prayer is never mentioned, but the imprecatory quality of the fast seems clear: what other reason would there be for her to abstain from food or drink before going before the king, other than to persuade God to give her favor? The only other possibility might be as a show of repentance, which we can assume would also have included prayer.

The three days of preparation before going into the presence of the king is reminiscent of several biblical scenarios. I have noted previously the parallels between the story of Esther and that of Joseph in Genesis, and this detail provides yet another point of comparison: the baker and cupbearer dwelt in prison with Joseph for three days before they were summoned to appear before Pharaoh (**Gen 40:12–13, 18–19**). The cupbearer, in fact, was presented before Pharaoh for pardon, while the baker was presented for execution. Both possibilities lie before Esther.

2. (:16b) Courageous Resolve Supported by Personal Fasting

"I and my maidens also will fast in the same way."

3. (:16c) Courageous Resolve Submitting to Divine Providence

“And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.”

H. Carl Shank: God’s providence requires our responsible, sometimes courageous, faithfulness. Esther was rightly scared to go before the king with Mordecai’s request and cry for Jewish relief. It was not a democratic process where she would be automatically invited into the king’s presence. It was not a forgone conclusion she would be welcome in the royal court. Esther took her life into her hands going into the king’s chambers. *“If I perish, I perish,”* was not an overstatement or drama by an emotionally distraught woman. God’s providence requires our decision making, our faithfulness in following the course of action that is right and true.

(:17) Epilogue – Esther Now Calling the Shots

“So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him.”

Frederic Bush: Hope for the Jews’ deliverance from annihilation at the hands of Haman and his edict has emerged. It may seem, indeed, a tenuous hope, lying as it does in the hands of a queen who is currently out of favor and one “whose life hitherto has been devoted to beauty treatments and the royal bed” (Fox, 67). However, the narrator has subtly brought the providence of God into the picture, both by the fact that Esther has ordered for the Jewish community and by Mordecai’s suggestion that there may indeed be providential purpose behind her position as queen (v 14d). Furthermore, he has portrayed Esther not as one who has passively accepted all that has transpired but rather as one who has been actively involved in the events surrounding. May she not, perhaps, be up to the challenge?

Tomasino: The development of Esther’s character is evident in this verse: Mordecai did what Esther ordered. In **Esth 2:20**, Esther did everything that Mordecai commanded her to do. Now, it is Esther who gives the orders, and Mordecai who obeys. It is important to notice the language here: Esther did not “*instruct*” Mordecai (as in the niv) or simply “*tell*” him what to do (ceb; ncv). The verb שָׂוָא (*šāwā*) is the same word used in **Esth 2:10** for Mordecai’s commands of Esther, in 3:2 of the king’s commandment regarding Haman, and in **3:12** of Haman’s commandment. The vocabulary here clearly demonstrates a reversal is taking place: Esther is growing into her role as queen, and even her uncle is subject to her will.

Laniak: This whole chapter finds the Jews filled with apprehension and disquiet while maintaining a ritual state of supplication and hope. In marked contrast is the “*drinking*” of Haman and the king in **3:15**. In fact, the fasting in **chapter 4** is situated in the center of all of the “*feasts*” in the book and sets the stage for the reversals that ultimately lead to Purim.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What types of desperate situations has God led you into?
- 2) As you look back over the tapestry of your life as it has unfolded, what strikes you about the providence of God in placing you in exactly the right position at exactly the right point in time?
- 3) How do you trace the development of Esther's character (how has she changed and matured spiritually) through these first four chapters of the book of Esther?
- 4) Has there been a time in your life when you pushed through your fears to pursue a biblical conviction in order to please the Lord at all costs?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Karen Jobes: Identity crisis for Esther.

When the situation had come to a crisis, Esther was brought to a defining moment in her life by circumstances over which she had no control. Mordecai said to Esther, *“If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place ... and who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?”* It was for *“such a time as this”* that she was forced to choose between identifying herself with God's covenant people or continuing to live as a pagan in the king's court. Apparently no one in the court, including her own husband, knew that she was a Jew. To save her people would mean revealing her own identity as well. She would be admitting that she had not been living as a devout Jew should live. Furthermore, she would be identifying herself as a target of destruction under Haman's decree and an easy mark in the treacherous Persian court. . .

After her decision to identify herself with God's people, Esther becomes the active agent, commanding Mordecai, planning a strategy to save her people, and even confronting Haman to his face. Her decision energizes her, gives her purpose, and emboldens her to face a threatening and uncertain future. There is first a great reversal in Esther's own life, through which consequently comes the great reversal of the destiny for her people. The defining moment in her own life is at the same time a crucial moment through which God will sovereignly fulfill his promise to his people in Persia. This is where wisdom and encouragement for Christian living is found in the example of Esther's life. . .

Perhaps, like Esther, you have been brought to this moment in your life by circumstances over which you had no control, combined with flawed decisions you made along the way. Perhaps instead of living for God, you have so concealed your Christian faith that no one would even identify you as a Christian. Then suddenly you

find yourself facing calamity, either in the circumstances of your life with others or just within your own inner emotional world. Regardless of the straits you find yourself in, turn to the Lord. Rend your heart, not your garment; “fast, weep, and mourn,” and return to the Lord your God. His purposes are greater than yours. And, who knows? Perhaps you have come to your present situation for such a time as this.

McConville: Any observer of the world, ancient or modern, can in principle discern the immediate and superficial causes of things that happen. He may, furthermore, conclude from this that all things can be sufficiently explained in a natural way, thus denying that God acts—or exists—at all. The style in which Esther is written acknowledges the fact that there is often, or usually, no obvious sign that God is at work in the world. But the whole series of coincidences in the book are made to show very clearly that, nevertheless, natural explanations are never enough. There is a purposefulness behind events which the pagan acknowledges by his recourse to lots, but which the godly know to belong to the nature of their Creator and Redeemer (**Prov. 16:4**—which even suggests a place in God’s purposes for Haman. Who knows whether, at some later stage in history, things might not have turned out much worse for the Jews had they not come to a head in the time of Esther?)

The Book of Esther, in its very tone, has much to say to a modern world which has become accustomed to explaining things apart from God. We in the 20th century are good at tracing causes and effects, but poor at understanding the meaning of reality. For the Christian the beginning of that pilgrimage is at the cross of Christ, the supreme act of redemption by the very God whom Mordecai trusted to deliver his people from the tyranny of Haman.

It remains to point out that the idea that God inevitably achieves his purposes for his people in no way diminishes the need for them to be fully and responsibly involved as he does so. This is really just to remind the reader of what we said (at the beginning of this section) about the need for Esther to come to terms with reality and meet the need of the hour. The knowledge that God is in control should not lead to resigned inactivity, but to the recognition that he commands, and the faith to follow wherever he leads.

David Thompson:

GOD PUTS HIS PEOPLE IN VARIOUS POSITIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY AND BY THEIR HUMBLE DEPENDENCY ON GOD AND BY THEIR FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE AND STAND FOR GOD, HIS PEOPLE WILL BE GREATLY USED BY GOD AND WILL SEE GOD DO GREAT AND WONDERFUL THINGS.

RESPONSE #1 – The response of Mordecai to the news of extermination. **4:1-2**

RESPONSE #2 – The response of the Jews to the news of extermination. **4:3**

RESPONSE #3 – The response of Esther to the whole situation. **4:4-16**

RESPONSE #4 – The response of Mordecai to Esther. **4:17**

Bob Deffinbaugh: Esther’s Dilemma and Decision

Suddenly Haman, a new character, is introduced. Haman appears as a prince who stands

head and shoulders above the rest of his peers, at least in the king's mind. The king had elevated him above all the rest and clearly placed complete trust in him, a decision which proved to be foolish. Although the king commanded all of his citizens to show respect to Haman, Mordecai refused, which caused the king's servants to rebuke him. When challenged, he excused his actions by simply saying he was a Jew. For him, that was all that was necessary. But for the king's servants, this made no sense at all. And so they informed Haman to see if he would let Mordecai get away with his stubborn refusal to show respect to the king's right hand man, in effect, the prime minister of Persia.

Although furious, Haman kept his anger concealed. He looked upon Mordecai as a typical Jew, and his purpose was not only to do away with Mordecai but to do away with every Jew in the kingdom. At the propitious moment, he approached the king with an indictment and a proposal. He informed the king that a certain race of people in the empire were rebels, who could not be kept in submission (not unlike Vashti) and that the king would do well to be rid of them. He offered a very large sum of money to Ahasuerus to proclaim a certain day as the time when anyone in the kingdom could kill every living Jew they encountered and then confiscate their property. It was a tempting way for people to get ahead, to be rid of their enemies, and to practice their racial bigotry. . .

You are the only hope of deliverance. If Esther does not act on her behalf and on behalf of her fellow-Jews, there is no other hope. How could I possibly reach such a conclusion? Does the text not indicate just the opposite? Does Mordecai not indicate to Esther that if she does not act to save her people, God will bring about their deliverance in some other way? No. Let me explain how I reached this conclusion.

The text need not be translated as we find it in most versions. A Catholic scholar challenges us to translate and understand it in a very different way, a way he believes is as legitimate a translation which better fits the context. This Catholic scholar's view is cited in a footnote in **Mervin Breneman's** commentary on Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther:

“See **J. Weibe** “**Esther 4:14: ‘Will Relief and Deliverance Arise for the Jews from Another Place?’**” CBQ 53 (1991): 409-15. **Weibe** argues that this phrase should be translated as a rhetorical question, suggesting that the implied answer is no; help would not arise from anywhere else. Thus Esther was the only hope for their deliverance. **Weibe** suggests that this translation fits the context of the Book of Esther much better than the traditional rendering. Such a reading would, however, limit the resources of God, who brought this about, and transplant the emphasis from God's work to Esther's work. God is capable of using anyone for his purposes. He was not limited to using just Esther, but she turned out to be the one because she answered the challenge.”

I believe **Weibe** is right. Mordecai could apply a great deal more pressure on Esther by convincing her that she is the only hope of the Jews than by assuring her that another means of deliverance will be provided. In addition, God is not mentioned in the text (let

alone the entire book!). Mordecai is not a godly Jew, trusting in God to save his people. He is a disobedient, unbelieving Jew, who seems hardly to think of God. His panic is because he sees the deliverance of the Jews as the result of man's initiative. If Mordecai does not mention God in our text, we dare not assume he is trusting in God. Esther is the ace up Mordecai's sleeve, his last hope, Israel's last chance for survival. If she fails, all is lost. And this explains why he threatens Esther that her family will be wiped out. If deliverance comes from elsewhere, then why would Esther die? As queen, Esther will most certainly not die first. Mordecai's warning is that she will die in the end. If this is true, then all Jews will perish, and there will be no deliverance from elsewhere. Mordecai reasons that if **Esther is the Jew's last hope**, her failure will result in her death and the death of the entire race. No wonder he is so forceful.

David Strain: Sudden Reversals: For Such A Time As This

Think for a moment with me about the defining moments of your life – those forks in the road that set your course and determined your future; moments when you made a choice and you turned a corner and you declared your purpose and you set your face and you marked out your territory. Some of them are moments, not of choice, but of happenstance: the biopsy result, the stock market change, the company merger. Defining moments shape us and direct our steps in ways that leave us utterly changed.

As we turn our attention this evening to Esther chapter 4 we have come to the pivot of the whole book. In terms of character development, Esther moves from a subordinate, secondary role in the narrative, meekly following Mordecai's instructions, to the primary and central role in the story so that by verse 17, "*Mordecai then went away and did everything that Esther had ordered him.*" And for Queen Esther personally it was also a defining moment. A crucial decision has to be made, and only she can make it, upon which hung the fate, not just of her own broken family, but of her entire people. It was a decisive moment for Esther and for the Jewish people, and as we study it together this evening, one the key things it will help us begin to come to terms with is the oftentimes complex intersection of two vitally important Biblical themes. On the one hand, the absolute sovereignty of God in providence, upholding and governing all His creatures and all their actions, and on the other hand, the absolute responsibility of human beings as His creatures in their respective vocations and callings. The sovereignty of God governs and directs all things, including the free actions and decisions of human beings. And yet Esther 4 teaches us our responsibilities in such a universe where God reigns in such a way still cannot be denied by an appeal to His sovereignty. As Queen Esther discovers, the sovereignty of God does not get us off the hook when called upon to make difficult choices. . .

Here is the proper use of the doctrine of divine sovereignty. It is not a theological bludgeon with which to beat other Christians. It is not a shibboleth by which to test for orthodoxy. The sovereignty of God is a refuge in which to rest secure. A safe harbor in which to anchor your faith amidst every trial. A hiding place in the storm. Mordecai knows that God, because He is Lord over all things, utterly and comprehensively and

exhaustively sovereign, will not, cannot fail to keep His promises and uphold His covenant, no matter what the odds are arrayed against Him. Relief and deliverance will arise from another place. The sovereignty and faithfulness of God is the scriptural medicine for the disease of fear. You kill the germ of anxiety with a hefty dose of divine sovereignty. Brothers and sisters, your life rests in the hand of the God of infinite faithfulness and goodness and grace, and you could not be safer or more secure. . .

For what has God brought me to this moment and to this place? Who has He made me to be, in His wise providence? What are the unique opportunities that I have arising from the peculiar web of relationships I have developed? How is the path of duty illumined for me by the overruling sovereign providence of God at work in my life? Those were very much the kinds of questions Mordecai was asking Esther to begin to wrestle with and to face up to. And as verses 15 and 16 make abundantly clear, they were questions that did not wait long for an answer. God seems to have taken hold of Esther's heart. She resolves her fears. She makes her choice. She opts now for solidarity with the people of God no matter what waits for her by way of consequence. She calls the people of God to continue fasting in earnest, this time specifically with a view to God's provision for her, and she will join them as together they wait upon the Lord for the next three days. And then, verse 16, comes Esther's immortal declaration. "*I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.*" It is the decisive moment, not just in the narrative, nor even in Esther's life, but in the life of God's people at this point in salvation history.

And as Esther's words ring in our ears, resounding with notes of courage and faith and heroism, isn't it easy to hear in them also an echo of another Savior's words, spoken at the greatest decisive moment of them all. In the garden, staring into the gloom of Calvary still waiting ahead of Him, the submission and resolve we see in Esther is surpassed and fulfilled in the One to whom she points us, as the Lord Jesus prayed to his Father in heaven, "*If it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not my will, but yours be done*"? Like Esther, in the citadel of Susa and for the exiled Jews of the empire, so now for God's elect in every place, in every age, at just the right time – **Romans 5:6** – *in the fullness of time* – **Galatians 4:4** – for just such a time as this, God has raised up a Savior, in his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. But whereas Esther risked everything to intercede for her people and lived, we have a better Mediator, one who did not merely risk it all, but who lays it all down and dies for His people. What Esther confessed only as a possibility, "*If I perish,*" Jesus owned and chose as a necessity, for us and for our salvation. He perished that we might live.

TEXT: Esther 6:1-14

TITLE: *PROVIDENCE WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES*

BIG IDEA:

GOD DEMONSTRATES HIS SOVEREIGN CONTROL EVEN WHEN THE WICKED IMAGINE THAT THEY ARE IN CONTROL

INTRODUCTION:

What a reversal of fortunes! Haman starts out this chapter rejoicing in his recent promotion and looking forward to the extermination of the hated Jews. He ends up in fear of losing his life. Mordecai starts out this chapter in a panic over the looming threat of Persian persecution. He ends up being lauded by the king and led around the kingdom in triumph and exaltation by his bitter enemy. The providential and sovereign control of God is seen in all of the detailed ways that God works behind the scenes to bring about His kingdom agenda, to protect His covenant people and to destroy His arrogant enemies.

John Martin: Almost incredible circumstances point to God's hand guiding the course of events. The entire course of history for the Jewish nation was changed because a pagan king, hundreds of miles from the center of God's activities in Jerusalem, could not sleep. Jewish people all over the Persian Empire, and especially in Palestine itself, were unaware of God's dealings till long after the fact. But read in the light of God's covenants to Abraham, Moses, and David, the readers could well appreciate the sovereign action of God.

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).

Tomasino: The section now before us is surely the most entertaining of the entire Esther narrative. As a humorous anecdote, it could almost stand alone, an illustration of the follies of pride and presumption. In the context of the book of Esther, however, it is even more striking and enjoyable. The pompous vizier, at the urging of his wife and friends, has constructed a pike for the impaling of his enemy, the Jew Mordecai. . . In his presumptuousness, he assumes that requesting the king's permission is a mere formality. The king, however, has recently been reminded of Mordecai's heroic service to the crown. Haman marches into the palace expecting to emerge with the permission he seeks to remove the only remaining impediment to his happiness. Instead, he will be forced to heap upon Mordecai the honors that he craves for himself. The section will end as did the last: with the words of Zeresh, Haman's wife. This time, however, she sees no chance that Haman will be able to do away with the offending Jew. Indeed, she predicts Haman's downfall before Mordecai.

