

*The book
of Esther*

or

“If I perish, I perish”

by Rick Shoemaker

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CHARACTERS IN THE BOOK OF ESTHER

Please forgive my juvenile attempt to describe the people in the book of Esther. I have found it is easy to lose track of all the different people in this book. Hopefully, the diagram below will help.

THE EVIL CHARACTERS

KING AHASUERUS
(picture of Satan)



QUEEN VASHTI
AHASUERUS' WIFE



HAMAN
(picture of human nature / flesh)



ZERESH / HAMAN'S WIFE



THE GOOD CHARACTERS

ESTHER
(picture of new nature of a
Christian)



MORDECAI
(picture of the Holy Spirit)



The book of Esther tells us how one woman saved a nation from total destruction.

This book, and the book of Ruth, are the only books in the Bible named after women.

The author is unknown but a simple reading will show us its true author is God. We are told details of private conversations and the thoughts and feelings of the people involved. These are things no one but God would know.

Esther is one of the two books of the Old Testament that does not mention God, the other being The Song Of Solomon. All the basic elements of Judaism are absent. There is no mention of God, priests, prophets, sacrifices, the Temple, or the law.

There are no obvious miracles in Esther. There is no parting of seas, healing of lepers, or raising of the dead, but we see God at work on every page. This book is a wonderful example of how God is working in this universe. There will be times when we can't feel or hear God, but that does not mean He is not working in our lives.

Mankind has a "god" who is powerless over the circumstances of the laws of nature. To them, storms, earthquakes, volcanoes, drought, floods, wildfires, famine, and plagues are uncontrollable facts of nature. How different is the God of the bible? The bible says "*All things were created by him, and for him*" (Col.1:16). He did not simply set in motion the laws of nature and let them run on their own. He is Lord over all things, including the laws of nature (Gen.7:10-12; Ex.14:21; 2 Kgs.20:11; Mk.4:39). He is not a powerless bystander of these laws. He "*maketh*" the sun to shine (Mt.5:45), the rain to fall (Lev.26:4; Job 5:10; Ps.68:9; Mt.5:45), and He feeds the birds (Mt.6:26).

All that being said, the book of Esther reveals how God can accomplish His exact will without overriding the laws of nature or the will of man. In fact, we see how God actually uses these laws to accomplish His plan.

This book is meant to give the believer an unwavering confidence in their God. He is a God who can be trusted in the face of utmost danger. He will deliver us when there seems to be no means of escape.

There are eight feasts in this book. Each feast seems to be connected to a major change of circumstances. Also, it seems like circumstances change each time someone changed their clothes (4:1; 4:3; 5:1; 6:11; 8:15)

Some have chosen Mordecai's words, "*Who knoweth whether thou are come to the kingdom for such a time as this*" (Es.4:14) as the theme of this book. I think Esther's words are even better. She said, "*If I perish, I perish*" (Es.4:16). Esther had come to the place to where she was willing to do right no matter what the consequences. May we follow her example.

Esther answers the question about who, or what is in control of our daily circumstances. It shows how God is very much in control of the circumstances we face every day. It should enhance our faith in God for it reminds us that even though man is ungodly, God remains true. There are no accidents in the life of one of God's children (Rom.8:28).

THE PLACE

The events take place in and around Shushan (Susa in Greek), the capital city of Persia (1:2), and throughout the entire Persian Empire.

THE PERIOD

The events in this book happen during the Persian Empire and the events between Ezra chapter 6 and chapter 7.

THE PEOPLE

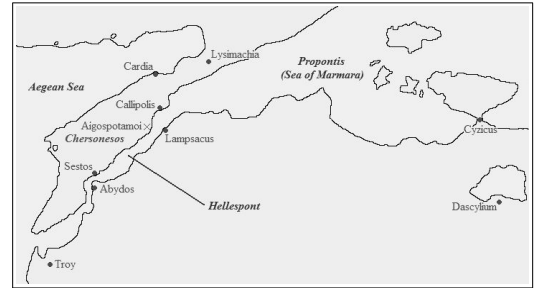
KING AHASUERUS

King Ahasuerus, also known as Xerxes, was the king of Persia. Ahasuerus was not an actual name, but a title used for a Persian king. The same is true of "Pharaoh" by the Egyptians and "Caesar" by the Romans.

He inherited the vast Persian Empire from his father, Darius I. This kingdom included the areas now known as Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel. It included sections of modern-day Egypt, Sudan, Libya, and Arabia.

He was a man who was power-hungry, brutal, and jealous. To say the least, that is not a good combination.

He was a man with many personal issues. In an attempt to conquer Greece, he had bridges built across the Hellespont (a narrow passage between the Aegean Sea and the Sea of Marmara). Before his soldiers could cross, a terrible storm destroyed the bridge. Ahasuerus was so angry that the bridge did not survive that he had the engineers beheaded. He blamed the water for bringing in the storm so he ordered some of his soldiers to go into the water and lash the waves 300 times with whips. He commanded these soldiers to say as they lashed the water, "You hateful water, our master lays his judgment on you thus, for you have unjustly punished him even though he's done you no wrong! Xerxes the king will pass over you, whether you wish it or not". He also had soldiers throw shackles into the water to demonstrate his mastery over the sea.



I believe King Ahasuerus is a picture of the devil. Like Ahasuerus, there are times when the devil seems to let his anger overcome his common sense.

QUEEN VASHTI

Vashti was the wife of Ahasuerus and the queen of Persia. She was the daughter of Belshazzar (the last king who was defeated by Darius and Cyrus) and the great-granddaughter of Nebuchadnezzar (who destroyed the Temple and Jerusalem). Vashti refused to come when the king ordered her presence. Her refusal started the events described in this book.

HAMAN

Haman was one of King Ahasuerus' most loyal officers (3:1). The king trusted him to the extent to where he allowed him to make life or death decisions on his own (3:10-12). He was a descendant of Agag, the king of Amalek (3:1; 8:3). Agag was the absolute enemy of the Jews. The Amalekites were the first ones to oppose Israel when they approached the Promised Land (Ex.17:8-16).

Haman hated the Jewish people and proved it by trying to eliminate the entire Jewish population (9:24). He was an ungodly man who was interested only in himself. He failed to include one thing in his plan, the faithfulness of Israel's God. That one miscalculation would be his downfall.

Haman, and his sons, ended up being hanged on a gallows he had made for Mordecai (7:9-10; 9:13-14).

I believe Haman is a picture of the old nature that every believer has to overcome. The old "Adam" loves itself and wants its way no matter who gets hurt. God wants us to yield our spirit to Him and resist the influence of the devil.

ZERESH

Zeresh was the wife of Haman and was as ungodly as he was. She and Haman had ten sons who were killed in a battle with the Jews (9:5-10).

I believe Zeresh is a picture of the demons who inform and assist the devil with his evil work. The devil has a great army of demons that follow his direction and are ready to do his will (2 Cor.4:4; Eph.6:10; Lk.8:30-33).

ESTHER

The name "*Esther*" was her Persian name, which means "Star". Her Hebrew name was "*Hadassah*" (2:7), which means "myrtle", which is a beautiful plant that grew at that time.

Being an orphan she was cared for by her cousin Mordecai (2:7).

She was a descendant of the Jews who were exiled to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar.

Her beauty caused King Ahasuerus to select her as his new queen after Vashti was removed. She started as a poor Jewish exile but she became the queen of Persia, the most powerful empire on earth.

She saved her people from annihilation. She was willing to lose her life if need be that her people might be spared (4:16). One person can be used to change the course of a nation.

It seems to me that, Esther and her people, the Jews, are the only ones in this book who are changed. Everyone else stayed the same. Esther had a teachable spirit and was willing to learn and grow. She was humble while others around her displayed pride and arrogance. Her willingness to accept the

circumstances in her life placed her in a position to accomplish great things for the glory of God.

I believe Esther is a picture of the spirit of a New Testament believer. As we will see, Esther gradually allowed Mordecai to influence her actions. The more she allowed Mordecai to control her, the less she was in control herself. Hopefully, we are learning to surrender more and more to the Holy Spirit and less and less to our own will. I am so glad we can trust the Lord to help us grow spiritually. He doesn't give up on us (2 Cor.5:17; Eph.2:10; Ps.51:10).

MORDECAI

Mordecai was Esther's older cousin and a descendant of King Saul (2:5). He raised Esther after her mother and father died (2:7,15).

He, like Esther, was a descendant of the Jews who had been exiled to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar

His compassion was demonstrated by him raising a girl that was not his own. His wisdom was revealed when he discovered the assassination plans of Haman (2:21-23).

I believe Mordecai is a picture of the Holy Spirit. Through his wisdom and direction, the will of God was accomplished (Rom.5:5; 8:9; 1 Cor.6:19; Gal.3:2; 4:6).

HATACH

Hatach was one of the King's chamberlains. Chamberlains were eunuchs who had charge of the king's harem. He assisted Mordecai in communicating with Esther (4:5-11)

I believe Hatach is a picture of the truth of Scripture. The truth of God will direct us if we will listen.

THE JEWS

Knowing the spiritual condition of the Jews is vitally important if we are going to understand the book of Esther. The book speaks of the people of Israel who were still in the land of Persia because they refused to return to the Promised Land after the Babylonian Captivity (Ezra 7:11-26).

There was a spiritual sluggishness among God's people. Nehemiah's prayer gives us an idea of their spiritual condition at that time. He prayed, "*We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses*" (Neh 1:7).

While these circumstances do not excuse Mordecai or Esther, it does help us understand why they may have been less spiritual than they should have been. We should not miss the fact that both of them did the right thing in the end.

The Jews of today place a great emphasis on this book and call it "The book of salvation".

SATAN

We must not miss the work of the devil in this book. Once again, he was trying to do away with the people of Israel in an attempt to stop the Savior from going to the cross. He hates God, so he hates God's people. But, like Haman, the devil will lose in the end.

GOD

Even though He is not mentioned by name, God was at work in every circumstance in this book. God may be anonymous, but He is never absent.

God did not force Ahasuerus, or anyone else, to do the ungodly things recorded in this book. However, God does direct the circumstances in our lives to where our own decisions accomplish His purpose. God, is indeed, "*upholding all things*" (Heb.1:3).

The greatest of God's miracles are often done without Him getting the credit. He delivers His people from the worse danger without turning parting a sea (Ex.14:21-31), opening the earth (Num.16:32), stopping the sun (Josh.10:12-14), or raising the dead (Jn.11:43-44).

THE PROBLEMS

There are some questions that arise from the book of Esther.

Question one is Esther truly a God-given book that should be included in the canon of Scripture.

Answer: Yes, this book is biblically trustworthy and historically accurate. It is historical fact, not a bedtime story. Its first words are, "*Now it came to pass*" not "Once upon a time".

Question two, why is God never even mentioned?

Answer: We are not told why God is not mentioned, but that has nothing to do with whether this book can be trusted or whether it should be in the bible.

Question three, why were Mordecai and Esther so secular in their manner of living? They seem to lack the holiness of Daniel, the zeal of Ezra, and the commitment of Nehemiah.

Answer: These facts have nothing to do with whether this book is Scriptural. If anything, it proves the book can be trusted for God tells the truth about people.

THE PURPOSE

Why would God inspire a book that does not even mention His name? What message was God trying to get across? What does it mean to us today? Seven reasons seem logical to me.

One, God gave us this book because it reveals how He supernaturally watches over His people, even when they are not what they should be.

Two, God gave us this book because it reveals how His mercy eventually runs out. God finally chastened the people of Israel by allowing Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the city of Jerusalem and the temple and take them into captivity.

Three, God gave us this book because it reveals the attitude of His people. Esther takes place at the time between Ezra chapters 6 and 7. They were satisfied with the pagan culture of Babylon and were not willing to make the journey back to Jerusalem.

Four, God gave us this book because it reveals the results of a nation that decides to live as though there is no God. God will let a man do what he wants if he is so determined. However, when man suffers the consequences of his decisions he cannot blame God. America has certainly ignored God and I am afraid we are suffering the results even now.

Five, God gave us this book because it reminds us how God His greatest work in seemingly insignificant ways. God does some of His best work anonymously. His name may be absent, but He is present.

This book is filled with big little events.

Vashti refused to obey the command of King Ahasuerus (1:10-12).

King Ahasuerus got rid of Vashti (1:19-21).

Esther pleased the eunuch in charge of the women (2:9).

Esther was chosen as the new queen (2:15-17).

Mordecai overheard a plot against King Ahasuerus (2:21-22).

The men planning to assassinate King Ahasuerus were executed, which saved the king's life (2:23).

Haman is promoted (3:1-2).

God caused the casting of the lots to fall as He desired (3:7).

King Ahasuerus allows Esther to enter the throne room (5:1-2).

King Ahasuerus could not sleep (6:1).

The record about the assassination attempt was read to King Ahasuerus (6:2).

King Ahasuerus decided to honor Mordecai for saving his life (6:3).

Haman was hanged on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai (7:10).

Esther pleads on behalf of the Jews and King Ahasuerus grants her request (8:3-14).

The Jews won the battle (9:11-12,15,17).

Mordecai was promoted (10:1-3).

Those times when something very small becomes something very big. God does some of His greatest work through what seems to be small circumstances.

Six, God gave us this book to show how He accomplishes His will without overriding the will of man. Man has their own thought processes, they make their own plans, and do as they please, without any regard for the will of God. And yet, in it all, God works His plan perfectly. Even His enemies are the agents of His

purpose (Pro.16:4). The greatest example of this is Calvary. Man's hatred for Jesus caused them to put Jesus on the cross. And yet, that very act, God used to bring about salvation to anyone who will believe and repent.

Seven, God gave us this book to show us He will not overlook our sin. God did bring about good things from the ungodly actions in this book. However, that does not give us permission to disobey. It is never right, to do wrong.

Interestingly, only Esther and the Jews change in this book. Sadly, most of those involved in this book faced very difficult circumstances without any personal improvement.

1. THE RICHES DISPLAYED 1:1-9

King Ahasuerus, also known as Xerxes, ruled over the mighty Persian Empire, the largest the world had ever seen. He gave two feasts that displayed his tremendous riches. The first was for the government officials, the second was for the citizens of Shushan.

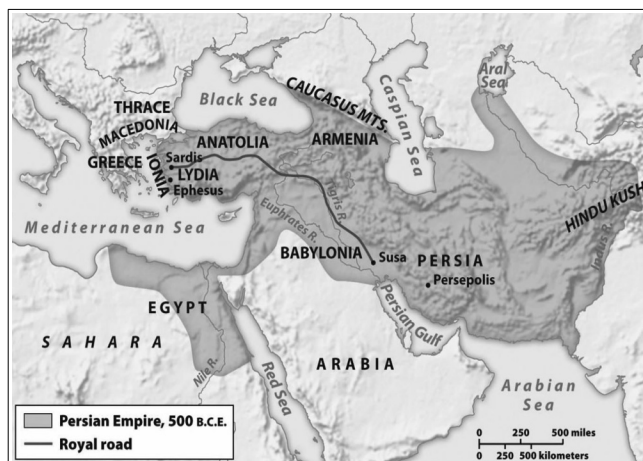
Ahasuerus is a perfect example of the mentality of our day. We are impressed not by the morality of a person but by their financial status. Those who are rich are placed on a pedestal no matter what their lifestyle.

King Ahasuerus shows his riches:

Es 1:1 Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus, (this is Ahasuerus which reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces:)

The words, "Now it came to pass" tell us this book is historically accurate. It does not say, "Once upon a time" because it is not a fairy tale. These words are found 453 times in the bible. If they are not true here, how do we know they are true anywhere else in the bible?

The map shows how the Persian Empire, which spanned an amazing two million square miles, included the area now known as Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, and sections of modern-day Egypt, Sudan, Libya, and Arabia. King Ahasuerus' kingdom was the chest and arms of silver on the image described by Daniel (Dan.2:38-39).

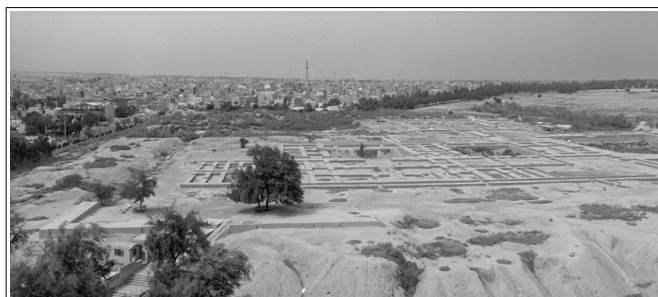


Ahasuerus was a man with many personal issues. He was power-hungry, brutal, jealous, and loved the approval of man. He ruled over 127 provinces but he did not have rule over his own wicked nature.

Es 1:2 That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace,

The words, "sat on the throne" imply that he was enjoying a time of peace throughout his kingdom. Sadly, this could be said of the devil all too often. When God's people are spiritually asleep, the devil is at peace. How long has it been since God's children disturbed the devil?

Shushan (Susa in Greek), was the winter capitol and home of the Persian kings. Shushan refers to the palace and the city (2:5; 3:14; 9:6; 8:15). King Ahasuerus also had an elaborate palace in Persepolis.



