

Purim – Partnering with God to Bring His Will

“As a Christian, serious about living out Christ’s intention for me, I view life as a series of opportunities to respond to and maximize... to recognize opportunities - either immediate or in the future - and prepare for, or respond well to them.”

Dr. Jerry Cook

This summarizes our partnership with God in bringing his will. This is exactly what Esther and Mordecai did when the Jews were threatened with extermination by the Persians, as recorded in the Book of Esther – the story commemorated on the festival of Purim.

This partnership is encapsulated in the very name – Purim, which means lots, as in “casting lots”. In earlier times, people often took parts of bones or stones or even sticks, marked them with symbols, then tossed them like dice to determine how to proceed. Casting lots was a way of letting providence decide something. It was taken very seriously in ancient times and used in all sorts of major decisions.

It wasn’t only Jews and Israelites that used this method of making decisions. The Romans used it as early as the 8th century BCE. Many cultures had some sort of method for seeking the will of their god (or gods).

In the Bible we see other cultures using it:

- The Romans used it to divide Yeshua’s clothing while he was on the cross. (Matt. 27:35)
- I found four incidents where Israel’s enemies used lots. (Joel 4:3, Obadiah 1:11, Nahum 3:10, Esther 3:7)
- Remember Jonah? The sailors on the boat cast lots to find out who was responsible for their calamities. This is how they decided to throw Jonah overboard. (Jonah 1:7)

There are nine references to Israelites and Jews using it, including:

- The disciples decided on who would replace Judas by casting lots. (Acts 1:26)
- We see it as part of the priests’ duties on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). (Lev. 16:8) The priest is to cast lots to determine which goat would be sacrificed, and which would be the scapegoat. (The word “pur” in Kippur is the same word as “pur” in

Purim. Pur is singular, purim in plural. So the name Yom Kippur is referring to the day of casting lots)

- The Promised Land was divided by lots. (Joshua 18)
- The Urim and Thummin that the high priest wore on his garment were a form of lots that worked similarly to determine God’s will. We see several references to these for God’s decisions.

PARTNERING WITH GOD

In the story of Esther, the Persians were using lots. But who is the only One who determines events on earth? YHVH! This is His specialty. Prov. 16:33 tells us:

“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.”

So when the Persians used lots to determine what day to destroy YHVH’s people, they were playing right into God’s hand. God answered them alright. They thought they were setting the date for their victory. But actually they were setting the date of their own destruction. Remember, Mordecai said to Esther, *“If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place...”* (Esther 4:14)

He said this because God was in on this plan – the Persians brought Him into it with their lots. His will would be accomplished.

But don’t miss Esther’s will in the story...Mordecai said,

“If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”

Esther had a choice. Esther’s will played into the story.

The book of Esther is the story of how God’s will and our will interact to bring about His purposes. God brings his will through people. We have to use our free will to cooperate with His will. Both of these had to be operating in this victory on Purim, and in fact both of these are always operating.

THE PATTERN OF INTERACTING WILLS IN THE STORY OF ESTHER

Before we get to the actual story, I want to highlight the pattern I've found in how God's will and our will interact. We'll see it throughout this story.

Here's what I've found in my life, I'm sure you've seen it in your life, and it's obvious in this story as well:

1. God sets the stage for his will through his sovereignty
2. We then have a choice as to whether to participate in what he's doing and what our participation will look like.
3. When we do participate, God supernaturally intervenes to bring about his will.

Let's look at how this pattern plays out throughout the story of Esther. (For expediency, we'll use a summary of the story, divided into six parts.)

Part 1

The book of Esther begins with Queen Vashti refusing to obey an order from her husband, King Xerxes. She was subsequently banished, and the search began for a new queen. The king sent out a decree to gather together all the beautiful women in the empire and bring them into the royal harem. Esther, a young Jewish woman, was one of those chosen to be in the royal harem. King Xerxes was so pleased with Esther that he made her his queen.

