

God's Providence in the Book of Esther

INTRODUCTION:

- A. It is biblical to apply the principles of God's providence in the book of Esther to each individual Christian's life.

Matthew 10:29-31 (ESV) ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Colossians 4:2-4 (ESV) ²Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. ³At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— ⁴that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

- B. The events occur in the time of the Persian Empire, between 483 and 471 B.C., in the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes the Great).

1. Over 100 years after the Babylonian captivity, between the return of a first group of Jews to Judah from Babylon (538 B.C.) and the return of a second group led back by Ezra (458 B.C.).
2. The Jewish people in the book of Esther are those who remained behind in Susa, the capital of the Persian empire.
3. The theme of the book is "God's Providence."
 - a. There is no mention of God in the book of Esther at all.
 - b. God worked "behind the scenes" in order to accomplish His will.
4. The four main characters of the book are Esther and her cousin, Mordecai, the King of Persia, Ahasuerus (Xerxes), and Haman.

- C. The key verses in the book:

Esther 4:13-14 (NKJV) ¹³And 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. ¹⁴For 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?"

I. THE STORY OF ESTHER

- A. The Rejection of Vashti (**1:1-22**)

1. King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) comes home from conquering all Asia and throws a huge drunken party that lasts 187 days. (**1:1-8**)
2. The drunken king commands Queen Vashti to come and show off her beauty, but she refuses and the king is furious. (**1:9-12**)
3. He rejects Vashti as queen to set an example for all of the women of the land. (**1:13-22**)

- B. The Crowning of Esther (**2:1-23**)

1. Beautiful young virgins are brought from all over the kingdom to prepare for the

selection of a new queen. **(2:1-4)**

2. Hadassah (Esther) is taken in with the other virgins and given special attention. Mordecai advises her to stay quiet about her nationality. Every day he checks on her. **(2:5-11)**
3. Esther prepares herself for 12 months and is finally presented to the king. The king loves Esther more than all the other women **(2:12-18)**.
4. Mordecai overhears a plot to kill the king and saves his life. Esther tells the king on Mordecai's behalf and the two eunuchs are hanged. Mordecai's deed is written in the king's chronicle. **(2:19-23)**

C. Haman's Plot to Kill the Jews **(3:1-15)**

1. Haman is promoted to a high position and the king makes a decree that all bow in reverence to him. Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman **(3:1-5)**
NOTE: The Jewish Targum (rabbinical commentary) says that Haman set up a statue for himself and everyone was obligated to bow to it and adore Haman himself, so Mordecai refused because prostrating himself to a statue implied worship of idols.
2. Haman finds out that Mordecai is a Jew and plots to have the Jews destroyed **(3:6)**
3. Lots are cast to choose the day to exterminate the Jews and it ends up being months away on the 13th day of the 12th month. (3:7)
4. Haman lies about the Jews to get the king to agree to kill them. (3:8)
5. Haman says he will pay for it himself (3:9) but he plans to be repaid by the plunder collected (3:13).

D. Mordecai Pleads with Esther to Intercede **(4:1-17)**

1. The Jews mourn their impending destruction and Esther inquires about the problem **(4:1-5)**
2. Mordecai sends someone to plead with Queen Esther to intercede **(4:6-9)**
3. Esther fears for her life **(4:10-12)**
4. Mordecai challenges Esther to trust in God and in His providence **(4:13-14)**
5. Esther agrees to intercede **(4:15-16)** ... "and if I perish, I perish"

E. Esther's Plan to Save the Jews **(5:1-14)**

1. Esther requests the King and Haman to come to a feast, and then to another **(5:1-8)**
2. Haman joyfully brags to his family about the honor, but is outraged again by Mordecai's refusal to bow. **(5:9-13)**
3. His family advises him to hang Mordecai on a 50 cubit high gallows **(5:14)**
4. That night the king is unable to sleep and reads about Mordecai's deed **(6:1-3)**
5. When the king asks Haman for advice, he thinks he is being honored and devises an elaborate plan. **(6:4-9)**
6. Totally humiliated, Haman must honor Mordecai **(6:10-14)**

F. At the second banquet, Esther reveals Haman's plot **(7:1-10)**

1. The king asks what Esther's request is, then Esther reveals to the king her heritage and tells him what has been devised against her people.
2. Haman is taken out and hanged on his own gallows.

