

Learning to Trust God's Unseen Hand

A Study of Esther

Lesson #3: God will always provide all that is necessary in order to make wise decisions.

Former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court William Rehnquist once said, “A judge's disposition should be about evenly balanced between sail and anchor. He cannot be anchored to the past mechanically, but he ought not be moved by every puff of novel doctrine.” This is true for judges and anyone else making critical decisions. How we make decisions is very important, especially in those circumstances where a decision may have to be made without having a directive from the Lord.

This next section is the story of a woman who was forced to make important decisions. Esther was called to serve a man who is was defeated and destitute. His desire for a companion is now placed into the hands of others. Sometimes, we are invited (willingly or unwillingly) to participate in the lives of others at critical times. The time of this occurring fits extrabiblical information about Xerxes' reign. Approximately four years passed between the time the king deposed of Vashti and chose Esther as his new queen. During that time (483–479 B.C.), he was engaged in an unsuccessful campaign against Greece. It is now time for a defeated, lonely king to choose a successor to the former Queen Vashti.¹

In those occasions where we are having to participate in the affairs of others, how we proceed can help or hurt the situation. For Esther, her consequences would be more severe. In tonight's text, we will examine not just the choices of Esther, but how she chose her actions, for her decisions were critical to her being chosen as the next queen.

Verses 1-4

- The process of selecting a new queen begins. The king may have regretted his actions, but it was too late; the legislation had made his actions permanent.²
- We have a contrast of decisions being made. The king is quick, too quick, to make decisions that impact entire kingdoms without giving necessary thought.
- The Hebrew grammar of this passage, moreover, does not imply the existence of any hesitation on the part of the king; if anything, the word order suggests that immediately upon hearing the plan, the king is pleased and sets out to take action.³

Verses 5-11

¹ James M. Freeman and Harold J. Chadwick, *Manners & Customs of the Bible* (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1998), 295.

² R. C. Sproul, ed., *The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version* (Orlando, FL; Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2005), 681.

³ Barry C. Davis, “Expositions of the Book of Esther,” in *Ruth & Esther: God behind the Seen*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 147–148.

- Verses 5-7 are extremely curious and do not seem to match the context, yet the author interposes a parenthetical discussion about a man and his adopted daughter. From the beginning of the book all the way through 2:4, the author has focused solely on Gentiles in the Persian empire.
- From 1:9 through 2:4, he has directed his readers' attention to a particular woman or to women (beautiful young virgins) in that empire. The author further arrests our attention by placing these two nouns at the beginning of the verse, before the verb, and thus disrupting the normal word order for a Hebrew sentence.
- One additional surprise exists in this verse: this Jew is living in Susa during the time of Ahasuerus. What makes this fact so startling is that Cyrus the Great, a previous king of the Medo-Persian empire, had declared fifty years earlier that the Jews could return to their homeland. Yet this Jew (whose ancestors came from Jerusalem, 2:6) is living not only in exile but at the very heart of the heathen kingdom, in its capital.⁴
- Mordecai was in the wrong place at the right time. But verse 9 is of utmost importance. This paragraph is our first insight to God providentially moving in this situation.
- Notice also that Mordecai has helped to prepare Esther for this move that was inevitable. Being pressed into service was not a pleasant one, but Mordecai knew the value of information and how to protect it.

Verses 12-14

- Patience is an absolute virtue.
- Verses 12–14 indicate the process used to present the girls to the king. Apparently most of the girls spent only one night with the king. They moved on to the house of Shaashgaz, where they were concubines. There was no guarantee that the king would call them again, so many were confined to virtual widowhood. Again we see how one person, the king, could use so many other human beings just to satisfy his personal desires. Xerxes' abuse of power is evident in the demise of so many innocent women for his physical pleasure. Even today those who have no fear of God sometimes can satisfy their desires without limit.⁵
- The gynæceum comprised at least three distinct houses:—1. A residence for the queen, corresponding to that which Solomon built for the daughter of Pharaoh (1 Kings 7:8); 2. A house for the secondary wives, or concubines; and, 3. A house for the virgins. On returning from her first visit to the king's chamber, a woman ordinarily became an inmate

⁴ Barry C. Davis, "Expositions of the Book of Esther," in *Ruth & Esther: God behind the Seen*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 148–149.

⁵ Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, electronic ed., vol. 10, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 317–318.

of the “second house.” This “second house” was under the care of a eunuch called Sha’ashgaz.⁶

Verses 15-18

- Esther chooses wise counsel that leads to her being chosen as Queen. She listened to the advice given by Hegai.
- 1. Wise decisions can be lost in the details. Be careful how much you really need to “know”. Information can help, but also hinder your ability to make a wise decision.
 - a. It can lead to too many “what-if’s.”
 - b. Precisely the implication behind Jesus’ command in Luke 10:4. The knapsack was full of what a person needed rather than being dependent upon the Lord.
- 2. Trust the Lord with the consequences that are out of your control.
 - a. Esther had one night.
 - b. What if she were not chosen? What if people do not take your advice?
- 3. Always play by the rules.
 - a. Now was not the time to be a rogue virgin. They were prepared, they were instructed. Esther listened.
 - b. Hegai knew the King, Esther did not. The other virgins had a choice, just as we have a choice to do things our own way or the way that is set before us. The text indicates that the other virgins had access to the same information as Esther, but choose poorly.

Esther had many “puffs of doctrine” come at her, but she chose wisely. In times of “silence” from the Lord and we are required to make a choice, we must be cautious. Discipline is at the heart of being a disciple of Jesus. The more we know about Him, the better decision we can make, not matter what else is known. Being in Christ is the most important guard against rash and unbiblical decisions (Colossians 2:6-15, Ephesians 4:11-14). May God increase your desire to know Him and to make Him known in every decision you make.

⁶ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Esther*, The Pulpit Commentary (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 40.