



ESTHER

GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN AN EVIL DAY

Questions of Ambiguity

Difficult Decisions 2



Why Esther?

Paul states: “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of Scriptures we might have hope (Rom 15:4).

Why Esther? – So that we may have hope.

The Great Paradox

God is omnipotently present
even where God is most
conspicuously absent.

The King's Unhappiness (vs.1-4)

- Timeframe: 483 B.C. (War Council) – 479 B.C. (Esther made queen)
- State of Mind: Herodotus describes Xerxes' life as one of “sensual overindulgence.” He dallied with the wives of his officers and leaders.
- Small Minded: His search for a “better” wife focuses on only beauty.

The Introduction of Mordecai (vs. 5-7, 10-11)

Positive:

- Lineage: Jew of the family of Benjamin
- Character: Protector of his orphaned cousin

Neutral:

- Jewish Concealment: He kept his heritage secret. He had partially adopted the lifestyle of the Persians.
- Failure to Protect: He allowed Esther to be taken.

Conclusion: Mordecai is introduced as a neutral figure. He has both strengths and potential weaknesses.

The Introduction of Esther (vs. 8-9)

Positive:

- Physically: Lovely in form and feature
- Socially: Pleasing to the eunuchs

Negative:

Law Breaker: There is no indication that Esther made any attempt to maintain fidelity to God's covenant.

Conclusion: The reader is not sure what to make of Esther. A law-abiding Jew would be repulsed by her compromise. Yet, they would know that she was a 'savior' for Israel.

Author's Intent

Regardless of motives and practices, God uses less than perfect individuals to achieve His ultimate, perfect purpose for good.

The Sensual Setting (vs. 12-14)

1. It was the practice of ancient kings to have immense harems with both men and women.
2. The king spared no expense in preparing the women to satisfy him.
3. A concubine was not to be shared with another man after the king. She spent her life in luxurious but desolate seclusion.

The Taking of Esther (vs. 15-18)

1. She listens to the advice of the chief eunuch.
2. She wins the favor of the people and the king.
3. She is granted the status of queen.

What was Esther thinking?

1. Perhaps she internally resisted every step of this pathway, yet failed to speak out because of her youth, inexperience, and obedience to Mordecai. Should we understand her situation as her having no choice? Is that a justification for her actions? Is she to be perceived as an innocent child with no culpability? Is Esther a naïve individual on whom we should take pity?

What was Esther thinking?

2. Perhaps she thought that if she could rise to power (in whatever means provided) then she could be in a position to have a positive influence for good. . . In the end, this is what happens. . . Do the ends justify the means? Is Esther a pragmatic thinker who is doing what is necessary to potentially accomplish the greater good?

What was Esther thinking?

3. Perhaps she was overwhelmingly flattered by the situation. She was going from an orphan to the palace. She was being granted great favor and an opulent lifestyle. To be with the king of the empire was considered an honor. She may not have had any level of regret for her actions. She followed the expected cultural path before her. . . If this is the case then how should we view her? Is Esther a sinful compromiser who has embraced a pagan culture?

What are the original readers thinking?

What parallels or commands would come to mind?

1. Joseph and Potiphar's wife – Gen 39
2. Daniel and his three friends – Dan 1 – 3
3. Ezra and the people in Israel – Ezra 9-10
4. Mosaic Law – Deut 7:3

What does God want us to think?

1. The author does not tell us what Esther was thinking. Any guess is just a guess. The author (Holy Spirit) does not want her motivations to be the focus of the passage. He desires that we think beyond the human action.
2. The actions of Esther cannot be justified in accordance with the OT law or the actions of others. She clearly falls short of the mark of the perfect standard.

What does God want us to think?

3. God in his providence:

- a. At times chooses not to issue public judgment on the short-comings of others. He hides their faults, but limits their praise.
- b. Allows for sinful choices to take place without intervention. His providence includes a knowledge and an allowance for man's sins.
- c. Uses the shortcomings of others to accomplish his will. He steers their weaknesses for his good.
- d. Continues to grow individuals in spite of sinful choices.

Practical Applications

1. When you make a poor decision:

- Don't discount God's ability to bring about good through it.
- Don't be paralyzed in thinking that God can never use you.
- Don't justify the action as culturally necessary.

2. When others make a poor decision:

- Be slow to judge and quick to forget motivations.
- Be encouraged that God can use it for good.
- Be challenged to learn from their mistakes.



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