

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 16 August 2026. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Winds of Providence (Part 1)

Esther 1:1-11

In May of 1940, the situation in Europe was looking very dark. Hitler's Nazi forces were making huge strides across France and the Low Countries. In the Battle of France earlier that month, about **68,000 British troops** had died. Poland, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, and France had already fallen to Nazi control; and it looked as though Britain would be next. All the Allies' tanks and other heavy equipment had had to be abandoned; and the remaining British, Belgian, and Dutch forces were surrounded and trapped in northern France. To all appearances, it would be only a short time until these 338,000 troops would be annihilated by the Nazis. At this point, the Allies had no choice but to evacuate across the English Channel, to England; so they gathered their troops on the beaches of **Dunkirk**. However, this evacuation would be very risky. In fact, it looked impossible. **King George VI** called for a national day of prayer; and on **26 May**, the evacuation began. A motley flotilla of tiny vessels (consisting of everything from fishing boats, to merchant boats, to private yachts) was sent across the channel to collect these 338,000 troops, and bring them to England. They called it **Operation Dynamo**.¹

Now, for the next ten days, strange things happened. For one thing, Hitler pulled his own panzer tanks back on **24 May**, even though they could have slaughtered the Allies. (To this day, no one is certain as to why Hitler did this.)² However, there was another favourable factor for the Allies: **the weather was very abnormal**. The Allies had opened the dikes to slow down the German advance; and as they were doing this, a strong wind blew in from the sea, and greatly aided this move. Yet, this strong wind did not *continue* to blow. If it had, many of the tiny boats would have been wrecked. Throughout the flotilla operation, the winds were generally light; but they seemed to blow "as needed, where needed, and when needed to facilitate the retreat."³ Usually at that time of year, the channel is very "rough and stormy"; but throughout those ten days, it was "still as a pond."⁴ Not only that, but fog rolled in at very "critical moments, covering the rescue of the troops."⁵ Winston Churchill later described it as a "miracle": and he was right!⁶ Had God not silently intervened, it is very possible that the Nazis would have prevailed in Europe and beyond; and countless millions more lives would have been lost. As for God's covenant people, the Jews, it is anyone's guess as to how many millions more would have died in the gas chambers.

Time and again, God has preserved the Jewish people from annihilation; but over the next few months, we will be examining one of the most amazing deliverances of the Jewish people in history, as recorded in the book of **Esther**. Just as Hitler was insanely bent on wiping out the Jews, so a Persian man named **Haman** was once insanely bent on wiping out the Jews. The time was about **509 B.C.**; and the place was

in the ancient Persian empire. About 25 years earlier, in **535 B.C.**, about **42,000 Jews** had returned to their land from their long captivity in Babylon; and the Temple had very recently been rebuilt and rededicated in Jerusalem. Yet, most of the Jews had *not* returned to the land of Israel. Jewish people were still scattered everywhere from Egypt to India. Some of them had unavoidable reasons for not going back to the land; but others had very worldly reasons for not going back. Nevertheless, they were still His covenant people; and God had promised that the seed of Abraham would never be wiped out. Just as God gently shifted the winds over the English Channel at just the right times to ensure that the Allies would be preserved, and the Nazis would eventually be defeated, and the Jews would be saved from annihilation, so God, over a period of about six years, silently shifted the “winds of Providence” in such a way as to save His people from the wrath of a madman named Haman. It is my prayer that through this series (which I am calling “For Such a Time as This”) you will see the power and Providence of God—not only in the affairs of Israel, but in *your* life. The title of this message is ***The Winds of Providence***.

Read Esther 1:1-22.

