

# The God Who Works Behind the Scenes

THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD #1 - Pastor Gary Combs - April 26, 2026 – Esther 1-2

**INTRO:** Good morning church! We're beginning a new 6-week sermon series today entitled: THE HIDDEN HAND OF GOD: A Study of Esther.

I had no idea when I outlined this book during my end of the year study break and put it on the Spring calendar that it would take place during "such a time as this." For the setting of Esther is Persia, which is modern day Iran. As we watch events unfold in that part of the world today, it can feel uncertain, even unsettling. And while the book of Esther isn't a prediction of modern conflicts, it does give us something we desperately need: A reminder that even when nations rage and God seems silent, He is still at work behind the scenes.

Have you ever studied the book of Esther? Although its author is unknown, it bears the marks of an author very close to the events recorded. In Jewish tradition, it is often attributed to Esther's cousin, Mordecai, but it contains no autograph. The events described in the book occurred in 483–473 BC and the book was written soon after.

It's a very unique book. Why's it unique? First, it's one of only two books in the Bible named after women: Ruth and Esther. Second, it's the only book in the Bible that doesn't mention God a single time!

So, why's it in the Bible? Because even though God's name is absent, His hand isn't! You can see **God working behind the scenes** throughout the story. The book of Esther is in the Bible to show us that even when God seems silent, He is still sovereign, working behind the scenes to preserve His people and accomplish His saving purposes.

**Need:** The truth is, many of us struggle right here. We believe God is real—but when life feels chaotic, when circumstances don't make sense, and when God seems silent, we start to wonder: *Is He really at work in my life?* If you've ever felt like God is distant, inactive, or hard to see, then this book is for you.

**Trans:** And that's exactly what the book of Esther helps us see, that even when God seems hidden, He is not absent. He is working behind the scenes.

**BODY:** In the book of Esther, the author showed God's people living in exile under the Persian King Ahasuerus that the Lord was providentially working behind the scenes to accomplish His purposes for His people. We can know that God is working behind the scenes in our lives. How can we know that God is working behind the scenes in our lives? The text shows **three ways** we can know that God is working behind the scenes in our lives.

**Text:** Esther 1 (ESV) <sup>1</sup> Now in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, <sup>2</sup> in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne in Susa, the citadel, <sup>3</sup> in the third year of his reign he gave a feast for all his officials and servants. The army of Persia and Media and the nobles and governors of the provinces were before him, <sup>4</sup> while he showed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor and pomp of his greatness for many days, 180 days. <sup>5</sup> And when these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in Susa the citadel, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace... <sup>10</sup> On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded... <sup>11</sup> to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown, in order to show the peoples and the princes her beauty, for she was lovely to look at. <sup>12</sup> But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command delivered by the eunuchs. At this the king became enraged, and his anger burned within him... <sup>19</sup> If it please the king, let a royal order go out from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be repealed, that Vashti is never again to come before King Ahasuerus. And let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. <sup>20</sup> So when the decree made by the king is proclaimed throughout all his kingdom, for it is vast, all women will give honor to their husbands, high and low alike." <sup>21</sup> This advice pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed.

## WE CAN KNOW THAT GOD IS WORKING IN OUR LIVES...

### 1. By recognizing His power over worldly kingdoms.

**EXP:** (1:1-22) This is a humorous opening, the king of the largest empire in the world just got refused by his queen (12). The king is publicly humiliated. But this creates an opening for a new queen (19).

**"Ahasuerus" (1:1)** - his name in Hebrew. In Greek, he was known as Xerxes I, the very Persian ruler who led the campaign against the Greek city-states in the early 5th century BC.

**"India to Ethiopia" (1)** - At its height, the Persian Empire covered around 2.5 million square miles, making it the largest empire the world had seen up to that point.



**"Third year of his reign" (3)** - The events in Esther occur during the third, seventh (2:16), and twelfth (3:7) years of Ahasuerus's reign (486–465 BC). The lavish feast was around the time Xerxes was gathering support and displaying his power before launching that Greek campaign.

**"Queen Vashti" (11)** (וַשְׁתִּי, *vaštī*) - name means "beautiful."

**"Queen Vashti refused" (12)** (וַאֲשֶׁר־בָּרְאָה, *mā'ēn*) - to utterly refuse. Her refusal becomes the first domino to fall.

**"Give her royal position to another" (19)** - Vashti is dethroned. Opening up the job to Esther.

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**ARG:** What looks like the unchecked power of the king is actually under the sovereign hand of God.

Psalm 103:19 (ESV) The Lord has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.

Proverbs 21:1 (ESV) The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.

**ILL:** This week, the conflict in Iran even affected our Uganda mission team's travel: flights cancelled, plans disrupted because of something happening halfway around the world. Apparently, there's a jet fuel shortage. It reminds us how much of life feels out of our control.

**APP:** So when your life feels out of control, when circumstances shift, when decisions are made that affect you, when things don't go your way, you can rest in this: God is not reacting. He is ruling. Nothing in your life is outside His sovereign control. **EVEN WHEN YOU CAN'T SEE IT, GOD IS WORKING!**

**Text:** Esther 2:1-18 (ESV) 1 After these things, when the anger of King Ahasuerus had abated, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her. 2 Then the king's young men who attended him said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought out for the king. 3 And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom to gather all the beautiful young virgins to the harem in Susa the citadel, under custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women. Let their cosmetics be given them. 4 And let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This pleased the king, and he did so. 5 Now there was a Jew in Susa the citadel whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjamite, 6 who had been carried away from Jerusalem among the captives carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away. 7 He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, the daughter of his uncle, for she had neither father nor mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter. 8 So when the king's order and his edict were proclaimed, and when many young women were gathered in Susa the citadel in custody of Hegai, Esther also was taken into the king's palace and put in custody of Hegai, who had charge of the women. 9 And the young woman pleased him and won his favor. And he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and her portion of food, and with seven chosen young women from the king's palace, and advanced her and her young women to the best place in the harem... 15 When the turn came for Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her as his own daughter, to go in to the king, she asked for nothing except what Hegai the king's eunuch, who had charge of the women, advised. Now Esther was winning favor in the eyes of all who saw her. 16 And when Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign, 17 the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. 18 Then the king gave a great feast for all his officials and servants; it was Esther's feast.

