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THE BOOK OF ESTHER

BY

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THE BOOK OF ESTHER

Introduction

The book of Esther is one of the five books which the Jews call Megilloth (Rolls). They appear in the Hebrew Bible in the following order:

1. Canticles, that is, Solomon's Song, read in connection with Passover;
2. Ruth, read on the feast of weeks (Pentecost);
3. Lamentations, used on the ninth day of the month Ab, commemorating the destruction of the temple, which happened twice on the same day, first by Nebuchadnezzar and then afterwards by the Romans;
4. Ecclesiastes, which is read during the celebration of the feast of tabernacles;
5. The book of Esther, read on the feast of Purim.

The Jews hold this little book in the highest esteem; they call it "The Megillah" and thereby give it the place of pre-eminence among the other Megilloth. The ancient Rabbis give it a place next to the Torah, the law. Maimonides taught that when the Messiah comes every other book of the Jewish Scriptures will pass away, but the law and the book of Esther will remain forever.... Yet many objections have been made against this book. Its rightful place in the canon of the Old Testament has been hotly contested by Jews and Christians.

We mention the two leading objections. The first objection is that the name of God does not appear in this book. Some ancient teachers have tried to overcome this objection by the theory that the name of Jehovah is found a number of times in the initial letters of certain sentences, which letters spell the sacred name. Jehring, Bullinger and others have adopted this attempt to vindicate the book. But this is at best only a fanciful endeavour to do away with this objection. We believe the Holy Spirit is the author of the book of Esther and has given in it a correct report of this remarkable episode in Jewish history. He does not conceal things and to use initial letters of certain words to produce another word is an extremely unsafe method of Bible study. The Spirit of God had a valid reason why He omitted the name of God, which we state later.

Some have suggested that inasmuch as Esther was to be used in connection with the feast of Purim (a feast of merrymaking) the name of the Lord was omitted on purpose to avoid its irreverent use amid the scenes of feasting and drinking. Professor Cassel in his lengthy commentary on Esther states that the omission of the name of God was an act of prudence and caution from the side of the person who wrote this account. Others claim that the report was taken mostly from Persian records, which would explain the absence of the name.

It is true the name of God is absent, but God is nevertheless present in this little book. We find Him revealed on every page, in His providence, in His overruling power, in the preservation and deliverance of His covenant people. God cared for His people and Watched over them, though they were unfaithful to Him. He frustrated the plan of the enemy. It is true they did not call on Him, but nevertheless His sovereignty in grace is displayed towards them. God's government is therefore revealed in this book though His name is unmentioned.

The second objection is that the canonicity of the book should be rejected because it is not quoted in the New Testament. But this objection also breaks down when we remember that seven other Old Testament books are unquoted in the New Testament Scriptures. Destructive criticism has made other objections of a minor character; we do not need to mention these. Amongst those who had no use for this book is found Martin Luther, who went so far as to say that he wished the book might not exist at all. The evidence that the book is true, with its remarkable story of the great deliverance of a part of God's people, is found by the celebration of the feast of Purim by the Jews. If such a thing as the book of Esther records had not occurred then the Purim feast could not be explained.

The author of the book of Esther is unknown. Some think of Mordecai, others mention Ezra and Nehemiah as possible authors; but this is only guesswork. It is certain that one person wrote the entire account with the exception of chapter 9:20-32, which probably was added by another hand. The style is extremely simple; the Hebrew used is much like that of Ezra and Nehemiah. It contains some Persian words.

The purpose of the book of Esther has admirably been stated by Professor Cassel: "It is a memoir written by a Jew to all his people who are scattered in the extensive countries of Persia, in which are recorded the wonderful interpositions of Providence in their deliverance from destruction, which appeared to be certain. It has no other purpose but to narrate this; it is not called upon to give information about other

matters; albeit it gives a picture of Persian court life, the like of which is found nowhere else."

It brings out the great fact that the Jewish people out of their own land, and no longer in any outward relation to God, are nevertheless the objects of His gracious care. This broken relationship seems to be the reason why the name of God is avoided in the book. In spite of their unfaithfulness they are still His people, for God's gifts and calling are without repentance. He covers them with His protecting hand and watches over them and in His own way and His own time acts in their behalf, delivering them from their enemies.

Significant it is that the history in the book of Esther concludes the historical books of the Old Testament. The conditions described therein continue during the times of the Gentiles till finally the great deliverance comes for the people Israel. Jewish expositors have compared Esther to the dawn of the morning, that it is like the dawn which announces the end of the night.

It is a prophetic forecast of their history and is especially typical of the coming days of Jacob's trouble when they shall be delivered.

The typical-dispensational application is of much interest, for it illustrates some of the prophecies in a practical way. Vashti, the Gentile wife, may be looked upon as Christendom, to be set aside for her disobedience, and Esther, the Jewess, takes her place. This reminds us of the parable of the two olive trees in Romans 11 and the final execution of the divine threat that the grafted in branches, Gentile Christendom, are to be cut off and the broken off branches, Israel, put back upon their own olive tree.

Haman, the wicked enemy of the Jews, a descendant of Agag, the first enemy Israel met in the wilderness, is an illustration of the future enemy Israel will face. He is called "Haman the wicked" (chapter 7:6). The numerical value of the Hebrew letters composing the words "Haman the wicked" is exactly 666.

Mordecai is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ in His coming glorious exaltation. The complete triumph of the Jews over their enemies, the joy and peace, recorded at the close of this book, are typical of the time when Christ reigns on earth. We give at the close of each chapter hints on the typical and dispensational application which can be made of this history.

Analysis and Annotations

THE BANQUETS AND QUEEN VASHTI DISOWNED

CHAPTER 1

1. The first feast of the king (1: 1-4)
2. The king's feast unto all the people (1:5-8)
3. The queen's feast for the women (1:9)
4. The queen's refusal to appear at the king's feast (1:10-12)
5. The queen put away (1:13-22)

Verses 1-4. King Ahasuerus, one of the leading characters of this book, is known in history as Xerxes I. The name Ahasuerus is an appellative, which means the chief king, or the king of all kings. Xerxes, the son of Darius Hystaspes, bore this title, king of kings. This title is also given to him in the cuneiform inscriptions. One of these reads as follows: "I, the mighty king, king of kings, king of populous countries, king of this great and mighty earth, far and near." His dominion extended from East to West, even from India unto Ethiopia. He had a universal kingdom. The capital of his empire was Shushan, which had a beautiful situation surrounded by high mountains, traversed by streams and abounding in a luxurious vegetation. Since the time of King Darius it became the residence of the Persian kings. The word "palace" is better translated by fortress or castle. And in the third year of his reign he made the great feast unto all his princes, and his servants, and all the nobles of Persia and Media were before him. He then showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and entertained the nobles and princes for six months.

Verses 5-8. This sumptuous feast was followed by a second banquet to which all the inhabitants of the capital were invited. It was held in the garden of the palace and lasted for seven days. The decorations were in white, green, blue, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to rings of silver and pillars of marble. Upon a pavement of red, white, blue, and black marble (a mosaic floor) stood the couches of gold and silver. The royal wine was served out of vessels of gold not two of which were alike. The king displayed his enormous wealth and his abundant possessions. "And the wine of the kingdom was in abundance, according to the bounty of the king." And there was perfect freedom; each could drink to his heart's content. The king had instructed the officers "that they should do according to every man's pleasure."

Verse 9. Queen Vashti (Vashti means "beautiful woman") is now introduced. She made a separate feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to her husband, the king. Such feasts were frequently given by royal women of the East. Nothing is said how long her feast lasted.

