

God’s Providential Protection of His People

Esther 1:1–10:3

Introduction:

In Psalm 135:5-6, the psalmist testifies:

*“For I know that the LORD is great,
and that our Lord is above all gods.
Whatever the LORD pleases, he does,
in heaven and on earth,
in the seas and all deeps.”*

Job came to the same conclusion in Job 42:2:

*“I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”*

God, our sovereign Creator, has both “the right and power to do all that He decides to do.”¹ Yet from God’s Word we understand that His power is always used in accordance with His good purposes. When God sovereignly intervenes—directing human affairs so that His good purposes are accomplished on behalf of His people—we see His providence in action. Throughout biblical history, we find abundant examples of God providentially providing for the needs of His people. Even after unfaithful Israel was exiled from the Promised Land for their many sins, God remained faithful to His covenant with them—always preserving a remnant so that His promises to them might be fulfilled.

The history recorded in Esther is a snapshot in time when God moved providentially to spare His people from annihilation. Though He is never mentioned by name, God is the guiding force behind the events the book records. God’s providential care is on display for all to see.

Author:

- Unknown. “Many early writers, both Jewish as well as Christian, suggested Mordecai as the author.”²

Genre:

- History

Main Characters:

- God (unnamed)
- Ahasuerus (Xerxes)
- Esther
- Mordecai
- Haman

¹ John Piper, “Are God’s Providence and God’s Sovereignty the Same?” *DesiringGod*, Oct. 18, 2019, accessed May 10, 2024, <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/are-gods-providence-and-gods-sovereignty-the-same>.

² Carl R. Anderson, “Esther Introduction,” *HCSB Large Print Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Pub., 2015), 804.

Purposes:

- To show how God sovereignly protected His people who remained in exile.
- To encourage Jews to trust in Yahweh's compassionate care, no matter where they live.
- To encourage future generations to remember how God delivered them from destruction by celebrating the Feast of Purim.

Themes:

- Providence — Nothing is outside of God's protective care and control.
- Reversal — God can redeem even the most dire of situations for His glory, and he can use the most unlikely of people to do it.

Structure:

I. Providential Positioning (1:1–2:23)

- A. Setting (1:1–4)
- B. Vashti deposed as Queen (1:5–22)
- C. Search for a New Queen (2:1–11)
- D. Esther becomes Queen (2:12–18) [First Feast]
- E. Mordecai Saves the King's Life (2:19–23)

II. God's People Are Threatened (3:1–5:14)

- A. The Rise of Haman (3:1–2)
- B. Mordecai Defies Haman (3:3–6)
- C. Haman's Plot to Kill the Jews (3:7–15)
- D. Mordecai Cries Out to God (4:1–5)
- E. Mordecai Reminds Esther of God's Providence (4:6–16)
- F. Esther Hosts Ahasuerus and Haman (5:1–14) [Second Feast]

III. God Saves His People (6:1–10:13)

- A. Mordecai Rewarded (6:1–11)
- B. The Fall of Haman (6:12–14)
- C. Haman's Last Meal (7:1–10) [Fourth Feast]
- D. Mordecai Takes Haman's Place (8:1–3)
- E. A New Edict (8:3–17) [Fifth Feast]
- F. Enemies Defeated (9:1–16) [Sixth Feast]
- G. Salvation Celebrated (9:17–32) [Seventh Feast]

Historical Background:

Assyrian Empire

The Assyrian Empire conquered the northern Kingdom of Israel (Samaria) in 722 BC and deported many Hebrews into Assyrian territories (2 Kings 18:1–12).

Babylonian (Neo-Babylonian) Empire

The Babylonian Empire, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, defeated the Assyrians in 722 BC. He laid siege to Jerusalem, eventually destroying both its walls and the Temple in 586 BC and exiled most of the Hebrews from Judah into Babylonian controlled territories (Jer 52:12–16, 2 Kings 25:1–12).

