

ESTHER: THE DRAMA OF REDEMPTION

A few notes on the text of chapter one

Historically, the book of Esther has received a very mixed reception. Both Jew and Christian at times have considered it unworthy of entry into the biblical canon. Of the many difficulties noted the fact that the word God is not mentioned in the entirety of the book is problematic for some. In my mind, Esther could be read like the old poem “Footprints” where the individual sees two sets of footprints in various flashing scenes and it troublesome times sees only one set. In his query to God about the single set of prints God says that it was during those troublesome times that he carried him. So in many ways Esther reads this way. Even though the name of God is not mentioned, anyone with a good forensic imagination can see the fingerprints of God in every stage of this story.

The reading of this book brings to mind all the intrigue and passion found in the 1001 Arabian Nights. There is mystery, interesting plot narratives and multiple climactic materials. Most importantly though, there is a good story—a believable, historical depiction—of actual events. Surprisingly with so much noise emerging from Iran presently, few consider that the country under the dominion of mullahs is also the place where the events of Esther occurred. And this book allows us the opportunity to peer through the window of language and see events as they transpired. Our hearts race as we gloss over the times of fear and we look forward to the next chapter with excitement. That is precisely what a good book should do: It allows the voices within its pages to cross over and enter into your heart. It allows the reader to access fact and fiction and enjoy scenery as he or she re-imagines himself inside the story of the text.

This is no less true here where we have a country whose customs, culture, language and religion has changed dramatically. The Persia (Iran) of today is unlike anything that Esther knew of. So as we read the text backwards in time we will face many dilemmas, but none that cannot be overcome with a careful scan of the Hebrew and English texts. So with these insights in mind, let us now explore some nuggets in chapter one which will help us to see the “*Drama in Shushan Palace*”.

The beginning of the chapter relates the extent of King Ahasuerus’ reign (v.1). There are 127 provinces. These were more than small rural places. The Hebrew, Arabic and specifically used word: “*medina*” is used of larger concentrations of people. With a kingdom so great, his correspondence from far and wide would have been excessive. Hearing of matters small and great can lead to apathy and a desire to recline and

relax in ways that offer danger more opportunities than it needs to succeed.

In v. 2 we must take note of the power of a throne. As far back as Genesis 41:40 Pharaoh speaks well of Joseph and informs him that he (Joseph) is going to rule as his number two and that only in the throne would he be junior to Pharaoh. The thing that made Joseph's reign exceptional was his character. After he was sold as a slave by his brethren we find him decades later yet able to love and forgive. He even went as far as to hug their necks and kiss them when they came to Egypt for grain.

To each of us today this should be a lesson. The exercise of might and power requires character and humility. In Revelation 1 we discover that Jesus is the King of Kings. The implication is simple. We who are seated in heavenly places (Eph. 1) should not only take note of where we reside but also learn to love and forgive as we deploy these powers in this world which John says lies in wickedness. For wherever you find one who cannot forgive you find drama: the drama of bitterness that evokes hostility and anger—all of which will soon manifest in this chapter when Vashti refuses to come.

By v. 3 the King desires to put on a feast. First of all, the English word "feast" is *Mishne* in Hebrew. We have a parallel in old Syriac where the text presents it as *mishtuutha*. Both words are capsules that hold together one central thought, that of consumption of liquid. This feast was a drinking party or festival. Here the King makes it a point to display his riches (v.4) in order to parade his power. Such a display of pride is beneath the dignity of one who occupies the throne as God does, but it is well within reason for a local earthly potentate.

But we have seen displays of pride before. Adonijah in I Kings 1:4-5 proved the futility of his ways as he usurped David's power only to lose shortly thereafter. And Belshazzar defiled the holy vessels of the temple and took the cups and filled them with wine and began to drink with his lords, wives and concubines until he saw a man's hand writing a strange language on the wall. Up till that time Daniel had not been invited, but soon an invitation was extended for him to come and interpret the matter. This illustrates what is played out around the world daily. You may not be asked to appear at many popular raucous styled functions, but when trouble arises they will look for the believer who they know understands how to pray. Excessive pride adds drama to any gathering. It pushes self forward and causes pain to all who will not bow to the pressure.

The chapter (v. 5-8) continues with documentation on all the types of materials used for the beautifying of the party. More than likely name

brand materials and such. These all amount to very little. The poor have little regard for these matters and the wealthy usually feel that they could do better but my point is simple: human motive and intent need to be regulated by the Cross of Jesus. One of the reasons that I keep our pulpit bible open to Isaiah 53--for any of you who have been in the sanctuary during after-hours—is because that chapter speaks to me of the kind of Savior Jesus was (despised, rejected et cetera), the kind of sheep I am (one will go astray) and the accomplishments of His death, bearing our sins, sorrows and infirmities. If I need this as a minister how much more a king whose life is governed by the whims of this world?

In v. 9-11 queen Vashti is said to be holding a private function for the women. It is unlikely that they were ministering to each other the Word of God. Women, like men, are given to much small talk at political parties. I remember years ago while working for the US State department, there were times where the conversations between ladies was so far out of my world that I would have rather slept. It was not that it could not be comprehended it was just that it was wholly irrelevant to my life. Stories of trickery and lies were the norm. How to become the next one set for promotion was a game that required a deft hand much scheming.

Later as the men were well ‘drunk with wine’ a thought came forth: Let us bring in Vashti. Let us display her beauty for all to see. The Hebrew says she was *tovat mar’eh-good for sight or viewing*. She was an exquisite specimen of a woman. Her beauty was ravishing. There are a number of ways to describe an attractive lady but this phraseology captures a radiance that cannot be hid. It seems that ‘prettiness’ is more comforting to the eye than ‘plainness’. The average TV commercial proves this again and again. The populace craves various kinds of eye candy and the producers are interested in pleasing the masses. Here we have a King who is willing to make a spectacle out of his own wife (in the palace, her own home) for some cultured elitists that little regard for the status of women.

As the text helps us to see, too much wine will lead you to do foolish things, and there is always drama when alcohol is involved. Today America is littered with broken homes, orphaned children and wrecked lives. One of the sorrowful elements of pastoral ministry is the handling of situations where alcoholic beverages have destroyed marital bliss and cursed the children to be indifferent to life. I’m weary of parents you purchase liquors for high school graduation parties and wonder why their ‘little darlings’ end up shipwrecked on the substance abuse island. Ahasuerus will lose his wife because of a few gallons of wine and in chapter 2:1 will remember again what he lost--the days of Vashti.

The second half of the chapter is one statement after another statement of idiocy. He sends seven men for Vashti and she refuses to come. I have often wondered why so many men were needed. Maybe he had some idea that her temperament would not allow her to yield to his request. Certainly though, the seven men failed in their vain attempt to deliver her to the party of drunken men—who knows what all could have ensued?

In v. 12-22 we observe as supposed gentlemen of the kingdom give unsound advice to the king concerning his wife. Never considering the dignity of the Queen but only their slighted and potentially bruised egos, they whispered to the king of the possible evils that would surely happen from Vashti's disobedience. Oh King, what if the women in the provinces hear of what the queen did? All men will be treated as the scum of the earth. Now we cannot have that can we sir? Fear always leads to bad counsel and once again, the result will be more drama.

Only this time the drama affects Vashti in an otherwise unwholesome fashion. She is banished! Just like that, a life pushed away, but why? It was all because some foolish men were allowed to speak. Psalm 1:1 says that a man is blessed by not listening to bad counsel. Whether you realize it or not, you empower people when you continue to listen to their words. Choose carefully friend, this matter will not go away so soon. If you refuse to hear God's voice but persist in listening to man's wisdom trouble will not only follow you it will meet and greet you at every turn.

So as you can read in the text, there was drama in Shushan palace: (1) Drama arising from the misuse of the throne—unforgiveness. (2) There was drama from excessive pride—parading power. (3) Also there was drama involving too much wine. (4) Finally the drama from all the bad counsel. Vashti was shamed throughout the kingdom for a few bottles of cheap wine.

Tell me sir or madam, who did you discard because of your intoxication with this world. Have you turned your back on Jesus? Have you walked away from God, the King, who alone should be the center of your universe? If so, why not make your way back to God through repentance? This one act could repair your family, your church but most certainly, your broken and sinful heart.

