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The Mystery of God's Providence

Esther 2

In John we read of the death of Lazarus- a death so shocking to Martha that she rebuked the Lord, "...Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." (John 11:21b)

The truth be known, when He heard about Lazarus' illness, Christ delayed two days, time enough for Lazarus to die! Why? The text says that it was because He "loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus" (cf. John 11:5)! If He loved them, why would He allow Lazarus to die? Christian, does God love you? Barring the Second Coming of Christ, is God some day going to "allow" you to die?

How it behooves us that we understand that God's loving purpose for us goes way beyond the things of this life and world! Lazarus's death was "unto the glory of God" (John 11:4).

Because of that, when we consider God's purpose and care of this world, most times we are at a loss to explain it, for with our limited gaze God's providence is mysterious! And it is to that we turn our focus.¹

We are looking at the second chapter of Esther, a chapter given to demonstrate that God's ways are not our ways! There are four scenes in which the reader is left to wonder how God will bring about His eternal purpose for His people. What would be the means by which God would deliver His people? We begin with scene #1: A changing of the guard.

Scene #1: A Changing of the Guard when it Came to the Queen, vv. 1-4, 12-14.

Esther 2:1, "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."

You may already know this, but there is a four-year gap between chapter 1 and chapter 2 of this book.² Accordingly, when we come to this chapter these things are history past:

- The Greco-Persian war had both been waged and lost by Ahasuerus.
- His time in Sardis where he engaged in a scandalous affair with his niece in the presence of Vashti likewise was past history.
- And though she was stripped of the title of queen, nevertheless we also know historically that Vashti continued to be part of Xerxes' life such that upon arrival back in Susa, we read in secular literature of the "Red Birthday Party" (my designation) where Vashti presented to Xerxes the mutilated body of the mother of his mistress!

So, when we read that Ahasuerus' anger "had subsided"³ AND that he "remembered Vashti", it is NOT difficult to imagine *WHAT* he "remembered" about his ex-queen.⁴ She was a strong woman and NOT one to be crossed NOR told what to do! And so, he purposed to install a new queen in agreement to the law that was passed four years before (Esther 1:19). But the question was "How?" His advisors responded.

Esther 2:2-4, "Then the king's attendants, who served him, said, 'Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king. 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; and let their cosmetics be given them. Then let the young lady who pleases the king be queen in place of Vashti.' And the matter pleased the king, and he did accordingly."

The clear emphasis is on the external looks of the woman who would replace Vashti and the pleasure of Xerxes. Ian Duguid wrote:

The original idea when Vashti was deposed and sent away from the king's presence was to find a better woman to fill her royal position (Esth. 1:19). By 'better,' the king's advisors presumably meant someone more compliant than Vashti, someone who would toe the royal line and obey her husband. Yet strangely enough, in their search for a replacement it never seems to have occurred to those in charge to include a character assessment. Instead, only three virtues were necessary in this 'better' woman: she had to be young, she had to be unmarried, and she had to be extraordinarily good-looking. (Duguid, 2005, pp. 18-19)

What we are talking about would have turned the stomach of any Jew reading this story (as it should us). While at the time in Persia it might have appeared that the lives of the women selected would have taken a turn for the better- security, food, pampering, etc. — nevertheless the life to which they were being called was that of being treated as less than a person, seclusion, loneliness, insignificance, and so much more!^{5,6} As to the selection process, we read this:

Esther 2:12, "Now when the turn of each young lady came to go in to King Ahasuerus [that is sleep with him], 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 myrrh⁷ and six months with spices⁸ and the cosmetics for women."⁹

No expense would be spared in the physical preparation of each woman. Already she was beautiful, she now had a year to endeavor to improve upon her looks! So, with this preparation complete we read:

Esther 2:13-14, "The young lady [we are talking here about a young teenager] 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. 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. She would not again go in to the king unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name."

This is why the life of one of the king's concubines was one of deprivation. If the woman did NOT stand out, she'd be forgotten. Yet, because she now was the property of the king, she was NOT free to marry another man. RATHER, she would live her life, essentially imprisoned, with the other forgotten wives of Xerxes!

Now when we think of God's providence and how He would deliver His people, with the mind of the typical Jew in this era we would NOT think it would have been through the deposition of Vashti and the choice of a new queen. We are talking here about a bankrupt system with a wicked king! So, at this point, we are going to ask what is behind Door #2- which brings us to scene #2.