I. The vanity of Ahasuerus (vv. 1-8)

If you had never heard the story of Esther before, and you were reading this opening chapter of **Esther** for the first time, you might wonder, “Where is God in this story?” God’s name isn’t mentioned; nor is anything pertaining to God mentioned. All we see is a vain, raucous, boozy, pagan feast. We see a drunken Persian king named Ahasuerus acting irrationally. We see senseless expenditure and decadence, in a feast that lasted six whole months—plus another week! We are told all about the white, green, and blue hangings; about the cords of fine linen and purple; about the silver rings, and beds of gold and silver; and about the pavement of red, blue, white, and black marble. (By the way, archaeologists have found that these were the *exact* colours of the marble in the palace that King Darius built in Shushan!)⁷ We are told about the gold cups, which were unique in design; and we are told about the massive amount of wine that was drunk. Nothing even remotely godly is mentioned at all. Yet, the Holy Spirit of God moved the author of this book to start off this history by telling us all about the minute details of this ostentatious feast, and about the vanity of this pagan king named Ahasuerus.

Now, if God moved the author of this book to tell us so much about Ahasuerus, I believe it would be helpful to find out a bit more about him. Who was Ahasuerus? Can we pinpoint, from historical records, who he was? I believe we can. The name “Ahasuerus” itself doesn’t tell us much, since “Ahasuerus” was a title that was held by many Persian kings; however, history definitely seems to point to **Darius Hystaspis the Great** as the Ahasuerus in **Esther**.

Now, most Bible scholars don’t agree with this. Most historians believe that the Ahasuerus of Esther was Darius’ son, **Xerxes I**, who came to the throne of Persia in 486 B.C. They assume that Xerxes held this feast in order to celebrate the great victory that he *thought* he was going to have in his upcoming military campaign against Greece (a campaign which actually ended

in disaster). According to ancient records, Xerxes sent **10,000 troops** to attack the Greeks at Thermopylae; but they were slaughtered. He then sent out **20,000 troops** the next day; but they were slaughtered, too. Xerxes then ordered the survivors to be severely whipped, to motivate them for the battle the next day; and this time, he sent out **50,000 troops**. However, they, too, were soundly defeated by the Greeks.⁸ Still not daunted, Xerxes marched his troops up to the **Hellespont Strait**, which separates Asia from Europe; and he commanded his men to build a pontoon bridge across the strait. However, just after it was built, a storm dashed it to pieces. Enraged, Xerxes ordered all the men who built the bridge to be beheaded! He then commanded his men to wade out into the water, and to give the water 300 lashes of the whip, and to throw a pair of fetters into the water to “bind” it, as punishment to the sea for the great wrong it had done to him.⁹ (*That taught the naughty sea a lesson!*) Obviously, Xerxes had an insane temper. In an ancient inscription, Xerxes is reported to have said, “I am *not* hot-tempered! I hold my will firmly under control! I rule myself!”¹⁰

Now, this isn’t the only time when Xerxes did these kinds of things. He did dumb things like this all the time! That is why many people believe that the Ahasuerus in the book of **Esther** is Xerxes. Here in **Esther**, we are told that Ahasuerus, in a fit of rage, did something very foolish and irrational (just as Xerxes often did); therefore, many people assume that Ahasuerus and Xerxes were the same guy. However, Xerxes wasn’t the only Persian king who had an anger problem bordering on madness: so this doesn’t really prove anything. I believe that Ahasuerus is *not* Xerxes, but rather Xerxes’ *father*, Darius Hastaspis—and for several reasons.

For one thing, by the time Darius died in 486 B.C., and his son Xerxes succeeded him as king, things weren’t looking rosy for the Persian Empire, as they had looked *earlier* in Darius’s reign. Toward *the end* of his life, in 490 B.C., Darius suffered a serious defeat to the Greeks at Thermopylae; and for the last four years of his life, his son Xerxes helped him to regroup for the *next* campaign against Greece. When Darius finally died, and Xerxes came to the throne, it was no time to be throwing an insanely expensive six-month party. Even *he* realised that it was time to *conserve* Persia’s resources for the next war! On the other hand, it would make *perfect* sense for *Darius* to throw a lavish feast in the second year of his reign (in 520 B.C.). You see, Darius had just succeeded in crushing 19 revolts in one year; and he was now reorganizing his kingdom. *This* would have been the time to throw a feast for the new governors that he had appointed over his newly-acquired provinces. Persia wasn’t at a *weak* point in 520 B.C.; they were nearly at the *peak* of their power: and it was time to party.¹¹