This picture shows where archaeologists have unearthed the palace of King Ahasuerus. The remains still reveal the magnificence of its beauty. Alexander the Great entered this palace more

than a century later and found 1200 tons of gold and silver bullion and 270 tons of gold coins.

King Ahasuerus makes a feast:

Es 1:3-4 In the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him: When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred and fourscore days.

It was common for rulers to display their greatness and authority by giving banquets. The Jewish historian Herodotus described banquets with 15,000 guests and one Assyrian king who gave a feast with nearly 70,000 guests.

King Ahasuerus made a feast for all his chief officers and commanders that lasted six months (180 days). Unlike the feasts instituted by the Lord which focused on God and His greatness, these were a display of the accomplishments of a man and were filled with sinful indulgence.

King Ahasuerus had dreams of conquering the world and had his sights set on Greece. His father, Darius I had invaded Greece but was defeated and died before he could try again. So, Ahasuerus wanted to overcome Greece for his father's sake.

He probably used this banquet to discuss his plans with officials throughout his kingdom and get on their good side. However, his invasion of Greece would fail miserably.

King Ahasuerus' attitude was all about him. So it is with the devil. He loves to demonstrate his power over mankind. He is called the "god of this world" (2 Cor.4:4), the "prince of this world" (Jn.12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph.2:2).

Es 1:5 And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace;

After six months of feasting, King Ahasuerus threw a party that lasted seven days for "all the people that were present in Shushan the palace".

No doubt, Ahasuerus gave these feasts because he wanted to impress. He wanted everyone to think his kingdom offered the best benefits available on earth. He also wanted to convince everyone it would be foolish to try to overpower him. Is that not exactly how the devil works? He wants mankind to believe he offers the way to happiness. He also wants to intimidate mankind into thinking he cannot be defeated.

The "court of the garden" for a man like Ahasuerus would have been grand.

Es 1:6 Where were white, green, and blue, hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble: the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black, marble.

If the court of the garden, which was outside the palace, was so beautiful, what wonders must have been inside the palace.

The "beds" mentioned here were coaches on which the guests reclined. They did not sit at tables to eat, as we do, but reclined on couches (Jn.13:23).

Es 1:7 And they gave them drink in vessels of gold, (the vessels being diverse one from another,) and royal wine in abundance, according to the state of the king.

The "diverse" vessels remind me of the many vices offered by the devil. If one doesn't suit your fancy, he has many more to choose from. However, they all leave you empty and unsatisfied.

No doubt there was a great variety of the best wines on earth.

Reading this description of the riches of Ahasuerus brings us to the age-old question, why do the wicked prosper (cf. Jer.12:1b; Job 21:7; Ps.73:3). A better question may be, why are we so concerned about the condition of the ungodly. God tells us to not fret about such things. The evil person is enjoying the only pleasure he will ever experience (Ps.37:1-7).

Es 1:8 And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure.

The Persians believed intoxication put them in closer touch with the spiritual world.

Herodotus, the Greek historian wrote this about Persian counsels "It is also their general practice to deliberate upon affairs of weight when they are drunk; and then on the morrow, when they are sober, the decision to which they came the night before is put before them by the master of the house in which it was made; and if it is then approved of, they act on it; if not, they set it aside".

Usually, everyone at such a feast would be forced to drink with the present round. Everyone was expected

to drink when the king lifted his cup to drink. On this occasion, everyone could drink, or not drink, as they desired. By no means does this mean there was less drinking. There was probably more than usual because the guests did not have to wait for the king to drink.

Isn't this just like the devil? He controls a person while making them think they are in control. Many a person bound by their sin believe they can quit anytime they want to. The problem is, it seems like they never quite come to the place where they want to.

King Ahasuerus seemed to be on the top of the world at this point. But, his party was about to come to an end. The devil may seem to be winning right now, but his day is coming (Rev.20:10).

Es 1:9 Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to king Ahasuerus.

While the men were in the court of the garden, Queen Vashti, the wife of Ahasuerus, gave a feast in the "royal house" for the women. It was common for the men and women to entertain separately.

This sounds like Vashti decided to give this feast. If so, it indicates she had the freedom to make such decisions and carry out her plans.

2. THE RESPECT DENIED 1:10-12

Queen Vashti disobeyed the king's command to appear before himself and those attending the feast. We are not told the reason for her refusal. In their culture, this was an inexcusable action because she disrespected royalty and that would not be taken lightly.

The connection between Vashti's refusal and God's deliverance could not be seen at that time. However, God would turn this around and accomplish His will. God can work just as well in the playhouse of the devil as He does in the house of God. He rules over His enemies as much as His friends.

King Ahasuerus needed to learn that he was not in control. Pharaoh (Ex.7:3-5), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan.3-4), Belshazzar (Dan.5), and Agrippa (Acts 12:20-23) all had to learn it. You and I need to learn the same lesson.

King Ahasuerus calls for Vashti:

Es 1:10–11 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on.

The "seventh day" marked the end of the second feast.

King Ahasuerus had been drinking for days and was "merry with wine". In other words, he was drunk as a skunk.

The "chamberlains" were eunuchs who had charge of the king's harem. Some had been surgically impaired that they might not be able to have a physical relationship with a woman (Isa.56:3b). This assured there would be no relations between them and the women in the harem. However, some had not had surgery. Potiphar was called an "officer" of Pharaoh (Gen.39:1). The word "officer" is the same Hebrew word translated "chamberlains" in Esther. It was unlikely that Potiphar had this type of surgery since he had a wife (Gen.39:7; Mt.19:12).

Being emboldened by the wine, he "commanded" his eunuchs to bring Vashti before himself and the men at the feast. As has been said, "Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely". Ahasuerus' pride got the best of him.

A lot of ink has been spilled attempting to explain why King Ahasuerus made this demand of his wife.

It seems obvious that it had something to do with her "crown". Perhaps King Ahasuerus wanted to display the queen as a part of his vast accomplishments and authority. The feast and everything involved was a display of the majesty of King Ahasuerus' kingdom. The queen with her crown was the jewel of his accomplishments.

It also seems obvious it had something to do with her "beauty". There is little doubt that he had something ungodly in mind. When a bunch of drunken men demands a woman appear before them, they don't have anything good on their minds. What makes this even more sad is that the Persians usually protected the king's wife from any public gaze.

King Ahasuerus should have realized he was degrading himself as well as his wife by making such a demand. No doubt, his drunken state caused him to do such a disrespectful thing. The bible warns us

about the danger of strong drink (Gen.9:21; Isa.5:11; 5:22; Pro.21:17; 23:20-21; Hab.2:15; Lk.21:34; Rom.13:13; 1 Cor.5:11; Eph.5:18). Proverbs says, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (Pr 20:1).

Why did the king send seven eunuchs to bring Vashti to the feast? It probably took seven to carry her on her royal litter. What an impressive entrance she would have made.



Queen Vashti refuses the king's command:

Es 1:12 But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains: therefore was the king very wrath, and his anger burned in him.

Vashti was not a follower of God, but she refused the king's demand. Such a refusal was unheard of in a time when the king was an absolute sovereign.

Vashti knew the king better than anyone else. She knew how wicked he was, she knew his anger was extreme, she knew he would make her pay, yet she refused his command.

Why did Vashti refuse her husband's request? Many have offered their opinion and some of them are not worth the ink it took to write them.

Jewish tradition tells us Vashti refused because the king expected her to come unclothed. Jewish tradition also tells us that Vashti was expecting a baby at this time. One Jewish legend says Vashti wanted to appear before the men but the angel Gabriel afflicted her with leprosy. The Midrash, an ancient Hebrew commentary, says Vashti grew a tail and was embarrassed to appear at the feast. No wonder Jesus warned us about Jewish traditions (Mt.15:3).

Vashti's refusal may have been because of anger, pride, modesty, feminism, or she may have simply been tired of her husband's wicked actions. The fact is if we were meant to know, God would have told us.

I believe the motives of Ahasuerus and Vashti are not given because it has nothing to do with the purpose of this book. The book of Esther deals with the actions of man, without any concern for his motives. If we miss this point, much of this book will confuse us.

The reason why Esther refused is not as important as the fact that she did refuse. Even though our motives do matter (Pro.16:2; Mt.6:1; Heb.4:12; 2 Cor.9:7; Jam.4:3), our actions are most important (Dt.26:16; Mt.5:16; 7:21; 12:50; Rom.2:13; Jam.1:22; 4:17).

The bible teaches a wife to submit to her husband (1 Cor.11:3; Eph.5:22; Col.3:18; Tit.2:4-5; 1 Pet.3:1). However, when it comes between obeying her husband or obeying the bible, she must obey the bible. Peter and the apostles said, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Ac 5:29). We should obey the Lord first and foremost.

The word, "wrath" means "to burst out in rage". King Ahasuerus was almost out of control with rage. For a man who was used to getting whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted it, this was hard to handle.

Probably at least part of the reason King Ahasuerus' anger was because he was trying to garner support for his attack on Greece. He wanted the princes of his empire to see him a mighty warrior, not a hen-pecked husband. If a king could not control his wife, how could he control his empire?

The king could build an empire, but he could not build his own character. He ruled a dynasty but could not rule his own spirit. Proverbs says, "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls" (Pr 25:28).

Vashti was not the first to be faced with the decision about doing the right thing. Others were, Eve (Gen.3:1-6), Lot (Gen.13:10-13), Joseph (Gen.39:6-12), Ruth (Ruth 1:14-18), Nehemiah (Neh.5:14-19), Mary (Lk.10:38-42), John Mark (Acts 13:13b), and Paul (Phil.3:7).

We all will be confronted with a situation that forces us to decide to do what others expect or to do what is right. Doing right is always most difficult, but it is always right to do right.

3. THE RETRIBUTION DETERMINED 1:13-22

King Ahasuerus met with his advisors to determine what should be done to Vashti for refusing his demand to come to the banquet (1:1-12). He took their advice and banished Vashti. God would turn it around and bring something good out of it. This opened the way for Esther to become queen and eventually save herself and all the Jews from annihilation. This is the theme we see throughout the book of Esther. God knows how to work through our everyday circumstances that His will might be accomplished.

In the verses ahead we will see how the decisions of people can have astonishing results. Ahasuerus, Vashti, Mordecai, the king's advisors, and Esther, made decisions that set in motion circumstances that had far-reaching consequences.

We never know what effect our decisions will have. They may result in triumph or tragedy. God can turn things around and bring about a glorious end to what started horribly. But, He can also let circumstances run their course and let it end horribly. For that reason, we need to be keenly sensitive to the direction of the Holy Spirit.

King Ahasuerus and his advisors decide what to do about Vashti:

Es 1:13 Then the king said to the wise men, which knew the times, (for so was the king's manner toward all that knew law and judgment:

The word, "wise" means "capacity to understand". These types of men were acquainted with the history and customs of their time. Therefore, they had a reputation of being able to give good advice. However, their

knowledge was useless without godly character. Knowledge without spirituality is not only useless, it is harmful.

The words, "*knew the times*" mean they used astrology and other forms of deviation. These men did not consult with heaven, they searched the stars for their direction. I am glad our future does not depend on the movement of the stars.

This belief system of astrology, omens, and magic, was prevalent in ancient Persia but condemned in the Old Testament. The modern-day New Age movement has many of these beliefs. God warns us about seeking after powers that are contrary to His (Ex.22:18; Lev.20:27; Dt.18:9-12; Isa.8:19; Mic.5:12; Gal.5:20).

The bible leaves no room for fatalism. Our circumstances have nothing to do with chance, but everything to do with a God who is God over all things. God is God over the past, present, and future.

The words, "*so was the king's manner*" mean it was his practice to ask for advice when making important decisions. It was common for Persian kings to have counselors who could offer them advice (Dan.6:6-9). It was also common that these counselors be put to death if they did not tell the king what he wanted to hear.

Everyone needs advice from time to time. But, we certainly need to have someone who is spiritual when that time comes. Bad advice will only make matters worse.

True wisdom comes from learning how to analyze the facts, search the Scripture, listen to the Holy Spirit, and do what God says.

Es 1:14 And the next unto him was Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, which saw the king's face, and which sat the first in the kingdom;

These "seven princes" were men who assisted and advised the king.

Which "*saw the king's face*" means they were allowed access to the king. This was an extraordinary privilege for no one else had access to him in such a manner, not even the queen.

Which "*sat first in the kingdom*" means they often sat at his side around the throne.

Es 1:15 What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law, because she hath not performed the commandment of the king Ahasuerus by the chamberlains?

They talked a great deal about what should be done about Vashti. How sad there was no mention of Ahasuerus needing to apologize for making such an unreasonable demand of his wife.

Es 1:16-17 And Memucan answered before the king and the princes, Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people that are in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus. For this deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported, The king Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not.

Memucan worded his speech in a way that suggested the king's command was perfectly legitimate and Vashti's refusal was inexcusable.

He said the queen "*hath not done wrong to the king only*" but to "*all the provinces*" because she had given them an example of rebellion against her husband.

The words, "*come abroad*" mean everyone in the kingdom will hear about Vashti's actions. That was certainly the last thing King Ahasuerus wanted.

They were afraid the women throughout the empire might "*despise their husbands*" when they heard about Vashti's actions. This same mentality is prevalent today. So many men want to control their wives when they can't even control themselves.

The fact is, what Vashti did would not cause any of the wives to disrespect their husbands if there was not a problem already. It would merely reveal the problem that was already under the surface.

It is important that we realize, Vashti was not disobeying the king in a general sense. She disobeyed in a very specific manner, over a very particular issue. She refused to do something wrong. There is no indication that she was a cantankerous old woman who always demanded her way.

Es 1:18 Likewise shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king's princes, which have heard of the deed of the queen. Thus shall there arise too much contempt and wrath.

The word, "*contempt*" means "disrespect". It carries with it the idea of treating badly. The word, "*wrath*" means "anger or strong displeasure". If the wives followed Vashti's example, the husbands would treat their wives badly and the wives would get angry at their husbands. This would cause serious problems throughout the empire.

Es 1:19 If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, That Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she.

The words, "*If it please the king*" are found eight times in the bible. Six of these are in Esther which is a good indication of how important the desire of the king was at that time.

Memucan recommended that Vashti not be allowed into the king's presence again. More or less, King Ahasuerus would be divorcing Vashti. Her punishment was severe but considering the fact that she could have been put to death, it could have been worse.

Depraved men can offer only depraved advice. They did not seek a just solution, they simply wanted to flatter the king's vanity and make it as easy for him as possible.

Vashti was called Queen Vashti before (1:9,11,12,15,16,17), but from this point, she was referred to only as "*Vashti*".

Instead of repenting himself, Ahasuerus decided to get rid of his wife and get another one. He thought he was a ruler but he actually was a slave to his pride, passions, and perversions.

Vashti was disposed of immediately but it would be four years before she would be replaced (cf. 2:16).

The laws made by the "*Persians and the Medes*" could not "*be altered*". Once made, a law could not be changed (cf. Dan.6:8).

These men were taking a risk by suggesting the king get rid of Vashti. If the king did not like their advice he could have had them put to death. Had he refused and Vashti remained the queen, she would certainly have made them pay for attempting to unseat her.

Es 1:20 And when the king's decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all his empire, (for it is great,) all the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small.

The king's decree was delivered throughout "*all*" the empire that "*all*" the wives might be informed. Memucan had been concerned about the women hearing about Vashti's actions. Ironically, his plan made certain that every woman throughout the entire empire would know about it.

No doubt, this caused fear among the women of the empire. They realized, if the queen, in all her power, could not resist her husband without consequences, they certainly had no hope of doing so.

As I have mentioned, I believe Haman is a picture of our corrupt human nature. Like Haman, it wants to demand its way and have complete control.

The word "*honour*" means, "to value". It carries with it the idea of respect. Respect cannot be gained by force, it must be earned. The husband who demands his wife be submissive had better make sure he lives in a manner that makes him worthy to be submitted to. A leader is worthy to be followed. The bible teaches a wife should be submissive to her husband (Eph.5:22-23; Col.3:18; 1 Pet.3:1), but that does not mean she is a doormat to be walking on.

King Ahasuerus removes Vashti:

Es 1:21 And the saying pleased the king and the princes; and the king did according to the word of

Memucan:

Memucan's suggestion pleased the king and the rest of the advisors, so he did what Memucan recommended. Any time we listen to the world's philosophy, we are heading for trouble.

Es 1:22 For he sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man should bear rule in his own house, and that it should be published according to the language of every people.

King Ahasuerus sent letters throughout his empire informing the people of Vashti being ousted and advising the husbands to keep control of their families.

The letters were delivered by the Persian communication network which was a relay of horses much like the pony express (3:13; 8:10).

The decree went out to all people. Notice how this verse says, "all" the king's provinces, and "every" province", to "every" people, after "their" language. No city or back road hamlet was overlooked. No individual was missed, so no one could plead ignorance.

The modern male will tell us the king had every right to deal with Vashti as he did. The modern woman will say he was a vile and selfish creature that abused his wife horribly. The fact is, both men and women are depraved creatures who will think only of themselves unless the Holy Spirit gets control of their hearts.