Scene #2: A Tale of Two Compromisers, vv. 5-11.

Esther 2:5-6, "Now there was a Jew in Susa the capital¹⁰ whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei [who cursed David¹¹], the son of Kish, a Benjamite, 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."

Here we are introduced to "Mordecai." He was named after the chief Babylonian god, Marduk. As I've referenced, most Jews in the ancient world had multiple names on account of the mixed cultures in which they lived. For example:

- Daniel was the prophet's Jewish name, translated as "God is my judge".
- Yet his Babylonian name was Belteshazzar- literally *Belti-šar-ušur* which translated as "May the Lady/wife of the god Bel protect the king."

Now in most cases the secular name(s) of a child of God were rather benign, as in the case of Daniel, BUT NOT so with Mordecai. In his case, his name fits our initial impression of him.

When the people of God were given the option to return to the Promised Land, you know very few went home. Those that remained had been paganized and so struggled with worldliness. Life in Babylon/Persia was quite comfortable. Yet that did NOT mean that these Jews gave up on Judaism. Truly, God seemed far off from them (again, His name is NOT mentioned in this book which SHOWS the mindset of the Jew when it came to God at this time; He was viewed as far off). Yet in spite of this perception, they remained Jewish. Recall Haman's description of them:

Esther 3:8a, "Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, 'There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from *those* of all *other* people, and they do not observe the king's laws...'"

Yet as we have seen such a description really was NOT applicable to Mordecai. Judaism was NOT near as important to him as blending in and so advancing in the Persian system. For example, in this book Mordecai had advanced to the position of a Persian judge^{12,13} where he was employed at the summer palace in Susa. While this would have been viewed as a good job in that day, nevertheless it would have come with a need for compromise, positions like this were NOT acquired on account of skill alone. Then there is his awful advice to Esther to conceal her identity and so NOT practice Judaism (Esther 2:10).

At the start of this book, Mordecai is presented to us as a compromised Jew, more so than any of his countrymen. In other words, he's no Biblical hero at this point! And yet, though compromised he is a genuine servant of God which the forthcoming chapters will show. Secondly, we are introduced to Esther.

Esther, vv. 7-11.

Esther 2:7, "And he was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. Now the young lady was beautiful of form [figure] and face¹⁴, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter."

At this point we don't know much about Esther, BUT only that (1) she was an orphan [which raises a massive question: who sinned? Her or her parents?], (2) she was part of Mordecai's household [which would have raised questions about her integrity], and (3) she was incredibly beautiful. With that we read this:

Esther 2:8-9, "So it came about when the command and decree of the king were heard and many young ladies¹⁵ 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. [Sadly, she is one of them! Yet as a Jew, like Daniel before her, she no doubt is going to make a stand! Right? No...] Now the young lady pleased him and found favor with him. So he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and food, gave her seven choice maids from the king's palace, and transferred her and her maids to the best place in the harem."

Unlike Daniel and his three friends, Esther did NOT keep herself separate from Persia. She worked the system (just like Mordecai would have done to become a judge), and so she became a favorite of the eunuch in charge.¹⁶ Now that's not necessarily bad (to become someone's favorite). What is bad is what we read next.

Esther 2:10, "Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make them known¹⁷."

Here we have positive proof that Esther was compromised. She is going to keep her

Jewishness a secret? Again, do you understand what this means? Esther would NOT be a practicing Jew.

- No holy days.
- No worship.
- No fellowship.
- No hearing the Torah read.
- No special diet.
- No hint of Jewishness whatsoever.

And rather than read of any reluctance, Mordecai's advice seemed to have been heartily embraced by Esther.¹⁸ Applying the words of Duguid to her, we would say, "...when we hear the Jewish exiles described as those whose laws are different from those of every other people and who do not obey the king (Esther 3:8), we feel that [Esther], at least, is being grossly misrepresented." (Duguid, 2005, p. 35)

Esther 2:11, "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."

We don't know what impelled Mordecai to take this "daily walk." We'd like to think it was because he was so concerned for Esther's personal welfare. Yet his life choices and advice are the very reason Esther is where she was, doing what she is doing. And so, based on what we know it most likely is that Mordecai's daily walk and concern was for the purpose of hearing of Esther's advancement and success. Clearly, he had his agenda which involved Esther's success in which Esther was 100% complicit!

