

Esther

1. What is peripety and how does it function in the book of Esther?

Peripety is when actions or states of affairs result in the opposite of what is expected. It comes from two Greek words, peri (around) and piptein (to fall); thus, it means to fall around, turn around in sudden reversal, turning the tables. This is addressed as a theme in the book (9:1, 22, 25). Consider what was expected in the following in contrast to what transpired:

- 1) Haman intends to destroy Mordecai and the Jews, (ch 3 with 9.1)
- 2) Haman expects special honor at the queen's banquet, (5:11-12; seeks her mercy when things go wrong only to intensify the king's anger 7:7-8)
- 3) Haman writes a script for his own glorification (6:6-9; but must exalt Mordecai and is humiliated before his family, 6:10-13).
- 4) Haman erects a gallows for Mordecai at his family's suggestion (5:14; but is hanged on it himself at a servant's suggestion, 7:9-10).
- 5) The enemies of the Jews hoped to overpower them (9:1)
- 6) The threat of death brought sorrow and fasting to the Jews (4:1-3.15 with 9:22)

2. What is the outline of the book of Esther?

Background to the plot against the Jews 1:1-2:23

Divorce of Vashti 1:1-22

Elevation of Esther 2:1-18

Loyal service of Mordecai 2:19-23

Haman's plot, timed by lot, 3:1-15

Esther's intervention 4:1-9:16

First banquet, 5:1-8

Haman's sadistic happiness, 5:9-14

King's sleepless night, Mordecai honored, 6

Second banquet, Haman hanged, 7

Conquest of Jewish enemies, 8:1-9:16

The feast of Purim 9:17-32

Prominence of Mordecai 10:1-3

3. How is the sovereignty of God presented in the book?

The sovereignty of God is therefore a major theme of the book. It is part of the literary genius of the author to convey this message forcefully without mentioning God. He relates "seeming coincidences" that are "indispensable when the story reaches its moment of peak dramatic tension at the beginning of chapter 6" (IOT 196).

Note the seeming coincidences: Esther's attractiveness, her ancestry and relation to Mordecai, her being chosen by the king to be queen, Mordecai's loyalty and "chance" overhearing of an assassination plot that was recorded in the king's chronicles, that Esther had concealed her identity, that the king showed her favor, the sleepless night of the king and the reading of the annals, reading the section relating to Mordecai's loyal action and lack of reward, and the king's wide-eyed concern to reward Mordecai.

"Luck indeed! What the writer of Esther has done is to give us a story in which the main actor is not so much as mentioned—the presence of God is implied and understood throughout the story, so that these mounting coincidences are but the by-product of his rule over history and his providential care for his people" (IOT 196).

4. What does it mean to say that covenant fulfillment is peripetetic?

Israel's expected Messiah has come and tabernacled with us in Christ but his own people received him not and crucified him and he rejected the nation for another (Matt. 21). Israel's fall has brought blessing to the nations; God keeps this part of his promise to Abraham in spite of Israel's unbelief. But the formation of a new Israel from the nations includes a remnant from the old Israel (Rom. 11:1-4).

The rejected stone becomes the head of the corner. A sinful people become a blessing to the nations. A rejected people are saved in remnant. The church is the new Israel, the new 12 tribes (cf. the 12 apostles) and the

church is composed of both Jew and Gentile for Jewish particularism has now given way in Christ to national universalism.

But God is never mentioned, how do we explain this fact? Young: these are exiles who did not return to the promised land of covenant; these are blessed but not fully in covenant.

Another explanation - God is at work with covenant people who are immersed in the nations; thus the book is almost secular. The covenant name and language is omitted in order to present the covenant God who is 1) working among the nations, 2) in remnant. A subtle emphasis on the promise to bless the nations (the nations are blessed when Israel is blessed as part of them). God is saving his people in remnant form wherever they may be.

Deliverance (salvation) comes through opposition; there is no bed of roses; through much tribulation we enter the kingdom of God.

The Lord and king of glory rides the donkey of humiliation.

The rejected stone (crucified Jesus, perishes as Esther was willing to perish, Esther 4:16) becomes the head of the corner (resurrected and exalted as pre-eminent one and head of the church).

Israel's fall brings blessing to the nations.

The kingdom is given to another in covenant fulfillment yet that other includes Israelite remnant (Matt. 21:33-46; Rom. 11:1-5; Eph. 2:11-14).

The remnant will be the world (today you are a little flock, tomorrow you will be the world, Warfield).