A husband who has a domineering wife will become a weakling with a backbone like a marshmallow. The wife who has a controlling husband will eventually become weary and strike back. Neither excuses their actions but it does explain it. A cowardly husband and a domineering wife are equally unbiblical (Eph.5:22,25,28,33; Col.3:18-19; 1 Pet.3:7).

4. THE REPLACEMENT DECIDED 2:1-18

After a delay of three to four years, King Ahasuerus initiated the plan of Memucan (1:16-19) and decided on a replacement for Vashti.

As mentioned previously, God uses the passions and desires of the godly, and ungodly, to bring about His purpose. He uses the righteous and the unrighteous to accomplish His plans.

Man makes his own plans and does as he pleases without any regard for the will of God. And yet, in it all, God works His plan perfectly. Even His enemies are the agents of His purpose. What a wonderful God we serve.

King Ahasuerus finds a replacement for Vashti:

Es 2:1 After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her.

The words, "After these things" means three to four years later. Vashti refused King Ahasuerus' command during the third year of his reign (1:3), and Esther became queen the seventh year (2:16).

History tells us between these two events King Ahasuerus attempted to overcome Greece but failed miserably. He came home a broken man. His failure discredited him with his people leaving him much less powerful and with a depleted treasury. Herodotus, the Greek historian tells us the king's life after this defeat was consumed with sensual overindulgence which included seducing his own daughter-in-law.

King Ahasuerus' anger subsided. The word "appeased" means "to be in a lower position". It is from the same root word translated "asswaged" when describing the floodwaters (Gen.8:1).

Some believe the words "he remembered Vashti" mean he regretted banishing Vashti. I am not convinced that is what the verse is saying. It says he remembered, "what she had done". It seems obvious that even though his anger had subsided, he could not get it off his mind that he had not been able to control his wife. He wanted a woman who would do what he said and satisfy his desires without hesitation.

He certainly showed no sorrow for his abuse of Vashti. If he regretted his decision, he certainly did not repent or do the right thing. Real repentance begins with humiliation of heart and ends with a change of conduct. We see neither with King Ahasuerus. Without real repentance, there is no forgiveness.

His attitude reveals how stubborn he was. He was the one who got drunk, demanded his wife do something inappropriate, listened to unwise advice, kicked his wife out so he could replace her, and yet, we see no indication that he was accepting any of the blame for the circumstances he was experiencing.

Ahasuerus was getting what he deserved. Many are living in misery but refuse to see the connection between their behavior and their circumstances. We will reap the fruit of what we sow (Gal.6:7; 6:9; 2 Cor.9:6). Even the ungodly sailors thought the storm was a result of Jonah doing something wrong (Jonah

1:8). The barbarians believed Paul's experience with the snake was connected to the type of person he was (Acts 28:4, 6).

As I said, King Ahasuerus had been preoccupied with his invasion of Greece and had not taken time to think about, or to replace, Vashti. So, why didn't he restore Vashti?

One, his pride. To admit he had done Vashti wrong was more than his ego could handle.

Two, his concern for what the people of his kingdom would think. He was terrified that he would be seen as a weak leader.

Three, his fear. No doubt he wondered if Vashti would reject his offer to restore her. She had refused him once (1:12). He was not willing to take the chance for her to do it again.

Four, the law. Whether he wanted Vashti back or not, he was bound by the law he himself had decreed (1:19-22).

Es 2:2 Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king:

The same "servants" who got the king in this predicament (1:14-17) were quick to add their two cents worth again. Surely they realized this situation was partially their fault since they had convinced the king to get rid of Vashti in the first place.

The devil, like Ahasuerus, has many "servants" willing to follow his instructions. He is called the "prince" of demons (Mt.9:34; Jn.12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Eph.2:2). A prince is one who rules or governs.

The devil is also called the "god of this world" (2 Cor.4:4). He doesn't just control the demons, he controls the people who are foolish enough to listen to him.

The devil will always have someone who is ready to lead us the wrong way. That is why the Lord warns us about the importance of wise advice and the danger of unwise advice (Pro.1:5; 11:14; 12:2; 12:15; 13:10; 15:2; 15:12; 19:20; 24:6; 28:26; 1 Cor.15:33).

The word "fair" means "beautiful". His criteria in searching for a new queen was not whether she would be a suitable queen, but how pretty she was. The three requirements for these women were, they had to be young, they had to be pretty, and they could not have had a physical relationship. Nothing is said about their intelligence or their character. Everyone in the kingdom would suffer the consequences if the queen was unfit. The bible warns of the danger of having an immature king (Ec 10:16). The same could be said about the country that has an unfit queen.

Sadly, many of our politicians operate by their selfish desires and ambitions. Our government is supposed to be "by the people, for the people" but it has become "every man for himself".

This may sound like a beauty contest and every young woman's dream, but the women involved were uprooted from their homes and forced to live in the king's harem. History tells us the women in a harem were kept only to satisfy the desires of the king. This was far from a little girl's fairy tale come true.

This should remind us of the shackles of pleasure. The devil's bait may look good, but there is always a hook. The pleasures of sin are never worth the agony they include (Gen.2:17; 3:10-11; Mt.4:8; Jam.1:15).

There was one thing missing in all their plans. None of them said, "we need to pray about this". That proves they cared nothing about what God wanted. If there was ever a time when prayer was needed, it was then. This was not just a couple of citizens trying to decide their future. It was the king and his queen and the entire empire would be affected by what they decided.

There are no decisions so small that we do not need to pray. There are no unimportant decisions in our lives. They all have consequences.

Es 2:3 And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the palace, to the house of the women, unto the custody of Hege the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women; and let their things for purification be given them:

Officers were appointed to search the empire for women who might please the king. When these beauties were selected, they were taken to the palace and placed under the care of "Hege", the chief eunuch of King Ahasuerus. The women in the harem were very dependent on this man for it was through him all things were provided. Staying in his favor would be very important.

In the countries of the East, when the family of a young woman was summoned to the royal palace, they knew their daughter would end up in a harem and would they likely never see her again, yet they dared not refuse.

The "things of purification" consisted of oils, baths, and perfumes (2:12).

Es 2:4 And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so.

Their plan involved the maiden which "*pleaseth the king*". As mentioned, there was no consideration about what kind of queen she would be.

The word, "*pleased*" means, "to benefit", "make cheerful", or "to be content". The king made this world-changing decision by his own selfish desires. He did not have his family or citizens in mind, he was looking for the woman that would make him the happiest. How often does mankind base their most important decisions on something just as frivolous?

It is obvious he was still the selfish and stubborn man he had been years earlier. He was suffering the results of his bad decision and had learned nothing from it. But, before we criticize him, we need to take a good look at ourselves. We have endured many hardships because of our own foolish actions without learning enough to not do it again. Many a Christian has had to attend God's "summer school".

Like the pampered horse that overpowers the rider, when we pamper our flesh, it will end up controlling us.

The woman selected was to please the king "*instead of Vashti*". This is a perfect picture of how the nature of man is never satisfied. What we have is never good enough. There is always a nicer car, house, or pair of shoes. The entire marketing world tells us we can never be fulfilled unless we buy their latest product.

Sadly, this mentality is that which we see in our nation right now. The average citizen cares little about the character of their politicians. They simply want the ones who will give the most stuff.

We certainly see a picture of the devil here. He always seeks for that which will please him and he does not care how he gets it. He'll gladly cheat, lie, steal, or kill, to get what he wants. He selfishly seeks for those he can "*devour*" (1 Pet.5:8). He walks "*to and fro in the earth*" trying to convince anyone and everyone to do his bidding (Job 1:7; 2:2).

The maiden who "*pleaseth the king*" would become his wife. The other women would become a part of his harem and be considered as his wives or concubines. Polygamy was accepted and not considered dishonorable by the Persians. That is not to say that God has put His stamp of approval on such an ungodly practice.

Miraculously, God intervened by bringing the woman who would save the entire Jewish population from annihilation.

Mordecai is introduced:

Es 2:5 Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimej, the son of Kish, a Benjamite;

Up to this point, the story had been only about Persians. Now, a Jew was finally introduced.

Esther's cousin, "*Mordecai*" is first introduced here. He was Esther's older cousin and a descendant of King Saul (2:5).

Kish was the father of Saul, who would become king of Israel (1 Sam.9:1-2) and from the tribe of Benjamin (cf. Gen.49:27). "*Shimej*" was the man who cursed and threw stones at David (2 Sam.16:5).

Mordecai had raised Esther like his own daughter (2:7), and now he would continue to watch over her.

As previously mentioned, I believe Mordecai is a picture of the Holy Spirit who assists the believer. Mordecai would certainly be a comforter to Esther. In like manner, the Holy Spirit is able to comfort, encourage, strengthen, direct, and empower the Christian who will submit to Him (Jn.16:13; Acts 1:8; Rom.8:26-27; 14:17; 15:13; Gal.5:22-23). Living in this world can be difficult, but God has given us a helper so we need to make it.

Mordecai was already "*in*" the palace before Esther arrived. God is always where we need Him when we need Him. He is working on our problems before we even know we have a problem. He made a well for Hagar before she needed it (Gen.21:18). He sent a bear and a lion to prepare David for Goliath (1 Sam.17:34). He grew the tree that became a cross before His Son was crucified (Acts 5:30).

Es 2:6 Who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away.

The "*carried away*" in this verse is referring to the Babylonian Captivity when the Jews were taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and taken to Babylon. (2 Kgs.24-25).

A question arises here. Who is this verse talking about that was "*carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity*"? Three options have been suggested.

One, it is speaking of Kish, Mordecai's grandfather.

Two, it is speaking of Mordecai. This is unlikely for it would mean that he would be at least 110 years old.

Three, it is speaking of Mordecai being carried away in the person of his grandfather. That is, when Kish was carried into captivity, in essence, all his future descendants were carried with him.

Mordecai, being a Jew in Persia, was living in a foreign country. But, his location did not change his character. I am sure the Holy Spirit is grieved to have to operate in this sinful world, but He will always do what is right.

Esther is introduced:

Es 2:7 And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter.

This verse is the first time "*Esther*" is mentioned in this book. Hadassah, which means "star", was her Jewish name. Esther, which means "myrtle", was her Persian name given to her by King Ahasuerus. She is the only one in this book who has two names mentioned. No doubt, this is intended to help us see her two identities.

It was common for conquering nations to rename the residents of the land they overcame. Daniel and his friends were given Babylonian names (Dan.1:6-7). This was done in an attempt to indoctrinate them into a different belief system and remove all thoughts of their original beliefs. Any time we expose ourselves to worldly philosophy, we are in danger of being changed.

We must never forget the fact that, as believers, we are in a foreign land. This world is not our home (Phil.3:20; Eph.2:6). While here, the devil will do all he can to remove our desire for God. He would love to get us to the point to where we don't think, look, or act like Christians. It is so easy to get caught up in the cares of this world and forget we are citizens of a different country. The writer of Hebrews talks about desiring a "*better country*" (Heb.11:16).

The words, "*fair and beautiful*" mean she was physically attractive in terms of her body, face, and overall appearance. More often than not, physical beauty becomes a tool of the devil and not the Lord. In Esther's case, her beauty was the means whereby the will of God was accomplished.

This should remind us of how God gives us what we need to do what He wants us to do. He gives us natural talents and abilities. We are "*fearfully and wonderfully made*" (Ps.139:14). Natural abilities such as mental sharpness, social skills, artistic talent, mechanical ability, writing, singing, or playing an instrument, can, and should, be used for the glory of God. Of course, these talents alone are not enough, so God gives the believer spiritual gifts to enable them to do His will (1 Cor.12:1-11; Rom.12:6-8; Eph.4:8-11). All these abilities have been given to us by our Creator and should be used for Him.

God will hold us accountable for how we use the natural talents and spiritual gifts He gave us (Mt.25:14-30; 1 Cor.3:14-15).

The words, "*brought up*" mean "to foster as a parent". Mordecai, being Esther's older cousin, raised Esther after her mother and father died. Mordecai, like the Holy Spirit, took one who was an orphan and provided for their necessities. God is a "*father of the fatherless*" (Ps.68:5). He is a "*helper of the fatherless*" (Ps.10:14).

Es 2:8 So it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was brought also unto the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women.

No one was exempt from the king's "*commandment*". His word was law and all were subject to its demands. A Persian king could take whoever he pleased and do with them as he pleased.

The word, "*gathered*" means "to gather together in one place". It carries with it the idea of collecting for a purpose. The women were not taken straight into the king's presence. Instead, they were placed under the "*custody of Hegai*" one of the king's eunuchs.

Esther would eventually replace Vashti as queen.

The word, "*brought*" has the idea of grasping an object with the hand. It could mean with, or without, the consent of the owner. No doubt, some of these women were thrilled about being chosen and some were taken against their will. Some were glad and some were mad. They knew they were leaving all they knew and would most likely never be returning. For some, it was escaping a life of misery. For others, it was leaving a life they loved.

The word, "*many*" means "abundant". We are not told how many maidens were brought. The Jewish historian, Josephus says there were 400. Some have suggested there may have been thousands since the entire Persian Empire was searched. We do not know how many were involved.

While the women waited for their turn to be examined by the king, they were kept in the harem under the care of a eunuch named "*Hegai*". Hegai is the same eunuch mentioned in verse 3.

Esther pleases Hegai, the harem keeper:

Es 2:9 And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, which were meet to be given her, out of the king's house: and he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the house of the women.

Of course, the "maiden" refers to Esther. The "him" refers to Hegai, the keeper of women.

We are not told what exactly it was that "pleased" Hegai about Esther.

Esther's beauty was part of it (cf. 2:7). But, it is probably her personality as well. His approval of Esther was based primarily on whether the king would be pleased with her.

But, Esther's attitude had to be part of the reason Hegai was pleased with her. Verse 15 tells us she required no special treatment from Hegai. That seems to suggest she had a contented spirit. Her attitude had to be refreshing to Hegai. Certainly, some of the women were spoiled brats that were used to getting their way. Others saw this as a way to take advantage of the situation and demanded special attention.

Esther received "kindness" from Hegai. No doubt about it, this did not have to be the case. The men put in charge of a harem were many times brutal men who took advantage of the women under their care.

Certainly, Esther's good attitude pleased Hegai but we cannot overlook the fact of how God was working in the background. He was moving her to the place she needed to be that she might do what He wanted her to do. God will always make the way that His will might be done. This is another big little in this book (cf. 1:10-12; 1:19-21; 2:9; 2:15-17; 2:21-22; 2:23; 3:1-2; 3:7; 5:1-2; 6:1; 6:2; 6:3; 7:10; 8:3-8; 9:11-12,15,17; 10:1-3).

Hegai "speedily" gave Esther that which was needed to prepare herself for the king's examination. He recognized the uniqueness of Esther and wanted to get her before the king as soon as possible.

Esther was given "seven maidens" to attend to her bathing, anointing, and to be her servants in general.

Hegai gave Esther and her maids the "best place in the house of the women". Like Joseph, she prospered (Gen.39:1-4). This was unusual since many times such women were treated much like a slave.

As always is the case, even in a difficult situation, the hand of God was at work. God may not take us out of our difficulties, but He will go with us. He was with Noah in the flood, David before Goliath, Elijah, and the false prophets, and He will be with us when we face our difficult place. Life can be difficult no matter what, so doing the Lord's will is always best.

We are not told but it seems likely that some of the other women were jealous of Esther. Those who are not willing to behave in a manner that deserves blessings are often jealous of those who are.

Esther did not disclose her nationality:

Es 2:10 Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew it.

Some have criticized Esther for remaining silent about her nationality. There are other instances in the bible where people concealed their identity, Sarai (Gen.12:10-13), Rebekah (Gen.26:7), Jacob (Gen.27:1-27), and Tamar (Gen.38:11-26). We must realize Esther did not lie about her nationality, she merely kept quiet about it.

Mordecai instructed Esther to remain silent about her nationality. We are not told why. No doubt, she had great respect for Mordecai and his wisdom.

Some believe Esther was wrong to remain silent. I believe there are six things we need to consider.

One, she did not lie, she simply did not tell anyone she was a Jew.

Two, Mordecai told Esther to not reveal the fact that she was a Jew. Remember, in my opinion, Mordecai is a picture of the Holy Spirit. We know the Holy Spirit will never give us improper advice.

Three, knowing her nationality probably would have caused Ahasuerus to reject her as his new queen. And, Esther had to be the queen if the Jews were going to be spared later.

Five, as mentioned previously, I believe Esther is a picture of an immature believer. It is reasonable to assume she was not mature enough to handle the consequences of revealing her nationality. Since the Jews were a despised people, she would likely have suffered greatly had she divulged her nationality.

The Holy Spirit will keep us from that which we are not yet mature enough to handle. Jesus said, "*I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now*" (Jn 16:12). God did not ask Abraham to put his son to death the day he was born. It took time for Abraham's faith to grow enough to where he would obey such a difficult command (Gen.22:1-3).

Six, the timing wasn't right. The time would come when Esther revealed she was a Jew (4:13-14). At that time, Esther was established as the queen, and revealing her nationality actually helped the Jews.

Esther knew nothing about what was ahead. Like Esther, we can't see what is ahead so we need to trust the Lord and obey Him.

