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].
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 _______ (6:10; 8:7; 9:31; 10:3; 5:13).

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

• He was an _____________.

Esther 2:6 “employs the root of the word for exile (glh) 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 ______ _______ from Jerusalem with the _________ which had been ______ _______ with Jeconiah king of Judah whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had ______ _______.”

• He was a ________ _______ _______ to his _______ _______.
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____.’ ”

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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 wrath (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_____.

viewer guide • session three
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_____.’”

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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 ___________ fear____

And if __________________________________, then ____________.

[your answers here]
Scenario #5

It’s tough being a woman in the ________
___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____.
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____.”

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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.’”16

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.

“Yet the LORD ___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 resemblance 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.