Esther takes the stage
A few notes on chapter two

Previously we learned of the ‘drama’ in the palace of Shushan. In many ways the whole of the book looks like a stage play with a variety of acts and scenes, with each character playing their part magnificently. There is the glory of the kingdom, the grandeur of the royal feast, the pride of a king along with his wayward counselors, and of course, the woman who dared refuse the king, Vashti. Now we are confronted with the after effects of one misguided decree and it is sorely revealed by the trite little phrase “after these things”. Subsequent to his foolish decisions, King Ahasuerus must face his missteps head on and it all begins with a memory: “*he remembered Vashti and what she had done.*”

How often have our personal decrees glared at us from afar, only to move in closer as we meditate on them? The king is remembering someone he banished and possibly a small amount of regret is present. If not so, then why the need to search for another wife upon the heels of Vashti’s banishment? We often become keenly aware of our own stupidity with the power of hindsight. There was a butler who was greatly helped by Joseph in prison who promised to mention Joseph to the Pharaoh upon his exit. But when the butler was restored to his former estate in the palace he had forgotten about the dreamer in Jail he had met briefly. Then when the Pharaoh dreamed a dream he could not understand the Butler’s memory served notice on him of an honorable man, Joseph, still languishing away in prison. The butler regretted his forgetfulness.

It is amazing how hindsight works when spurred on by the sorrow of regret. Although regrets can be handled quickly, impaired relationships are harder to deal with. The king’s own decree forbid him from altering his written word. So he found himself in the position of dwelling with a memory. Pride is at times halting. And as you can see here in the text we often live like this: maybe some words have been spoken and we really desire reconciliation but our pride will not allow us to admit wrongdoing or even our offense. The drama of Esther’s book is perpetuated by one thing, pride!

If our calculations are right Mordchai may have been well over 100 years of age as these events unfolded. Scholars estimate that Jeconiah was taken in 599BC, that Ahasuerus-Xerxes rose to power in 486BC. This would certainly be a believable scenario but no less true would be this point I feel I need to mention. First of all, even in old age you can play a role in God’s plans. Do you not remember Noah, Abram and Moses, all of whom began their work in their winter season of life? You will never

know the role your seed might play in someone else's future. Mordechai had no idea that Esther would figure so prominently in the history of Israel. Most parents today have little prophetic insight into their child's future. Many rarely possess the genius to prepare them for it as Abram did his 'seed'.

In many ways Esther's promotion resembles that of Joseph's rise in Egypt. He and she both were placed in the custody of superintendents, who later discovered their uniqueness as God gave them grace and favor in the eyes of their superiors. This blessing was later cashed in for greater glory. Esther was indeed a special lady. No less so because of the strength of her character. This scene in history may be the first recorded Miss Universe pageant on record. I'm not sure but it does have a few of the hallmarks of it: beauty, purity and purifications. The old saying that beauty is only skin deep was not applicable to a lady like Esther. She was a graduate of Mordechai's charm school.

An interesting text is verse 11. The Hebrew for the English word 'walking' immediately called to my mind Genesis 3:8 where God was 'walking' through the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day. Then I was touched by the latter portion of the verse when it says in the AV1611 that he wanted to see or basically check up on her. In the Hebrew it says that he wanted to know her "peace". Peace in Hebrew is used as a greeting, as a way for inquiring how one is and several other ideas are connected to it. However, Mordechai's concern for her (like God's care for Adam and Eve) did not change with geography.

Mordechai cared about her when she dwelt in his house and now too as she is in the palace, and his daily strolls in the vicinity are proof of it. Mothers and fathers know this feeling well. The child who begins to walk at home, later graduating in school, then going on to the workforce is no less cared for as an adult than when cared for as a baby. As a proof of this, consider that every holiday parents want to see their kids. Some want to see them more than that, and that concern and love is what causes them to pass by, walk by or go and visit so often. This really is a story of love. It seems to me that Mordechai's role in this book is just as important as that of the Queen. She was in the palace yet he sat in the king's gate.

Verses 15-20 ignore some of the intricate details that we would like to know of the culture and other things but we do learn that everything Esther needed was given to her. She never required more than what was appointed her. She lived meekly and submitted to her cousin/father Mordechai while in the palace. His parental guidance constrained her even in his absence, which says much of how she was reared.

It is obvious that Mordechai did not forsake the God of Israel though he was brought up in the strange land of Persia. Okay, you might ask, how do I know this or what leads me to this assumption? Well, the answer is simple. In chapter 4:14 as he instructs Esther in the game of politics he says to her that if you decide to muzzle yourself, deliverance and salvation which come for the Jews from some other quarter. How would he know of anything called “deliverance”? It is because he understands the history of his people. The stories of old were passed down to him too. Maybe he had some pieces of scrolls that contained portions of the Law, who knows? At the least, he knew of God’s power to save.

Now most of us have more bibles on our shelves than the average citizen of the States and we still struggle with trusting God to deliver us. Why not fill your mind with the righteous stories and testimonies of grace inscribed in verse after verse and allow your faith to rise in difficult times, like Mordechai’s did? I can assure you, even though the pundits and teachers of doom and gloom predict an unsavory future for Christians in America, God is going to protect his people. After all, we do have a better covenant than the Israelites had with God. If you do not believe me then read the book of Hebrews written by Paul, the Apostle.

All this drama is so quickly being acted out. Some characters are leaving and others are entering the stage from the other side. Vashti is banished and vanishes from our sight and Esther emerges to take her seat. This too is a lesson. Everyone is replaceable. The moment you begin to believe that you are so essential to the plan that nothing can remove you, you have fallen prey to pride. The Apostle James says that our lives are like a vapor, we are here today and gone tomorrow. The home you live in—unless you built it—was occupied before you arrived and will be occupied after you are deceased. So think about it! What is there of eternal value in the scenes being acted out in your day to day affairs?

The chapter concludes with a brief story relating how Mordechai saved the king from an assassination attempt. Two offended parties looked for an opportunity to murder the king. They were discovered because they were talking about it to the wrong persons. Offended people typically stew over a thing and then later look for others into whose ears they can pour their filth. Quite naturally when people talk too much and too often the people who should not hear of it do hear of it and this was the case this time also. Mordechai, being an honorable man, told Esther who informed the King and this little deed of kindness was recorded in the King’s annals of worthy deeds. In a later chapter this will be of significance when the king is up and fighting a battle with insomnia.

Some might say that Mordechai was a snitch or a tattletale. I do not see it this way. The best way to cut the enemy off is to have some eyes and ears that will relate pertinent information at the right time. Secret service work is not easy and the rewards are not immediate, but a life spared is well worth the toil and trials of releasing the data for public notice. How many parents could have avoided restless nights sitting by hospital beds if only a student would have notified a teacher that the child was going to be attacked after or during school? Our priorities are on the wrong track in these days. Some time ago, many unlearned rap artists were composing lyrics and videos which portrayed “snitching” as un-cool. How can a nation be so lunatic to think that not assisting the police, who incidentally are sworn in to protect and to serve, and helping out drug addicts and gang members is a fine thing to do?

Our nation is in trouble. It is not headed for trouble. It is in trouble right now. And the only answer for America is Jesus. We do not need a Haman in the White House, but if there is one there let’s expect an Esther to rise up and usurp any and all authority given to him. In these last days just prior to the return of the Lord, necessity has thrust itself upon us and we should push hard for help is on the way and his name is Jesus.

THE DANGERS OF PROMOTION

Notes on chapter three

Promotion is a natural result of a faithful service. Psalm 75:6 states that promotion comes from the Lord and not from any particular direction. What is overlooked is the fact that a promotion (in scripture) is always based upon personality and character. For Christians, Galatians 5:22 outlines the fruit of the Spirit necessary for a healthy life in Jesus, but without living your Christian life genuinely before men you will ultimately end up the mean spirited hypocrite that Haman portrayed.

After these things is always a noted phrase because it points to events which preceded it. Knowledge of what has already occurred is good for moving forward. This is the reason history is so exciting. You can see the future in the past, especially if the citizens of the present have little or no regard for past happenings.