Mordecai keeps watch over Esther:

Es 2:11 And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her.

Mordecai being able to go before the court of the women's house seems to indicate he held a position in Ahasuerus' government.

He kept a constant check on Esther because he recognized the danger of her being involved with Ahasuerus. The Holy Spirit does the same with a believer. We may not be able to rid ourselves of the devil but we certainly have a Helper to watch over us.

A harem was a protected sanctuary and much of what took place within its walls was unknown to outsiders. But, Mordecai had a connection with the harem and knew information the average person would not know. In like fashion, the Holy Spirit can gain access to places unavailable to anyone else. He, being God, is omnipresent (Ps.139:7-10; 2 Chr.16:9).

Mordecai wanted to know "*how Esther did*". He was genuinely concerned about her living conditions.

The word, "*become*" means "be done" or "to make". Mordecai wanted to know what was going to be done to Esther and what effect it would have on her. He was concerned about her state of mind.

He was concerned about what the future held for Esther. The Holy Spirit works today that we might be prepared for what is ahead (Jn.16:13; Acts 8:29; Rom.8:14).

The maids are prepared and examined by the king:

Es 2:12 Now when every maid's turn was come to go in to king Ahasuerus, after that she had been twelve months, according to the manner of the women, (for so were the days of their purifications accomplished, to wit, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odours, and with other things for the purifying of the women;)

Verses 12 through 14 take a step back from the story about Esther to tell us how the women were treated before they were taken to be examined by the king.

The maid's "*turn*" meant she was taken to the king to spend the night. He was testing her to see how she would perform in the bedroom. It is amazing how low the evil nature of man will take him when he gives into it.

Each woman went through twelve months of preparation before she was taken to the king. Why would it take an entire year of preparation before their examination by the king? I have five suggestions.

One, at least part of this preparation was training about how they should act around royalty.

Two, the course diet of some of these women would cause a strong body odor. The wholesome Persian food, anointing with oil, and hot baths, would remove this unpleasant odor.

Three, such treatment would soften any animosity a woman might have for being taken into the harem against their will, and make them feel obligated to the king.

Four, the extensive treatments took time. Persia was famous for its aromatic perfumes and beauty treatments. These included ritualistic baths, plucking of the eyebrows, facial make-up, and applying paste all over the body to lighten the color of the skin and remove any blemishes.

Five, to make sure none of these women were expecting a baby. They were supposed to be virgins, but the possibility of becoming the queen would be incentive enough to lie.

Twelve months of beauty treatments, palace delicacies, elaborate clothes, accessories, and perfumes sound wonderful. But, I think the average woman would rather have her freedom.

The extent to which they went to enhance the beauty of the women is incredible. We should not be surprised for the mentality of our world may be even more extreme. In 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic, there were 15,595,955 cosmetic procedures done in the United States. In 2020, there was \$20,174,266,026 spent in the United States for cosmetic procedures. Pop Star, Michael Jackson has reportedly had over a hundred cosmetic procedures. One ad stated, "If you're ready to make a change in your appearance, whether you're a teen or a grandma, we're ready to help you". When a nation tells a teen they need plastic surgery, that nation is in trouble.

What does the bible say about beauty? God looks at the heart, not the body, to define beauty (1 Sam.16:7). Peter wrote, "*Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even*

the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Pe 3:3-4).

There are times when those who were the most attractive physically are the most disappointing spiritually (Gen.26:7; 1 Sam.9:2; 16:7).

Notice, Esther did not refuse the king's indulgences as Daniel and his friends did (Dan.1:8-12). Again, I believe this reveals her immaturity. In time, she matures and develops. That certainly is good news for every believer. We may lack spiritual maturity at this point, but God promises to work on us (Phil.1:6; 2:13; 1 Th.5:24).

Es 2:13 Then thus came every maiden unto the king; whatsoever she desired was given her to go with her out of the house of the women unto the king's house.

The indulgence was unlimited for each woman. She could request anything "out of the house of the women". No doubt, the resources of the "king's house" were unlimited. Whether attire, jewelry, or perfumes, she had access to whatsoever she could dream of.

The benefits were fantastic but their freedom was a high price to pay for these luxuries. None of the king's "stuff" could provide true happiness. So it is with the junk in the world. The devil offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, but he refused (Mt.4:8-11). The devil's treasure house is vast, but none of what he offers will satisfy.

It is in the nature of man to seek for happiness yet all his seeking leaves him empty. The curse has touched the gold as well as the thorns. After an intensive search of everything the world had to offer, the richest man on earth said it was all vanity (Ecc.1:2). And yet, man keeps searching.

The child of God may have to endure difficult times, but in spite of the troubles, they have a deep settled peace (1 Pet.1:8; 4:12-13).

Es 2:14 In the evening she went, and on the morrow she returned into the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's chamberlain, which kept the concubines: she came in unto the king no more, except the king delighted in her, and that she were called by name.

After a woman spent the night with the king, she was taken to the "second house of the women" where the king's concubines were kept under the care of another eunuch, named "Shasshgaz".

She would never be taken back to the king unless he called for her "by name". That would only happen if she pleased him in an unusual way. So, she would be placed into the harem, never be allowed to marry or enjoy a normal life. As mentioned before, she would have all the comforts she could desire but most women would rather have a husband and family who loves them than worldly comfort.

A concubine was a woman who lived with a man as if she was his wife, but without having the status as a wife (Gen.21:10). As long as she was a concubine she was unable to marry another.

Their culture approved of concubines. The bible does not expressly condemn, or condone, concubines. That is not to say that God has put His stamp of approval on such an ungodly practice. God allowed divorce (Mt.19:8) and polygamy (2 Sam.5:13; 1 Kgs.11:3) but was displeased with both. His original design was one man and one woman for life (Gen.2:21-24).

Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormons, said polygamy was "the most holy and important doctrine ever revealed to man on earth". He said a man needed at least three wives to attain what he called the "fulness of exaltation". He went so far as to say that those who rejected this teaching would not be permitted into God's glory. It does not matter what Joseph Smith or anyone else says. God established one man for one woman, for life.

If there was any positive aspect to being a concubine it was the fact that the woman would be provided for. A single woman in ancient times had few options as far as income, so some felt forced into homelessness, begging, or prostitution.

Esther's turn comes to be examined by the king:

Es 2:15 Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her.

Verse 15 takes us back to Esther and her experiences before she was seen by the king.

The time came for Esther to take her turn with the king. Realizing this was necessary for her to become the queen does little to remove the sadness I feel for her. No one should ever be treated in such an ungodly manner.

Despite this horrible situation, God was bringing Esther to the place she needed to be to save Jews later on.

Her beauty was such to where she "*required nothing*" extra in preparation to go before the king. The one quality the king was looking for, Esther had. God gave her beauty. Had she had great riches, great wisdom, or even great pedigree, it would have done nothing to bring her to the place where she needed to be. She needed beauty to get her to the place where God wanted her, and that is what He gave her.

She "*obtained favour*" tells us her appeal went further than just her beauty. Her personality and spirit caused people to like her. In like fashion, God blessed Joseph and gave him favor with Potiphar (Gen.39:3-4). He gave the Jews favor with the Egyptians (Ex.12:36). And, He gave Esther favor with Hegai.

The fact that Esther was liked by all those who had dealings with her sounds like a positive thing at first glance. The fact is, it tells us she must have compromised her Jewish standards. She must have acted, dressed, and eaten like a Persian.

This certainly reminds me of an immature Christian who is struggling to become all they should be. All believers realize the difficulties involved with growing in grace and becoming a spiritual Christian. Unfortunately, we are very much like the people in the church of Corinth. Paul called them "*carnal*" and "*babes in Christ*" (1 Cor.3:1-3).

Es 2:16 So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus into his house royal in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.

The Jewish "*tenth month*" corresponds with our late December and early January. This was four years after Vashti was removed (1:3). For three years Ahasuerus was busy with war with the Greeks and one year had been dedicated to the preparation of the women.

Esther being taken into his "*house royal*" means she was not sent to the house of women as the other women before her.

King Ahasuerus was doing what he pleased, seemingly without any thought about whether it was right or not. God said fornication is sin (Ex.20:14). The fact that Ahasuerus was the king did not excuse him.

Also, we should not overlook the fact that it was unbiblical for Esther, a Jew, to marry Ahasuerus, a pagan (cf. Dt.7:1-4). Many commentators have ignored this issue entirely. Others say God excused her because she ended up saving the entire nation of Israel. But, there is no justification for doing that which is contrary to the bible.

As queen, Esther would be able to save the Jews from certain death (8:1-8). God was able to make something good out of a bad thing, but that does not excuse the actions of Ahasuerus.

Esther is chosen to be the new queen:

Es 2:17 And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti.

The word, "*loved*" means "to have affection for" and includes a physical attraction. It carries with it the idea of comparing one person with another. This does not mean Ahasuerus had fallen in love with Esther. It simply means she satisfied his human nature more than any of the other women. Just like the devil, he was driven totally by his evil nature.

The "*royal crown*" was placed on Esther's head, she became the queen, and replaced Vashti.

A glance at Esther's life reveals how God works in our lives. God took her from being an orphan living in a foreign land to the queen of the greatest empire of the world.

Was Esther thrilled or terrified? We are not told. She may have been thrilled that the most powerful man on earth has selected her. Or, she may have been terrified that this man would control the rest of her life. The uncertainties of our lives can take control of our emotions if we allow them to. Paul said, "*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts*" (Col 3:15). The word "*rule*" means "to control".

At that moment, no one knew what God was doing. They did not realize this all would end up being the means of saving all the Jews. That is, no one but God.

Es 2:18 Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast; and he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts, according to the state of the king.

King Ahasuerus gave another feast (the fourth one in this book) and invited all those connected to the royal court. This feast was to recognize Esther as the new queen, but as always, King Ahasuerus used the opportunity to show off his power and riches. The Jewish historian Josephus says this feast lasted a month.

The words, "*release to the provinces*" mean Ahasuerus took off a portion of the taxes of the people throughout his empire. This was a common practice of Persian kings at weddings. No doubt, this helped to produce a positive attitude towards Esther.

5. THE RELATIVE'S DISCERNMENT 2:19-23

Mordecai, Esther's older cousin, revealed a great deal of discernment by hearing, and reacting properly, to a plan to assassinate the king. We begin to see how God was not only working on replacing the queen but to make Mordecai the new assistant to the king.

Mordecai continues to watch over Esther:

Es 2:19 And when the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai sat in the king's gate.

The "king's gate" was the place where public affairs of the king were transacted (cf. Dan.2:48-49). Sitting at the king's gate suggests the strong possibility that Mordecai held an official position in the king's government. Earlier, he only walked before the court of the women's house (2:11).

We are not told why these women were gathered together the "second time". Some believe it means King Ahasuerus selected his first wife (Vashti) through this method, but that does not seem likely. Had it happened before there would have been no need for his advisors to go into such detail when they described it to him. It may mean Ahasuerus had all the virgins to come before him that he might show off Esther. Perhaps him thinking he got the best gave him a weird sense of satisfaction.

Es 2:20 Esther had not yet shewed her kindred nor her people; as Mordecai had charged her: for Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him.

Esther had yet to reveal the fact that she was a Jew. Her silence about her nationality is a subject of much debate. Please read the comments on 2:10.

Certainly, God could have protected Esther if she had openly proclaimed her nationality. He certainly did take care of Daniel and his friends when they took a stand for God (Dan.1:8-12).

The fact that no one realized Esther was a Jew tells us she had not been living the separated lifestyle God required of all Jews. She must have been dressing, eating, and living like the Persians. Sadly, all too many believers are doing the same in our day.

It is interesting that Esther, even after she became queen, was devoted to the man who had been a father to her. No doubt, she did this out of gratitude for his kindness, and confidence in his wisdom. We should never forget where we came from or those who have assisted us in our journey.

Mordecai hears of a plot to kill the king and tells Esther:

Es 2:21 In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those which kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus.

At the gate, Mordecai overheard two of the king's chamberlains making plans to assassinate King Ahasuerus.

We are not told why these men were upset. It may have been they saw King Ahasuerus as a disgrace to the throne since he failed in his attempt to overthrow Greece. They may have been upset about the king's treatment of Vashti. They may have wanted Haman to become the king. They may have disagreed with Esther being selected as the new queen. We do not know because we are not told.

Once again we find Mordecai at the "king's gate" which seems to suggest he held some position in the king's empire. God was at work making sure Mordecai was at the right place at the right time that he might hear the scheme against Ahasuerus. This is another big little event (cf. 1:10-12; 1:19-21; 2:9; 2:15-17; 2:21-22; 2:23; 3:1-2; 3:7; 5:1-2; 6:1; 6:2; 6:3; 7:10; 8:3-8; 9:11-12,15,17; 10:1-3).

This is an unusual scene in that it shows a rare occasion when the devil's crowd was fighting against each other. Usually, the devil's children are in one accord. Sadly, they are more unified than God's children.

God will use this event later as a means of delivering His people but we should never assume the plans and motives of Bigthan and Teresh were inspired by the Lord. Yet, without this evil plan, the Jews would have perished. This was another necessary link to God's chain.

Es 2:22 And the thing was known to Mordecai, who told it unto Esther the queen; and Esther certified the king thereof in Mordecai's name.

Bigthan's and Teresh's conversation about assassinating the king was overheard. We are told only that the thing "was known to Mordecai". We are not told if he heard the conversation himself or if someone else heard it and told him. Josephus, the Jewish historian says a Jew, named Barnabasus, overheard their

conversation and told Mordecai.

However Mordecai discovered the plot, he did the right thing with the information. He told Esther that she might warn the king. One of the Holy Spirit's primary ministries is to protect those in danger.

It should be noted that Mordecai was loyal to a king who was a heathen and one under whom he lived as a captive. It would have been easy to keep quiet and let the king be put to death. An evil government does not give us the right to be poor citizens or to do the wrong thing (Rom. 13:1-4).

The word, "*certified*" means "to speak or tell". Esther spoke in "*Mordecai's name*". She made sure to give the credit for the information to Mordecai. This may seem trivial but, as we will discover, it made all the difference in the world later (6:2-3). Things will never end well when we try to steal the glory (cf. Acts 12:21-23).

This should remind us how our small acts of honesty can have a huge impact (Acts 8:26-39). This is true also of our, seemingly, small acts of disobedience (Josh.7:20-26; 1 Sam.15:3,9).

Since Mordecai did not have direct access to the king he communicated with the king through Esther. Like King Ahasuerus denied Mordecai access into his throne room, many people deny the Holy Spirit full access to their lives. He will not force Himself into the affairs of our lives.

Those plotting to kill the king are executed:

Es 2:23 And when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out; therefore they were both hanged on a tree: and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.

An investigation revealed the guilt of Bigthan and Teresh so they were put to death.

The word, "*tree*" means "wood stick or staff". They were actually impaled on a wooden stake. History tells us this type of execution was done by placing the body at the top of the stake and pulling down by the legs until the stake came out the side of the neck.

These events were recorded in the "*chronicles*" of the Persians. The Persians were exhaustive record keepers. This one of those big little events in this book (cf. 1:10-12; 1:19-21; 2:9; 2:15-17; 2:21-22; 2:23; 3:1-2; 3:7; 5:1-2; 6:1; 6:2; 6:3; 7:10; 8:3-8; 9:11-12,15,17; 10:1-3). The simple fact that this was recorded will be vitally important later (6:1-3).

Neither Mordecai nor Esther received any of the credit for spoiling the assassination attempt. I wonder if Mordecai felt neglected since he was the one who exposed the plot. So often, the Holy Spirit works without getting any recognition. I am sure there are times when He feels unappreciated and neglected. He is the silent person in the Godhead.

In like fashion, we who are believers must learn to be patient in being rewarded for the good we do. We will be rewarded "*in due season*" but only "*if we faint not*" (Gal.6:9).

King Ahasuerus may have forgotten Mordecai, but the King of Kings did not. He would be recognized later for what he did here (10:2-3).

There is little doubt that God wanted to reveal Haman's, sinful heart. Had Mordecai been rewarded at this time, the wickedness of Haman would have not been revealed and would have gone unchallenged.

6. THE REVERENCE DEMANDED 3:1-4

In chapter three, we see evil Haman being promoted and King Ahasuerus demanding everyone reverence him by bowing in his presence. Haman's anger got the best of him when Mordecai refused to bow. He devised a plan to put to death Mordecai and all his people. Yet, as before, God was working in the background.

Haman is promoted:

Es 3:1 After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him.

King Ahasuerus promoted Haman. We are not told why he was promoted. Setting his seat "*above all the princes*" means he was the number two man of the entire Persian empire and sat beside the king.

Strangely, Mordecai saved the king's life (2:21-23) but it was Haman who got promoted. There are times when life simply is not fair and it seems like the devil is winning. We must remember, God knows what He is doing. Mordecai was passed over here but he would get a promotion at a time when it is needed even more (8:2).