Persian (Medo-Persian) Empire



Cyrus (559–530 BC)

- Conquered Babylon in 539 BC.
- Some Jews returned to Jerusalem with Zerubbabel in 538 BC (Ezra 1–2).
- Cyrus' decree in 538 allowed any Israelite to return to Jerusalem, but many, having established new lives in foreign lands, were content to remain where they were.

Cambyses (530-522 BC)

- Rebuilding of the temple stopped (Ezra 4:24).

Darius I (522-486 BC)

- Temple completed (Ezra 5–6).

Ahasuerus / Xerxes 1 (486-465 BC)

- Invaded Greece in ~480 BC (taking Athens)—expelled in 479 BC.
- The events recorded in Esther take place during the first half of Ahasuerus' reign.

Artaxerxes 1 (465–424 BC)

- More Hebrews return with Ezra in 456 BC (Ezra 7–8) and Nehemiah in 445 BC and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2).

I. Providential Positioning

A. Setting (1:1–4) [First Feast]

1:1 Now in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, 2 in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa, the citadel, 3 in the third year of his reign he gave a feast for all his officials and servants. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were before him, 4 while he showed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days, 180 days. 5 And when these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in Susa the citadel, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace.

The book of Esther begins by recording one of six feasts mentioned in the book. Ahasuerus throws the first feast to celebrate Himself. History records that just before this time, Ahasuerus successfully subdued an Egyptian rebellion. And shortly after this time he would lead the Persian army in a short-lived invasion of Greece. This might explain why his army is present, as well as his chief officials and even his servants—his military exploits will require support from everyone.³

B. Vashti deposed as Queen (1:5–22)

10 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha and Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, 11 to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at. 12 But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. At this the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him

Under the influence of too much wine, Ahasuerus' pride causes him to attempt to put his queen's physical beauty on display. She refuses, and his pride turns to rage. And he turns to his "wise men" who are also called "the seven princes of Persia and Media" for their opinion about how to deal with this situation. Memucan speaks for all in vs. 16:

16 ... "Not only against the king has Queen Vashti done wrong, but also against all the officials and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. 17 For the queen's behavior will be made known to all women, causing them to look at their husbands with contempt, since they will say, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, and she did not come.' 18 This very day the noble women of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's behavior will say the same to all the king's officials, and there will be contempt and wrath in plenty.

³ For more information on Ahasuerus' (a.k.a. Xerxes) military exploits and their correlation with biblical history, see Andrew Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2011), 192–195.

Memucan is afraid that Vashti's refusal will lead to a rebellion among the women of the empire. So, he proposes that the king issue a royal order that...

19 ... may not be repealed, that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus. And let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. 20 So when the decree made by the king is proclaimed throughout all his kingdom, for it is vast, all women will give honor to their husbands, high and low alike."

Ahasuerus and the others agree that this is a good course of action, and the King's edict is written and sent to every corner of the empire—and translated into every language appropriate for each locale. There is now no queen in Persia. God is working through the prideful decisions of men to establish a new queen on the throne of his choosing.

C. Search for a New Queen (2:1–11)

After Ahasuerus' anger abated, he remembered that he had deposed Vashti as queen, and apparently his courtiers recognized he was unhappy, so they suggested that he should

2:2 ... "Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king. 3 And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in Susa the citadel, under custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women. Let their cosmetics be given them. 4 And let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This pleased the king, and he did so.

This royal search for a new queen and the year-long preparations to follow would have taken place while Ahasuerus was leading His army in an invasion of Greece. Ahasuerus' forces would even conquer Athens for many months, but the Greeks would eventually turn the tables and drive the Persian armies away.

Now the story changes focus to introduce two other main characters: Mordecai and Esther. He is from the tribe of Benjamin and descended from those who Nebuchadnezzar had driven into exile a century before. He is a father to his much younger cousin Esther, who has lost both of her parents.

Because Esther is especially beautiful, she is also required to relocate to the winter capitol city of Susa and is enrolled in the king's harem under the charge of Hegai—one of the king's trusted eunuchs—who soon elevates her position among the virgins.