As can be seen from verse one, Haman is promoted to the second seat, just behind the King’s throne. He is seated above the other princes in authority. No reason is given for the promotion but one would gather that he surely pleased the king in some way or another. The problem with the promotion is that you can arrive at a place or station in life by means of

your talent or skill but if you have no character then you cannot remain there. Your weakness will destroy you and those around you, which is what happened to Haman and also to his family with him. I find it amazing that when you contrast Haman and Jesus with one another some striking things emerge. First, Haman can't handle insubordination. This later leads him on a rampage against Mordechai and the whole Jewish nation. Jesus on the other hand has atheists and agnostics all through his kingdom and thinks nothing of showing tolerance to these fools who say in their heart there is no God (Ps. 14:1).

One should never forget that there is a certain amount of protocol involved with dealing with public officials. If nothing else, most would go out of their way to show respect to the office while despising the officer, but not Mordechai. The few years that I spent as a State Department Employee overseas was proof enough for me that conduct must be controlled around dignitaries. If the President was to extend his hand and you were to angrily thrust both your hands in your pocket instead of grasping his, chances are you would be in hot water. So imagine the consternation to Haman upon discovering that a lowly subject would not give him the respect he believed was due him.

Unfortunately, we Christians who are seated in heavenly places in Christ, like Haman, are oftentimes set off by so small an incident. Imagine the fights that incur in households across America all because they feel their honor has been impugned. No wonder death and destruction and genocide are in various places of the earth.

In verse three the question regards the transgressing of the King's commandment. This tells us that his word was revered as Law: so much so that Mordechai was interrogated on the basis of the written decree signed by the King. But if you would allow me to digress and ask a question somewhat unrelated to this, why do you, oh listener, transgress the Lord's commandment? I'm sure I have the answer. You believe that you are getting away with it. As long as it seems that no judgment is pending then you will continue in your recklessness.

So Mordechai refused to bow and it led to an attempted genocide, verse 4-6 fills all this in for us. Genocide is the wholesale destruction of a particular people group. Rwanda had the battle between Hutu and Tutsi. Russians stood by as Stalin murdered more than 30 million of his own people. Hitler killed too many Jews to number. American government officials left a trail of broken promises across this nation as they mistreated, mishandled and lied to various Native American Indian tribes. Now for the most part they subsist on handouts and reservation are populated by many drunkards. Think of the mass murders of millions

of Armenians in Turkey back during WWI. Even to this day the Turkish government haughtily denies anything of this nature ever occurred. We can never forget the inquisition and all the hundred of persons who were tortured and slaughtered because they saw the light on true redemption. The Roman hierarchy could not stand by and allow people to voluntarily depart from the so-called Only True Church on earth.

Now as we come to verses 8-13 we observe what appears to be a happenstance but I take to be providence. As the lots are cast, the date for the termination of the Jewish nation is set toward the end of the year. This little point should not be missed. God controls the affairs of man and may do as he pleases but he certainly made space for the whole situation to be turned around or stopped. People my point is simple: *God has a plan to reverse the forward progress which the devil has made in your life.* Just hang on in there. God works thru the natural process of men and it usually takes quite a bit of time but not always.

Can you imagine being somewhere in another part of the kingdom and seeing letters posted which cared your death notice? There was fear, even panic! I remember my dad telling me of the time when as a boy in the forties his sister was bring him up from Alabama to the north, to Cleveland, and they told him that they must pass through Mississippi by the route they were taking. Of course in those days colored folks were not suppose to (or even allowed to) travel by night. So they told him that while he was in the back of the vehicle to keep the blanket over him if they were pulled over. Sure enough they were stopped by some white people and they were questioned as to where they were from and going? My dad said that he peeked out from under the blanket to see a sign that said “Negro if you can read these words, you better run!” And the “N” word used what not the nice professional term I penned above.

It is quite easy to see how fearful the Jews would have been while this all transpired. People were fretting and scared. It wasn't a problem of Jewish persons lacking faith they were staring at a government document that authorized person who found a Jew, saw a Jew or knew where one was, to go and butcher them and take their spoil. Then in verses 14 and 15 the King and Haman sit down to drink a bit and the kingdom of Jewish populace worries themselves to tears, sackcloth and ashes. How could they do that? I'll never forget September 11 2001. I watched in horror as smoke ascended and buildings collapsed. It seemed to me like Lady Liberty (The Statue) had been violated. It was an infamous day. The I saw Al-Jazeera TV and they showed Obama and his cronies sitting in a semi-circle drinking tea, laughing and bragging about the events in New York. My God, people, what kind of world are we living in? Haman is still here after all this time.

THE PLOT THICKENS

Notes on chapter four

This chapter starts off with a strong note of sorrow. It seems the wailing cry of Mordechai has made its way around the city, down the corridors of the palace and into the chambers of Esther, his adopted daughter. All of us understand the reasons for his consternation and pain: a posted document describes how masses of Jews may be legally and justifiably murdered on a set date. Up to this point we have seen the virtuous and noble side of the man. Although he is in pain at present I do not feel that this is reason to look upon his sudden changes as a desperate act. Sackcloth and ashes are a historic feature of his people.

As far back as Job 16:15 we have an early record of the knowledge of sackcloth and ashes. Then in II Samuel, after Abner's death, folks are told by King David to adorn themselves in the same. People in scripture face death in different ways. Mordechai's impending death is not one of his own choice or design, it was announced to him and all. When Jesus knew that death was drawing near (Mat 16:21) he drew his disciples close and began to prepare them for his betrayal, sufferings and crucifixion. Paul (in II Tim. 4:6-8) also foresaw his departure from this earth but he recognized it as a time of reward and reunion with Christ. Even Peter knew that his time was short (II Pet 1:14). There have been numbers of times where the Lord made his people aware of their soon coming death.

A Pastor used to tell of how his mother passed on. She was up in years and often on Sundays the family—children and grandchildren—would arrive to her house after church for the lunch meal. While at the table she informed them that she would soon be going home to be with Jesus. Naturally, the kids thought that grandma was becoming a bit senile in her old age. And one day after the meal with all of the family gathered she told them again that she was about to go home. Young people were shuffling food and dishes back and forth from the dining room table to the kitchen, when grandma arose and said good bye and went out to the front porch. Still, no one paid much attention to what she had said. She sat down and began to rock in the rocking chair and hum and moan a bit and by the time they came to check on her the rocking chair was still in motion but she had gone home to be with the Lord. The last thing anyone heard her say was “children, Jesus is standing just out yonder beckoning me to come”.

Everyone approaches death differently. Obviously Mordechai has little chance of leaving planet earth as so described above. He does not appear to be departing on his own terms. As the scripture clearly reveals, he believed the King's document/word which said all Jews would die. And this kind of judgment more or less drove him to the change of garments. I wonder though, how many of us would change or alter our lifestyles if we really believed the King's word concerning us? Paul does say in *Romans 14:9-12* that we must all face God. Since there is but one step between us and death it would behoove us to behave correctly.

In verses 4-9 we are introduced to Hatach, the queen's faithful servant. He is called a chamberlain in the KJV but his role would have been similar to that of a deacon in the New Testament. However this is true only so far as it relates to his duties. He was there to assist and to make sure things ran smoothly for Esther. All of us have roles that to some might seem menial but each and every task assigned to you by God or in Church is a necessary office. Someone must clean the sanctuaries, do the landscaping, others must prepare music and/or sermons, another must do visitation or send out cards to the shut-in. Hatach was an example of a man who faithfully discharged his duties with spirit. Whether in the palace or in the streets he handled and cared for Esther's concerns as if they were his own. Queen Esther wanted to know why her father was so dismayed and troubled and sent her servant to inquire.

A few points I would like to mention are these:

1. As he was on the Queen's errand he never allowed anything to keep him from completing the goal—get to Mordechai and see why he is dressed in sackcloth and ashes while fasting?
2. Though Esther lived in the palace with the king she was unaware of the Haman's vile deceptions. This proves that just because you are in the general vicinity of evil there is no guarantee it will be revealed to you by God or others. In John 13:27-29, the disciples sat at the table with Judas and never knew that he had turned into a devil while daily in their presence.
3. Then Hatach carried the Jew's death notice from Mordechai to Esther and never detoured long the way. Simple truths like this are important when considering the immense importance of faithfulness in a local assembly.