Laniak: These coincidences highlight the story's important reversals and constitute the hinge for the whole narrative. Mordecai will move up the social escalator as Haman moves down. He will begin to assume some of the royal prerogatives that were reserved for Haman. This status reversal suggests that the prospects for the Jewish community are also hopeful. What has been threatened will be secured once again. And the perpetrators of evil will taste the punishment they themselves designed. From a biblical perspective these reversals signal the involvement of providence, expressed through the principle of retribution (see **Hos. 10:13–14**) and the wondrous protection of God's people. Although these changes presage hope, Esther has yet to present the king with her request. And the parade for Mordecai is more symbol than substance.

The emerging "theology" in Esther takes together the initiatives of Mordecai and Esther and these [divinely] orchestrated coincidences. There is an implied confluence of human and divine activity, with causality located in both spheres.

**I. (:1-3) PROVIDENCE UNEXPECTEDLY BRINGS THE PAST TO BEAR ON THE PRESENT --
DISCOVERY BY THE KING THAT MORDECAI NEEDS TO BE HONORED FOR PAST DEEDS OF LOYALTY**

A. (:1-2) Discovery of Mordecai's Key Role in Foiled Assassination Attempt

1. (:1) Reading the Historical Record

"During that night the king could not sleep so he gave an order to bring the book of records, the chronicles, and they were read before the king."

Probably thought this dull reading would help him to sleep. But he came upon an exciting account that refreshed his memory and held his interest.

Breneman: "Could not sleep" is literally, "The sleep of the king fled." This is the pivotal verse in the story. The reader has known all along of the injustice about to be done, but thus far only the possible victims, the Jews, and the instigator, Haman, have known about it. Now, in a dream, the king is disturbed. For the first reader as well as the present reader, there can be no doubt that God was behind the king's sleeplessness. "That night" certainly would suggest God's providence in the section of the annals that was read and in the timing of the reading.

Dr. C. I. Scofield: Here is a remarkable instance of the veiled providential control of God over circumstances of human history. Upon the king's insomnia, humanly speaking, hinged the survival of the chosen nation, the fulfillment of prophecy, the coming of the Redeemer, and therefore the whole work of redemption. Yet the outcome was never in doubt; for God was in control, making the most trivial of events work together for Haman's defeat and Israel's preservation (*New Scofield Reference Bible*, p. 697).

2. (:2) Reporting on Mordecai's Loyal Heroism

"And it was found written what Mordecai had reported concerning

Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs who were doorkeepers, that they had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.”

B. (:3) Question of Reward Raised

1. Reward is Appropriate

“And the king said,

‘What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?’”

Karen Jobes: It was important that Persian kings publicly reward those who were loyal as a means of promoting their own safety in such treacherous times. **Herodotus** records examples of two such honors. In one instance Xerxes granted land to two ships’ captains who had assisted in a battle against the Greeks and recorded one of them in the list of the “King’s Benefactors.” In another incident, a man was made governor of Cilicia for saving the life of Xerxes’ brother.

2. Reward Has Not Been Granted Yet

“Then the king's servants who attended him said,

‘Nothing has been done for him.’”

II. (:4-11) PROVIDENCE TRANSFORMS EXPECTED HONOR INTO INTOLERABLE HUMILIATION -- HAMAN PUT IN A BIND AND FORCED TO HONOR MORDECAI BY VIRTUE OF HIS OWN JUDGMENT

A. (:4-5) Haman’s Intentions = Hanging Mordecai

1. (:4) Haman Seeking the Execution of Mordecai

“So the king said, ‘Who is in the court?’ Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace in order to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows which he had prepared for him.”

2. (:5a) Haman Standing in the Court

“And the king's servants said to him,

‘Behold, Haman is standing in the court.’”

3. (:5b) Haman Summoned by the King

“And the king said, ‘Let him come in.’”

Tomasino: King Xerxes seeks some official of whom he could ask advice on how to proceed. In his typical fashion, the king will not proffer a decision without plucking it from the mouth of one of his counselors. The fact that Xerxes assumes that some official will be present is further evidence that it is morning, not the middle of the night. Haman has stationed himself in the outer court of the throne room to present his petition, just as Esther had done earlier in the narrative. His arrival at this very moment is most fortuitous indeed. (It is also another humorous element in the story, since Haman is so eager to present his request that he arrives at the palace before the king is out of bed.) The two men are eager to put their respective problems to rest: Haman

must kill and humiliate Mordecai, or he can have no peace of mind; and King Xerxes must honor Mordecai, or his sleepless nights will continue.

B. (:6-9) Haman's Pride Leading to His Fall

1. (:6a) Inquiry of the King Regarding Best Way to Honor Deserving Loyalist

*“So Haman came in and the king said to him,
‘What is to be done for the man whom the king desires to honor?’”*

2. (:6b) Immense Ego of Haman

*“And Haman said to himself,
‘Whom would the king desire to honor more than me?’”*

3. (:7-9) Ignorant Judgment Rendered by Haman

“Then Haman said to the king, ‘For the man whom the king desires to honor, 8 let them bring a royal robe which the king has worn, and the horse on which the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown has been placed; 9 and let the robe and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble princes and let them array the man whom the king desires to honor and lead him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him, ‘Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor.’”

David Thompson:

Suggestion #1 - Give the honoree a royal robe. **6:8a**

Suggestion #2 - Give the honoree a royal horse. **6:8b**

Suggestion #3 - Give the honoree a royal crown. **6:8c**

Suggestion #4 - Give the honoree a royal parade. **6:9**

John Martin: Haman did not need money (cf. **Es. 3:9**). He craved respect from his peers and from the population at large (cf. **5:11**). Even though he was fabulously wealthy and had more power than anyone outside the royal family (**3:1**), he wanted even more respect from the people of the city. Haman's lust for respect (from Mordecai) is what got him into trouble in the first place (cf. **3:2, 5; 5:9, 13**).

Laniak: Haman has made the equation between honor and royalty. His description of this ceremony uses the terms “king” (*melek*) or “royal” (*malkut*) eight times. Haman is so consumed with royal honor that some ancient commentators connect him with the attempted coup in **chapter 2**. It is also possible that such an extravagant parade was intended to be a succession ceremony (**1 Kgs. 1:33–40**). Apart from any conjecture, Haman's loyalty to the king is suspect. From a wisdom perspective, Haman is playing the part of the conceited fool whose blind ambition knows no boundaries.

C. (:10-11) Haman's Humiliation

1. (:10) Enduring Shame

“Then the king said to Haman, ‘Take quickly the robes and the horse as you have said, and do so for Mordecai the Jew, who is sitting at the

king's gate; do not fall short in anything of all that you have said.”

2. (:11) Eating His Words

“So Haman took the robe and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city square, and proclaimed before him, ‘Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor.’”

Duguid: Haman’s own words had come back to haunt him, and the phrase he had so delighted to pronounce must have tasted like ashes in his mouth by the end of a long day of shouting it in front of Mordecai. His dream day turned into his worst nightmare.

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. . .

In the Hebrew and Greek versions of the narrative, no words are exchanged between Mordecai and Haman. Indeed, none are needed. The situation itself speaks volumes without dialogue. Later Jewish tradition, however, could not help but heap more ignominy on Haman: according to Tg. Esth. I and b. Meg. 16a, as Haman led Mordecai through the streets, Haman’s daughter looked out a balcony window and thought that the splendidly accoutered man on the horse must be her father, and the inglorious figure leading him about must be Mordecai. To further abuse the Jew, she dumped a chamber pot on his head. When Haman looked up and reproached her, she was so shocked that she fell from the balcony and died.

McConville: Haman’s recklessly hopeful speech produces the best comic moment in the tale; though for the pretender himself it is pure tragedy. The naming of Mordecai (v. 10) as the recipient of the honours is a hammer blow to Haman’s perfect but fragile confidence. The blow is the more devastating because the honours were of his own concoction, and designed to be as glittering as he could imagine. Now he is instructed to “*leave out nothing that you have mentioned*”. And he is himself to be the mediator of the king’s goodwill to this hated enemy. Little wonder that the once-voluble Haman is now silent. He is struck dumb. We are left to imagine the numb shock slowly giving way to bitter shame and self-recrimination.

**III. (:12-14) PROVIDENCE SETS IN MOTION EVENTS THAT RAPIDLY ESCALATE OUT OF CONTROL --
HAMAN HEADED FOR HIS CERTAIN DEMISE**

A. (:12) Haman Hurries Home to Try to Rescue His Life

1. Mordecai Exalted

“Then Mordecai returned to the king's gate.”

Place of influence and power and prestige

2. Haman Humiliated

“But Haman hurried home, mourning, with his head covered.”

Everything is done in a hurry with a sense of urgency and desperation and Haman realizes that he is in deep trouble now that Mordecai has the upper hand with the king.

B. (:13) Haman Hurries to Obtain Counsel Regarding How to Salvage His Life

1. Seeking Counsel

“And Haman recounted to Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him.”

Quite the turn of events; things had not gone as planned!

2. Receiving Counsel

“Then his wise men and Zeresh his wife said to him, ‘If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish origin, you will not overcome him, but will surely fall before him.’”

Your doom is sealed.

Joyce Baldwin: Those who had so recently encouraged him to take vengeance now sensed a change of fortune and superstitiously recalled that no one ultimately prospered who plotted against the Jews.

C. (:14) Haman Hurries to Esther’s Banquet with No Viable Options for Escape

“While they were still talking with him, the king’s eunuchs arrived and hastily brought Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared.”

Haman is no longer in control of his own destiny. He is being driven along by forces outside of his control.

Whitcomb: His spirit crushed, Haman went to Esther’s second banquet as a sheep to the slaughter.

Laniak: Once more Haman is hurried (as in **5:5a; 6:10**) to an activity that puts him further out of control and makes him more vulnerable to the queen’s plans. Esther has moved from passive object to active subject; Haman is moving from active subject to passive object.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does Providence sometimes seem to be slow and passive and other times so rapid and active?
- 2) When has the Lord brought up something from your past and made it very impactful in the present?
- 3) What lessons do we learn here about the delayed rewards for faithful service?
- 4) How do people who by nature very controlling react when events rapidly roll over them and expose their lack of control?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Martin: Haman stands as a prototype of all anti-God activists who oppose God's people. Like authors of many short stories, God led the author of the Book of Esther to make his historical figures into symbols of much larger proportions. As the regathered nation read this account, they could have looked back over their history and noted other times when men had tried to set aside God's promises to their nation and had failed. They could therefore rest assured that in the future God would do the same. Even though God's people often disobeyed Him, even though they were often not spiritually or even physically where God wanted them to be, deliverance would come. God would so work in history that He would be vindicated and His people delivered.

Frederic Bush: Unable to sleep (**coincidence 1**), the king has the daily court record read, discovers therein that Mordecai had revealed the attempt to assassinate him (**coincidence 2**), and ascertains from his attendants that Mordecai has received no reward for this (**coincidence 3**). Though he apparently has decided that this must immediately be rectified, the king makes no decision on his own, as is his wont, but looks for counsel. Hence, the most remarkable of this set of remarkable coincidences occurs. He asks his attendants, "*Who is in the court?*" just as Haman is entering the outer court of the king's residence to ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on the gallows that he had prepared (**coincidence 4**). Learning of Haman's presence, the king orders him to be brought in and asks him what he should do to reward Mordecai, without, however, identifying him as the one to be honored (**coincidence 5**): "*What should be done with the man whom the king wishes to honor?*" A writer whose world view is that of the OT people of God (as so much else in the story has demonstrated is the case with the author of Esther) could only intend his readers to see the hand of divine providence in a series of events seemingly of such pure chance.

David Thompson:

There are times in all of our lives when we feel all alone and threatened, totally surrounded by people and circumstances that are ugly and problematic. When we are in

the midst of the trial or hardship, we can begin to forget that our God is still sovereign and He is working out all things for our good. I am totally convinced that when all is said and done, what appeared to us to be a problem or threat or hassle will wind up being used by God to make our lives beautiful. If ever there is a remarkable illustration of this, it is the book of Esther, and if ever there is a chapter in Esther that reveals this, it is Esther 6.

IN THE PERFECT TIMING OF GOD, HE WILL DELIVER HIS FAITHFUL PEOPLE WHO ARE SURROUNDED BY VARIOUS THREATS AND WILL SWIFTLY AND COMPLETELY DESTROY THOSE WHO ARE CAUSING THE PROBLEMS.

It is no coincidence that God stepped in “after” Esther decided to do what was right and “after” Haman decided to kill Mordecai. God wants His people to be obedient. He never does anything before the right time or behind the right time; He does everything in exactly the right time. The sovereignty of God must never become a crutch for disobedience or apathy. The doctrine of God’s sovereignty does not replace the doctrine of human responsibility. **H. A. Ironside** wrote: “It has been well said that although the name of God is not in this book, the hand of God is plainly to be seen throughout” (Ironside, p. 66). . .

There are many lessons to be learned from **Esther 6**:

- 1) Even when God’s people go beyond the borders of where God wants them to be, God is still with them and will care for them.
- 2) The King does not give royal honor to the proud, but to the humble.
- 3) Faithful, loyal service which may seem to be temporarily unnoticed will eventually be greatly rewarded.
- 4) Little episodes of faithfulness often lead to big moments of blessing.
- 5) When God honors the righteous, He also humbles their enemies.
- 6) God delivers His attacked servants in His perfect time and ways.
- 7) God is completely sovereign—He will reward those faithful and He will punish those wicked.

Karen Jobes: It is particularly appropriate for the pivot point of the peripety that reverses the expected outcome to occur at an ordinary and insignificant event in a book whose meta-message is about divine providence. God providentially directs the flow of human history through the ordinary lives of individuals to fulfill the promises of his covenant. What a great God we serve! Any deity worth his salt can do a miracle now and then. Our God is so great, so powerful, that he can work without miracles through the ordinary events of billions of human lives through millennia of time to accomplish his eternal purposes and ancient promises. God delivered an entire race of people in Persia because the king had a sleepless night, because a man would not bow to his superior, because a woman found herself taken to the bedroom of a ruthless man for a night of pleasure. How inscrutable are the ways of the Lord!

Tomasino: For most modern readers, this scene is the most comical moment of the Esther narrative. Our merriment is inspired by a situation that figures frequently in both ancient and modern tales: the humiliation of a self-important windbag. Haman has obviously brought his trouble upon himself, in his assuming that no one could be more deserving of honor than he. Furthermore, we get to see the hero receive the recognition he is due. And finally, Haman's comeuppance, in this scene, is relatively harmless. He is not killed or imprisoned, or even publicly flogged. The only thing that is truly injured is his pride. If this narrative were not part of a larger narrative, we could even imagine that Haman could have learned his lesson and gone on to become a more humble person and a better administrator, perhaps like Nebuchadnezzar in **Dan 4**.

But there is much more to the story. Haman is not a harmless blowhard; he is a man who is plotting the extermination of the entire Jewish race. The man he is forced to honor is not just some insignificant rival; he is a person whom Haman plans to execute. The story does not end with a wise moral, but with a dire warning: this is only the beginning of the downfall. This little excursus is amusing, but it should not divert us from the seriousness of the situation. Indeed, it may be seen as a brisk zephyr that presages a coming storm. One man shall rise, and another shall fall. We may laugh, but let us remember that God is not merely playing a joke—He is setting a trap. The book of Esther may be wickedly funny at times, but it is also deadly serious.

Duguid: This passage poses a serious warning to those who are not willing to bow the knee before God. Haman's fall was not predictable, humanly speaking. He seemed to have it all: fame, wealth, position, honor. Yet in the space of less than twenty-four hours, he was disgraced, and dead. How could this happen? Haman's wife and advisors were right in assessing the cause of that fall: it was because he had chosen to attack the seed of the Jews, and thereby to oppose Israel's God. Haman's fall may not have been humanly predictable, but it was scripturally predictable. God said to Abraham in **Genesis 12:3**, "*I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse.*" The blessing of the land was promised to Abraham and his seed (**Gen. 13:15–16**), so to oppose the seed of the Jews was necessarily to make oneself an enemy of God's promise. This enmity was what had brought the Amalekites, from whom Haman was descended, under God's curse in the first place. Back in **Exodus 17**, they assaulted God's people while they were journeying through the wilderness. Once that curse was pronounced, the Amalekites' ultimate fate was sealed.

Is it possible that we too are under God's curse? The Scriptures are clear that anyone who breaks God's law, even in the tiniest detail, is under God's curse (**Gal. 3:10**). This means that if we are relying on our own goodness, we are in serious trouble, even if we think our personal record is well above average. Even outward goodness stands condemned in God's sight, if it is done to further our own honor and not his. Nothing short of perfect obedience offered from a perfect heart meets God's standard, and all who fall short are under his curse. Outwardly, the marks of that curse may not be evident in our lives yet. We may be prospering in our business or career, surrounded by people who care about us and respect our integrity, enjoying the good life in every way, just as Haman was. But the seeds of our destruction are still germinating, like a hidden

cancer that is waiting to burst out and overwhelm our body's defenses. Our whole life has been built around serving an idolatry, feeding our own sense of what would make us feel honored in the sight of the world. Our fall could be just as sudden and as inescapable as Haman's, taking us from our present comforts to face a holy God in an instant. Are we ready for such an encounter?