Verses 10-12. The king's heart being merry with wine, he commanded his seven chamberlains to bring Vashti in her royal apparel to the feast, so that the peoples and the princes could admire her great beauty. The seven chamberlains were eunuchs who held important offices. Mehuman was the chief officer; Biztha, according to the meaning of his name, the treasurer; Harbona, the chief of the bodyguard; Bigath, who had charge over the female apartments; Abagtha, the chief baker; Zethar, the chief butler, and Carcas, the chief commander of the castle. These dignitaries were sent to accompany the queen to the feast of Ahasuerus. She refused to obey the king's command. Her refusal has been differently interpreted. According to Persian custom the Persian king held all for slaves except the legitimate wife. Was it in defiance of the king's order or out of self respect? She may have refused to show that she could not be dictated to by a drunken husband and that she was unwilling to show herself in the midst of revelry. Perhaps she did not care to come because she had a feast of her own. Then the king became extremely angry.

Verses 13-22. At once the wise men were called, the astrologers, the magi and sorcerers (Dan 2:2). His privy council consisted of seven

princes, the princes of Persia and Media, who were next to the king, sat with him and the wise men to take up this serious matter. The question is, "What shall we do unto the Queen Vashti according to law, because she had not done the bidding of the king Ahasuerus by the chamberlains?" The case is thus turned over by the king into the hands of the wise men and the seven princes. These decide that Vashti has wronged the king and furthermore by her refusal had set a dangerous example to all the subjects of the king. Much contempt and wrath would follow throughout the empire. They advise that Vashti is to lose her royal estate, that she be put away. The king sanctions it and issued at the same time a decree to be published throughout his great kingdom that all wives should honor their husbands. The Persian kings were great autocrats and ruled with an iron hand. Their laws were irrevocable. "It is certainly no fable which is told of Xerxes, viz., that when the inundation of the Hellespont had destroyed all bridges, he gave order that it should be beaten with rods for disobedience (Herodotus 7:35). But it was more easy for him to beat the sea than to obtain that which his edict demanded."

The letters were dispatched by the excellent postal service, which according to the historian Herodotus, Persia possessed. Memucan had brought about the downfall of the queen; she disappears completely. Jewish tradition gives several reasons why Memucan was so hostile to Vashti. One is that his own wife had not been invited to Vashti's feast and another, because he wanted his own daughter promoted and become the queen.

Typical Application

The Persian king claimed the title King of Kings, which belongs only to the Lord Himself. The great feast which he made reminds us of another feast which the Lord has spread. Ahasuerus' feast was on the third year of his reign and appointed to show the riches of his kingdom and the honor of his excellent majesty. The gospel feast to which God invites, is prepared in His Son, who died and was raised on the third day, and this feast shows forth exceeding riches of His grace in kindness towards us. And those who accept become partakers of the heavenly calling, nobles and princes, who shall reign with Him in His coming kingdom. The invitation is, "Come for all things are now ready." There is enough for all; enough to fill to overflowing. The wine is the symbol of joy; it cheereth God and man (judges 9:13). As the king had his joy with his subjects in this earthly feast, so God rejoices in those who come to the table of His love, and those who accept His invitation rejoice in Him. The couches of gold and silver at the King's feast were for rest. Gold and silver are symbolical of righteousness and redemption, and these are the couches, the resting places for the believer. And as Ahasuerus invited all to come to his feast, with no other conditions, but to come, so God wants all men to be saved and offers the riches of His grace without money and without price. While the Persian king displayed the glories of his great kingdom, God displays the glory of His grace.

In Vashti we see a type of the refusal of the invitation. She had been invited to come and grace the feast with her presence; she would not come. It reminds us of the parable of our Lord, in which He speaks of the great supper, a symbol of the gospel, and the bidden guests who made excuses for not coming. She had her own feast, which she probably would not leave. How many there are who refuse the gospel invitation because they love their own things best. And Vashti is banished. She is put away. And this is the sinner's fate who refuses to obey the gospel

of Jesus Christ.

Vashti too may be taken as a type of professing Christendom, those who have the form of godliness and deny the power thereof, whose god is their belly and who are the enemies of the cross, disobedient to God. Some day Christendom will be disowned by the Lord; He will spew Laodicea out of His mouth. Then the King of Kings will call another to take the place of apostate Christendom.

ESTHER CHOSEN QUEEN AND MORDECAI'S DISCOVERY

CHAPTER 2

1. The suggestion (2:1-4)
2. Mordecai and Esther introduced (2:5-7)
3. Esther brought to the king's house (2:8-11)
4. Esther chosen as queen (2:12-18)
5. Mordecai's discovery and exposure of the plot (2:19-23)

Verses 1-4. This probably did not happen immediately after the feast. We learn this from verse 16 in this chapter. He took Esther in the place of Vashti in the seventh year of his reign, but the feast described in the opening chapter happened in the third year. About four years elapsed. During these years, profane history tells us, Ahasuerus (Xerxes I), undertook a campaign against Greece with which many misfortunes were connected. He must have returned exhausted and unhappy. Then his conscience spoke. He probably missed the companionship of Vashti and he remembered her and what was decreed against her. But why did the monarch not take Vashti back into favor and forgive her, if remorse troubled him? As nothing more is said of Vashti it is more than probable that she was put to death. Perhaps the unfortunate war, the great losses he had sustained, were looked upon by the king as being the punishment for his drunken wrath against the queen. Then the courtiers made their suggestions which is in fullest keeping with the customs of Persia and still practised by oriental sultans and shahs. Fair young virgins are to be brought to the harem, the house of the women, under the custody of Hegai, the king's chamberlain and keeper of the women. The king was well pleased with this suggestion.

"One cannot but admire the simple, quiet historical style of our narrative. Laying aside all the reports which only would prolong our way of coming to the essential part of the contents of the book, there is nothing omitted which would contribute to the historical and psychological introduction and illustration. How much is necessary to happen before Israel could have ready help in time of need! What great things, according to the external appearance, must precede, in order to make it possible that a Jewish girl by the influence of her charms ascend the throne of the Persian Empire! The great conference of all the officers of the state, the dreadful war with Greece, and the unfortunate issue of the same, were they not in the hands of Providence so many stepping stones in the path of Esther's ascendancy? in order to replace the loss of Vashti, a woman of equal endowments must be sought for the king, wherever and however it might be! How many things must subserve to the frustration of Haman's wicked plan! The wrath of Xerxes against Greece, and his wrath against his wife. Court intrigues against the powerful influences of a wife, and the vain conceit of offended sovereignty? First drunkenness, then homicidal passion, then new excited

sensuality, were the sad instruments which preceded Israel's redemption.

"When the people were delivered, they could well be penitent when they considered the way in which Vashti--though not herself guiltless--was one of the main causes of their deliverance. And if deep penitence must have resulted from the reflection that a woman like Vashti had to die a violent death in order that the people of God should live,--what kind of penitence must the thought call forth when we remember that Christ gave His Life in order that Israel and the Gentiles might live" (Professor P. Cassel).

Verses 5-7. These verses introduce us now to the leading actors in this book. Mordecai, the Jew, was the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite; who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives which had been carried away with Jechoniah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away.