So now the predicament for Esther becomes clear. Mordechai believes that Esther should do something. She should take an opportunity to go before the King on behalf of the Jewish people. And she is not quite on board yet. Knowing Persian law as she does she understands that it has been more than a month since she has been requested to appear before

the king and that if someone attempts to appear before him unannounced it could mean death. Russian roulette had not become a popular phrase as of her day but this is exactly what Mordechai was petitioning her to do: to go before the king with his prior consent. Whew! Even I would be a little nervous at the mere thought.

So now the weight of the whole race of Israel is on her shoulders. Whether she acts or does nothing she still would have made a decision. Most of us forget that if we choose to something or nothing we still have made a decision and whatever we choose affects all those around us. So what would you have done? In fact, what will you do now? Since you are burdened by the responsibilities of your family and so many are depending on you what will you do about the weight you now carry? You have to make a decision. Indecision is still a decision it is just a decision to be non-committal.

Mordechai's reply to Esther—thru the servant—was great. In verse 14 he basically tells her that she is embracing a false assumption if she thinks she will escape this coming genocide. Abraham's blood yet flows in her too. And although she is passing as Persian gentry now the truth will eventually come out. Mordechai continued by letting her know that if she refused to do anything that {God would ensure that} deliverance and salvation would arise from somewhere. This verse (14) in Hebrew uses wording that leads us back to the book of judges. Do you remember when Israel would end up in a huge amount a trouble and a judge would arise on their behalf? This is what we have here. You can't have deliverance without a deliverer. You can't have enlargement-salvation without a savior. The Hebrew tells us that this deliverance will "stand {up}". The implication is that the Jews need someone to stand up for them.

If you have ever dealt with a bully before you know that he or she feeds on the fears of the intimidated. The bullied wants someone to stand up for them and the bully can see in the eyes of his victim that he or she just wants to be left alone. Is this clear now? Haman was a bully in every sense of the word and he craved the power he received from other people's fears. The he ran into Mordechai, a man unafraid of him. I wonder if in verse one Mordechai was wailing bitterly because he imagined that his stubbornness has brought this judgment upon all his Jewish brethren? Who knows but in fact that is the cause!

I do find it refreshing that Mordechai still believes in the delivering power of Jehovah. Many immigrants, captives, slaves, refugees or whatever you want to call them forget their religion when trouble arises. Not so with Mordechai. The ancient stories of old still resound in his

spirit and he has proven that no matter what comes he will trust in the Lord. In turn, Esther chooses to walk by faith like Mordechai. It was unlawful for him to enter the King's gate clothed in sackcloth and ashes—but he did it anyway. If he could do that for something he considered important then she felt she could try her hand at approaching the king. What Esther had forgotten was that she had favor with the King. Maybe she did not know how much favor she had with the King in the first place but she was able to engage him and because of his love for her “the plot thickened”. She could now put into motion her plans to save all the Jewish persons residing in the Kingdom.

This all came down to guts! She sent a messenger to instruct the people to fast for three days and nights. She and her maidens would do the same. Then she threw herself upon the altar of God's sovereign will saying, “if I perish, I perish”. Most can't perform under duress of this nature but she did remarkably well. She entered the King's presence and later saved her people. With the threat of death looming about many would have avoided this confrontation. Those who would fail to act in faith are not representative of the kinds of people who have been used in God's service in past times though.

More than 120 years ago the length of missionary service in Africa was about 6 months. Usually mission personnel died from malaria or black-water fever or some other deadly disease. But people journeyed there knowing that their lifespan would be cut short. You might ask why? Well, I believe that they understood that if they truly were “called” to go in their heart then inaction would have led to many more descending into the bowels of hell. But to go was better than to live with the “I wish I had gone” voice that would have tormented them for years after. Despite the hardships of life on the Dark Continent there was a 3 year waiting list to go there. Amazing!

My closing thought is simple. In Esther we find a young lady who from her toddler days unto now has followed the wise and sound counsel of Mordechai and still finds him credible in the face of the powers that be. Can you too affirm that after all these years in Christ that you are still respecting of your heavenly father's wishes as you were when you were born-again a babe in Christ? If you are unable to affirm such then you must ask yourself why? Have the palatial blessings of prosperity and health been so rich in your life that you find it a discomfort to allow God to yet give you instruction. Be careful, your pride could very well be your undoing.

GOING FORTH TO SEE THE KING

Notes on chapter five

It is important for us to view the book of Esther as a peephole into ancient history. Without this document there would be little evidence for all it contains. What other ancient literary documents tell us with such specificity of the arrangements of marriage, Kingly laws and customs and of historic genocide? If we are truthful, there are few others, if any, of this type. In our study of Esther we find a lady standing up on behalf of her people and literally walking by faith. Esther was not the first, nor the last lady to exemplify faith in scripture.

The bible does mention Sarah. She left the area we know now as Iraq and traveled East with her husband, the whole time wanting a child of their own. In due time she did bare seed and her seed became a beautiful nation. Rebekka also was a lady with faith. She departed her homeland in Syria to be united with a man whom she had never met. All this she did at the word of her future father-in-law's servant. When she left home it was told her in a form a blessing to "be the mother of millions". It did come to pass for her. Each time we mention the state of Israel we are reminded of many past promises extended to Abraham's family.

For Esther, she is under a slight bit of duress. Mordechai has explained to her that the Jewish populace is in trouble and he is requesting that Esther provide some 'inside the palace' assistance. Esther is somewhat hesitant because of the royal laws requiring one to be summoned to see the king rather than arbitrarily barging in on him with requests. In the end she decides to throw all caution to the winds, and here is where we board the train for the next act of this drama. The last thing we heard Esther declare prior to her attempted visit to the king was "If I perish, I perish!"

In chapter five Esther begins with one goal: to make it to the throne and back alive. She already knows that at the throne all issues are settled. It never entered her mind to visit another noble. She knew that the help she needed would be found in the king and in him alone. Now is a good place to emphasize this point: her faith was not in the throne per say but in the occupant of a throne. Yes, she knew the king had the answer but as we all know the throne of men is subject to the powers of God. Her zeal to intercede for her people should match our zeal to make intercession for people who are in trouble. Consider the persecuted Christians around the world from the Middle East, Central Asia, India and also in tiny Israel. But God says in Hebrews 4:16, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in a time of need."

Our prayer lives are to be God-focused, God-centered and very trusting. Let us note that in verse one Esther puts on her royal apparel. In the AV1611 you can see that the words, *her* and *apparel*, are italicized. In the Hebrew there is simply the word “malkhoot-kingdom”. This was certainly kingdom business to which she was attending and she desired to prepare herself accordingly. No doubt she was beautifying those features that were already quite pleasing to the king. After having stood where she could be seen she “obtained favor in his sight”. Favor is a good thing. No one enjoys being disliked, most of us desire acceptance and Esther was no different. She was a Jewish lady attempting to approach an austere royal personage.

Undoubtedly she was wearing garments fit for a queen. I would never want to leave you with the impression that she was wearing some haggard and tattered hand-me-downs that all large families are familiar with. She was a queen and her attire was fit for each occasion. I note this only in the comparison of our approach to god and her approach to her king. We are not entering into His presence robed in our own righteousness. We are adorned with the seamless robe of righteousness that was hand sewn and stitched by the nail-scarred hands of Jesus himself. His death was for a propitiation which allowed us access into this wonderful favor we did not deserve. And we are not to enter sheepishly or in a skittish way but boldly. Oh my, what a great acceptance has been offered to mankind in Jesus Christ.

The king was excited to see Queen Esther. He probably was kicking himself that it had been so long since he had seen her. Thirty days is a long time to go without seeing your spouse. However, his delight in seeing Esther is in no way compared to God’s delight in seeing you. God is crazing about you and his joy in being with us hardly fathomable to us. But allow me this one digression: how long has it been since you last spent time with the King? Can you say that it has been more than a month since the last time you prayed, read your bible, sat aside a few minutes to listen in on the heartbeat of God in the form of a sermon? If you are guilty of this then you may soon—if you have not already—lose your first love.

I cannot imagine going a month without speaking with my wife. I left Peru many months early because I was madly in love with her. Our affections are real and I pray that they never change. Our marriage is an example to our churches and as you can see on a day to day basis we live this love affair right before your eyes each day. He invited Esther to speak clearly of her request and Esther stayed with her plan and invited the king and Haman to a banquet.