Unlike Haman, we still have time to turn around. Whereas Haman had no sooner heard the prediction of his downfall than the king's eunuchs arrived and hurried him off to meet his fate, we still have time to reflect and repent. Where can we turn to avoid such a terrible end? There is only one place to go, and that is to turn to Israel's God and Jesus Christ, the true "*seed of the Jews*." Mordecai's honor before his enemies was more than just his reward from the Persian king for a job well done. It was also God's way of foreshadowing the Savior who was to come. The promise to Abraham of land and blessing was not just a general promise to take care of his descendants—his seeds (plural)—but a promise of ultimately bringing through Abraham the Seed (singular): Jesus Christ (see **Gal. 3:16**). In him, the blessings promised to Abraham would find their fulfillment not only for the descendants of Abraham, but even for their traditional enemies, the Gentiles. In Christ, the promised Holy Spirit descends on a new people made up of Jews and Gentiles so that they might receive together all of the blessings that God has planned for his people (**Gal. 3:14**). In Christ, there is hope even for former Hamans, those whose lives have been lived in enmity to God and his people.

TEXT: Esther 7:1-10

TITLE: *HAMAN'S LAST SUPPER – HANG HIM HIGH*

BIG IDEA:

**THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD LEVERAGES DIVINE APPOINTMENTS,
PROTECTS GOD'S PEOPLE AND DESTROYS GOD'S FOES**

INTRODUCTION:

The pattern of reversals continues in this next banquet narrative. Once again the dynamic interaction of the sovereignty of God and human responsibility and initiative are in play. Esther can no longer remain silent and hide her Jewish identity. “*For such a time as this*” she must intercede before the king. We are dealing here with dramatic issues of life and death – both of individuals and of nations. How ironic that Haman ends up being executed on the very device he had just erected to put Mordecai to death. Now the tension mounts as to how these events will lead to the rescuing not just of the life of Esther but the fate of her fellow Jews as well.

John Schultz: Esther’s timing was perfect. As observed before, the fact that she postponed her request one more day heightened the expectations. It was clear that she had something in mind that was of great importance. The fact that the king had accepted her invitation guaranteed that her request would be granted.

Karen Jobes: This scene is about who gets life and who does not. Both Esther and Haman plead for their lives in this chapter. Neither is in control of their respective destinies. Both are caught up in a complicated web of intrigue that has taken on a life of its own. Esther’s destiny lies with that of her people. Haman’s destiny overtakes him like a thief in the night.

The scene is steeped in irony. Consider how the entire conflict between Haman and the Jewish people begins when Mordecai the Jew dishonors Haman the Agagite by refusing to fall before him. In his final scene, Haman falls before a Jew (and a Jewish woman at that!), whom he has unknowingly condemned to death, to plead with her for his life! On the couch of this Jewish queen he “falls” all the way from his exalted position as second over the empire to an ignominious death as a traitor. The enemy of the Jews is executed for being an enemy of the king. This sudden reversal of expected outcomes gives Haman’s story a tragic irony. All of a person’s best laid plans can in an instant be turned to produce the opposite of the intent. It is especially ironic when that person has all the power of a great empire behind him and when his downfall begins with something as insignificant as someone’s night of insomnia.

Breneman: These proverbs teach by expressing contrasts, which the author of Esther frequently used: Haman celebrated, but the people were bewildered (3:15); Esther and Mordecai fasted, but then Esther invited the king and Haman to a banquet (4:15; 5:4);

Haman expected honor, but Mordecai received that honor, and Haman was humiliated (6:11–12); Haman schemed to execute Mordecai, but he himself was condemned.

McConville: The demise of Haman now quickly ensues. The fatal blows have been struck, and the reader awaits the villain’s exposure and come-uppance. Once again, of course, the characters involved know less than we do. The king still does not know that his queen is a Jewess, and Esther cannot know how he will take the news. Nor is she aware, it seems, of Mordecai’s advancement and therefore of the turning tide. Haman remains as oblivious as the king, presumably, both to Esther’s Jewishness and her close relationship with Mordecai. He may yet have hopes, therefore, of salvaging some honour for himself following his humiliation -- which was known to be such only to himself and his closest associates -- in the Mordecai affair. The stage is set for revelations.

I. (:1-4) PROVIDENCE LEVERAGES DIVINE APPOINTMENTS ON A GRAND SCALE

A. (:1) Intimate Setting for Divinely Planned Interaction

“Now the king and Haman came to drink wine with Esther the queen.”

Quite an intimate and privileged gathering. Lots of wine flowing.

B. (:2) Invitation to Make Request on a Grand Scale

“And the king said to Esther on the second day also as they drank their wine at the banquet, ‘What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be done.’”

Hyperbole but very generous

C. (:3-4) Issue = Life vs. Death – Both Personal and Ethnic

1. (:3) Dramatic Request

“Then Queen Esther answered and said, ‘If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me as my petition, and my people as my request;’”

Duguid: Esther also backed up her request with reasons. Why was her petition to the king necessary? It was necessary because she and her people had been sold to be destroyed, killed, and annihilated. Here Esther is simply quoting verbatim from the royal edict. If it had merely been a matter of enslavement, she said, she would not have brought it up at all. Esther was well aware that for Ahasuerus the empire’s needs trumped issues of mere personal freedom. There was no constitutional right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in the Persian Empire. Indeed, there is a sharp irony in this sentence, since in a manner of speaking being sold as a female slave was precisely what had happened to her personally. She herself had been enslaved as the personal toy of the king. This was not the issue she was protesting, however. Of course

the king's personal interests would far outweigh any such small injustices. To this point, the king was nodding happily along in agreement with Esther! Her logic appealed to him thus far. But genocide, said the queen, especially a genocide that may very well involve her personal death, is a different story altogether.

2. (:4) Desperate Request

“for we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed and to be annihilated. Now if we had only been sold as slaves, men and women, I would have remained silent, for the trouble would not be commensurate with the annoyance to the king.”

Tomasino: Esther's statement, *“We have been sold,”* is certainly a reference to the money that Haman paid to the king for the Jews' destruction (**Esth 3:9; 4:7**), though it is also reminiscent of the language used in **Deut 32:30**, which states that Israel could not be put to flight by a single individual unless their *“Rock”* had sold them. Esther is making ready to implicate Haman in the conspiracy against the Jews, but the narrator may be taking an opportunity to remind his readers of the real reason Israel finds itself in this predicament: it is not only Haman who has *“sold”* them, but Yahweh. **Berlin** (66) also sees here an echo of the story of Joseph, who was sold by his brothers. It should also be noted that it was often the fate of adulteresses to be sold into slavery (**Isa 50:1; Hos 3:1–2**). Esther announcing that she had been sold would have mortified the king, since the imagery would have cast him in the role of a cuckold. . .

In short, then, we should understand the bulk of Esther's appeal here to be a request for her people to be spared, but couched in terms of the king's financial interests. The Jews have been sold, but not as slaves. Presumably they would have brought market value in the slave trade, and the king would have benefitted handsomely. But they have been sold simply to be destroyed, and the compensation the king received (grand though it was) was not sufficient to offset the loss of revenue from tribute, gifts, and labor that the king would receive from allowing the Jews to live.

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 (v. 4; cf. **Gen. 37:28, 36; 45:4**).

II. (:5-7) PROVIDENCE PROTECTS GOD'S PEOPLE IN SURPRISING WAYS

A. (:5) Identification Demanded

*“Then King Ahasuerus asked Queen Esther,
‘Who is he, and where is he, who would presume to do thus?’”*

Chi Alpha Christian Fellowship: The king's response is astonishing; the English translation cannot come close to disclosing the amount of emotion, anger, and rage

conveyed when he commands Esther to reveal who this man may be. Things continue to crescendo as Esther matches the king's emotion and boldly declares, "*The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman!*" (**Esther 7:6**). "Brilliantly, she left out Haman's identity in verse 3 so she could put a bow and arrow in Xerxes' hands before she pointed him toward the target. Had he known from the beginning that the culprit was his own right hand man; the king might have protected him. What could he do but follow through?" (**Beth Moore**) Once again, we see Esther's great wisdom as she uses the perfect place, time, audience, and words to deliver the truth. This day could have resulted in disaster just as easily as triumph. Esther put her life on the line again at this banquet hoping, praying, and believing the king would be favorable to her over Haman and he was. Her moment arrived and she did not hesitate to reveal the truth.

Laniak: Esther articulates her request with clear resolve. She is asking the king to make a critical choice between his queen and his prime minister. Her request is crisp, and she delivers an accusation without so much as hinting at the king's complicity. Like Nathan with David, she elicits the king's anger before identifying the culprit (**2 Sam. 12:1–6**). Once Xerxes hears of this unnamed threat to herself and her people (compare **3:8**), he is agitated (indicated by the Hebrew syntax) into demanding details: "*Who is he? Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?*" Without hesitation, she answers (with similar staccato in Hebrew), "*The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman*" (**v. 6**). Her enemy is now his enemy and thus The Enemy.

B. (:6) Indictment Leveled

1. Characterization of Wicked Haman

"And Esther said, 'A foe and an enemy, is this wicked Haman!'"

- "foe" -- A traitor to the king
- An "enemy" to the Jews

2. Cowering of Terrified Haman

"Then Haman became terrified before the king and queen."

Breneman: Esther's answer was short and exact, "*This vile Haman.*" She made her case as strong and clear as possible. By announcing Haman as the guilty person, she revealed her Jewishness. Haman must have felt doomed immediately because he realized he had not condemned to death just a people from another land, for that had never bothered him. What was troubling was that the king's favorite wife also was a Jew. This would be certain trouble for Haman. "Haman was terrified," and he had every right to be afraid for his life. His plots and lies had now been uncovered by the one who had more power than he, the king.

C. (:7) Implications Drive Various Responses

1. Implications Drive the Response of the King

"And the king arose in his anger from drinking wine and went into the palace garden;"

Karen Jobes: Esther's words send Xerxes into an enraged quandary that drives him out of the banquet room and into the garden. In his commentary, **M. Fox** reads the questions circulating in Xerxes' mind: "Can he punish Haman for a plot he himself approved? If he does so, won't he have to admit his own role in the fiasco [and lose face]? Moreover, he has issued an irrevocable law; how then can he rescind it?"¹ The king's dilemma will soon be resolved by Haman's further folly.

Tomasino: Surely, the king has had adequate cause to be enraged. Earlier, his anger flared when Queen Vashti refused to appear before him. Now, it appears that someone is trying to deprive him of his current queen—and that someone is his trusted advisor, Haman. Torn between loyalty to his wife and the vizier that he himself appointed, the king feels a need to retreat before investigating the matter further. **Clines** notes that the king's first instinct when faced with the dilemma is to flee. He is not a decisive man, and does not commit himself to a course of action without input from his advisors. But now, it is his chief advisor who stands accused. From whom can he seek counsel?

McConville: The king's first instinct in the wrath that he feels following the accusation of his Prime Minister is to take a walk in his garden! Is this a likely response? He may well have been somewhat confused, of course. Certainly, he was involved in a far more complicated situation than he had anticipated when the party began the day before. Who was more dispensable, queen or Prime Minister? If these questions were in his mind when he went off for his stroll they were quickly answered on his return. The sight of Haman "*falling on the couch where Esther was*"—no doubt reclining—looked like the kind of advance towards his queen which under the harem (understood as an abstract idea, namely the prohibition of all approach to the king's wives) was absolutely taboo. (The word used by the king and translated "*assault*", v. 8, has the overtones of a sexual attack.) As if this were not enough (though the immediate covering of Haman's face, v. 8, as of a criminal, suggests that it was), Xerxes discovers in the next moment that the villain also harbours hostility against his benefactor, Mordecai. The only offences which King Xerxes recognizes, therefore, are offences against himself.

2. Implications Drive the Response of Haman

*"but Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther,
for he saw that harm had been determined against him by the king."*

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.

III. (:8-10) PROVIDENCE DESTROYS GOD'S FOES IN IRONIC FASHION

A. (:8a) Inappropriate Conduct – Governed by Providence

1. Compromised Position

“Now when the king returned from the palace garden into the place where they were drinking wine, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was.”

Laniak: Irony gives way to slapstick when the king returns to find what he identifies (perhaps conveniently) as attempted rape.

Breneman: In this verse the character of the three protagonists is brought out. Haman was a prideful man with a cowardly heart. The king was easily influenced and weak in spite of his appearance of power. Esther was courageous and steadfast.

2. Convenient Narrative

“Then the king said, ‘Will he even assault the queen with me in the house?’”

Chi Alpha Fellowship: The king may have already been jealous since Esther kept inviting Haman to banquet. . . He knew Haman had eyes and could see how beautiful Esther was, already probably jealous, it was the final straw. Moreover, in that culture no man is to be left alone with any woman in the harem except the king, and Haman also violated a cultural rule.

Tomasino: The meaning of the verb כָּבַשׁ (*kābaš*) in this context has been disputed. Its basic meaning is “to subdue” or “subjugate.” In this verse, it is usually understood to mean “rape.” It has been argued, however, that Haman certainly had no intention of attacking the queen, so perhaps the word here refers rather to the violation of court protocol, of simply coming too close to the queen (**Bardtke**, 359). But though Haman had no intention of violating Esther, the fact that Xerxes emphasizes that the offense was occurring in his presence implies that he interpreted the scene as more than a mere proximity breach. One might even wonder if Xerxes deliberately misinterpreted the scene, in order to simplify his decision regarding Haman’s fate (**Bush**, 433). While it would have been difficult for Xerxes to condemn Haman for attempting to execute a decree issued in the king’s name, he could certainly execute him for attempted rape of the queen.

B. (:8b) Inexcusable Conduct – Governed by Providence

“As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.”

No hope left for Haman; he is now being prepared for execution

Whitcomb: The ancients sometimes covered the heads of those about to be executed.

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown: The import of this striking action is, that a criminal is unworthy any longer to look on the face of the king, and hence, when malefactors are

consigned to their doom in Persia, the first thing is to cover the face with a veil or napkin.

C. (:9) Impulsive Condemnation of Haman – Governed by Providence

1. Suggestion of Available Instrument of Execution

“Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs who were before the king said, ‘Behold indeed, the gallows standing at Haman's house fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai who spoke good on behalf of the king!’”

MacArthur: Haman heard the third capital offense charged against him.

- One, he manipulated the king in planning to kill the queen’s people.
- Two, he was perceived to accost the queen.
- Three, he planned to execute a man whom the king had just greatly honored for extreme loyalty to the kingdom.

Tomasino: As is typical of the unimaginative monarch, Xerxes needs help to decide how to respond to the problem of Haman’s treachery. Once the suggestion is made, Xerxes agrees to it readily.

2. Simple Solutions are the Best Solutions

“And the king said, ‘Hang him on it.’”

Tomasino: As **Berlin** (66) notes, it is in keeping with the comedy of this story that that the villain is condemned for crimes that he did not commit (swindle and rape). Indeed, Haman has committed no crime worthy of death, in terms of the law: his decree was approved by the king.

D. (:10) Ironic Execution of Haman – Governed by Providence

1. Subverting of the Intentions of Haman

“So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai,”

2. Satisfaction of the King’s Anger

“and the king's anger subsided.”

Tomasino: With the vizier executed, the king’s anger abates. The wording is reminiscent of **2:1**, where the king’s wrath against Vashti abated. In **chapter 1**, the flaring of the king’s anger led to the removal of the queen; when it abated, he chose a new queen. In this chapter, his wrath meant the removal of Haman. The abating of Xerxes’ wrath signals the coming of Haman’s replacement, which will occur in the next chapter.

Duguid: With that the king’s fury abated. Game over. Issue resolved. Threat to Esther removed. “Now that we’ve taken care of that little unpleasantness, what’s for supper?” we can imagine Ahasuerus saying casually to Esther. Except that from Esther’s

perspective, it was far from over. Even though Haman personally had been dealt with, his edict still remained out there, like a ticking time bomb, just waiting to explode and destroy the Jews. Esther herself might be safe, guarded within the king's palace, but that wasn't what she had gone through this whole routine to achieve. At this point, she must still have wondered if she would be able to achieve her goal of rescuing her people.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How many specific instances of irony can you find in this passage and what is the divine purpose for employing so much irony?
- 2) Should Esther have shown compassion for Haman and interceded on his behalf with the king since he was falsely accused of attacking her?
- 3) How can you make a difference in the areas of influence you have for godliness, and how can you better reflect Christ in all you do?
- 4) How is your view of the legitimacy of the death penalty impacted by the fact that sometimes people are executed who are innocent or falsely accused?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Duguid: In this chapter, we see the interplay between **human responsibility** and **divine sovereignty**. Esther's intricate plan was a necessary part of the process of bringing Haman to justice, a plan that required a combination of subtlety, boldness, and strength to carry it through. Yet Esther's plan by itself was not what turned around the fortunes of God's people. The writer of the story has shown us this by making the king's sleepless night the hinge on which the whole story turns. Prior to that point at the beginning of **chapter 6**, the fortunes of the Jews were heading steadily downhill. From that moment on, though, their prospects were transformed. The key event thus had nothing to do with Esther or Mordecai, but instead was a seemingly insignificant detail in which the hidden hand of providence may be discerned—though only with careful hindsight. Isn't that so often how it is in life? The intricate plans we lay can never come to fruition without God's providential blessing upon them. As **Psalm 127:1** puts it, *"Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain."*

This chapter shows us the complementary aspect of that truth, however, which is that unless the builders labor, there won't be much of a house! It is thus significant that the pivotal chapter in the book, from which Esther is entirely absent, is bracketed by two chapters that show her diligently using all of the means at her disposal to bring about

her desired end. God's sovereign act is the turning point, but God works through the faithful efforts of his people, just as much as through remarkable providences.

