

ESTHER - A PROTOTYPE OF PROVIDENCE

Providence is God's overarching intervention in the affairs of man. It's His means of accomplishing His purposes with or without man's cooperation. The word "*providence*" is the combination of two words: "*pro*" means "*before*", "*video*" means "*to see*". God sees the end from the beginning, and He orchestrates circumstances to produce the outcome He desires. The prevailing of His will in all situations is what we call *providence*.

God controls the human drama. The definition of the word "*History*" is found in its spelling "*His Story*." God sets the stage and gives the cues. He is the director on the set. He alone deserves the curtain calls, and merits the applause.

This week we celebrate the 224th anniversary of the founding of the United States. In crediting God with our beginnings, Benjamin Franklin posed the question, "God governs in the affairs of man; and if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid?"

Understand, God is not only the creator of the universe, but its supervisor. He didn't set the world in motion, like a spinning top, then walk off to wait until it runs down. God is not an ambivalent Creator, but active in His world.

Jesus said in John 5:17, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." All three members of the Godhead are overseeing affairs on earth to insure that the outcome will be in harmony with God's plan.

Once a little boy had climbed a tree, and was having a difficult time working his way down. He slipped and started to fall. As he plummeted toward earth people heard him screaming "God, save me! Please, save me!"

But there was a strange pause in his cry. By this time the crowd had gathered around the tree. They overheard him saying, "Never mind, Lord, my pants got caught on a branch."

How slow we are to give God credit for the favorable circumstances in our lives, and how quick we are to blame Him for the bad.

Guys, there is no such thing as luck, or fate, or chance. Proverbs 16:33 tells us, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord." Every role of the dice - every bounce of the football - is determined by God. Often God's purposes are veiled to us, but He has His purposes, nonetheless.

As one man humorously observed, "Depend on the rabbit's foot if you will, but remember it didn't work for the rabbit." Guys, don't wish me luck. Pray for me.

Despite how things may appear, life has not gone haywire. God is in control. He's at the helm. He has us right on course.

The Bible is chocked full of examples of divine providence working in the lives of individuals and nations.

Joseph was thrown into a pit - sold to a caravan - thrown in a prison - met a butler - interpreted a dream - brought to pharaoh - interpreted another dream. Finally, he was made second in command in all the land of Egypt. It was more than a series of coincidences that brought Joseph to power - it was God's hand behind the scenes positioning Joseph according to His purposes.

Was it mere happenstance that Saul's bowels moved as he walked by the very cave in which David was hiding - providing David with a test of loyalty and faith?

Was it a fluke that David made his delivery of cheese and bread just as the giant Goliath came out to blaspheme God, and torment the Israeli army?

Or that Jonah just happened to get tossed into the sea as a giant fish, with a man-sized appetite, came swimming by to see what was on the menu?

Or that the basket holding the baby Moses floated right by the eddy in the river where the pharaoh's own daughter had decided to take a bath?

Or that the cloak dripping with the freshly spilled blood of the church's first martyr, Stephen, was thrown down at the feet of a rabbi named Saul of Tarsus?

The Bible abounds with *prototypes of providence*, but none is more vivid than the history of Esther and Mordecai. Theirs is a story of suspense, intrigue, and romance. The plot twists and turns in unexpected directions. The story rivets you to your seat. But in the end the story stands as a testimony to God's *prevailing providence*.

Esther's selection as queen, the choice of the 12th month, the king's sleepless night, his discovery of Mordecai's loyal act, the king's order to Haman to reward Mordecai, Haman's hanging on gallows he built for his enemy; it's all a result of Providence.

Alexander MacClaren writes, "This book of Esther does not say much about God, but His presence broods over it all, and is the real spring that moves the movers that are seen. It is all a lesson of how God works out His purposes through men that seem themselves to be working out theirs."

William Cowper wrote in a famous hymn, "Behind a frowning providence, there shines a smiling face."

Never forget: "What God sends is better than what men ask." Let's learn to trust in God's gracious providence.

Bible Scan - Esther 1-10

ESTHER AS A PROPHECY

What's amazing about this example is the faithfulness of God's providence in spite of Mordecai's and Esther's unfaithfulness. Throughout the story our hero and heroine are guilty of numerous violations of God's Law. The most obvious was her willingness to marry a pagan. History tells us Ahasuerus worshipped Zoaraster.

