

A National Crisis

Esther 1

A destabilizing event...

How potentially fragile is the stability of our nation? There's no doubt in my mind that God providentially protected us on 9-11-01 and protects us still, because, if God would will it to be so, He obviously could in an instant bring our nation to our knees and eliminate us as a world power.

It's easy to take for granted our utter dependence upon God's sovereign, providential, protective care. Think of the great Babylonian empire in Daniel's day, in 539 B.C., when, through a surprise attack, the Medes and Persians completely conquered the kingdom. Daniel to King Belshazzar in Daniel 5: Unlike his father, Nebuchadnezzar, whom God humbled, "You, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart [before the Lord], but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven. And, you have praised the gods [instead]. **But the God in whose hand is your breath, you have not honored. So, God has numbered the days of your kingdom and [God] has brought it to an end.**"

As we turn to Esther 1, we will discover that God is not interested in bringing down the Persian empire. It will continue for years to come to serve His sovereign purposes in the world. Of course, He could bring it down in a minute, but that's not His sovereign will. What will become obvious to us who fully believe in Him, is that He is providentially superintending the _____ in this scene to give King Ahasuerus and his wise men *the sense* of national destabilization. God sovereignly used his drunkenness, anger, stupidity, and pride to set in motion an event that felt most threatening to the king. The king thought he was controlling the destabilizing event. But, the God of heaven and earth and Israel, even when they have mostly forgotten Him, is in perfect control.

Let's watch together how God uses messed up people and messed up events for Israel's ultimate good and His glory as He intends, for His divine purposes, to displace the Persian queen. He will be successful, of course, but how will He providentially do it?

God is setting the table:

1. The king's _____ (1-9).

Verses 1-4: This is a great king, who was full of himself. Ancient inscriptions have been found in which Ahasuerus referred to himself as “the great King, the King of _____, the King of this great world.” And, having an insatiable hunger for more power and property, he unsuccessfully invaded Greece in the fourth year of his reign (482), the next year after this great banquet (483). So, it may be assumed that the purpose of the banquet was to gather together all his leaders from all his provinces to make plans for a huge and costly military campaign against Greece that was only a year out. It’s, also, speculated that he didn’t bring all the leaders to Susa all at once, but rather rotated them in over this six-month-long banquet.

Centuries earlier, King Solomon wrote, “The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He _____ it wherever He wishes (Proverbs 21:1). Most people don’t know what we, God’s people know, that all authority in heaven and on earth comes from God. He alone is perfectly sovereign and in complete control of His universe. King Ahasuerus is second in command, and, in this case, *second is far below first!*

Verses 5-8: So, the plans are made, and the king is feeling really good about himself, and really generous, so he throws a citywide party, but only for the men. **Verse 9:** Some scholars believe Vashti and a wife of Ahasuerus named Amestris are one and the same. If so, Vashti was pregnant in 483 B.C., with Ahasuerus’ son, Artaxerxes, who later became king after his father’s death. *In all of this*, God is providentially setting the table to remove Vashti as queen for His divine purposes on earth as it relates to His covenant people Israel.

2. The queen's _____ (10-12).

I’m pretty certain that if he was even somewhat sober, even on day five or six of this drunken party, he wouldn’t have shamed his royal wife by making a shameless spectacle out of her. Personally, I think he was totally out of line, and she was noble and right by refusing to come at the king’s command. But, her refusal got her in deep trouble. Persian kings were used to getting what they wanted whenever they wanted it.

So, in refusing to obey the king, she was challenging his authority and defying the king! But, it's all in accordance to God's providential plan. In dealing with a fallen earth, He has to work with good and evil, and easily _____ evil for good. So, all of this is a divine set up.

3. The king's _____ (13-18).

All a sudden, the seven princes of Persia and Media, along with all the other men at this stag party, envision the earth tilting off its axis and their whole world being thrown into chaos, as women everywhere rise up in all-out rebellion! Is that what would've happened? I seriously doubt it! But God filled their masculine, ego-centric minds and hearts with the _____ of a most destabilizing event occurring. And He did so for His awesome purposes, calmly channeling their hearts, turning them exactly where He wishes.

4. The king's _____ (19-22).

Verses 19-22: Status quo saved! No matter how right Vashti was, the fallout from "the great crime" against men everywhere was averted.

Verse 19: "...let the king give [Vashti's] royal position **to another who is better than she.**" Of course, the princes had in mind, one who would be intimidated, fearful, and obedient, one who would know her place in their male-dominate world. But, from God's angle as the Only Sovereign, working effectively behind the scenes, channeling hearts as He will, that line sets up the way this great story will develop. **The table is set** for the entry of two of the other three main players in this drama, Esther, of course, but also Mordecai.

Our God is in _____!

We need to know that according to Daniel, God is the One who gives kings and presidents their place. So, like it or not, President Trump was given the presidency of the United States of America by _____. America voted, but he's God's choice. And, God, *who's first in charge*, channels the hearts of our rulers and uses our nation to accomplish *His purposes*, which are far above our nation's concerns.

From a purely earthly perspective, in 483 B.C., there is no one on the planet who was more important than King Ahasuerus and no kingdom even close to being as expansive and powerful as his Persian empire. And, the nation of Judah was but a little dot on the empire's radar screen—tiny and insignificant!

But, from heaven's perspective, the Only Sovereign will move heaven and earth to faithfully, providentially protect and provide for His "little nation" and that tiny strip of land along the Mediterranean Sea. Israel then and now, and the Church today and in the future, are seen by the world as little players on the world scene. But the God of heaven "works all things according to the counsel of His will, *so that we who hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory*" (Ephesians 1:11-12). The fallen nations of our world may consider God's people as nothing, but God considers us as everything. Therefore, behind the scenes, He is providentially working out all things on our behalf.