

The Providence of God – Part 1 | Esther 1-3 | 6/3/18

- Background
 - Esther's place in the Old Testament
 - Esther is the last of the historical Old Testament books in the Bible.
 - Pentateuch – Genesis -> Deuteronomy
 - Historical books – Joshua -> Esther
 - Poetic books – Job -> Song of Solomon
 - Major Prophets – Isaiah -> Daniel
 - Minor Prophets – Hosea -> Malachi
 - These OT books of history are important even though we may discount them at times.
 - Sometimes the Old Testament isn't the first place that we turn to when we read our Bibles.
 - But we must not forget that the OT laid the groundwork for everything to be fulfilled in the NT.
 - **It is written as a historical narrative** and provides us a detailed description of a time in the life of a certain group Jews in 4th Century B.C.
 - Author and Date
 - The author is unknown but whoever it was had a detailed knowledge of the customs of the Persian customs as well as Jewish traditions. So, likely He was a Persian Jew.
 - Additionally, the writer would have had to be someone who was very much aware of the conversations and events that unfolded. So, one of the potential authors could have been Mordecai who plays a big part in this book.
 - Esther covers a 10-year period between 483 B.C to 473 B.C during the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes).
 - The story ends before the assassination of Ahasuerus in 465 but it was written after this time as this is made evident by the verses at the end of the book of Esther.
 - The writing is likely to have taken place anywhere from 465 B.C to 331 B.C.
 - Esther takes place between chapters 6 and 7 in the book of Ezra.
 - This is also the time period after the 70-year captivity in Babylon
 - It occurred after the first and 2nd return of the Jews to Jerusalem.
 - Overall Purpose
 - God's providence at work to fulfill His promises.
 - **Esther shows us very clearly how God's providence, that is to say His invisible hand, is always at work.**
 - **Providence – divine guidance or care; God conceived as the power sustaining and guiding human destiny**
 - God's has a purpose and plan for His people that is going to happen, and no worldly powers are going to change that.
 - Interestingly Esther does not deal with prophecy or God in a direct way.
 - **In fact, there is not mention of God in the book at all, but his providence is clearly seen.**
 - Esther shows us how foreign powers in the world attempted to essentially commit genocide on the Jews. There were those that despised the Jews and wanted them to be completely wiped out.

- But if you recall the promises that were made by God to Abraham that he was to be a father to many nations and that his people would multiply, and that nations and kings would come from Abraham.
 - Ultimately God's power is greater, and this is made known through the book of Esther.
 - God's plan of redemption was not going to be interrupted by evil in the world.
 - To help us put into perspective the significance of God saving the Jews from genocide we can remember that the **lineage that brought for Jesus was in the Jews.**
 - **God' plan of redemption for His people was to come through the Jewish lineage,** if they had been wiped out then God's promises and His divine plan would have been interrupted.
 - John 4:22
 - "You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know because salvation is from the Jews."
- Esther's overall story
 - In a nut shell the story of Esther is one of a Jewish woman (who was a peasant) through the divine workings of God ended up becoming the Queen of Persia.
 - Esther was an orphan who was raised by her older cousin Mordecai.
 - And because of her influence with the King Ahasuerus [uh haz yoo ER uhs] (or Xerxes in Greek) she was able to save her people from genocide.
 - God works in wondrous ways, as we will see in the story of Esther.
 - This lead to the establishment of Purim
 - An annual festival to celebrate the nations survival and their unlikely victories over their enemies.
 - Purim was established at the end of the book of Esther and is still viewed to this day at which the book of Esther is read.
 - Esther 9:27-28
- God's providence at work
 - As we look through the book of Esther we will see on numerous occasions where God's providence is at work.
 - Where God is moving His invisible hands and putting things into motion according to His will.
 - **As we review Esther and we look at what happened we are going to keep our eyes open for the signs of God's providence at work.**
- The rise of queen Esther | Esther 1-2:20
 - **Read Esther 1:1-9**
 - King Ahasuerus
 - Esther begins in the 3rd year of the reign of king Ahasuerus.
 - Who was king Ahasuerus?
 - He was the king of Persia from 486-465 B.C.
 - Ahasuerus is the Hebrew transliteration from his Persian name of khshayarsha.
 - In world history he is more commonly know from the Greek transliteration of his name Xerxes I
 - Yes, OT was real history!
 - The defiance of queen Vashti
 - **Read Esther 1:10-19**
 - King Ahasuerus was pretty proud of himself and after only ruling for 3 years he put together this massive banquet and feast that lasted for 6 months.

