

Title: The Invisible God

Text: Esther, chapter 5

Main Point: God works behind the scenes for His people

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Series: The Book of Esther

INTRODUCTION

Historically, the events of Esther take place during the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes). (Ahasuerus represents the linguistic pathway following the Aramaic rendering; the Greek language identified him as Xerxes. Although the different languages used different names, both names speak of the same ruler.) History records Xerxes' character as vain, foolish, fickle, and hot-tempered. Nevertheless, Xerxes ruled an immense area, "from India to Ethiopia" (Est 1:1), celebrated for his massive building projects at Susa and Persepolis. His rule ended in 465 B.C. by assassination.

The book of Esther is part of the biblical books (Ezra and Nehemiah) and describes the Jews' return from exile in 538 B.C. Esther, although in the same historical context, generally describes those Jews who remained in Persia rather than returning to Israel. In 586 B.C., the Babylonian leader Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and took its captives to Babylon. Later, Babylon fell to Persia in 539 B.C. The Persian leader Cyrus the Great permitted Jews who were interested to return to their homeland in 538 B.C. However, some (Esther and Mordecai) remained in Persia.

There are those, and I am one, who resist placing too much emphasis on Esther and Mordecai. Neither acknowledges their Jewish heritage (Esther 2:10, 20) until the threat of extinction (Esther 4:13; 7:3-4). Esther seems more concerned with Persian law (Esther 4:11) than God's law. Esther entered the king's palace a virgin (Esther 2:2) and left a concubine (2:14). Sex outside marriage was against God's law. Further, the writer focuses on Mordecai and Esther remaining in Persia rather than returning to Jerusalem. Also, Esther became the wife of a foreign king, something God warned against (Deuteronomy 7).

I realize there is disagreement on the degree to which Mordecai and Esther assimilated into Persian culture and the rationale for doing so. After all, they were willing to risk their lives for the Jewish people. All I am saying is that I do not make too much of Mordecai and Esther. The book of Esther is about God, even though it doesn't mention His name. It is an encouraging book for Christians. Most of the time, God is active behind the scenes, working His purpose into individual lives, as in the book of Esther.

In *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Forrest S. Weiland provides fifteen evidentiary pieces of God's working in the book of Esther. I find his article excellent, and it places the book's emphasis correctly on God's work behind the scenes.

Here are the fifteen points he makes:

Many scholars see at least an indirect reference to God's activity in Esther 4:3, 14; 9:1, 22, and most see His sovereign presence encased in the outworking of the events. Several events, favorable incidents, and veiled statements point to God's sovereign working on behalf of the Jews.

First, Queen Vashti's refusal to come at King Ahasuerus's bidding not only created an immediate conflict, but also set in motion a series of events which made possible Esther's rise to power (1:12).

Second, Esther's beauty (for which God as Creator was responsible) provided an opportunity for her to enter and win the beauty pageant (2:7, 15).

Third, the “favor” (חַסֵּד) that Esther continually experienced suggests that providential power was at work (2:9, 15, 17; 5:2; 8:4–5).

Fourth, an incident in chapter 2 clearly points to a guiding hand moving through these events. Mordecai overheard a plot to kill Ahasuerus. His working in the king’s gate (2:19, 21) gave him the opportunity to uncover this conspiracy. Also, the recording of this in the king’s chronicles was necessary so that it could be found later by the king (2:21–23; 6:2).

Fifth, the casting of the lot before Haman “in the first month” fell out so that the destruction of the Jews would take place in the “twelfth month” (3:7, 13). This gave the Jews eleven months to prepare to defend themselves.

Sixth, Mordecai made a veiled reference to God’s sovereign working. He told Esther that if she failed to intercede for the Jews, then “deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place.... And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?” (4:14).

Seventh, Esther’s unexplained failure to articulate her request before the king at the first banquet points to God’s superintending purpose. Her hesitancy, whatever the motive, enabled several important events to unfold in chapter 6, of which the most important began with the king’s insomnia.