Another reason I believe that Ahasuerus was Darius Hastaspis is that the Bible specifically says that he reigned over **127 provinces**. The Bible says that there were 120 provinces at the time when Daniel was cast into the lion’s den (in **537 B.C.**); but extrabiblical records tell us that Darius *increased* that number to 127—just as the book of **Esther** says. During Darius’s reign, India was conquered (in **506 B.C.**)—just as the book of **Esther** says. Also, we are told,

in **Esther 10:1**, that a “*tribute*” was laid “*upon the isles of the sea*” during Darius’ reign. We know that this happened in **496 B.C.**, when Darius conquered Samos, Chios, Lesbos, and the other islands of the Aegean Sea. We know, from history, that Darius is the king who moved the capital city of Persia to Shushan—just as the book of **Esther** says. Ancient records tell us that Darius is the one who established the tradition of having seven chamberlains to be his close advisors—just as the book of **Esther** says.¹² All these things point to Darius as the “Ahasuerus” in Scripture. But the most important evidence of all is in **Esther 2:6**.

Read 2 Kings 24:11-16 and Esther 2:5-7.

In **Esther 2**, we are told that Esther’s cousin, Mordecai, was taken away to Babylon at the time when *King Jeconiah of Judah* was taken away. And when was that? In **597 B.C.!** That was a *really* long time before Xerxes became king of Persia! Even if Mordecai were an infant in 597 B.C., he would have been *at least* 123 years old by the close of the book of Esther—if this king were Xerxes.¹³ As for Esther, she certainly wouldn’t have been young and beautiful anymore, no matter how huge of an age gap there was between her and Mordecai! Clearly, Ahasuerus was *not* Xerxes, but **Darius the Great**. (And he truly thought he *was* great!) However, the “great” Ahasuerus had a huge character flaw; and that flaw was **anger!**

Now, let’s park on this thought. Folks, anger is a destructive thing. Anger is nothing but wounded pride; and it does *not* make you strong: it makes you weak and vulnerable.

Proverbs 16:32 says, “*He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.*” On the other hand, **Proverbs 25:28** says that “*He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.*” Think about that analogy. In Bible times, a city *had* to have walls: otherwise, the inhabitants were extremely vulnerable to attack. Well, so it is with an angry person. Angry people have no guard over their spirit; thus, they are extremely vulnerable to the consequences of their own anger. Their angry outbursts bring consequences down on their heads, such as loss of employment, or loss of their own family. Anger even has consequences physically. Cardiologist Dave Montgomery, of Piedmont Hospital, says, “If you have a destructive reaction to anger, you are more likely to have heart attacks.”¹⁴ In **Proverbs 27:3**, Solomon says that wrath is heavier than a stone, or than sand. Anger is like a heavy weight on your chest. It is always there, weighing on you, and burdening you (*and* your loved ones). **Proverbs 19:19** says that anger causes your loved ones to have to step in and “rescue” you from the consequences of your wrath—again, and again, and again. Solomon says, “*A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again.*”

Now, I wish I could say that anger is something that only lost people have a problem with: but it is not. Many believers have this problem, too. Why? Because we Christians still have a sin

nature; and as long as you are not yielding yourself to God, and walking in the Spirit, anger can easily control you! That is why Paul had to exhort Christians to ***“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.”*** Christian, if you have a problem with anger, don’t be like Xerxes, who said, ““I am *not* hot-tempered! I hold my will firmly under control! I rule myself!” You can no more rule your temper than you can rule a wild rhinoceros, or tame a crocodile. Your anger can’t be *tamed*; instead, it must be *put to death*, by the power of the Holy Spirit. That is what the Christian life is all about—yielding yourself to God, and carrying the cross of death to self. Jesus said, ***“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”*** You may try to conquer your temper by your own will-power; and you may seem to succeed for a while. You may train yourself to “bite your tongue,” and to “stay cool”—*outwardly*. You may preoccupy yourself with other things, so that you aren’t constantly consumed with anger. You may even push your angry thoughts into a back corner of your mind. However, you *cannot* take away the root of bitterness, self-righteousness, and pride deep in your heart, from which your anger springs!

