

Subject: *Book of Esther – God’s Providence for His People*

Scripture: *Esther 2:1-23*

INTRODUCTION

The book of Esther and the book of Ruth are the only Bible books named after women. In chapter 2, we are introduced to Esther. Her Hebrew name was Hadassah (2:7) which means “myrtle.” Her Persian name Esther means “star.” Esther was an orphan who was adopted by her cousin Mordecai. She loved and obeyed him as her foster father. Esther’s submission to Mordecai stands in contrast to Vashti’s disobedience to King Ahasuerus.

Chapter 2 begins, “After these things,” which refers to the things that happened in chapter 1. Four years passed between Esther 1 and 2 (see 1:3 and 2:16). We see God’s hand working as the story unfolds. It is clear evidence of His sovereignty and providence. By definition, *sovereignty* is God’s control over all things, and *providence* is God’s working in all the details and events of life to accomplish His will. God uses bad things, good things, big things, and little things to carry out His plan. J. Vernon McGee defines God’s providence as “the means by which God directs all things, both animate and inanimate, seen and unseen, good and evil, toward a worthy purpose, which means His will must finally prevail.” God’s name is not mentioned anywhere in Esther, but we see God’s hand everywhere. To better understand and appreciate the story of Esther, we should keep three Bible verses in mind:

Proverbs 21:1 *The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.*

Daniel 4:35 *And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?*

Romans 8:28 *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

OUTLINE OF CHAPTER 2

1. God’s providence in the bad things

In chapter 1 we see God’s hand at work in the king’s depravity, the queen’s defiance, the king’s disgrace, and the king’s decree to replace Vashti as queen. In chapter 2 we also see God’s hand at work in the lives of His own people, especially in the story of Esther and Mordecai.

A. Esther and Mordecai were Jews living in a foreign land (2:6)

Many years earlier they had been taken as captives to Babylon and now they were living in Persia. At the same time, Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were also Jews living in a strange land. Some of the Jews returned to their homeland about 60 years earlier, but most of them remained in Persia. The book of Esther reveals how God took care of His people and protected them while they lived in a foreign land. All of this didn’t just happen by “chance” or “luck.” God had a sovereign plan and a purpose.

B. Esther was chosen to participate in the king’s selection of a new queen (2:8)

Esther didn't volunteer to be the next queen, but she was forced to participate. As a godly Jewish woman she found herself in a very unpleasant situation. When bad things happen remember that God is at work and nothing just happens without His direction or permission. Everything in this story was done apparently to please the king (2:4), but actually everything was done to please the King of kings. Some of these things were bad, unpleasant things, but God worked to bring blessing out of bad circumstances. The nature of prescription drugs furnishes a good illustration of this truth. If the chemicals found in some medications were taken by themselves they would cause bodily harm or death, but when these chemicals are wisely mixed together, they help a sick person to recover and be well.

2. God's providence in the good things

A. Esther was loved and nurtured by Mordecai as her foster father (2:7)

Mordecai cared for his younger cousin as an orphan and raised her in a loving, stable home. What a special providence it is to be cared for and raised in a good Christian home.

B. Esther was very beautiful and found favor with her keeper (2:8-9)

God blessed Esther with physical beauty. All of our physical features come from God. God also caused Hegai to show her kindness and take special care of her.

C. Esther was able to conceal her Jewish identity (2:10)

God would allow her to reveal her identity at the right time. We do not know why Mordecai and Esther hid their Jewish identity, but God ultimately used this to save the lives of all Jews.

D. Esther was chosen to be the next queen (2:16-17)

God wanted her to be in that position, even though she never sought it. The process of selecting a new queen took a long time. Esther and all the young ladies went through twelve months of purifying and beauty treatments. Can you imagine how they must have smelled? Have you ever walked through the perfume section of a department store? An interesting (and amusing) woman's survey found that 15% of women color their hair, 22% wear false eyelashes, 38% occasionally wear wigs or hairpieces, 80% wear facial makeup, and yet 100% say they favor legislation to prohibit any kind of false packaging. Esther didn't need makeup. She had natural beauty and charm, but she had no ambition to be the next queen. She seemed to realize that God was with her, and she accepted her position as queen as a part of His plan.

3. God's providence in the little things

In verses 19-23 we see some things that happened to Mordecai. Don't think that God works only in the "big" things. He also works in small details and unexpected ways. It has been said that big doors swing on little hinges.

A. Mordecai was in the right place at the right time (2:19)

Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate, an important place similar to a modern courthouse. He had an official position in the kingdom and God brought him there for that eventful that day.

B. Mordecai overheard a plot to assassinate the king (2: 21-22)

When he heard this he told Esther who then informed the king and gave credit to Mordecai.

C. Mordecai's good deed was recorded, but not immediately rewarded (2:23)

It was written into the official record that Mordecai saved the king's life, but there was no public recognition. God would take care of that at the right time. The lesson is clear: be faithful to your duty and God will reward you in due time. **Galatians 6:9** *And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*

Two important things happen in Chapter 2. Esther becomes the new queen and Mordecai saves the king's life. The stage is now set for what is going to happen later. Note that the events in this book took place over a ten-year period from 483-473 B.C. In Esther 1:2, the third year of the king's reign, Vashti was removed as queen. In 2:16, the seventh year of the king's reign, Esther was selected as the new queen. In 3:7, the twelfth year of the king's reign, God delivered the Jews and defeated their enemy Haman.

In God's providence bad things turn out to be good things, little things turn out to be big things, overlooked things turn out to be important things, and all things turn out to be God-directed things. God is providentially working all things together for His glory and the good of His people and He is working in His wise way and in His perfect timing.

Do you see the evidence of God's providence in your life? Do you see His hand working in the bad things, in the good things, in the little things, and in all things? Nothing happens by accident or chance, but only by the loving providence of our sovereign God.

Thou art all my good in times of peace, my only support in days of trouble, my one sufficiency when life shall end. Help me to see how good thy will is in all, and even when it crosses mine teach me to be pleased with it. Grant me to feel thee in fire, and food, and every providence, and to see that thy many gifts and creatures are but thy hands and fingers taking hold of me. Thou bottomless fountain of all good, I give myself to thee out of love, for all I have or own is thine, my goods, family, church, self, to do with as thou wilt, to honor thyself by men, and by all mine. If it be consistent with thy eternal counsels, the purpose of thy grace, and the great ends of thy glory, then bestow upon me the blessings of thy comforts; if not, let me resign myself to thy wiser determinations.

THE VALLEY OF VISION

Providence is a Christian's diary, but not his Bible.

THOMAS WATSON (1620-1686)

The vastness of the sway of Providence cannot be imagined. It ranges from the archangel to the microbe, from the highest heavens to the humblest anthill; nothing is too large for His grasp, nothing is small enough to elude His notice.

W. J. TOWNSEND