esther
it’s tough being a woman

BETH MOORE
The Background of Esther in the Hebrew Bible and Tradition

The Book of Esther is also known as the __Megillah_____.

Historical Background

Like the Book of Daniel, Esther is a __Diaspora____ story.

The Uniqueness of the Book of Esther

1. The total __absence_____ of any __reference_____ to __God____

Why study the Book of Esther?

• It’s part of __God’s____ __Word____.

• Based on Psalm 138:2b God’s name may not be __in____ __it____, but __it____ __is____ __on____ __it____.

• It offers tremendous __hope____.

• It extends a vital perspective on the __providence_____ of __God____.

Merriam Webster’s definition of providence: “God conceived as the power __sustaining____ __and____ __guiding____ __human____ __destiny____.” Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary adds, “In so doing [in His providence] God attends not only to apparently momentous events and people but also to those that seem both __mundane____ and __trivial____. … Indeed, so all encompassing is God’s attention to events within creation that nothing … __happens____ by __chance____.”
Ephesians 1:11—Even when we’re blind to the evidence, God
“____ works ____ out ____ everything ____ in conformity with the
____ purpose ____ of His will.”

Philippians 2:13—God “____ works ____ in ____ you ____ to will and to act
according to His good ____ purpose ____.”

2. The title bears a ____ woman’s ____ name ____.

Throughout the next nine weeks we’ll consider different scenarios to
underscore the concept captured in our study’s title.

Scenario #1
It’s tough being a woman ____ in ____ another ____ woman’s ____ shadow ____.

3. The God-ordained emphasis on ____ human ____ responsibility ____

According to Word Biblical Commentary, the inspired author of Esther
“lays all the stress on the ____ human ____ contribution ____ to the
divine-human __ synergism ____” [combined or shared energy].

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Today's session introduces our protagonist and most vital supporting actor. We will use these important “first mentions” to help us draw character sketches of each based on what we know and what we also might imagine.

Part One
A Character Sketch of Mordecai

- **He was a Jew** (6:10; 8:7; 9:31; 10:3; 5:13).

  “Its significance is indicated by the fact that this is the only time in the whole Old Testament that a native member of the community of Israel is named and identified by a gentilic.”

- **He was an exile**.

  Esther 2:6 “employs the root of the word for exile (głh) in four distinct constructions, lest the full measure of the Jewish plight be overlooked.”

  View the repetition in the King James Version: “Who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away.”

- **He was a sudden parent to his cousin**.
Part Two

A Character Sketch of Esther

• *She was named* ____Hadassah_____.

  This Jewish name comes from the word for “____myrtle____” and means “____fragrance____.”

• *She was* ____orphaned____.

• *She was* ____brought_____ ____up__ by her male ____cousin____.

• *She was* ____lovely____.

Scenario #2

It’s tough being a woman in a ____world____ ____where____ ____beauty____ is a ____treatment____.

• *She was also* ____known____ as ____Esther_____.

  *This Persian name means “____star____.”*

Perhaps even more significantly, “the name Esther comes from the verbal root in Hebrew str, meaning ‘to ____conceal____.’”
Scenario #3

It's tough being a woman __in__ a __mean__ world__.

1. __Meanness__ always has a __history__.

Consider the history of these two rivals.

**Mordecai,**
a ______Jew______ from the tribe of Benjamin and a descendant of ______King______ ______Saul______

**Haman,**
a presumed Amalekite and descendant of ______Agag______, their king during ______Saul’s______ reign

The ______disobeyed______ instruction:

1 Samuel 15:10-23,30

The revealed ______explanation______:

Deuteronomy 25:17-19

(Referring to Ex. 17:8-16.)
Exodus 17:16—“The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.”

2. __Meanness___ perceives a __threat__ (2 Cor. 10:12).

3. __Meanness___ catches like a __virus__.

- The word Agag is believed to be related to an Assyrian term (agagu) that means “to be ____ powerful____, vehement, ____ angry____.”

- The name “Haman” sounds similar to the Hebrew word for __wraith__ (Hebrew, heman). (Compare Prov. 22:24-25.)

Consider the following quote

“Surely as Christians we must recognize the ‘____ spirit____
____ of ____ Haman ____’ not only in our world but __ within ______ ourselves____.”

4. __Meanness___ is ____ curable____ (Rom. 12:17-21).
The Human Dilemma of Destiny

Many of the biblical figures who fulfilled their God-appointed destinies shared some of Esther’s basic inner conflicts.

Consider the dilemma of destiny from a human perspective:

1. The __poor___ __timing____. Reflect on Esther 4:11b.

2. The __unreasonable___ __expectation____.

Scenario #4

It’s tough being a woman __thrown____ __a__
___giant____-___size______weight____.
3. **The ____ risky _____ identification_____.**

- Remember, destiny appoints ____one____ but affects ____many____.

- The ____revelation____ of a person's destiny always demands a revelation of the ____person____. Consider the wording “if you remain silent at this time.” The Hebrew word translated silent in this verse can also be translated ____conceal_____.