The king told her that he would give her whatever she wanted, up to half of the kingdom. Once again in verse four we have italicized words in the AV1611: “If *it seem* good”. The Hebrew clearly emphasizes the word “good” which is present in the Hebrew text. This was her reply to the king’s statement. He told her he would give her HALF, then, she shouted GOOD! What woman would not find that word in her vocabulary if her husband said “honey here is a fistful of cash and a credit card with no limits, go and spend to your heart’s desire”. Everyone woman in this sanctuary would scream out GOOD!

The king’s love for her in giving her of his wealth and substance is a nice picture of our heavenly Father’s desire to give us so much more. Esther banquet is a model of sobriety and she is a picture of a sober-minded person. Often in scripture we have stories of banquets where things get out of hand quickly—see chapter one. In scripture there is also the story of the “dirty dancer” of Matthew 14. Remember, she is one the one who danced so well that King Herod said, “tell me what you want and I will give to you”. That had to be a very wild and carnal dance in order to lead him to that conclusion. But the outcome had been predicted by Herodias, Herod’s wife. When her daughter was asked what she wanted her mother had already told her to request the head of the John the Baptist, who was in prison at the time. John the Baptist was the one man who dared tell Herod that his marriage to Herodias, his brother’s wife was unlawful. Now he loses his life over a 5-to-10 minute dance in the palace.

Esther was opposite of all this in her character. There was nothing vain about her. She was pleased to keep sober-minded until the end of all things. I wish this was our desire. I Peter 5:8 tells us to be sober because the devil is walking about looking for someone to devour. Who better for him to attack than someone who is inebriated? Drunkards are the easiest to take advantage of because their reflexes are slower, their balance is off and their coordination is all screwed up. For a Christian to become intoxicated with/by this world is a terrible thing. There is nothing to this ball of wax but “Lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh and the pride of life.” To give in to its system is to surrender your hands and become captive and prey to the devices of the devil.

Verses 9-13 present Haman as a joyful and glad-hearted soul as he returns from Esther’s banquet. That is, until he see Mordechai, the Jew sitting there, who essentially disrespected him again by not moving or showing him any honor. At this point Haman’s wrath is boiling in his blood. In reading this passage I find it remarkable that one man’s action or inaction could destroy the happiness created by the preceding events of the day. Then I remembered that people whose joy is connected to “things” and not centered in God can easily lose focus.

The fact that Haman's joy river ran dry when he saw Mordechai is a proof of his character flaws. Have you ever watched people who were standing around talking and slapping each other on the back in laughter until someone enters the room who they despise? Whether or not you see this as a problem, it is. The devil will surround you with people who can push your button, so to speak, if he knows that it will keep you off (spiritual) balance. Haman put together a private gathering of family and special friends and then he basked in the glory of his fake greatness. Like so many evil and dumb potentates he was unable to see the trouble ahead of him as he planned trouble for another.

In the beginning of this message I mentioned women who were good models of faith to follow. There are however, infamous women in the bible who you never need to emulate. Job's wife was only pleased when things went well but when her husband became ill she told him to "curse God and die". Please, don't imitate her. Ahab's wife, Jezebel, too, was a vile woman. When her husband refused to take Naboth's vineyard she decided he was not half the man she was and she confiscated it herself, killing Naboth in the process through lies. No, for God's sake, if you are going to follow in someone's footsteps find a person like Jesus and avoid the silly people of the world.

Haman boasted to all who were present of his children, wealth, fame and glory but went on to say it all means nothing so long the Jew, Mordechai, sits in the King's gate. As you can see there was not pleasing this man. He was the number two person in the kingdom, and a lowly Jew with no significant status is giving him inner fits. But don't worry his advisors are on hand to push him over the edge. Haman's wife and friends instructed him to build a gallows about 75 feet high and hang Mordechai from it. So he acquiesced to their proposal, the gallows were then built, and they all returned to the merriment of their feast.

It is too bad that his counselors helped him dig a ditch into which ultimately he and his family would fall. It should be an informative scene for all of us who are studying this narrative. Anyone who desires to see a person, whom he or she dislikes, hang from a high precipice is in danger of becoming the victim of their own wrath. Man's wrath never executes the true justice of God so it would be best if you prayed for your enemies and stood back and allowed the Hands of God to intervene in all this. Otherwise you run the risk making your bed and then being forced to lay in it, as grandma used to say.

THE NIGHT THE KING COULD NOT SLEEP

Notes on Esther chapter six

The twists and turns of this story are such that if we did not already know the ending of this story we would read on to see the conclusion. There is a lot of interesting material assembled here. In order for a story to hold the reader's attention a villain is definitely needed. It seems that villains always add the right contrast to story that otherwise could be dull. It should be remembered that Esther's story is of Persian origin. We do have in scripture another narrative which too is from the Persian area, and it is the book of the Persian King's cupbearer, Nehemiah.

He was a grieving over the stories he often heard coming out of Israel. Many travelers made their way back and forth from Israel to Persia and the events often discussed related to Jerusalem and its destroyed state. Nehemiah felt compelled to fix the broken walls in Israel and as he attempted to do so there were people who opposed him. In chapter four of Nehemiah things really heat up. Sanballat and Tobiah are mocking the Jews to the point that they have conspired with others to attack them in order to keep them from completing the walls around the city. Nehemiah responds by arming his workers. In the end their task was completed and the wall was finished.

All the things related in the book of Nehemiah are true but the villainous roles of Sanballat and Tobiah make it all a captivating piece of reading. So once again I reiterate the role of the villain in scripture. If there is an Able there is a Cain to slay him. If there is a Moses, there is a Pharaoh to oppose him. If there is a King David, King Saul fights him often. And when an Elijah rises up a Jezebel is there to frustrate his labors. This role of the "opposition" is dramatized well in the person of Haman, the agagite who hates Jewish people.

The night before he had gallows constructed. I am not sure whether or not he went to bed by I am certain that while he oversaw the completion of the gallows the King battled a form of temporary insomnia. As scripture says "on the night the king could not sleep." No doubt our Lord was involved with this. In scripture he has disturbed people before. When Daniel was entered into the lion's den the king slept not, but on one occasion (Mat 27:19) Pilate's wife told her husband to leave Jesus alone because she had endured a lot the night prior in a dream. Sometimes restlessness is of the Lord. Old preachers used to say, if your eyes suddenly opened in the middle of the night and no one was attempting to break and enter your home, the phone was not ringing or there was no pain in your body, that God wanted an audience with you.

Few people look at an inability to sleep in this way but it is an attractive to view it. So what did the king do? Well, for starters he called for a reader and had a reader read the chronicles to him. Reading is important because it allows you an opportunity to enter into ancient worlds of fact and fiction. When I moved to the Middle East many years ago, I reacquainted myself with the fabled volumes of 1001 Arabian nights. One king needed to be entertained for a long period just to keep virgin after virgin from being strangled the following morning. It was and is a popular set of stories. Even though mostly Muslim in tone some of the stories are a part of our public conscience now. For example, Ali baba and the forty thieves or Sinbad the sailor. Are known by many. I enjoy good reading whenever I cannot sleep.

Also one could reach for Pilgrim's progress by John Bunyan. It is a great book on how 'Christian tries to make his way to the celestial city where he can unload his burden.' Everyone needs to read it at least once. Moral and Christian throughout it is a classic and is very entertaining while scriptural too. If I was going to read a book at night it would have to be interesting, but the King's chronicles? Why have that read. It contains all the excitements of the "begats" of Matthew chapter one. This king is strange though. We know this because when Haman brought the idea to him of killing all the (Jews) people, the king never investigated or tried to search out the facts of the case, he simply signed the document. Isn't that strange? Here we have a document that will adversely affect thousands of people within the Kingdom and he signs it without ever having read it or searched out the matter.

This king was spontaneous and his spontaneity could have led to the deaths of many people. However, as the record was read to him he discovered that Mordechai had saved his life and he wanted to do something to reward him. Maybe Mordechai had wondered if his kind deed would ever be found out by the king. You know, sometimes you can do a good thing and it is overlooked. What is worse than that? We all want to be acknowledged for good deeds, no one desires to be forgotten. And God has now arranged the circumstances to bring promotion to Mordechai and will do it in the strangest way. The whole of this chapter illustrates why we should adhere to Romans 12:3 as an admonition. We never think too highly of ourselves, but we do it often. First Corinthians ten verses six through twelve instruct us in the same way. We should learn from our ancestors so that we will not make the same mistakes they made. Mistakes can be deadly, as can be seen in Israel's history.

