

**Esther: The Divine Behind the Scenes, “The Divine Appointment”  
Esther 1-2:18, 3/4/18**

Have you ever gone to a Broadway show? I actually have never been. I’m so uncultured. When we are watching a show we may see the cast on the stage, maybe a small cast or cast of a hundred. While there are actors on the stage, behind the scenes there is so much happening to bring the play together. Writers, set designers, wardrobe, stagehands, lighting, A/V, an orchestra in the pit. Most of the time you will never see them, but make no mistake, if they weren’t there the play would fall apart in an instant. If we liken the history of the world to a play, we may have kings and queens, generals, political leaders, religious leaders and lots of members of the cast as actors on the stage of history, but when we peak behind the scenes Scripture tells us that we would see God orchestrating, directing, pulling together the story to bring about his ultimate purposes. This is a wondrous mystery that theologians call the attribute of God’s providence. **By Providence- we mean that God, in some invisible and inscrutable way, governs all creatures, actions and circumstances through the normal and ordinary course of human life, without the intervention of the miraculous.** While God had and does work through miraculous intervention by a flood, or powerful plagues or parting the Red Sea, or healing miracles of all kinds... he most often works through the course of the ordinary, mundane, regular course of history, even using the decisions, both good and bad, of humans, to bring about his purposes. Do you believe this?

We are going to explore the providence of God over the next 4 weeks in a study through an obscure, often neglected little book called Esther we are entitling: The Divine Behind the Scenes. In this book God is so behind the scenes that he isn’t even named! He’s absent! Why?

*Charles Spurgeon- Although the name of God does not occur in the Book of Esther, the Lord Himself is there most conspicuously in every incident which it relates. I have seen portraits bearing the names of persons for whom they were intended, and they certainly needed them, but we have all seen others which required no name because they were such striking likenesses that the moment you looked upon them you knew them.*

God hides himself in the background to teach us about his providence in our everyday lives so that like the book of Esther, we learn to see God’s fingerprints working behind the scenes through the good, the bad and the ugly.

Esther 1 is going to set the stage of history on which this play takes place. And we are introduced to the first character- King Ahasuerus, or better known by the Greek name, Xerxes. The first portrait we get of Xerxes is that he is a big deal.

**Esther 1:1-2**

*This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush: At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa,*

History both inside and outside of the Bible tells us that Xerxes was an incredibly powerful king. He ascended to the throne at age 32 when his father Darius died in 486 B.C. and our story here picks up three years into his reign. The Persian Empire was one of the largest in history, spanning from India to Ethiopia. [Show Map](#). He was a big deal and he knew he was a big deal. We have found [archeological inscriptions on tablets \(Show Picture\)](#) in Persepolis, the other capital in addition to Susa. The words of Xerxes.

*I am Xerxes, the great king, king of kings, king of countries containing many tongues of men, king in this great earth far and wide.*

Not only was he a big deal, but the author wants us to know that he threw big parties.

**Esther 1:3-8**

*and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present. For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty.*

*When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest who were in the citadel of Susa.*

*The garden had hangings of white and blue linen, fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and other costly stones.*

*Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king's liberality. By the king's command each guest was allowed to drink with no restrictions, for the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man what he wished.*

Open bar. Now what was the occasion of this party? From history we have good indication that this banquet was to curry favor of his military generals and governors and display his power as they planned their next campaign against the Greeks, which they would lose. So the idea here is let's get these guys drinking and let me entertain them to get them on my side before this war. Now the story starts with its first twist.

**Esther 1:9-12**

*Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes. On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Karkas—*

*to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at. But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger.*

Ok, so the wine is flowing, we all know the best decisions are made while drunk... He decides to show off his wife. Now we don't get the sense that her appearance was to wave and shake hands with her husband's friends. No, this was a bunch of drunk dudes that we looking for a show and a dance. Well she refuses. Good for her...Now we will see her decision had consequences but apparently she didn't want to be dangled like a piece of meat in front of hungry lions.

Do you see the irony here? God wants us to see that this "big deal king", powerful, "Xerxes- king of kings" who controls the whole world can't control his wife. Maybe he's not in control as much as he thinks. And so what ensues is a laughable overreaction in order to attempt to control the onslaught of a women's liberation movement. The kings advisors start telling him, "Listen if we don't do something about this...our wives might not do what we tell them either.

**Esther 1:18**

*This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen's conduct will respond to all the king's nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord.*

And so they convince the king to not only depose Queen Vashti but to legislate RESPECT of husbands across the kingdom. Ironically the King publicizes his embarrassment by ordering throughout the empire what he himself could not accomplish in his own palace.

Stop here to make a small point of relevance for us. Here we see the ramifications of the abuse of power. When leaders make decisions based on selfish motives or fear of losing control it inevitably brings tyranny- in a household, in a church, in a country. Jesus had something to say about this kind of leadership in Matthew 20:25-28. True leadership is service. Husbands, church leaders- remember this.