Here we face one of the inconsistencies charged by higher criticism. But their mistake is quite apparent. They claim that Mordecai belonged to the captives carried away by Nebuchadnezzar. Then they say, that being the case Mordecai must have been over 130 years old and Esther at least 70 years. But does it say that Mordecai was carried away at the time of King Jechoniah? It was not Mordecai who was carried away but his great-grandfather Kish. "The clear and instructive intentions of the historian in this genealogical passage are evident. He points out, through the enumeration of the four generations from Kish to Mordecai, the time which elapsed since the banishment of Jechoniah, which took place before the destruction of the temple. The period of about 120 or more years which since then elapsed to the sixth year of Xerxes are exactly expressed by the four generations. We have also some intimation concerning the period of the narrative, which is assigned to the reign of Xerxes I. That Kish was a Benjamite, is only told for the purpose of distinguishing him from other men with the same name who belonged to the tribe of Levi. One might have thought it impossible that Biblical expositors should commit the mistake of making the information concerning the exile of Jechoniah refer to Mordecai himself--an idea for which there is neither textual nor historical foundation, but rather both against it" (Professor Cassel). Mordecai had brought up Hadassah. She was an orphan, fair of form and good of countenance, his uncle's daughter. Mordecai had adopted her. Hadassah means "myrtle" and Esther "star." Critics have identified the name Esther with Babylonian goddess Istar (similar to Ashtoreth), and they also claim that Hadassah was the Babylonian title for the same goddess. But such statements are mere inventions.

Verses 8-11. Esther on account of her great beauty was taken with the many other virgins in obedience to the King's command. Jewish tradition informs us that Mordecai, her guardian and second father, had kept her concealed, in order not to be obliged to deliver her to the royal agents, but people who knew her, and who had not seen her for some time drew the attention of the agents to the concealment. She with the others is placed in charge of Hegai the keeper of women. In all we see the hand of the Lord preparing step by step the help needed for the preservation and deliverance of His people during the approaching crisis. And Esther pleased Hegai; he showed her kindness. This kindness was expressed in furnishing her the means of improving her appearance, such as cosmetics and perfumes, according to Oriental customs. Then she received no doubt beautiful garments and jewelry to enhance her person still more. Then the best place in the house of the women was given

to her and the seven maids who waited on her. (Very interesting and curious is the Jewish tradition concerning these seven servants. This tradition as preserved in the Targumim makes their names to correspond with the work of the six days of creation. Thus the fourth maid-servant's name was "Starlight" because on the fourth day the heavenly bodies came into view. Remarkable is the name of the maid who attended her on the sixth day--Friday; her name was "Lamb." On the seventh day, the Sabbath, the servant's name, who waited on her was "Rest" she reminded Esther of the Sabbath. And the Servant who attended her on the day after the Sabbath (Our Lord's day) bore the name of the mystical bird Phoenix, the symbol of light, rising out of the fire and out of death. It is certainly interesting, to say the least, to find such traditional statements.)

And Esther had not showed her people and her kindred. This was done on the advice of Mordecai. This has been characterized as deception, extraordinary adroitness, and cowardice. It was neither. Divine Providence ordered it thus. Inasmuch as Esther's parents were dead such concealment of nationality was not difficult; had her parents lived it would have been next to impossible. Had it been known that she belonged to the alien race, intrigues for her destruction would have soon been set afoot. Haman's wicked endeavour may even then have been in process of planning. Mordecai walking daily before the court of the women's house, proves his great concern for his adopted daughter.

Verses 12-18. The description of verses 12-14 is a perfect picture of Persian customs and the licentiousness of Persian and other Oriental rulers. In due time Esther's turn came to be presented to the king. "She required nothing." Professor Cassel in his exposition gives the best exposition of this statement. The other women could not find enough artificial means with which to make an impression upon the king. But Esther cared nothing about these things. She had no such ambitious desires. Her heart did not burn to become something illustrious, yet unbecoming to a Jewess. Reluctantly she must have left her home, and reluctantly she must have put on the ornaments. She was wanted, and was ordered to appear, and therefore she obeyed Hegai and allowed herself to be prepared for the occasion. She was compelled to be there, while no doubt in heart she detested the whole affair.

She was brought in to the king. Attracted by her beauty he set the royal crown upon her head and the Jewish maiden became queen in the place of Vashti. This took place in the month Tebeth in the seventh year of the reign of Ahasuerus.

Then a great feast was made, even Esther's feast, a release was made, probably a release of prisoners and taxes and gifts were bestowed. God in His providence.

Verses 19-23. This paragraph contains another important providential event which in the subsequent history plays a very leading part. The opening words of verse 19 have been pronounced obscure by critics. "And when the virgins were gathered together the second time." Jewish expositors have explained this as meaning a conspiracy, that the enemies of the new queen had collected more virgins so that in some way Esther might be eclipsed and placed into the background. It is claimed by others that the words "the second time" should be omitted from the text as there is some doubt about them. If this is done the statement would then refer to the gathering of the virgins mentioned in the eighth verse of the chapter. But

the suggestion that the second gathering was an act of conspiracy might be the true meaning; it would show the purpose of the unseen enemy and it also explains the watchfulness of Mordecai. He sat at the king's gate. It was according to oriental custom a place of public resort, where news was heard and conversation with friends and others were carried on. The suggestion by some that Mordecai sat in the king's gate because he was an official of the government must be dismissed as incorrect.

Verse 20 informs us of two interesting facts. Esther did not disclose her nationality and she continued in humble obedience to her foster father as if she were still under his roof and not the great queen. The royal glory and dignity which surrounded her on all sides had not affected her in the least. She had not forgotten that the whole royalty was not a matter of pleasure to her, but only an act of obedience, the providential purpose of which she did not know, but which she found out afterward. Her interest was with Mordecai outside and not with the royal splendour inside.

Let us note the providential leading in all this. If Esther had revealed her connection, if it had become known that Mordecai at the gate was her uncle and she his adopted daughter, he would not have remained in the obscure position before the gate. Then the conspirators would have been cautious and not spoken within the hearing of such a person so closely related to the queen. The knowledge of the planned attempt upon the life of the King Mordecai owed to the fact that nobody knew who he was and therefore paid no attention to him.

The conspirators were Bigthan and Teresh. They sought to lay hands on the king. According to Jewish tradition they intended to put a venomous reptile in the king's cup when he was about to drink. The plot was overheard by Mordecai who at once communicated the fact to Esther and she told the king of it in the name of Mordecai. She did so guided by the divine hand, which is so evident in this remarkable history. The plot is at once investigated and the report is found true. The conspirators were hanged and the event is historically recorded in the book of the Chronicles. (King Ahasuerus, Xerxes, lost his life by assassination in 465 B.C. Artaban, the commander of his cavalry, conspired with Mithridates, his confidential chamberlain, who admitted him into the king's bedroom, and Artaban stabbed him to death while he slept.)

Esther had saved the king's life by giving him the report of Mordecai. And Mordecai received no reward. His faithfulness was evidently forgotten; but God had ordered it all.

Typical Applications

Dispensationally Esther typifies the Jewish remnant, which will be called by the King of Israel, our Lord, when Gentile-Christendom has been disowned and set aside for its unfaithfulness, as Vashti was set aside. The parable of the good and the wild olive tree in Romans 11 is thus illustrated by Vashti and Esther. The branches of the wild olive tree--professing Christendom (but not the true Church) which were grafted in upon the root of the good olive tree (Israel and the Abrahamic covenant) on account of their failure will be cut out and cast aside. The broken off branches (the remnant of Israel) will be put back upon the root of the good olive tree. (See annotations on Romans 11, or for a fuller exposition read "The Jewish Question," an exposition of Romans 11 by A.C. Gaebelein.) This remnant will then be brought into definite relationship with the

Lord, pass through the period of the great tribulation, foreshadowed in Haman's wicked Plot, and then receive the kingdom, be delivered and have part in the kingdom, as it was the case with Esther, Mordecai and the Jews at Shushan.

