

Subject: *God's Unseen Hand*

Scripture: *Esther 1:1-22*

There are many unique things about the book of Esther, but the most surprising is that God is not mentioned by name anywhere in this book, and yet there are 175 references to the king of Persia. Although we don't see God's name anywhere, we see God's hand everywhere. God's hand is unseen, yet God is working in all the details in a very powerful and amazing way. Esther is the book that highlights the providence of God.

The book of Esther is rooted in history. In fact, the whole Bible is rooted in history. Three words describe the contents of the Bible: history, biography, and theology. History reveals the main events. Biography reveals the main characters. Theology is what the Bible reveals about God's character and His works. God reveals Himself through the events of history and through people. It has been said, "History is His story."

God is always at work in this world. We may wonder with so many bad things and evil people, what is God doing? The book of Esther reminds us that when the days are darkest and during the most trying times, God is still on His throne and He is working out His plan on earth. His unseen hand is moving and it is usually behind the scenes. Providence has been described as the hand of God in the glove of history. There are no miracles in this book, but we see God working through normal people and events to accomplish His plan. That is how God's providence works.

1. God's unseen hand is at work in the king's dominion (vs. 1-6)

King Ahasuerus, also known as Xerxes, ruled over a vast kingdom that stretched from India to Ethiopia in Africa. He ruled over 127 provinces or regions. He made a feast or official state dinner that lasted 180 days (6 months). During this feast the king displayed his enormous wealth and majesty. Now we need to stop and realize that God allowed this man to be king and to rule over this impressive kingdom. God allowed king Ahasuerus to rule and He was in control of the time and size of his kingdom.

***Daniel 2:20-21**²⁰ Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his:²¹ And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding.*

Kings came to power by birth right or by force, but ultimately they ruled because God put them in power. How does this apply to us? We can apply it to what is happening in our nation and what is happening in the world. First of all, we are responsible in our nation to pray for and elect good and godly leaders. We need to evaluate them carefully and prayerfully and then exercise our right to vote. But when all is said and done, we need to rest in God's will. The same is true in our world. We see and hear about the danger and expansion of ISIS, the threats of North Korea, China, and Russia, but we can rest in knowing that God's unseen hand is at work. We can rest in God's sovereign will.

2. God's unseen hand is at work in the king's depravity (vs. 7-11)

After the king's first party that lasted 180 days, he made another feast that lasted 7 days and it turned into a drinking party. After 7 days of drinking the king was ready for his queen to make an appearance. He had displayed all his wealth; now he wanted to display his woman. He did this under the influence of alcohol. It was something he would not

have done if he had been sober. **Proverbs 31:4-5**⁴ *It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink:*⁵ *Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.*

God certainly did not cause him to drink, but he allowed it so he would call for the queen. God is up to something here. **Proverbs 21:1** *The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.* God can soften the king's heart or He can harden it. Remember that God hardened Pharaoh's heart to bring judgment on Egypt and set Israel free from slavery. God's unseen hand is at work in the king's depravity. **Proverbs 16:4** *The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.* God even uses wicked people to accomplish His plan and to bring Him glory, and yet every person is responsible for his decisions and actions. When I think of God's unseen hand at work in man's depravity I think of how God used the wicked heart of Judas, Pilate, Herod, the Romans and the Jews in the crucifixion of Christ. **Acts 2:23** *Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:*

3. God's unseen hand is at work in the king's disgrace (vs. 12-15)

The king sent word for Queen Vashti to come and make her appearance, but she refused. We are not told why. She was hosting a party of the women and maybe she wanted to prove a point. It must have been very embarrassing for the king to announce there would be a change in plans for the entertainment that night. The main attraction didn't arrive.

The king was hot. Nobody said no to the king, not even his wife. But there was something much bigger at stake. The queen's defiance was more than a marital problem; it was a kingdom problem. This led to an emergency meeting of the king's advisors. This story reminded me of an old Three Stooges episode called "Malice in the Palace."

Psalms 76:10 *Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.* God's unseen hand is at work in the king's depravity.

4. God's unseen hand is at work in the king's decree (vs. 16-22)

One of the king's advisors, Memucan, suggested that the king make a decree to remove Vashti as queen and find someone to take her place. This was huge. It would set the stage for the rise of Esther as the next queen. The king's decree would serve notice all over the kingdom that wives were to obey their husbands.

Three things are true about the king's decree. It was a pleasing decree to the king. Notice the phrase in verse 19, "if it please the king," and then in verse 21, "the saying pleased the king and the princes." This is found seven times in the book. The only thing that really matters is what pleases the King of kings, and that is what takes place as the story unfolds.

It was a permanent decree. One theme that runs through Esther is the absolute rule of the king. His word was law, and this is another theme in the book. And finally, it was a published decree. The king had a system to communicate information to the far reaches of his kingdom, and this will be another important part of the story.

We see God's unseen hand and His providence at work in all these events and circumstances (the king's dominion, the king's depravity, the king's disgrace, and the king's decree). And this is just the beginning. Do you see God's unseen hand in your life?