

The Providence of God
A Sermon on the Book of Esther

by
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1. Introduction

2. God Exalts Esther in the Place of Vashti (1:1-2:20)

a. Vashti Deposed from being Queen (1:1-1:22)

i. The book of Esther begins with a description of Ahasuerus's kingdom (1:1-9).

1. In the third year of his reign, he holds a banquet for all of the princes, nobles, and military officers to attend.

a. This is a six-month banquet which holds two purposes to it.

b. We know from secular history that this is the time the king is planning his attack on Greece, so his list of attendees is based on all the people who can come and help develop strategy.

c. But notice in v. 4 that during this time, he displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty.

2. He then opens up the festivities to all people, both great and small, for another banquet that lasts for seven days.

a. And this is where you really see the opulence on full display.

b. You can just imagine the sort of overindulgence that characterized this seven-day extravaganza.

ii. On the final day of the banquet, the drunken king commands Queen Vashti to attend (1:10-22).

1. There's a tremendous amount of conjecture on what exactly the king desired his queen to do, but it is mostly just that: conjecture.

2. What we do know from v. 11 is that he wanted her to display her beauty before this crowd and she didn't like it one bit.
 - a. She refuses and angers the king.
 - b. The text also tells us he's afraid she's going to cause a sort of feminist movement among the women of Persia, which is what we see in vv.17-18.
3. To solve this dilemma, he issues an edict saying the queen has not only wronged him as king, but all the people of the land.
 - a. He deposes her as queen through an official edict, and as you can see in v. 19, it can't be repealed.
 - b. Notice though in vv. 21-22, he simply sends these letters all throughout the land, in every language, and part of it is simply establishing that every man should be the master of his home.

b. Esther Exalted as Queen (2:1-2:20)

- i. After a period of time, the king remembers his decree against Vashti and holds a beauty contest of sorts to determine the next queen (2:1-7).
 1. The king appoints people in all 127 provinces to pick out the most beautiful young virgins from among them so they can be brought into the harem of the king.
 2. In v. 5 we get introduced to Mordecai and the text gives us a very brief lineage and history of him, followed by that of Esther.
 - a. In v. 7 we find that Hadassah, which is Esther's Hebrew name, was raised by Mordecai because her parents were both dead.

- i. Mordecai, on one of his frequent visits to Esther, is sitting at the king's gate and hears of a plot to kill the king (2:21-22).
 1. Mordecai has been visiting Esther to check in on her like he always does, and on one such occasion, he overhears a discussion of two guards plotting to kill the king.
 2. He tells Esther who then tells the king on his behalf—but there's no mention of their relation. No mention that she's a Jew.
- ii. The plot is investigated and confirmed, and Mordecai's deeds are recorded in the Persian's records (2:23).
 1. Both men, of course, are hanged for their plot of assassination, but nothing further happens at this time.
 2. This is incredibly significant because the king would normally award such loyalty. Yet as we will see, even this oversight will all be part of the Lord's providential care for His people.

b. Haman's Promotion and Decree (3:1-15)

- i. We are introduced to a man named Haman, who is the king's righthand man (3:1-6).
 1. In v. 1 we learn something significant about this man, and it is that he is an Agagite.
 - a. The Agagites all trace their lineage back to king Agag, of the Amalekites.
 - b. Earlier we learned that Mordecai is a descendent of Kish, and Kish is from the tribe of Benjamin, and the tribe of Benjamin is from the line of king Saul.

- a. The king gives him his signate ring, which is basically a blank check for Haman to write up whatever decree he sees fit, and in this case, it gives permission for people to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, women and children, and to seize all of their possessions as plunder.
- b. The couriers go out and all the land is very aware of the fact that they have royal sanction to exterminate the Jews.

c. *Esther's Intervention (4:1-5:14)*

- i. Mordecai learns of this plot to kill his people, and he's taken to mourning in sackcloth and ashes in the king's gate (4:1-17).
 - 1. Esther hears of this, and an exchange happens between the two of them.
 - a. Mordecai informs Esther of the whole plot and even includes a copy of the royal decree—and then he begs her to stand before the king and plead on behalf of the Jews.
 - b. But there's a problem with this. If anyone comes before the king without an invitation, the king has the absolute power and right to kill them.
 - 2. Esther tells this to her uncle though, and his response is phenomenal (v. 14).
 - a. If you remain silent, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from somewhere else and you and your father's house will perish.
 - b. But perhaps, he suggests, *perhaps* you have attained to royalty for such a time as this?
- ii. Esther then goes before the king in chapter 5, not knowing if she will die or be spared (5:1-14).