2:9 And the young woman pleased him and won his favor. And he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and her portion of food, and with seven chosen young women from the king's palace, and advanced her and her young women to the best place in the harem.

Here we see God's providential hand granting favor to Esther, one of His chosen people, even though the authorities have no idea that she is a Hebrew—because Mordecai commanded her to keep her heritage a secret.

D. Esther becomes Queen (2:12–18) [Second Feast]

After the group of virgins was selected, they essentially lived in spa-like conditions for a year, undergoing beauty treatments to enhance their attractiveness to the king.

12 Now when the turn came for each young woman to go in to King Ahasuerus, after being twelve months under the regulations for the women, since this was the regular period of their beautifying, six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and ointments for women—

Ahasuerus had returned from his unsuccessful invasion of Greece. The preparations of the virgins were completed, and the selection process began. Each would spend an evening with the king—and he would choose the one he liked the best. And even here, we see the hand of God on Esther’s behalf.

15 ... Now Esther was winning favor in the eyes of all who saw her. 16 And when Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign, 17 the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. 18 Then the king gave a great feast for all his officials and servants; it was Esther's feast. He also granted a remission of taxes to the provinces and gave gifts with royal generosity.

Everyone in the Persian Empire had something to celebrate. But something more significant had happened than the crowning of a new queen. God providentially guided the desires of a pagan king to put his woman in the position where she might save her people—even before they were in danger.

E. Mordecai Saves the King’s Life (2:19–23)

God’s plan included more than the elevation of Esther to the throne. Mordecai also had a pivotal role to play. So, the text focuses on Mordecai and how God orchestrated something that would lead to his advancement too.

21 In those days, as Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. 22 And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai.

In description of Mordecai as “sitting at the king’s gate” — probably means that he was a minor official of some kind. And here, through the providence of God, Mordecai was in the right place at the right time to overhear a plot against the King and report it to Esther. A legal investigation was opened, the plotters were found guilty and hanged—and the whole affair was inscribed in the official records. This last fact will play a pivotal role in the salvation of God’s people.

II. God's People Are Threatened

A. The Rise of Haman (3:1–2)

Chapter three begins with an ominous note. Someone evil comes on the scene:

3:1 After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him.

Haman is called an “Agagite”—a descendant of Agag the Amalekite king. In Moses’ day, the Amalekites, unprovoked, attacked Israel before they entered the Promised Land. After the battle Yahweh told Moses to record His promise to **“utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven” (Ex 17:14)**. Hundreds of years later, God commanded king Saul (a Benjaminite) and the people of Israel to wipe out the Amalekites for their earlier treachery. Saul disobeyed God and spared Agag, the Amalekite king, which ultimately cost Saul his throne. Samuel the prophet obeyed God by **“hacking Agag to pieces before the LORD” (1 Sam 15:33)** which gives a strong impression of how much of an offence the Amalekites were in God’s eyes. The fact that Haman is labeled an Agagite lends an ominous note to the story by confirming that he is surely an enemy of God’s people.⁴

B. Mordecai Defies Haman (3:3–6)

Sadly, Haman’s elevation led to an untenable situation for Mordecai, because the king’s order compelled all of his servants to bow down and pay homage to Haman—to prostrate themselves before Haman in submission—which Mordecai would not do because...

3:4. ... he was a Jew. 5 And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury.

Haman’s fury then moved him to seek the destruction of all of Mordecai’s people

6 But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

If Haman’s evil desires came to fruition, it would amount to a total extermination of the Jewish race. No wonder the book of Esther refers to him three times as **“the enemy of the Jews” (Esther 3:10, 8:1, 9:10)**. Clearly a battle is brewing. And the way the writer of Esther has introduced both Mordecai the Benjaminite—and Haman the Agagite—sets up a “rematch” of the fight between Saul and Agag in 1 Samuel 15.⁵

⁴ See Roger L. Omanson and Philip A. Noss, *A Handbook on the Book of Esther: The Hebrew and Greek Texts*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1997), 89.