So, how is it that God is going to bring about His purpose for His people? It most certainly would NOT be through this compromised man and woman. While God can "draw a straight line with a crooked stick,"¹⁹ YET we're NOT talking here about a *CROOKED* stick, BUT a *BROKEN* one! That brings us to the third scene.

Scene #3: A "Go Figure" Moment, vv. 15-18.

Esther 2:15, "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.²⁰ And Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her."

This is shocking — or maybe not! Esther is the master schmoozer — she's Princess Charming — who seems always to end up on top. Now in a world that believed that God "helps those who help themselves", why would God bless Esther in this way? Yet it seems that that is God's will when it came to Esther.

Esther 2:16-17, "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. And the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found favor and kindness with him more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.”²¹

How many Jewish families much more righteous than Esther were struggling to survive at this time? Yet God poured His blessing upon this compromised Jew who has stopped practicing her religion! Then to top it off we read this:

Esther 2:18, “Then the king gave a great banquet, Esther’s banquet, for all his princes and his servants; he also made a holiday for the provinces and gave gifts²² according to the king’s bounty.”

Ahasuerus was smitten by Esther, so much so she got a banquet thrown in her honor and a holy day set aside in her name!

As we consider each scene thus far, there would NOT have been much enthusiasm when it came to answering the question: how is God going to protect and provide for His people? Consider the mindset of the faithful Jew in the Old Testament.

- Habakkuk, “*Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, and Thou canst not look on wickedness with favor...*” (Habakkuk 1:13b)
- Abraham, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” (Genesis 18:25b)

If you think along these lines — which typically is how my default programming reasons when I perceive the blessing of the Lord upon those I perceive as undeserving — you and I would have a hard time guessing THE means by which God would bring about His will for His people at this time. NONE of the options seem tenable! Yet there is one more scene *which is so easily missed*.

Scene #4: An Incredibly Innocuous Event, vv. 19-23.

Esther 2:19-20, “And when the virgins were gathered together the second time²³, then Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate.²⁴ [In other words, he was on duty] Esther had not yet made known her kindred or her people²⁵, even as Mordecai had commanded her, for Esther did what Mordecai told her as she had done when under his care.”

This serves as a status update describing what went on week after week. Mordecai and Esther haven’t changed at all, he remains a judge and she remains a compromised Jewish queen hiding her identity.

Esther 2:21, “In those days, while Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate, Bigthan

and Teresh²⁶, two of the king's officials from those who guarded the door, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus."

This would NOT be the last time Ahasuerus would be threatened. In a short fourteen years after this passage, Ahasuerus would be assassinated by the captain of his bodyguard. Yet such would NOT be the case when it came to "Bigthan and Teresh's" plot, for it was uncovered.

Esther 2:22-23, "But the plot became known to Mordecai, and he told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name. Now when the plot was investigated and found to be so, they were both hanged²⁷ on a gallows; and it was written in the Book of the Chronicles in the king's presence."

Ironically and to our surprise, it is this final scene which reflects THE most important puzzle piece that God would use to protect and deliver His people.²⁸ What was that puzzle piece? It was NOT the uncovered assassination attempt, BUT the fact that it was "...written in the Book of the Chronicles..."

We so easily read over this in light of either our love for Esther and Mordecai or our contempt for them. Now does that mean that the providential elements of this chapter — what occurred in Scenes 1-4 — are unimportant or immaterial to God's plan? Absolutely not!

Matthew 10:29b, "...not [a sparrow] will fall to the ground apart from your Father."

So clearly, when it came to God preserving and protecting His people, He most certainly would use these elements:

- Mordecai and Esther's compromised state,
- Xerxes' bankrupt personality,
- The court politics as well as the actions of a mad man, and
- The position that Esther acquired as queen of Persia, and more!

Truly, there are NO unimportant elements in the chapter before us. Yet THE most important element in this chapter that God would use to bring about His purpose for His people has LITTLE to do with Mordecai, Esther, concubines, weddings, Xerxes, Hegai, Haman, and the like! RATHER, it was the recording of an event by an unnamed scribe about a forgettable attempt on the life of Xerxes. As we will see in Esther 6, this was THE most significant moment when it came to God's care for His people in this chapter!