The gospel application is also of interest. The humble Jewish girl is raised to the place of a queen, to the place beside the King. She did not seek that place. It never entered into her mind to receive such a place. She was sought for. All this illustrates the gospel by which the beggar upon the dunghill is raised to sit amongst princes and to inherit the throne of glory (1 Samuel 2). She, who was a foreigner, becomes married to the king, to share his glory, his riches and his honors. And so the believing sinner becomes one spirit with the Lord, a member of His body "flesh of His flesh and bone of His bones," to share His eternal glory and His eternal riches.

HAMAN AND HIS WICKED PLOT

CHAPTER 3

1. The promotion of Haman and Mordecai's faithfulness (3:1-6)
2. Haman's proposal and the King's assent (3:7-11)
3. The proclamation of death (3:12-15)

Verses 1-6. How long after these things the history of this chapter came to pass is not definitely stated. It probably happened after a short interval. We are now introduced to Haman, the Son of Hammedatha the Agagite. Him the king promoted and set his seat above all the princes. The tracing of this man's name is of interest. Its meaning is "A magnificent one." Philologists derive it from the Persian god Haoma or Hom, who was thought to be a spirit, possessing life-giving power. There can be no doubt that his name has a religious sentiment connected with it and his activity shows zeal in religious things. What interests us the most is that he was a descendant of Agag, the king of Amalek (1 Sam. 15:8) who descended from Esau, Jacob's brother and enemy. Amalek is always the bitter enemy of Israel. His final overthrow will come with the second coming of Christ. Thus Balaam announced in his prophetic utterance. When the sceptre at last rises out of Israel to smite the nations, then Amalek will find his end. "And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable and said, Amalek was the first of the nations, but his latter end shall be that he perish forever" (Numbers 24:17-20). This Haman, the Amalekite, is later called "the Jew's enemy" (verse 10). He foreshadows that final enemy, who arises to trouble Israel and attempts their extermination before the King of Israel appears. The dispensational and typical applications at the close of this chapter deal more fully with this interesting character.

And all the king's servants bowed down and did him reverence. They paid to him the honor of a god. Nearly all these Oriental rulers claimed divinity. Artaban is saying to Themistodes, according to Plutarch "The important thing with us Persians is that a king is worshipped and looked upon as the very image of God." As the king's representative this worship was extended to Haman. But Mordecai did not bow down because such reverence involved the recognition of a false god and was against the commandment of God. Mordecai may have remembered Isaiah's great prediction, "To Me every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear." According to Jewish tradition Haman wore on his coat the image of an idol and that this was the reason why Mordecai refused. The king's servants warned Mordecai and

when this was not heeded they told Haman. What a noble figure! In the midst of the worshipping servants bowing deep before Haman stands erect Mordecai, the Jew. He manifested faith in God. He trusted in Him who had delivered Daniel's companions out of the fiery furnace, when they refused to worship the image set up by Nebuchadnezzar. He trusted the same God who had stopped the lion's mouths when Daniel would not pay divine honors to Darius, the Persian king.

And when Haman discovers that Mordecai was a Jew and that his refusal was not wilful disobedience but inspired by faith in God, in obedience to His law, the Amalekite hate is stirred up in his wicked heart, and he became full of wrath. An unseen being, he who is the murderer from the beginning, told him to make this occasion for destroying all the Jews in the Persian Empire.

Verses 7-11. And now Haman waits on his unseen master, the devil. They cast the lot before Haman, from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, which is the month Adar. He wanted to find out the month which would be best suited for the execution of his wicked plot. Soothsaying, familiar spirits, asking the dead, divining by the flight of birds or by the liver of a slain animal, prognosticators and astrologers, flourished among the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Persians and all other pagan nations. Behind it all is the Devil and his fallen angels. And these things are still practised, not alone in China and India, but in the very midst of professing Christendom. Spiritism, the worst form of demonism, is ever on the increase. Astrology, asking the dead, consulting the demons, casting the lot, getting messages through the so-called "ouija board" (in use in China, the land of demon possessions, for over 2000 years) is made use of today by countless thousands among the supposedly "Christian nations." We see what kind of progress the world has made. The same superstitions, the same evils morally and in religious matters, the same demon powers whose fellowship the greater part of the race invites, as 3000 and more years ago.

Through the lot he imagines that the twelfth month, the Jewish month Adar, is the month to execute the plot. Jewish tradition explains this in the following way: "When he came to make observations in the month Adar, which comes under the zodiacal sign of the fish, Haman exclaimed, "Now they will be caught by me like the fish of the sea." But he did not notice that the children of Joseph are compared in the Scripture to the fish of the sea, as it is written: "And let them multiply as the fish in the midst of the earth" (Genesis 48:16; marginal reading).

And now he approacheth the king who was ignorant of Haman's dark counsel. He tells the king of a certain people which inhabit his kingdom. He avoids mentioning their names, if he had the plot would not have succeeded for Xerxes must have been well acquainted with the illustrious history of the Jews and he knew that ever since Cyrus the policy of the Persian Empire had been the protection of the Jews. Haman's accusation is twofold. First: Their laws are diverse from those of every people. Second: Neither keep they the king's laws. And then the verdict: It is not for the king's profit to suffer them. They were a separate people, following their God-given law. It was this religious side which stirred up the hatred of Satan and through Haman he urges now the wholesale murder of the race. And Haman Like his dark master, Satan, was cunning enough to anticipate an objection from the side of the king. Would not his kingdom suffer financially if a whole people is wiped out? To remove this financial

consideration he offers to pay 10,000 talents of silver for the desired slaughter of the Jews (about 20 million dollars). With it he tempted the avarice of the king and at the same time tickled his pride by implying that it must be a trifle to him to lose a whole people who were only worth the price of 10,000 talents. And Haman probably speculated that this great sum he offered, the greater the sum was the more flattering it would appear to the fancy of the king to waive it. Oriental monarchs were known for doing such things in a boastful spirit. This Haman knew well.

Then the king gave him his ring. It was a ring to seal a document. Every ring had a seal. The transfer of the royal ring with the royal seal and denoted the transfer of kingly authority and power to the recipient. Haman was therefore invested with royal authority. The haughtiness of the king appears now. Not alone does he turn over his signet-ring but he also makes Haman a present of the enormous sum he had offered to the king. In cold blood Xerxes gives over to him the unknown people into the hands of this wicked enemy.

Verses 12-15. A great activity is here described. An Empire-wide proclamation, a veritable proclamation of death was issued. The king's scribes were called on the 13th day of the month. Research has established the fact that the 13th day of the month was called by the Persians Tir (the meaning of which is "lot"). All the king's satraps, the governors of every province, the princes of every people who had become identified with the Persian empire were notified in different languages of what should take place on the 13th day of the month Adar. The proclamation was written in the name of the king and sealed with his ring in Haman's possession. "And letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey." And this horrible decree was sent in haste throughout the land. The king and Haman sat down to a banquet, while the capital, Shushan, was perplexed and deeply stirred.