As we move through the story, we'll also find that Esther fails to keep the dietary laws, the Sabbath, the feasts. She encountered none of the conflicts with the pagan practices of the Babylonians that Daniel did. Esther was quick to compromise. Rather than be a witness, she covered up her heritage.

Understand, Esther represents the Jews of the Diaspora – then and now. At the time backslidden Jews lived in Persia, but God protected them providentially. For the last 2000 years this has been the plight of Jewry. They've lived compromised lifestyles in foreign lands – yet God has been faithful to insure their survival.

It's interesting, the word "God" never appears in the book of Esther. This is the only book in the Bible void of the name "God". Yet that sums up the lives of Esther and Mordecai, and many of the Jews of the Diaspora. They were Jews, but their Jewishness was more ethnic and racial - than religious and practical. This sums up most Jews today. They hold to their Jewishness with a patriotic fondness, without trying to keep the Law – or often, even believing in God.

Bible commentator, Alexander MacClaren, writes along this line, "Patriotism is more evident than religion in the book of Esther... To the Jews in Persia national feeling was stronger than devotion..." They were what we'd call "secular Jews". MacClaren continues, "The picture of Jewish characteristics in this book shows many of the traits which have marked them ever since: accommodating flexibility, strangely united with unbending tenacity, a capacity for securing the favor of influential people, and the willingness to stretch conscience in securing it, reticence and diplomacy - and beneath all, unquenchable devotion to Israel, which burns alike in the politician, Mordecai, and the lovely Esther."

The book of Esther is a blueprint for how God has dealt with the Jews for the last 2000 years. Even though they've been unfaithful to Him, He's been faithful to them. Most Jews today fail to recognize their Savior, but that doesn't mean their Savior isn't watching out for them... just as He was in the days of Esther. The survival of the Jews to this day are evidence of God's providence.

THE DIASPORA

A biker at a tea party – a ballerina at a football practice – a truck driver at a poetry recital – a vegetarian at a barbecue – an anti-gun activist at a turkey shoot – and Vince Dooley at a Georgia Tech booster club meeting – are all what I'd call "a fish out of water". They're people outside their natural habitat. Here's another example we could add to the list... *the Jewish community in Persia.*

In 535 BC the Babylonian empire fell to the Persians, and King Cyrus issued an edict allowing the Jews to return to Judah to rebuild their homeland. Jerusalem was the city of God. Judah and Samaria the land God chose for His people. Judah was home. It's where the Jews belonged, but few wanted to return.

While in exile, many Jews had prospered, and rose to prominent positions. Isaiah 6:13 implies that 90% of Jewry remained in Persia. They became known as the *Diaspora*, or *Dispersion*. The New Testament book of James is addressed "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad," or to the Diaspora Jews.

In a sense, these Jews were fish out of water! They belonged in Judah, but lived in a foreign land, under gentile rulers, surrounded by a pagan culture.

Sadly, many of these Jews compromised their obedience to God, but God remained faithful. His providence supernaturally protected these displaced Jews, and insured their survival.

KING AHASUERUS

Secular history refers to this man by his Greek name *Xerxes*. And we know a great deal about him.

Though the Greek historian, Herodotus, called him "incompetent and corrupt" we know he built an enormous and illustrious empire. John Phillips provides this summation of Xerxes. "(he was) a tyrannical despot, imperious in temper, ruthless in the exercise of his power, grandiose in his schemes and ambitions, abandoned in his sensuality."

Ahasuerus also loved to drink wine. He may've been an alcoholic. The story of Esther begins in the year 438 BC.

Devotion Box - For Such A Time As This?

In 4:13-14 Mordecai answers Esther, "Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other Jews. For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

In other words, *providence has a point! God positions us for a purpose.*

Think of your own life. God worked out the circumstances in your life so you could get the job you currently enjoy. You didn't think you had a chance, but the Lord opened the

door. – You thought there was no way you could get financing for a house, but God worked it out. – God got you into the class they said was full. – You made the team, and you know it was God who opened the door... but now that the door is open, the job is yours, you're now a neighbor, you're in the class... what are you going to do with the opportunity?

Perhaps, God put you where you're at "for such a time as this..." A person needs to be loved - a stand needs to be taken - an example needs to be set - and God has providentially positioned you to be the answer to the need. God has set you up to shine His light, His love, His truth. How do you need to fulfill the point of providence?

BLESSING AND ENVY

As in the case of Esther coronation, through the ages, it's amazing how many Jews have been elevated to positions of prominence. Statistically, the world's Jewry is a small percentage of the total human population, yet their impact far exceeds their numbers.