Eighth, the king’s sleepless night led to his reading of the chronicles and discovery of Mordecai’s good deed, which had taken place years earlier (2:16; 3:7; 6:1–3).

Ninth, Haman’s arrival at the king’s court to request the right to hang Mordecai, simultaneously with the king’s desire to reward Mordecai, suggests that God’s hand was at work (6:4–10).

Tenth, Zeresh’s statement that Haman would not be able to defeat Mordecai since he was a Jew alluded to the unique position of the Jews in God’s purpose (6:13).

Eleventh, Ahasuerus’s return from the garden at the exact moment when Haman was falling on Esther’s couch led him to misinterpret that action as an attack on the queen and resulted in the execution of Haman (7:8).

Twelfth, many conversions to Judaism took place (8:17; 9:27).

Thirteenth, a dread of the Jews and/or a dread of Mordecai had fallen on many people (8:17; 9:3).

Fourteenth, the narrator explained that circumstances were turned to the favor of the Jews (9:1, 22).

Fifteenth, not one Jew was listed as killed in the fighting. In contrast to this, Haman, his ten sons, and 75,800 enemies of the Jews were slain (9:5–16).

Berg writes, “These ‘coincidences’ fall within the realm of possibility but nevertheless strain the laws of probability.” At a minimum, these dramatic developments and perfectly timed incidents allude to something more than chance. Taken together they suggest that a divine superintending and a providential weaving together of circumstances by an unseen hand have taken place. The author probably assumed that the events themselves would provide plausible evidence for the conclusion that God had providentially intervened on behalf of His people. (Forrest S. Weiland, “Literary Clues to God’s Providence in the Book of Esther,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160 (2003): 44–45.)

The “Fingerprints of God” in Esther 5

1. 5:2, “When the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won favor in his sight, and he held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand
2. 5:3, “The king said to her, “What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom.”

Christians and Esther 5

1. Paul provides a principle for the use of the Old Testament in 1 Corinthians 10. “Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.” (1 Corinthians 10:11) Therefore, I want to offer two insights I see from Esther, chapter 5, for Christians.
 2. The first insight is for those who feel evil is winning. Someone took advantage of you, and it appears God is doing nothing about it. Your “Haman” is “joyful and glad of heart” (5:9) while you suffer.
 - 2.1. Yet, like in your life, Haman’s time is coming to an end. He has no idea, but God is working on behalf of His people to end his evil.
 - 2.2. In these situations, I find three truths helpful.
 - 2.2.1. 1 Samuel 2:9, “**He will guard the feet of his faithful ones**, but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness, for not by might shall a man prevail.
 - 2.2.2. Luke 18:7-8, “Will not God **give justice to his elect**, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily.”
 - 2.2.3. Romans 8:28, “We know that for those who love God **all things work together for good**, for those who are called according to his purpose.”
3. The second insight is that bitterness is a poison that cannot be contained.
 - 3.1. “Bitterness is that state of mind which willfully holds on to angry feelings, ready to take offense, able to break out in anger at any moment.” (Got Questions Ministries, Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2002–2013).)
 - 3.2. Hebrews 12:15, “See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.”

Faith Hill's song "Cry" captures bitterness well.

<p>If I had just one tear running down your cheek Maybe I could cope maybe I'd get some sleep If I had just one moment at your expense Maybe all my misery would be well spent</p> <p>If your love could be caged, I would hold the key And conceal it underneath the pile of lies you handed me And you'd hunt those lies They'd be all you'd ever find And that'd be all you'd have to know For me to be fine</p>	<p>Yeah, and you'd cry a little, Die just a little And I would feel just a little less pain I gave now I'm wanting Something in return</p> <p>So cry just a little for me I gave now I'm wanting Something in return So cry just a little for me Yeah, cry just a little for me</p>
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