The fact that Haman was an "*Agagite*" is one of the most important details of this book. This takes us back to an old conflict between Haman's and Mordecai's families. Agag was the king of the Amalekites when

Saul was the king of Israel. God told king Saul to put all the Amalekites to death (1 Sam.15:1-3) but he disobeyed and allow Agag to live (1 Sam. 15:9). Haman was a descendant of Agag and Mordecai was a descendant of Saul. Saul's failure to exterminate the Agagites almost led to the extermination of all his own people. Our disobedience has greater consequences than we realize. No doubt, neither Haman nor Mordecai had forgotten what happened to their families.

Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman:

Es 3:2 And all the king's servants, that were in the king's gate, bowed, and revered Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence.

The Persian custom was to kneel down in respect to their kings, or those he had given special authority. Also, King Ahasuerus had "*commanded*" everyone to bow to Haman and give him the same respect they would give himself.

As Christians, we are instructed to respect and obey civil authorities (Mt.22:21; Rom.13:1-7; Tit.3:1; 1 Pet.2:13). Only when the government instructs us to disobey God's law do we have justification to disobey (Acts 4:19; 5:29). At that point, we must obey God and leave the consequences to Him.

King Ahasuerus could have put Mordecai to death for his rebellion. Chances are, we will face a situation where we have to decide to stand for right or give in to the crowd.

Es 3:3 Then the king's servants, which were in the king's gate, said unto Mordecai, Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?

The spirit of Mordecai is seen here. Even after he received no recognition for alerting the king (2:22) we find him back at the gate where he must have continued his duties for the Persian Empire.

The word, "*transgresses*" means "to cross over". It refers to crossing over a line, much going past a No Trespassing sign. This tells us the king's servants thought Mordecai was doing the wrong thing.

The king's servants asked Mordecai why he had refused to bow to Haman. The pressure to conform to the world's point of view comes from all directions.

Es 3:4 Now it came to pass, when they spake daily unto him, and he hearkened not unto them, that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand: for he had told them that he was a Jew.

The pressure to give in to the demands of the king grew even greater. Day after day, the king's servants questioned Mordecai. The world constantly pressures the believer to yield to its influence. This reminds us of the unrelenting attack of the devil and our flesh. We must never lower our guard.

Why did Mordecai refuse to bow before Haman as the king had demanded?

- Some believe it was because of Mordecai's rebellion against the king's authority

If anything, the opposite was true about Mordecai. He had demonstrated complete loyalty to the king and his authority.

- Some believe it was because Mordecai was upset about Haman's promotion

It seems to me that Mordecai was a bigger man than to let this upset him. As mentioned, he went back to the gate after Haman was promoted, which seems to imply he continued his duties as before.

- Some believe it was because Haman was such a wicked and ungodly man

Certainly, a man as wicked as Haman deserved no respect but I doubt if this was the reason. The bible tells us to respect the position even if the person in the position is unworthy (Rom.13:1-5).

- Some believe it was because bowing would be considered as worship

God has commanded His people never bow to worship anything, or anyone, other than Himself (Ex.20:5; 23:24). But, there had to be more involved here. Later, Mordecai refused to stand to recognize Haman's presence (5:9). Certainly, standing could not be considered as an act of worship.

Also, there were times when Jews bowed to others, Abraham (Gen.23:7), Jacob (Gen.33:3), Joseph's brothers (Gen.43:28), David (1 Sam.24:8), Nathan (1 Kgs.1:23), and Bathsheba (1 Kgs.1:31). None of these were considered as worship.

- Some believe it was because Haman was an Amalekite (Agagite) and the enemy of the Jews

It seems to me this is the most likely reason. Mordecai said he refused to bow because he was a "*Jew*". As mentioned earlier (please read the comments in verse 2 for further explanation), the Amalekites were absolute enemies of the Jews (Ex.17:8-16; Num.14:45; Dt.25:17-19; Judges 3:13, 6:3). God told His people to remember what the Amalekites had done (Ex.17:14-16; Dt.25:17-19; 1 Sam.15:1-3).

And after all this discussion, I come to this conclusion, if God had wanted us to know why Mordecai

refused to bow, He would have told us. As mentioned before, this book is about what people do and not so much about why they do it. We should learn to be silent when the Bible is silent. Our opinion may only serve to confuse. Many false cults have started when a man or woman began to rely too much on their opinion.

Mordecai's refusal did cause problems but it was also opened a way for the Lord to demonstrate His love for His people and His power over circumstances. God leads His people to a dead end and then provides the way out. He may bring us to the edge of destruction just to show us how helpless we are. We should be willing to trust God when things seem hopeless. By following His instructions will we make it through.

I am not really surprised that Mordecai refused to bow. But, I am surprised about the other servants being willing to bow so quickly. Sadly, this is a perfect example of our day. So few are willing to do the right thing when things get difficult.

7. THE RESENTFUL DECISION 3:5-15

In the verses ahead we are told how Haman's resentment towards Mordecai led him to a decision. Strangely, we are told more about Haman's emotions than anyone else in this book.

Haman is angry at Mordecai for not bowing and seeks revenge:

Es 3:5 And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath.

Haman's pride is evident here. Pride blinds people from seeing themselves as they are and causes them to demand the respect they do not deserve. God warns us about pride (Lev.26:19; Ps.73:6; Pro.8:13; 29:23; 1 Jn.2:16). Pride, sooner or later, will bring a person down. God said, "*Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall*" (Pr 16:18).

It seems that a man in such a prominent place of leadership would be mature enough to not get upset because one person refused to bow.

The word, "*wrath*" means "hot displeasure". It speaks of a fury that causes a desire for revenge. Our old nature always wants first place in our lives.

Es 3:6 And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had shewed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai.

At this point, Haman discovered Mordecai was a Jew. No doubt, this enhanced his anger toward Mordecai and spurred him to devise a plan for revenge.

The words, "*he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone*" mean Haman saw himself as so much better than Mordecai that getting revenge on him alone would not be enough. Therefore, he determined to "*destroy*" all "*the people of Mordecai*". The combination of pride and anger always causes people to overreact.

The decree to destroy "*all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus*" would include those in the land of Israel. This means those who had obeyed God and returned to the Promised Land after the Babylonian Captivity would suffer because of something done by those who had been disobedient and stayed in Babylon. Those who are guilty often cause hardship for those who are innocent (cf. Num.32:7).

It is important to realize, if Haman's plan to destroy all the Jews was successful, Jesus would not have been born. And without Jesus, there would be no means of salvation. But, as we have seen repeatedly in this book, nothing or no one can stop God from doing what He determines to do.

Haman casts lots to determine when the Jews should be destroyed:

Es 3:7 In the first month, that is, the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar.

This took place in the twelfth year of Ahasuerus' reign. Esther had been queen for five years.

The word, "*Pur*" means "lot" which is referring to the casting of lots. The Persians, being superstitious people, often used the casting of lots to make decisions. The casting of lots is mentioned seventy times in the Old Testament and seven times in the New Testament. Even though they are mentioned so often, we do not know exactly what they were. They may have been different colored stones, sticks of different lengths, or some type of dice. It was much like our flipping of a coin.

There were times when the casting of lots was used in a questionable manner (Jonah 1:7; Joel 3:3; Mt.27:35; Acts 1:26). However, there were times when God revealed His will by the casting of lots (Lev.16:8; Num.26:55; 33:54; 34:13; 36:2; 1 Chr.24:5; 25:8-9; 26:13-14). In these cases, it was God, and not fate or luck, that controlled the lots. The New Testament believer has the completed Word of God, the Holy Spirit, and prayer, and should not use such a method in discerning the Lord's will (Jn.16:13).

The words, "*from day to day, and from month to month*" mean they first cast to determine what day, then cast again to determine what month, the attack would take place.

They cast the lots on the twelfth day of the thirteenth year of Ahasuerus' reign. The lots fell to where the date to destroy the Jews would be the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (cf. 3:13).

No doubt, Haman was excited about this plan and the opportunity to make Mordecai regret his actions. Little did he realize, the God of heaven and earth was the One who controlled the lots. Eleven months gave Haman time to plan his attack but it also gave God time to prepare a way of escape for His people.

We will discover later that God delivered the Jews from Haman's attack. Mordecai will instruct the Jews to commemorate this event with a celebration (9:21).

Haman goes to convince the king to destroy the Jews:

Es 3:8 And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them.

Up to this point, king Ahasuerus knew nothing about the problems between Haman and Mordecai, nor Haman's plan to get even.

Haman's wickedness is seen here. A normal person would have been content to get revenge on Mordecai. But, that was not good enough for Haman. He devised a plan whereby Mordecai, and all of his family members, would be killed.

However, if he was to carry out such a plan he would need permission and assistance from the king. He approached the king in a way that made it sound like he was being loyal. Little did he realize there was another King with more authority than Ahasuerus. God was still on His throne.

The "*certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people*" were the Jews throughout the entire Persian Empire. It included those who had returned to the Promised Land after the Babylonian Captivity and those who remained in the place where they had been taken captive. To recognize the full impact of this decree, we must remember, at that time, practically every Jew on earth was under the dominion of this king.

The word, "*certain*" means "united, one, altogether". Haman was implying these people, though spread throughout the empire, would stand together as one.

Just the fact that these Jews still existed as a separate people was nothing short of a miracle. No other nation could live so long in a foreign land without being assimilated into its population. But, for them to ever stand together as one was truly impossible. How could a people scattered all across the empire ever stand together as one? It may have been impossible, but that was exactly what happened (9:2).

Haman spoke half-truths and lies to the king. He did not say a word about his personal conflict with Mordecai. Those who lack morals have no issue with stretching the truth that they might accomplish their desire. Our human nature is a liar. It will tell us we are too good to need forgiveness, or too bad to get forgiveness.

Haman did not tell King Ahasuerus these "*people*" were Jews. Nor, did he tell him the people he wanted destroyed would include the man who had saved his life (Mordecai), and the woman he was married to (Esther).

He said these people have different "*laws*". Their laws were the laws of God from the Word of God.

He said they did not keep the "*king's laws*". Of course, this was not true. God's people have always obeyed the laws of the land unless those laws went against God's law.

He said it was not the king's "*profit to suffer them*". Haman was implying that the Jews would, sooner or later, revolt against the king and his empire. No doubt, this got the king's attention. His greatest fear was that someone might start a rebellion and overtake his throne.

The biggest lie Haman told was "*it is not for the king's profit to suffer them*". The Jews scattered throughout the land were the best friends King Ahasuerus had. It was one of those Jews who had just saved him from an assassination attempt (2:21-23). In fact, the Jews may have been the only reason God had not judged king Ahasuerus and the Persians. I believe, the Christians scattered around our country are the salt that keeps God from judging America (Mt.5:13). Had there been ten righteous in Sodom, God would have spared it (Gen.18:29).

It is amazing how the world considers Christians as a nuisance. The truth is, the average Christian will be the best citizen, the best neighbor, the best employee, and the best friend in any country. A Christian obeys the laws, pays their taxes, and cares for the needy. It isn't the Christian who robs and kills, fills the prisons, or drains the government finances.

Es 3:9 If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries.

As previously mentioned, to recognize the full impact of this decree, we must remember, at that time, practically every Jew on earth was under the dominion of this king.

Haman desired, not only a verbal command but that it be "*written*" to make sure there could be no disagreement later.

Haman's hatred is seen in the fact that he was willing to pay "*ten thousand talents of silver*" (worth millions in our day) to the "*king's treasuries*". We do not know if he would pay this money from his own pocket or if he planned to get it from the spoils of the Jews after he had them killed. Either way, it would come from his own bank account. Living by our flesh costs a lot more than we realize. King Ahasuerus would later refuse this money (3:11).

Haman had just said it was not to the king's profit to let the Jews live (3:8). Now he was trying to convince the king it would be profitable to put them to death.

King Ahasuerus gives permission for Haman's plan:

Es 3:10 And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy.

The king's signet "*ring*" was a symbol of his authority and would be like his signature. Without asking a question, the king simply tossed his signet ring to Haman and gave him the authority to do what he pleased. The devil is quick to assist our human nature when it is doing wrong.

The Holy Spirit was careful to remind us how Haman was the "*Jew's enemy*". The children of God have always had people who hated them. Jesus said, "*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you*" (Jn 15:18). Those who love darkness, hate light (Jn.3:20).

Es 3:11 And the king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee.

The "*silver is given to thee*" means King Ahasuerus told Haman to keep the silver he had offered (cf. 3:9). Undoubtedly, he was so convinced that Haman was watching out for his safety that he did not care about the money.

Once again we see the wickedness of Ahasuerus. He told Haman to do that which "*seemeth good*" to him. He turned the keys to the empire over to Haman.

This act reveals the evil heart of Ahasuerus as much as any deed recorded in this book. He, seemingly without hesitation, gave permission to kill thousands, if not millions, of law-abiding people without even asking who they were or requiring proof of the accusation against them. He, being the king, had a responsibility to protect these "*certain*" people just like all those under his authority.

Where was his compassion for the "*young and old, little children and women*" (cf. 3:13)? Where was his sense of responsibility for those who lived in his kingdom? The devil has no mercy whatsoever. He loves it when people are hurting. The child molester, the drunk in the gutter, or the Wall Street executive addicted to power, are all his delight.

It reminds us also of how the devil has no allegiance to those he can control.

It is interesting to note, King Ahasuerus told Haman he could do with the Jews "*as it seemeth good to thee*". Later, when the attack against the Jews took place, it was the Jews who did "*what they would*" to the Persians (9:4). God can indeed turn things around for His people.

Es 3:12 Then were the king's scribes called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and there was written according to all that Haman had commanded unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors that were over every province, and to the rulers of every people of every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language; in the name of king Ahasuerus was it written, and sealed with the king's ring.

The decree of Haman was written as proof and sealed with the king's ring to make it official. It was then directed to the officials throughout the empire. The decree was written in each language spoken throughout the empire so no one was left out.

This decree was written on the thirteenth day of the first month of the year.

Es 3:13 And the letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey.

The word, "destroy" means "bring to nought". The word, "kill" means "to slay". The word, "perish" means "to not escape". The implication was, the Jews would not only be killed but to be wiped off the face of the earth. Haman wanted every Jew killed and the entire race done away with.

The "posts" were much like the old pony express. Stations were set one day's journey from each other where a new rider and a fresh horse were waiting.

The decree was not saying if they happen to run into a Jew, they were to put them to death. It said, they were to go out, hunt them down, and put them to death, whether they be men or women, adults or children. No mercy was to be shown.

They were to "destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish" which means they could use any means they saw fit to put them to death.

God was working even in the ungodly plans of these ungodly people. The lots chose the 12th month as the date to kill the Jews. The lot could have determined the very next day as the day of the attack. God gave almost a year for the Jews to prepare and the Persians to change their mind.

Also, the lots chose the 13th day of the month. The number thirteen was considered unlucky by the Persians. It was like God was telling Haman and Ahasuerus they were making a big mistake.

God warns us of the danger of listening to our old nature (Rom.8:13; Gal.5:16; 1 Pet:2:11).

Everyone in the empire was instructed to massacre the Jews and keep the spoils of their property. The "spoil" refers to taking the possessions of a defeated foe. This would be a great incentive for anyone hesitant to put a Jew to death.

As mentioned, to recognize the full impact of this decree, we must remember, at that time, practically every Jew on earth was under the dominion of this king. Since this decree went throughout the land, the Jews would literally have nowhere to run. Their annihilation seemed certain.

Copies of the degree of Haman are sent to everyone in the empire:

Es 3:14 The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people, that they should be ready against that day.

Haman had to wait to attack, but he did not wait to send out the decree about putting the Jews to death.

Es 3:15 The posts went out, being hastened by the king's commandment, and the decree was given in Shushan the palace. And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed.

The actions of these two men tell us a great deal about their lack of character. They had just sent out a decree to execute all the Jews, including men, women, and children, and they "sat down to drink". It seems as though their conscience had been seared beyond repair. The next time Haman sat down to drink with King Ahasuerus, the tables would be turned (7:1-10).

The word, "perplexed" means "bewildered". It carries with it the idea of being confused and not knowing what to do next. What could be worse than to know trouble is coming and having no idea how to handle it?

Both the Persians and the Jews were bewildered. The Jews, because they did not know what would happen to them. The Persians, because the Jews lived among them and they knew them to be decent people who caused no trouble. No doubt many of them had become close to some of the Jews. They had become friends, business partners, and even intermarried, with Jews.

8. THE RIGHTEOUS DEPENDENCE 4:1-5:14

In the next few verses, we will see how Esther still had a ways to go. She is about to face two of the most evil men on earth and her life was literally at stake. As I have mentioned, I believe King Ahasuerus is a picture of the devil and Haman is a picture of the human nature of man. Esther will have to face them both. So will we.

Esther, like Moses, will have to face an evil leader and convince him to do something he does not want to do. Unlike, Moses, Esther has no power to do miracles to help her to convince King Ahasuerus.

Esther will have to face her fears and learn to depend on Mordecai. In like fashion, we should learn to depend on the Holy Spirit to tell us the truth and to lead us the way we should go. We need to listen to, and

obey, the Holy Spirit without hesitation.

What will God do? How will He protect the Jews? Will He open the earth and swallow Haman as He did Korah (Num.16:32)? Will He send brimstone and fire on them like He did Sodom (Gen.19:24)? No, once again, He will work in the background to accomplish His plan. He delivers His children from the snare (Ps.91:3). We need to watch for His inconspicuous hand in our lives.

