



ESTHER

GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN AN EVIL DAY

The Unseen Hand of God

Powerful Pawns



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.

Historical Background

1. Jewish Timeline - Exile

- Theological Significance
 - Israel is dependent upon the OT covenants. They provide the promise of land, kingship, dominion, and a future. During the exile, they lose all covenant possessions. They have nothing, but promises.
 - Israel is experiencing the curses of Deuteronomy 28 due to sustained disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant.

Historical Background

2. Historical Timeline

- 586 B.C. – Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon sacks Jerusalem (Daniel 1).
- 539 B.C. – Cyrus II takes Babylon and establishes the Persian Empire (Daniel 5).
- 539 B.C. – Cyrus II releases the Jews to rebuild Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-4).
- 539 B.C. – Daniel serves his son-in-law, Darius the Great (Daniel 6).
- 486 B.C. – 465 B.C. – Xerxes I (Ahasuerus), the son of Darius, the grandson of Cyrus, reigns (Esther 1).
- 445 B.C. – Artaxerxes, son of Xerxes, releases Nehemiah to rebuild Jerusalem's walls (Nehemiah 1).

Xerxes the Great - Ahasuerus

- Duration: 486 B.C. – 465 B.C. (Esther tells the story from 483 B.C. to 473 B.C.)
- Territory: India to Ethiopia (Modern Pakistan to Sudan)
- Biblical References: Ezra 4:6-7, Esther
- Provinces: 127 administrative units (speaks of his empire's breadth)
- Susa: Winter capital – Nehemiah 1:1
- Event: 483 B.C. – The War Council Against Greece

The War Council

For this cause I have now summoned you together, that I may impart to you my purpose. It is my intent to bridge the Hellespont and lead my army through Europe to Hellas (Greece), that I may punish the Athenians for what they have done to the Persians and to my father. You saw that Darius my father was minded to make an expedition against these men. But he is dead, and it was not granted him to punish them, and I on his and all the Persian's behalf, will never rest till I have taken and burnt Athens. . . . As for you, this is how you shall best please me: when I declare the time of your coming, everyone of you must appear, and with good will, and whosoever comes with his army best equipped shall receive from me such gifts as are reckoned most precious among us.

Ahasuerus (via Herodotus)

The Magnificence of Persia (vs. 1-9)

1. The author reminds readers of the immensity, power, and wealth of the Persian kingdom.
 - One hundred years later, when Alexander the Great enter Susa he found 40,000 talents of gold and silver bullion (1,200 tons) and 9,000 talents of minted gold coins (270 tons). Today's dollars - \$50,000,000,000.
 - In the OT, the only other location described in such intricate detail is the tabernacle/temple of God.

The Limitation of Power (vs. 10-12)

2. The author ironically (humorously) reflects on the limitations of power.
 - “Moreover it is their custom to deliberate about the gravest matters when they are drunk; if when they are sober they approve it, they act thereon . . . And when they have taken counsel about a matter when sober, they decide upon it when they are drunk.” (Herodotus)
 - “Ahasuerus - the great Ahasuerus that reigns from India to Ethiopia; the powerful ruler of the armies; the lord who sits upon the royal throne; the King whose cups are gold; the ruler who commands wine to flow like water, the owner of the great palaces of the earth – was told ‘no’ by his wife.”

A Note on Vashti

We need to be careful about reading *into* the story an intent that the author does not have. The focus is not on:

1. Vashti portrayed as a virtuous woman.
 - “Vashti is one of the nobler women in humanity.” (A. Kuyper)
2. Vashti pictured as a rebellious wife.
 - “If she (wife) refuses (conjugal duty), get rid of her, take an Esther and let Vashti go, as King Ahasuerus did.” (M. Luther)

The Author's Intent (vs. 10-12)

1. The Persian court is not a safe place with a King who holds great power which he unpredictably wields, making decisions from dubious motives with impaired judgment.
2. Esther is entering into a marital relationship with a man with a furious temper, who carelessly uses women for his own glory and easily discards them when they don't please him enough.

The Knee Jerk Reaction (vs. 13-22)

Escalation of the problem – framing the event based on a personal agenda.

- Not Vashti's problem – the problem of all women.
- Nor Xerxes' problem – the problem of all men.
- Not a Susa problem – the problem of all of the provinces.

The initial desire is to cover the event, the final result is that Xerxes shame become international news.

The Author's Intent (vs. 13-22)

1. Divine providence works through human behavior that flows from ambiguous and confused motives.
2. Even the great and powerful are frail humanity and mere footnotes in the plan of God.
 - Do not place your trust in righteous leaders. They may fail.
 - Do not fear wicked leaders. God can use them (Isaiah 45).

Percy Shelley's "Ozymandias"

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert... near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed;

And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings;
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.



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