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**Message: God Establishes and Removes Kings and Queens**

**Text: Esther 1:1-22**

### **Introduction**

- A. The choice to preach from Esther is not without challenges.
1. No mention of God, the only book in the Bible that does not mention Him.
  2. No mention of the “tora,” the law of God.
  3. Esther is not mentioned or quoted in the New Testament or any other book of the Old Testament.
  4. No prayer (but there is the practice of fasting, which is associated with prayer).
  5. No mention of any worship associated with Jerusalem, the rebuilt temple, the land of Israel.
  6. No overt miracles, no signs and wonders performed.
  7. Preachers old and current typically avoid the book. John Calvin wrote no commentary on Esther. Charles Spurgeon preached only 2 sermons from a total of 3 versus from Esther. John Piper lists zero sermons preached from Esther over his lifetime. (This is no criticism of these men. I personally have in over 3 decades of ministry never preached from Esther.)
- B. So these observations beg the question, “Why should we look for God to speak to us, strengthen us, guide and transform us through this portion of His Word as we do through other portions of His Word?”
1. Because it is the Word of God, that reveals God to us, Christ to us, and that is profitable for our instruction and our being equipped to live righteously by faith in Christ Jesus.  
  
2 Timothy 3:16 **All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable** for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;<sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.
  2. Because Esther, like every Old Testament book, was written to give us perseverance, encouragement, and hope in the Lord.  
  
Romans 15:4 For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.
  3. Because Esther, perhaps more than any other Old Testament book, shows us that God can be trusted to be present and intervening in our lives and faithful to His covenant promises, even when He does not overtly intervene with observable miracles obvious to all.
- C. You and I live in a period and place in God’s redemptive history where most of us would say we don’t see what Scripture calls “signs and wonders,” obvious, visible to all, miraculous interventions of God’s power not explainable by His laws of nature.

1. There are periods in history where God visibly, miraculously intervened. E.g., ...

Deuteronomy 6:22 'Moreover, the LORD showed great and distressing **signs and wonders** before our eyes against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household;

Daniel 6:27 "He delivers and rescues and performs **signs and wonders** in heaven and on earth, Who has *also* delivered Daniel from the power of the lions."

Acts 5:12 At the hands of the apostles many **signs and wonders** were taking place among the people;

Hebrews 2:3 how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,<sup>4</sup> God also testifying with them, both by **signs and wonders** and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

2. But there have been periods of history where God has not intervened by visible signs and wonders. The last overt miracle recorded in the Old Testament was God's sending an angel to shut the mouths of lions to preserve Daniel's life overnight in the lions' den. There are no overt miracles recorded by Ezra and Nehemiah during their ministries. It is not just a matter of miracles being done but not recorded. The Scriptures attest to such periods where there is no visible divine involvement. Asaph the seer writes ...

Psalms 74:9 **We do not see our signs**; There is no longer any prophet, nor is there any among us who knows how long.

- D. So the book of Esther is provided to us who live in such a period of history, instructing us to trust in the providence of God, in His remaining unseen yet intervening and ruling through the people and events of human history.

### **I. 1:1-9 The projection of human pomp and power is under God's sovereign rule.**

- A. 1:1-2 Ahasuerus (Xerxes [NIV] is the Greek translation of his name) was born in 520 BC, and ascended the throne of his father Darius I, reigning from 486-465 BC.

Esther 1:1 Now it took place in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces,<sup>2</sup> in those days as King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne which *was* at the citadel in Susa,

1. He was the most powerful man in the known biblical world. (Show map)
2. It will be important to note that his realm contained virtually the whole Jewish nation, those who had returned to Israel and those dispersed (diaspora). Their fate, and thus the fate of God's covenant promise to the patriarchs (in Abraham's seed all nations would be blessed) and to David (that a descendent would sit on his throne forever) would appear to

be in his hands. When in chapter 3 Haman receives Xerxes's approval to kill all the Jews in the kingdom, the race would be virtually exterminated, and certainly the line of David.

- B. 1:3ff After harshly putting down rebellions in Egypt and Babylon at the beginning of his reign, Xerxes, in the third year of his reign (483 BC) puts on a lavish, rolling 6 month banquet displaying his wealth and power, followed by a special 7 day banquet in Susa, one of 4 imperial capitol cities. His palace in Susa was a magnificent building. This might have been a flexing of his muscles after putting down the rebellions, but he is also in this year beginning plans for his invasion of Greece that would take place in 480 BC.

Esther 1:3 **in the third year of his reign** he gave a banquet for all his princes and attendants, the army *officers* of Persia and Media, the nobles and the princes of his provinces being in his presence.<sup>4</sup> And he displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty **for many days, 180 days.**<sup>5</sup> **When these days were completed, the king gave a banquet lasting seven days** for all the people who were present at the citadel in Susa, from the greatest to the least, in the court of the garden of the king's palace.

Esther 1:6 *There were hangings of fine white and violet linen held by cords of fine purple linen on silver rings and marble columns, and couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and precious stones.*<sup>7</sup> Drinks were served in golden vessels of various kinds, and the royal wine was plentiful according to the king's bounty.<sup>8</sup> The drinking was *done* according to the law, there was no compulsion, for so the king had given orders to each official of his household that he should do according to the desires of each person.