4. **The ____unanswered____ ___question_____.**

(See verse 14.)

“The sentence contains a figure of speech known as *aposiopesis*—a sudden ____breaking____ off____ of what was being said or written so that the mind is more impressed by what is ____left____ ____unsaid____, it being too wonderful, solemn or awful to verbalize. In English this figure is sometimes called the ‘sudden ____silence____.’”
Part One

Our protagonist made three shifts that moved her from self-preservation to brave determination.

1. Esther had a __________ choice.  
   “She [Esther] had to ___________ ___________ in order to do what God had created her and positioned her to do.”

2. Esther __________ _______ _______.

Consider general fears, then our context’s specific fear:

- Facing any ________________

   And if ____________________________, then ____________.
   [your answers here]
Scenario #5

It’s tough being a woman in the __ tight______
_ fist ____ of _____ fear _____.

• Facing fear of ____ death ____

Hebrews 2:14-15 from The Message: “By embracing death, taking it into himself, he destroyed the Devil’s hold on death and freed all who ____ cower ____ through life, ____ scared ____ to ____
_ death ____ of ____ death ____.”

Recall a quote we discussed in week 3 of our homework:

“Living perpetually in the shadow of immanent catastrophe, the Jew was threatened not only physically but psychologically. Walking in the ____ shadow ______ of ____ death ______ was as ______ perilous ______ as ______ dying ______.”

3. Esther ____ took ____ the ____ courage ____
   she was offered.
Sometimes God forces the issue of time.

Amazingly, other times He seems to entrust it.

Reflect on the importance of knowing …

1. When it’s time.


2. When it’s time to wait.

   Ecclesiastes 3:1,7 say, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven … a time to be silent and a time to speak.”

   • Sometimes we need to be silent even when man invites us to speak.

Consider the idiom, “Even up to half the kingdom.”

(Compare Mark 6:17-28.)

   • Sometimes the words sound right, but they don’t taste right. See Job 34:2-4. (Compare 2 Cor. 6:1-2.)
3. When it’s time to ___wait__ for ___someone______ else’s ___time._____

- The time wasn’t ____right____ for ____Xerxes____. 
  (Recall Mark 6:23.)

- The time wasn’t ____right____ for ____Haman____.

Commentator Adele Berlin suggests the delay is “a clever move on Esther’s part to disarm Haman and make him think he was the center of attention. This plays to Haman’s ___personal____ ____weakness____.”11 Similarly, J. Gordon McConville explains that the delay allowed time “for Haman’s misguided ____self-confidence____ to ____mature____.”12

4. When the _____meantime_______ is ____God-time_____. 
  (See Isa. 40:31, KJV.)

Scenario #6

It’s tough being a woman who can balance ___passion____ with ___patience_____.

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The sixth chapter is “the hinge of the story of Esther.”

God appoints or allows circumstances (often crises) in our lives to redirect our paths. Today we explore the unexpected pivot point of Esther by giving a name to an important concept in the book: The Reversal of Destiny also called The Reversal of Fortunes. Review Esther 6:6-11.

These reversals are part of a literary tapestry that will open our eyes to see …

1. The beauty of the book’s construction.

Am I willing to do the work to see the wonder?

Two literary devices are employed magnificently in the Book of Esther. The first is called “chiastic structure.”

What in the world is it? In its tightest form, chiastic structure is inverted parallelism. In other words, it is a reversal of structures to emphasize an overarching point.

What’s the best way to picture it?

• The “chi” that begins the word chiastic is the 22nd letter of the Greek alphabet.
It is written like this: __X__. The letter itself represents the ______ crisscross ______ literary structure of a chiasm (literally in Greek, a crossing).

What's the best example of it in the Book of Esther? Chiastic structure is deliciously illustrated in the repeated occurrences of ______ feasts ______ or ______ banquets ______.

2. The beauty of the book's ______ instruction ______.

Esther's best theology is in its ______ subtlety ______. To offer a perfect example, we'll consider a second literary device called “____ peripety ____.”

What in the world is it?

• “Peripety: a ______ sudden ______ turn ______ of events that ______ reverses ______ the expected or intended outcome” particularly in a literary work.”

Scenario #7

It's tough being a woman ______ who ______ feels ______ responsible ______ for ______ the ______ “ ______ how ______.”

“A peripeteia swiftly turns a routine sequence of events into a ______ story ______ ______ worth ______ ______ telling ______.”
Esther 7–8:2 shows the impact of the climactic events on all four major players.

Every __turn__-_around__ starts with a __step___.

1. Esther __stepped__ __through___.
   (See Esther 7:3 and 8:1.)
   “Literally, ‘_what_ _he_ _was_ _to_ _her_.’ The author probably intended to convey more than is being suggested by the translation ‘that he was __related__ to her.’”

