

The Book of Ester: God's Sovereignty in Human Affairs

"For such a time as this"

- Setting of the book: Reign of Xerxes (Ahasuerus) 486-465 BC.
- It tells the story of the Jews who remained in Persia after a small remnant had returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel (Ezra 2; 538-537 BC).
- Although God's name is not found explicitly in the Book of Ester, His presence and power are clearly manifested throughout as He provides deliverance for His people through a series of designed coincidences.

Part I. The expulsion of Queen Vashti

"On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was drunk from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at. But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger." Ester 1:9-12.

- Since Persian custom required women to be veiled in public, the king was asking her to degrade herself to satisfy his drunken whim. She refused to be displayed, thus angering the king.

The king then gets seeks advice from his wise men: "Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree...that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she. Then when the king's edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest" Ester 1:19-20.

Part II. The elevation of Ester

For the replacement of Vashti, a harem was assembled at the capital Susa (Shushan) from all the beautiful young women in the kingdom. "Then let young woman who pleases the King be queen instead of Vashti." Ester 2:4

- As potential young women were brought to Shushan, Ester (Hadassah) joined them: she had been adopted by her cousin Mordecai after the death of her parents. Mordecai's ancestor Kish had been carried into captivity in Babylon.

"Now when the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his daughter, to go in to the king, she requested nothing but what Hegai the king's eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her. So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which *is* the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. The king loved Esther more than all the *other* women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti." Ester 2:15-17

Ester hides her identity as commanded by Mordecai: “Now Esther had not revealed her family and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him” Ester 2:20.

- Mordecai, who sat within the king’s gate, subsequently exposes a plot to assassinate the king by telling Ester, who notified the king. The incident was recorded but Mordecai was not rewarded immediately.

Part III. The extermination of the Jews planned

Haman the Agagite was promoted by the king and “advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him. And all the king’s servants who were within the king’s gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage.” Ester 3:1-2

- Haman was an Agagite, a descendent of the kings of the Amalekites. Amalek was the grandson of Esau, who lived after the flesh and despised his birthright. Esau is the only man in Scripture whom God declared he hated: “As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.” Romans 9:13

The Amalekites were the perpetual enemies of God’s people, but God proclaimed that the day would come when He would wipe out the remembrance of Amalek.

God had commanded Saul to wipe out and utterly destroy the Amalekites, (1 Samuel 15:1-3) but instead he spared the king (Agag) and the best of their livestock. As a result, the Lord rejected Saul from being king over Israel; furthermore an Amalekite would later take credit for killing Saul (2 Samuel 1:8). Haman is a descendent of Agag.

The lesson: “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its lusts*” Romans 13:14

Mordecai refused to bow to a mere man, especially to an Amalekite. The law of Moses did not forbid showing respect due to those in authority, but it did forbid the worship of any but God.

“When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath. But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who *were* throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus—the people of Mordecai.” Ester 3:5.

Haman’s first step was to cast lots (Pur) to determine a suitable date for the mass execution. By a seeming coincidence, the date indicated was nearly a year away. God overruled this superstitious process to allow sufficient time to thwart Haman’s plan.

- Haman then approached the king with an inflammatory report about the Jews, misrepresenting them as a danger to the kingdom. As added incentive, Haman

offered to pay ten thousand talents of silver into the royal treasuries, badly depleted by the king's losses in Greece:

"There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws *are* different from all *other* people's, and they do not keep the king's laws. Therefore it *is* not fitting for the king to let them remain. If it pleases the king, let *a decree* be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring *it* into the king's treasuries.' So 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." Ester 3:8-10.

"And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth month, which *is* the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions." Ester 3:13

Part IV. The extermination of the Jews thwarted

Mordecai and the Jews mourn in sackcloth over the pronouncement, and Ester sent a servant to Mordecai to find out the cause of his lamentation: "And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, which was given at Shushan, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her, and that he might command her to go in to the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people. So Hathach returned and told Esther the words of Mordecai." Ester 4:4-9

- Ester was hesitant to carry out the command of Mordecai because to enter the king's presence without being summoned by him was a capital offense, and death was certain. She lets Mordecai know this by way of her servant.

"And Mordecai told *them* to answer Esther: "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. **Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?**" Ester 4:13-14

- Mordecai expressed tremendous faith in the purposes of God. He believed that though Ester may fail, God would not. Because God had promised a future for the Jewish people, Mordecai believed that somehow He would spare the Jewish people from the edict. He trusted God's word.

Here God reveals His purpose to Ester: God brought her to the kingdom for such a time as this to deliver His people.

- Ester does the right thing and asks for fasting on her behalf from the Jewish community.

“Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which *is* against the law; **and if I perish, I perish!**” Ester 4:16

“Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” Heb. 4:16

- Ester put on her royal robes and entered the presence of the king, who held out to her the golden scepter. He also promised to grant her request, up to half his kingdom. Ester invites him and Haman to a banquet.

Christ holds out His scepter of grace to all who come to him in repentance and faith. For the believer, the golden scepter is always extended: “Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” Hebrews 10:22

•A picture of anti-semitism: Haman

“Haman went out that day happy and in high spirits. But when he saw Mordecai at the king’s gate and observed that he neither rose nor showed fear in his presence, he was filled with rage against Mordecai. Nevertheless, Haman restrained himself and went home.

Calling together his friends and Zeresh, his wife, Haman boasted to them about his vast wealth, his many sons, and all the ways the king had honored him and how he had elevated him above the other nobles and officials. “And that’s not all,” Haman added. “I’m the only person Queen Esther invited to accompany the king to the banquet she gave. And she has invited me along with the king tomorrow. But all this gives me no satisfaction as long as I see that Jew Mordecai sitting at the king’s gate.” His wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, “Have a pole set up, reaching to a height of fifty cubits,[a] and ask the king in the morning to have Mordecai impaled on it. Then go with the king to the banquet and enjoy yourself.” This suggestion delighted Haman, and he had the pole set up.” Ester 5:9-14

• God-inspired insomnia of the pagan king:

“That night the king could not sleep. So one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. And it was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’s eunuchs, the doorkeepers who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. Then the king said, “What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?” And the king’s servants who attended him said, “Nothing has been done for him.” So the king said, “Who *is* in the court?” Now Haman had *just* entered the outer court of the king’s palace to suggest that the king hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him. The king’s servants said to him, “Haman is there, standing in the court.” And the king said, “Let him come in.” So Haman came in, and the king asked him, “What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?” Now Haman thought in

his heart, "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?" And Haman answered the king, "For the man whom the king delights to honor, let a royal robe be brought which the king has worn, and a horse on which the king has ridden, which has a royal crest placed on its head. Then let this robe and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that he may array the man whom the king delights to honor. Then parade him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor!'" Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry, take the robe and the horse, as you have suggested, and do so for Mordecai the Jew who sits within the king's gate! Leave nothing undone of all that you have spoken." Ester 6: 1-10

- The Lord is in perfect control of the circumstances
- Haman: "Pride *goes* before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" Proverbs 16:18

- At the banquet, Ester asked for her own life and the lives of her people, who had been sentenced to death.

The tables are turned: "So King Ahasuerus answered and said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing?" And Esther said, "The adversary and enemy *is* this wicked Haman!" So Haman was terrified before the king and queen" Ester 7: 5-6.

Judgment and justice comes swiftly: "Haman stood before Queen Esther, pleading for his life, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king. When the king returned from the palace garden to the place of the banquet of wine, Haman had fallen across the couch where Esther *was*. Then the king said, "Will he also assault the queen while I *am* in the house?" As the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. Now Harbonah, one of the eunuchs, said to the king, "Look! The gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai, who spoke good on the king's behalf, is standing at the house of Haman." Then the king said, "Hang him on it!" So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's wrath subsided." Ester 7:7-10.

"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." Galatians 6:7

Haman intended the gallows for Mordecai, but God turned it around and delivered Mordecai. Things that are designed to hurt or harm God's people, God will turn it around for their good. "No weapon that is formed against you will prosper. This is the heritage of the children of the Lord" Isaiah 54:17

Mordecai's promotion and the Jews' Deliverance:

The King's scribes were called and Mordecai dictated an edict that gave the Jews the right to protect their lives.

“By these letters the king permitted the Jews who *were* in every city to gather together and protect their lives—to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, *both* little children and women, and to plunder their possessions, on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth month, which *is* the month of Adar. A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province and published for all people, so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. The couriers who rode on royal horses went out, hastened and pressed on by the king’s command. And the decree was issued in Shushan the citadel.

So Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, with a great crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad. The Jews had light and gladness, joy and honor. And in every province and city, wherever the king’s command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. Then many of the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them.” Ester 8:15-17

- The king could not reverse the decree to eradicate the Jews, so he granted them permission to gather and defend themselves on the appointed day.

- The feast of Purim is an official Jewish holiday and a memorial of Ester’s successful intercession and of God’s preservation of His people—returning the evil that was intended against them for good, turning their sorrow into joy.

“The days wherein the Jews had rest from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning into a good day; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor.” Ester 9:22

- Mordecai was promoted to the place of prime minister. When Ester’s husband died, his son, also called Ahasuerus, became the next king. This Ahasuerus was the one who gave Nehemiah the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, no doubt due to the influence of Ester and Mordecai.

Excerpts taken from: Life application notes, *The Word for Today Bible* by Pastor Chuck Smith, Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa