

Slide # 1

Theme: God’s providential Care For His People

Outline:

Chapter 1 – Queen Vashti Deposed

Chapter 2 – Esther Becomes Queen

Chapter 3 – Haman’s Plot Against the Jews

Chapters 4-7 Esther’s Courage – Haman’s Plot Backfires

Chapter 8 The Jews Avenged

Chapter 9 The Feast of Purim Instituted

Chapter 10 Epilogue – Mordecai Exalted

In Esther we have a look behind the curtain to see the providential hand of God at work on behalf of His people. God’s NAME is not mentioned in the book and yet His fingerprints are all over what is happening.

Slide # 2

Proverbs 20:24 (NKJV)

24 A man’s steps are of the LORD; How then can a man understand his own way?

There are a lot of things in life that we have no idea how to make sense of it. The trajectory of life is complex. Often there are things that seem like “bad luck” or “good luck” but in truth there is a BIGGER picture that God is providentially weaving together for His glory and the good of His people. Often it happens in ways we would never choose nor devise.

The main players in the book of Esther had no idea how God was using them or the end in view. They were just living life and yet God had BIGGER plans. The moral of the story is that this really is GOD’S STORY and He is always the KEY character in view – even when He is not named.

It is fitting that God is not named in Esther because the people who remained in the land were really living in disobedience. And yet God proved Himself faithful – not because of them – but really in spite of them.

The story begins after the time of the Babylonian Captivity – after a remnant of the Jews had returned back to the land and after the rebuilding of the 2nd Temple. But many of the Jews (in disobedience) remained in Persia – perhaps comfortable and too settled into the world of the Gentiles.

In that context in about 483 B.C. the king of Persia by the name of Ahasuerus gave a really big 6 month party for all his officials and nobles and topped it off with a one week finale for all the people in the capital city of Shushan (also known as Susa). On the final day of this ultimate party the king was feeling merry because of wine (1:10) and decided to command his beautiful wife (queen Vashti) to show herself off to him and all his imbibed friends.

She refused to come which made the king exceedingly angry. Tonight we pick up the narrative in 1:13.

Esther 1:13–22 (NKJV)

13 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, 14 those closest to him being Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who had access to the king's presence, and who ranked highest in the kingdom):

The king for being such a “brilliant” leader did not know what to do about the defiance of his wife so he called for his highest ranking wise men to give him counsel.

It says they were “wise men who understood the times”. Some have taken this to mean they were astrologers.

However, the answer from these wise men does not mention the stars or the zodiac. More likely the reference to those who “understood the times” is like the usage in 1 Ch 12:32 in which the men of Issachar “understood the times.” - **HCSB**

The sense then is that these were very wise men who knew the intricacies of what was going on. They knew about law and justice as well as culture and politics.

Seven of those in the category of “wise men” are mentioned who were closest to the king (cf. Ezra 7:14). This was his inner cabinet of most trusted advisers.

15 “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?”

Obviously the king did not have a very “personal” relationship with Vashti. Even though Vashti had the title “queen” she was only one of the king’s women in his harem as seen in 2:3. Vashti in effect was the chief (or main) wife but he had lots of other women in his life.

He showed no real concern or respect for Vashti’s personhood as noted in 1:10-12. He was the king who just ordered people around including Vashti.

Also note that when Esther became the queen that in 4:11 she says she has not “been called to go in to the king these thirty days.” In other words it had been a month she had seen the king.

All of this shows that the king did not have a very close relationship with the queen -even if she was his number one wife. She was largely a trophy wife used for his pleasure when he felt like it.

I don’t know about you but I don’t think I want my daughter applying for this job. Remember these Jewish people are out of the will of God whom God works through in spite of themselves.

The question before the king’s counselors was what to do with Vashti since she had dared to disobey his orders.

16 And Memucan answered before the king and the princes: “Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also all the princes, and all the people who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.

Memucan comes off like the ultimate “suck up” guy. He really overstates the case in a politically correct fashion so as to remove any blame from the king. Instead of reasoning with the king that perhaps it was foolish to command his beautiful wife to perform before a bunch of drunken men he proceeds to spell out that the queen had in fact wronged not only the king, but also everybody in the kingdom.

The king in Memucan’s mind clearly did no wrong – this was all on Vashti. Political correctness always protects the king even when it is patently false.

And here is why he said what Vashti did was so terrible...

17 For the queen's behavior will become known to all women, so that they will despise their husbands in their eyes, when they report, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in before him, but she did not come.'

His concern is that when word of Vashti's disobedience gets out the women of the kingdom will then despise their husbands. If the queen can get away with this there is going to be a feminist revolt. This was his thinking. Therefore damage control must be applied.

18 This very day the noble ladies of Persia and Media will say to all the king's officials that they have heard of the behavior of the queen. Thus there will be excessive contempt and wrath.

Memucan comes off like quite a talker. He really embellished this. His concern is that the wives of the nobles this very day will hear of this and the result will be excessive contempt and discord. He says this is going to cause havoc in the homes of all the nobles.

This man, Memucan, is one of the princes, you see. He says, "I will have a fight over this matter when I go home." In fact, I think he came to the conclusion that if something was not done, he would not go home. – ***J. Vernon McGee***

Perhaps McGee is on to something here. Indeed, after all Memucan was one of the princes and his wife was probably one of those he was talking about. Who knows? Certainly he sees trouble for the king's officials if something is not done.

And so he made a suggestion...

19 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.

Memucan calls for a royal decree to be made that cannot be altered which would permanently ban Vashti from access to the king. This in effect would serve as a divorce. She refused the king's command to come and therefore she would be forever banned from coming. She would be forever deposed as queen.

Furthermore the suggestion was that Vashti be replaced with another who is better than her – and in context probably this means better behaved. Even though it is messy – we see the providential hand of God at work here – because we know the end of the story.

Won't heaven be grand when we see the whole story – all the pieces of the puzzle will then fit together perfectly in our understanding.

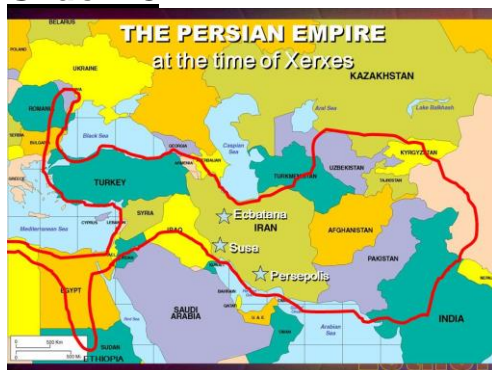
The law of the Persians and the Medes was considered “unalterable” and this becomes an important feature in the development of the story (cf. 4:11; 8:8; Dan. 6:8-9). As the story progresses we see what was binding according to man could be overridden by the providence of God. Again, this is God's story, and He is shown to be absolutely sovereign over all – even using unsavory actors to carry out His plan and purposes in such a way that He is ultimately glorified.

This appeal to the immutability of Persian laws was apparently to protect the princes from Vashti's revenge should she ever return to power. – **John Whitcomb**

20 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.”

Now remember this is a really large empire – consisting of 127 provinces as we saw back in verse 1.

Slide # 3



The reasoning in verse 20 gives evidence of having a little too much to drink. Who in their right mind thinks you can legislate all the wives honoring their husbands throughout this great empire simply on the basis of this decree?

Obviously you cannot legislate women respecting their husbands. This is totally unenforceable. Also, this is what happens when too much power goes to your head. You think you can make things happen that in reality are impossible.

Forced obedience is not the stuff of true love. As the old saying goes, “A person convinced against their will is of the same opinion still.” You simply can’t force or legislate honor in the home.

And there is some major irony here. Here the king is making this universal decree to control all the women of his empire when in fact he couldn’t even control his own wife. Oh the irony!

There are a lot of political leaders who want to run the whole country who in fact are clueless on a personal level. It is amazing the insanity that passes for leadership sometimes. I often think about Dan. 4:17 in this light...

Slide # 4

Daniel 4:17 (NKJV)

17 ‘This decision is by the decree of the watchers, And the sentence by the word of the holy ones, In order that the living may know That the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will, And sets over it the lowest of men.’

God is sovereign and His providential hand guides all.

21 And the reply pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan.

The whole group applauded the counsel of Memucan. And so the king did accordingly.