2. Haman __stepped__ __off___.
   (See Esth. 7:10. Compare Ps. 7:15-16.)

3. Xerxes __stepped__ __in___.
   (See Esth. 8:1. Compare 2 Cor. 8:9.)

4. Mordecai __stepped__ __up___.
   (See Esth. 8:1-2.)

Now see the “Turn It Around!” page and fill in the appropriate blanks.*

*Editor's Note: This form is available in the leader guide and online at www.lifeway.com/bethmoore.
Turn Around Scenario #7

It’s tough being a woman who feels responsible for the “how.”

“The ___ Lord ___ knows ___ how ___ to rescue the godly from trials and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.”
(2 Pet. 2:9, HCSB)

“For ___ he ___ knows ___ how ___ we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.” (Ps. 103:14)

Turn Around Scenario #6

It’s tough being a woman who can balance passion with patience.

“They ___ longs ___ to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who ___ wait ___ for him.” (Isa. 30:18)

“The Lord ___ waits ___ … blessed are all those who ___ wait ___ for Him.” (ESV)

“That same day,” Esther 8:1

“Rather than love, than money, than ___ fame ___ give me ___ truth ___.

— Henry David Thoreau (Walden, 1854)
Today’s chapter explicitly states the Book of Esther’s most pronounced theme—the reversal of destiny. We will glance ahead to Esther 9:19-22 and then focus on verses 1-4. Esther 9:1 says, “but now the tables were turned.” The Hebrew transliteration for “the tables were turned” is hapak which means “to overturn, to overthrow, to tumble.”

Premise for Today’s Session

God can’t ___ turn ___ a ___ table ___ that was ___ never___ 
___ set ___ against ___ you ___.

Seeing purpose in tough scenarios increases the trust required for a turnaround.

Turn Around Scenario #5

It’s tough being a woman in the tight fist of fear.

• The Jews weren’t just ___ delivered ___, they were ___ empowered ____.  
  (See Deut. 33:29; compare Neh. 4:10-14.)

• See Esther 9:2: “The Jews assembled in their cities.” The power wasn’t just ___Mordecai’s____. It was all of ___ theirs____.

• Every time you’re in a ___tight___ ___fist___ of fear, remember you’re in something much ___tighter____. Isaiah 49:16 says, “See, I have ___engraved____ ___you___ on the ___palms___ of ___my____ ___hands____.”

Turn Around Scenario #4

It’s tough being a woman thrown a giant-size weight.
- God always has the upper hand. Exchange the burden for a weapon (1 Pet. 5:7; see Deut. 23:3-5).

  “However, the Lord your God … turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you” (Deut. 23:5).

Ahab—“Implies an ardent and vehement inclination of the mind and a tenderness of affection at the same time.”

Consider the unique metaphor in Hosea 7:8

“Ephraim is a flat cake not turned over.”

Turn Around Scenario #3
It's tough being a woman in a mean world.

- In a mean world, New Testament believers are called to a good fight.

“I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith” (1 Tim. 1:18-19).

Consider the following excerpt from The Queen and I:

“When, because of your faith, your life too becomes perceptibly different; when your reactions are quite opposite to what the situation seems to call for and your activities can no longer be explained in terms of your personality; that is when your neighborhood will sit up and take notice. In the eyes of the world, it is not our relationship with Jesus Christ that counts; it is our resemblance to him!”

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As the inspired writer puts the finishing touches on the book, we will put the finishing touches on our approach to its overarching theme—reversals of destiny.

Interestingly, a book called by Esther's name and showcasing her beauty and courage begins and ends without her. So, who is the Book's real hero? Who is the truest protagonist?

Consider the following thoughts:

Neither Esther nor Mordecai had the power or position alone to deliver their people. It was only as they acted in concerted power and authority that they were able to lead God's people through the crisis of death and into deliverance. Neither of them aspired to the role; perhaps neither of them deserved it. It was thrust on them by a series of improbable circumstances largely beyond their control. Nevertheless, their unlikely partnership accomplished God's ancient promise, and the Jewish race was preserved until in the fullness of time, God entered history through this people as the Messiah. How marvelous are God's inscrutable ways!

Recall Scenario #2

It's tough being a woman in a world where beauty is a treatment.
Before we locate and record our “turn around” Scripture, consider some of the possible implications of Genesis 3:16. Two different Hebrew words are translated “man.” They are *adam* and *ish*.

When a distinction exists between the two, *ish* denotes “man as the counterpart of woman and/or distinguished in his maleness.”

The word is first used in Genesis 2:24. In the KJV, *ish* is translated “husband” 69 times and “man” or “men” 1212 times.

**Turn Around Scenario #2**

*It’s tough being a woman in a world where beauty is a treatment.*

“He has made _everything_ _beautiful_ _in_ _its_ _time_” (Eccl. 3:11).

In man’s realm, _time_ _diminishes_ _beauty_.

In God’s realm where we will spend forever, _time_ _perfects_ _beauty_.

**Turn Around Scenario #1**

*It’s tough being a woman in another woman’s shadow.*

“He who dwells in the _shelter_ of the _Most High_ will rest in the _shadow_ of the _Almighty_” (Ps. 91:1).

On the “Turn It Around!” page, write concise descriptions of each scenario over the top of each corresponding box.