So, how do we make application? Don't forget, this chapter must be read in light of the overall message and so God's purpose and will for His people. When we do that, we see four things.

First, we see a contrast between man's anger and God's anger. (cf. Romans 2:5)

Esther 2:1, "After these things when the anger of King Ahasuerus had subsided..."

What a contrast to God's anger.

Romans 2:5, "But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God."

No sin, no matter how small, will go unpunished. Justice demands it! So unlike with man's anger, God's anger does NOT subside; it will always be executed!

So, at those times in our lives when we want to cry "foul" on account of the things of this world, let us be humbled, sobered, and prayerful. Justice belongs with God, He always will repay! (cf. Romans 12:19)

Secondly, we see the contrast between Xerxes's bride and the Christ's bride. vv. 2-4, 8-18; Ephesians 5:25-27.

What was THE only qualification used when it came to Ahasuerus' bride? She had to be beautiful (Esther 2:2,4). What a contrast! Whereas Xerxes would only marry a beautiful bride; Christ makes us, His bride beautiful!

Ephesians 5:25-27, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless."

What a God! What a Savior! We were NOT chosen to be Christ's bride because of our beauty! RATHER it was His choice that makes us beautiful! That means that no matter how much we sin, we will never be ugly to the Lord. For our beauty does NOT emanate from us BUT is given to us in Christ!

Thirdly, we see God's choice when it comes to His servants in bringing about His holy will, vv. 5-7; Ephesians 2:4-7, 8.

When we are introduced to Mordecai and Esther, we are struck by the fact that of all God's people in Persia, from man's perspective they were the most unworthy to be used by God to bring about His purposes! But so, it is with every genuine servant of God!

Ephesians 2:4-7, “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions [we were so unworthy, YET God...] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places*, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

it is as Paul told the Corinthians,

1 Corinthians 1:26-27, “For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong.”

When will we learn the incredible truth that our person and conduct was NOT and will never be the basis for God’s choice or blessing? We are saved by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves (Ephesians 2:8)!

Finally, coming back to the point and message of our passage, in this chapter we discover God’s providence is mysterious. vv. vv. 21-23

Truly, God’s providence goes way beyond our ability of observation, anticipation, or comprehension. Because of our default programming which believes that *God helps those who help themselves*, we tend to miss God’s working when it comes to our lives.

Isaiah 55:8-9, “‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,’ declares 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.”

This does NOT mean that God’s ways are unknowable. RATHER, it means that they are NOT innately intuitive to us as sinners. For us, the race is to the swift, the battle to the skilled warrior, blessing to the wise, and wealth to the worthy. Yet what do we read?

Ecclesiastes 9:11, “I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift, and the battle is not to the warriors, and neither is bread to the wise, nor wealth to the discerning, nor favor to men of ability...”

So, to what are we to look when it comes to the outworking of God’s purpose for His people? Paul put it this way:

Ephesians 3:20, “Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

This is the way, the why, and the wherefore of all that God is doing in your life and on this earth! He is demonstrating the greatness of His character through His providential dealings with (1) the church/His people and (2) Christ!²⁹ In light of this, may God make us willing servants!

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End Note(s)

¹ “Throughout the narrative of chapter 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.” (Breneman, 1993, p. 319)

² “‘Later’ does not specify how much later. Verse 16 indicates that when Esther came before the king, it was the seventh year of Xerxes’ reign. That would be four years after the events of chapter 1.” (Breneman, 1993, p. 313)

³ “This verb (Heb. *šākak*), which occurs only five times altogether in the Old Testament, is found again in 7:10, so tending to link these incidents.” (Baldwin, 1985, p. 64)

⁴ “That Ahasuerus remembered Vashti implies some uneasiness over the whole incident, but the king was trapped by his own legislation decreed against her. The verb (Heb. *gāzar*) meant ‘cut, divide’ and is an Aramaism in the sense of ‘decree’.” (Baldwin, 1985, p. 64)

⁵ “These verses highlight the inhumanity of polygamy. The twelve months of beauty treatment provided ‘marriage preparation’, but the sad part was that 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..." (Baldwin, 1985, pp. 67-68)

