

Scattered Threatened and Preserved

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The Caucasians in Persia

Main Text

Esther 3:8
Esther 3:13
Esther 4:3
Esther 8:17
Esther 9:1–5

Sermon Theme

In the days of Esther, the Jews were scattered throughout the Persian empire and marked for destruction by a wicked decree. Yet God preserved His people, turned mourning into relief, and reversed the plans of their enemy. The book of Esther reminds us that even when God's name is not openly mentioned, His providence is still at work.

Introduction

The book of Esther takes place after many Jews had already been scattered among the nations. Some had returned to Jerusalem, but many still lived throughout the vast Persian empire. They were no longer all gathered in one land. They were dispersed among many provinces, speaking different languages, living under foreign rule, and vulnerable to the decisions of kings and rulers.

Then a man named Haman rose to power.

Haman hated Mordecai, and because Mordecai was a Jew, Haman's hatred widened into a plan of extermination against all the Jews in the kingdom.

Esther 3:8 says:

Esther 3:8

"And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom..."

That phrase describes the condition of the Jews: "scattered abroad and dispersed."

They were not gathered as an army.

They were not ruling the empire.

They were not a political threat.

They were a scattered people living among the nations.

But Haman twisted their scattered condition into an accusation. He made their difference sound dangerous. He made their obedience to their own laws sound like rebellion. He made their existence seem like a problem that had to be removed.

And the king listened.

A decree went out to destroy them.

Yet the book of Esther shows that God is not absent when His people are scattered. He is not powerless when wicked men write decrees. He is not surprised when enemies plot in secret. He is able to place the right person in the right position at the right time for the preservation of His people.

This sermon is about scattered Jews, a death decree, a mourning people, a hidden providence, and a mighty reversal.

1. God's People Were Scattered Among the Nations

Esther 3:8 says:

Esther 3:8

"There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom..."

Haman's words were meant as accusation, but they also describe a real condition. The Jews were scattered abroad. They were dispersed among the people. They lived in many provinces of the Persian empire.

They were not all in Jerusalem.

They were not all in Judah.

They were not all gathered in one visible place of strength.

They were spread throughout the kingdom.

This scattering was part of the long story of Israel and Judah among the nations. Exile had removed many from the land. Some returned, but many remained in foreign territories. They had to live as God's covenant people under Gentile rule.

This is not an easy place to live faithfully.

It is hard to keep identity when surrounded by another culture.

It is hard to remain faithful when laws and customs are against you.

It is hard to stand out when standing out may bring danger.

It is hard to remember Zion when living in Shushan or another province of Persia.

Yet the Jews remained a distinct people.

Haman noticed it. He said they were "a certain people." They had not completely disappeared into Persia. Their identity had not been erased. Their laws, customs, and faith still marked them.

That alone is a testimony of preservation.

Scattering did not destroy them.
Distance did not erase them.
Foreign rule did not make them vanish.
God preserved a people even in dispersion.

God's people may be scattered, but they are never lost to God.

2. The Enemy Used Their Difference Against Them

Esther 3:8 continues:

Esther 3:8

"...and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them."

Haman framed Jewish difference as a political threat.

He said their laws were diverse. That much was true. God's people were not meant to live exactly like the nations. They had received the law of the Lord. Their identity, worship, and obedience made them distinct.

But Haman twisted this into accusation.

He claimed they did not keep the king's laws and that it was not profitable for the king to allow them to live. He presented extermination as good policy.

This is how hatred often works. It takes difference and turns it into fear. It takes faithfulness and calls it rebellion. It takes a people's identity and makes it sound like a danger.

Haman did not begin by saying, "I hate Mordecai, and I want revenge." He spoke in the language of state interest. He told the king it was not profitable to let the Jews remain.

Wickedness often tries to make itself sound reasonable.

It does not always appear with an open confession of hatred. Sometimes it comes dressed in political language, financial language, social language, or public safety language. Haman was not only angry; he was manipulative.

But God saw the truth behind his words.

The Jews were scattered and vulnerable, but they were still under the eye of God. Haman could accuse them before the king, but he could not hide his wicked heart from the Lord.

3. A Death Decree Went Out Against All the Jews

Esther 3:13 says:

Esther 3:13

“And the letters were sent by posts into all the king’s provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day...”

This is one of the darkest verses in Esther.

The decree was not limited. It targeted all Jews.

Young and old.

Little children and women.

Every province.

One appointed day.

The language is severe: “to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish.”

This was not oppression only. It was planned extermination.

The scattered condition of the Jews made the danger empire-wide. Because they lived in all the provinces, the decree reached all the provinces. There was no safe corner of the kingdom. A Jew in Shushan, a Jew in a small village, a Jew in a distant province — all were marked.

The decree was written in the king’s name. It carried royal authority. It was sealed. It was sent by posts. It became law in the empire.

Humanly speaking, the Jews were trapped.

They had no army great enough to overthrow Persia.

They had no homeland strong enough to defend them.

They had no political power equal to Haman’s position.

They had no easy escape from a decree sent throughout the empire.

But the book of Esther teaches us that earthly decrees are not higher than heavenly providence.

The king’s ring may seal a letter, but God still rules over kings. Haman may cast lots, but God governs times. The empire may appoint a day of death, but God can turn the day of death into a day of deliverance.

4. The People Mourned in Every Province

Esther 4:3 says:

Esther 4:3

“And in every province, whithersoever the king’s commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing...”

When the decree arrived, grief spread wherever the Jews lived.

Every province heard the news.
Every province felt the terror.
Every province had mourning.

The verse says there was “great mourning.” This was not a small sorrow. Families knew the date of their intended destruction. Parents looked at children and understood what the decree meant. Old men and young women, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters all lived under the shadow of a death sentence.

But notice what accompanied the mourning: fasting.

Esther 4:3 says there was “fasting, and weeping, and wailing.”

The Jews did not merely panic. They humbled themselves. Fasting in Scripture is often tied to mourning, repentance, dependence, and urgent seeking of God. Though the book of Esther does not openly mention God’s name, the fasting of the Jews points to their dependence upon Him.

They could not save themselves.
They could not reverse the decree.
They could not command the king.
They could not defeat Haman by human strength.

So they mourned, fasted, wept, and wailed.

There are seasons when God’s people must not pretend everything is fine. There is a time to mourn. There is a time to fast. There is a time to fall low before God and confess helplessness.

The scattered Jews mourned together though they were spread apart. Their grief was shared across the empire.

This teaches us that scattered people can still be united in sorrow, prayer, and dependence upon God.

5. God Had Already Placed Esther in the Palace

Though the verses listed focus on the decree and deliverance, the heart of Esther’s story includes God’s providence in Esther’s position.

Esther was a Jewish woman in the palace of Persia. Her identity had not been known publicly at first. She had become queen before the decree was issued. What looked like a strange rise to royalty became part of God’s hidden preparation.

Mordecai tells her in Esther 4:14:

Esther 4:14

“...and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

This is one of the great statements of providence in the Bible.

Esther did not fully see the purpose when she entered the palace. Mordecai did not know every detail. The Jews did not know how God would deliver. But God was already at work before Haman's decree was written.

That is one of the greatest comforts in this book.

God prepares deliverance before the crisis is fully seen.

Before Haman plotted, Esther was in the palace.

Before the decree went out, God had positioned a witness.

Before the mourning began, God had already made a way for appeal.

Before the enemy's plan reached its height, providence had already moved.

The name of God is famously not mentioned in Esther, but the hand of God is everywhere.

Sometimes God works openly through miracles, as He did at the Red Sea. Sometimes He works quietly through timing, placement, courage, sleepless nights, conversations, and reversals. Esther teaches us to trust God even when His work is hidden.

6. Deliverance Required Courage and Risk

Esther could not remain passive.

Mordecai warned her that silence would not protect her forever. If she held her peace, deliverance would arise from another place, but she and her father's house would be destroyed.

Esther had to go before the king, though going uninvited could cost her life.

Esther 4:16 says:

Esther 4:16

"...and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish."

This is courage under submission to providence.

Esther did not know exactly what would happen. She did not control the king. She did not control Haman. She did not control the law. But she could do the right thing at the right time.

"If I perish, I perish."

That is not despair. That is surrendered courage.

The scattered Jews fasted. Esther acted. Mordecai stood. God worked.

This teaches us that trusting God's providence does not mean doing nothing. Faith may require risk. Faith may require speaking when silence feels safer. Faith may require entering a hard place because God has placed us there for a purpose.

Esther's courage became part of God's deliverance.

7. The Enemy's Plan Was Reversed

Haman intended to destroy Mordecai and the Jews. But God turned the story.

The gallows Haman prepared for Mordecai became the place of Haman's own death. The king's favor shifted. Esther's petition was heard. Mordecai was exalted. A new decree was issued allowing the Jews to defend themselves.

This is one of the great themes of Esther: reversal.

Mourning is turned to joy.

Danger is turned to deliverance.

Haman's plot is turned upon his own head.

The day of destruction becomes a day of victory.

The scattered people are preserved.

The God of Esther is the God who can reverse what looks irreversible.

Haman had money, power, position, and the king's seal. The Jews had mourning, fasting, and a hidden queen. But the Lord was able to overturn the enemy's design.

This is important for all God's people.

Do not assume the enemy has the final word because the decree is written.

Do not assume the day appointed for destruction cannot become a day of deliverance.

Do not assume God is absent because His name is not immediately visible.

Do not assume the scattered are forgotten because they are weak.

God can reverse the sentence.

8. Relief Came to the Jews

Esther 8:17 says:

Esther 8:17

"And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day."

What a contrast with Esther 4:3.

In Esther 4:3, every province had mourning, fasting, weeping, and wailing.

In Esther 8:17, every province had joy, gladness, a feast, and a good day.

The same empire that had received a death decree now received news of deliverance. The same scattered Jews who mourned now rejoiced. The same provinces that heard weeping now saw gladness.

God turned mourning into joy.