Ray Stedman: Haman's Last Supper

There are three steps here which I will take briefly. In these we come to the climax of the story of Esther. How is the king at last delivered from the chicanery, subtlety, and casuistry of this man Haman? How, at last, does he finally learn the truth? There are three steps: First of all we have, the **revelation of evil: vv. 1-6a.**

Haman, the friend, is revealed as Haman, the traitor, the enemy, the double-dealing foe! And when we see this it is almost always followed by a **conflict within: v. 7**

There is only one way out. The only possible escape from Haman's tyranny, the only real deliverance, is to pronounce the **sentence of death: vv. 8-10.**

David Thompson:

In the O.T. God makes a remarkable promise to His people Israel: "*I will bless those who bless you and will curse those who curse you*" (**Gen. 12:3**).

In the N.T. God makes a similar promise to His people in the Church: "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord*" (**Rom. 12:19**).

In both of these passages, God is promising to personally intervene and punish the enemies of God's people. Those who turn against God's people never last long for God always keeps His Word; He blesses those who bless His people and He curses those who curse His people and if ever there was a prime example of this principle, it is the example of Haman.

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.

ENEMIES OF GOD'S PEOPLE WILL EVENTUALLY BE EXPOSED AND ELIMINATED.

Haman was a vicious enemy of God's people and he was eventually fully exposed and fully eliminated. Now this exposure and this elimination did not just happen by osmosis. God used His faithful people, who were willing to lay their own lives on the line, to accomplish His objective. There was certainly God's sovereignty involved, but there was also human responsibility. Mordecai and Esther took the right stand and the right time and Haman was destroyed.

Esther 7 is a remarkable study of Haman's exposure and elimination.

Brian Borgman: Then I Understood Their End

Psalm 73 – psalmist struggles with the prosperity of the wicked; troubling issue; his heart began to be envious of the wicked; they never seemed to suffer any hardship; it looks like I am serving God and walking in faithfulness for nothing; **vs. 17** is key - - *“then I perceived their end”*

Great Reversal Chapter – demonstration of God’s Providence; 2 paragraphs to the chapter:

vv. 1-6 Esther reveals her identity and Haman’s evil plan

vv. 7-10 Haman experiences justice;

Haman is evil; the enemy of God’s people; yet promoted and prospered and honored and praised even by the king and people bowed down to him

Psalmist goes into the sanctuary, the house of God, the presence of God and is reoriented; so that now he understands what will happen to the wicked

Humor of **Chap. 6** should just make you laugh; to laugh at the wicked can be a sanctifying experience

Haman preoccupied with coming doom at the banquet

Esther has now bound her life up with the life of her people; a solidarity

Here’s my petition; here’s my request – uses the exact words of the edict = “destroyed, killed, annihilated” -- Emotion oozes out

Vs. 4 is difficult; Esther letting the king know that his interests are her interests; how could my queen’s life be in danger? Who would do such a thing? “This wicked Haman – a foe and an enemy” – the Hebrew is more abrupt than the English translation’ Probably points her finger and Haman starts to choke on his wine; probably wet his tunic

Haman realizes in this single moment that he has come to an end; totally terrified; realizes now that Esther is a Jew

King leaves the room – not to cool off; Duguid said king was troubled by issue of his own reputation; he had authorized this edict; how could he now punish Haman for promulgating an edict he had personally ratified; going thru political machinations

Compromising position; violation of royal court protocol to get that close to the queen; king walks in and draws the wrong conclusion; or sees the opportunity for a convenient charge against Haman; Esther doesn’t speak up to clarify; she lets the king continue in his perception

Application: Christians in our country are really soft when it comes to wickedness – you hear objections like the following:

- I don't know Haman's heart . . .
- Even David was a sinner . . .
- Aren't we all sinners . . .

There is such a thing as degrees of sin and degrees of punishment; don't level the playing field so that all wickedness is equal (even though all have sinned, etc.); some wickedness transcends the ordinary bounds of human sin and is so vile that we should have a somber sense of satisfaction when God acts in justice; if we don't see the wickedness of Haman it is because we don't see the holiness of God; Haman wanted to kill all Jewish men, women and children

Prov. 11:10

Frederic Bush: As for the chronological question, it is not at all impossible that the events recorded in vv 1–8 could have taken place at the conclusion of the day that began in 6:1 with the king's insomnia. The events of the day would have been the following:

1. During the late night/early morning, the king asks Haman, who has arrived to request the king to hang Mordecai, what he should do for the man whom he desires to honor, since the king has just learned that Mordecai's report of the assassination attempt has gone without reward. Haman, thinking that the king is referring to him, describes what he should do for such a man. The king commands him to do such for Mordecai (6:1–10).
2. Later that morning Haman so honors Mordecai. Mordecai returns to the royal court. Haman goes home and complains to his wife and friends, and they proclaim that his doom is certain. Just then the king's servants arrive and bring Haman in haste to Esther's banquet (6:11–14).
3. In the early afternoon Esther's second banquet takes place, at the end of which, during the wine course, Haman's perfidy is discovered, and the king condemns him to execution (7:1–9).
4. That afternoon Haman is executed (7:10).
5. In the late afternoon/early evening the king gives to Esther the property of Haman. Esther informs the king of all that Mordecai is to her. Mordecai is admitted to the king's presence. The king gives him his signet ring, and Esther places him over Haman's property (8:1–2).
6. Later that evening Esther appeals again to the king on behalf of her people. Consequently, the king gives her and Mordecai permission to issue whatever edict they please concerning the Jews (8:3–8).

Karen Jobes: While inviting us to reflect on the question of who gets life and who does not, the author of Esther reveals the nature and destiny of human evil and the mysterious workings of divine justice.

Human evil, wherever it occurs and for whatever motivation, always sets itself against God, because God is the definition of goodness and righteousness. Divine justice

inevitably and inextricably means the destruction of evil. The author of Esther shows that evil is personal. It is not some ethereal substance “out there”; evil does not exist apart from beings who are evil. Therefore, in order to deliver the Jewish people from annihilation as God promised in his covenant with them, God necessarily had to destroy the evil that threatened their existence. In this case that evil came in the person of Haman. Mercy on Haman would have been inconsistent with God’s covenant.

Nevertheless, Haman’s death illustrates that the divinely appointed path to destruction is a path that proceeds step-by-step from the will of the wicked person. There is perhaps no better biblical illustration than Haman of the truth stated by the great Christian theologian **John Calvin**, “Man falls according as God’s providence ordains, but he falls by his own fault.”

If God’s deliverance of his people in the book of Esther is by providence, so also is Haman’s destruction. Deliverance of one and destruction of the other are correlative in the book of Esther, shown as two sides of the same coin. Yet even though the deliverance providentially orchestrated by God necessarily implies the destruction of Haman, the author shows that Haman is responsible for each step that leads to his own death, even while mistakenly thinking he is safe in his power, wealth, and prestige.

Haman’s example shows that human evil is self-deceptive. It allows evildoers to believe themselves justified in their evil actions and clever enough not to get caught in their own web. Haman had all the resources of the empire on his side as he schemed and plotted—power, prestige, wealth—but it all came to nothing because of that one unforeseen, unpredictable night of the king’s insomnia. We have all read well-written mysteries of the “perfect” murder that is finally solved by some chance event the murderer could never have foreseen or prevented. People sin with the delusion that while others may get caught, they will not.

Evil is also self-deceptive because while it appears to provide well-being and safety, it feeds off impulses that blind us to the truth. Haman’s true, precarious situation was veiled to him by the darkness of his own thinking. The truth he could not see was that while he thought he was prescribing his own honor, it was really Mordecai’s (**6:6–9**). He constructed a gallows of colossal size, thinking it was for Mordecai, but in reality it turned out to be his own (**5:14**). Haman boasted to his friends of being honored by being invited alone to the queen’s banquet, not realizing the truth that it was an invitation to his own execution. For Haman, things were actually not what they appeared to be, even while he himself was doing them. Suddenly, without warning, the true destiny of human evil is revealed: destruction by the long-promised justice of God. On the final judgment day when the truth is revealed, the condemned will finally realize that they have no one to blame but themselves.

Tomasino: The most interesting theological issue in this section concerns the interaction of divine and human initiative. We have observed already how the hidden hand of providence created the reversals that the Jews have experienced in this narrative. Esther’s elevation to queenship, Mordecai’s overhearing the plot against the king, the

king's sleepless night and the reading of Mordecai's loyalty in the royal chronicles—all these acts appear to be the machinations of a secret providence. In this section, however, Esther's intellect and people skills come to the fore. Like Joseph, she has been placed in a situation where she has access to a foreign king, and she will use that access to bring deliverance to her people. Like Moses, she is in a remarkable position to save the children of Israel from a dark fate. But unlike either Joseph or Moses, Esther has no miraculous powers or divine insights. There is no indication in the text that she received any supernatural guidance in her planning. Instead, she relies wholly on her own cleverness to achieve her ends. In this regard, she is no different from the wise woman of Abel (**2 Sam 20**), from Judith, or even from the midwives Shiphrah and Puah, who rescued the Israelite infants from Pharaoh. There is a well-established tradition of Israelite women using their wits to overcome power.

It has long been recognized that such human-divine interaction is a main theme of Esther: God creates opportunities, but Esther must act upon them (see, e.g., **Burrows**, 140; **Clines**, 268–71). It is a pattern that God repeats throughout Scripture, and throughout history. While Yahweh initiates the work of deliverance, there is also the human response required. God will part the Red Sea, but Moses must raise the staff. God will destroy the walls of Jericho, but the Israelites must blow the horns. God sends Jesus Christ to make the way of salvation, but humanity must still respond by placing faith in Him.

TEXT: Esther 8:1-17

TITLE: *THE SURPRISING IMPACT OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE*

BIG IDEA:
THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD TRANSFORMS DESPERATION INTO DELIGHT IN SURPRISING WAYS

INTRODUCTION:

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.

Duguid: It was that great baseball philosopher Yogi Berra who came up with the memorable slogan, "It ain't over till it's over." It was, perhaps, Yogi's own version of the more highbrow saying, "The opera isn't over till the fat lady sings"—which anyone who has ever endured a full-length Wagnerian opera will recognize as a fairly accurate plot summary.

So too, this biblical soap opera, *The Days of Esther's Life*, is not yet at its conclusion. Many issues have been resolved already. The villainous Haman has met his comeuppance—literally, with the aid of his own seventy-five foot pole. Esther and Mordecai also receive their reward at the beginning of **Esther 8**, in the shape of Haman's confiscated estate and a promotion for Mordecai. . . . However, Haman's edict to exterminate the Jews had not yet been reversed: it was still hanging over their heads like the proverbial sword of Damocles. Perhaps it would yet turn out that the laws of the Medes and the Persians really could not be changed, and all of Esther's efforts would have been wasted. Much still hangs in the balance at this point in the story.

Breneman: With Haman out of the way, Esther requested that the Jews be spared of the approaching massacre. Since the king was unable to overturn an official edict, he made another edict authorizing the Jews to defend themselves against anyone who would attack them. Because of Esther, the Jews now had hope for deliverance.

Constable: Even though Haman was now dead, the Jews were not yet safe. This section of the text records what Esther and Mordecai did to ensure the preservation of the Jews who then lived throughout the vast Persian Empire. The death of Haman is not the major climax of the book.

[Outline of 4 major points inspired by breakdown by **David Strain**]

I. (:1-2) THE SURPRISING REWARDS BESTOWED BY THE KING

A. (:1a) Surprising Reward of Property -- Ownership of Haman's Property Granted to Esther

“On that day King Ahasuerus gave the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther;”

Tomasino: In ancient Persia, betrayal of the king meant not only loss of life, but loss of property. . . So with Haman dead, the ownership of his estate would have been transferred to Xerxes, who could dispose of it however he saw fit. In a rare case of personal initiative, the king decides to bestow it on Esther, either to compensate her for her grief, or to demonstrate his royal favor.

B. (:1b-2) Surprising Reward of Power -- Leadership Authority Granted to Mordecai

“and Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had disclosed what he was to her. And the king took off his signet ring which he had taken away from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai.”

Tomasino: Mordecai's promotion here might support the theory presented above regarding Mordecai's refusal to bow before Haman (see commentary on **3:1**)—that Mordecai refused to bow because he felt Haman had received the promotion unjustly, and that it should have been his. In that case, Xerxes' elevation of Mordecai would simply be righting the wrong that had led to all the unpleasantness in the first place.

C. (:2b) Surprising Reward of Prestige -- Stewardship of Haman's Property Granted to Mordecai

“And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.”

Tomasino: In yet another interesting reversal, Esther bestows mastery of Haman's property on Mordecai. The act demonstrates her growth as a character: when she is introduced to the audience, she is an orphan, taken in by Mordecai. Now, she serves as his benefactor.

Frederic Bush: She begins by informing the king of all that Mordecai is to her (**v 1b**), which probably implies not just the fact of their blood relationship but the quality of that relationship (cf. **2:7, 10–11, 20**) and of Mordecai's character. As a result, Mordecai fully assumes Haman's position as the grand vizier. First, like Haman (**6:4**), he is admitted to the status of those who have access to the king without a specific summons (**v 1b**). Then the king gives him his signet ring, which he had taken away from Haman (**v 2a; cf. 3:10**), thus transferring to him the power to act with the king's full authority that was previously Haman's (cf. **3:12c; 8:8**). Finally, Esther appoints him to be the administrator of Haman's property (**v 2b**), thus giving him the resources appropriate to his new status. It is important to note that this is all effected by Esther. It is because she informs the king of all that Mordecai is to her that he is admitted into the royal presence and made vizier in Haman's place (he had already been rewarded for saving the king's

life, 6:1–11). It is she who appoints him over Haman’s estate. This, then, is all part of her preparations for dealing with Haman’s edict, for Mordecai’s position and power as vizier will play a critical role in nullifying that threat.

II. (:3-8) THE SURPRISING REQUEST GRANTED BY THE KING

A. (:3-6) Critical Appeal to the King

1. (:3) Emotional Appeal

“Then Esther spoke again to the king, fell at his feet, wept, and implored him to avert the evil scheme of Haman the Agagite and his plot which he had devised against the Jews.”

Chi Alpha Christian Fellowship: Despite this massive power shift and the acquisition of wealth unimaginable, Esther does not lose her focus or forget the reason she was brought to the palace in the first place. Esther knows that there is still a death warrant standing for her whole people. And she falls to her knees in desperation and humility:

Tomasino: Apparently, however, Esther is not actually seeking another audience; she never left the king’s presence in the first place. The text does not say that she “came before” the king, but merely “*spoke before*” the king. The plea she presents here occurs on the same day as her banquet with the king and Haman. Very likely, there has been a change of location back to the throne room; it seems unlikely that the king would have taken his golden scepter to the queen’s banquet. But there is no reason not to assume this episode is a continuation of the appeal made at the banquet.

2. (:4) Favorable Appeal

*“And the king extended the golden scepter to Esther.
So Esther arose and stood before the king.”*

F. B. Huey Jr.: Some commentators (e.g. **Paton**) assume that Esther risked her life a second time to come uninvited into the king’s presence, because the king again extended his scepter to her (cf. 4:11; 5:1-2). However, the scepter was extended only after her emotional plea and not at the moment of her entrance before the king. Therefore his gesture was intended to encourage her to rise from her prostrate position before continuing to speak.

3. (:5) Legal Appeal

“Then she said, ‘If it pleases the king and if I have found favor before him and the matter seems proper to the king and I am pleasing in his sight, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the king's provinces.’”

Duguid: Esther prefaced her request with a long preamble in four parts . . . Two of these clauses dealt with whether the matter to be discussed was acceptable to the king, while the other two asked whether Esther herself was acceptable. These two themes were

inextricably linked, for the only real reason for the king to grant her request was his favor toward her. Esther made no reference to right and wrong, justice and injustice. Those were not categories that registered with the empire. All she could do was to appeal to Ahasuerus's own self-interest, as it related to her.