1. Queen Vashti was also hosting a banquet for the women.

Esther 1:9 Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus.

2. But Ahasuerus did not ultimately make himself rich and powerful, or make Vashti queen. Our reading of Esther is meant to be shaped by what we know from elsewhere in the Scriptures. As Daniel previously said decades earlier to Nebuchadnezzar's arrogant son and successor, Belshazzar ...

Daniel 5:18 "O king, **the Most High God granted sovereignty, grandeur, glory and majesty to Nebuchadnezzar** your father."<sup>19</sup> "Because of the grandeur which He bestowed on him, all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language feared and trembled before him;

## II. 1:10-12 The king's illusion of control exposed by his wife's rebellion.

- A. Having shown off his wealth and being full of wine, the king now wants to show off his wife to his guests.

Esther 1:10 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus,<sup>11</sup> to **bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown in order to display her beauty to the people and the princes**, for she was beautiful.<sup>12</sup> **But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command** delivered by the eunuchs. Then the king became very angry and his wrath burned within him.

- B. Vashti's refusal to be made an object of gawking and lust in order to feed her husband's ego embarrassed him, called into question his power, enraging his heart. But so insecure was this supposedly powerful man, that he allowed this single marital spat to be turned into an international crisis.

### III. 1:13-22 The deposal of Vashti as queen was ultimately God's doing for His people's preservation.

- A. 1:13-15 Ahasuerus needs to consult his counselors to deal with his own wife? Doesn't make him look so powerful.

Esther 1:13 Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times-- for it was the custom of the king so *to speak* before all who knew law and justice<sup>14</sup> and were close to him: Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan, **the seven princes of Persia and Media** who had access to the king's presence and sat in the first place in the kingdom--<sup>15</sup> "According to law, what is to be done with Queen Vashti, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus *delivered* by the eunuchs?"

- B. 1:16-18 Memucan, evidently the lead counselor, speaking for the group, makes all the empire's leaders look insecure and weak.

Esther 1:16 In the presence of the king and the princes, Memucan said, "Queen Vashti has wronged not only the king but *also* all the princes and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.<sup>17</sup> "For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women causing them to look with contempt on their husbands by saying, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in to his presence, but she did not come.'<sup>18</sup> "This day the ladies of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's conduct will speak in *the same way* to all the king's princes, and there will be plenty of contempt and anger.

- C. 1:19-20 It appears ironic that the solution to these princes' concern that people will hear about Vashti's conduct is to publish a decree describing it to all 217 provinces.

Esther 1:19 "If it pleases the king, let a royal edict be issued by him and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media so that it cannot be repealed, that Vashti may no longer come into the presence of King Ahasuerus, and let the king give her royal position to another who is more worthy than she."<sup>20</sup> "When the king's edict which he will make is

heard throughout all his kingdom, great as it is, then all women will give honor to their husbands, great and small."

D. 1:21-22 Vashti's crown is taken away to be given to another.

Esther 1:21 *This* word pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed.<sup>22</sup> So he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province according to its script and to every people according to their language, that every man should be the master in his own house and the one who speaks in the language of his own people.

1. Ultimately the Lord was sovereignly working behind this seemingly small marital spat, to provide a path for a young Jewish orphan to replace Vashti as queen and become strategically placed in a position to be used to deliver herself and her people from extermination. God removes and establishes kings and queens.

Daniel 2:19 Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven;<sup>20</sup> Daniel said, "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever, for wisdom and power belong to Him."<sup>21</sup> "It is He who changes the times and the epochs; **He removes kings and establishes kings**; He gives wisdom to wise men and knowledge to men of understanding.

## Conclusion

- A. Any miracles happening in this story? Not to the naked eye, but God was then and is now involved in every facet of human history. You and I are tempted to live as functional deists, acknowledging God exists and created the world, but is no longer involved with it. So Christ speaks to us and protects our faith in Him through His apostle Paul ...

Acts 17:24 "The God who made the world and all things in it, ...<sup>25</sup> ... **gives to all people life and breath and all things**;<sup>26</sup> and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, **having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation**,<sup>27</sup> that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;<sup>28</sup> **for in Him we live and move and exist**,

- B. Where is Christ in this story? He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Sovereign who appoints and directs all things according to His will. We saw prophesied in the Messianic psalms is willingness and intention to be born a descendent of Abraham and David, to suffer and die for our sins, to be raised and glorified for our justification, resurrection and glorification at His return. No way would he let a mere mortal king exterminate the seed of Abraham and David, and thus extinguish God's covenant promises to bless His elect from every people through Himself.

Ephesians 1:11 In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined

according to His purpose who **works all things** after the counsel of His will,

- C. You and I may never see an overt miracle, a sign and wonder in our entire lives, but don't let that keep us from seeing the providential workings of our unseen Lord in our daily lives and in the lives of others. As Jesus said to His disciple Thomas, who would not believe God raised Jesus from the dead unless he saw Him and touched His wounded hands and side ...

John 20:29 Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? **Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.**"