

Esther

The Unseen Hand of God

God's ultimate will is...

1. The advancement of his Kingdom - *“In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. Daniel 2:44*
2. His glorification - *“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (1 Cor 10:31)*
3. and the salvation and sanctification of his children through his son, Jesus Christ - *“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. “ (2 Peter 3:9).*

Overview and Purpose

The book of Esther tells how a Jewish girl became the queen of Persia and saved her people from a plot to destroy them. She is assisted in this by Mordecai, her cousin and guardian. Esther was written to explain the origin of the Feast of Purim and to ensure that it would be observed by all future generations of the Jewish people (Esther 9:28). It has clearly achieved this purpose, since Jews have continued to observe Purim to the present day. The book of Esther is read as part of the celebration of Purim.

Esther is part of a much larger story that runs all the way from Abraham to Christ and, through him, to the church. If Haman had succeeded, the Jewish people as a whole would have been destroyed, and the story of God's saving work in and through Abraham's descendants would have come to an end. There would have been no fulfillment in Christ, and therefore no gospel and no Christian church. Christians should read the book of Esther, not just as a story about the Jews but as part of their own heritage. Christians are not obliged to observe the Feast of Purim, but they are to take to heart the truth that God providentially watches over his own (Romans 8:28).

Esther and the Sovereign Rule of God

Key Themes

1. Divine Providence

Practically, providence is the hand of God in the glove of history—and that glove will never move until He moves it. God is at the steering wheel of this universe. Providence means that God is behind the scenes, shifting and directing them. Providence is the way God coaches the runner on second base. It is the way God leads those who will not be led.

God is not mentioned by name in the book of Esther. But it shows clearly that, even when God is most hidden, he is still working to protect his chosen people.

2. Human Responsibility

Esther and Mordecai show great initiative and courage. Their actions are obviously significant. The providence of God does not negate the responsibility of people to act with courage and resolve when circumstances require it.

3. The Absurdity of Wickedness

Ahasuerus and Haman were important people who had considerable power. But the story of Esther often causes laughter at their expense. God laughs at such people (Psalm 2:4). The story of Esther invites us to laugh with him.

Coincidences? - Note how the following “coincidences” work in the book to attain God’s purposes.

First, how wonderful that Esther was so beautiful and that King Ahasuerus chose her from among all the young women of the kingdom to be his next queen (Esther 2:17).

Second, how fortunate that Mordecai overheard the plot against the king and rescued him from assassination, and that Mordecai’s valiant deed of loyalty was recorded in the royal archives (Esther 2:21-23).

Third, note that when Esther presented herself before the king (which, in Persian law, was punishable by death), she “won favor in his sight” and was spared and allowed to speak (Esther 5:2).

Fourth, it was quite a stroke of good fortune that the king could not sleep and therefore ordered that the chronicles of memorable deeds should be read to him; that the scribe just happened to read about Mordecai and his heroic act; and that the king was alert enough to ask whether Mordecai had been rewarded for his deed (Esther 6:1-3).

Fifth, how ironic for Haman to walk in just as the king was considering how he might honor Mordecai for his deed (Esther 6:4 -12).

Sixth, how unfortunate for Haman that he “was falling on the couch where Esther was” to beg for his life just as the king returned, and the king interpreted Haman’s move as an assault upon Esther (Esther 7:8).

Seventh, how interesting that Mordecai was made second in command in place of Haman over all of the vast Persian empire (Esther 8:2; 10:2-3).

God Works All Things Together for Good

Are these events insignificant circumstances? Are they merely chance? Or are they examples of God quietly yet sovereignly working on behalf of his people to accomplish his purposes? The Lord so governs situations that he overrules and thwarts the schemes of those who would seek to destroy his chosen people and works them instead for ultimate good (see Romans 8:28).

1. GOD WANTS US TO KNOW THAT HE IS FIRMLY AND SOVEREIGNLY IN CONTROL OF ALL OUR CIRCUMSTANCES.

- Nothing that happens to us escapes God’s careful attention because He is shaping our lives to bring Him glory (Romans 11:36).

2. PROVIDENCE IS GOD AT WORK BEHIND THE SCENES TO CONTROL SITUATIONS.

- Providence is often mysterious. We may not see God’s hand at work, but He is the puppet-master, pulling the strings and controlling the action by either causing or allowing things to happen.

3. GOD ARRANGES CIRCUMSTANCES AND PEOPLE TO ACCOMPLISH HIS SOVEREIGN WILL.

- Esther’s story reveals that God will providentially either cause or allow things to happen that may be in contradiction to what He wants in order to achieve His ultimate, sovereign plan.

- When you begin to understand God’s sovereignty and His providential ways of achieving His will, you can be conscious of God’s fingerprints even when He seems absent. Because of this, we can trust God even when we cannot trace His hand at work in our lives.

4. WHEN WE CAN’T SEE GOD IN OUR CIRCUMSTANCES, WE NEED TO REMEMBER THAT THERE IS FAR MORE HAPPENING THAN WHAT WE CAN SEE.

- God recorded the story of Esther so you can apply its truths to your circumstances as you grow to understand and appreciate God’s sovereignty and respond correctly to it.

- Look at God’s providence at work in Esther: a family conflict, a cultural battle between the sexes, a law in a secular culture that can’t be changed, and a beauty contest—none of which has anything to do with God’s will being accomplished—or does it?

5. GOD CAN EVEN ORCHESTRATE A COMPLETELY SEPARATE “SUBPLOT” BEHIND THE MAIN SCENES OF THE STORY TO LINE UP CIRCUMSTANCES FOR THE BLESSING AND DELIVERANCE OF HIS PEOPLE.

- Esther relays the plot to the king in Mordecai’s name. • Ahasuerus is going to be very grateful to Mordecai the Jew.