As is often the case, we need to see these circumstances from two points of view.

From the human view, Esther's hesitation could have been devastating for herself and her people. The immature actions of a weak believer can bring havoc to the family of God.

In the spiritual view, we must not miss the work of God's hand in these same circumstances. God will bring His people to the brink of hopelessness that He might deliver them just in time (Ex.14:21-31; Dan.3:19-30; 6:20-24). Calvary is the greatest example of this. That which seemed to be the absolute defeat of Jesus, God made the greatest victory in human history. God does His best work when everything seems hopeless. We need to remember this the next time we find ourselves at a dead end.

Mordecai is brokenhearted about Haman's decree against the Jews:

Es 4:1 When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry;

As I have mentioned, in the book of Esther it seems, a change of clothes indicates a change of circumstances (cf. 4:1; 4:3; 5:1; 6:11; 8:15).

In this verse, we see Mordecai's personal and public grief.

First, his personal grief. Mordecai was grieved when he heard about Haman's plan. In like fashion, the Holy Spirit is very sensitive and is grieved when believers face difficulties.

The rending (tearing) of the clothes was a sign of extreme grief (2 Sam.1:11-12; 1 Kgs.21:27; 2 Kgs.2:11-12; Job 1:20; Judges 11:34-35; Acts 14:14). The tearing of the clothing was an outward sign of an inward broken heart.

Putting on "*Sackcloth*" was a symbol of extreme grief, mourning, or remorse (Gen.37:34; 2 Sam.3:31; 1 Kgs.21:27; 2 Kgs.19:1; Isa.37:1; Jonah 3:5-7; Dan.9:3; Mt.11:21). It was a coarse material usually made of black goat's hair. It had a texture something like burlap which made it quite uncomfortable to wear. The black color made it extremely hot in the desert climate.

The sprinkling of "*ashes*" on the head and body was also a symbol of grief, sorrow, or repentance and often accompanied wearing sackcloth. The ashes signified desolation.

Second, his public grief. Mordecai made no effort to hide his grief. In fact, he cried with a "*loud*" cry in the city to inform them of the coming devastation in an effort to get others concerned.

We should not forget, all this trouble began when Mordecai refused to bow before Haman (3:2). There will be times when God intentionally causes problems to come into our lives. But, along with the problems, He will always give us the grace needed to face it. He does indeed give "*more grace*" (Jam.4:6; 1 Cor.1:4; 2 Cor.12:9-10).

Es 4:2 And came even before the king's gate: for none might enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.

The "*gate*" mentioned here is the entrance into the palace itself and not one of the gates into the city.

The king refused entrance to anyone wearing sackcloth. He did not want anyone around him that might make him unhappy. It is amazing how some people can close their minds to all the sin, pain, and heartache around them. Pretending it doesn't exist does not take it away. More importantly, it doesn't do anything to make it better.

Mordecai knew if the Jews were to survive, someone had to get to the king and persuade him to do something. But, he could not even get in the gate, let alone get to the king personally. However, he did not give up. The Holy Spirit is persistent.

Es 4:3 And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

Here is another change of clothes and another change of circumstances (cf. 4:1; 4:3; 5:1; 6:11; 8:15).

Understandably, the decree of Haman caused great distress among the Jews. They were "*fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes*".

"*Fasting*" is abstaining from food and/or water for a certain period of time. It is depriving our physical man to get help for our spiritual man. Fasting is good and profitable (Acts 13:2; 14:23). Fasting is a way of

getting our eyes off the physical things in this life and on the Lord. Therefore, if we fast, our focus should be on the Lord and not on our lack of food. Fasting is a way to show the Lord, and ourselves, that we are serious about spiritual matters. It is not an attempt to punish our flesh, it is an attempt to focus our attention toward God and His will. It is something that is personal and should be done privately (Mt.6:16-18).

As mentioned earlier, "sackcloth" was a symbol of extreme grief, mourning, or remorse (please read the comments on 4:1).

The sprinkling of "ashes" on the head and body was also a symbol of grief, sorrow, or repentance and often accompanied wearing sackcloth.

All of these things are commendable but there is one important thing missing. Nothing is said here about them praying. Here the Jews simply cried out but their forefathers in bondage to Egypt cried out to God (Ex.2:23). There is a vast difference.

Some believe their fasting suggests they were praying also, but we are not told that. Certainly, prayer is usually connected to fasting (Neh.1:4; Mt.17:21; Lk.2:37; Acts 14:23; 13:3).

It is possible that they did pray and the Lord simply chose not to mention it, but that seems unlikely to me. The Lord made sure to tell us about their fasting, weeping, wailing, and sackcloth. Would He not tell us about them praying if they were indeed praying?

Someone may think it would be impossible to do all they did and not be praying also. But, there are people every day who experience all types of trouble and go through all kinds of religious gymnastics, but never turn to God in prayer.

The obvious question is, why would they fast but not pray? To answer that question, we need to remind ourselves of the circumstances surrounding this situation. The Jews closest to Shushan were those who had become comfortable in Babylon (now Persia) and refused to return to the Promised Land when they had the chance (Ezra 1:1-6). This is a perfect example of a believer who has become comfortable in the world. They have no desire to give up the things of the flesh and move closer to God.

The last thing we want to do when we are out of God's will is to pray. For a worldly believer, real prayer must start with repentance. Backsliding almost always begins in our prayer closet.

Before we throw stones at them, we need to take a good look at our lives. We go through all types of problems and we do not pray as we should. We turn to doctors, lawyers, family, friends, and our own intellect, but not to God. We may complain, condemn, and criticize, but we do not call on the Lord. How often do we look first to other means of deliverance before we pray? How often do we try every other resource before we turn to God? We try to rearrange our lives, change our habits, persuade people, and manipulate circumstances but never utter a word of real prayer.

Esther is told about Mordecai grieving:

Es 4:4 So Esther's maids and her chamberlains came and told it her. Then was the queen exceedingly grieved; and she sent raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take away his sackcloth from him: but he received it not.

By this time, news about Haman's plan to destroy the Jews was common knowledge throughout the kingdom (3:12-15). However, Esther, being the queen, was isolated from the outside world and was not aware of Haman's plan.

Being unaware of the news on the streets was one thing but the plan to destroy the Jews had been made under the same roof where Esther lived. It reminds us of how uninformed believers can be at times. Peter didn't see the trap being set for him (Lk.22:31). We should be sensitive to what the devil is trying to do in our lives. Jesus told us to "watch and pray" (Mt.26:41).

Undoubtedly, Esther's assistants had told her about Mordecai's distress but not why he was grieving (cf. 4:5). Desiring to help Mordecai get over his grief, Esther, sent him clean clothes. We certainly see here a picture of the immature spirit that longs to be free of any hardship or unpleasantness. It wants an easy path with no difficulties. Unfortunately, this life includes many difficulties and hardships so we need to learn to deal with them.

Why did Mordecai refuse to be comforted?

- Because of the seriousness of the situation

There are times when it is right to grieve (Gen.23:2; 2 Sam.12:15-16; Neh.1:4; Ps.126:6; Ecc.3:4; Lk.6:25; Rom.12:15; 2 Cor.7:10; Jam.4:9). The Holy Spirit is often grieved (Isa.63:10; Eph.4:30; 1 Th.5:19).

- Because his refusal to bow to Haman caused the problems they were going through

He knew his refusal to bow before Haman had caused the problems they were enduring (3:2). In like fashion, the Holy Spirit, being God, does what is right even though He is grieved over the consequences.

- Because Haman refused to repent

The Holy Spirit grieves over those who refuse to acknowledge their sin and repent.

- Because of Esther's reaction

Esther wanted Mordecai to stop mourning before she even knew why he was disturbed. At this point, she simply wanted him to get over his grief and be happy. This had to break Mordecai's heart. The Holy Spirit is grieved when God's people are untouched by the consequences of sin in the world. The consequences of sin should grieve every believer (Mt.5:4; Ecc.7:3; 2 Cor.7:9).

Esther and Mordecai communicate through Hatach:

Es 4:5 Then called Esther for Hatach, one of the king's chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her, and gave him a commandment to Mordecai, to know what it was, and why it was.

Hatach was the eunuch who had been assigned to take care of Esther. His responsibility was to take care of her needs but also to observe her conduct. Her life of luxury came with the high price of jealousy from the king.

The wives of kings were watched strictly and not allowed to go out of the palace on their own. This made communication with the outside world very difficult. Outside of the walls of the palace, there was trouble brewing. The Jews were in grave danger, they were mourning, weeping, wailing, and in sackcloth and ashes (4:3). But, Esther was completely in the dark about the entire situation.

This certainly reminds me of the average believer of our day. So many times, we isolate ourselves from the outside world and seem unaware of a world of hurting people. The lost world is going to hell all around us and we don't seem to notice.

Esther, still unaware of Haman's plan to destroy the Jews, sent Hatach to ask Mordecai "*what it was, and why it was*". Undoubtedly, her assistants had told her about Mordecai's distress but not why he was grieving. She should have asked this question before she sent the clean clothes to Mordecai (cf. 4:4).

I believe Hatach is a picture of the truth of the Word of God. He always sticks to the facts. The Word of God always tells the truth and never changes no matter what the circumstances. If the bible says it, we can believe it, if the bible says it, we should do it.

Esther finds out about Haman's evil plan:

Es 4:6 So Hatach went forth to Mordecai unto the street of the city, which was before the king's gate.

Hatach went to Mordecai with the message from Esther.

Es 4:7 And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and of the sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them.

Mordecai told Hatach about Haman's plan. We do not know how Mordecai knew these details but it certainly reminds us of how the Holy Spirit knows all things. There is nothing hidden from our God (Jer.1:5; Ps.147:4; Heb.4:13; Mt.10:30). God has never learned anything, He is not learning anything, and He will never learn anything.

God sent the Holy Spirit to teach us that which we do not know (Jn.14:26). He will give us insight about ourselves and those around us. The heart of man is "*deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it*" (Jer.17:9). We may not know our own hearts, but God does.

Es 4:8 Also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, to shew it unto Esther, and to declare it unto her, and 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.

Through Hatach, Mordecai told Esther about Haman's plan, gave her a "*copy of the decree*", and encouraged her to use her influence to convince the king to end the attack on the Jews. Being able to actually read the decree assured Esther that Mordecai was not exaggerating about the severity of the situation.

The best hope for Mordecai, Esther, and the Jews, was that someone convince King Ahasuerus to change his mind and stop Haman. Of course, Esther was the one person who could even hope to accomplish this. It would be no easy task. As mentioned (1:19), the law of the Persians and the Medes could not be altered, so King Ahasuerus' command (3:13-15) could not be undone. However, as always, God would make a way when there was no way.

Mordecai told Esther what the problem was and how to deal with it. She knew what she needed to do, but would she do it? That is the same question we must answer when we face a problem. We know we need to

pray, live clean, and obey God, but do we? Our problem isn't what we don't know, it is what we do know, but don't do.

Es 4:9 And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai.

Notice how simple this verse is. Hatach simply told Esther what Mordecai said. He did not add, or take away, from his message. The bible and the Holy Spirit always agree.

Esther offers excuses about talking to the king:

Es 4:10 Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai;

Esther continued to communicate to Mordecai through Hatach.

Es 4:11 All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days.

The "inner court" was where the king's residence and throne were. No one, not even the queen, could approach the king unless he called for them. To enter the king's presence without an invitation meant death. This law protected the king from danger and also demanded respect for his position. This is a total contrast to how our Lord tells us we can come to Him any time (Eph.2:18-19; 3:12; Heb.4:16; 10:19).

Esther was not being overdramatic with her response to Mordecai. She spoke the facts as they were.

First, she was in a situation where there was no easy way out. If she did nothing, she and her people would die.

Second, entering the king's presence without an invitation meant likely death.

Third, the king had not called for her in "thirty days". To say the least, she had reason to wonder if his affection for her had lessened.

These were the facts, but facts mean nothing to God. The fact is, you can not walk across a rushing river, but God ignored the facts and makes a way (Ex.14:21-22). The fact is, dead people do not come to life, but that means nothing to God (Jn.11:43-44). God is able to change that which seems certain.

Es 4:12 And they told to Mordecai Esther's words.

There seems to have been more than one person who brought Esther's message to Mordecai.

Mordecai reminds Esther of the seriousness of the situation:

Es 4:13 Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews.

Mordecai sent word to Esther telling her to not expect to be spared just because she was in the "king's house" and the wife of the king. Haman's decree spared no Jew.

It seems the fact of Esther being Mordecai's cousin had been discovered by now, or at least, Mordecai suspected it would be. This was very important for it meant whatever was done to the Jews would be done to Esther. The evil King Ahasuerus would have no more mercy for Esther than he had for Vashti. In like fashion, the devil has no mercy.

Es 4:14 For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?

These are the only recorded words of Mordecai in the entire bible. His words revealed his confidence, and his confidence helped convince Esther to do what she should do.

The words, "holdest thy peace" mean "to remain silent". There is a time to be silent and a time to speak. It takes spiritual discernment to know the difference.

The word, "enlargement" means "room or space". The word, "deliverance" means "rescue". Mordecai had confidence that God would somehow give the Jews room and bring about their rescue.

What did Mordecai mean by "another place"? I believe he meant if Esther refused to obey, God would use some other person to deliver the Jews. Mordecai must have known the promises of God well enough to know the Jews would be spared somehow (Gen.12:1-3; Dt.33:29; Isa.46:4b; Rom.11:1). After all, one of the major lessons of this book is the fact that God is working in all things, whether they be good or bad.

God will carry out His plans, with us if possible, but in spite of us, if necessary. He will find some other means to accomplish His will. Those who refuse to let Him use them will cheat themselves of the blessings that come from obedience and will also experience God's chastening.

The word, "*destroyed*" means "a state of ruin". Mordecai told Esther if she refused to approach King Ahasuerus, God would spare the Jews some other way, but she and her immediate family would not escape God's judgment. We cannot do wrong and get by.

Refusing to do God's can take us out from under His protection. We cannot claim God's provision and protection while we are walking our own way.

Mordecai thought God might have brought Esther into the kingdom for "*such a time as this*". He knew there was a reason why God had taken an orphan and made her queen of the greatest empire on earth. Nothing happens by accident in our lives.

Esther was at the right place at the right time, but she had to be willing to do the right thing.

Do you not realize, just like Esther, God has placed you where you are at this moment? There are no accidents with God. Are you doing that for which God put you where you are?

God is willing to protect His people but to think they are indestructible is unwise. In Jeremiah's day, the Jews thought they were safe from God's judgment because they were Jews, they lived in Jerusalem, and because of the Temple. But God said He would judge them severely (Jer.7:8-16). God will always keep a remnant but He will judge any nation that sins against Him.

We should ask, was Esther free to make her own choice? Of course, she was. Would Esther have played the part of history she did if she decided to remain silent? No. Would God have allowed the Jews to perish? No. He would have made some other way.

Esther decides to approach the king as Mordecai has suggested:

Es 4:15 Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer,

The messengers continued to carry the messages between Mordecai and Esther.

Es 4:16 Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.

Esther finally decided to take a stand. Vashti had taken a stand years earlier but for a completely different reason. In chapter one, Vashti risked her life by refusing to appear before king Ahasuerus. Now, Esther was risking her life by appearing before the king. Vashti refused when she was summoned. Esther entered though not summoned. Their reasons were totally different but both took a stand.

Vashti taking a stand reminds me of how the world stands for what it believes. The doctor takes a stand for medicine, the lawyer for the law, the athlete for a game, and the activist for their cause. The believer should be willing to openly declare their belief in the Lord.

As I have mentioned. I believe Esther's comment, "*if I perish, I perish*", is one of the great themes of this book. She was willing to trust the Lord and put her life on the line to do His will. Job said, "*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him*" (Job 13:15).

Esther failed to stand earlier (2:10) but she did not allow regret to control her. We should not allow our past actions to affect our present actions. Paul learned the importance of putting the past in the past (Phil.3:13). It is seldom too late to do the right thing.

Esther asked the Jews to "*fast*" for her. The Jews were instructed to fast one day each year, that being the Day of Atonement (Lev.23:27). Of course, they usually fasted for more than one day (Ex.34:28; 1 Kgs.21:9; Zech.7:4-6; Mk.2:18; Lk.18:12).

The New Testament does not command a Christian to fast, but it does speak of the spiritual benefits of fasting (Lk.2:37; 5:33; Acts 13:2; 14:23). When Jesus spoke of fasting, he said "*When*" ye fast, which indicates he was assuming they would fast (Mt.6:16-18).

Esther said, "*I also and my maidens will fast likewise*". She did not ask others to do what she was not willing to do herself. This was certainly unusual since a queen was used to having others do for them that which they did not do themselves. Many of us need to learn from Esther's example. It is easy to expect others to do right and not do right ourselves.

As previously mentioned, there is no word about Esther or anyone, actually praying (please read the comments on 4:3).

As we will see, during the three days, God would give Esther the courage to approach the king.

There are several differences between Esther's first approach to the king (2:15) and this one.