## 2. By acknowledging His placement in strategic positions.

**EXP:** (2:1-18) The king searches for a new queen. This wasn't a romantic fairy tale. It was a "taking" (8) of young women into the king's harem. And into this situation comes young Esther, raised by her cousin Mordecai. She's an orphan. She's living in exile. She has no political power. And yet, she is moved into the very palace itself. She won "favor" (9,15,17 - 3x) with all who saw her and was made queen. That's not luck. That's placement. God is positioning her before the crisis ever comes.

"Mordecai" (5) - a Benjamite who adopts Esther as his daughter. Though the Hebrew is a little difficult here, Mordecai is Esther's 1st cousin relationally, but has adopted her as his daughter.

"Hadassah ... Esther" (7) (הַדַּסָּה, *hăḏasâ*) - myrtle tree (symbolizing life and endurance; known for its fragrance, often associated with beauty and blessing). (אֶסְתֵּר, *'estēr*) - Persian for "star."

"She had neither father nor mother" (7) - Esther is an orphan.

"Esther also was taken" (8) (לָקַח, *lāqah*) - to take, get, fetch, lay hold of, seize

"Seven chosen young women" (9) - Esther made it to the final 7 selected.

"Favor" (9,15,17 - 3x) (חֵן, *hēn*) - favor, grace. God gave Esther favor "with all who saw her."

"Seventh year of his reign" (16) - 4 years have passed since the feast and Vashti's removal.

"The king loved Esther" (17) (אָהַב, *'āhab*) - to love. She found favor with the king too.

**ARG:** Esther didn't just end up in the palace. Look what is said of David's placement:

Acts 13:36 (NIV) Now when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors...

**ILL:** Think about Joseph. He didn't choose the pit. He didn't choose slavery. He didn't choose prison. But later he could say in Gen. 50:20, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good." God placed him in Egypt long before the famine ever came.

**APP:** Have you ever looked at your life and thought, "How did I end up here?" The job you have, the family you're in, the city you live in... It may feel random. But what if it's not random at all? What if God has placed you there? You may not feel important. You may not feel ready. You may not even like where you are. But God has you where you are for a reason. **EVEN WHEN YOU CAN'T SEE IT, GOD IS WORKING!**

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**Text:** Esther 2:19-23 (ESV) <sup>19</sup> Now when the virgins were gathered together the second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate. <sup>20</sup> Esther had not made known her kindred or her people, as Mordecai had commanded her, for Esther obeyed Mordecai just as when she was brought up by him. <sup>21</sup> In those days, as Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. <sup>22</sup> And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai. <sup>23</sup> When the affair was investigated and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows. And it was recorded in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.

## 3. By trusting His providence in the smallest details.

**EXP:** (2:19-23) At the end of ch. 2, we get what feels like a small, random detail. Mordecai overhears a plot to assassinate the king. He reports it through Esther. The plot is stopped. And then nothing. No reward. No recognition. Just a note written in the royal records. It seems insignificant. Forgotten. Later in the story, this “small detail” becomes the turning point, but at this moment in the story, no one knows that yet.

“Esther had not made known her people” (10; 20) (נִגַּד, *nāḡaḡ*) - to be conspicuous, tell, make known

“Sought to lay hands on King” (21) - Mordecai overheard a conspiracy against the king.

“The affair was investigated” (23) - the word of Mordecai was validated

“Recorded in the book of the chronicles” (23) (כְּתִיב, *kāṭab*) - to write, record. This refers to an official Persian royal record. This becomes a key part in the story, showing how something seemingly mundane (record-keeping) becomes the means of deliverance at just the right moment.

**ARG:** God cares about the details. He works in the details to bring about His purpose.

Matthew 10:29-30 (ESV) Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.

Romans 8:28 (ESV) And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

**ILL:** It's like a seed planted underground. For a long time, nothing seems to happen. No growth. No visible change. But beneath the surface, something is happening that will eventually break through.

**APP:** Some of you are in that place right now. You've done the right thing, but nothing has come of it. You've been faithful, but it feels unnoticed. But nothing is wasted with God. The small things, the hidden things, the forgotten things... God is using all of them. **EVEN WHEN YOU CAN'T SEE IT, GOD IS WORKING!**

**CONCLUSION:** Today, as we begin our study of Esther, we see a God who is working behind the scenes:

- 1) Ruling over worldly kingdoms,
- 2) Placing His people in favored places, and
- 3) Providentially working in the smallest details.

God was working behind the scenes in this book, but the greatest example of that is not in Esther.

In Esther, God was working behind the scenes to place a queen where she could rescue His people.

But at the cross, God was working behind the scenes to send a Savior who would rescue the world.

When Jesus Christ was crucified, it looked like chaos. It looked like defeat. It looked like God was absent.

But behind the scenes, God was accomplishing the greatest act of salvation the world has ever known. For Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day, so that we might trust in Him and be saved.

And if God was working then, He is working now.

So whatever you're facing today. Whatever feels uncertain, unseen, or unresolved, you can trust this:

**EVEN WHEN YOU CAN'T SEE IT... GOD IS WORKING.**

Let's pray.