Typical Application

Haman illustrates the coming man of sin, the beast of Revelation 13. As remarked in the introduction, his title "Haman the wicked" (7:6) represents in the numerical value of the Hebrew letters which compose this title the number 666. (See Revelation 13:18.) This future coming one will be like Haman the enemy of the Jews and one of Satan's masterpieces. Haman was to be worshipped and revered. And the man of sin will demand divine worship and with the help of the first beast, the little horn of Daniel 7, he seeks to exterminate the Jews. He will manifest greater cunning than Haman and use the political power to accomplish his purpose. Mordecai in his refusal is a type of the godly Jewish remnant to worship the man of sin.

The proclamation of death pronounced upon a whole race of people, everyone doomed to death, none exempted, typifies the condition in which the whole race is spiritually. The law on account of sin is such a proclamation. "The soul that sinneth shall die." "The wages of sin is death." The helpless condition in which the death doomed Jews found themselves is a picture of the helpless condition of man as a sinner. Nothing the Jews did could save them; no weeping nor pleading could change things. All this may be enlarged upon and helpfully applied to man's

condition as a sinner.

THE CONSTERNATION OF THE JEWS -- MORDECAI AND ESTHER

CHAPTER 4

1. The great lamentations of the Jews (4:1-3)
2. Esther's discovery (4:4-9)
3. Esther's helplessness (4:10-12)
4. Mordecai's answer (4:13-14)
5. Esther's decision (4:15-17)

Verses 1-3. When Mordecai heard of what had been done and the plan to exterminate his people became known to him he rent his clothes. This and the putting on of sackcloth and ashes were the outward expressions of the most intense grief. The sackcloth was a coarse hair-cloth of a black color. Then his bitter cry and wailing was heard in the midst of the city. Because of the sackcloth, which was also used as a sign of mourning over the dead among the Persians, it was regarded as unclean, and inasmuch as the palace of the king was looked upon as a clean and holy place, Mordecai could not enter the king's gate. He had to stand outside the wall. And throughout the provinces as the proclamation became known and was read by the condemned race, there was the same weeping and wailing with fasting. Prayer unquestionably was also connected with this grief.

Verses 4-9. Esther in the secluded portion of the palace knew nothing of the great edict which had gone forth. Her maids and chamberlains, whom she may have used to keep in touch with her uncle, then informed her that Mordecai was missing inside of the gate and that he was sitting outside in a most pitiable condition, weeping and wailing. How this report must have shocked Esther! She was exceedingly grieved and then sent raiment to Mordecai. This was according to Persian custom in connection with mourning over the dead that the nearest relations should send the mourner new garments, to put these on instead of the sackcloth. The Jews must have conformed to some of these customs. Esther thought that some one of the family of Mordecai had died. But Mordecai refused the garments for he was not mourning over death. This must have mystified Esther still more. She therefore sent Hathach, one of the king's chamberlains, her personal attendant, to Mordecai to find out the cause of his mourning.

And Hathach went forth. Mordecai told him of Haman's plot. As he possessed a copy of the decree he gave it to Hathach to deliver to Esther and then Mordecai's message to Esther. "To charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him, for her people." He did not say "for this people" but "for her people." This made known to Hathach Esther's Jewish origin. Mordecai knew the great favor Esther had found before the king and he hoped that her supplication would avert the doom of the race. There is nothing said of Mordecai calling upon God, no record of his supplications to the God of Abraham. Undoubtedly he did call on Him. This is in accord with the character of the people; they are seen as out of the land and out of touch with the Lord. Yet Jehovah in unchanging mercy watcheth over them. And Hathach delivered the message.

Verses 10-12. Esther sent the answer. Mordecai heard the alarming news that the king was unapproachable. Esther herself had not seen his face for a whole month. To enter the king's presence unbidden would mean sure death.

Death to all "except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live." Esther thus informed Mordecai that she is subject to the same law, and if she transgresseth it, no exception would be made, though she be the queen.

Verses 13-14. Mordecai's answer to Esther is a sublime one. It would have been quite natural for Mordecai to say "If thou canst not save all the people, at least save me, and the house of thy father, for thou belongest to the unassailable house of the king." He does not think of his personal interest and safety; it is the salvation of his people which is upon his heart. He knows that Esther is in a position not only to be saved herself, but also to save her people. He gives her to understand if she does not act now and if she holds her peace deliverance for the Jews would be granted through another source. She would lose a great opportunity and she and her father's house would perish. In these words Mordecai expressed his deep conviction that the Jewish people cannot perish. He knew the history of the past and trusted God that He would find a way out at this time also. And he believed more than this, that Providence had put her on the throne just to effect the deliverance: "Who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

"The answer of Mordecai is a masterpiece of eloquence. He who loved and cherished Esther as a daughter, seeks now that she should risk her life for the deliverance of Israel. He wills it, because he believes in the deliverance; because he draws from the history of Israel the assurance that as a race they cannot become extinct, and because he sees in the exaltation of Esther the divine purpose to use her in the deliverance. He encourages her to act and to risk her life and this he did by stimulating her faith in an overruling providence and that therefore she had nothing to fear."

Verses 15-17. She responded to this eloquent appeal; her believing heart had laid hold on the suggestion of her uncle. The Jews are to be gathered together in Shushan, she requests, for three days and three nights, neither to eat nor to drink. She would do the same with her maidens. "And so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law, and if I perish, I perish."

Fasting in the Old Testament is always the symbolic form of prayer; it cannot be disassociated from prayer. In giving this command she expressed her dependence on God and put Him first before attempting to go in to the king. And then her noble word--If I perish, I perish. Her faith measured up to Mordecai's expectation. She is ready to sacrifice herself in order to save her people. How it reminds us of Him who did more than say, "If I perish, I perish," who gave Himself and took upon Himself the curse of the law. And Mordecai did according to all that Esther had commanded him.

Typical Application

In the weeping, and wailing of Mordecai and the Jews, the rent clothes, the sackcloth and the ashes, we have a prophetic foreshadowing of the earnest turning to God of the Jewish remnant during the end of this age. How vividly Joel speaks of this man in the name of Jehovah. "Therefore also now saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting and with weeping, and with mourning" (Joel 2:12). And then comes for them the final deliverance as revealed by Joel and foreshadowed in the

deliverance of the book of Esther. Mordecai's faith and Esther's noble decision are equally typical of the trust and confidence of that godly portion of the Jewish people who will pass through the time of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:4) and who will be delivered out of it.

As we pointed out in the previous chapter, the great proclamation typifies what God has said as to the race of sinners, that the wages of sin is death. "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." The whole race is therefore under condemnation. And the Jews read this awful proclamation and reading they believed, and believing what was written they gave expression to their grief in fasting and turning to God. Alas! that God's proclamation telling the sinner of his dreadful condition, of the death and wrath which hangs over him is less believed than the proclamation of the Persian enemy of the Jews. Yet to know and to enjoy real salvation and deliverance, the realization of our real condition as lost sinners is eminently necessary.

As already stated, Esther is a faint type of our Lord in that she was willing to sacrifice herself in behalf of her people; while He gave that blessed life and died for that nation (John 12:27).

ESTHER AND THE KING AND HAMAN'S DELUSION

CHAPTER 5

1. Esther before the king and her request (5:1-8)
2. Haman's delusion (5:9-14)

Verses 1-8. On the third day Esther put on her royal apparel, a significant day in Scripture as we point out in the typical application of this chapter. The days of fasting and agony were passed and she is seen no longer attired in sackcloth but in royal garments. It is of great interest that Rabbinical exposition (Midrash) gives a tradition that in her great anxiety and anguish of soul she uttered the opening sentence of Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" She made use of the very words which the most ancient Jewish exponents understood as referring to the Messiah and which came from the lips of our Lord when He bore our sins in His body on the tree.