⁶ "Though this sounds like a beauty contest, it was not a very happy assignment for most of the women. They were uprooted from their communities, which implied confinement to the king's harem, and moved to what would actually be perpetual widowhood." (Breneman, 1993, p. 314)

⁷ "Persia and India, together with Arabia, were famous for their aromatic perfumes which they exported from time immemorial, so it is not surprising that full use of them was made at the royal harem. Even today vestiges of ancient customs connected with preparation of the bride for her wedding survive in parts of Iran and north India. These include ritual cleansing at the communal bathhouse, the plucking of eyebrows and removal of body hair, and the painting of hands and feet with henna, in addition to facial make-up. Application of beautifying paste over several months could be expected to lighten the colour of the skin and remove spots and blemishes, much as face-packs are used today. Oil of myrrh was valued for its sweet perfume (Ps. 45:8; Pr. 7:17). There can be no doubt about the seriousness with which all this beauty treatment was applied." (Baldwin, 1985, p. 68)

⁸ "W. F. Albright has drawn attention to the use of cosmetic burners during the fifth century BC in South Arabia, Palestine and Mesopotamia. On the basis of a study of inscriptions on such burners he suggests that the fragrant spices mentioned here were used in fumigation, 'which would have both hygienic and therapeutic value.'" (Baldwin, 1985, pp. 68-69)

⁹ "It has been suggested that the women may literally have spent their time 'in' these elements, with ointments being applied by means of a chemical bath or fumigation! The food they were given was likewise more than mere sustenance: it was intended to enhance their beauty, perhaps by fattening up these scrawny commoners (see Daniel 1:15). The modern Western cult of 'thin is beautiful' would undoubtedly have been regarded as a bizarre preference in the ancient world, as it is in many parts of the world to this day." (Duguid, 2005, p. 23)

¹⁰ "Mordecai lived in the citadel of Susa, along with the imperial employees, rather than out in the city of Susa itself." (Duguid, 2005, p. 21)

¹¹ Cf. 2 Samuel 16:5.

¹² "The implication of the phrase sitting in the king's gate [cf. 2:21] has been taken up by Gordis, who claims that it is not 'a meaningless tag in any of its five occurrences in the book'. He points out that, throughout the ancient Near East, 'the gate' was the area where justice was dispensed, and that, while the litigant stood, the king or his appointed official 'sat' (cf. Pr. 31:23, RSV)." (Joyce G. Baldwin, *Esther*, TOTC, p. 70)

¹³ "Throughout the Near East, law cases and official matters were handled near the gate area. Therefore, that Mordecai was 'sitting at the king's gate' suggests that he was an official of some sort (cf. Lot in Gen 19:1)." (Breneman, 1993, p. 321)

¹⁴ "The Hebrew is more specific, 'beautiful in form and lovely to look at', 'lovely in form and features' (NIV)." (Baldwin, 1985, p. 66)

¹⁵ "The vague statement many maidens has provoked guesses as to a likely number. According to Josephus there were four hundred, but Paton, estimating at the rate of a different girl per night for four years (16; cf. 1:3), arrives at 1,460." (Baldwin, 1985, p. 66)

¹⁶ "Esther learned that the harem was simply life in the empire in miniature: a relatively pointless existence, where life was regulated in all its details, and promotion depended not on talent or character, but on pleasing those in charge. Thus Esther learned to be a pleaser, first of all charming Hegai- the 'keeper of the women,' to give him his official title... Esther didn't merely 'find favor' (*matsa' hen*) in Hegai's sight... Esther 'won favor' (*nasa' hen*) in Hegai's sight: she worked for her promotion in the house of women, by fitting into the agenda that the empire set for her. She was willing to let the empire

define her reality. Resistance was not high on her program at this point; on the contrary, she seemed content, even eager, to be assimilated.” (Duguid, 2005, pp. 22-23)

¹⁷ “The similarity of Esther’s position to that of Daniel and his three friends, exiled and incorporated into the imperial system, highlights also what is different about them. Daniel and his three friends stood up to the empire, quietly but firmly requesting permission to be faithful to their own beliefs by not eating the royal food (Daniel 1:8–16). They received permission to do so and God in turn blessed them, against all the odds. They remained unassimilated, and yet were nonetheless respected by the empire because of God’s direct intervention. Unlike Daniel and his three friends, however, Esther had apparently no ethical qualms about eating the empire’s food and being used as the emperor’s plaything. And following Mordecai’s advice, her Jewishness remained perfectly concealed...” (Duguid, 2005, p. 23)

