

## God's Providential Hand at Work in the Book of Esther

### Part One – The Rise of Haman

- *The word “providence” in English means: “timely preparation for future eventualities; the foreseeing care and guidance of God, especially when conceived as omnisciently directing the universe and the affairs of humankind with wise benevolence; a manifestation of divine care or direction.”*
- *Providence can be seen as God's unseen hand working behind the scenes being manifest in what appears to be coincidence or random chance that brings about God's purposes.*
- *A skeptic will never see the miraculous, only unexplained events. However, a committed follower of Jesus Christ will have confidence that God is weaving the circumstances of his or her life together to bring forth God's glory and purposes.*
- *As followers of Jesus, we cannot successfully maintain a life filled with unshakeable confidence, thanksgiving, and joy unless we are able to look past the circumstances of life that confront us and see with eyes of faith the Holy Spirit at work behind the scenes.*
- *Trusting in God's sovereignty and providence enables us to deal with the uncertainties of life.*

John 10:4 (NKJV)

<sup>4</sup>And when he brings out his own sheep, He goes before them; and the sheep follow Him, for they know his voice.

- *God has promised us that not only will “He never leave us nor forsake us” (Hebrews 13:5), but that He actually goes before us and prepares the way. This describes God's divine providence—“He goes before them; and the sheep follow Him.” Leading us is God's part, following Him is our part.*

Romans 5:8 NKJV

<sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

- *Jesus' death on the cross was an act of God's divine providence.*
- *Before we were even born Jesus died for us so we could be saved and redeemed.*

Deuteronomy 1:29–30 (NKJV)

<sup>29</sup>“Then I said to you, ‘Do not be terrified, or afraid of them.

<sup>30</sup>The LORD your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all

**He did for you in Egypt before your eyes,**

- *God revealed Himself to Israel as the God who went before them to prepare the way. This revelation should produce a deep sense of confidence, security, and peace in our hearts*
- *For the Jews to be gathered back into the land of Israel after being scattered throughout the nations for almost two millennia is an act of God's foreknowledge and providence.*
- *Let's review the historical context of the Book of Esther to better understand the setting in which the story took place.*
- *The events of the Book of Esther took place between 478 BC and 473 BC, a five year period.*
- *The Jews, because of their many years of rebellion against God, were conquered by King Nebuchadnezzar and carried into captivity by the Babylonians some 140 years prior to the events described in the Book of Esther.*
- *The captivity of the Jews in Babylon ended 60 years prior to the events in the Book of Esther. All the Jews were free to leave Babylon and return back to the land of Israel.*
- *The reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem took place 40 years prior to the events in the Book of Esther.*
- *Ezra, the priest, left Babylon and returned to Jerusalem about 20 years after the Book of Esther to teach the people God's Laws, commandments, and statutes, as recorded in the Book of Ezra.*
- *Nehemiah left Babylon and returned to Israel and became governor about 30 years after the Book of Esther. He rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and strengthened the people in their commitment to God, as recorded in the Book of Nehemiah.*
- *Esther was probably younger than twenty years of age at the beginning of the story. (She might have been as young as 16).*
- *Mordecai, Esther's uncle, might have been in his mid-forties.*
- *Mordecai's great-grandfather, Kish, had been carried away as a captive into Babylon. (Esther 2:5-6). Mordecai himself was born in Babylon. Mordecai was a child of the captivity.*
- *Mordecai had heard about the land of Israel, but he had lived his entire life in*

***Babylon.***

- ***The question that arises is this: “If the Jews were allowed to return to the Land of Israel some 60 years prior to the events that took place in the Book of Esther, why did Mordecai, Esther, and the rest of the Jews continue to live in Babylon?”***
- ***Mordecai represented the majority of the Jews who chose to continue to live in Babylon even after they were given the opportunity to leave when the Babylonian captivity ended. They could have returned to Israel and served God in their own land.***
- ***The Jews had been secularized and had lost their vision of God’s plan for their lives and for their nation and were trying to blend in as best they could.***
- ***This gives us the context of the spiritual condition of Mordecai and those Jews who chose to continue to live in Babylon at the beginning of the Book of Esther.***
- ***The Jews had a defeated mentality and struggled to survive the hardships of life without any real hope of living fruitful, faith-filled, overcoming lives.***
- ***There are four books that almost didn’t make it into the Old Testament Canon of Scripture:***
  - ***Ecclesiastes, because it was too dark.***
  - ***Song of Solomon, because it was too explicit.***
  - ***Ezekiel, because it was too weird.***
  - ***Esther, because God’s name is not mentioned once.***