Let's look at the interaction between God's will and man's will in just this first part.

- When Esther is of age, the king suddenly needs a new queen. This is God's sovereignty, he's setting the stage for his will. Esther is beautiful and is chosen. God has set up this opportunity.
- Esther goes along with the king's decree. She doesn't hide from the men who were sent to find beautiful women; she doesn't protest being taken from her family; and she participates in the 12-month beautification process before being presented to the king.

- Then God supernaturally intervenes. The king chooses Esther. In his eyes, Esther is the most beautiful women of all of them. Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, and in this case, it was another divine set up.

So we see God set the stage for His will, we see Esther's choice (even though she's unaware of God's plan), then we see God intervene.

Part 2

Meanwhile, Mordecai, Esther's older cousin, became a government official and during his tenure foiled an assassination plot against the king. But the ambitious and self-serving Haman was appointed second-in-command in the empire. When Mordecai refused to bow in reverence to him, Haman became furious and determined to destroy Mordecai and all the Jews with him.

- Mordecai becomes a government official. Is this God's doing or Mordecai's? It sounds like part of the divine set up. In his role, Mordecai hears of an assassination plot on the king's life. He decides to act - that's his free will. He foils the assassination plan and saves the king's life.
- But Mordecai is not rewarded. (How many times have we felt like we weren't rewarded for some good deed?) In this case, it's God's sovereignty at work, setting the stage for things to come. God uses Mordecai's act to supernaturally intervene later on.
- In his role as a government official, Mordecai decides not to bow to Haman - of his own free will. He decided to follow God's commands. God uses that act to supernaturally set up the whole plan of eliminating any enemies of the Jews.
- Then, we know that Haman had his men cast lots to decide on the exact date of their extermination, playing right into God's hand. Here we see God using even the decisions of his enemies for his purposes. Their action set the stage for his supernatural intervention.

This pattern repeats itself over and over.

Part 3

To accomplish this vengeful deed, Haman deceived the king and persuaded him to issue an edict condemning the Jews to death. Mordecai told Esther about this edict, and she decided to risk her life to save her people. Esther asked King Xerxes and Haman to be her guests at a banquet. During the feast, the king asked Esther what she really wanted, and promised to give her anything. Esther simply invited both men to her banquet the next day.

- Esther is queen at this time, which we already said was an act of God.
- She decides to risk her life and go to the king about Haman's plan – her decision, and her plan for how to do it - over two banquets.

Then how does God supernaturally intervene?

Part 4

That night, unable to sleep, the king was flipping through some records in the royal archives when he read of the assassination plot that Mordecai thwarted. Surprised to learn that Mordecai had never been rewarded for his deed, the king asked Haman what should be done to properly thank a hero. Haman thought the king must be talking about him and so he described a lavish reward. The king agreed, but to Haman's shock and humiliation, he learned that Mordecai was the person to be honored.

- God has now weaved together Mordecai's action years earlier of foiling the assassination, and Esther's decision to set up two banquets for the king. He uses these two together to supernaturally intervene and change the king's heart toward both of them. God has the king up at night between the two banquets reading about Mordecai.

(Remember, Esther didn't know this. She would've still been afraid that she could die by naming Haman as her enemy. She still had to follow through on her decision to tell the king. But God had already been working on the king's heart overnight.)

This is how God's will works. When we decide to partner with God in his will, he goes ahead of us and brings us help and support we never imagined.

Part 5

During the second banquet, the king again asked Esther what she wanted. She replied that someone had plotted to destroy her and her people and she named Haman as the culprit. Overcome by rage, the king left the room; meanwhile Haman stayed behind and begged Esther for his life, falling upon her in desperation. The king came back at this moment and thought Haman was assaulting the queen. Immediately the king sentenced Haman to die on the gallows that he had built for Mordecai.