This past week, as I was talking with my family, I told them about a failed experiment that I tried when I was twelve years old. I had recently gotten a Lego set for Christmas; and this Lego set had a little motor in it, which could turn gears. Well, I used this motor to power a little cable car, which could move along on a string. (At least, I *thought* it could!) I did a very short-range test at home, and it seemed to work; and I assumed it would work at school, too. I asked my teacher if I could do a demonstration of it for “show and tell” time; and she let me do it. I set up a string across the classroom; but when it came time to show it off to my class, it wouldn’t move. I tried to push it along; but when I pushed it, it would go for only a couple inches, then stop. I *thought* my little motor had the power to move the cable car: but the weight of the motor itself was weighing the cable car down. So it is with anger. You may *try* to conquer your anger; but your self-righteousness and pride are weighing you down. You no more have the power to conquer your anger than my Lego motor had the power to move the cable car. Only *Christ* can truly take away your anger! When you remember that *Jesus* forgave *you*, even though you are totally undeserving, how can you hold bitterness in your heart toward someone else? The remembrance of what Jesus had done for you *humbles* you, and compels you to go to *Him* to receive the power that you need to love and forgive.

Anger destroys families and relationships; and as we will see, it destroyed Ahasuerus’ relationship with his wife Vashti. However, anger wasn’t Ahasuerus’ only problem. His anger was fueled by another of his big weaknesses: and that weakness was **alcohol**.

II. The vileness of alcohol (vv. 9-11)

(Read Esther 1:7-11 again.) The ancient Greek historian Herodotus, who lived during the days of the Persian Empire, once recorded that “the Persians...not only loved excessive drinking, but would weigh important matters of state only if they were drunk.”¹⁵ It seems incredible that anyone would think that he is stronger or wiser when he is “under the influence”; but then, alcohol *is* deceitful—just as the Bible warns us!

Read Proverbs 20:1 and 23:29-35.

These verses tell us, in no uncertain terms, what God thinks of alcoholic drink. You’ll notice that God has absolutely nothing good to say about it—only harsh condemnation! He condemns alcohol as a cause of fighting and wounds; as a looser of inhibitions, and as a cause of immorality. Alcohol loosens the tongue, and leads to perverseness. Will God judge people for the words they spoke when they were inebriated, and didn’t know what they were saying? Yes, He will. They knew what they were doing when they took that first swig!

Now, allow me to pause for a moment, and explain a few important Hebrew words. First of all, there is the word **yayin**, which is usually translated as “wine.” *Yayin* can refer either to **fresh grape juice**, or to **intoxicating wine**. How do we *know* which is meant? By context! If it be condemned, it is alcoholic wine. If it be *not* condemned, it is fresh wine (grape juice).

Now, there is another Hebrew word for “wine”—the word **tirosh**. (This word is often translated as “new wine.”) The word *tirosh* always refers to fresh, unfermented wine—what we would call “grape juice.” This is the word that is used in many passages that speak *positively* about “wine.” For example, **Proverbs 3:9-10** says, ***“Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine [or “grape juice”].”***

So, we’ve seen the difference between *yayin* and *tirosh*; and we’ve seen that *yayin* can mean either “grape juice” or “alcohol.” However, you don’t need to know Hebrew to know which is which. You simply need to look at the context. When God speaks positively about wine, it is *grape juice*. When He speaks negatively about it, it is intoxicating *alcohol*.