***There are at least four things that are unique about the Book of Esther:***

1. ***Prayer is not mentioned once.***
2. ***The name of God is not mentioned once.***
3. ***Although God is not mentioned in the Book of Esther, one cannot help but come away with the distinct impression that God is involved in every detail of the story.***
4. ***There are five unique acrostics found in the Book of Esther that reveal God’s divine hand of providence. These five acrostics act almost like God’s fingerprints.***

- *What is an acrostic?*
- *An acrostic is a series of words in which certain letters such as the first letter in each word form a word or message.*

- *An example of an acrostic:*

**FEAR** = **F**alse **E**vidence **A**ppearing **R**eal

- *The Rabbis have identified eight acrostics of God's divine name "Yahweh" found in the Old Testament.*
- *Four of those eight occurrences are found in the Book of Esther!*
- *The other four occurrences are 1 Chronicles 16:31; Psalm 96:11; Isaiah 45:18 and 1 Kings 8:42.*
- *The fifth acrostic found in Esther reveals the remarkable name "EHYH" meaning in Hebrew, "I Am."*
- *The first two acrostics are formed by the first letters of the words.*
- *The last three acrostics are formed by the last letters of the words.*
- *The reason for this grouping is that the third acrostic marks a turning point in the events in the story.*
- *The third, fourth, and fifth acrostics show that the plans of the enemy are unraveling as God reveals and carries out His plan of deliverance.*
- *Every acrostic with the name "Yahweh" spoken by a Gentile is spelled backwards.*
- *Every acrostic with the name "Yahweh" spoken by a Jew is spelled forwards.*
- *The unbelieving Gentiles were unaware of the divine hand of God working behind the scenes directing the outcome.*
- *The believing Jews were looking with eyes of faith for God to deliver them from their enemies and restore His purposes for their lives and their nation.*
- *In each acrostic the four words that form the acrostic are in consecutive order.*
- *In each acrostic except the first one, they form a thought complete in itself.*

- *The Four acrostics of the Name “Yahweh” found in the Book of Esther:*
- *The first acrostic is spelled backwards.*
- *The second acrostic is spelled forwards*
- *The third acrostic is spelled backwards.*
- *The fourth acrostic is spelled forwards.*
- *The first acrostic contains words spoken about a Gentile queen—Queen Vashti.*
- *The second acrostic contains words spoken by a Jewish queen—Queen Esther.*
- *The third acrostic contains words spoken by Haman.*
- *The fourth acrostic contains words spoken about Haman.*
- *We can see that the acrostics are not randomly scattered throughout the Book of Esther. Instead, they are strategically and purposefully placed by God in specific places in the text to produce distinct patterns revealing God’s providential hand at work.*

#### **Esther 1:1–2 (NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup>Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus (this was the Ahasuerus who reigned over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, from India to Ethiopia),  
<sup>2</sup>in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the citadel,

- *The story begins with a Gentile king reigning over a great kingdom, which would have included the land of Israel.*
- *The Jews were seen as just one of a number of insignificant people groups under the subjection of the Persian Empire. Their lack of importance is seen in that they were not even mentioned by name at the beginning of the story.*

#### **Esther 10:3 (NKJV)**

<sup>3</sup>For Mordecai the Jew was second to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his countrymen.

- *At the end of the story, God had elevated His people into a position of great importance, prominence, and power.*

#### **Esther 1:3–4 (NKJV)**

<sup>3</sup>that in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants—the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces being before him—

<sup>4</sup>when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days in all.