⁵ John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 486–487.

C. Haman's Plot to Kill the Jews (3:7–15)

More than four years have passed since Esther was crowned queen.

7 In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, they cast lots) before Haman day after day; and they cast it month after month till the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.

During this time Haman has cooked up a plan to exterminate the Jews. Here we find him casting lots to determine the month in which he should implement his plan. **Proverbs 17:33** reminds us that even the smallest of events is under the providential control of Yahweh: **The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.** And indeed, the month designated by “chance” would give God’s people nearly a year to prepare for the danger to come.

3:8 Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, “There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king’s laws, so that it is not to the king’s profit to tolerate them. 9 If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay 10,000 talents of silver into the hands of those who have charge of the king’s business, that they may put it into the king’s treasuries.” 10 So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews. 11 And the king said to Haman, “The money is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you.”

Mordecai offers to enrich the King’s treasure with a fantastic sum of money—which he will presumably receive from the pillaging of the Jews. As we observed earlier, an edict given by the king—guaranteed by the imprint of his signet—could not be revoked. And Haman worded that document in such a way that it seemed hopeless for the Hebrews. It was sent... **to every province in its own script and every people in its own language... and sealed with the king’s signet ring (3:12).** And it included an **instruction to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their goods (3:13).**

D. Mordecai Cries Out to God (4:1–5)

When the news of the king’s decree reached the ears of Mordecai, he began to cry out to the Lord.

4:1 ... Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and he cried out with a loud and bitter cry.

The wearing of sackcloth and ashes signify deep inward grief and repentance. Mordecai also begins to lament, and he wasn’t alone in his grief, because...

3 ... in every province, wherever the king’s command and his decree reached, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and many of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

When Esther learned of Mordecai's grief, she ***“was deeply distressed”***—or as the LSB translates it ***“the queen writhed in deep anguish”*** (4:4). So, she sent the eunuch Hathach to find out why.

E. Mordecai Reminds Esther of God's Providence (4:6–16)

Mordecai provided a copy of the decree to Hathach so that he could explain the situation to her, and more than that, to call her to plead with the king for the lives of her people.

This was a dangerous request, because anyone who appeared uninvited before the king was sentenced to death—unless the king held out his scepter granting permission to approach. And Esther had not been invited to appear before the king during the last 30 days. But Mordecai understood that God's providence was at work. So, he sent this message back to Esther:

4:13 ... “Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. 14 For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

Notice that Mordecai is confident that God will bring deliverance no matter what. He understands that divine providence is still at work for God's people. But his message to Esther forces her to consider that she may be the very one through whom God will work to bring that deliverance for her people.

Application: *God's providence is still at work on behalf of his people today. Do you and I see ourselves as instruments to be used by the Lord to bring about his provision, protection, and deliverance for others?*

Esther responds wisely calling others to fast in intercession before God on her behalf, so that God might preserve her life when she approaches the king.

4:16 “Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.”

During those three days, God granted Esther wisdom in how to approach the king on behalf of her people—and she puts her plan into action.

F. Esther Hosts Ahasuerus and Haman (5:1–14) [Third Feast]

5:1 On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, in front of the king's quarters, while the king was sitting on his royal throne inside the throne room opposite the entrance to the palace. 2 And when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, she won favor in his sight,

and he held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter. 3 And the king said to her, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to the half of my kingdom."

God answered the requests of His people. Esther was granted such extraordinary favor that the king responds with an oath that promises to give her whatever she asks. So, she asks that both he and Haman attend a feast in their honor.

5:5... So the king and Haman came to the feast that Esther had prepared. 6 And as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king said to Esther, "What is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled."

The king enjoyed the feast and makes the same promise again—Esther may have whatever she wishes from his hand. So, she requests that both the king and Haman attend yet another feast the next day. Haman responds with great joy, and, on the way out, God providentially arranges for him to see Mordecai which inflames his hatred for the Jews.