By the way, today’s “wine” is extremely different from the kind of “wine” that existed before the 1200’s. In the 1200’s in Europe, it was discovered how to distil already fermented wine into a hard, very intoxicating drink. With this discovery, it became possible to produce the alcoholic beverages of today, which are anywhere from **30% to 75% alcohol** in the hardest liquors. Now, prior to the 1200’s, the hardest alcoholic wine that could be produced was only

6% alcohol. That is weak by modern standards; yet, even this was too strong for God's people. Ancient Jewish writings tell us that alcoholic wine was to be mixed with three parts water, because it was too strong. This made the mixture ½ - **1% alcohol!** But modern standards, that is very weak. **Yet, according to God's Word, even this was too strong!** Remember in **Proverbs 23**, where Solomon referred to the wine as "**mixed wine**"? He was talking about the mixing of water with fermented wine, to weaken it. That is why people had to "**tarry long at the wine**" in order to get drunk. Their alcohol was weak by modern standards. Yet, even this weak alcoholic mixture was forbidden by God. Now, if God condemned *their* weak wine, how much more does He condemn the poison that modern beer and winemakers produce? What must God think when He looks down on some of His *own* people, and sees them drinking the devil's drink, just as the ungodly do?

Alcohol is what the Bible calls an "***unclean thing.***" God constantly commanded the children of Israel to "***touch not the unclean thing.***" Where does the Bible call wine an "***unclean thing***"? Well, let's take a look in **Leviticus**.

Read Leviticus 10:8-11.

Brethren, stop and think about what God is saying here. God commanded the priests not to drink "wine" (this is that word **yayin**); but he also commanded them not to drink "***strong drink.***" This is another Hebrew word: **shekar**. **Shekar** usually refers to intensely strong alcohol. It is the word that was used in **Proverbs 20:1** when Solomon said, "***strong drink is raging.***" Now, that having been said, even the word **shekar** must be determined by the context. In a few Scriptures, **shekar** can refer to a strong *concentrate* of grape juice, which people would carry in animal skins, and mix with water; and it was not alcoholic. However, most of the time, **shekar** refers to **alcohol**, which was mixed with water to dilute it.

Now, let's go back to that last Scripture. **(Read Leviticus 10:8-11 again.)** Some Christians would read this passage and say, "Well, yes, the Scripture does say that the priests were not to drink strong drink when they were serving in the *Temple*. But it didn't say they couldn't drink it in their *homes*." Really? My friends, when a child of God thinks this way, it is a sure sign that something is very wrong spiritually. Since when do God's people look for "loopholes"—for the lowest possible requirement? Since when do we try to cosy up to the world as closely as possible, and find a way to justify their sinful pleasures? God was *not* throwing us a hint that it was "O.K." for the priests to drink strong drink when they were "off duty" from the Temple; He was simply putting an extra-serious requirement on those who were God's ministers, doing His work. The penalty for doing God's sacred work while imbibing something that could pervert their judgment was nothing less than death. Now, to put it in perspective, consider some of God's requirements for a bishop (a pastor) today.

Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

In this passage, we are told that a pastor is to be the “*husband of one wife*” (not polygamous or divorced); he is not to be a “*striker*” (not physically violent); and he is *not* to be “*given to wine*.” Now, since these are the requirements for a *pastor*, should we assume that it is O.K. for a Christian who is *not* a pastor to be polygamous, or to be violent, or to drink wine? Of course not! Paul is simply saying that these things absolutely cannot be tolerated in a pastor. Yet, these moral and ethical expectations are the same for *all* Christians! The Bible says that we are *all* kings and priests before God.

Read 1 Peter 2:5-11.

Folks, think about the implications of what we’ve just read. If all believers are “priests” before God, it means that God holds all believers to a very high standard. Consider this, too: not only are we *priests* before God: we are also *Temples*. Just as the Temple of was the earthly dwelling place of God in the Old Testament, so every believer is the “Temple” of God today! Paul says that your “*body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own.*” If God forbade the priests in the Old Testament to have intoxicating drinks in their system while they were ministering in His Temple, do we really think that He would permit His priests *today* to drink intoxicating drink while they are ministering to Him, as *priests*, in the Temple of their bodies? Not on your life! Since we are in the Temple of our bodies all the time, it means that we are “on duty” 24-7. Christian, don’t compromise your judgment for even one second. You are a holy priest; your body is God’s Temple; and you are to use every ounce of your intellect to serve the Lord!