¹⁸ “The result of the family’s history of disobedient compromise was that Mordecai and especially Esther found themselves in a position that, for all its worldly advantages, was potentially disastrous spiritually. Esther ended up married to an uncircumcised pagan and virtually cut off from the community of faith, successfully pretending not to be a child of the true and living God... Her enviable progress in one world, the world of the empire of Ahasuerus, came at the cost of completely suppressing her identity as a citizen of the kingdom of God.” (Duguid, 2005, p. 27)

¹⁹ Thomas Watson wrote, “Suppose you were in a smith’s shop, and should see there several sorts of tools, some crooked, some bowed, others hooked. Would you condemn all these things, because they do not look handsome? The smith makes use of them all for doing his work. Thus it is with the providences of God; they seem to us to be very crooked and strange, yet they all carry on God’s work.” (Watson, 2010, p. Chapter 16)

²⁰ “The offer of all kinds of adornment meant that prospective queens revealed by the choice they made whether they had good judgment and artistic sense, or whether they were interested only in enriching themselves. Esther was prepared to be guided by Hegai, who no doubt knew what was in keeping with the king’s preferences.” (Baldwin, 1985, p. 69)

²¹ “‘Sense,’ in the shape of Esther, has apparently triumphed over ‘Sensibility’ (Vashti), to use the model of Jane Austen’s book.” (Duguid, 2005, p. 25)

²² “The gifts of the king on this occasion would probably be portions of food (cf. Genesis 43:34; Je. 40:5 where the same word *mašē’ēt* occurs and the context supplies the meaning), and so all the population, and not merely the rich and influential, had cause for rejoicing.” (Joyce G. Baldwin, *Esther*, TOTC, p. 69)

²³ “Some scholars think [the reference to ‘a second time’] is a flashback to a time before Esther was chosen queen. But Keil correctly maintains that it can only mean a second gathering of virgins after Esther was made queen. Gordis agrees and says: ‘In view of the context which describes Esther’s coronation, we suggest that the verse refers to a second procession of the unsuccessful contestants, whose undeniable charms served to set off in more striking relief Esther’s beauty.’” (Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, NAC, p. 321)

²⁴ “This location identifies him as an official of the king, although whether he held such a position already before Esther’s rise to the throne or received it through Esther’s influence is not clear. Joyce Baldwin argues for the latter (Baldwin, 1985, p. 70)(Esther although the fact that Mordecai already lived in the citadel of Susa rather than in the city (2:5) before Esther was taken may point in the opposite direction.” (Duguid, 2005, p. 26)

²⁵ “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.’” (Duguid, 2005, p. 25)

²⁶ “As guardians of the threshold, Bigthan, who may be the Bigtha of 1:10, and Teresh guarded with their life the door of the royal apartment, but in doing so they had unique

opportunities to conspire against the king. Many monarchs have died at the hands of their own servants, including eventually Ahasuerus.” (Baldwin, 1985, p. 71)

²⁷ “Both practices existed in the Persian period. The interest in the height of the gallows, at least in Haman’s case (Esth. 5:14), may point toward hanging rather than impaling (Carey A. Moore, Esther [Anchor Bible; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971], 31). For the Persians, impaling was not generally the means of execution, but a subsequent step, designed to expose the body to public shame.” (Duguid, 2005, p. 26)

²⁸ “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.” (Breneman, 1993, p. 322)

²⁹ “Here is hope for all those who find themselves in difficult circumstances in the present because of their past sin and compromise. Here is hope for people who married a non-Christian husband or wife, even though they knew it was wrong. The person who chose a career based on all the wrong motivations, or who has wasted a lifetime in pursuit of the wrong goals can discover that God is sovereign even over those sinful choices and wasted opportunities. Perhaps he has brought us to where we are today so that we can serve him in a unique way. If so, that doesn’t make those wrong decisions and sinful actions right. But it should cause us to give thanks to God that he is able to form beautiful pictures out of our smudged and stained efforts. Past failures do not write us out of a significant part in God’s script for the future.” (Duguid, 2005, p. 29)