- *The story begins with a feast given by a pagan king to the glory of a pagan*

*kingdom.*

**Esther 9:22 (NKJV)**

<sup>22</sup>as the days on which the Jews had rest from their enemies, as the month which was turned from sorrow to joy for them, and from mourning to a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and joy, of sending presents to one another and gifts to the poor.

- *The story ends with a feast celebrated by the Jews to the glory of their God and His wonderful deliverance and victory.*
- *The Jews were now rejoicing that God had taken them from being an oppressed and powerless people to a people who had overcome their adversaries and were now ruling over those who once had oppressed them.*
- *As we study the Book of Esther, we will see how God through His providential hand, took the Jews from being oppressed and downtrodden to a people filled with faith who stood boldly and confidently against their enemies.*
- *Chapter one begins with King Ahasuerus putting on a great feast lasting 180 days to display the glory of his kingdom.*

“in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom ... he made a feast ... he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days in all.” (*Esther 1:2a, 3b, 4*).

“On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded...to bring Queen Vashti before the king, wearing her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials, for she was beautiful to behold. But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command brought by his eunuchs; therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him.” (*Esther 1:10a, 11-12*)

- *On the last day of the last week of the king's 180 day feast, the king commanded his queen to come dressed in her royal apparel to parade herself before his half intoxicated guests.*
- *Queen Vashti, feeling belittled, refused to do so and the king feeling humiliated reacted with an outburst of anger.*

**Esther 1:13,15 NKJV**

<sup>13</sup> Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times (for this was the king's manner toward all who knew law and justice,

<sup>15</sup> “What shall we do to Queen Vashti, according to law, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus brought to her by the eunuchs?”

- *The king called his royal advisors and sought counsel as to what to do about Queen Vashti.*

**Esther 1:19–20 (NKJV)**

<sup>19</sup>If it pleases the king, let a royal decree go out from him, and let it be recorded in the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it will not be altered, that Vashti shall come no more before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she.

<sup>20</sup>When the king’s decree which he will make is proclaimed throughout all his empire (for it is great), all wives will honor their husbands, both great and small.”

- *His advisors told the king that if he failed to deal with the queen severely it would incite all the wives in his kingdom to disrespect their husbands.*
- *They advised him to pass a royal edict which could not be altered saying Vashti would no longer be queen and that she would never again be allowed in the king’s presence.*
- *Verse 20 contains the first acrostic.*
- *It is spoken by one of the king’s advisors and contains the divine name of Yahweh spelled backwards using the first letters of each of the four words.*

**Esther 1:20 (NASB95)**

<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.”

- *it      and-all      the wives      shall-give*
- (1)      (2)      (3)      (4)
- H      V      H      Y – English equivalents to the Hebrew letters.
- *This is the only acrostic that does not form a complete thought.*
- *Many have argued that it was inappropriate for the king to make such an immodest request of his wife.*
- *Others have argued that the queen should have been more tactful and respectful in her refusal.*
- *This first acrostic does not form a complete thought on its own because the quality of the advice by the king’s advisors is not what is being addressed. Its point was that Vashti was deposed to make room for Esther.*

- *This Scripture is not making a statement about husband and wife relationships, but about God's sovereignty to place people in positions of authority and to remove them.*
- *This is not about whether the king should have been more reasonable or whether Vashti should have been more respectful. It demonstrates God's foreknowledge and sovereignty in preparing the way for Him to meet a pending future need that had not yet become apparent.*
- *God foresees the needs before they arise and provides for them—Jehovah-Jireh—God Sees—God Provides—God's Providence.*

#### **Esther 2:1-2,4**

<sup>1</sup> After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus subsided, he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what had been decreed against her.

<sup>2</sup> Then the king's servants who attended him said: "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king;"

<sup>4</sup> "Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This thing pleased the king, and he did so.