Haman's devilish plan called for the systematic destruction of the Jews and it led to the creation of the "Gallows" where Mordechai's hanging could be carried out. But be careful! The hole you dig for another might

end up being the one into which you eventually fall. Certainly by the end of chapter seven Haman will have been hung from these same gallows but his blinded pride keeps him from seeing his future death at this time.

The night before, Haman had on his mind ‘thoughts of death’ while the king was meditating on thoughts of peace and blessing for Mordechai. We should all think biblically when thinking about others. Jeremiah 29:11 informs us that God thinks good and peaceful thoughts about those who have a covenant with him. Since we are Christian we have an agreement with God, a contract that will never expire. God’s thoughts toward us are thoughts of peace just as they were toward the Jew in the book of Esther. Let us never forget that our Lord works on our behalf to bring about things that he has pre-determined for our end.

The king suddenly wanted to do something about his idea of showing favor to Mordechai so he inquired as to who was in the outer court and was told that Haman was there. However, Haman was there because he was following through on the instruction he had received from his wife and friends in chapter 5:14. Haman wanted to see Mordechai hang from the gallows not receive a blessing from the king but Haman’s pride, rage and stupidity blinded him to this whole scheme. When the king asked Haman about what should be done to someone in whom the king found delight Haman, being self-centered, immediately thought of himself as the most favored of the king.

Notice all the things Haman mentioned should be done were all things that were fit for a king. Haman felt he should be treated as royalty himself and he articulated this in his answer. As he finished his statement the King said, well said Haman! All that you have said go and do to Mordechai the Jew who sits in the King’s gate. Can you imagine the feeling he had when the king told him to go to the man he hated most and dress him in royal apparel, put a crown on his head, and set him on the king’s horse, then lead him through the streets and preach the king’s message to the crowds on behalf of the king: “Thus shall be done to the man in whom the King finds delight”.

What can we learn from all this? For starters, we can see how destructive “envy” is as a character flaw. Haman envied the king’s status and position and wanted to be kingly so bad that he sought to have the king’s clothing et cetera placed on him. This was actually against the law at the time. Plutarch and Herodotus provide some good glimpses of ancient practices and wearing the King’s attire was not usually part of any royal program I have been able to discover. Envy forces you to dwell in the number two slot because you are always trying to copycat someone else’s behavior or lifestyle.

Haman walked into this trap and never saw it in front of him. When you work hard to cause problems for other people you cannot see the problems you are also creating for yourself. Haman was influenced negatively by his family and friends. In reality, they fed his ego and he thought that they were right in pushing him to plead for the death of Mordechai. He had no idea that he would be called on by the king to be so embarrassed and humiliated.

This is why it is good to be humble. It is far better to be humble early on than to be humiliated later. Humiliation is always a “shock” to the mental system because we are rarely expecting it. So when immorality is discovered and names suddenly appear in the newspaper it is an embarrassment to all parties connected to it: family members and friends find themselves explaining some unforeseen occurrence, lately manifested.

Mordechai did not think too much of the clothing and the crown and the horse. We realize this when he takes it all off and returns to the King’s Gate. He was there when Haman came and dramatically promoted him in the first place. This is a good disposition to live with. None of us should be so enthused by riches, wealth and power so as to be changed. This may be easier said than done but it still needs to be said. People who crave power usually are destroyed by their own cravings. This blessing came out of nowhere to Mordechai and that makes it a thing of grace. Sure, he did do something back at the end of chapter two. But what he did was the right thing to do at the time and the text does not lead us to believe that he was expecting to receive something for his deed.

Haman, on the other hand, could never do anything without looking for something in return. His life was about moving forward and upward. When he sheepishly returned home to his family and friends they had no comforting words for him. Although when he departed earlier he was acting on their advice he now finds them empty of rhetoric, other than to say that “it looks like you are going down and Mordechai is going up”. Friends can be so fickle. Few of them know anything about genuine relationships and what most of them know is based on money, power and prestige. Now that Haman is losing these things it seems that there is a hole in the vessel and the ship is sinking. Yes, it is, and in the next chapter the whole vessel and all those aboard go down to the bottom with him.

If you cannot understand it by now, the decisions you make will affect all those around you so be careful. Foolishness and hurt many people connected with you.

HAMAN’S DOWNFALL AND RUIN

Notes on Esther chapter seven

Do you all remember the reign of Saddam Hussein? He was the former ruler of Iraq whose methods and practices were despised both inside his country and outside. He murdered clerics he thought were rebellious, he systematically attacked people of Kurdish descent, and he tolerated no disrespect and literally ruled the nation with an iron fist. Anyone who has been reared in a colony of fear knows that a day is coming when human rulers will die. Saddam’s decline, capture and death sentence were carried out before a watchful world, and even then Iraqis were skeptical. Soldiers pulled him out of a spider hole, placed him in jail and then put on a mockery of a trial for a man who was destined to die under judicial authority. ‘Destined’, you might ask, yes. Here is a man who lived by the sword and died (sort of) in the same manner. All the above looks very much like a caricature of Haman.

This chapter deserves a slow and considerate read. It begins with a false assumption and ends with a verdict of “guilty”. The false assumption is the idea that that Haman was a noble and honorable man. This is understood throughout the book as the Haman receives promotion and blessings in abundance. The end of the chapter presents us with a shallow shell of his former self. He begs for his life when he sees in the king’s countenance displeasure. All this in a chapter permeated with grace and favor. Unlike the king in this story who was in the dark with regard to the behavior of his prime minister, God is omniscient and sees and knows all. Even still, he does not allow his omniscience to hinder the flow of events in history that are not so nice, much to our chagrin.

In verse one we read that Haman’s humiliation at walking before Mordechai through the city is ameliorated by his invitation to be a dinner guest with the king as Esther’s table. The parties at the table know so little of this man Haman who was known to Esther as a wicked man. When you compare Mordechai and Haman you come to some strong and definite conclusions about human character.

1. Mordechai was godly and Haman was wholly ungodly.
2. Mordechai exposes secret plots of wickedness and Haman devises evil schemes in his heart.
3. Mordechai is not impressed by wealth—evident by his return to the gate and to his apparel of sackcloth and ashes following his trip through the city in royal attire. Haman on the other hand, could not wait to call his friends and boast of his favor with the king upon his promotion earlier.

4. Mordechai was a wise counselor to Esther and Haman was a bad advisor to the King on political matters.

In verses three and four Esther is at pains to reveal herself to the king and she valiantly owns the situation and declares her cause, going so far as to call the Jews “my people”. In the palace she is identifying herself with her people’s pains in the ghettos. This is a marvelous illustration of how Christ came to identify with us here on this earth. He came in the likeness of men and atoned for our sins. He made intercession for us when we were sinners and he so righteous and “other” than us. Yet he who knew no sin became sin. He stood between us and the King and prepared a way for our redemption and deliverance. A good question to ask now would be, are you ashamed of *your* people? It is amazing how many people despise their people group. I have met Mexicans who are unhappy with the way their fellow people live in certain neighborhoods. I have seen blacks who go far in disassociating themselves with other people of darker complexion. Even Caucasians who have grown up in less than covetable circumstances might tend to avoid the peoples of the trailer park. To me this is all unfortunate and it displays a pride that is destined—here is that word again—to bring you to the place or people who you disdain the most. Remember, God so loved the world..!

In verses five and six we have a king who was oblivious to the real character of the enemy sitting next to him. Think about it, David allowed Absalom to return to the city and never knew Absalom was stealing the hearts of the people day by day (II Sam 15:2-6). In John 13 the disciples ate with Judas and had no idea that he was a devil possessed man. So now the king is faced with a predicament that is evil on its own terms but also very embarrassing for him as a ruler official. How could he not know that his number two was a devious scoundrel who hated Jews? This, I believe, was part of the question(s) with which he was faced. And the solution was no less comforting.