1. Esther comes before the king and lays herself at his mercy. But king Ahasuerus has mercy and he asks in v. 3, “What’s troubling you, queen Esther?”
 - a. Evidently he can tell just by looking at her that something isn’t right—but he loves her, and so he reassures her that even up to half of the kingdom would be given to her at her request.
 - b. She asks for something relatively simple: she requests that he and Haman attend a banquet, and of course, he obliges her request.
 - c. For some reason Esther doesn’t sense this is the right time to reveal her request, so she asks yet again for another banquet.
2. Then the focus turns to Haman as he’s returning home, but as he daydreams of his good fortune, he bumps into Mordecai, who refuses to bow to him and becomes enraged yet again.
 - a. He returns home and boasts of all the ways the gods have smiled upon him to his wife and friends—and yet because of Mordecai, it is not enough.
 - b. His wife and friends encourage him to build gallows about 70 feet high, hang Mordecai from it—and then he can go to banquet in good spirits.

d. Mordecai is Recognized for His Previous Loyalty (6:1-6:12)

- i. Unbeknownst to Haman, there is another seemingly ordinary night taking place in the king’s palace where the king is having difficulty falling asleep.
 1. We’ve all had those restless nights where you toss and turn and evidently this isn’t an uncommon thing for the king either, so he does what any ordinary human would do.

- a. He asks his attendants to bring in a book of the royal records to be read to him so he can doze off.
 - b. But of all the records that could be picked, the one book his servants bring is the book that records of a man named Mordecai who revealed an assassination plot.
- ii. In a twist of irony, Haman just so happens to be on the scene and gets called into the king's quarters (6:4-11).
1. The king calls his righthand man to his side and asks in v. 6, "What is to be done for the man whom the king desires to honor?"
 - a. Haman, of course, just beaming and beside himself thinks the king wants to honor him. "Who else could the king desire to honor more than myself?" he thinks.
 - b. The king finds his counsel to be good, and in a shocking turn of events tells Haman, "Go and do all that you have said for Mordecai, the Jew."
- e. *Haman's Fall (6:12-7:10).*
- i. Haman returns home mourning his misfortunes to his wife and friends, and they tell him that this Jew he wished to kill would be his own downfall (6:12-14).
 1. Notice then in v. 14 though that in the midst of this conversation, the king's eunuchs arrive and hastily bring Haman to the banquet that Esther prepared.
 2. He has no time to process what's just happened; he's been summoned to go to the banquet, and he must go. We move then to chapter seven where we see everything unfold.
 - ii. Once again, the king and Haman are at the banquet, and once again the king affectionately reassures his queen (7:1-10).

1. This time, Esther doesn't hesitate. She replies in v.3, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me as my petition, and my people as my request, for we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated."
 - a. The king, no doubt bewildered by the fact that some treasonous man has presumed to kill his queen asks who the man is.
 - b. Esther breaks the silence, "A foe and an enemy is this wicked Haman!"
2. The king needs to clear his head—so he leaves their presence and Haman avails himself to the only thing he can think to do.
 - a. He knows the king will kill him, but he knows the king loves his wife, and so he begs her to spare him.
 - b. king comes in at just the right time and with a new wave of fury sees the worst thing imaginable: "will this wicked Haman even assault the queen with me in the house?"
 - c. He orders his servants to cover Haman's face in shame and a eunuch points out the freshly made gallows, where Haman is hanged.

4. God Exalts the People of Israel (8:1-10:3)

a. Israel Survives Haman's Genocidal Plot (8:1-9:19)

- i. The reversal of Israel's fate all happens in rapid succession (8:1-17)
 1. Esther finally reveals that Mordecai raised her as a child, and so the king places Mordecai in Haman's place.
 2. The king gives Mordecai his signate ring, which gives him the right to make official decrees under the name of the king.

3. Esther reveals the full plot of Haman to exterminate the Jews and then requests that Mordecai can write a letter to revoke what Haman has done.

- a. He orders them to write a decree to all the Jews in his name and seal it with his signate ring.
- b. The scribes are called in on the third month, which still gives the Jews ample time to prepare to defend themselves, based on the rights on this new decree.
- c. Then Mordecai is draped in royal robes and a large crown, and all the Jews rejoiced because it seems their fortunes have been reversed.

ii. The Jews prove victorious over their enemies (9:1-19).

1. “Now in the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar), on the thirteenth day when the king’s command and edict were about to be executed, on the day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, it was turned to the contrary so that the Jews themselves gained the mastery over those who hated them.”

- a. I’m going to summarize this whole section rather quickly because it simply tells us that rather than the Jews were victorious over their enemies in all the regions where the original decree was given to exterminate the Jews.
- b. They destroy 500 men and the ten sons of Haman in Susa, and then an additional 75,000 men in the remaining regions.

b. *Purim is Instituted (9:20-32)*

i. Mordecai and Esther then institute the days of Purim to celebrate the Jew’s victory (9:20-32).

1. Mordecai records these events in the history books of Persia and the people of Israel memorialize these two days with feasting and giving gifts to the poor.
 2. There's this delightful bit of irony here that again reminds us that though men may cast the lot, the determination is from the Lord.
- ii. Mordecai is recognized for seeking the welfare of his people (10:1-3).
1. We then turn to chapter 10, which is only three verses that give us some details about King Ahasuerus laying a tribute, or a tax, on the land
 2. It then draws attention once again to the greatness of Mordecai for seeking the welfare of the Jews, and the welfare of his whole nation, meaning Persia.

5. Conclusion

Small Group Questions

1. What have you learned about the providence of God? How have you seen this play out in your life, and why is this so significant to the life of the Christian?
2. Why is the providence of God significant as you think over your missional opportunities in the home, neighborhood, workplace, and more?
3. What can the providence of God do to encourage us in the monotony of life? What about the dark days where we are prone to despair?