22 Then he sent letters to all the king’s provinces, to each province in its own script, and to every people in their own language, that each man should be master in his own house, and speak in the language of his own people.

The language here is difficult but the sense seems to be that they wanted every dialect in the entire kingdom to get this message. And the message was clear: “that each man should be master in his own house”.

The last phrase “and speak in the language of his own people” may indicate that the man’s native language be respected in the home. In an empire this large there was lots of ethnically mixed marriages represented and lots of languages and dialects represented. The language that dominated the home was reflective of who was in charge. That seems to be the idea. And this law said the husband is to be the master of his house which was to be reflected in the language spoken in the home (cf. Neh. 13:23-24).

Here is another ironic twist. Yes, the king had an issue with his wife but this decree sent out far and wide insured that now everyone in the entire empire would know about it. If the goal was to “save face” for the king I am not sure this plan accomplished it.

But alas we know the end of the story and it is BIGGER than the king or the queen. It ultimately has God’s people in view and God’s preservation of them.

Application: It is true that Biblically God has ordained the husband to be the head of the home, but he is not to be a dictator. What is missing in this story about legally forcing the women to honor their husbands and the man to be the master of the home – what is missing here is LOVE!

God has ordained the husband to be the head of the home but the command to him is to lead with LOVE! That makes all the difference. Yes, the wife is to submit to the husband as to the Lord, but the husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the Church (cf. Eph. 5:22-33).

Laws can’t make this work right – only the Spirit can. The instructions to the husband and wife in Eph. 5 flow out of the command to be filled with the Spirit. The world can never make this work right – this can only be accomplished by the Spirit.

And the spirit of things makes all the difference.

Slide # 5

1 Peter 3:7 (NKJV)

7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

The king didn't have a clue what God was doing, neither did Vashti, neither did the princes, and yet as we look back and consider the whole story we know where this was going. The providential hand of God was at work to bring deliverance to His people in a very unlikely fashion.

The book of Ecclesiastes is the most philosophical book in the Bible as Solomon in his own wisdom tried to figure out life. What he figured out is that life is inscrutable. God's ways are complex beyond figuring out.

Slide # 6

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NKJV)

11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that **no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.**

Slide # 7

Ecclesiastes 8:17 (NKJV)

17 then I saw all the work of God, that a **man cannot find out** the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover it, yet **he will not find it**; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will **not be able to find it.**

Slide # 8

Ecclesiastes 11:5 (NKJV)

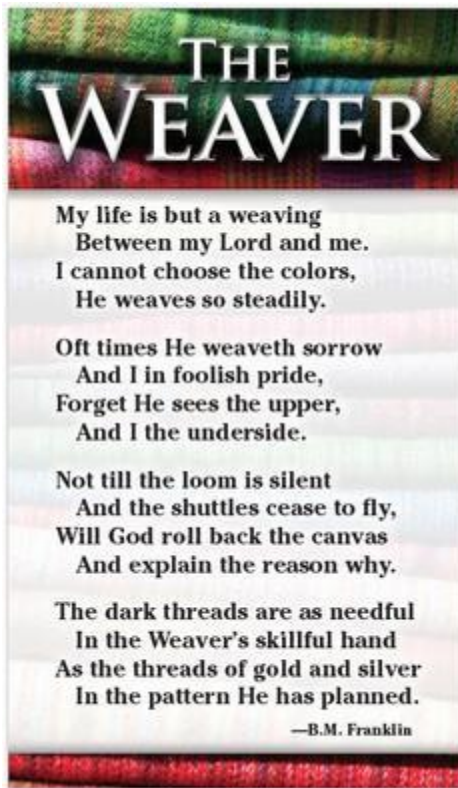
5 As you do not know what is the way of the wind, Or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, So **you do not know the works of God who makes everything.**

What we know is what we have been told. No one ever figures out the ways and plan of God on their own. He providentially leads us along in way that are totally beyond us. And yet God wants us to know that He is in control and has a purpose in all that happens.

Slide # 9

Romans 8:28 (NKJV)

28 And we **know** that **all things work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Slide # 10

The world is clueless to the truth of God's sovereign providential hand...but those who know the truth know better!

Indeed, "Life is but a Weaving" sewn by the providential hand of God.

Rest in that reality and you will rest well indeed.