Esther used an adjective that the king could not have conceived: she said “wicked Haman”. You can read the text in English or Hebrew and almost feel Haman’s heart rate increasing. In Esther’s patience the Jewish people found deliverance, which is a lesson for us. We should take our time when confronted with opposition. There is never a need to rush and hurry, for when we do, we generally *impregnate Hagar* (make things worse) and now are forced to live with *Ishmael* (our own decisions). As a pastor you know that I am telling you the truth. Take David again as a case in perspective. He took Bathsheba and later probably wished on more days than one that he had never seen her the night she bathed on the roof.

As we look again to the text, verses seven and eight are signposts for us. Surely we can see that Esther is fulfilling her destiny. She was brought to the kingdom for an occasion of this magnitude. Haman's life took a wrong turn the moment he decided to go after the Jewish nation because of his anger at one man. Now, at Esther's dinner table, his fortunes have turned for the worse. Seeing anger on the king's face, no sooner had the king departed the room for a brief period of reflection and contemplation he falls to his knees and begins to beg. Do you see this? When death is near even a grown man will beg for his life. Haman's actions are all a result of what he quickly deduced from the expression on the king's face. Oh my, if you think the king is Esther was angry wait until King Jesus returns. Revelation 19:11-16 clearly reveals when the King of Kings comes again, literally there will be holy wrath and anger with which man must contend. Justice will finally reign and evil men will be set aside in that great day. The anti-Christ will be no more. It seems a thought to faraway to consider now but eventually payday does come for the wicked. It is still a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

So what happens next? As the king returns with a decision for Esther, he enters the room and it looks as though Haman is attempting to "have his way" with Esther, the king's wife. Note the tenor of the narrative. A hint of jealousy is there. Proverbs 6:34,35 makes the case that a jealous man will not be easily pacified. If you walked into a room and found someone seemingly forcing himself upon your wife (men), how would you react? Few things will cause someone to lay aside religious beliefs but I can think of a few situations which might strain the Christian's conduct. (1) if someone were to harm your children, (2) if someone were to harm your parents, and lastly (3) if someone were to harm your spouse, all these would excite an uncommon rage that most people actually deny is a possibility in their life.

The king's verdict was easy: Haman was tried and found guilty in less time than it has taken for you to read this far in these notes. And those remarkably high gallows (c. 75 feet) were brought to the attention of the king and the king declared that Haman was fit to hang from them himself. The conclusion to the whole matter is simple: do not dig ditches for others because the hole you are digging may very well turn out to fit your proportions exactly. He made his bed—as the old proverb says—and now he must lie in it. Haman's death signals for us all the overarching providence of God in the affairs of men. You may not like how the process is carried out but that is beside the point, you can take it up with God when you reach eternity, but for now, you are commanded to believe, obey, love and practice and authentic Christianity that proves God is at work in your life and genuinely is your redeemer!

A SUDDEN CHANGE OF EVENTS

Notes on chapter eight

Politics inevitably affect people. The word “politics” is derived from a Greek word “polis” which means city. So politics represents the rulings instituted by the leaders of a society. Policy is usually geared towards the interest of the imposing powers. We notice this throughout scripture. Whenever taxes or heavy tribute is laid upon a nation, it is done as a means to subjugation. How often do we hear the phrase, “in America’s best interest?” Few stop and ask the question as to who it is determining the “best interests” of a society. Well, the politicians determine this, of course.

Modern times are no different. The Middle East is a typical example of the jockeying that occurs among nations seeking power and people to exploit. Most of the current nations of the Middle East were non-existent 100 years ago. But the people policies the British, Italians and the French carved up the nations into a nice neat gift package for each of these countries. These were and still are policies of control, designed to empower foreigners. Why do you think we are in Iraq? Surely you do not really believe we are there because we care about the Kurds or the Shiites. They have been there for years. We are there now because they tell us it is in our best interests, read Oil, is in our best interests.

The world is so different today from the worlds of yesterday and the change came quickly and suddenly. This is why the topic today is on the sudden changes which may be affected when God is involved with your affairs. Notice in verses 1-2, Haman, who was the King’s number two is now dead. Verse 15 says that Mordechai is now the Prime Minister or number two. When Haman died, the King even had his officers pry the royal ring from Haman’s finger. One day Haman is sealing documents and the next day he is hanging—oh what a difference a day makes!

The point in the story is simple: what you possess today may be owned by another tomorrow, so learned to be grateful for your blessings. Your fortunes may change overnight. You can go from riches and wealth to poverty in a day. You may move from extreme poverty to the abundance of excess tomorrow. In verse 7, the Word speaks of Haman laying his hands upon the Jews. This statement makes little sense at first because Haman only signed a document decreeing their deaths he never actually touched them. However, in the mind of God that was the same as striking them. Another parallel to this is in Acts 9 where Saul is told that he is persecuting Jesus when all he thought he was doing was attacking Christians. To attack God’s people is to attack him.

To conspire against the covenant people of the Lord is to invite judgment upon one's self. Thus Haman fell by the wayside because of his folly. Wicked Haman's death led to promotion for Mordechai and in turn, blessing for the provinces of the Persian Empire. From verses 9-11, we see a marvelous transformation. Mordechai who once sat in the king's gate in sackcloth and ashes is now crafting legislation for the King. Just be patient, things can turn around for you quickly. Take Mordechai as an example of this truth. He was born a captive, a foreigner from Israel, rejected as a low class indentured worker, but in the end, he becomes a household name as a politician.

Things change quickly. I once heard a friend tell a story of his grandmother. She had developed tumors after the birth of her son. Yet years ago she had heard of the 'healing cloths' folks would pray over and anoint then send out. So she sent for one and kept it close to her. One night she went to bed with a distended stomach and woke up the next morning with a normal one healed by the power of God. There are multitudes who know little of that aspect of God but there still are a few who really do believe that God is a miracle worker. Overnight things changed. He can do that for you too. If he spared the Jews in Persia he can spare you too!

In verse 16 we read of the power of a postman's letter. It brought rejoicing and happiness and all the excitement that attends various ceremonies when you know that the Government is on your side. Disenfranchisement is an evil thing. Worse still, is the empowering of people to do wickedness. Is this not our problem in America these days? We encourage evil and despise the scriptural? In Israel, to this day, Christians are still persecuted. The government is opposed to them. There were three Ethiopian girls who were Jewish and had immigrated there, they became Christians—having accepted Jesus—and the government took their case to the supreme court of Israel, who then said that their citizenship could be stripped because they have believed Jesus to be the Messiah. And this is what we call democracy in the Middle East.

The most heinous and wicked crimes ever committed have been committed against Jews over and over again. Yet when they are empowered to do scriptural things they persecute their biggest fans. No one supports Jewish causes around the world like Christians, and they are the butt of so many evils today. In verses 12-16 there is a messenger, a mule and a message. The postman takes his letters all across the Empire. At no time is he asked to open the letter, change a word, read to see if he agrees with it or if he thinks something is not in the king's own handwriting. His role is simple: deliver the words of the king.

Can you see how simple the mission of the minister is? The preacher's role is not to amend scripture as he sees fit. It is not to check for supposed interpolations and adjust texts to his personal designs. Our role is only to deliver what has been written many years ago. I am troubled these days by all the "fixes" taking place in bible publishing houses. Excised verses are so normal now that 30 years from now some will not even recognize the truth from error. All these changes pushed upon us by multi-culturalists who hate God, and specifically hate narratives that present ideas which oppose them.

So now what do we do? For starters, we can pray. We do not need to take to the streets as the ungodly do and attack people. As a preacher I can only utilize what I have to get the message across. The ancient postman had a mule or a camel. I have a car, so I can carry the truth of God's Word across this earth and not be ashamed of what it says. Hey, I did not write all this, I am only a mailman bringing to you love letters from above. If you do not like what is contained therein that is your problem but I must tell you what they say. This letter says change comes quickly but you must continue to trust God.

In the end, sudden conversions took place. When the new letters came out telling the Jews to stand and fight, it then became vogue to be a Jew. Overnight, throngs of people wanted "in"! Fear has a way of producing some positive events and this is one of them. The FEAR of the Jews came upon them and the populace turned aside to learn more of Judaism and their worship of God. Sure some may have turned out of a desire to exploit the situation but I am inclined to believe that most turned because they wanted to know what the Jews knew. How can we live in such a way that crowds will want to follow us?