So at the decree of the King, Vashti is out and we find the king in the beginning of chapter 2 maybe with a bit of regret from his drunken, impulsive decision. And so his advisors again go into action, they gave him such great advice last time after all... they say- we have an idea- you want a woman, you are lonely? Miss Persia contest! Or the Bachelor, Susa Style. They round up hundreds of women to see which one will win the ultimate prize, Queen of Persia. You can't make this stuff up.

And so the king again follows their advice and the search is on.

**Esther 2:5-6**

*Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah.*

Now why is a Jew from Jerusalem 800 miles away in the foreign land of Susa? Remember from our study in Nehemiah, the Southern Kingdom of Judah was conquered by the Babylonians in 586 B.C., by another act of God's providence, after 70 years in captivity, the now ruling Persian empire decrees for the Jews to be allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their city and their temple, all fulfillment of prophecy. And so the Jews over the next thirty years return to Jerusalem. Here 100 years after their captivity. However, Mordecai is still living in Susa, why? A question that we will come back to.

**Esther 2:7-9**

*Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.*

*When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. She pleased him and won his favor.*

We continue to read we find out that at the end of 1 year it was Esther's turn to go into the king for a night of...let's just say, romance. Now why a year? Well 12 months of beauty treatments of course! And you thought your wife took a while to get ready! But this was again, a show of the opulence and power of King Xerxes.

**Esther 2:17-18**

*Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins. So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.*

*And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality.*

So within two brief chapters we see an unlikely turn of events. An ousted queen, a Jewish orphan girl from a defeated, powerless people rises to a place of influence as queen.

Now if we just read Esther apart from understanding the context of biblical history we will read an entertaining, fairy tale-like story with irony and coincidences. But there are no coincidences with God. Only when we step back to see the big story of God's redemption will it make sense what is happening here. Spoiler alert: What we will come to find is that Esther was in the right place, at the right time to make a right decision to stop the plot of an anti-Semitic, genocidal maniac. And the reason that this is critical is because if she wasn't in the right place at the right time to make a right decision the Jewish people would have been destroyed, God's promises to bring his people back to the land, to bless the nations through the seed of David, to bring the messiah, the savior of the world would all have been made void and we would still be dead in our sins...with no hope and no future.

But God was behind the scenes! If we don't see Esther in the grand scheme of God's providence, we can begin to moralize this story and we will quickly get ourselves into trouble, trying to put characters into camps of moral heroes. Here's the problem with that. I don't know if you noticed, but Esther and Mordecai, our "heroes", are people of questionable character. Let me just raise a handful of questions about their character.

-Should not Mordecai have gone back with the Jewish people to rebuild according to the command of Ezra? What does that say about his commitment to God?

-I didn't mention it but they were hiding their Jewish identity. Why did no one recognize that Mordecai and Esther were Jewish? Apparently they gave up on their customs to blend in, clearly not adhering to the Jewish law.

-Esther it appears did not resist this beauty contest. She appears to have been in it to win it! She appears eager to please and in this context that would have certainly been sexually speaking. Pre-marital sex with a pagan? Clearly against Scripture and not exactly the virtuous woman we'd like to paint her to be.

I've heard preachers approach this, outside of the big picture and try to make into a bastion of godly character for us to follow. She certainly will have her bright spots and heroic moments that we can emulate, but if that is our focus we have missed the author's intent, who never comments on their moral decisions. Regardless of their character, their motives, or their fidelity to God's law, the decisions Esther and Mordecai make move events in some inscrutable way to fulfill the messianic, covenant promises God made to his people long ago.

So this is not the book for a character study, as much as it is a story for us to ask in our lives- God where are you when we can't see you? Do you care about your people? Do you care about me when I'm suffering? Will you fulfill your promises? Can I trust you with my life?

**Who is the hero?** Esther? Mordecai? The answer is **God**. God, even in their questionable character and integrity, is still working all things out according to his providence. This biblical worldview again reaffirms that God, the divine, is at work behind the scenes...through the mundane and the profound, in your little life and

through the shifting of geo-political nations. Through your mistakes, regrets, through pain and suffering, through bad decisions... And we have the great promise of **Romans 8:28**

*We know that all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purposes.*

#### Tapestry Poem

My life is but a weaving  
Between my God and me.  
I cannot choose the colors  
He weaveth steadily.

Oft' times He weaveth sorrow;  
And I in foolish pride  
Forget He sees the upper  
And I the underside.

Not 'til the loom is silent  
And the shuttles cease to fly  
Will God unroll the canvas  
And reveal the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful  
In the weaver's skillful hand  
As the threads of gold and silver  
In the pattern He has planned

#### Communion