

Esther

1. God's invisible providence

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If you've been around Christian circles and attending churches for sometime, you've heard that the Book of Esther is the only Book in the Bible that does not mention God. Besides, the Book itself seems so fairy tale like. It almost starts with, "Once upon a time..." and it would end with "...they lived happily ever after."

Even though the Book of Esther doesn't mention the name of God, He was the hidden Author of this incredible epic saga and you can see His meticulous touches in every scene from the start to the end.

More than any Book in the Bible, the Book of Esther shows us the invisible providence of Almighty God. What is 'providence'? Dictionary defines "the foreseeing care and guidance of God".

Usually our daily lives are not filled with breath taking, heart pounding miracles from God. It seems that our lives go on with mundane day to day routines mixed with a few agonizing or irritating situations that are developed by people around us or ourselves. We don't see the Red Sea parting, the pillar of cloud by day or the cloud of fire by night leading, or the speaking burning bush consulting, or angelic host appearing. But we must not forget that God's hand is in every single situation in our lives – good or bad – that we can be led by His strong right hand and hear His still small voice if we let Him.

A. GAINING A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF GOD

A study of the Book of Esther is really a study of God's power and sovereignty. So as we begin, let's look into a few things about God, because it is incredibly easy for us to try to put Him in our box even though it is impossible.

1) The Mind of God – His Unsearchable Judgments

Can you imagine looking at night sky and declaring that we understand everything about the universe? Our God holds the universe in the palm of His hand.

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.

2) The Will of God – His Unfathomable Ways

Romans 11:33-34 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?"

3) The Power of God – His Sovereign Control

Daniel 4:34b-35 For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation. 35 All the inhabitants of the earth are

reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, "What have You done?"

4) The Presence of God – His Invisible Providence

Ecclesiastes 7:13-14 Consider the work of God; For who can make straight what He has made crooked? 14 In the day of prosperity be joyful, But in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, So that man can find out nothing that will come after him.

Make no mistake about it. God will have His way no matter what we try. Though He remains invisible, He is an omni-potent, omni-scient and omni-present God.

Psalm 46:10 Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!

B. FEASTS, MORE FEASTS

Esther 1:1-9 Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this was the Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia), 2 in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the citadel, 3 that in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants--the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces being before him-- 4 when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days in all. 5 And when these days were completed, the king made a feast lasting seven days for all the people who were present in Shushan the citadel, from great to small, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. 6 There were white and blue linen curtains fastened with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars; and the couches were of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of alabaster, turquoise, and white and black marble. 7 And they served drinks in golden vessels, each vessel being different from the other, with royal wine in abundance, according to the generosity of the king. 8 In accordance with the law, the drinking was not compulsory; for so the king had ordered all the officers of his household, that they should do according to each man's pleasure. 9 Queen Vashti also made a feast for the women in the royal palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus.

Ahasuerus was a Hebrew translated name of this king of Persia. He is also known as Xerxes in Greek. His kingdom extended from India to Ethiopia. His father was Darius I, and his grandfather was Cyrus the Great.

Because the location of the Book in the Bible, somehow we tend to think that the Book of Esther happened before the Book of Daniel. Actually, it is the other way around.

A six month feast – obviously these people were regular party animals. The king probably didn't assemble all his provincial leaders at one time. That would have kept them away from their duties for six months and weakened the empire. It's more likely that, over a period of six months, Ahasuerus brought the officers to Shushan on a rotating schedule. Then, having consulted with them, the king would bring them all together for the seven-day feast so they could confer collectively.

They were preparing to invade Greece to avenge Ahasuerus' father Darius I's defeat. At the same time, the king was trying to impress his nobles and military leaders with his wealth and power. A proud man knows how to appeal to the pride in others.

C. ROYAL DRUNKEN STUPOR

Esther 1:10-12 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, 11 to bring Queen Vashti before the king, wearing her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials, for she was beautiful to behold. 12 But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command brought by his eunuchs; therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him.

This is a clear implication that Ahasuerus was drunk as a skunk. He wanted to show off his wife's beauty to other drunks like a game trophy. Some commentators said that the king commanded her to come wearing only the crown, nothing else. Either way it was stupidity.

Queen Vashti represented a good example of the limits of a wife's submission. The command for a wife to submit to her husband is clear in Scripture in Eph. 5:22-24.

Ephesians 5:22-24 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. 24 Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

But it is not absolute and without limits. God doesn't expect a wife to be a door mat of her husband. The woman does not give up her dignity as a human being when she becomes a wife. Neither should she allow her principles to be trodden underfoot by an unprincipled husband.