4. (:6) Personal Appeal

“For how can I endure to see the calamity which shall befall my people, and how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?”

Tomasino: Should the legal appeal fail, Esther adds a personal appeal. The destruction of her people would be an unbearable tragedy for the queen herself. If the king truly loves her, would he not desire to spare her such heartache? He has already stated by his actions that she has “found favor in his eyes.” Even if he cares nothing for the Jews, he cannot deny that he cares for her.

B. (:7-8) Calculated Approval Granted by the King

1. (:7) Direct Action -- Haven't I Done Enough Already?

“So King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, ‘Behold, I have given the house of Haman to Esther, and him they have hanged on the gallows because he had stretched out his hands against the Jews.’”

2. (:8) Delegated Action -- You and Mordecai Complete What is Necessary

“Now you write to the Jews as you see fit, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring; for a decree which is written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's signet ring may not be revoked.”

Tomasino: King Xerxes, as usual, is unwilling to take any action personally. The use of the personal pronoun “you” (אַתָּה, *’attem*) here is redundant, and certainly emphatic. The king is definitively washing his hands of the matter, delegating it to his queen and new prime minister. One frequently suggested explanation for his reluctance to be involved is that he does not want to be forced into a situation where he will be required to override his own orders. This explanation seems unlikely, however, since the king allows the decree to be written in his own name. A more likely scenario, it seems, is that he simply does not want to be bothered with the problem of reversing an irrevocable decree. I have noted several times that this Xerxes is unable to make a decision on his own, depending on his counselors and even his attendants (as in **7:9**) to help determine his course of action. **Berlin** (75) further observes that Esther and Mordecai are cast fully in the role of the heroes. It is they who deliver the Jews, not the Persian king.

McConville: Esther now pleads as only she can. The king shows that he is basically well disposed to whatever she might ask by extending the sceptre, perhaps simply indicating this time that she need not prostrate herself to address him (as she has done, **v. 3**). Yet, knowing that she asks the unaskable, she goes on to stir a mix of flattery and coyness (**v. 5**) which must have been irresistible. (Notice the alternation of phrases

which emphasize the king's right to do as he wishes with phrases which draw attention to Esther's desire to please him, v. 5a.) She then comes to the point (vv. 5b, 6) and secures what the king evidently regards as the best deal he can offer. The decree cannot be revoked. Esther and Mordecai—now recognized as a “team”, since the “you” in verse 8 is plural and thus addressed to them both—may devise a further decree “as they please”. (This sweeping permission corresponds to that originally given to Haman, 3:11.) And so the stage is set for a great turning of the tables.

III. (:9-14) THE SURPRISING REVERSALS OF THE PREVIOUS EDICT

A. (:9) Scripting of the New Edict

“So the king's scribes were called at that time in the third month (that is, the month Sivan), on the twenty-third day; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded to the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the princes of the provinces which extended from India to Ethiopia, 127 provinces, to every province according to its script, and to every people according to their language, as well as to the Jews according to their script and their language.”

Tomasino: As many scholars have noted, the time span could itself be significant: two months and ten days is the equivalent of seventy days. **Seventy** is a significant biblical number, being the product of two numbers that represent completion, seven and ten. The importance of the number is illustrated in numerous Bible passages: Jacob took seventy Israelites to Egypt (**Gen 46:27**); the Egyptians mourned Jacob seventy days (**Gen 50:3**); seventy elders presided over Israel (**Exod 24:1; Num 11:16–25**); seventy years was considered a full life span (**Psa 90:10**). **Clines** (316) sees a reference here to the seventy years of the Babylonian exile: in his understanding, the time between the threat of annihilation and the issuance of reprieve represents the time between Judah's downfall and its return. It is difficult, however, to see much similarity between the joy the Jews felt at the death of Haman and promotion of Mordecai and the despair they would have felt at the destruction of Jerusalem. Nor is it altogether obvious that the return from the Babylonian exile figured prominently in this narrator's thinking. As a Jew of the Diaspora, Cyrus' decree may have meant little to him.

B. (:10a) Sealing of the New Edict

“And he wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, and sealed it with the king's signet ring,”

C. (:10b) Sending of the New Edict

“and sent letters by couriers on horses, riding on steeds sired by the royal stud.”

D. (:11) Substance of the New Edict

“In them the king granted the Jews who were in each and every city the right to assemble and to defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate the entire army of any people or province which might attack them, including children and women, and to plunder their spoil,”

Breneman: To whom were they to do this? The object of the verbs is “*any armed force ... that might attack them.*” But the end of the sentence appears to give the Jews the right to plunder any of their enemies. Many ask why the decree was so harsh. Moore says it was the wisdom doctrine of retributive justice that the author was showing here, for that was what the edict of Haman proclaimed against the Jews. Haman’s followers were to reap what they had sown. Crucial at this point, however, is the fact that the Jews would act in self-defense.

Tomasino: Several scholars (e.g., **Jobes**, 184; **Laniak**, 253; **Levenson**, 110–11) see the slaughter of the women and children as a completion of the destruction of the Amalekites. In that case, the issue of morality is shifted back from Mordecai’s decree to God’s decree for the destruction of the Amalekites (**Exod 17:14; 1 Sam 15:3**). Since the extermination of the Amalekites is treated as a matter of divine judgment, the destruction of the Jews’ enemies in Esther—women and children included—must then be viewed in the same light. While this explanation is appealing because of its literary symmetry, it is difficult to imagine that all the Jews’ enemies were considered to be Amalekites.

One consideration that has received little attention is that the destruction of women and children prescribed by Mordecai’s decree—and Yahweh’s earlier decrees—must be understood in light of the corporate responsibility characteristic of OT thought. The idea of “corporate personality,” once prominent in biblical studies, has been largely abandoned in current scholarship, but the notion of “corporate responsibility” is well-recognized. Essentially, it means that an entire family or ethnic group could be held responsible for the actions of an individual or individuals within the group. When Achan stole some of the plunder of Jericho, God proclaimed, “*Israel has sinned; they have transgressed my covenant*” (**Josh 7:11**). All Israel suffered because of his guilt when Israel was defeated at Ai (**7:1–5**), and Achan’s entire family was executed for the sins of this one man (**7:24–25**). Similarly, when David sinned by conducting a census of Israel, God sent a plague that destroyed 70,000 men (**2 Sam 24:1–25**). The entire nation was punished for one man’s transgression. In a similar manner, in the book of Esther the women and children of Israel’s enemies bore the same guilt as the men. While this concept may be repugnant to us—indeed, the OT itself seems at times to repudiate it (**Jer 31:29–30; Ezek 18:1–3**)—there are positive elements to the idea of corporate responsibility, because it goes hand-in-hand with corporate election.

Deffinbaugh: This new law is just what Esther pled for—a reversal of the decree made law by Haman. And that is precisely what bothers me. I believe the author intended for the wording of the new law of Mordecai to bother us. Revenge is getting even or getting back. The new law of Mordecai does not merely grant the Jews permission to defend themselves; it grants them permission to avenge themselves. Self defense would involve granting the Jews the right to assemble and to fight back if attacked. But the words of Mordecai’s law go much farther. They go every bit as far as Haman’s law, only in reverse. The Jews are given license to “*kill, destroy, and to annihilate,*” not just those who did attack them, but “*the entire army of any people who might attack them.*” And

those whom they could kill included women and children. I may be reading between the lines, but it seems the Jews were granted to kill virtually anyone they perceived to be a threat—or even a potential threat.

What I am about to say is not popular, but I believe it should be said. The Jews, from the days of Esther to the present, celebrate Purim, and thus the defeat of the “enemies of the Jews.” I think the law which permitted the Jews to kill their Persian enemies was no less a permit to practice genocide than were the German laws or principles which permitted their attempt to annihilate the Jewish race. Genocide is genocide, regardless of whether it is practiced against Jews or by Jews. I find it strangely inconsistent for Jews to fiercely protest against the brutality of the Germans and yet to celebrate the slaughter of Persians. The magnitude of these two atrocities may have been different, but the essence seems similar. The law of Mordecai made it legal for the Jews to practice the same brutality against the Persians as Haman had made legal against Jews.

E. (:12) Scope of the New Edict in Terms of its One Day Duration

“on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar).”

Joyce Baldwin: Such killing was liable to escalate into an ongoing vendetta, but by specifying the date, limits were set and the bloodshed contained.

F. (:13) Significance of the New Edict

“A copy of the edict to be issued as law in each and every province, was published to all the peoples, so that the Jews should be ready for this day to avenge themselves on their enemies.”

Tomasino: The word “vengeance” (נָקָם, *nāqam*) is very significant in this context. For **Baldwin** (98), this word provides the moral imperative for the slaughter: “This was justice, not revenge.” As **Fox** notes, “NQM never refers to a simple defense or rescue, but everywhere designates a punitive action and presupposes a prior wrong, that is, some offense to which the avenging party is responding.” In this initial decree, at least, the Jews are not simply given carte blanche to do away with anyone they do not like. It is possible that the decree could be understood broadly to refer to anyone who has afflicted the Jews in the past. It is apparent throughout the narrative that there is some stigma attached to being Jewish, since Mordecai wished to conceal Esther’s Jewishness. The Jews might well have been subject to prejudice, and this vengeance might have included anyone who had insulted or abused the Jews in the past. More likely, however, it specifically empowered the Jews to respond to anyone who followed Haman’s decree and attacked them on the thirteenth of Adar.

G. (:14) Circulation of the New Edict

“The couriers, hastened and impelled by the king's command, went out, riding on the royal steeds; and the decree was given out in Susa the capital.”

Breneman: The verbs “*riding*,” “*raced out*,” and “*spurred*” heighten the urgency of the narrative. The edict also was issued in the area of the palace, no doubt to confirm Mordecai’s position before the king.

Tomasino: Though the day of attack is still nine months away, Mordecai’s decree (like Haman’s edict; **3:14**) goes forth in great haste. Indeed, there is even more urgency attached to this edict than Haman’s. Some commentators have expressed puzzlement over the need for speed: as **Berlin** (78) notes, **Herodotus** claimed that due to the great efficiency of the Persian postal system, it took only three months for a message to circulate through the entire empire (Hist. 5.52–3). Nonetheless, it would take some time to assemble, equip, and train the Jews into an army, so the haste is understandable on purely pragmatic grounds.

There are also literary considerations at play. Each detail shows how Mordecai and his decree do not merely parallel Haman and his decree, but go it one better: Xerxes gives Haman the signet ring only when he needs to authorize a decree (**3:10**), but Mordecai receives it from the start; Haman’s decree goes forth by couriers (**3:13**), while Mordecai’s goes forth by couriers mounted on special royal steeds; Haman’s decree goes out in “*haste*” (**3:15**), but Mordecai’s decree goes out with “*urgent haste*.” Mordecai has triumphed over Haman in every particular.

Whitcomb: Four main ideas seem to be set forth in Mordecai’s decree:

- (a) the Jews were to gather into groups by the thirteenth of Adar;
- (b) they were to defend their lives;
- (c) they were to kill those who attacked them; and
- (d) they were to take the spoil of their attackers

IV. (:15-17) THE SURPRISING RESPONSES OF EXALTATION, JOY AND FEAR

A. (:15a) Surprising Response of Exaltation of Mordecai

“Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a large crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple;”

Tomasino: Mordecai’s new clothes illustrate his new status. As noted earlier, a change of clothing in this narrative typically indicates a change of position. This motif is not unique to the book of Esther: both Joseph (**Gen 41:42**) and Daniel (**Dan 5:7, 29**) also received stately robes to accompany their promotion to high status by foreign monarchs. What is more, Xerxes’ command to clothe Mordecai in Xerxes’ own robe in **6:11** now seems almost prophetic. The honor he received at that time foreshadowed the honor he now receives from the king.

Though Mordecai undoubtedly received new garments when he was promoted to vizier, the narrative withholds the description until this point. There is a reason for the delay: once again, reversal is at work. When Mordecai had heard of Haman’s decree, he had taken off his garments and clothed himself in sackcloth (**4:1**). So attired, he could not

enter into the king's gate (4:2). Now, when he issues his own decree, he is clothed in splendor. He can stand in the very presence of the king.

Upon Mordecai's head is a golden headdress (תִּצְרֵת, *āteret*, typically translated "crown"). The noun comes from a root meaning "to surround," and may refer to any ornament that is worn on the head. The term is used to designate the royal crown in **2 Sam 12:30**, but merely some kind of jewelry in **Ezek 23:42**. It is uncertain what Mordecai was wearing, but it is somewhat misleading to refer to it as a "crown," which in English usually implies kingship.

B. (:15b-17a) Surprising Response of Joy – Both by the City of Susa and the Jews

1. (:15b) By the City of Susa

"and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced."

2. (:16-17a) By the Jews

a. (:16) Response of Happiness and Honor

"For the Jews there was light and gladness and joy and honor."

Laniak: There were two primary responses to Mordecai's edict and his promotion: happiness and honor. "Light" is synonymous here with "honor"; "joy" (*sason*) is synonymous with "gladness" (**Jer. 31:13**). These terms are arranged in chiasm. The happiness of the Jews replaces the happiness of Haman when he was honored (by the queen's invitation in **5:9**) and when a plan was in place to eliminate his enemy (5:14). Jewish "feasting and celebrating" (v. 17) mark the reversal of the fasting and mourning of **4:2–3** (both being the response to Mordecai's appearance). Mordecai is the barometer for the security and status of the Jewish people.

b. (:17a) Response of Celebration

"And in each and every province, and in each and every city, wherever the king's commandment and his decree arrived, there was gladness and joy for the Jews, a feast and a holiday."

C. (:17b) Surprising Response of Fear – Leading to Greater Jewish Influence

"And many among the peoples of the land became Jews, for the dread of the Jews had fallen on them."

Frederic Bush: The enemies of the Jews might have been aware of an unnamed power ranged on the side of the Jews, but in the context it can hardly be some sense of the numinous that prompts the non-Jewish peoples to profess to be Jews, let alone a religious awe of the God of the Jews. It is surely, rather, the dread of the superior political and military power now wielded by Mordecai and the Jewish community that prompts their profession. . .

Clearly our story has reached its resolution. But that resolution is not yet complete. The crisis that set the story in motion was Haman's having written into immutable Persian law the edict that all the peoples of the empire were to be ready to annihilate all the Jews and to plunder their goods on one day, the thirteenth of the twelfth month, the

month of Adar. Given the immutability of Persian law, it has not been possible simply to rescind Haman's edict. What Mordecai has been able to do is write and promulgate a counteredict that gives the Jews specific royal permission to defend themselves by destroying any and all who attack them. Hence, even though the Jews are now in the ascendancy with Esther as queen and Mordecai as grand vizier, the Jewish community is not yet safe, for Haman's edict still holds legal sway. It can in no way be taken for granted that, when 13 Adar comes, no one will rise against the Jews and seek to put the edict into effect. The crisis that set our story in motion still waits to be fully resolved, for 13 Adar still looms in the future as a day in which countervailing edicts and those that support them will yet face one another. Victory may seem secured, as the Jews' joy and celebrations affirm, but it is yet to be realized (cf. Fox, Redaction, 110–12).

Tomasino: While the nature of the “conversion” is uncertain, the significance for the narrator and his audience is clear. First, it represents yet another example of the “reversal” motif. Early in the story, Esther had to conceal her Jewishness. Though we are not told why, we might infer that there was some kind of danger to or prejudice against Jews. Now, it is the Gentiles who are afraid, and they try to hide their non-Jewishness. But this reversal is not merely a literary device. It is, in fact, connected to one of the main purposes of the Esther narrative: to encourage Jewish resistance to foreign cultural domination. The scenario envisioned here is part of a “hidden transcript” similar to the folklore of African American slaves and other oppressed peoples. In such tales, the oppressed show their resentment of dominant groups by subtle insults or mockery expressed in forms or venues that would be accessible only to members of the oppressed group. A book like Esther, written in Hebrew, is clearly designed for exclusively Jewish consumption. This report of Gentiles converting to Judaism is included because of the boost it gives to Jewish esteem by demonstrating the fear the Jews inspire in their enemies, and the desire of the nations to identify with the Jewish people. (Actually, the Jews of this era were not especially interested in winning proselytes to their race.) This story is designed for Jewish consumption, and its nationalistic spirit will become increasingly evident in these last two chapters.

John Martin: Their rise to power caused many Gentiles to become Jewish proselytes. God's good hand was then becoming obvious to the world at large. No longer were these events being viewed simply as happenstance; now people were beginning to realize that the God of the Jews was protecting them.

Duguid: How ironic! No sooner had Esther conquered her fear and revealed her true identity with respect to her Jewishness than many of the pagans around her apparently chose to pretend to be Jewish, motivated by precisely the same type of fear. Some may indeed have been genuinely converted, motivated to join God's people by the fear of the Lord. But others were motivated more by their fear of the Jews.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How (and on what basis) will the Lord Jesus distribute leadership roles in His millennial kingdom?
- 2) Why was the king not willing to simply overturn the earlier edict that called for the extermination of the Jews?
- 3) How would you describe the change in the relationship between Esther and Mordecai over the course of the book of Esther?
- 4) In what ways have you found the working of divine providence to bring you positive opportunities and blessings that were truly surprising?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Strain: Sudden Reversals: Eucatastrophe!