III. The seeming vacancy of God (vv. 1-22)

At the beginning of this message, I pointed out that the name of God is not mentioned in this chapter. However, **chapter 1** isn’t the only place where God’s name isn’t mentioned. God’s name is not mentioned in the *entire book of Esther*. That is why some have questioned whether the book of **Esther** is Scripture. **Martin Luther** (who I doubt was a saved man) said that he considered himself an “enemy” to the book of Esther, and that he wished that it hadn’t “come to us at all,” because of its “many heathen unnaturalities.”¹⁶ (Actually, I suspect that Luther hated the book of **Esther** because he *hated Jews*; but I’ll save this for a later message!)

Now, if the “heathen unnaturalities” in the book of Esther bother you, guess what? The Bible is *full* of stories of “heathen unnaturalities”! The Bible is full of “messy” stories. Why? Because we live in a sinful, fallen world! Yes, this *was* a messy situation, because some of the main people in this account were sinners who did not know the true God of Israel. First, a king throws an insanely expensive, boozy feast. Then he demands that his wife come out to entertain his drunken guests—which was a flagrant violation of his duty to protect his wife. His wife then understandably chose to protect her own modesty, and disobeyed him (although she probably didn’t have a sweet spirit as she did so). The king then *divorced* her for it. All these things were against the law of God, and against God’s holy character. Surely *God* didn’t *desire* for these wicked, selfish things to happen, did He? No—no more than He willed for Adam to eat the forbidden fruit, and bring sin into our world. But does this mean that God couldn’t *use* these evil deeds to accomplish a divine purpose? Absolutely not! God *did* use Ahasuerus’ actions for His purpose. God didn’t *make* Ahasuerus do any of these selfish things; yet, He used him, anyway! The Bible says, “***And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.***” As we will see, as we study this book, there was a man in Shushan named Mordecai, and his cousin Esther, who loved God; and because they loved and obeyed God, God used them as His vessels, to turn a very evil situation around for good.

Conclusion: As we close this morning, I would ask: “Have *you* answered God’s call to salvation?” God calls *everyone* to be saved from sin; but only those who *answer* that call, and personally repent and believe on Christ, *are* actually saved. God can use *anyone* to accomplish His purpose (just as He used Ahasuerus); but that doesn’t mean that everyone is a child of God. You must personally *repent* of your sin and *believe on Christ* to be saved. If you aren’t sure that you’re saved, I urge you to repent and believe on Christ today! If you *are* saved, maybe God is convicting you of things that need to be rooted out of your life—such as bitterness and anger, or even alcohol consumption. If so, humble yourself, and ask the Lord to remove these things from your life, so that He can use you as a vessel unto honour!

¹ “Dunkirk Evacuation,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunkirk_evacuation

² *Ibid.*

³ Robert J. Morgan, *Preacher’s Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2007), p. 649.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ “Dunkirk Evacuation,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunkirk_evacuation

⁷ Bill Cooper, *The Authenticity of the Book of Esther* (United Kingdom: Creation Science Movement, 2016), p. 42.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹¹ Dr. Floyd Nolan Jones, *The Chronology of the Old Testament* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, pp. 199-204.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 203.

¹⁴ Katherine Ham, “How Anger Can Hurt Your Heart,” <https://www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management/features/how-anger-hurts-your-heart>

¹⁵ Cooper, *The Authenticity of the Book of Esther*, p. 19.

¹⁶ Mike Cospers, “The Scandal of Esther,” <https://gcdiscipleship.com/pre2019-articles/2018/05/17/a-roadmap-for-faith-among-the-faithless>