The first time, Esther spent a year preparing for her appearance before the king. This time, she had very little time to prepare herself physically and was exhausted from a three-day fast.

The first time, Esther came timidly before the king. This time, she came with some fear but realizing she

was the queen.

The first time, she was summoned by the king. This time, she initiated the encounter.

The first time, she approached the king on behalf of herself. This time, she approached on behalf of all her people.

Es 4:17 So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.

Mordecai did what Esther asked him to do.

I believe we can see a picture of prayer here. Esther and Mordecai communicated with each other. Mordecai gave Esther needed information and instructions. Esther made a request of Mordecai and he did as she requested. Can we not see a believer who understands their need for God and their authority to approach Him? Certainly, I am not saying we can command God, but we can believe by faith that we have the right to ask of Him and expect an answer (Mt.7:7; 21:22; Mk.11:24; Jn.14:13-14; Eph.6:18; Phil.4:6-7).

Esther approaches the king:

If Esther was to stop Haman she had to go through Ahasuerus to do so. In the same manner, if we are to get victory over our old man, we must do battle with the devil first.

Esther knew how evil Ahasuerus was, so she realized she was walking into a life-or-death situation.

Es 5:1 Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house.

A lot of important events in the bible take place on the "third day" (Gen.22:4; 40:12-13; Jonah 1:17; Hosea 6:2; Mk.9:31; 1 Cor.15:3-4). God does some of His best work on the third day.

The king "sat upon his royal throne in the royal house". His appearance must have been intimidating to Esther. If we allow it, the devil can be very intimidating to us.

Like Esther, the time may come when we have to do the right thing, even if it could cost us our lives. Jesus said, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves" (Mt 10:16). I am afraid most Christians are more like the virgins who slept than the ones who stayed awake (Mt.25:5).

Esther did what she could to increase the chance of her being heard by king Ahasuerus. This should remind us of how we must trust God completely but we should also do what we can to deal with the bad situations in our lives.

- Esther changed her clothes

Her "royal apparel" did two things.

Her apparel reminded Esther who she was. After all, she was the queen. Anytime we go to battle with the devil, we had better remember who we are. We are children of the Almighty God.

Her apparel also reminded the king who she was. He needed to remember she was more than just a vagrant off the street. She was the queen and deserved respect.

As mentioned earlier (4:3), a change of clothes in this book is an indication that something is about to happen (cf. 4:1; 4:3; 5:1; 6:11; 8:15).

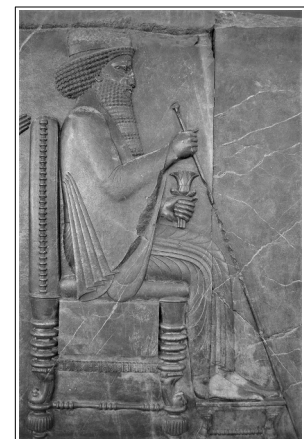
- Esther paused at the entrance of the throne room

Instead of rushing up to the king, she paused and gave him some time to think about how he would react to her presence.

- Esther did not make her request immediately

She used great wisdom by not blurting out her request when she first walked in. Courage is one thing, but we also need patience and common sense. God gave us a brain for a reason. He expects us to use it.

This picture shows how the "royal throne" of a Persian king was not what we usually think of. It was much like a chair sitting high enough to require a footstool. It would be made of gold, or at least, inlaid with gold. The picture also shows the "golden sceptre" mentioned in verse 2.



Es 5:2 And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre.

The first moment Ahasuerus saw Esther would be vitally important. Would he become enraged or would his heart become tender?

Esther waiting and wondering, the king looking and thinking, provided a tense moment, to say the least. That moment must have been difficult for Esther. No doubt, she realized how helpless she was. She knew the king's usual response to such an invasion would be instant death. She truly was trusting the advice of Mordecai. As long as we follow the instructions of the Holy Spirit, God will take care of us. When we know we are obeying the voice of God, we can go to fiery furnaces and know we will come out not even smelling of smoke (Dan.3:27).

The word, "*favour*" means "graciousness" and means he extended her mercy. This mercy was an act of God just as it was for the Jews years earlier (Ex.3:21).

Esther's wisdom paid off. King Ahasuerus was moved when he saw her. He "*held out*" his golden sceptre which signified to Esther he was granting her permission to draw closer.

Touching the "*top of the sceptre*" was a sign of respect and submission. We should never submit our will to the devil but we certainly need to respect his power and recognize our inferiority to him. Like Esther, our only hope of overcoming the devil is to trust and obey our heavenly Mordecai (cf. 4:14).

Esther delays her request :

Es 5:3 Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom.

King Ahasuerus offered Esther anything up to "*half of the kingdom*". This comment was more of a figure of speech than an actual promise. In essence, he was saying that anything she asked, within reason, would not be denied. This statement bound him to a promise he would be expected to keep. However, you can not trust a man who is a liar, cheat, and murderer.

There is one reference in the New Testament that may be indirectly connected to the book of Esther. Herod told his wife he would grant her request "*unto the half of my kingdom*" (Mk.6:22).

King Ahasuerus asked Esther what she wanted and promised to give it. Humanly speaking, this would have been the perfect time for her to speak up. But, but she did not.

Es 5:4 And Esther answered, If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him.

Esther did not make her request at this time. I believe it was because she wanted Haman present when she brought this matter before the king. So, she asked the king to come to a banquet and bring Haman along.

Es 5:5 Then the king said, Cause Haman to make haste, that he may do as Esther hath said. So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

The king instructed someone to tell Haman about Esther's invitation.

Ahasuerus and Haman did not realize they were walking into a trap. I love it when one of the devil's plans backfire on him.

Es 5:6 And the king said unto Esther at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed.

At the banquet, Ahasuerus repeated his offer to Esther (cf. 5:3). He will do it again later (7:2). But, as mentioned in verse 3, you cannot trust a liar. If a liar lies once, he will lie again.

We should pause for a second and consider the fact that none of these people had any idea about how God was working behind the scenes. The same is true for us. So many times, God is doing His best work and we don't even realize it. We can trust Him whether we see what He is doing or not.

Esther delays her request the second time:

Es 5:7-8 Then answered Esther, and said, My petition and my request is; If I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition, and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do to morrow as the king hath said.

Esther delayed making her request the second time. Instead, she asked King Ahasuerus and Haman to attend another banquet the next day.

We aren't told why Esther decided to not make her request of the king at this time.

- It may have been she lacked the courage at that time

She knew her life was still at stake. A man as evil as Ahasuerus needed little reason to put someone to death, even if that someone was his wife. Being fearful does not excuse us from doing what is right. We need to do what the Lord says, even if we are afraid.

- It may have been she was taking time to soften the king's will

Convincing a king to modify a command he had sent throughout his entire kingdom was no easy task. To do so would make him look uncertain and weak. No king would want to be viewed in such a manner, especially a man like Ahasuerus, who already had a bad reputation about how he treated his wives.

- It may have been that she was still trying to choose the right words

We see this as Esther delaying, but it may be that she was preparing. She wanted to make sure she was ready to say the right thing and to avoid saying the wrong thing. Many of us would do well to learn such a lesson. A quick and unplanned comment can get us into a lot of trouble (Ecc.5:2; Pro.10:19; 16:27; Jam.3:2).

Notice, how Esther carefully constructed her words. She said, "*if it please the king to grant my petition, and to perform my request*". She used this phrase four times (5:8; 7:3; 8:5; 9:13). In essence, she was saying, "If you mean to do what I ask, come to my banquet tomorrow". Then, by coming, he was saying he would grant her request.

- It may have been the Lord working

I believe this is at least one of the reasons, if not the only reason, for Esther's delay. There had to be time for the events recorded in the next chapter to occur. That very night an event would take place that would be a vital part of saving the Jews from destruction.

So once again, we see the hand of God at work. Had Esther asked the king too early, there was a good chance he would have refused. Breaking his promise to give her up to half his kingdom meant little to him.

Esther's invitation to the second banquet was the "*them*". She wanted to make sure Haman was there.

Mordecai refuses to honor Haman again:

Es 5:9 Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai.

Haman left the banquet on top of the world. He was second in charge in the Persian Empire, he had just attended a banquet at the king's house and had been invited back for the next night. What could be better? But, his balloon was about to pop.

The word, "*but*" in this verse is enormous. Haman went from the top of the world to the pit of despair in one second. His attitude depended totally on the circumstances of the moment. This is like so many in our world today.

As Haman passed through the king's gate, Mordecai saw him and refused to stand or honor him in any way.

I feel that I must add a quick comment here about how we find Mordecai once again at the gate being faithful to his duties. Nothing takes the place of faithfulness.

Suddenly, Haman's glee disappeared. Like the little child he was, he could be glad one minute and sad the next. The word, "*indignation*" means "heat or rage". He lost his cool.

Some may wonder why Mordecai did not compromise and bow to Haman as was demanded. It would have been a wonderful time to appease Haman and smooth things over. However, there is never a right time to compromise with our old nature or the devil. Trying to appease either is foolish.

Mordecai refusing to honor Haman reveals some very important things about him.

- He was a man of principle

Of course, this was not the first time Mordecai had refused to bow before Haman (3:2,5). If refusing to bow was right the first time, it was still right. God's will and Word do not change.

- He was a man of courage

The word, "*moved*" means "to tremble". He did not fear Haman. By this time, he was aware Haman had been granted permission to put all the Jews to death. Certainly, no one would have complained if he killed one Jew.

- He was a man of faith

I believe this shows he was trusting God to protect him. Faith trusts God during trying times.

Es 5:10 Nevertheless Haman refrained himself: and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife.

The word, "*refrained*" means "to control oneself". No doubt, this was a work of God for Haman was not the type to restrain himself. He was compulsive and explosive, but certainly not patient.

Haman ran home to tell his wife and friends. He had been one of those who said they needed to keep their wives under control (1:16-18), but now he is running to his wife like a whipped puppy. He was upset about the king's wife not being in submission (1:12), yet now he was allowing his own wife to control him.

Es 5:11 And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king.

It is obvious that Haman liked talking about himself and all his accomplishments. Pride loves to talk about itself.

Haman bragged about the "*glory of his riches*". It is common to associate greatness with wealth. A quick glance at those who are rich will prove that theory wrong. Those who are rich are often the most ungodly.

He bragged about the "*multitude of his children*". Haman had ten sons (9:10). Having a lot of children was considered an honor in that day. Sadly, these sons would be killed later (3:13-14).

He also bragged about how the "*king had promoted him*". King Ahasuerus had promoted him to the second in command of the empire.

With all these blessings, you would think Haman would be thankful. But, as we are about to discover, Haman let one problem spoil all his blessings. I am afraid we do the same.

Haman's pride completely controls him:

Es 5:12 Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to morrow am I invited unto her also with the king.

Haman bragged about being the only one invited to the banquet. He was so full of pride he assumed Esther had invited him to another banquet that she might honor him in some way. Little did he realize, the next banquet would be his last. Pride blinds the proud (Pro.16:18).

Es 5:13 Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.

The words, "*all this*" refer to everything Haman mentioned in verses 11 and 12.

All his blessings meant nothing as long as Mordecai was alive. Haman's pride, anger, jealousy, and envy would play a role in his demise. He would eventually lose his riches, his family, and his own life because of this attitude. He would be dead and gone and Mordecai would still be alive and well. Jealousy and anger never produce good results.

Haman's problem was not Mordecai, Haman's problem was Haman. The human nature always blames someone else for the problems it causes.

If everyone has to treat us right for us to be happy, we will not be happy. No one can be truly happy who is not in the center of God's will.

Haman had many things to be thankful for, but it only took one bad thing to upset his apple cart. We may be guilty of the same thing. God has been so good yet we center our attention on the negatives.

Sadly, we can get spoiled by our blessings. That certainly is true in America. We have gotten so used to the blessings of God, it takes very little for us to complain. In the process, we do not truly appreciate the blessings we have.

Es 5:14 Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and to morrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made.

This verse shows the power of influence. Haman's wife and friends were quick to give their advice. As is so often the case when advice comes from the ungodly, their recommendation led Haman further down.

Haman's first mistake was to go to people who were just like him. Our human nature desires company of like sort. Instead of helping Haman with his anger issues, they simply added fuel to the fire. Haman should have found someone who could have given him some godly advice. He should have admitted his pride and anger and dealt with it (Eph.4:31-32).

The "fifty cubits" probably means the gallows were on a hill and not actually 75 feet tall itself. Being so high made it easier to see. Haman designed, not just a place of execution, but a billboard. He meant to show everyone what happened to those who dared to defy him.

Building the gallows so high was evidence of his pride, anger, and hatred. Like when Nebuchadnezzar had the furnace heated seven times hotter (Dan.3:19), Haman's actions were an overkill. This was the same type of hatred that caused man to hang Jesus on the cross.

Haman's wife and friends said if he got rid of Mordecai, he could go "*in merrily with the king unto the banquet*". Their hardheartedness was astounding. There was absolutely no concern about the effects of this action. Did they not think at least some of the people throughout the kingdom would be upset? Did they not think the God of heaven might be angered?

Their suggestion, "*pleased Haman*" so he had the gallows built. He would end up regretting this decision (7:10).

9. THE RECORDS DISCOVERED 6:1-3

Not being able to sleep, King Ahasuerus called for the book of records to be read to him. He was hoping this would help him get to sleep. How wrong he was.

The king can not sleep:

Es 6:1 On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king.

It was "*that*" night, which means, it was the same night of the first banquet. This night of sleeplessness was between the two banquets Vashti prepared. The king's sleeplessness was one of the big little events of this book (cf. 1:10-12; 1:19-21; 2:9; 2:15-17; 2:21-22; 2:23; 3:1-2; 3:7; 5:1-2; 6:1; 6:2; 6:3; 7:10; 8:3-8; 9:11-12,15,17; 10:1-3). Who would expect God to be working through a case of insomnia?

While Mordecai, Esther, and the Jews were fasting (4:15), and Haman was planning to put Mordecai to death (5:14), that king Ahasuerus was tossing and turning in bed. He could control a hundred and twenty seven provinces, but he could not control his own mind.

Humanly speaking, it seems like time is about to run out for Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews. God is never late, but He is never early either. That means He is always right on time.

The king's case of insomnia was actually another work of God. He can give sleep (Ps.127:2; 4:8; Isa.32:18; Acts 12:6) or He can take it away (Dan.6:18). This is one of God's big little events (cf. 1:10-12; 1:19-21; 2:9; 2:15-17; 2:21-22; 2:23; 3:1-2; 3:7; 5:1-2; 6:1; 6:2; 6:3; 7:10; 8:3-8; 9:11-12,15,17; 10:1-3). Had king Ahasuerus slept through the night, he would have not read the records. Had he not read the records, Mordecai probably would have been dead soon.

Like many people do when having trouble sleeping, King Ahasuerus tried reading. He called for someone to bring the "*book of records*" so they could read to him. The word "*records*" is from a root word that means "remembered". The Persians were meticulous record keepers (cf. 2:23).

King Ahasuerus had a wife, musicians, and singers, yet he asked that someone read the records. Another big little event done by a God standing in the shadows (cf. 1:10-12; 1:19-21; 2:9; 2:15-17; 2:21-22; 2:23; 3:1-2; 3:7; 5:1-2; 6:1; 6:2; 6:3; 7:10; 8:3-8; 9:11-12,15,17; 10:1-3).

Any book of many could have been selected, any section of hundreds could have been read, but God pointed the reader to the exact place He wanted read.

King Ahasuerus was awake, but it was Haman who was about to receive a wake-up call from heaven.

Es 6:2 And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus.

The records described the plan of "*Bigthana and Teresh*" and the bravery of Mordecai (cf. 2:21-23).

It had been five years since Mordecai helped save King Ahasuerus and long enough for it to be forgotten by most. But, God had not forgotten and He was about to remind everyone.

Es 6:3 And the king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him.

As mentioned earlier, Mordecai's actions being recorded were so important. Had they not been written, King Ahasuerus would not have been reminded of Mordecai's assistance or that he had not been rewarded. God makes all the little pieces fit together. Certainly, this is another one of His big little events (cf. 1:10-12; 1:19-21; 2:9; 2:15-17; 2:21-22; 2:23; 3:1-2; 3:7; 5:1-2; 6:1; 6:2; 6:3; 7:10; 8:3-8; 9:11-12,15,17;

10:1-3).

King Ahasuerus knew Mordecai's act of patriotism should have been rewarded. A Persian king felt it their duty to reward those who were loyal. Naturally, Ahasuerus was upset to discover this information.

You, like Mordecai, may have been overlooked for the good and godly things you have done. Man may not have recognized your sacrifice, but the Lord has. Even a cup of cold water given in the name of the Lord will not be forgotten (Mt.10:42). God may not always pay on Friday, but He will always pay.

We must not miss the blessing behind Mordecai being forgotten earlier. Had he been rewarded then, the blessings would have been long gone. But now, he would receive a reward that was above all rewards, the lives of himself, Esther, and all the Jews. God's timing is always right on time.