Haman returns home, and gloats to his wife and friends that he alone was invited to feast with the king and queen. He also recounts ***the splendor of his riches, the number of his sons, all the promotions with which the king had honored him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and the servants of the king (5:11)***. They all interpret these blessings as divine favor towards Haman, and they suggest that he move quickly to rid himself of Mordecai:

14 Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, "Let a gallows fifty cubits high be made, and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it. Then go joyfully with the king to the feast." This idea pleased Haman, and he had the gallows made.

Unbeknownst to Haman, he was constructing the instrument of his own demise. God would soon go to battle for His people in fulfillment of **Exodus 17:16**—and fight against this descendant of Amalek.

God Saves His People (6:1–10:3)

A. Mordecai Rewarded (6:1–11)

Once more divine providence works in ordinary ways. Insomnia strikes Ahasuerus, and, perhaps in an effort to fall back asleep, he orders an attendant to read to him from the recorded history books kept in the official archives. Not surprisingly, what is read is helpful to the cause of God's people.

6:2 And it was found written how Mordecai had told about Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, and who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. 3 And the king said, "What honor or distinction has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" The king's young men who attended him said, "Nothing has been done for him."

This record comes as a complete surprise to Ahasuerus. He recognizes that Mordecai deserves a reward for saving his life—so he calls for the nearest of those to whom he can seek wise counsel about how to reward this good deed.

4 And the king said, “Who is in the court?” Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king’s palace to speak to the king about having Mordecai hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for him. 5 And the king’s young men told him, “Haman is there, standing in the court.” And the king said, “Let him come in.”

Divine providence intercedes, and Haman “just happens” to appear in the court when no one else is around. He intends evil towards Mordecai, but God intends the opposite. Haman’s own evil will reverse and fall upon his own head.

Once Haman is called in, the king asks him **“What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?” (5:6)** And Haman, assuming the king is referring to him, answers with an honor so great as to be fit for a conquering king:

And Haman said to the king, “For the man whom the king delights to honor, 8 let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown is set. 9 And let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king’s most noble officials. Let them dress the man whom the king delights to honor, and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him: ‘Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.’”

Haman is sure he is the one to be honored. But God providentially reverses the situation to bless Mordecai.

10 Then the king said to Haman, “Hurry; take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king’s gate. Leave out nothing that you have mentioned.” 11 So Haman took the robes and the horse, and he dressed Mordecai and led him through the square of the city, proclaiming before him, “Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.”

The very thing Haman intended for his own glory becomes a means to humble him publicly before Mordecai. And, just as Haman’s wife and friends read his former blessing as God’s favor, they now read this humiliation as a portent of doom.

B. The Fall of Haman (6:12–14)

12 ... Haman hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered. 13 And Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and his wife Zeresh said to him, “If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him.”

Notice how even his wife seems to understand that Yahweh will fight against Haman for seeking the demise of the Jewish people. She also rightly concludes that Haman’s fall has already begun and will continue. And Haman doesn’t even have a moment to think about this coming doom before ***the king’s eunuchs arrived and hurried to bring Haman***

to the feast that Esther had prepared (6:14). Haman is a dead man walking—because God is against him.

C. Haman's Last Meal (7:1–10) [Fourth Feast]

Esther wines and dines Haman and the king yet again. And the king responds with the same grand promise to grant whatever she wishes:

7:3 Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request. 4 For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king.”

Esther is saying that she would not have troubled the king if her people had simply been sold into slavery. But since their very existence, and her own, is threatened, she must bring it to his attention. The King responds by asking **“who has dared to do this?”** And Esther finally unmasks the treachery of Haman by calling him out as **“A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!” (7:5–6).**

Haman immediately fears for his life, and the king, full of wrath, heads to the palace garden to wrap his mind around what he just heard. Seeing his last opportunity to save his skin, Haman begins to **beg for his life from Queen Esther (7:7).** And once again divine providence moves against Haman, because the moment the king returns, he finds Haman in the process of accidentally falling down or intentionally prostrating himself before her on the couch on which she was reclining to eat the meal. And Ahasuerus interprets this as an assault upon his wife.