Clothed in her majestic robes, probably wearing the crown the king had placed upon her head, she entered in and stood in the inner court, which was the entrance gate to the pillared hall at the opposite end of which the king sat on his throne. The king saw her and she obtained favour--grace--in his sight.

And the king held out the golden sceptre which was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre. The beautiful typical meaning of this the reader will find at the close of this chapter. The royal sceptre, the emblem of royal power is extended towards her, the sign of the king's favour, and she touched the sceptre. (The Latin translation--the Vulgate--translates "she kissed the sceptre.") In touching the sceptre she expressed her need of it. She touched the royal sceptre of power and authority--because from this she seeks and expects deliverance. And it was the touch of faith. And so at once the king recognizing her action and what was behind it said, "What wilt thou, Queen Esther? And what is thy request? It will be given thee even to the half of the kingdom." instead of asking for a big gift she requests that the

king and Haman be present at a banquet she had prepared. The initials in the Hebrew of the sentence "Let the king and Haman come" spell the word Yahweh, which is Jehovah. This the rabbis used to prove that the name of God is mentioned in this book. While this is merely fanciful, we know that Jehovah is revealed in the manifestation of His power in behalf of His people. It must have mystified the king that such a request came from Esther. But she made the petition for she wanted Haman to be present when she uncovered the plot to the king. And the king urged haste upon Haman. He was hurrying to his doom. At the banquet he repeated his question to find out what her petition was. It was customary among oriental kings that petitions were offered and then easily granted at banquets. He repeats his offer also that even if it is the half of the kingdom, it is to be performed. This benevolence of the king proved to the queen his affection for her and hence the success of her great mission. She still holds back her petition. She invites to another banquet on the next day when she promises to make known her petition. In this she exhibited great wisdom. She made the king curious and expectant.

Verses 9-14. Haman's pride produces delusion. He congratulates himself over the honour the Queen has done him. It was a day of joy and gladness of heart. And how he was moved with indignation when he beholds again Mordecai standing up and not doing him the honour which in his delusion he thinks is now more due him than before. Why did he not kill him at once? According to Persian law one who sat at the king's gate put himself under the protection of the king. As long as he was there he was safe. Now this being the case, if Haman had killed Mordecai, his enemies would have reported the matter to the king that he had murdered one who had placed himself under the protecting wings of the king, who had appealed for protection. Haman knew the possible consequences. Therefore he fetched his friends and his wife Zeresh. He gives a review of his riches and his honors including the latest of being invited by the queen. Then he tells of his vexation. "Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." Then comes from his friends and his wife the advice. The suggested gallows are made to hang Mordecai and Haman waits, perhaps impatiently, for the morrow when he would go in merrily to the king and request the execution of the Jew. In his delusion and pride he did not know that he built the gallows for himself.

Typical Application

This chapter is especially rich in its symbolical, typical and dispensational meaning. It was on the third day that Esther came forth to enter into the presence of the king. The third day throughout Scripture is the day of resurrection and life, the day of blessing and glory. On the third day in the first chapter of Genesis the submerged earth came out of the waters and brought forth its beautiful vegetation. This speaks of resurrection and it is the first time this type is found in the Word of God. Many times after that the third day in the history of Israel is mentioned, as well as the third time, and each time it carries with it the same lesson. (See 2 Kings 20:5; Jonah and his experiences, etc.) All these passages are blessed types of Him who was raised on the third day after He finished the work the Father gave Him to do. And so is Esther a type. She passed typically through a death experience in her fasting, with deep anguish of soul. "If I perish, I perish," she had said; ready to sacrifice herself. When she stands in her royal garments before the king on the third day with her death experience behind she reminds us of Him who left the grave behind and is now garbed in resurrection glory. The golden sceptre

tells of divine righteousness, power and grace. That sceptre is extended to all who come to God in that blessed and worthy Name. We can come with boldness to the throne of grace, obtaining mercy and finding grace to help in time of need. And there are other gospel applications which we can make. Esther's entering in to the king was not according to law. Law excluded her from the presence of the king. So we are excluded from being in God's presence, because we are sinners. But love has made a way through the Beloved One in whom we are accepted. And the banquet which Esther made for the king was for more than giving refreshment to him who loved her, as we can refresh Him also. It was a banquet to expose the enemy, to stop his accusation and take his power away from him. And all this is graciously accomplished in a spiritual way through the cross and the resurrection of Christ.

If we look upon Esther as a type of the Jewish remnant we see in her fasting and agony the tribulation through which this remnant passeth. But there comes a third day. This prophecy declares. "After two days will He revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live before Him" (Hosea 6:1). The third day will surely come when Israel will rise out of the dust and when the golden sceptre will be extended to His earthly people.

In Haman we see the arrogant pride of the enemy of God and the final enemy of the Jewish people. "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18), was true of Haman, it is true of all who walk in pride and will finally be exemplified in the total defeat of him, who exalteth himself above all that is called God.

THE SLEEPLESS NIGHT AND MORDECAI'S EXALTATION

CHAPTER 6

1. The sleepless night (6:1-3)
2. The exaltation of Mordecai (6:4-11)
3. Haman anticipates his doom (6:12-14)

Verses 1-3. A sleepless night is the next event. The king wanted to sleep but sleep refused to come. What was the cause of his insomnia? Some say too much excitement and anxiety in connection with his kingdom; others that he was speculating on the petition the queen would make on the morrow. The ancient Jewish expositors say that God took his sleep away from him. And this is the correct answer. His wakefulness was ordered by God. Next God puts it into his heart to order the book of record of the chronicles to be brought so that they might be read to him, not to produce sleep but to spend the sleepless night in a profitable way. Once more we see the hand of God in directing the reading of the record of Mordecai's discovery of the plot against the king's life and how he had saved the king. The deed of Mordecai had been unrewarded through the wise purpose of the Lord; and now it is brought to light by the same providence. In that memorable, sleepless night the machinations of revenge, so finely spun in the dark, are suddenly arrested and their exposure becomes assured. And let us remember that the same providence still works, mysteriously and openly in the lives of God's people.

The king hears that Mordecai had not been rewarded. His pride and dignity were suddenly stirred up. He felt it was not just that such a deed should go unrewarded. It must also have come to his mind that this Mordecai

had not reminded the king of his deed, by sending a petition for a reward or by requesting a favour, so common in oriental life. He had kept silent.

Verses 4-1 1. The king must have been indignant that such a matter had been overlooked and he wants to have the matter rectified at once. He asks "Who is in the court?" Whosoever would be there would have to carry out the king's commission. He did not expect that Haman was waiting outside. Perhaps he also had a sleepless night, nervously excited as he thought that soon Mordecai would dangle from the gallows; and how he would enjoy the banquet of Esther on the same day. He was in a great hurry and desired that the execution of the despised Jew should take place in the early morning. All is working together and God's majestic hand is seen every step of the way! "Never was there exhibited a more frivolous and thoughtless judgment than that shown by many higher critics in their light estimation of the book of Esther. For surely there can be no more beautiful description of the impending dramatic catastrophe than that with which the whole of this book is full. At the moment when the mind of the king has but one thought, to compensate Mordecai with the long-merited honour and dignity, and so much the more because it ought to have been done long ago, at the very moment when he looks for a person to carry out his plans, just then, Haman appears on the scene" (Professor Cassel).