- Must have been quite the party!
 - Esther 1:3-4
- At the end of this period he threw a weeklong banquet that was held at the palace and all were invited both those of status and those that were common.
- On the last day after king Ahasuerus was apparently feeling pretty good from all the alcohol he called to his eunuchs (like a court officer) to have them bring him his wife so she could display all her beauty to everyone at the party.
 - While the details of what this would consist of is not made in detail but from a historical perspective she likely would not have been wearing much other than her crown.
- Vashti upon hearing this outright refused to obey the king.
 - Esther 1:10-12
 - This act of defiance was of course a big deal, no one could refuse the king not even his wife.
 - The king angry gathered his wise men (those skilled in law and justice) and they decided that the king would make a royal decree stating that Vashti would be removed from her position as queen and that someone else would be chosen in her place.
- **God's providence at work**
 - This is also where we have our first notable act of God' providence. God had his hand involved so that Ahasuerus would have to find another wife.
 - Esther 1:12
 - "But Queen Vashit refused to come at the king's command that was delivered by his eunuchs. The king became furious and his anger burned within him"
 - **These circumstances set the stage for the rise of queen Esther.**
 - Though it may have seemed unrelated at the time, it was in fact a very critical and important moment.
- The search for a queen | Esther 2:1-11
 - After some time passed, the king decided it was time to start the search for a queen.
 - **Read Esther 2:1-4**
 - This process was a bit more involved than what we might do today.
 - When people generally are looking for a spouse they find them either from just their day-to-day interactions, friends, work or perhaps even a dating site.
 - The king had appointed commissioners to go into each province (or section) of his kingdom and they assembled ALL of the beautiful women.
 - Then they would all go through beauty treatments and then the king would choose whoever pleased him the most.
 - Mordecai and Esther | Esther 2:5-7
 - **Read Esther 2:5-7**
 - So now enters in Mordecai and Esther.
 - Mordecai was a Jew, a Benjaminite
 - Esther 2:5-6
 - He was also employed at the palace.
 - Esther (Hadassah is her Hebrew name) was the cousin of Mordecai, but he took her in as his own daughter after her parents passed away.
 - Esther 2:7
 - Esther is brought to the palace | Esther 2:8-11
 - **Esther 2:8-11**

- Esther was also gathered at the fortress of Susa and she was put under Hegai who was in charge of the women that were being prepared for the king.
- Esther made an impression on Hegai
 - We then see that Esther made quite the impression on Hegai and was given preferential treatment. She was moved up in the line so to speak and was given special treatment.
 - Esther 2:9
- **God's providence at work**
 - The Bible doesn't say how many women there were, but I would have to assume a very high number.
 - Out of all of these women, Esther was singled out and given the preferential treatment.
 - God has his hand and his watchful eye involved in this entire process. **It wasn't by chance that Esther was gained favor with Hegai, it was because of God's providence.**
 - Esther never revealed that she was a Jew
 - It was also by God through Mordecai that she did not reveal to anyone that she was in fact a Jew.
 - If she had then likely would have lost favor instead.
- Esther becomes queen | Esther 2:12-17
 - **Read Esther 2:12-17**
 - The time came for all the women who had gone through the necessary beauty treatments, to go before the king. We find that Esther wins the king's favor.
 - **Esther 2:16-17**
 - God's providence at work
 - We see here that again God's providence was at work.
 - Not only did she win favor with the king, but also with everyone else she came into contact with.
 - This was not by accident as it was the will of God and part of His plan to save the Jews from genocide.
 - **That of all the women that were available for his choosing, that the one he would make queen would be a Jew who was critical in God's plan to save them.**
 - When you think about the providence of God, what does this mean to you?
 - What does His providence mean about His involvement in the world?
 - Have you seen God's invisible hands at work in the world and in your own life? In what way?
 - Do you think he is at work in your life and involved in things you are not capable of understanding?
 - Is God at work even in the smallest of details in our lives?
- Mordecai saves the King from assassination | Esther 2:21-23
 - **Read Esther 2:21-23**
 - This passage records for us a short description of how Mordecai saves the king from assassination.
 - On the surface, it almost seems insignificant because nothing really happens to him. There was no reward or recognition from the king.
 - **But as we see the story play out we find that this is a vital step in God's providence to save the Jewish people and fulfill His promises.**
 - Mordecai who was employed by the king overheard a plot to assassinate the king.