As we study the Book of Esther, we will discover that this mighty monarch could control everything but himself. His advisers could easily influence him. He made ridiculous decisions that he later regretted. To make the matter worse, when he didn't get his own way, he became angry.

At this point we need to talk about alcohol and anger: People who claim Jesus as their example in social drinking, and even point out that He turned water into wine, should take Luke 22:18 into consideration:

Luke 22:18 for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.

I wonder whether these people "follow His example" in any other areas of life, such as praying, serving and sacrificing. Probably not.

A character in this story who is often overshadowed by Esther is Queen Vashti. Whatever else may be said about her, she was a woman of conviction. She stood up to the most powerful man in the land at the expense of her marriage and her throne.

Not many people would be able to stand so firm in their convictions. How about you? Does any principle mean so much to you that you would be willing to risk losing your job over it? Is there any principle for which you would be willing to risk a significant relationship?

The majority of people tend to live by carnal pleasure rather than by principle, making decisions not on the basis of our convictions but on the basis of possible immediate fleshly benefits. A German theologian before the WWII Dietrich Bonhoeffer, however, opposed this thinking: "If we claim to be Christians, there is no room for carnal pleasure."

D. A MAJOR NATIONAL DISASTER

Esther 1:13-22 Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times (for this was the king's manner toward all who knew law and justice, 14 those closest to him being Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who had access to the king's presence, and who ranked highest in the kingdom): 15 "What shall we do to Queen Vashti, according to law, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus brought to her by the eunuchs?" 16 And Memucan answered before the king and the princes: "Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also all the princes, and all the people who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. 17 For the queen's behavior will become known to all women, so that they will despise their husbands in their eyes, when they report, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in before him, but she did not come.' 18 This very day the noble ladies of Persia and Media will say to all the king's officials that they have heard of the behavior of the queen. Thus there will be excessive contempt and wrath. 19 If it pleases the king, let a royal decree go out from him, and let it be recorded in the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it will not be altered, that Vashti shall come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. 20 When the king's decree which he will make is proclaimed throughout all his empire (for it is great), all wives will honor their husbands, both great and small." 21 And the reply pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan. 22 Then he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province in its own script, and to every people in their own language, that each man should be master in his own house, and speak in the language of his own people.

A wife said, "Take a hike, husband" and eight men had to scramble to counteract. How about that! In his childish, drunken mindset, the king allowed his queen to be deposed by the counsel of the seven drunken counselors. His pride got the best of him. Since Queen Vashti had embarrassed the king before his own leaders, the king had to do something to save both his ego and his reputation.

Is it wrong to be angry? Absolutely not. You don't find anywhere in the Bible for that kind of command. But it gives limitations of how we should act when we are angry.

Ephesians 4:26 Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath,

Sometimes what we call "righteous indignation" is only unrighteous temper masquerading in religious garments. Jesus equated anger with murder in Matt. 5:21-26.

When the ego is challenged, it releases a powerful poison that makes people do all sorts of things they'd never do if they were humble and submitted to the Lord. A man that plans revenge keeps his own wounds raw, which otherwise would heal and do well. Had Ahasuerus sobered up and thought the matter through, he would never have deposed his wife. After all, she showed more character than he did.

In v13, the king's counselors were the ones who understood the times. That means they were astrologers who consulted the stars and used other forms of divination. These counselors were playing it smart with the king. By exaggerating the problem, they also inflated their own importance and made the king more dependent on them.

The king didn't immediately replace Vashti. Instead, he went off to invade Greece, where he met with humiliating defeats.

As I have said before, this Book is not about a drunken king deposing his queen, but it is about God's incredible yet invisible providence that He orchestrated behind the scene. The stage is set to bring forth Esther, because the king is a bachelor.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) God's plans are not hindered whether events are secular or carnal.

His power penetrates through the broken glass of a drunken banquet as well as through the stained glass of a Gothic cathedral.

2) God's purposes are not frustrated by moral or marital conflicts.

The king, in all his drunken debauchery and cruel chauvinism, could not change the purposes of God. In reality, he was not king at all, but only one more pawn in the hand of God. And God could move him anywhere on the chessboard that He wanted.

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, Like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes.

3) God's people are not excluded from high places because of handicap or hardship.

Esther was a foreigner and an orphan. By all human odds it was a million-to-one chance that she would even be invited to the pageant, let alone win it. But by God's providence, it happened.