

God's Providence #3 – Esther, Purim

Review: Providence is God's activity as the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent Creator, whereby He

1. Directs, sustains, preserves, and provides for all his creation, from galaxies to electrons
2. Directs all things to the ultimate conclusion of his sovereign will and purpose.

God's providence means that he is in control of all things, bad as well as good, yet is in no way the cause of evil, or the author of sin. Men choose to do what we do, and so are morally responsible, yet unknowingly and unfailingly fulfill his ultimate purpose. Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are both true, and not contradictory.

God's providence is best seen in the rearview mirror. In the present, we do not and cannot see God's ultimate purpose. It is only when we look back, that we can see how God was working, and even then, we may be unable to grasp the long-term significance of events.

We are studying God's providence by stories – some from scripture, and some from history. We are looking mainly at the second part of the definition of Providence, God's directing of all things to accomplish His ultimate purpose, often by what unbelievers call "coincidence", "fortune", or "luck".

Story #1: Joseph in Egypt, Gen. 37-50

Story #2: "A Dollar and Seventy-seven Cents" in 70 Years of Miracles by Richard Harvey, pp. 35-38

Story #3: Preservation of the Baby Moses (Ex. 2)

Story #4: Preservation of Paul (Ac. 23:11-22)

Story #5: War of 1812 – the Burning of Washington DC

Story #6: War of 1812 – Deliverance of Fort Bowyer (Mobile, Alabama)

Story #7: Esther

It is interesting that "God" is not even mentioned in the book, yet his providence is quite obvious throughout.

As background information, king Ahasuerus is also commonly known as Xerxes, who ruled over the Persian empire from 486-465 BC. He came after Cyrus and Darius, and after some of the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity to Jerusalem (see Ezra and Nehemiah).

The basic story is that God used a faithful Jew (Mordecai) and his beautiful orphaned niece (Esther) to foil the plot of a wicked man Haman, whose intent was to destroy all Jews in Persia. The destruction was not only averted, but Haman destroyed, and Mordecai elevated. Instead of Jews, it was their enemies who were destroyed, and the whole affair was memorialized by an annual festival or celebration of "Purim"

"Pur" was the word for the lot. Haman cast the lot to determine the date for the destruction of the Jews. The festival is called Purim as the plural of pur, apparently because it was celebrated on two different days, either 14 Adar or 15 Adar. You can look up the reasons for this on the internet, but it doesn't matter to us in this study.

If God's only purpose was to deliver the Jews from genocide, He could have just prevented Haman's decree to begin with. Yet he didn't, so there is obviously a fuller purpose. In hindsight, we can see that he intended:

1. to show his people that he could and would deliver them from their enemies
2. to show his enemies that he is greater than their most carefully laid plans
3. to show that the Jews were indeed his special people
4. to bring about the Festival of Purim (Lots) as a perpetual remembrance of his faithfulness and power.

Now for the story details. There are multiple parts of the story, that all work together to fulfill God's ultimate purpose.

1. Queen Vashti deposed; Esther becomes queen
2. The plot against Ahasuerus (aka Xerxes) by two underlings; foiled when exposed by Mordecai
3. Conflict between Haman and Mordecai
Haman was an Agagite, apparently a descendant of of king Agag of the Amalekites. Mordecai was from the line of Kish, so apparently a distant relative of king Saul. Saul was supposed to have killed the Amalekites, but didn't. In any case, there seems to be an unresolved grudge between Haman and the Jews based on their national histories (not just a personal quarrel with Mordecai).
4. Haman's conniving decree for the destruction of the Jews throughout Persia
5. Esther's first request, followed by Haman's intent to hang Mordecai
6. The dream of Ahasuerus, and the honoring of Mordecai
7. Esther's second request, pleading for relief from Haman's decree; Haman executed on his own gallows
8. The counter-decree and victory of Jews over their enemies
9. Institution of the annual festival of Purim (poo-RIM) to commemorate their deliverance

This story is amazing in all its interwoven circumstances. It is not merely a chain of events, but multiple chains that are perfectly interwoven so as to bring God's will to pass.

Story #8: Deliverance of Russian Jews from Stalin (see long story at Chabad.org)

Stalin was guilty of the murders of millions, even of loyal Communists, and anyone who could in any way be considered a threat to his maniacal rule. From 1948-1953 it got especially severe for Jews, and they were being arrested and either murdered or sent to Siberia. Finally he had a lying plot against the Jews by accusing Jewish doctors of being terrorists using various kinds of medical malpractice. Six prominent doctors were to be put on trial and when convicted, the plan was to follow the resulting pogroms by rounding up all Jews in the USSR and sending them to an all-Jewish settlement in Siberia ("for their own good"). They had trains ready to move a million people. Expectations were for 1/3 to die in pogroms, 1/3 to die in the trains, and the rest when they got to Siberia, so Stalin's intent was really to continue what Hitler had started.

The plan failed when Stalin got ill (?) and died ... on the day of Purim, the day when Haman had died! God often works, not just marvellously, but with more than a touch of irony.

Story #9: First Gulf War, 1991 (see various sources on internet)

Saddam Hussein of Iraq had for some time been acting like a modern-day Haman, with frequent threats to level Israel with SCUD missiles, armed not just with explosives, but with chemical weapons. Then he invaded Kuwait and triggered the first Gulf War. During the war he fired at least 39 SCUD missiles into Israel with miraculously few casualties. The war turned out to be short and disastrous for Iraq, and it ended ... on the first day of Purim!

Story #10: Second Gulf War, 2003 (see various sources on internet)

The first Gulf War left a lot of things unresolved. Saddam Hussein was still alive, persecuting Kurds and still being a threat to Israel. The second Gulf War, in which he was captured, and then tried and executed by the Iraqis, began on the second day of Purim!