On the 7th of November, 1944, the author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of The Rings*, J.R.R. Tolkien, penned a letter to his son, Christopher, in which he defined a word of his own invention that stood at the heart of his vision of what makes a story, especially fairy stories, truly great. He called it eucatastrophe. A good catastrophe! He said, “I coined the word ‘eucatastrophe.’ It means, “the sudden happy turn in a story which pierces you with a joy that brings tears.” He likened the sudden relief that eucatastrophe brings to the snapping back into place of a limb that had been long put out of joint. Joyous relief.

The book of Esther, from chapter 8 really on to the end of the story, is a eucatastrophe. If you’ll remember, everything had been going wrong for Esther and Mordecai and the people of God in exile in the Persian Empire. But in chapter 7, we saw the first rays of a new sunrise begin to crest the horizon. Haman was, remember, he was hoist on his own petard, caught in his own trap, quite literally hung on his own gallows. But Ahasuerus, the Persian Emperor, had permitted Haman to pronounce an edict, a royal decree, declaring the universal destruction of the Jewish people, and Haman’s death notwithstanding, that decree still stood. And Esther chapter 8 shows us how the great reversal, the eucatastrophe in this story, actually comes about by which those who were doomed to die are delivered and made to conquer.

Laniak: As noted above, the narrator is intent on demonstrating more than a pattern of reversals. The tendency is to move beyond vindication and beyond return to the status quo to an enhanced state of honor. Mordecai receives the ring Haman had worn but also symbols of royalty (seen here in **8:15** and first in **1:6**) that Haman had only dreamed of (see these terms also in **Gen. 41:42** and **Dan. 5:7, 29**). Members of the court had bowed to Haman; now the whole city acclaims Mordecai. Haman’s edict had been sent out by “*couriers*”; Mordecai’s was sent by “*couriers [on] royal horses*.” Haman had

built a stake for Mordecai, but it was used for Haman and his ten sons. Haman's private celebration with the king is "replaced" with the Jewish festivities in this chapter but also, more significantly, with the permanent celebration of Purim. The city that was once bewildered with Haman's decree (3:15) is visibly delighted with Mordecai's.

Jeremy Myers: Mission Accomplished: From Rags to Riches

Remember, we saw earlier, that Haman's plot against the Jews was a business venture for him. The Persians had a law that if you brought an accusation against someone, and it turned out to be true, and as a result that person was put to death for their crimes, you, as the one who revealed the crime, were rewarded by gaining the land and possessions of the criminal.

Haman had tried to use this law to his own advantage by bringing accusations against the Jews. He would have become a very rich man if his plan had been carried out. But here in **verse 1**, we see this law turned against him. Esther brought accusations against Haman, which turned out to be true, and so the King gives to Esther all of Haman's land and possessions. And at the end of **verse 1**, we see that the King finally learns that Esther and Mordecai are related. . .

You know, this is going to happen to us as Christians. Our archenemy the devil is currently the ruler of this world. He is evil like Haman, and is bent on our destruction. But we know from various places in Scripture that at the end of time, the one who is seeking our destruction will himself be destroyed, and all that belonged to him will become ours.

First Corinthians 15:24-25 says Satan will be destroyed and **Revelation 2:26** says we will rule: "*And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations.*"

We, as faithful children of God may not be honored yet. Satan may still be ruling over this world, but do not despair, remain faithful, and time is coming when all will be set right, and our faithfulness to God and commitment to Christian living will be rewarded according to God's infinite benevolence. . .

You know, when people of God live as they should, and as a result, according to the promises of God, God works mightily among them, two things happen. First, people are afraid, and second, many people join in following God, because they see that what is going on is not just circumstances; it is the hand of God at work among his people. We see it happen here. And remember, I told you that this all happened about the same time of year as Pentecost in **Acts 2**? Do you remember what happened after the Holy Spirit came? **Acts 2:41** says that about 3000 were added to their numbers. Just like here in Esther.

Explainingthebook.com: God's Providential Peripety

There's a literary term called *peripety*. Here's its definition — "the sudden or unexpected reversal of circumstances". I thought that this term describes pretty well

what's happening at the end of the book of Esther. So, I'll call this message "God's Providential Peripety". . .

When did this scene take place? It may have happened right after Haman was hung and his stuff given to Esther and Mordecai. Maybe it was the same day. Maybe it was a little later. But whenever it happened, Esther, Mordecai, and the king were all together in the same place at the same time. . .

And the Jews lamented and mourned when Haman's edict went out. How do they react now? With light, gladness, joy, and honor in verse 16. Joy, gladness, a feast, and a good day (holiday) in **verse 17**. What a complete reversal of circumstances! What peripety!

And it's not a simple restoration for the Jews to how they were before Haman's plans. No, now they're in a far better position. Those enemies that hate them will be out of the picture in less than a year. Two of their own – Esther and Mordecai – are in positions of supreme authority and will see to it that their people are treated with equity.

TEXT: Esther 10:1-3

TITLE: *EPILOGUE – GREATNESS OF MORDECAI EXTOLLED*

BIG IDEA:

THE ELEVATION OF MORDECAI TO GREATNESS IN THE PERSIAN KINGDOM PROTECTED THE JEWISH COMMUNITY BY THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

INTRODUCTION:

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.

Frederic Bush: In expressing his praise for Mordecai, the narrator draws on the conceptions and language of the traditions of his people in three striking instances:

- (1) in expressing the dramatic extent of the Persian empire, v 1;
- (2) in the rhetorical question expressing Mordecai's status, v 2; and
- (3) in the title "Second to the King" v 3.

Breneman: The book ends on a note similar to that of its beginning—the greatness, wealth, and splendor of King Xerxes. This example of *inclusio* is common in Hebrew literature. The author emphasized the great extent of the empire, "*to its distant shores.*" This must refer to the coastlands of the Mediterranean area under the Persian Empire.

Taxation, "*imposed tribute,*" was not a pleasant subject, but the author mentioned it here. Perhaps in keeping with one of the themes of the book he wanted to show that King Xerxes, who saved the Jews from extinction, later prospered. Although he did not receive the great gift Haman had promised, King Xerxes prospered by receiving all this tribute.

10:2 "*The greatness of Mordecai*" brings us to the real purpose of this section. The author wanted to praise Mordecai as an example of one who put the welfare of his people before his own personal interests.

McConville: The short final chapter is hardly more than a summarizing footnote. We are reminded of the greatness of Xerxes, with which the book opened, in order to impress upon us not only the accuracy of the things recorded, but also the extent of the

honour which the king was able to confer upon Mordecai.

The final picture of Mordecai is, however, of one who, far from exploiting his power for personal ends, was motivated only by love of his people and desire for their good. The principle of endowment with gifts for the benefit of God's people is thus exemplified by Mordecai as by other Old Testament figures (e.g. Nehemiah); the same principle is enunciated theologically in the New Testament (**Eph. 4:11ff.**). It is such, i.e. those who put themselves and their resources at the disposal of other people, and particularly the people of God, who receive an honour which is not contingent upon the whim of an earthly tyrant.

Whitcomb: Xerxes died in 465 B.C. Looking back over his reign shortly afterward, the author emphasizes the stupendous power and wealth of this king (**v. 1**) in order to show the marvelous providence of God in elevating a despised Jew to a position of honor in such an empire.

I. (:1) GREATNESS OF THE PERSIAN KINGDOM

A. Dominion on the Land

“Now King Ahasuerus laid a tribute on the land”

Laniak: There may be a subtle reference to the tax relief offered when Esther became queen (**2:18**; NIV “*holiday*”) or to the missed bribe from Haman in **3:9**. The Jews, in essence, constituted only gain to the king. The king himself had been the source of generous giving throughout **chapters 1–2**. Now, with the threat to the Jews gone, it is time for him to receive.

David Thompson: Mordecai, now being in the number two position, apparently had the responsibility to help the king replenish his financial situation. We may recall that Haman's plot to exterminate the Jew would have added 10,000 talents of silver to the king's treasury (**3:9**). It was also Haman's plan to seize their possessions as plunder (**3:13**). There is no question that getting rid of the Jews would have been temporarily, financially profitable for the Persian Empire.

The Jews purposely did not take the “*plunder*” of the Persian people (**9:10, 15, 16**). Most could not contribute large sums of money to the king's treasury. Apparently Mordecai helped the king see another way to get the necessary funds; rather than hostile plundering, through a peaceful taxation. **Josephus** says Mordecai was assisting the king in his governmental decisions (Complete Works of Josephus, p. 242).

Constable: Perhaps the writer mentioned Ahasuerus' tax (**v. 1**) because Mordecai had something to do with it, or perhaps this tax reflects God's blessing on the king for preserving the Jews (**Gen. 12:3**). Instead of benefiting from the plunder that Haman promised for the Jews' extermination, Ahasuerus had to rely on taxation. Residents of Persia proper had long since been exempted from taxation; it was the inhabitants of the outlying satrapies in the empire that paid taxes—and they were exorbitant

B. Dominion on the Coastlands

“and on the coastlands of the sea.”

Frederic Bush: The purpose, then, for using this unusual expression to describe the Persian empire, “the land and the islands-and-coastlands of the sea,” must surely be to emphasize its vast expanse: it extends to the farthest western reaches of the known world. This serves to enhance the power and greatness of the king.

II. (:2) GREATNESS OF MORDECAI’S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

A. Renowned for His Authority and Strength

“And all the accomplishments of his authority and strength,”

This verse shows that the taxation of **verse 1** was directly tied to the administration of Mordecai – for it is the greatness of Mordecai that is the subject of this Epilogue.

B. Rewarded by the Respect from the King

*“and the full account of the greatness of Mordecai,
to which the king advanced him,”*

Laniak: Mordecai’s “greatness” (*gedolah*) participates in the king’s “glory” (*gedolah*), mentioned first in **1:4**. This term also reminds the reader that Mordecai deserved greatness much sooner. When the king was reminded of Mordecai’s act of loyalty in **6:1–3**, he asked, “*What honor and recognition (gedolah) has Mordecai received for this?*” Mordecai eventually became *gadol* (NIV “prominent”) in the palace (**9:4**). The narrator uses the same root (*gdl*) in **10:2** to refer to Mordecai’s promotion: Mordecai’s *gedolah* is a status to which the king had raised him (*giddele*). This is precisely the terminology employed to describe Haman’s promotion in **3:1** and **5:11**. The Agagite, who had craved the king’s honor so transparently, is now replaced by the Jew, who is known not for self-seeking but for service to the king and his fellow Jews.

C. Recorded for Posterity

*“are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles
of the Kings of Media and Persia?”*

III. (:3) GREATNESS OF MORDECAI’S REPUTATION

A. Great as Measured by His Boundless Popularity

1. With the King

“For Mordecai the Jew was second only to King Ahasuerus”

2. With the Jews

“and great among the Jews,”

3. With His Kinsmen

“and in favor with the multitude of his kinsmen,”

B. Great as Measured by His Beneficial Policies

1. On Behalf of the Jews

“one who sought the good of his people”

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).

2. On Behalf of the Persian Empire

“and one who spoke for the welfare of his whole nation.”

Joyce Baldwin: Miraculously the power behind the throne of this mighty empire was a Jew and therefore, though this is not spelt out, one who feared God and stood for justice and right in the affairs of state. Who would have expected that the exiled Jews would ever have a representative in so influential a position? He could be counted on to protect them against exploitation and any further attempts during his lifetime to exterminate them. His interest was not in promoting his own advantage but the welfare (Heb. *ṭôb* ‘good’) of the whole Jewish community, and he spoke *peace* (Heb. *šālôm*), which means prosperity of all kinds, health, security, material plenty and good relationships. In making these his aims for the total Israelite population of the empire he would secure prosperity also for the countries as a whole. Such an effective leader was likely to be popular and revered, not only by his own people but also by the population at large.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why is the focus at the end of the book only on Mordecai and not on Esther?
- 2) How does the greatness of God lie behind this picture of the greatness of Mordecai?
- 3) How was Mordecai able to advance the standing of his fellow Jews?
- 4) Why was King Ahasuerus content to give Mordecai such power and authority?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

David Thompson:

WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE, GOD WILL HAVE ACCOMPLISHED HIS SOVEREIGN WILL BY DESTROYING HIS ENEMIES AND BY ELEVATING HIS FAITHFUL SERVANTS AND BY PRESERVING HIS PEOPLE.

Ladies and gentlemen, God is a sovereign God. He can sovereignly use us and bless us and He will if we will purpose to be faithful to Him. But even when we aren't, He is still sovereign, He is still caring for His own and He will still accomplish His will. That is the story of Esther!

Frederic Bush: This high praise for Mordecai is grounded in two aspects of his role, service to the king and service to his people, the Jews (v 3). In regard to the former, he is the “*Second*” to the king, a rank that is at home in the Persian world and also reminiscent of both priestly and courtly rank in the world of Israel. In regard to the latter, he is again identified as “*Mordecai the Jew*,” emphasizing that the setting of this encomium is the world of the diaspora and that his preeminence among the Jews and the high esteem in which he is held by his compatriots does not result from his rank in the foreign court, as important as that is to the Jewish community. It is not even said to be the result of the role he has played in the deliverance from terrible evil that the story has related. It results rather from his continued actions in seeking the good of his people, the Jews of the diaspora, and promoting the welfare of all their descendants, as the present participles of the last two clauses stress.

Mordecai entered the story as a “Jew,” a member of the diaspora who was a resident of the Citadel of Susa (2:5) and who served as a minor official in the Persian bureaucracy. At the end of the story he rules Persia as the grand vizier, second in power to the king alone, a power that he wields for the benefit of his people (Clines, 333). As such, Mordecai typifies for every diaspora community the possibility “of living a creative and rich life in the foreign environment, as part of the complex social, political, and economic dynamics of that world, and also of remaining a devoted and loyal member of his community of fellow Jews” (Humphreys, JBL 92 [1973] 216). Also, and far more significantly, he represents the need (and the hope) of the diaspora of having such a friend in high places whose dual loyalty may be the means of deliverance from the evil resident in that world.

Breneman: There are few books of the Old Testament more relevant to life in a society hostile to the gospel. Believers are scattered throughout the world, awaiting the Lord's return. Although he is present and active now as much as ever, he is usually “hidden” behind the events of life that he is directing for his own glory and the benefit of his children. Although unbelievers can refuse to acknowledge him, those “*who have eyes to see*” are able to recognize his hand at work in the affairs of life. “In a world in which hostility to the household of faith seems to flourish naturally, and indeed in which atheistic explanations of the universe grow more strident, ‘scientific’ and apparently convincing, it belongs to faith to ‘hold fast’ nevertheless to our hope—now specifically in Christ—‘*for he who promised is faithful*’ (Heb. 10:23).

Tomasino: In this way, too, the book of Esther should feel real to us. In our crises, there will undoubtedly be times that we, too, will feel as if God has hidden His face from us. Indeed, when we consider the iniquity of society, the compromise and hypocrisy of the church, and the sin that taints even the seemingly noble and good acts that we perform, we might well wonder if God could bear to show His face among His people. Yet we experience His providence daily—not, typically, in miraculous works that defy scientific explanation, but in unlikely coincidences, improbable victories, or words that leap from the page in the middle of a sleepless night. Viewed separately, these serendipities may not seem to be part of any great master plan. We may be like people with our noses pressed against a wall and trying to make sense of a mural. We must step back and look at the big picture: the intersecting lines, the blending colors, the places where no paint has been applied. It is when we look at the whole that we can recognize that the hand of a master has been at work. In similar ways, any one coincidence may look like chance or luck. But when we consider the ways that so many chances have come together to bring us where we are, we realize that no simple roll of the dice has shaped our destiny. It is not that God is nowhere, but that He is everywhere, hidden in plain view in the grand design of our everyday lives.

TEXT: Esther 9:1-32

TITLE: *FEASTING AT THE OVERTURNED TABLE*

BIG IDEA:

PROVIDENCE LEADS US TO VICTORY OVER OUR ENEMIES AND GIVES US CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION AS WE MEMORIALIZE GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

INTRODUCTION:

All power and authority comes ultimately from God. When He providentially raises up His servants and grants victory over the enemies of God's people it is a time for great celebration. Such memorial services must be both historically and theologically rooted so that the significance of God's faithfulness is understood and perpetuated. Victory in Jesus is a sweet refrain indeed!

Frederic Bush: Though this victory has completed the resolution of the terrible threat to the life of the Jewish community created by Haman's edict, which crisis set our story in motion, it is not the conclusion to the final form of the book of Esther. In its present form, our story has not been told merely to relate how this resolution occurred. . . Nor, indeed, does it intend simply to relate how the festival of Purim emerged within the life of the Jewish community. It does do that, of course, but its primary purpose is a different one. The narrator now turns his attention to the institution of an annual celebration whose purpose is to memorialize the days of celebration and joy that occurred after the dramatic deliverance on 13 Adar. . . It intends to persuade the Jewish community that such a perpetual celebration is incumbent upon it. It is not narrational but legislative in purpose.