- Mordecai, who had access to speak with Esther, told her about the plot and reported it to the king.
- God's providence
 - Again, we can clearly see with the whole story in mind how critical this moment was.
 - So, Mordecai was not rewarded now, but we will see why later.
 - In verse 23 it was recorded in an official record book, this would prove to be vital later.
- Haman's plot to kill the Jews | Esther 3:1-14
 - In chapter 3 we are introduced to Haman who is scheming a plot to kill the Jews, to commit genocide.
 - However, we cannot ignore the fact that this wasn't just Haman's doing.
 - There is a battle or a chess game going on between God and Satan throughout the Bible.
 - **Satan is using Haman here as a tool to exterminate the Jews to attempt to deny the birth of Christ.**
 - Much like he did when Jesus was born, and King Herod was killing all those children because of the birth of Jesus.
 - **Read Esther 3:1-6**
 - After some time has passed perhaps 2-3 years we have a man by the name of Haman who was an Agagite.
 - King Ahasuerus honored this man and put him second in command.
 - This of course made him important and those in the kingdom would bow down to him when he passed by.
 - **It was likely that he won favor by deceit** especially when we see his true colors and the fact that he was obviously used by Satan.
 - Mordecai would not bow to Haman like everyone else
 - Esther 3:2
 - Unlike all the others Mordecai would not bow down to Haman.
 - Then we see that Haman became furious when he found out that Mordecai would not bow to him and then we see that his **rage was worse when he realized that he was a Jew.**
 - When he learned this, we see he went from looking to just punish Mordecai alone to **exterminating all of the Jews.**
 - Esther 3:6
 - Haman now realizing that Mordaci wasn't a common man but in fact a Jew we see that his rage increased greatly.
 - The feud between Haman and Mordecai
 - This passage leaves us with some questions:
 - So why was Haman so furious with Mordecai?
 - What was the significance of Mordaci's ethnic identity (he was a Jew)?
 - Why did Mordecai refuse to bow down to Haman?
 - To answer these questions, we need to look at history and see the heritage of Haman and Mordecai to see where they came from.
 - Haman is an Agagite which means that he was an Amalekite who descended from King Agag.
 - This is very significant because when we go back in history to the time of Saul and David we see where this makes more sense.
 - The Amalekites had oppressed the Jews as they were coming out of the land of Egypt, so God had commanded king Saul to completely destroy them.

