

Week Thirty-seven: King of the Darkest Night - Esther 2:21-23; 6:1-14



Overview

Dark nights seem to describe much of Israel's history. The LORD warns

Israel that captivity accompanies continued disobedience in Leviticus 26, "I will bring the land to desolation . . . I will scatter you among the nations When they are in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, nor shall I abhor them and break My covenant with them;

for I am the LORD their God" (32a, 33a, 44).

Israel and her kings ignore both Moses' and Jeremiah's warnings and find themselves taken into captivity by the Babylonians and scattered throughout Babylon. But God has not forgotten His people.

Just as God positioned Joseph in the seat of prime minister in Egypt for the welfare of His people, so God stations Esther as queen in Persia during the darkest night of their history. The good deed done by her uncle (some translations use "cousin"), Mordecai, and her appeal to the king change the course of history.

Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of this lesson students will marvel at the ways God protects His disobedient people even while they live in captivity.

Key Truths

God positions certain people in certain places to intervene for the good of others.

Though the name of God isn't mentioned in the book of Esther, the author of Esther discerns the fingerprints of God throughout her story.

God intervenes in the most unusual ways during the most desperate times in the lives of His people to demonstrate His sovereignty and faithfulness.

Lesson Outline

Only a remnant of Jews return to the land of promise; most remain in Babylon. Babylon, however, proves a dangerous place for those Jews when Haman uses his position in King Ahasuerus' government to enact laws to wipe out the Jewish population. The unseen hand of God providentially rules through a sequence of events to protect His people from Haman's evil intent.

1. Mordecai's Unrewarded Good Deed - Esther 2:21-23

It just so happens that Mordecai overhears the plot of Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, to lay hands on King Ahasuerus, and informs his niece, Queen Esther, who informs the king. Both men are hanged on a gallows. Mordecai's act is recorded in the book of chronicles (the daily record of the king's affairs)—and forgotten. Mordecai, however, doesn't seem to fret over his lack of reward. He simply looks out after the king's welfare because it is the right thing to do. He may have remembered Jeremiah's command to seek the welfare of the city where he lives (Jer. 29:7). Mordecai's righteous life brings him into conflict with the king's prime minister, who plots to kill him. This evil man—Haman—not only seeks to kill Mordecai, but even desires to destroy all the Jews of the kingdom. He plans to carry out this execution and prepares the scaffold, waiting until morning to gain the king's permission.

2. The King's Sleepless Night (the darkest night in Israel's history turns into light) - Esther 6:1-14

It just so happens that the king cannot sleep. Practically speaking, the king probably requests his servant to read from the book of chronicles, thinking that this material will certainly lull him to sleep. Not so. Instead, he realizes that the good that Mordecai had done has never been rewarded (1-3).

It just so happens that Haman enters the king's court with his own agenda, "to suggest that the king hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him," as the king determines how Mordecai should be rewarded (4-5). The king even asks Haman for a suggestion as to how to honor someone who has done good for the king.

It just so happens that Haman thinks that the king wants to honor him: "Now Haman thought in his heart, 'Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?'" He quickly thinks of the most honoring way he wants to be treated and tells the king. Imagine his surprise when the king says, "Hurry, take the robe and the horse, as you have suggested, and do so for Mordecai the Jew who sits within the king's gate. Leave nothing undone of all that you have spoken" (10). Mordecai receives the honor Haman prescribed for himself.

It just so happens that while Haman is bemoaning Mordecai's elevation to his wife that the king's eunuch arrives to escort him to the banquet prepared by Esther. Mordecai's wife recognizes the truth of the situation: "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him but will surely fall before him" (13).

Esther 7-10 chronicles Haman's death on the gallows instead of Mordecai and the prevention of the destruction of the Jewish people.

When the night becomes darkest it may appear that God is not involved, but appearance rarely reveals all. Behind the struggle between Haman and the Jewish people stands the LORD. He providentially orchestrates sleeplessness in the king's quarters to achieve his own sovereign purpose. Providence intersects the lives of Haman and Mordecai on numerous occasions to cause Israel's deliverance. If God's hand moves during Israel's darkest night, it is reasonable to expect that His hand moves during the darkest of nights today. What was true in Mordecai's day and in Joseph's day, "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Gen. 50:20), is true as well today.

Application - What does this lesson teach about God? Man? Sin? Redemption?
God often places certain people into positions of influence, not for their personal benefit, but for the assistance of others.

Believers can count on God to bring His good pleasure to pass, regardless of the evil that people intend.

It takes faith in God to see the hand of God behind human events.

When the situation looks hopeless, God waits to act on behalf of those who trust Him; He is the true Sovereign who never sleeps.

Summary

God speaks through providence. Though His voice is silent, His hands are never still.

God acts by placing people in influential positions and by interrupting the sleep of a powerful king to change the course of history

God reveals His covenantal care for His people at the lowest point of their existence.

Discussion Questions

At what other places in Scripture does God intervene when it looks hopeless?

Can God still intervene at hopeless times in our lives today? How can we exercise faith to see God work in our situation? What does faith look like?