If people started falling over dead again as in the Ananias and Sapphires story maybe things would change. One thing I am convinced of though, is this, if revival is ever going to come to America it is not going to come through miracles of mercy, ie. Healings et cetera. It is going to come through miracles of Judgment! We have had some of the greatest healing revivalists come through America in the last 75 years and still the nation is spiraling downward. In my travels I hear every possible story you can imagine about revival and see so little of it. We do not need a revival of movie theatres in the church, or fellowship halls transformed into dance halls, we need a move of God that will lead us back to the altar seeking the face of the Lord and loving him with our whole heart, soul and mind. Apart from that genuine experience it will result in little but flesh and flesh is worth nothing in the eyes of God. SO what kind of change are you looking for, the true or the false?

STAND AND FIGHT FOR YOUR LIVES

Notes on chapter nine

*Let me begin by reminding you that chapter ten of the book of Esther consists of only three verses and we addressed ourselves to these words in the sermon *Mordechai's Greatness*.

Chapter nine has thirty-two verses. We could easily divide it into two and take one half as a launching pad for delineating Mordechai's influence, and take part two to deal with Mordechai's memorial. Influence is important. It is what you use to affect another's thinking or behavior. The only sure way to lose your influence over someone is for someone to lose a person's respect. No respect, no influence, it doesn't matter how anointed you say you are or the number of dreams you purport to have had. A memorial is a signpost. It is an indicator of an occurrence. These are needed desperately in our time. We presently celebrate the wrong things. In fact most of our celebrations center around things the Lord despises. In practical matters this means that everyone is doing what he or she thinks is right in his or her own eyes.

In chapter nine, the picture is moving in the opposite direction. Folks are celebrating the righteous hand of God in delivering His people. This book is called the book of Esther. It could easily be called the book of Mordechai because he is so prominent throughout. Rarely does a supporting cast member upstage or take the point in so important a matter as deliverance. Yet we see Mordechai as often as we see Esther. The two work great together as a team and they demonstrate what happens when unity prevails. Now what is it about Mordechai that elevates him above all others?

1. He possessed a sense of history. This man knew from whom he had come and knew the family legacy well.
2. He had a sense of religion. He understood the God of his forefathers and sought to maintain this distinctiveness all his life.
3. He rehearsed what he knew of God in the ears of Esther. He raised her on the nourishing stories of truth.
4. He believed that God was still active "now". We need not underemphasize this. It was Gideon who complained of the lack of God's involvement in Israel's circumstances while, all the while, talking with an angel.
5. He lived his faith in the sight of all men. Sackcloth and ashes did not embarrass him at all. He was as comfortable in mourning as he was rejoicing before people.

It was this same man, Mordechai, who had written a new letter informing the Jews of their need to *Stand and Fight for Their Lives*.

We can all take a page out of this playbook and learn from it. Our role is not to grab spears, knives and clubs to fight enemies in the street. We are to pray for our enemies and do good to people who hate us. But we are not to allow ourselves to be trampled upon. The devil loves nothing more than to see Christians getting pushed around. If you have family members living in sin, spend time in the altar and pray. This is where the victory is won. You will accomplish little arguing with folks about their lifestyles. Just live for Jesus and let your light shine. Each day you do that you are pushing back the Kingdom of darkness. You might say how? Remember, when you enter a room and turn on the light, darkness flees. As a Christian, your light is a deterrent to human sinfulness.

It always shocks me when I hear stories and testimonies of sinners going to church that loved it and had a good time there. How can that be? If God is there, a sinner should be convicted of his sins. What sinner have you read of in scripture that went up to the Temple and rejoiced at how lively and contemporary the music was? If that is the case no wonder the world controls most churches. Holiness should still be posted over the door of God's house.

It has been a few months since Haman's decree was signed and now the children of Israel have had ample time to arm themselves and prepare for battle. Spiritual warfare is a reality in more ways than one. You may be having an easy go of it now but circumstances may call for you to turn the plate down and seek God. Verses one and two are proof that Haman's plans have been stunted and God has reversed the entirety of the situation. So in verses 3-12, God touches the hearts of leading citizens to aid the Jewish people: simply beautiful. Goad has illustrated for us one way of garnering assistance for us, "FEAR". Isn't that nice? Here the Lord has opened a way for the children of Israel to be aided in the Persian capital.

God's ways are not our ways. There are a lot of people who believe that they can understand God and His thoughts. I can assure you these people have never pastured, served on the mission field for years at a time, or even been married. Truthfully, no one can fathom the depths of the wisdom of God, least of all me. BUT, God's interest in the affairs of man is a blueprint to how he can work in certain scenarios. People are fickle and they change like the wind. We know this is true, think of Balaam. Back in Numbers 22-24, we find him trying to resist the bribes of King Balak. Two times Balaam was able to say no but the third go around he gave in and took the money. He brought a curse upon the Israelites and in Numbers 31: 8,16 we find he is killed by no less than Moses, the prophet, himself.

Behind all these strange narratives in scripture is the invisible and of God. On the first day the Jews fought, 500 were killed in Shushan. On the second day they fought 300 were killed there. Esther was surrounded by “haters” the whole time in the palace and may not have ever known it. She certainly was surprised to find out about Haman’s decree chapters earlier. The lesson we learn from Esther is that you can maintain your virtue even when you are encircled by many who dislike you. Esther never cast aside her faith in God or acted in any way that would detract from the beauty of her character.

Could you keep it together, knowing that your fellow-laborers desire your fall and demise? Joseph was able to do this. His brothers hated him on account of his dreams, which were God-given, incidentally. Then one day as he approached them they gang tackled him, stripped him of his coat, and sold him off to some Ishmaelites as though he were nothing but property. Over three decades later, Joseph is able to kiss his hateful brothers on the cheek in their time of need. But can you imagine siblings so wicked that they would lie to your father about your death, then sit at the table with him—as he mourns—day after day knowing that there were untruths festering beneath all this hypocrisy? People do it all the time. Some of you today may be participating in this.

Esther kept her heart and spirit carefully guarded and at the right time stood forth and outshined them all. In verses 20-32 Mordchai institutes the memorials or feast which would annually remind Israel of the deliverance of God in Persia. Depending on your relation to this event will determine what you believe about it. Some people read Esther and think that it is a nice story. Others, like you and me, we read it and see the fingerprints of God everywhere. Why so? Because the Holy Spirit has touched our hearts and our eyes to see this for what it is, a heartfelt story of salvation.

Israel is a miracle. From the loins of a humble old man named Abram to a number accented only by the sand so the sea they are chosen people of God. But so are we. Are covenant with God is better than the one they possess in Abraham. Read the book of Hebrews, you can see it more clearly there. This is why we need memorials. They inform us of significant occurrences from the past—our past, no less. What is Independence Day to you? To me, it is a day to reflect upon our liberty and freedoms. Sure there are fools whose folly leads them to use their liberty for the occasion of the flesh but this Day reminds us that we are no longer under the authority of the British Crown. We are to think of all the men and women that died for the cause of this nation. Our history is inspiring, so let it refresh you over and over again.

Since God is the one who promotes some and demotes others, he is the one who raises up kings and sits down other kings. This is good information for your future. You serve God in a great country and every citizen of this world should somehow connect their nation to the hands of God. If they fail to do this anti-nationalism will reign. How can you foster hope and promote education to a people who hate themselves. This is where communism fails their people. So we need memorials. Veteran's Day reminds us of the men and women who have lived and died in the service of their country. They had one goal: to ensure that you had the liberty of dissent. You do not have to agree with all that the government does but why criticize the troops whose role is to protect what the politicians says is the American Interest abroad?

As a church we too must reflect on historical events. You should regularly celebrate God's supernatural dealings in your life. He saved, healed and multiplied you over and over again. Does your family know how you were saved from your sins? Can they speak of those moments when the King of Kings entered the rooms of your heart and furnished them anew? Are they aware of how you were delivered from evil, angry persons that wanted your life? Please answer in the affirmative. You should shout these things from the rooftops.

We are in the closing days of this age. Jesus is soon to come. I reaching for the door on this side and his hand is probably extended towards the knob on the other side, so what can we do? Let's live right. Let's pray right. Let's live holy in the midst of this unclean world and hopefully we shall all meet real soon on the other side. I don't know about you but I am ready to see the king. His coming will change all things and we do want to be ready. God bless you and cause His face to shine upon you.

Nebraska

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