- *When the king cooled down he felt lonely and missed his beautiful queen.*
- *However, the king's trusted advisors had the perfect solution—gather the most beautiful virgins in his kingdom to his palace. Then let the king have a one night fling with each of them and the one who ravished his heart would replace Vashti as queen.*
- *In Chapter two of Esther, we see God's providential hand putting into place the next piece of the puzzle required for His plan of deliverance and redemption.*
- *Esther was chosen as one of the virgins to be taken into the king's palace. (Esther 2:7-8).*
- *Esther obtained favour in the sight of Hegai, the keeper of the women. (Esther 2:8-9).*
- *Esther's submission and humility enabled her to find favour with both Hegai and the king himself.*
- *The king loved Esther above all the other women. She obtained grace and favour in his sight and he chose her to be queen. (Esther 2:17).*

#### **Esther 2:10 (NKJV)**

<sup>10</sup>Esther had not revealed her people or family, for Mordecai had charged her not to reveal it.



- *When Esther was chosen queen, her identity as a Jewess was hidden.*
- *Why did Mordecai command Esther not to reveal that she was from the lineage of the Jews?*
- *Some may argue that Mordecai had received divine revelation that Esther needed to hide her lineage until it was time to deal with the future crisis.*
- *However, I think the answer lies simply in the spiritual condition of Mordecai and the Jews who continued to live in Babylon. Mordecai was fearful and possibly ashamed of his Jewish heritage.*
- *Mordecai had lost sight of God’s purpose for his life and for his people and this was reflected in a heart filled with fear and uncertainty. He was not confident that God would lead or protect him.*
- *Christians who are not confident in God’s leading and protection are afraid or at least ashamed to openly share their faith in Christ.*
- *Just because God used the fact that Esther concealed her heritage does not mean that Mordecai’s advice was motivated by a heart of faith.*

**Esther 2:21–23 (NKJV)**

<sup>21</sup>In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king’s gate, two of the king’s eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, doorkeepers, became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.

<sup>22</sup>So the matter became known to Mordecai, who told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai’s name.

<sup>23</sup>And when an inquiry was made into the matter, it was confirmed, and both were hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.

- *The third piece of the puzzle was added to God’s providential plan. Mordecai, Esther’s uncle, “happened” to overhear two of the king’s doorkeepers plotting to assassinate the king. Mordecai reported it to Esther, who in the name of Mordecai reported it to the king and the king in turn gave his two guards a severance package. 😊*
- *God’s divine hand is seen when Mordecai “happened” to be in the very place to overhear the plan to assassinate the king.*
- *God’s divine hand is seen in the fact that Mordecai was not rewarded for his faithfulness and loyalty to the king—at that time.*
- *What would appear on the surface as Mordecai being treated unfairly was*

*actually God's plan to pave the way for His divine deliverance.*

**Esther 3:1 (NKJV)**

<sup>1</sup>After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above all the princes who were with him.

- *Between Chapters two and three, five years have passed. During that time, Haman, the enemy of the Jews, had risen to power and prominence with the king.*
- *We see a biblical pattern—before God's deliverance and victory came to fruition, circumstances often appear to be darker, more dire, even hopeless.*
- *As Jesus Christ hung dying on the cross, it appeared that Satan's plans had prevailed, but in just a few short days the greatest victory of all eternity took place—the resurrection of Jesus Christ!*
- *As followers of Jesus Christ, do not let the apparent bleakness of personal circumstances or the deteriorating global condition of mankind cause you to falter in your confidence in God's faithfulness and victory—keep your eyes on Jesus and His promises!*
- *Jesus said that as the time for His return draws near, there will be an increase in wars and political instability along with an increase in plagues and natural disasters. But He encourages His followers not to become fearful or disheartened because soon He will return and bring an end to all evil and unrighteousness. (Matthew 24; Luke 21).*
- *In the story, the situation seemed to grow worse as Haman, a picture of the Antichrist, became the second most powerful person in the kingdom next to the king himself, as the king exalted Haman above all the other princes.*

**Esther 7:6 (NKJV)**

<sup>6</sup>And Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!" So Haman was terrified before the king and queen.

- *"Haman the wicked" This title has the Hebrew numerical value of 666—the number of the Antichrist.*

**Esther 3:2–4 (NKJV)**

<sup>2</sup>And all the king's servants who were within the king's gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage.