Of the four most influential people of the 20th century - Einstein, Marx, Freud, and Darwin - three were Jews. Ninety-eight Nobel prize winners have been Jewish.

Here's a who's who list of celebrities who are Jews: *Barbara Walters, Larry King, Sandy Koufax, Henry Kissinger, Mark Twain, Barbara Streisand, Kirk Douglas, Enrico Fermi, Bob Dylan, Paul Simon, Robert Oppenheimer, Jonas Salk, and the list goes on and on...* The prominence that Jews occupy in society is not an accident. God has blessed His chosen people.

But there's been a backlash to God's blessing. The world envies the success of the Jews, and God's enemies seek to harm Him by attacking the His people.

In 2:20 Mordecai cautions Esther not to tell anyone she's a Jew. Apparently, he feared persecution. Anti-semiticism was as great a threat then as it has been throughout history.

It's been said, "Prejudice is the dislike of anything that's unlike." Mark Twain once called anti-semiticism, "the swollen envy of pigmy minds." But it's more than that. Hatred for the Jews is not an ordinary, run-of-the-mill form of prejudice, born out of simple ignorance. The Bible tells us, Satan is the source of anti-semiticism.

History's relentless onslaught against the Jew is the devil's way of attacking God. If Satan can't harm God directly, just bash his kids. The Jews are a favorite target of Satan. And their survival is a direct result of God's providence.

HAMAN AND HITLER

In 3:1, the evil villain Haman enters. You can remember Haman's name and nature by making an association. *Haman* and *Hitler* – go together phonetically and philosophically. They both hated the Jews. Hitler killed 6 million, and Haman would've killed several million himself if it weren't for Esther and providence.

Providence turned the tables on Haman and Hitler.

God told Abraham He would bless the nations that bless Israel, and curse the nations that curse Israel. God's promise to Abraham is the best explanation I've ever heard of why Germany and Hitler lost World War 2.

It's interesting, even though Hitler killed 6 million Jews it was the Holocaust that galvanized world sentiment, and convinced the United Nations of the need for a Jewish homeland. Hitler was a primary cause in the formation of the modern state of Israel. What a strange twist - as Hitler's Third Reich crumbled, Israel was born.

WHO WANTS TO MARRY A MILLIONAIRE ?

Four years elapse between chapters 1 and 2, and they were tough years for Ahasuerus. He spends them fighting the Greeks, and loses the decisive Battle of Marathon. The Spartans stop his 200,000 troops, and sink 200 of his ships.

He returns to Shushan battered and beaten. He's looking forward to cuddling with his wife, and forgetting his miseries – when he remembers what he did to Vashti. He was angry and drunk – but in Persia when a king uttered a decree it was irrevocable. Even he couldn't take it back. Ahasuerus decides to remarry.

In chapter 2 he holds a contest to replace Vashti. It's a quest for a queen. Here's the original version of "*Who Wants To Marry A Millionaire?*". The king's servants go on a fox hunt. They comb the country in search of beautiful babes. Josephus tells us 400 girls were selected. The idea was to create a harem. The king could sample the girls, and pick the one he liked best.

Living in the capitol of Shushan at the time was a Hebrew girl named "*Esther*". She's introduced to us in 2:7: "And Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman was lovely and beautiful. When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter." The older Mordecai, and younger Esther, were cousins.

Of course "*Esther*" was her Greek name. She was known by her Hebrew friends as "*Hadassah*". Remember, many of the exiled Jews took Babylonian names. Daniel's three Hebrew friends had Babylonian names. Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael were also known as Shadrach, Meshach, and *To-bed-we-go...* No, no, that's what Ahasuerus was doing with his *Harem honeys*.

All the girls were brought to the palace, to prepare for their one crack at being queen. Each girl was given 12 months of Mary Kay treatments. 2:12 says she got six months with Oil of Olay, and six months with Chanel # 5.

When her turn came she was given anything she desired – fresh grapes, a T-bone steak, a sexy nightgown, the CD "Love Songs from the 80s", scented candles. Then she went in to spend her night with the king. 2:14 tells us, "She would not go in to the king again unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name." All the girls remained the king's concubines, but only one was made queen.

Guys, let me make sure you know just because Ahasuerus' method of getting a wife is in the Bible, doesn't mean that his method is biblical. In today's world, rather than getting a wife, it's a good way to pick up a venereal disease. Keep yourself pure, and God will pick your bride – and He'll do a much better job of it than you.