And the king asks Haman, "What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?" In his blind self-love, his deluded pride, Haman thought he was the man to whom the king would do still more honour. Well says a writer in the Talmud--"inasmuch as the writer of the book of Esther knew what was in Haman's heart, he must have been inspired in writing this account."

And pride fills his lips with an extraordinary demand. When his wicked lips spoke the words, he must have imagined himself clad in royal apparel riding the king's charger, wearing his crown, and thus led forth through the city, announced by the town-crier that he is the man whom the king delighteth to honour.

The king speaks: "Make haste and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate, let nothing fail of all thou hast spoken." What a thunderbolt this must have been for Haman! While he dreamt of his own honour and greatness he is suddenly awakened by the unalterable command of the king, whose word is law, to do all he had spoken to the man whom he hated and despised, whose death warrant he expected to have signed by the king. He could not tarry in the king's presence for the king demanded haste. He could not parley with the king; that would have been an insult. All that was left to Haman was to make haste and take the apparel and the horse to Mordecai. He arrayed him and then led him through the city and proclaimed before him the king's message. And Mordecai? His mouth must have been filled with laughter and with praises to his God, when his deadly enemy came to do him honour. How great was his triumph in the marvellous exaltation brought about by the keeper of Israel, who neither sleeps nor slumbers! The Jews read the entire book of Esther on the Purim feast. When the reader reaches this passage he reads the record with a raised and triumphant voice.

Verses 12-14. Mordecai is back at the gate; Haman in bitter disappointment, with evil forebodings, his head covered, the sign of grief, returns to his wife and friends. When they hear what happened they told

him that his case would be hopeless. In the conflict between the Jew and the offspring of Amalek, victory is on the side of the Jew. (Ex. 17:16; Numb. 24:20; Deut. 25:17-19) And then the king's chamberlains knocked at the door to hurry Haman to Esther's banquet.

Typical Application

The great lesson of this chapter is the wonderful working of divine providence. Surely "God works in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform." And how He cares for His people and watcheth over them! He is still the same, for He is the Lord who changeth not.

And Mordecai stands out in this chapter as another type of our Lord. All the men of God in Old Testament history, in their humiliation and exaltation, like Joseph, Moses, David, etc., are types of the humiliation and exaltation of our Lord.

What was done to Mordecai will also be some future day the happy lot of Israel when they will be delivered out of the hand of their enemies.

THE SECOND BANQUET AND HAMAN'S MISERABLE END

CHAPTER 7

1. The second banquet and Esther's petition (7:1-4)
2. Haman's exposure (7:5-6)
3. Haman's miserable end (7:7-10)

Verses 1-4. Esther at this second feast knew that the God of her fathers was at work and that all the hatred against her race came not from the heart of the king, but centered in Haman. In the events of the sleepless night and what followed she must have seen the display of the hand of God. And now she utters her delayed petition. Her petition is that her life may be spared as well as her people. How astonished the king must have looked as he gazed upon his beautiful wife and learned from her lips that her life was in danger. And still greater must have been his surprise when he hears, "For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish." What a scene! The handsome queen, her marvelous earnestness and eloquence in pleading for her life and for her people; the darkening, astonished countenance of the king, the blanching face of Haman and the others in the banquet hall in great excitement.

And her heart-rendering plea, perhaps mingled with tears which coursed down her cheek, did not fail to produce the desired effect.

Verses 5-6. The king must have been more than astonished" he must have been angry. Who dared to plot against the life of the beautiful queen and deprive him of her? Who dared to sell her and her people for slaughter? Even then before he hears from Esther the name of the man, he must have realized, that the crouching Haman is the man. "Who is he, and where is he that durst presume in his heart to do so?" Her answer is brief but eloquent. With flashing eyes and pointing her finger to the guest at her side she said, "An adversary and an enemy, even this wicked Haman!" The scene is beyond comparison. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen. He anticipated the fearful storm which would break over his head.

Verses 7-10. The king arose in his wrath. Close to the banquet hall was the garden. There the king went in the heat of his wrath and the great excitement which had seized upon him and made him speechless. When an oriental king or sultan arises angry from his own table, then there is no mercy for him that causeth it. (See Rosenmueller Oriental Studies on Esther.) In the meantime Haman begs cowardly for his life. He must have fallen at her feet with weeping and wailing. And Esther did not open her lips. Then Haman in his agonizing plea falls upon the couch where Esther was. At that moment the king re-entered the banquet hall. He has regained his speech and when he beholds Haman on the couch he utters a word of bitter sarcasm, as if he had designs upon the honour of the queen. No sooner had the king spoken the word, the attending servants covered Haman's face. This was a Persian custom. The face of a criminal was covered to indicate that he was no longer worthy to behold the light and that darkness of death would be his lot.

The gallows which Haman had prepared for Mordecai is used for his own execution. Critics point out the statement that the gallows 50 cubits high (80 feet) stood in Haman's house and they raise the question "How could an 80 foot long pole be gotten into any one's house?" But the word gallows means in the Hebrew "tree." Probably a tree standing in the garden of Haman was made ready with a rope to hang the hated Jew. It is characteristic of the critics to take such minor things to discredit the accuracy of Scripture.

Typical Application

Haman illustrates the work and the ignominious end of the final Anti-christ who troubles Israel. Haman had almost succeeded. But when the proper moment came God acted in behalf of His people and Haman falls forever. So that coming man of sin will almost succeed, but in the end of the great tribulation, the final 1260 days or three years and a half, with which this age closes, the power of God will be displayed in the complete victory over this enemy of God and man. Haman's end came by the decree of the king and the Anti-christ will be destroyed by the coming of the King of kings and Lord of Lords.

MORDECAI'S EXALTATION AND THE SECOND PROCLAMATION

CHAPTER 8

1. Mordecai's exaltation (8:1-2)
2. Esther's second petition (8:3-8)
3. The second proclamation (8:9-14)
4. The joy of the Jews (8:15-17)

Verses 1-2. Esther the Queen receives from the king the possessions of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. Then she revealed what Mordecai was to her, her uncle and foster-father. The king had taken the signet-ring of authority from the hand of Haman. The same ring Mordecai received. Esther honoured her uncle by placing him over the house of Haman.

Verses 3-6. But while Mordecai had become the prime-minister of Persia, Haman the Agagite had been executed, and all his property given to the queen, the horrible decree still stood; the first proclamation was still in force. Something had to be done to complete the deliverance of her people. Her life and Mordecai's life had been spared, but what about

her beloved people? It is true the fateful day was still in the future, but the evil decreed and not yet recalled had to be met in some way. Once more she enters into the presence of the king. Once more the king holds out the golden sceptre, from which we learn that his decree was still in force and that, therefore, Esther once more risked her life. But she knew he loved her. Knowing this she cast herself at his feet and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman, and his devices he had devised against the Jews. Her pleading and her tears were not in vain. Her petition is that the letters of Haman, demanding the destruction of her people, should be reversed. "For how can I endure to see the evil that will come upon my people? or how can I endure the destruction of my kindred?" The king answers her. But the former decree cannot be revoked; it must stand. Laws made by Persian kings could not be altered or changed. (See Daniel 6:15.) A revocation of the edict is impossible and the former proclamation therefore stands. This Persian custom had for its foundation the idea that a "decree" must be looked upon in the light of an emanation from the king as a person with divine authority. But inasmuch as Mordecai had now the signet-ring, which authorized him to issue decrees in the name of the king, he could do anything he pleased and write to the Jews in the name of the king and this second proclamation would also be irrevocable.