Laniak: These events provide the etiology of the Jewish festival of Purim. Much of **chapter 9** is devoted to explaining, in annalistic fashion, the origin of the two days that constitute the holiday and the authorization to continue its observance. It is apparent that this material has been edited. The perspective now betrays some temporal distance; the narrator relates a condensed version of the story to varying traditions of Purim ritual in practice between "rural" and "urban" Jews (**vv. 19, 26a, 31**). The narrator brings the story to its climax with festival legislation for the Diaspora community (v. 28).

David Thompson: WHEN GOD ELEVATES HIS FAITHFUL PEOPLE TO POSITIONS OF POWER AND WHEN EVIL HAS BEEN COMPLETELY DESTROYED, ALL WHO ARE RIGHT WITH THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB WILL CELEBRATE AND REMEMBER THE GREAT WORK OF GOD, PARTICULARLY IN REGARD TO ISRAEL.

God's people will have their share of difficulties and hardships. They will face enemies and hurts, intense pressure and opposition. But if God's people stay faithful, they will see God work in marvelous ways—sorrow will be turned into joy, fasting will be turned

into feasting, tears will be turned to smiles and worries will be turned into worship. That is the story of Esther, and every March there is a celebration, even to this day, called Purim that proves this eternal reality.

I. (:1-4) POWER IN THE PERSIAN KINGDOM FOR THE JEWS AND MORDECAI

A. (:1-3) Rise of the Jews to Power as They Successfully Defend Against Attacks

1. (:1) Summary of the Jewish Victory

a. Timing of the Conflict – 13th Day of Adar

“Now in the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar), on the thirteenth day”

Deffinbaugh: Nearly nine months pass between the end of **chapter 8** and the beginning of **chapter 9** (see **8:9** and **9:1**). The Jews of the Persian empire are elated by the new law which Mordecai has enacted in the king’s name. It gives them the right to fight back when their enemies attack them on the 13th day of the 12th month. It gives them the right to counter-attack and to rid themselves of their enemies, including women and children. They can start over with a clean slate once their enemies are destroyed.

b. Instigation of the Conflict – by the King’s Command

“when the king's command and edict were about to be executed,”

c. Objective of the Conflict on the Part of the Enemies of the Jews

“on the day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them,”

Breneman: The day finally came. Haman had cast lots to choose this day. The edict he had issued to destroy the Jews was still in effect. But now the tables were turned (cf. v. 22) because of the edict Mordecai had made. The author has been leading up to this point. **Proverbs 16:33** must express his feelings: *“The lot is cast in the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.”* The teaching that those who try to destroy the Jews will be destroyed appears repeatedly in the Scriptures. *“Those who plunder you will be plundered; all who make spoil of you I will despoil” (Jer 30:16)*. The Jews’ enemies had hoped to destroy them and take their riches, but their plans failed. Although the situation is expressed with the passive “the tables were turned,” the sense is clearly that God had caused them to turn. As **McConville** has noted, “In a world from which God appears to be absent he is nonetheless present.”

d. Resolution of the Conflict – Attributed to the Providence of God

“it was turned to the contrary so that the Jews themselves gained the mastery over those who hated them.”

Constable: The king gave the Jews permission to defend themselves by killing their enemies. Evidently this meant that they not only met attack with resistance, but in some cases they initiated attack against those who they knew would destroy them.

2. (:2) Operational Details

a. Preparation for Aggressive Defense

“The Jews assembled in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm;”

Whitcomb: Finally, on March 7, 473 B.C., the fateful day arrived, and the Jews gathered into compact groups within the various cities to await their attackers.

b. Power that Proved Invincible

“and no one could stand before them, for the dread of them had fallen on all the peoples.”

3. (:3) Explanation of Their Surprising Success

a. Support of Government Officials

“Even all the princes of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and those who were doing the king's business assisted the Jews,”

Frederic Bush: However one explains the change in order, the list nevertheless rings with significance from the previous narrative, since it is composed of the same ruling authorities as those ordered to implement the opposing edicts, who now aid the Jews. Moreover, it also contains a fourth category of officials, whose presence in the list is not inexplicable (contra **Clines**, Esther Scroll, 46) but significant. By including the “royal officials,” lit. “those who carry out the king’s business,” the narrator subtly emphasizes the support given to the Jews. Even the lower functionaries, those who carry on the everyday work and activities of the royal court, now support the Jews. But, there is more; these are the very officials who deposited Haman’s bribe in the royal treasury in **3:9** (**Bardtke**, 381; Dommershausen, Estherrolle, 113)!

b. Superstitious Dread of Mordecai

“because the dread of Mordecai had fallen on them.”

MacArthur: Pragmatically, the nation had a change of heart toward the Jews, knowing that the king, the queen, and Mordecai were the ranking royal officials of the land. To be pro-Jewish would put one in favor with the king and his court and put one on the side of God, the ultimate King (cf. **Rev 19:16**).

B. (:4) Rise of Mordecai to Power as His Reputation Expands

1. Reputation Expands in the Royal House

“Indeed, Mordecai was great in the king's house,”

2. Reputation Expands in All the Kingdom

“and his fame spread throughout all the provinces;”

F. B. Huey Jr.: The nobles and other political leaders “helped” (Heb., “lifted up”; “supported,”) the Jews because of their fear of Mordecai and the influence he had with

the king (v. 3). Mordecai was not only prominent in the palace, but “*his reputation spread*” (Heb., “his reputation was walking”) throughout the empire (v. 4). He had become increasingly powerful during his brief months as prime minister.

Deffinbaugh: Mordecai’s power, and perhaps the fierceness with which he “attacks” every task, is enough to demoralize any opponent. Mordecai is a powerful man in the king’s administration, and his power is growing. News of his greatness has quickly spread throughout the kingdom. He is a Goliath to his Persian foes, and news of his power takes the wind out of the sails of those who once boldly opposed him.

3. Reputation Expands Exponentially

“for the man Mordecai became greater and greater.”

Breneman: He had gone through difficult days and had been in danger of death. But his crisis became in God’s providence a stepping stone to greater influence. This fact is repeated often in the lives of God’s servants.

II. (:5-17) PURGING THE ENEMY

A. (:5-10) Record of the Killing on Prescribed Day One

1. (:5) Killing Summary

“Thus the Jews struck all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying; and they did what they pleased to those who hated them.”

Whitcomb: there were many Persian citizens who took full advantage of the first decree to attack their hated Jewish neighbors. Deprived of full government support and faced by a zealous and newly encouraged people, they were totally defeated.

F. B. Huey Jr.: The Jews showed no mercy to their enemies. They massacred those who hated them; there were no restraints imposed on them by the king. The Jews did not limit themselves to self-defense. They hunted out and destroyed those who might harm them. Their fury can only be understood by those who have experienced a long history of unjustified persecution.

Frederic Bush: True, Jewish actions in **9:1–19** are not simply defensive but include significant offensive action (cf. v 5). In the nature of the case, this would have been necessary as part of an overall defensive strategy. In any case, their actions do not go beyond the “*taking vengeance on their enemies*” envisaged by the narrator in **8:11**. . .

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. To this he now turns in the dénouement of his narrative.

2. (:6) Killing of 500 Men in Susa

*“And in Susa the capital
the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men,”*

3. (:7-10a) Killing of Haman’s 10 Sons

*“and Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, 8 Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, 9
Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha, 10 the ten sons of Haman the
son of Hammedatha, the Jews' enemy;”*

Frederic Bush: There is nothing in this succinct and spare narrative that demands the specific naming of each of Haman’s ten sons. The point, then, must surely be to underline the terrible retribution that fell upon Haman in the obliteration of his whole house.

Ray Stedman: Parshandatha means "curious-self," that is nosiness, a desire to pry into other people's matters. Dalphon means "weeping-self," self-pity, in other words. Aspatha I could not find. Poratha means "generous-self," or, in the bad sense intended here, "spend-thriftiness." Adalia I could not find. Aridatha means "strong-self," i.e. assertiveness. Parsashta means "preeminent-self," ambition. Arisai means "bold-self," which would be impudence. Aridai is "dignified-self," that is pride. And vaizatha means "pure-self," pure while everyone else is polluted.

David Guzik: Haman and his sons were descendants of the ancient Amalekites (comparing **Esther 3:1** and **1 Samuel 15:8-33**). God commanded Saul, the son of Kish, to execute the full extent of God’s judgment against the Amalekites (**1 Samuel 15:2-3**). Saul failed; but this later descendent of the tribe of Benjamin and a son of Kish named Mordecai (**Esther 2:5-6**) completed God’s judgment against the Amalekites.

Laniak: **Verses 7–10** list the names of Haman’s ten sons who were also killed. They were likely coconspirators who were now deprived of their father and their estate. Thus Haman receives poetic justice: “not only is he killed, but his honor, his position, his wealth, and now his sons—all his boasts from his days of glory (**5:11**)—are stripped away” (Fox, Character, p. 110).

The names of Haman’s sons attract attention for two reasons. Some appear to be *daiva* names—Old Persian names of pagan gods or demons. This may underscore their evil nature or cultic affiliation. The names are also singled out in an unusual way in the Hebrew text, with two names per line, margin justified. Despite substantial speculation, there is no clear explanation for this arrangement, which is found only here and in **Joshua 12:9–24**, a text which lists the names of the conquered Canaanite kings.

4. (:10b) Killing in the Context of a Holy War – No Seizing of Plunder

“but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.”

Whitcomb: The Jews refrained from taking advantage of their rightful privilege, in

order that the purity of their motives might be made evident to all.

David Strain: The Jews didn't touch the plunder because they understood that the conflict in which they were engaged was not merely political, but was sacred in nature. This is **holy war** that they are engaged in.

Karen Jobes: The author is careful to say three times that the Jews “*did not lay their hands on the plunder*” (vv. **10, 15, 16**) even though Mordecai's decree allowed it. Mordecai's decree included the permission to plunder because he was reversing the exact terms that Haman's decree had previously established. However, unlike the Agagite's intent, the Jews understood the execution of Mordecai's decree as governed by the ancient command of holy war against the Amalekites.

One of the rules of ancient holy war was that plunder must not be taken. When Abram, for example, fought for Sodom because his nephew Lot had been taken captive, the king of Sodom offered him material reward. Abram, however, would accept nothing, lest that wicked city be the source of his prosperity (**Gen. 14**). This example set a precedent for God's people.

When the Lord commanded the conquest of the Promised Land, Joshua and the Israelites devoted whole cities to the Lord. This meant killing every living thing in it—men, women, children, cattle, sheep, donkeys—and burning the buildings to the ground. Any gold, silver, and precious articles found in the city were put in the treasury of the Lord's house (e.g., **Josh. 6:20–24**). The Hebrew word for such complete destruction was *herem*, which means something devoted exclusively to God. There was to be no personal profit in holy war because the destroyers were acting not on their own behalf but as agents of God's wrath. . .

Throughout its history, Israel took illicit plunder, trusted in the strength of its own army instead of waiting on the Lord, and generally lived no better than the wicked people they were to war against in God's holy name. Israel's first king, Saul, followed in Achan's way and violated the trust of holy war when he failed to destroy completely the Amalekites. . . Saul did not kill every living thing, and he plundered the best of their possessions.

B. (:11-17) Record of the Killing on Extended Day Two

1. (:11-12) Success on Day One Opens the Door for Extended Engagement

a. (:11) Report of Success to the King

“On that day the number of those who were killed in Susa the capital was reported to the king.”

b. (:12) Request for Extended Engagement Solicited by the King

“And the king said to Queen Esther, ‘The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman in Susa the capital. What then have they done in the rest of the king's

provinces! Now what is your petition? It shall even be granted you. And what is your further request? It shall also be done.”

David Thompson: I agree with the commentators who suggest that this response not only proves the king is not upset by what is happening, but is in full support of what is happening. **Josephus** claims this support was because the king wanted to please Esther so she wouldn't be depressed. There is no doubt the king knew of the Jews loyalty to him (**Josephus**, p. 240). God has sovereignly intervened in this king's mind to the extent that he actually supports a plan that includes executing thousands of his own.

2. (:13) Solicitation by Esther of Two Additional Objectives

a. Objective #1 – Purging Conducted in Susa for Additional Day

“Then said Esther, ‘If it pleases the king, let tomorrow also be granted to the Jews who are in Susa to do according to the edict of today;”

b. Objective #2 – Public Display of Haman's Ten Executed Sons

“and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows.”

John Martin: Many have questioned why the Jews wanted to impale the already dead bodies of Haman's 10 sons. This was not an unusual practice in the ancient Near East. It was a visual warning that others better not commit the same crime as the punished ones.

Wiersbe: Perhaps she had received private intelligence that Haman's supporters had planned to attack again the next day, prompting her to ask Ahasuerus for permission to extend the Jews' right to defend themselves.

Deffinbaugh: the Jews of Susa will have a distinct advantage over their foes on this extended day. The enemies of the Jews are given but one day to destroy the Jews and confiscate their property, the 13th day of the 12th month. That day is over. Now it will be illegal for anyone to seek to attack or to kill a Jew, simply for being a Jew. But it will be legal for a Jew to seek and destroy anyone he perceives to be his enemy. This is hardly fair. It gives the Jews the right to kill anyone they suspect of being their enemy and to do it to one who cannot legally fight back. It exactly reverses Haman's law, only now the Jew is favored and the rest are disadvantaged.

3. (:14-15) Success of Esther's Two Objectives

a. (:14) Success of Objective #2 – Public Display of Haman's Ten Sons

“So the king commanded that it should be done so; and an edict was issued in Susa, and Haman's ten sons were hanged.”

b. (:15) Success of Objective #1 -- Additional 300 Killings in Susa

“And the Jews who were in Susa assembled also on the fourteenth day of the month Adar and killed three hundred men in Susa, but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.”

4. (:16-17) Success in the Surrounding Provinces

a. (:16-17a) Killing 75,000

“Now the rest of the Jews who were in the king's provinces assembled, to defend their lives and rid themselves of their enemies, and kill 75,000 of those who hated them; but they did not lay their hands on the plunder. This was done on the thirteenth day of the month Adar,”

b. (:17b) Celebrating Day of Feasting and Rejoicing

“and on the fourteenth day they rested and made it a day of feasting and rejoicing.”

Karen Jobes: The celebration of Purim is therefore different from the feasts prescribed by the Torah. Rather than being imposed on the people from above as God's commandment, Purim began as the spontaneous response of God's people to his omnipotent faithfulness to the promises of the covenant.

ASIDE (:18-19) DIFFERENCES IN DAYS OF CELEBRATION

A. (:18) Celebration in Susa on 15th Day

“But the Jews who were in Susa assembled on the thirteenth and the fourteenth of the same month, and they rested on the fifteenth day and made it a day of feasting and rejoicing.”

MacArthur: This section recounted why Purim would be celebrated for two days rather than one.

Breneman: This entire narrative has the sense of being an etiological story, that is, a story that explains the origin of an event (see **9:26**). In this case the narrative recounts the origins of the celebration of Purim. This does not imply that the story is in any way false, and actually the contrary is the most likely.

B. (:19) Celebration in Surrounding Rural Areas on 14th Day

“Therefore the Jews of the rural areas, who live in the rural towns, make the fourteenth day of the month Adar a holiday for rejoicing and feasting and sending portions of food to one another.”

F. B. Huey Jr.: The author added these verses to explain why in his time Jews living in the city kept the Feast of Purim on the fifteenth of Adar whereas Jews living in the country observed it on the fourteenth of Adar. The Jews in Susa were permitted two days for killing their enemies (the thirteenth and fourteenth of Adar) and therefore celebrated their victory on the fifteenth. Jews elsewhere had only one day for slaughtering their enemies (the thirteenth day of Adar) and therefore celebrated their victory on the fourteenth. In addition to feasting, they gave presents to each other (Heb., “sending portions of a man to his friend”).

Wiersbe: In the beginning, the Jews were united in their victory but divided in their celebration.

III. (:20-32) PURIM CELEBRATION MEMORIALIZED

A. (:20-25) Remembering the Reason for the Celebration

1. (:20-23) Commanding the Celebration

a. (:20-21) Obligatory Two Day Feast

“Then Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, 21 obliging them to celebrate the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same month, annually.”

John Martin: The Feast of Purim was not established by the Mosaic Law. It was commanded by Mordecai (vv. 20-28) and by Esther (vv. 29-32). The two-day feast was for remembering the goodness of God working through a number of circumstances to protect His people from extinction.

b. (:22) Observance Based on Historical Events = Transformation from Sorrow to Joy

“because on those days the Jews rid themselves of their enemies, and it was a month which was turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and rejoicing and sending portions of food to one another and gifts to the poor.”

c. (:23) Obedience Tied to Understanding of its Significance

“Thus the Jews undertook what they had started to do, and what Mordecai had written to them.”