<sup>3</sup>Then the king's servants who were within the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?"

<sup>4</sup>Now it happened, when they spoke to him daily and he would not listen to them,

that they told it to Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand; for Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew.

- *We can see that some remarkable changes had occurred in Mordecai's heart during the five years since Esther became queen.*
- *“But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage” A new level of faith and boldness had sprung up in Mordecai's heart.*
- *He was no longer a coward, fearing to disclose his faith. Before he would gladly have compromised to avoid hardship or persecution but now he stood against the spirit of the world and the spirit of antichrist.*
- *“for Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew” — Previously, Mordecai hid his true identity as a Jew and instructed Esther to do the same. Now he boldly declared that he was a Jew although it might have caused him great personal loss.*
- *“they told it to Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand” — This was an open conflict between God's Word and the word of the Antichrist.*

**Esther 3:5-6 NKJV**

<sup>5</sup> When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath.

<sup>6</sup> But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus—the people of Mordecai.

- *Haman's plan, as a reflection of the Antichrist's plan, was much bigger than just killing Mordecai, or even every Jewish person.*
- *Satan was actually working behind the scenes through Haman to annihilate the entire nation of Israel—every single Jew. Satan planned a pre-emptive strike so Jesus the Messiah, could not be born into the world to redeem mankind from the power of death, sin, and the devil.*
- *The Antichrist is seeking to not only imitate Christ but to eliminate Christ.*

**Esther 3:7 (NKJV)**

<sup>7</sup>In the first month, which is the month of Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, the lot), before Haman to determine the day and the month, until it fell on the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar.

- *Haman cast lots to choose the month when the Jews would be destroyed.*

- *To Haman, it was simply a “role of the dice” to randomly choose a date to destroy God’s people. But the “role of the dice” was actually God’s providential hand choosing the date when God would deliver Israel from Haman’s wicked plans and destroy Israel’s enemies.*
- *The month of Adar was chosen. Adar in Hebrew means “glorious.”*
- *What seemed like a random date was one that God handpicked to become a day of celebration when God would give Israel victory over her enemies and those who sought to destroy her.*
- *What the enemy meant for evil God used for good. The very date that Haman had chosen to destroy Israel, God chose to defeat Haman and all the enemies of the Jews and bring about a great victory—this is the power of redemption.*

**Esther 3:8, 10-11 NKJV**

<sup>8</sup> Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, “There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people's, and they do not keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain.”

<sup>10</sup> So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.

<sup>11</sup> And the king said to Haman, “The money and the people are given to you, to do with them as seems good to you.”

- *The plot thickens and circumstances seem to grow darker, more sinister, and more hopeless as the king gave Haman unrestricted power and authority to carry out all his wishes against the Jews and to utterly destroy them.*
- *Under the instructions of Haman, a royal decree went out “by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions.” (Esther 3:13).*
- *Haman seemed unstoppable! Through the millennia, Hitler and others have plotted genocide against the Jewish people. Every time God intervened in what appeared to be hopeless situations.*
- *The modern state of Israel was birthed out of the ashes of the Holocaust.*
- *Why has the devil tried to destroy the Jewish people over the millennia?*
- *Before Christ’s birth it was to prevent the birth of the Messiah so mankind would have no Saviour.*

- *However, another reason I believe is to prove God a liar. God has many as yet unfulfilled promises for the natural descendants of Abraham. However, God has preserved His people and has even restored them into the land He promised them.*
- *Ultimately, we will see all the promises that God spoke to Abraham concerning his natural descendants fulfilled.*
- *Next week as we further study the Book of Esther it will become apparent how God had been working behind the scenes all along to defeat the plans of the enemy and bring deliverance, freedom, and victory to His people.*
- *Although we don't always see or understand how God is working, believe this—He is always working!*
- *Our part is to be willing to surrender fully to the will of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit so God can do His part and bring forth His purposes for our lives.*
- *No matter what we face, no matter how many times we have failed, God is always working on our behalf to heal our hurts, free us from our past failures, and give us victory over all those things that have defeated and oppressed us so we can live overcoming lives.*