7:8 And the king said, “Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?” As the word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face. 9 Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, “Moreover, the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing at Haman's house, fifty cubits high.” 10 And the king said, “Hang him on that.” So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the wrath of the king abated.

Haman's plans to kill Mordecai have reversed upon Him. That same night he swung upon the very gallows he built for Mordecai. God providentially protected Mordecai. And the reversal continues:

D. Mordecai Takes Haman's Place (8:1–3)

8:1 On that day King Ahasuerus gave to Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told what he was to her. 2 And the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.

The reversal is nearly complete. Mordecai has supplanted Haman as second in command over all of the Persian Empire, and now possesses everything that formerly belonged to his enemy. Only one more reversal is needed—the edict of doom still hangs over the heads of God’s chosen people throughout the empire. And a Persian edict cannot be rescinded. How will God’s people survive? God will provide...

E. A New Edict (8:4–17) [Fifth Feast]

Esther again risks her life and comes to the king uninvited—and falling down before him she begs him to save her people from Haman’s evil plan. He lowers his scepter to receive her, and she begs him to revoke the dreadful edict. Yet a Persian edict with the seal of his signet may not be revoked. So, he gives her permission to write another irrevocable decree that might counteract the effects of the first:

8:7 Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew... 8 ...you may write as you please with regard to the Jews, in the name of the king, and seal it with the king's ring, for an edict written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's ring cannot be revoked." 9 The king's scribes were summoned at that time... And an edict was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded concerning the Jews

Like the first, this edict was sent out to every corner of the Empire, in every language, and it authorized all the Jews to take protective action:

8:11 [This new edict] allowed the Jews who were in every city to gather and defend their lives, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate any armed force of any people or province that might attack them, children and women included, and to plunder their goods, 12 on one day throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.

John MacArthur points out that two months and 10 days after Haman’s evil decree became the law of the land, this new edict was issued. Both would take affect simultaneously, yet the Hebrew people would have 8 months and 20 days to prepare.⁶

15 Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a great golden crown and a robe of fine linen and purple, and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. 16 The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor. 17 And in every province and in every city, wherever the king's command and his edict reached, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many from the peoples of the country declared themselves Jews, for fear of the Jews had fallen on them.

F. Enemies Defeated (9:1–16) [Sixth Feast]

The fateful day arrives. Both edicts come into force. One allows the enemies of the Jews to attack, another allows the Jews to go to war against their attackers. And God

⁶ Note on Esther 8:8 in *The MacArthur Study Bible: English Standard Version*, by John MacArthur and Crossway Bibles (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 678.

providentially moves on behalf of His people, and their enemies are filled with debilitating dread.

9:2 The Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could stand against them, for the fear of them had fallen on all peoples.

And, because Mordecai had been publicly elevated to Ahasuerus' right hand, God causes the governing authorities to aid His people

9:3 All the officials of the provinces and the satraps and the governors and the royal agents also helped the Jews, for the fear of Mordecai had fallen on them.

4 For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces, for the man Mordecai grew more and more powerful.

And just like the people of Israel saw God's hand give them victory in the days of Moses and Joshua, God gave them success against their enemies throughout the Empire.

5 The Jews struck all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying them, and did as they pleased to those who hated them. 6 In Susa the citadel itself the Jews killed and destroyed 500 men, 7 and also killed Parshandatha and Dalphon and Aspatha 8 and Poratha and Adalia and Aridatha 9 and Parmashta and Arisai and Aridai and Vaizatha, 10 the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews, but they laid no hand on the plunder

The first day of battle was a total success, yet some potentially influential enemies remained in the capitol city, so, God prompted Ahasuerus to offer another boon to Esther:

12 ... Now what is your wish? It shall be granted you. And what further is your request? It shall be fulfilled." 13 And Esther said, "If it please the king, let the Jews who are in Susa be allowed tomorrow also to do according to this day's edict. And let the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows."