2. (:24-25) Calling Out the Treacherous Scheming of Haman and the Dramatic Reversal of Fortunes

a. (:24) Derivation of the Connection to Pur

“For Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the adversary of all the Jews, had schemed against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is the lot, to disturb them and destroy them.”

b. (:25) Decree to Overturn Haman’s Scheme

“But when it came to the king's attention, he commanded by letter that his wicked scheme which he had devised against the Jews, should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.”

B. (:26-28) Regulating the Celebration

1. (:26a) Naming the Celebration

“Therefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur.”

John Martin: The feast was called Purim (v. 26) because of Haman’s use of the *pur* . . . the lot to determine the time of the execution (3:7). The *pur* became a symbol of God’s using circumstances to deliver His own.

2. (:26b-27) Instituting the Celebration

“And because of the instructions in this letter, both what they had seen in this regard and what had happened to them, 27 the Jews established and made a custom for themselves, and for their descendants, and for all those who allied themselves with them, so that they should not fail to celebrate these two days according to their regulation, and according to their appointed time annually.”

3. (:28) Perpetuating the Celebration

“So these days were to be remembered and celebrated throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and these days of Purim were not to fail from among the Jews, or their memory fade from their descendants.”

C. (:29-32) Ratifying the Celebration

1. (:29) Confirming the Celebration via a Second Letter

“Then Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter about Purim.”

Karen Jobes: Neither Esther nor Mordecai had the power or position alone to deliver their people. It was only as they acted in concerted power and authority that they were able to lead God’s people through the crisis of death and into deliverance. Neither of them aspired to the role; perhaps neither of them deserved it. It was thrust on them by a series of improbable circumstances largely beyond their control. Nevertheless, their unlikely partnership accomplished God’s ancient promise, and the Jewish race was preserved until in the fullness of time, God entered history through this people as the Messiah. How marvelous are God’s inscrutable ways!

Laniak: The sentence apparently means that Esther and Mordecai wrote a second letter to confirm authoritatively the observance of Purim, which was initiated spontaneously and regulated by Mordecai’s first letter. It is important to appreciate the fragility of a newly established holiday and the need for reconfirmation in its first years of observance (1 Macc. 4:56–59; 7:49; 13:49–52; 2 Macc. 10:1–8; 3 Macc. 6:30–36). Esther’s decree is a formal public declaration (1:15), now written down in the records (v. 32). This may be another reference to the second letter itself, or at least to its content.

2. (:30) Sending the Letter Throughout the Kingdom

“And he sent letters to all the Jews, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, namely, words of peace and truth,”

Wiersbe: This second letter is described as “*words of peace and truth*” (v. 30), which suggests that there was a division among the Jewish people that needed to be healed.

3. (:31) Establishing the Customs Surrounding Celebration of Purim

“to establish these days of Purim at their appointed times, just as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had established for them, and just as they had established for themselves and for their descendants with instructions for their times of fasting and their lamentations.”

4. (:32) Recording These Customs for Posterity

“And the command of Esther established these customs for Purim, and it was written in the book.”

Whitcomb: Not the book of Esther itself, but the book in which Mordecai had written his record of events (v. 20) and which served as one of the basic sources for the book of Esther.

Breneman: There is emphasis both on written records (vv. 26, 32) and on remembering these events for the benefit of future generations (v. 28). Again there is a didactic, that is, educational, function to the narrative centered around the celebration of Purim.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Where have you seen the Lord promote you and give you a good reputation?
- 2) How can you explain all of the violence and killing which the Lord supported in passages like this one?
- 3) What can we learn from the provisions for the poor recorded here in the context of the feasting and rejoicing of the Jews?
- 4) Why is it important for believers to have a solid theological understanding of the significance of our Christian customs and celebration events?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: Today, the Jews begin their celebration with a fast on the thirteenth day of the month (v. 31) commemorating the date on which Haman’s evil decree was issued

(3:12). They go to the synagogue and hear the Book of Esther publicly read; and whenever the name of Haman is mentioned, they cry out, “May he be accursed!” or “May his name perish!” Children bring a special Purim rattle called a “*grogger*” and use it to make noise every time they hear Haman’s name read.

On the morning of the fourteenth day of the month, the Jews again go to the synagogue, where the Ester story is read again and the congregation engages in prayer. The story about Moses and the Amalekites (**Ex. 17:8-16**) is also read. Then the celebrants go home to a festive holiday meal with gifts and special foods, and the celebrating continues on the next day. They also send gifts and food to the poor and needy so that everybody can rejoice together. . .

There is a godly patriotism that goes beyond mere nationalism and civic pride and gives glory to God for what He has done. To see the hand of God in history and praise God for His goodness and mercy, and to ask God to forgive us for our sins, is perhaps the best way for the Christian patriot to celebrate a national holiday. But dedication must follow celebration. The American political leader **Adlai Stevenson** said, “Patriotism is not short, frenzied outbursts of emotion, but the tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime.”

Karen Jobes: However, as those events were unfolding day by day, even the individuals involved may not have recognized their significance in God’s great plan and purpose. The author’s deliberate silence on God’s role as the story unfolds is also a part of his message. **Fox’s** emphasis on the “indeterminacy” suggested by the author’s silence should be allowed its full force. The fact is, God’s “absence” in Esther is true to life as we experience it. Who could have been certain that God was positioning Esther to be an agent of his deliverance when she was taken to the bedroom of a lustful pagan king (and she pleased him in one night more than all the other virgins!)? In hindsight we may understand it to be so, but at that moment God truly was unseen and his intent concealed. It is therefore both appropriate and highly effective that the author of Esther has portrayed God as absent and his role in the story as uncertain, even though the outcome of the crisis itself seems assured when read within the larger biblical context.

When the Jews finally are delivered from destruction on Adar 13, consider the means by which it came. It stood as the terminus of a long sequence of improbable and even morally questionable events. When the deliverance was realized, it came about not through a miraculous showing of God’s power or a great spiritual revival among the Persians. It came about through the natural outworking of all the ethical and political flaws inherent in the administration of the Persian empire. Just as the nobles, satraps, and governors had bowed down to Haman in fear of his power, they now helped the Jews only because “*fear of Mordecai had seized them ... his reputation spread throughout the provinces, and he became more and more powerful*” (**vv. 3–4**).

There was nothing noble or admirable about the way this reversal of fortune occurred. God did not change the hearts and character of the people. They simply continued in the political intrigue and manipulations that characterized them. Even Esther manipulated

the king for her purposes, just as others had done. Mordecai's increasing power caused others to fear him, suggesting that he was not meek and mild in his new eminence. As both Christian and Jewish interpreters have agreed, this episode of Israel's history in Persia is not one of impeccable morality and exemplary spiritual character. Even so, God's promise could not be frustrated.

Quoting **Fox** who understands the book of Esther to link:

the issue of national salvation to human character. It raises the question of whether a person of dubious character strength and (initially) unclear self-definition can carry the burden of national salvation. Esther becomes a sort of judge (of the type we see in the book of Judges) without benefit of the Spirit of the Lord. She is a leader whose charisma comes not in a sudden divine imposition of spirit but as the result of a difficult process of inner development and self-realization.... In Esther, not miracles, but inner resources—intellectual as well as spiritual—even of people not naturally leaders, are to be relied upon in crisis.

In other words, the book of Esther shows how God fulfilled his covenant promise through **providence** instead of miraculous intervention. Divine providence means that God governs all creatures, actions, and circumstances through the normal and ordinary course of human life, without the intervention of the supernatural. The biblical author's view that the deliverance was a fait accompli on the basis of the ancient decree given to Moses reflects deep confidence in God's ability to do exactly what he says, regardless of how he chooses to do it. . .

The awareness of God's power and presence should excite us to prayer that is full of anticipation. The answers to our prayers are already on their way, set in motion through a chain of previous events that might appear insignificant even if we somehow became aware of them. . .

As God brings his ancient promise of salvation to fulfillment in individual lives throughout history, we cannot at any moment know the significance of world events or even that of the ordinary events of our own private lives. The author of Esther calls us to **trust in the power and presence of God** even when, and perhaps especially when, he seems absent and we cannot imagine how he could possibly do what he has promised in his Word.

Reflection on the events described in Esther should make us more open to the creative and unexpected ways God works in us and through us. We are called to **walk by faith**, not by sight; however, that faith is a certainty in the unseen realities lying behind what we do see. We are to live with the knowledge that both our best moments and our worst are all a part of what God is doing in us and through us in the lives of others. We cannot see the end of the matter from the beginning or the middle. The story of Esther assures us that we do not have to.

Tomasino: This pattern of reversal, however, is only the foreshadowing of a much

greater reversal: the crucifixion of Jesus was engineered by the devil and by evil people to do away with the threat posed by the Son of God. But that act of violence was turned into a victory, both through the fact that God accepted the death of Christ as atonement for our sins, and also through the resurrection, which demonstrated his victory over the power of death. In this sense, then, the book of Esther only demonstrates the continuation of a pattern wherein God uses enemies' devices against them. Of course, it pales in comparison to the coup that God pulled off in Jesus Christ.

Another point to observe in these reversal narratives is that in no case was God taken by surprise and forced to resort to His "plan B." Long before Israel was enslaved, God had foretold that the bondage and the deliverance would occur, and that Israel would prosper through it (**Gen 15:13–14**). God's divine forethought is also apparent in the Esther narrative, as the elevation of Esther to the office of queen occurred long before the crisis. God had anticipated the coming threat, and had made preparation "*for such a time as this*" (**Esth 4:14**). The atonement was not God's effort to make the best of the unanticipated death of Jesus: it was God's plan from the beginning that Jesus, "*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*" (**Rev 13:8** kjv), should suffer and die to take away our guilt (**Isa 53:6, 10**).

The idea of reversal is more than a literary motif, and it is more than a recurrent biblical theme. Indeed, it is even more than a theological proposition. For the Christian, it is an existential reality, the foundation of our identity in Christ. Like the Jews in the book of Esther, we were under the decree of destruction: "*We were by nature children of wrath, like the rest*" (**Eph 2:3**). But as in the case of Jews in the book of Esther, "it was reversed": "*But God ... even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ*" (**Eph 2:4–5** esv). The decree of death was overturned, not because of the will of a mortal sovereign, but because of the merciful intervention of God.

Deffinbaugh: [He takes a different view of the Feast of Purim]

Three things trouble me greatly about the Feast of Purim as described in these verses:

(1) The Feast of Purim was not established by God, but by men. The author tells us plainly that "*the Jews established and made a custom for themselves*" (**9:27**). Other feasts, like Passover and Pentecost, are biblical feasts, feasts which God established and which He instructed men to observe (see, for example, **Exodus 12:1–20**). The Feast of Purim is a purely Jewish invention, which Mordecai decrees the Jews are to observe. There is a vast difference between divinely initiated holidays and humanly devised holidays. Passover is the former; Purim is the latter.

(2) The Jews are celebrating their victory over their enemies. The author informs us that the Feast of Purim was celebrated on both the 14th and the 15th day of the same month "because on those days the Jews rid themselves of their enemies (**9:22**). The Jews celebrated their victory, not God's victory. This celebration is more like the celebration of a football team which has just won the super bowl. There is no talk of God or of grace, but only such words and thoughts as, "We are the greatest."

(3) The Feast of Purim is celebrated in a very different manner than the feasts which God has ordained. **Exodus 15** or **Judges 5** reveals the response of the Jews of an earlier time after God had granted them a great victory over their foes. But in each instance, the resulting “celebration” is not one of self-indulgence nor even of generosity and gift-giving. It is one of worship. God is worshipped and praised for the victory He has accomplished. In our text, Mordecai prescribes the way in which the Jews should celebrate the newly established Feast of Purim: *“they should make them days of feasting and rejoicing and sending portions of food to one another and gifts to the poor” (9:22)*. No biblical Jewish holiday is celebrated in precisely this manner. There are no sacrifices, no references to God, to His deeds, to His character or His Word. There is no worship, only celebration. It is more like New Year’s Eve in New York City or the New Orleans’ Mardi Gras than the Passover or Pentecost in Jerusalem.

David Strain: And in the celebration of Purim the Jews were doing two things. First they were remembering. They were remembering the remarkable providence of God, and his saving intervention, and the gift that He has at last given them of relief from their enemies, as **verse 22** puts it. That word, relief, by the way, is really the word rest, and it is a word that rings throughout Scripture, but especially perhaps in the books of Joshua and Judges, that feature holy war most prominently, it rings with connotations of God’s saving blessings and mercy. They remember the saving rest God gave them from their enemies. And the second thing they do is they remember that rest as they rejoice. They rejoice. *“The month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor.”* That day that commemorated their victory became the perennial day of rejoicing and celebration. The plot that was intended to destroy them became the festival that would unite them and sustain them down all the long years of trial that still lay ahead of them.

Ray Stedman: The Sweet Taste of Victory

2 Cor. 2:14 -- We have reminded you from time to time of the definition of a Christian as one who is continually cheerful, completely fearless, and constantly in trouble. Trouble is a continual experience as the Christian goes through life, but in every time and place of conflict God's will and God's provision for us is victory. That is what the book of Esther sets before us in pictorial fashion.

This is the marvelous story of God's process of delivering his people. We have seen how Haman plots the destruction of the people of God (a picture for us of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives), and issues an edict with the authority of the king by which the kingdom will ultimately be destroyed if it is carried out. Then we saw how Mordecai moves to prevent this, and, through Esther, brings about an awareness on the part of the king of what is going on. At last the folly of Haman is exposed, and the king hangs him on the gallows that was prepared for Mordecai. Then we have the issuing of a new edict, an edict which permits the Jews to defend themselves when the enemy comes against them. This is a beautiful picture of the seventh chapter of Romans, and the new law, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which sets us free from the law of sin

and death.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS:

Archer, Gleason L. Jr. *A Survey of Old Testament – Introduction*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1964.

Baldwin, Joyce G. *Esther – An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984.

Baxter, J. Sidlow. *Explore the Book*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1960.

Breneman, Mervin. *The New American Commentary – Ezra / Nehemiah / Esther*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993.

Bush, Frederic W. *Word Bible Commentary – Ruth / Esther*. Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1996.

Duguid, Iain M. *Esther and Ruth*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing Company, 2005.

Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Wilmington, DE: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1972.

Huey, F. B. Jr. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Esther*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978.

Jobes, Karen. *The NIV Application Commentary – Esther*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1999.

Laniak, Timothy S. *Understanding the Bible Commentary Series -- Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003.

Martin, John A. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary - Esther*. Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications Ministries, 1983.

McConville, J. G. *The Daily Study Bible Series – Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985.

Stedman, Ray C. *Adventuring Through the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 1997.

Tomasino, Anthony. *Evangelical Exegetical Commentary – Esther*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013.

Whitcomb, John C. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary - Esther*. Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1962.

Wiersbe, Warren W. *The Bible Exposition Commentary – Esther*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2001.

Wood, Leon. *A Survey of Israel's History*. Grand Rapids: MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970.

ONLINE RESOURCES:

(mainly https://www.preceptaustin.org/esther_commentaries or www.sermoncentral.com or www.sermonaudio.com)

Begg, Alistair.

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?t=t&keyword=Esther&BibleOnly=true&subscat=speaker&subsetitem=Alistair+Begg>

Borgman, Brian.

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?t=t&keyword=Esther&BibleOnly=true&subscat=speaker&subsetitem=Brian+Borgman>

Chi Alpha Christian Fellowship (based on Beth Moore study). <https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/2988a589/files/uploaded/Esther%20Study.pdf>

Constable, Thomas. <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/eng/dcc/esther-1.html>

Deffinbaugh, Bob. <https://bible.org/series/esther-study-divine-providence>

Guzik, David. <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/esther-1/>

Hurt, Bruce. https://www.preceptaustin.org/esther_commentaries

Klock, Thomas – CrossCards. https://media.swncdn.com/cms/pdf/CROSSCARDS-261-findyourpurpose-10day-study_cc.pdf

Malick, David. <https://bible.org/article/introduction-book-esther>
<https://bible.org/article/argument-book-esther>

Schultz, John. http://www.bible-commentaries.com/source/johnschultz/BC_Esther.pdf

Shank, H. Carl. <https://irp-cdn.multiscreensite.com/5425dcea/files/uploaded/EstherDraft.pdf>

Silversides, David.

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?t=t&keyword=Esther&BibleOnly=true&subscat=speaker&subsetitem=Rev+David+Silversides>

Stedman, Ray. <https://www.raystedman.org/old-testament/esther>

Strain, David. <https://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/scripture-index/esther/>

StudyLight Commentaries. <https://www.studylight.org/commentary/esther.html>

Swindoll, Chuck. <https://insight.org/resources/bible/the-historical-books/esther>

Thompson, David.

<https://www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?t=t&keyword=Esther&BibleOnly=true&subscat=speaker&subsetitem=David+E%2E+Thompson>