Esther 8:17 continues:

Esther 8:17

“And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.”

This is remarkable. The deliverance was so evident and the reversal so powerful that many people became Jews. The fear of the Jews fell upon them.

God not only preserved His people; He magnified them before the nations.

The people who had been marked for death became a people others feared and joined. The scattered Jews did not disappear. They became a testimony.

This is what God can do.

He can take a people under threat and make them a witness. He can take a death sentence and turn it into a feast day. He can take mourning in every province and turn it into gladness in every city.

9. The Jews Defended Themselves and Prevailed

Esther 9:1 says:

Esther 9:1

“Now in the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same... though it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them.”

The day appointed for Jewish destruction came. But the outcome was turned to the contrary.

That phrase is powerful: “it was turned to the contrary.”

The enemy expected victory.

The Jews expected danger.

The empire expected conflict.

But God turned the day.

Esther 9:2 says:

Esther 9:2

“The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt...”

The Jews did not become aggressors against the innocent. They defended themselves against those who sought their hurt. The decree allowed them to stand against their enemies.

Esther 9:3 says:

Esther 9:3

“And all the rulers of the provinces... helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them.”

The power structure that had once endangered them now helped them. Mordecai, once targeted by Haman, was now feared and honored.

Esther 9:4 says:

Esther 9:4

“For Mordecai was great in the king’s house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces...”

The man who had refused to bow to Haman now stood great in the king’s house.

Esther 9:5 says:

Esther 9:5

“Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword...”

The Jews prevailed over those who hated them.

God did not remove the day from the calendar. He transformed what happened on that day. The day that was supposed to mark Jewish extinction became the day of Jewish victory.

10. The Scattered People Were Not Forgotten

The Jews in Esther were scattered abroad and dispersed among the people, but they were not forgotten by God.

This is the great comfort.

They were far from the full glory of Jerusalem.

They were under Persian rule.

They were vulnerable to wicked decrees.

They had enemies in high places.

They faced an appointed day of destruction.

But God preserved them.

He placed Esther in the palace.

He gave Mordecai wisdom and courage.

He exposed Haman.

He moved the king.

He reversed the decree’s effect.

He turned mourning into joy.

He gave the Jews power to defend themselves.

He made the fear of the Jews fall upon many.

He preserved His covenant people.

The scattered may feel forgotten, but they are not forgotten.

God knows every province.
God knows every hidden enemy.
God knows every written decree.
God knows every mourning household.
God knows every fasting cry.
God knows where He has placed His servants.

The book of Esther teaches us that providence works even when the people of God are dispersed.

11. Lessons From the Persian-Era Dispersion and Persecution

First, God's people may be scattered, but they are not lost.

Haman said the Jews were scattered abroad and dispersed, but God knew exactly where they were.

Second, hatred often disguises itself as public concern.

Haman made his personal hatred sound like royal policy.

Third, earthly decrees are not higher than God's providence.

The king's decree was serious, but God still ruled the outcome.

Fourth, mourning and fasting are right responses in desperate times.

The Jews did not treat the crisis lightly. They mourned, fasted, wept, and wailed.

Fifth, God prepares deliverance before the crisis appears.

Esther was already in the palace.

Sixth, providence often requires human courage.

Esther had to go before the king and risk her life.

Seventh, God can reverse the enemy's plan.

The day of destruction was turned to the contrary.

Eighth, God can turn mourning into gladness.

The provinces that saw weeping later saw joy, feasting, and a good day.

Ninth, God can make His people a witness among the nations.

Many of the people of the land became Jews.

Tenth, God preserves His covenant people.

The Jews were threatened with extermination, but God did not allow Haman's plan to stand.

Closing Exhortation

Haman looked at the Jews and saw a scattered people.

He saw them dispersed among the provinces. He saw them as vulnerable. He saw them as different. He saw them as people he could accuse, isolate, and destroy.

But Haman did not see what God saw.

God saw His covenant people.
God saw Mordecai at the gate.
God saw Esther in the palace.
God saw the mourning in every province.
God saw the fasting and weeping.
God saw the decree.
God saw the day appointed.
God saw the enemy's hatred.
God saw the reversal before it came.

Esther 9:1 says:

Esther 9:1

"...it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them."

That is the testimony of Esther.

The enemy's day was turned.
The death decree was answered.
The mourners rejoiced.
The scattered were preserved.
The wicked plot failed.
The people of God lived.

So do not judge God's care by how scattered things look.

A family may be scattered, but God can gather purpose.
A church may feel weak, but God can preserve witness.
A believer may be in a foreign place, but God can work there.
A decree may look final, but God can turn it.
An enemy may seem powerful, but God sees the end from the beginning.

When God's people are under threat, let them humble themselves. Let them fast. Let them pray. Let them stand with courage. Let them trust the providence of God.

The God who preserved the Jews in Persia is the God who still rules over hidden places, palace rooms, sleepless nights, written decrees, wicked plans, and appointed days.

He can turn mourning into joy.

He can turn fear into gladness.

He can turn the day of destruction into the day of deliverance.