

DANGEROUS DELIVERANCE

The book of Esther presents an exciting narrative of intrigue and danger. But it was real life for God's people in exile. And parallels to our own day are extraordinary. Evil continually creeps forward, and God's people must be diligent, and obedient to His Word. Esther shows us how to trust and obey, as God works behind the scenes, and as "peripety" overturns the ordinary expected outcomes.

1- PEOPLE ARE COMPLEX - and flawed by sin. For some 2,500 years, the Jewish people have acted out the dangerous drama of Esther when they celebrate the feast of Purim. They even include sound effects: "yay" for Esther and Mordecai, "hmm" for Xerxes, "boo" and stamping their feet for Haman.

Prof M Breneman provides helpful character sketches of the protagonists. Haman (*boo*) is a prideful man with a cowardly heart. Proverbs 16:18, "*pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.*" Xerxes (*hmm*) is easily influenced and weak in spite of his appearance of power. Proverbs 16:2, "*all the ways of a man are pure in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit.*" Mordecai (*yay*) is wise and faithful. Proverbs 16:31, "*gray hair is a crown of glory gained in a righteous life.*" Esther (*yay*) is steadfast and courageous. Proverbs 16:3, "*commit your work to the Lord and your plans will be established.*"

2- GOD OVERCOMES EVIL - in His sovereign providence. In chapter 7, Xerxes returns from the garden just as Haman is begging for his life and falling on the couch where Esther was. Incredibly risky and inappropriate for Haman to do. Also ironic, that Haman would fall at the feet of a Jew, since Mordecai would not bow to Haman. Xerxes realizes he has been terribly tricked by the evil Haman. When he sees Haman with Esther, he says, "*will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?*" As the word left the mouth of the king (his judicial decree) his servants arrested Haman.

The servants reported, "*moreover, the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing at Haman's house.*" And the king said, "*hang him on that,*" so they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. "*And the wrath of the king abated.*" Haman was hoisted on his own petard, a great pole to display an impaled corpse, and discourage evildoers.

In chapter 8, the king gives Haman's wealth to Esther. He took off his own ring, which he had previously given Haman as his viceroy, and put it on Mordecai's hand and put him in charge of all Haman's house, wealth, position, power, and authority. Proverbs 16:9, "*the heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps*" and verse 20, "*blessed is he who trusts in the Lord.*" Psalm 17:4, "*the wicked man conceives evil and falls into the pit that he has made; his mischief returns on his own head.*" To desire personal gain at the expense of others is to be overcome with evil, rather than obeying God's Word.

3- GOD DELIVERS HIS PEOPLE - in His sovereign grace. God's providence was at work through ordinary circumstances, to accomplish His extra-ordinary purposes, through his obedient people. However, there was still another matter. Esther pleaded with the king for a royal order to undo the evil edict of Haman. Mordecai wrote a new edict that likewise was sent in every language to every province, from India to Ethiopia, saying that "*the king allows the Jews to gather and defend their lives, to destroy, kill, annihilate any force that attacks them, and to plunder the goods of their attackers.*"

Verse 15 says "*then Mordecai went out in royal robes and a crown, and the people shouted and rejoiced, and the Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor.*" And many from the other people groups declared themselves to be Jews. Peripety continues, and the tables were turned!

In chapter 9, "*on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, the reverse occurred: the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them.*" The ten sons of Haman were also hanged, ending the Amalekites, as Queen Esther accomplished what King Saul failed to do in 1 Samuel 15. And the Jews inaugurated the Feast of Purim, after the term "*pur*" which means casting of lots. Haman had done this to establish the fate of the Jews, but God overturned their pagan worldview and their practices. Proverbs 16:33, "*the lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.*"

4- PROVIDENCE OR MIRACLES - God is always at work. Another edict set the holy days of Purim, as Judaism still does today. Because God delivers His people (Zechariah 12), as an echo of Moses' prayer in Deuteronomy 9, asking God for grace, "*for they are Your people and Your heritage, by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm!*" Miracles are described as temporary suspension of natural laws.

This contrasts with providence, which includes the preservation of the universe, divine concurrence in human action, moving history toward a planned end. In Esther, human decisions led to an outcome God had promised many centuries before, but in the exact reversal of the humanly expected outcome.

KH Jobes notes, "though there is not one tiny miracle in the book of Esther, the cumulative result of a series of improbable events leads one to ponder the miraculous quality of the ordinary. It's said that a coincidence is a miracle in which God prefers to remain anonymous." Romans 8 teaches believers to trust God in all that happens in our lives, as He works out His purpose in every circumstance.

Just as Esther's deliverance came by identifying with her people, so the work of Jesus Christ identifies with His redeemed people (1 Corinthians 1:20). This results in the consummation of covenant promises of God, who invites all people, Jews and Gentiles, to be born again and receive His deliverance! ☐