G. Esther pleads for her people **(8:1-17)**

1. Because no law can be reversed, Ahasuerus gives Esther and Mordecai the authority to make a counter decree (8:8)
2. The Jews are given the authority to resist their enemies (8:9-14) — and are saved!!

H. Jewish victory over their enemies (9:1-16)

1. The Jews people fight; many take their side; many convert to Judaism.
2. The enemies are killed; Haman's 10 sons are killed.

I. The celebrations of their victories (9:17-32)

1. On the 14th day of Adar there was rest in the villages, but in Susa the the 15th day.
2. Both days are thus honored in the feast of Purim.

J. Mordecai's Notoriety (10:1-3)

II. LESSONS ON PROVIDENCE:

A. God works mysteriously behind the scenes to help the efforts of His people succeed.

1. Notice how many things just “happened” to take place to make this deliverance possible.
 - a. How was it that Vashti happened to fall from the kings favor at just this time, so that another queen could be selected?
 - b. How was it that Esther was selected among hundreds of girls to be the king’s queen?
 - c. How was it that Esther was TWICE extended the golden scepter rather than lose her life for coming uninvited to the king?
 - d. How was it that when Haman wanted to determine what day to destroy the Jews that the lot kept coming up negative time after time until it reached the twelfth month?
 - e. How was it that the two men who plotted the king’s death happened to speak in the presence of Mordecai?
 - f. And how was it that the king neglected to reward him immediately for his good deed?
 - g. How was it that the king happened to have insomnia the night before the banquet with Esther and to have read the report of Mordecai’s help?
 - h. How was it that Haman had built the gallows of his own destruction the day before he would fall into the king’s disfavor?
2. What the natural man might call “coincidence,” the believer might call “divine providence.”
3. God will work His providence, regardless of whether or not His people obey Him:
 - a. Notice that Haman is an Amalekite (Esther 3:1). Hundreds of years earlier God had issued a charge to King Saul to utterly destroy them (1 Sam. 15:1). But Saul disobeyed. What if he had obeyed? There would have been no Haman! This threat to the people of God would not have existed.
 - b. Mordecai: During the rebellion of Absalom against David, one of the descendants of Saul named Shimei followed David and hurled stones and uttered curses against David as he left the area (2 Sam. 16). David’s men

wanted to slay Shimei; but David refused to take revenge. Later upon David's return, Shimei met him at the Jordan begging for mercy. Again David's men urged him to take revenge; but David refused to do so (2 Sam. 19). It's a good thing he refused because Mordecai was a descendant of Shimei (Esther 2:5). If David had acted vengefully, Mordecai would never have been born.

B. God is at work in the darkest times of life.

1. What we see is not necessarily all that is happening. In our times of trial "behind a frowning providence God hides a smiling face."
2. God knows the needs of His people and provides for them.
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C. To trust in God's providence is to be content with our life as it is.

1. We may be where we are because God wants us there. *Complain? Covet? Live selfishly? Or get busy serving?*
Hebrews 13:5 (ESV) ⁵Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."
2. Destructive pride and covetousness does nothing but build our own gallows. *Haman's pride destroyed himself and his family.*
 - a. I will serve the Lord right where I am. I won't dwell on the past or wish for the future!
 - b. I will stop moping! I will not live discontented. My circumstances do not define my life.
 - c. I will not expect change to make me happy.
 - d. I will live a fulfilled and satisfied life, discovering all the blessings of service to the Lord.
 - e. I will never forget where I am headed.