Verses 7-14. Then followed a great activity. The scribes were called and Mordecai dictated the message. It was addressed to the governors and princes of the whole empire from India to Ethiopia and written in many languages. He wrote in the name of the king and sealed it with his ring. The letters were dispatched by posts on horseback, riding on swift steeds that were used in the king's service. The proclamation contained the following good news: "The king grants the Jews in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, their little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey, upon one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, that is upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar." The proclamation of death stood, but alongside of it there was given a proclamation of life. They needed not to die. Their enemies were given into their hands. Acting upon this second proclamation, believing its contents, they learned that while the first decree stood and could not be revoked, the second decree set them free from death and gave them liberty.

Verses 15-17. How things had changed under God's merciful dealings with His people! When that first decree was issued Mordecai sat in sackcloth and ashes and all the Jews wept and wailed. But now when the second decree was announced Mordecai went forth from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue, white and purple, the Persian colours. (They illustrate the ancient Persian view about the world. White the colour of light, blue, the sky, and purple was brought in connection with the sun.) On his head he had a great crown of gold. There was great joy in the city of Shushan. The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and glory. Throughout the vast kingdom there was nothing but joy. Furthermore many people became Jews.

Typical Application

In Mordecai's exaltation as given in this chapter, in Haman's possession handed over to the queen and her uncle, in the authority which both received, we have a fine foreshadowing of what will take place when the final Haman is overthrown. That will be when the times of the Gentiles are passed and the King, our Lord, has come back. Then Israel will

get her great blessings, promised long ago by a covenant-keeping God.

Like it was in Mordecai's and Esther's day, the riches of the Gentiles will be given unto them. "Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the wealth of the Gentiles shall come unto thee" (Isaiah 60:5). Israel restored will then be the head of the nations and no longer the tail. As many people became Jews as recorded in the last verse of this chapter, so in that coming day, ten men out of all languages of the nations shall take hold of the skirt of a Jew and say, "we will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech. 8:23). "And many nations shall be joined unto the LORD in that day" (Zech. 2:11). All this blessing for the Jews in Persia was brought about by the heroic deed of Esther, who passed through a great struggle, who risked her life that her people might be saved. And the promised blessings and glory can only come to the people Israel through Him who gave His life, the true King and Shepherd of Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In gospel application the second decree or proclamation is of much interest. It typifies and illustrates the good news. As we saw, the first decree illustrates the sentence of death passed upon the whole race on account of sin. The second decree does not cancel the first, but declares that which liberates from death, sets free and gives power. And that is the good news as it is given in the cross of Christ. Death is met by death; the death of the Son of God in the sinner's place, bearing the curse, sets free from the law of sin and death. Thus the sinner's doom is fully met in the death of Christ. "This second decree has been nailed to the cross of Christ, it has been revealed in His sacrificial death, written with His blood, sealed by His bowed head, uttered by His expiring cry. It has a twofold effect. First, the sinner who avails himself of it, who believes, is saved. It arrays all the forces of righteousness on his side and enables him to find his surest protection in that which but for the work of Christ must have condemned him. Then it puts him in a position to rise up against his enemies by whom as a captive he was enslaved and to lead his captivity captive. From the condemnation of the law and from the cruel dominion of sin believing sinners are equally delivered by the proclamation of the gospel in the cross of Christ, as the Jews had righteous power given to them over their enemies.

But faith was necessary for the Jews. They had to believe the second proclamation as they believed the first. Woe unto the Jews when that thirteenth day of the month Adar came and they acted not upon the second decree. Then the first decree would have been carried out upon their heads and they would have suffered death. So must the sinner believe the first decree--that death is sentence as a sinner; then he must believe the second decree "Christ died for the sins of the ungodly"--there is life in a look to the crucified One. And as the Jews had light, gladness, joy, and glory because they believed, even so he who believes the good news has salvation, peace, joy and glory.

THE THIRTEENTH DAY OF ADAR AND THE FEAST OF PURIM

CHAPTER 9

1. The resistance and victory of the Jews (9:1-11)
2. Esther's petition (9:12-16)
3. The institution of Purim (9:17-19)

4. The messages of Mordecai and Esther (9:20-32)

Verses 1-11. The fateful day, the thirteenth day of Adar, came and with it the retribution for the enemies of the Jews. On that day they gathered together to withstand all who would assault them. The princes and governors and all other officials of the king helped the Jews, because they knew the influential position which Mordecai held and that he waxed greater and greater. Theirs was a great victory. In Shushan itself 500 were slain and 300 more in another part of the city; there were 75,000 slain in the provinces. The ten sons of Haman were slain; their Persian names are given.

Verses 12-16. The king heard the report of the number of his subjects slain in Shushan the fortress and then asks the queen to make a petition. She requests that an additional day be given to continue the work in Shushan and that the ten sons of Haman be hanged on gallows. But had they not slain already 500 in Shushan? The 500 were killed in the palace, or, as that word should be rendered, citadel, fortress; the extra day was requested to continue the retributive work in the city itself. The request was granted and the ten sons of Haman were hanged. On the spoil, the goods and possessions of those slain, they did not touch, probably to avoid false accusations, though the decree gave them permission to spoil their enemies. When Jews read in orthodox synagogues the book of Esther they read the names of Haman's ten sons in one breath, as quickly as possible, intimating thereby that they all were exterminated at one and the same time.

Verses 17-19. With the fourteenth day of Adar they rested and made it a feast of rejoicing. The Jews in Shushan celebrated the thirteenth and fourteenth day and rested on the fifteenth day. This was the origin of the traditional feast of Purim still kept by the orthodox Jews in commemoration of the great deliverance and the wonderful history of Mordecai and Esther. It is mostly celebrated by public reading of this book and by the distribution of gifts.

Verses 20-32. The final section of this chapter gives the account of a message which Mordecai sent to the Jews in the provinces of the Persian kingdom enjoining them to observe these days, the feast of Purim. Queen Esther also wrote with all authority confirming this second letter of Purim.

Typical Application

What happened to the enemies of the Jews in Shushan and the Persian provinces will be the lot of all those who hate them. This is often made known in the prophetic Word. Thus spake Balaam: "His king (Israel's King) shall be higher than Agag, and His kingdom shall be exalted. God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn; he shall eat of the nations his enemies and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with arrows" (Numbers 24:7-8). The Lord Himself will arise in behalf of His people and judge their enemies, for it is written, "I will render vengeance to mine enemies and will reward them that hate me" (Deut. 32:41). In this respect this little book with its history is a prophecy of the ultimate victory of God's chosen people over their enemies. In all their history it has been true, and will be finally true in the fullest sense of the word what Isaiah wrote: "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn (Isaiah 54:17).

The ten sons of Haman, so fully identified with the wicked father,

are also not without meaning. The final form of the Gentile government in the close of the age was revealed to Daniel. It consists of ten kingdoms, seen in Nebuchadnezzar's dream image and in Daniel's ten-horned beast, forming once more the Roman empire. It will be domineered over by the little horn, who works together with the man of sin. The ten sons of Haman and their miserable end are another illustration of prophetic truth.

AHASUERUS AND MORDECAI: THE CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 10

The three verses with which this book closes tell us of the greatness of King Ahasuerus. Here also is the record of the increasing greatness of Mordecai. He was next unto King Ahasuerus, great among the Jews, accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people and speaking peace to all his seed. A blessed type of Him who is greater than Mordecai and who will some day bring peace to His earthly people and who will speak peace to the nations. The precious little book ends with peace.

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