God's people were given yet another opportunity to destroy their enemies. And so, they did. And the already dead sons of Haman were publicly strung up—serving as a warning of God's vengeance upon Israel's enemies.

Yet no Hebrew took anything that belonged to their adversaries. This completes the reversal. Mordecai, the son of Benjamin, fulfilled God's decree to wipe out the Amalekites—which Saul failed to do. And unlike Saul, who disobeyed God by taking plunder from the Amalekites he conquered—none in Israel were willing to take the spoils from those who hated them, for ***they laid no hands on the plunder (9:16)***.

God sovereignly intervened on behalf of His covenant people. His providential care had so orchestrated men and women, both good and evil, and events both good and bad, so that certain doom became sure blessing. And His people were grateful.

G. Salvation Celebrated (9:17–32) [Seventh Feast]

17 ... on the fourteenth day they rested and made that a day of feasting and gladness. 18 But the Jews who were in Susa gathered on the thirteenth day and on the fourteenth, and rested on the fifteenth day, making that a day of feasting and gladness. 19 Therefore the Jews of the villages, who live in the rural towns, hold the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a day for gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and as a day on which they send gifts of food to one another. 20 And Mordecai recorded these things and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, 21 obliging them to keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same, year by year, 22 as the days on which the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

Here we have the origin for the Jewish celebration of Purim:

23 So the Jews accepted what they had started to do, and what Mordecai had written to them. 24 For Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur (that is, cast lots), to crush and to destroy them.

Purim is the plural of Pur.

26 Therefore they called these days Purim, after the term Pur ... 27 the Jews firmly obligated themselves and their offspring and all who joined them, that without fail they would keep these two days according to what was written and at the time appointed every year, 28 that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, in every clan, province, and city, and that these days of Purim should never fall into disuse among the Jews, nor should the commemoration of these days cease among their descendants.

H. God's Ongoing Provision Through Mordecai (10:1–3)

10:1 King Ahasuerus imposed tax on the land and on the coastlands of the sea. 2 And all the acts of his power and might, and the full account of the high honor of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? 3 For Mordecai the Jew was second in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was great among the Jews and popular with the multitude of his brothers, for he sought the welfare of his people and spoke peace to all his people.

Conclusion:

Isaiah 46:9–10

***...remember the former things of old;
for I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like me,
declaring the end from the beginning
and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, 'My counsel shall stand,
and I will accomplish all my purpose...***

Had God not intervened in history as recorded in the book of Esther, every promise made to Moses, Abraham, and David would have been annulled, for His people would be no more, the Messiah would never be born to a Jewish virgin in Bethlehem, and the gospel of salvation through Christ would never be proclaimed to a sin-sick world. To say the events recorded in Esther have far-reaching implications is an understatement of astounding proportions.

Thankfully, God did orchestrate the events in Esther. He was and is truly in control of human history, and every moment that makes it up—and He is bringing everything to His intended conclusion for the sake of His glory, and for the good of His covenant people. God actively oversees and guides the course of human history through the good times and bad. Although God is never mentioned directly in Esther, every chapter reveals His work through various means both large and small—in the lives of the great and the obscure—to fulfill His covenant commitment to Israel. The book of Esther demonstrates the effective providential care God pours out on His people even in the face of overwhelming odds

The book of Esther also encourages God's people to cry out to Him in faith during times of trial knowing that God has the power to reverse any situation, no matter how bleak. And to act in accordance with His will in the knowledge that one single person like Mordecai or Esther, providentially guided by God, can make an enormous difference for countless numbers of others. Nothing is beyond His control. He is able and willing to cause everything to ***work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose (Rom 8:28)***.

Finally, the book of Esther also helps the reader to understand the origins of Purim, the reason it should be remembered, and the significance it has to the Hebrew people.