- Wow - who would've guessed Haman's response? Flinging himself on Esther, begging for his life. Just then the King walks in. Talk about a divine set up!
- And then there's the hanging of Haman on the gallows meant for Mordecai. That could be a study all its own on God's will and man's will intermingling. It's another example of how God uses the will of his enemies to accomplish his plans. He uses Haman's pride and decisions over and over for his own purposes in this story.

Part 6

The previous decree against the Jews could not be annulled, but the king allowed the Jews to defend themselves during the planned attacks. As a result, on Adar 13, 500 attackers and Haman's ten sons are killed in Shushan, followed by a 75,000 Persians throughout the empire. In the final act of this true-life drama, Mordecai was appointed to Haman's position, and the Jews were guaranteed protection. To celebrate this historic occasion, the Festival of Purim was established.

- This is the divine set up of the Jews being able to defend themselves on Adar 13.
- But remember, they still had to act. They couldn't just sit back and ask God to save them. They weren't hiding in their barns, or fleeing the scene. They had to participate to bring about God's complete plan.
- Then, what does God do in response? He strikes most of the empire with fear of the Jews (it tells us in the full story). And those who do come against them are killed – more than 75,000 of their enemies.

THE PATTERN IN OUR LIVES

This story shows this pattern very clearly, the interplay between God's sovereignty and human will. God prepared the place and the opportunity, his people chose to act, then he came alongside and used their decisions to supernaturally bring about his will.

This is what Mordecai was talking about when he told Esther:

"If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance for the Jews will arise from some other place."

He knew this was God's will, and that God would bring it about.

Then he says *"...but who can say but that you have been elevated to the palace for just such a time as this?"*

Deliverance was going to happen; it was just a matter of whether Esther would participate or not. This was God presenting Esther with an opportunity. She could choose to either cooperate or ignore it.

This points to the fact that there is any number of ways God can bring his will. The question to us is always, "I'd like for you to join with me in making this happen, and I've set it up so that you can succeed. Will you join me?"

Wow – what an honor! He doesn't need us, He is God. But he wants us to join him. It's a matter of us hearing the question and responding in faith.

Remember, once Esther made the decision to join him, God didn't necessarily tell her every step to take, such as: "Now make sure you tell the people to fast ahead of time. Then invite the king to two banquets before you ask him."

No – these were probably her own ideas. But because she was acting on God's behalf, her ideas are what God used. He created Esther for opportunities just like this - the way she looked, the way she thought, the way she went about things, the way she expressed herself. God created her this way maybe "for just such a time as this."

And it's the same for us today. We were created for the opportunities God has for us. We need to trust that our whole person has been saved and redeemed - the way we look, the way we think, our ideas, the way we go

about things. God made us who we are, and he put us in the situations that we find ourselves in, because it's our exact expression that is needed there. He can work with who we are – he made us to be that way.

Remember, Ephesians 2:10:

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Messiah Yeshua to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

This means, these opportunities were created for us, and us for them. It's the perfect set up. Sometimes it's years in the making – like Esther's opportunity. It's this interplay of God's set up, our decisions and expression over the years that then results in God's ability to use us in very specific situations. You can probably think of times when you acted into an opportunity that no one else could've done in that way, and it was the exact thing that was needed.

God weaves in things that man has decided along the way and uses them to further his will on earth. He really does use people to bring his will. But he will never override our free will. We have a choice in how we will partner with him.

What opportunities can you see on the horizon in your life? It may be a career decision, maybe a ministry focus, maybe determining how the next chapter of your life will look, or how to focus your time. Maybe you've been asked to participate in something specific.

What are the opportunities God has set up for you? And how can you prepare for and respond in those situations? It could just be one situation where you decide to act that God uses down the road in a supernatural way.

I've found that once I make that decision to pursue what he's calling me to, he then begins opening doors I didn't even know were there, and intervening along the way to guide the process, removing obstacles and revealing unexpected resources.

Take a few minutes and ask God to show you the situations he's set up for you. Or, maybe you already know of situations you need to act into. Examine this pattern of God's divine set up in your life and the steps you can take to partner with him.