- The first oppression of the Amalekites against the Jews began nearly 1000 years prior.
 - 1 Samuel 15:1-3
- Of course, we know that further in the story that Saul disobeyed God and did not completely wipe out the Amalekites and had spared King Agag (Samuel finished King Agag though).
 - 1 Samuel 15:7-9
 - 1 Samuel 15:32-33
- **Even though these events took place over 500 years earlier Haman has not forgotten what the Jews had done, and he is looking for revenge.**
- The Amalekites heritage began with Amalek whose grandfather was Esau.
 - Genesis 36:12
- Mordecai is a Jew from the tribe of Benjamin.
 - When we look at the heritage of Mordecai we see that he was from the tribe of Benjamin, which makes him a Benjamite.
 - **Additionally, Mordecai was also a descendant of Saul.**
 - Know we can see why Haman would have the desire for vengeance.
 - So we can see where Mordecai knowing God's dislike for these people and the oppression that they had shown to the Israelites that he was not going to bow down to him.
 - Mordecai stood by God and was not going to bow to his enemy.
 - Exodus 17:14-15
 - "Then the LORD said to Moses, Write this as a memorial in a book and recite it in the ears of Joshua, that **I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.**" And Moses built an altar and called the name of it, The LORD Is My Banner, saying, "A hand upon the throne of the LORD! **The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation**"
- Haman sought genocide, to completely exterminate the Jews and thus kill off the line of the Messiah.
 - Satan has tried on several occasions to prevent the future birth of Jesus Christ.
 - He has tried in many ways from cutting off the line before Joseph and Mary, to killing Jesus after He was born and even his futile attempts at His crucifixion.
 - However, in each instance, the divine providence of God prevailed, and Satan could not overcome God.
 - **What do you think of the impact of one individual's disobedience and how that can affect future generations?**
 - **(Saul didn't kill all the Amalekites and now Haman is trying to wipe out the Jews)**
 - **Does Satan also try to intervene in our lives, to throw us off the path that God has laid out for us?**
 - **Does God's providence in our lives mean that our lives will be easy and our path easygoing?**
- Haman plots to kill the Jews by deceiving the king.
 - Haman, with likely some guidance from Satan, hatched a plan to destroy the Jews.
 - His plan was to use his position with the king to deceive and persuaded the king to do this for him.
 - ***Read Esther 3:7-9***
 - Haman cast lots (called Pur) to decide when he would hatch his plan.

- Haman wanted to be sure that he used the prime opportunity to pursued the king to allowing his evil plan to take place.
- Haman lied and gave half-truths regarding the Jews.
 - Haman painted a false picture of the Jews to the King.
 - First, he never even mentioned who they were, he never said they were Jews. This came after the king gave permission for him to write it down.
 - He made it appear that the Jews were living in his kingdom but neglecting his laws and rules and instead abiding by their own.
 - This was half true in the fact that yes, the Jews had their Jewish laws and the Torah, the Scripture given to them by God.
 - But that didn't mean that they were anarchists either, but that's the picture that Haman painted for King Ahasuerus.
- Haman said he would get 10,000 talents for the king.
 - This would have come from plundering the Jews.
 - The amount was significant because it would have been about 70% of the king's yearly revenue.
- Haman through deception got his way and the king's orders to kill the Jewish people was sent throughout the kingdom.
 - **Read Esther 3:10-14**
 - So, Haman at this point seems to have succeeded in wiping out the Jewish people and enacting his revenge.
 - The decree was written to kill all the Jews in a single day.
 - This was to be a day of massive bloodshed.
 - Historians figured the signing date of the edict was April 7th 474 B.C.
 - Historians figured the date of the Jews genocide to be March 7th, 473 B.C.
 - By having the king sign this into law it would be irrevocable
 - Esther 1:19a
 - The King has unknowingly just signed the death of his wife because he still did not know that she was a Jew.
- Has Haman and Satan won?
 - **At this point it would seem that Haman had won**, he was able to get the king to issue a law stating the death of the Jews or genocide of the Jewish people.
 - **Satan also was likely thinking that he had outsmarted God.**
 - By human reasoning this was an impossible circumstance, where the Jews could not possible hope to escape.
 - This would have been the case if it wasn't for the providence of God.
 - All this might have been so if it wasn't for the providence of God.
 - God had invisible had at work, in fact he had it at work well before to set everything up perfectly so that the Jews would be saved.
- **Have you been in a situation in life where you knew that God was in control, but you couldn't help but feel that perhaps Satan had the upper hand. Because your situation seemed to be impossible to get out of.**
- **In these circumstances what should your course of action be?**
- **This story shows us how God can work in mysterious ways that are beyond our understanding.**
- **We must use this example to trust God even when we don't understand our situations because God's providence may be at work in our lives.**