2:17 tells us the outcome of Esther's interview with the king. "The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen..."

He even proclaims a holiday, and calls it "the Feast of Esther". It was an amazing, supernatural demonstration of God's providence. Out of 400 gorgeous girls – the pick of Persia – an exiled orphan, the great-granddaughter of a conquered Jew, ends up the Queen of the empire.

Bible Scan - Esther 1-10

Calvary Chapel

If you have questions on tonight's study email Pastor Sandy - sandyadams@calvarychapel.org

Calvary Chapel Announcements - July 9, 2000

7/10 Mon—Ladies Night Out Luau

7/24 Mon - 7/27 Thurs—Kid's Camp 2000 at FDR State Park

7/22 Sat– 7/29 Sat – Senior High Mission Trip at Saltillo, Mexico

8/18 Fri– 8/19 Sat—Calvary Chapel Worship Conference

Next Bible Scan - July 16 - Job 1 - 42

**Devotion Box -
The Components
of Commitment**

**"Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"
- Esther 4:14**

**Bible Scan
Memory
Verse**

Being raised in a Christian home, or hanging out with Christian friends, or attending church doesn't make you a Christian.

It's been said: "Attending church doesn't make you a Christian any more than visiting a barn makes you a cow – *or going into a Dunkin Donuts makes you a police officer.*"

It takes more than just saying a prayer, or walking a church aisle, or even confessing your sins to be a Christian. God's grace will save IF we make a commitment to follow Jesus.

Esther was certainly committed to her cause, even to the point of death. Her famous statement is found in 4:16, "*if I perish, I perish.*" Esther is willing to risk her life to save the life of her fellow Jews.

And Esther's commitment serves as a model for the Christian's commitment to Christ. The components of her commitment were threefold: *She considered the cause, counted the cost, and cut the cord.*

Consider the cause - not every cause is worthy of a commitment, but not so with following Jesus. A commitment to Jesus is an adventure on earth, and an investment in eternity. Jim Elliot once said: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he will never lose."

Being a Christian is worth it, but it's not easy! There's a cost involved. To say "yes" to Jesus, requires us to say "no" to the things of this world. A true commitment to Jesus will begin by *counting the cost.*

Finally, we need to *cut the cord.* You can't fully follow the Lord if you're holding on to the past, or plotting other options. Let's follow Jesus, do or die... *If I perish, I perish!*

GOD'S DELIVERANCE

Under Persian law once a king signed an edict it became irrevocable, but Ahasuerus issues a new decree that counterbalances his previous orders. He commands the Jews to arm themselves and fight back against their attackers.

8:9 describes how the king's scribes record Ahasuerus' new orders. (What's also interesting about verse 9 is it's the longest verse in the Bible – 81 words.)

When month 12 rolls around, the Jews are armed to the teeth. 9:1 tells us, "Now in the 12th month, that is, the month of Adar, on the 13th day (March 7, 473 BC), the time came for the king's command and his decree to be executed. On the day that the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, the opposite occurred, in that the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them."

The counterattack against her enemies went so well, in 9:13 Esther asks the king for another day to wipe out the enemies of the Jews in Shushan.

The retaliatory slaughter included the hanging of Haman's 10 sons.

THE FEAST OF PURIM

"Pur" means "lots". (Haman threw 'em, but God controlled 'em.) On the days selected by the casting of lots, Mordecai and Queen Esther establish a celebration. Every year on the same two days the Jews should hold a feast, and commemorate the upper hand God gave them over their enemies.

To this day, every year the Jews celebrate the Feast of Purim - a time of rejoicing, and merriment, and gift-giving. Along with Hanukah it's one of the two major Jewish feasts not required in the Law of Moses. Purim is also a big occasion for the children. They dress in crazy costumes, and march in parades. On Purim the Jews gather in the synagogue and re-read the story of Esther. Every time the name "*Haman*" is read everyone boos and hisses, and shakes noisy rattlers called "*groggers*". When "*Mordecai*" is mentioned cheers go up.

Here's a poem: "Man proposes, God disposes: all things His design fulfill; every human wrath unconscious serves to execute His will. This the goal of all the ages – highways, by-ways, higher bend, and despite all foes and factions, God is Victor in the end. So man's festival of Purim, read in Faith's illumined sense, shall be seen in realms eternal as the Feast of Providence."