10. THE REAL DISAPPOINTMENT 6:4-14

As the king is deciding the best way to reward Mordecai for saving his life, Haman comes into the outer court of the palace to ask the king for permission to put Mordecai to death. Before he has a chance to ask, the king asks his opinion about honoring a loyal subject.

Haman visits the king:

Es 6:4 And the king said, Who is in the court? Now Haman was come into the outward court of the king's house, to speak unto the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him.

Being anxious to ask permission to hang Mordecai on the "gallows" (5:14) Haman had come, probably early in the morning, and was waiting in the outer "court" until he was invited in to talk to the king.

Es 6:5-6 And the king's servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in. So Haman came in. And the king said unto him, What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour? Now Haman thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself?

Haman came in intending to ask the king for permission to eliminate Mordecai but the king started talking first. He asked Haman's advice on how he could honor a man he was pleased with. Fortunately, the king did not mention Mordecai by name. How different everything would have been if he had. Once again, we see one of the big small things in this book.

Haman was so proud, he assumed he had to be the one the king was delighted in. Being honored by a rich and powerful man like King Ahasuerus was a dream come true for Haman. The king had the ability to give extraordinary gifts. He had entire cities at his disposal. He wasn't the type to give bedroom slippers as a gift.

This sounds great, but we should remember nothing would come from Ahasuerus without some strings attached. The devil has plenty to give, but none of it is free. On the other hand, all of God's gifts are good and free (Ps.85:12; 104:28; Mt.7:11; Rom.6:23; Jam.1:17; 3:17).

Haman's pride is seen in his use of the word, "delight" or "delighteth". He must have really enjoyed the sound of these words since he used them four times in these two verses.

We should notice the omission of the word "dignity" in this verse that is found in verse 3. It is a word that refers to being advanced or promoted. Had King Ahasuerus used this word here as he had earlier, Haman would have known it was not him that the king had in mind. Haman was already second to the king which meant he could be promoted no higher.

Es 6:7-8 And Haman answered the king, For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head:

Thinking he was the one the king planned to honor, Haman really poured it on thick.

He did not say anything about a promotion because he was already second to the king and could to no higher.

The "royal apparel" was clothing that only the king would wear. Usually, it meant certain death for anyone to put on such apparel.

The "horse" of the king would be magnificent. Persia was known for its high-bred horses.

There is some discussion about whether the "crown royal" was something worn by the king or a headdress placed on the horse of the king. Since this crown is not mentioned in the following verses, it seems to have been something placed on the horse. Archaeologists have found reliefs showing Assyrian horses with crown-like decoration on their heads. It is quite possible the Persians did the same. Like an extravagant

luxury car shows the riches of the millionaire, this extravagant attire on a horse would emphasize the glory of the king.

Es 6:9 And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour.

The honored man would be led through the city on the adorned horse as a crier went before announcing his presence. This type of thing was done for Joseph. The bible says, "*And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee...*" (Ge 41:43).

It's interesting to note that Haman did not mention riches. His desire was for power and popularity. Our idol is that which we want the most and the thing we would least like to give up. Every person has their own particular ungodly vice. Such a vice will rule over us if we allow it.

Haman reluctantly assists in honoring Mordecai:

Es 6:10 Then the king said to Haman, 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 that thou hast spoken.

Once again, we see the hand of God at work. At the very instant Haman came to ask permission to kill Mordecai, he was instructed to honor Mordecai. To say the least, he was not having a good day.

This had to be devastating for Haman. He went from thinking he would be honored to realizing he had to assist in honoring the man he despised more than anyone on earth. The human nature wants recognition and does not handle humiliation so well. However, humiliating our human nature is one of the primary goals of God. Until we realize how useless we are, we will be of no use to God.

King Ahasuerus called Mordecai the "Jew". He still did not know it was the Jews he had condemned. Remember, Haman did not name the Jews when he approached the king earlier (3:8-9). As far as I can tell, we are not told how, or when, Ahasuerus found out Mordecai was a Jew.

Es 6:11 Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour.

Haman had little choice but to do as Ahasuerus had demanded. Mordecai's recognition was as grand as it was because of Haman's recommendation to the king (6:7-9). This should remind us of how God can override the plans of the devil and the human nature.

Es 6:12 And Mordecai came again to the king's gate. But Haman hastened to his house mourning, and having his head covered.

The reactions of these two men tell us a lot about their character.

Mordecai went back to his humble life as usual. He did not allow this experience to go to his head. We need the grace of God to help us stay humble when great things happen to us.

Haman, on the other hand, covered his head in shame and ran home. Covering the head was a sign of sorrow (2 Sam. 15:30; Jer. 14:3).

Es 6:13 And Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends every thing that had befallen him. Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him.

Once again, Haman went to his wife and friends to complain.

The "wise men" were the type of men, if not the very same men, who had assisted Haman when he cast lots earlier (3:7). They had given bad advice before but this time they showed some wisdom in their response. In essence, they said, "If Mordecai is a Jew, you are not going to win this argument". It is likely that they had heard or seen how God had taken care of the Jews. God had taken care of the Jews in such obvious ways, everyone had noticed.

Talk about a flip-flop. Before they told Haman he could never be happy until Mordecai was dead (5:14). Now, they tell him he has no hope of getting the best of Mordecai. Man's philosophy never makes sense.

Es 6:14 And while they were yet talking with him, came the king's chamberlains, and hastened to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared.

Even while Haman was talking with his wife and friends, one of the king's eunuchs came to bring him to Esther's second banquet.

No doubt, Haman was thrilled to be escorted back to the king's palace. He was expecting a grand ole' time

with the king and his wife. He had no idea what was in store for him. He was about to find out that we really do reap what we sow (Hos.8:7; 2 Cor.9:6; Gal.6:7). He wasn't the first to make this discovery and he wasn't the last. We all need to live with that in mind.

By this time, it is clear that Haman has totally lost control of the situation.

11. THE REQUEST DESCRIBED 7:1-4

Esther invited King Ahasuerus to a banquet to talk to him about stopping Haman's plan to kill the Jews. However, she delayed talking to him about it.

Esther's conflict with King Ahasuerus and Haman is a picture of the believer's battle with the devil and their flesh. This is a constant battle but one that can be and must be, won by every believer.

King Ahasuerus and Haman come to the banquet:

Es 7:1 So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen.

Surely, they came with glee and gladness, but that would change in a hurry.

Es 7:2 And the king said again unto Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom.

This was called a "*banquet of wine*" because it was a party of wine and delicacies and not a feast. This type of affair was usually given to honor an individual, so Haman had good reason to think he was going to be the guest of honor.

King Ahasuerus actually asked two questions. He asked, "*What is thy petition*" and "*what is thy request*". The first has to do with what she wanted, the second with what she was asking. In other words, he was asking Esther what she wanted and what did she want him to do about it. He promised to grant her desire, and do what she requested.

Es 7:3 Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request:

Esther's conversation with King Ahasuerus had to do with her "*life*" and the lives of her "*people*". The lives of all the Jews, including Mordecai and herself, was hanging in the balance. Esther used great wisdom in what she said and when she said it.

One, she waited until the right time to speak up. To say the least, this was a stressful time for Esther, yet she was tremendously patient and willing to wait until the right time to speak up. We would do well to do the same. So often, we speak when we should remain silent, or before the timing is right.

Two, even though King Ahasuerus had a great deal to do with the planned attack on the Jews, Esther did not blame him. If she had, he would have immediately gone on the defense.

Three, she softened the king by saying, "*If I have found favour in thy sight*". Her five years of devotion as a wife were paying off now. While she was being neglected and mistreated by the king, she may have wondered if it was worth it. Now, she did not wonder, she was glad she had endured the difficult times.

Four, Esther made a comment about what would "*please*" the king. This had to strike a chord in King Ahasuerus for he loved getting what pleased him. She used this phrase four times (5:8; 7:3; 8:5; 9:13).

Five, Esther spoke of herself before she said anything about the Jews. She said, "*let my life be given me*". Ahasuerus had no particular love for the Jews, but he did care about Esther.

Six, finally Esther spoke about her "*people*", the Jews. As far as we can tell, this was the first time King Ahasuerus learned of Esther being a Jew. Now his interest was stirred because he knew his wife's life is at stake.

Esther's timing could not have been better. At the exact moment when it was most important, she disclosed the fact that she was a Jew. Also, it seems this may be when Haman found out Esther was a Jew. He had been plotting to kill all the Jews but did not realize queen Esther would be included.

Es 7:4 For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage.

Esther used the words, "*destroyed, to be slain, and to perish*" which were in Haman's decree (cf. 3:13). Haman spoke them in hatred and anger, Esther in love and concern.

The word, "*destroyed*" means "bring to nought". The word, "*slain*" means "to slay". The word, "*perish*"

means "to not escape". As mentioned before (3:13), Haman wanted the entire Jewish race to be done away with and cease to exist.

Amazingly, Esther said if she and her people had been sold for "*bondmen and bondwomen*" she would have remained silent. Being sold into slavery, as bad as it would be, would not cost them their lives as Haman's decree would have.

The word, "*damage*" means "loss or injure". Haman's plan, if carried out, would end up being detrimental to King Ahasuerus and his empire. It did not make good financial sense to do what Haman wanted.

The word, "*countervail*" means "to equalize". It carries with it the idea of making even. It is used two other times in the book of Esther. The first time it is translated "*profit*" (3:8). The second it is translated "*availeth*" (5:13). Both times, the word deals with profit. Esther was saying the Jews were an asset and not a deficit because they added to the value of the land, paid taxes, built businesses, and raised families. The Persian economy would have lost the financial resources of these hard working people if Haman's plan was carried out.

Haman had told the king it was not profitable for him to tolerate the Jews (3:8). Now, Esther was telling him it was not profitable for him to put up with Haman.

We who are believers need to learn that listening to the devil will never be to our benefit.

12. THE REBEL DIES 7:5-10

Haman's anger caused him to seek revenge against Mordecai. However, his plans backfired and he was put to death on the gallows he had built for Mordecai.

Once again, we see circumstances changing. In chapter three, Haman received the honor Mordecai should have gotten, in chapter six, Mordecai received the honor Haman expected for himself, and in chapter seven, Haman will receive the punishment he intended for Mordecai. God has a way of working things out.

The true Haman is revealed:

Es 7:5 Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?

Up to this point, King Ahasuerus had not put all the pieces together. It is shocking that he did not immediately realize Esther was referring to Haman and the decree he himself had approved.

He asked Esther who was behind the scheme. He asked "*who*" he was and "*where*" he was. Little did he realize the man was one who pretended to be a friend and was sitting at the same table with him at that moment. Just as King Ahasuerus was deceived by Haman, the devil mistakenly thinks he is in control.

The problem with Haman was a "*heart*" problem. Our modern psychiatrists tell us the problems in our world are educational or financial. God says it is a heart problem. Mankind is wicked from birth.

Esther spills the beans on Haman:

Es 7:6 And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.

Esther did not pull any punches when she described Haman. She called him an "*adversary*", which means an "*enemy*", and "*wicked*", which means evil. Not until now did Haman get called what he actually was. No doubt, he had been called loyal, devoted, or maybe ever virtuous, but Esther called him what he really was.

Until we see what our old nature truly is, we will not see the need to put him to death. Like Haman, he can not be reasoned with or compromised with, he must be put to death.

Once again, Esther did not accuse King Ahasuerus for his part in the plan. King Ahasuerus seemed to be leaning in her direction and she did not want to rock the boat.

The word, "*afraid*" means "terrified". Haman was shaking in his sandals because he realized his plan was failing and knew things could not end well for him.

Notice, he was afraid before the king "*and queen*". We would expect Haman to be afraid before the king, but not so much before the queen. This shows us Esther had made an impression on Haman and he saw her as a real threat to his plans. Every believer should be such a threat to our flesh.

Haman, to say the least, was not having a good day. He had just returned from leading his archrival through the streets on horseback, now he finds out Esther was a Jew and would be included in his decree. He knew the king would not be happy with him.

King Ahasuerus walks out of the room and Haman pleads for his life:

Es 7:7 And the king arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath went into the palace garden: and Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king.

King Ahasuerus was so distraught he walked out into the garden. No doubt he was angry at Haman but he was also angry at himself for agreeing and assisting, in Haman's plot. I love it when the devil gets caught in his own trap.

While he was in the garden, King Ahasuerus was deciding what his next move should be. This certainly reminds us of the tactics of the devil. He takes time to plan his every move. He is usually about three steps ahead of us, so we need to "*watch and pray*" as Jesus said (Mt.26:31).

After King Ahasuerus walked out, Haman, realizing the king was tremendously upset at him, "*stood up*" to plead with Esther for "*his life*". As we will see, the more Haman begged for mercy, the deeper he got himself into trouble. That seems fitting since he was unwilling to show mercy to any of the Jews.

The word, "*request*" means, "to beg". He was pleading for his life. The mighty and proud Haman had become a lowly beggar. But, Haman was pleading with Esther and not the king. He realized if he was to survive, he had to somehow convince Esther.

Remember, Haman is a picture of our human nature. Our old nature does not want to be put to death. It wants to live. It wants control of our lives. It will not die easily.

The state of Haman lay in the hands of Esther. So it is with our human nature. We, by the grace of God, are the ones who have to decide to let him live, or reckon him dead. The bible teaches us that our old man died with Christ (Rom. 6:6). But, we must reckon that so by faith (Eph.4:22-24; Col.3:9-10). Until we do, our old nature will control everything we think, say, or do.

Es 7:8 Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther was. Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.

This is the fourth time this banquet was called the "*banquet of wine*" (5:6; 7:2; 7:7; 7:8). King Ahasuerus and Haman thought they were coming to a joyful party. Little did they realize, it would be one of the worse times of their lives.

The word, "*bed*" refers to a couch instead of a bed to sleep on. It was the custom of the Persians to recline on couches when they ate.



Persian protocol demanded that no man, other than the king himself, or a eunuch, be alone with the king's wife, or any woman from the king's harem. The last thing on Haman's mind was protocol or proper manners. He remained with Esther to plead for her mercy. He must have fallen on his knees across her couch in desperation as he was pleading with her.

Notice the comparison between Haman and Mordecai. Mordecai would not bow (3:2), nor stand (5:9), nor tremble (5:9). Haman trembled (7:6), stood (7:7), and bowed (7:8).

While Haman was laid across Esther's couch, King Ahasuerus returned from the garden. To say the least, Haman's bad day, just got worse.

King Ahasuerus accused Haman of trying to "*force*" his wife.

Once again, the king's words tell us what kind of person he really was. He talked about what Haman had done "*before*" him. As usual, he was more concerned about himself than anything else. The devil never cares about anyone but himself.

It is very unlikely that King Ahasuerus actually believed Haman tried to force his wife. Haman may have been wicked, but he was not dumb. The king knew Haman was not dumb enough to try to force the one woman who could grant him mercy and especially since he was just outside of the room.

So, the question arises, why would King Ahasuerus accuse Haman of trying to force his wife if he did not believe he had. I believe he was trying to divert the attention from himself.

Esther had just informed him that a man he had trusted enough to promote to the second in command of his empire, had been playing him for a dummy. Since the decree of Haman had been written in the name of the king (3:12), he would get the blame. So, accusing Haman of trying to force Esther gave him a way to judge Haman without implicating himself.

The devil is an expert at diverting the attention from himself. Like an undercover spy, he does his best when his work goes undetected.

King Ahasuerus' plan worked. As soon as he said something about Haman forcing Esther, some of his eunuchs grabbed Haman and covered his head.

The covering of Haman's face was a sign of his certain, and immediate, doom. When a criminal was condemned by a judge, his head was covered as he was taken to his execution. Haman was guilty of many things, but he would be executed for trying to force the king's wife, which was something he did not do.

Some say Esther should have had mercy and spoken up for Haman explaining that he was not trying to force her. But, we must remember, this whole situation can be traced back to when Saul had mercy on one of Haman's ancestors (1 Sam.15:7-9). Had Saul put Agag to death as God told him, all these problems in the book of Esther would have never even taken place.

Also, had Haman been allowed to live, he would have continued to create havoc for the Jews. This was not a time for mercy, it was a time where justice needed to be served. The only way to deal with wickedness is to put it to get rid of it. I will say it again, we cannot play around with our old nature, it must be put to death.

Es 7:9 And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. Then the king said, Hang him thereon.

One of the eunuchs named "*Harbonah*" mentioned the gallows Haman had erected. King Ahasuerus did not need convincing. He was quick to give the command to "*Hang him thereon*".

This shows how quickly the devil will turn on any who disappoints him. Many have given their lives to the devil and his pleasure. Little do they realize, the devil is their worse enemy. He will not hesitate for a second to throw them under the bus.

Haman is hanged on the gallows he had built for Mordecai:

Es 7:10 So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified.

So, Haman was put to death on the "*gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai*". Talk about bad karma.

A few hours earlier, Haman was on the top of the world and thought nothing could touch him. How quickly things can change. Those who seek for worldly fame will find themselves empty and disappointed.

Haman's plan to annihilate the Jews did not work. It didn't work for Hitler, it didn't work for Haman, and it will not work for the Anti-Christ (Rev.19:20).

There may be times when we wonder why the wicked seem to prosper. Asaph wrestled with the same question (Ps.73:1-3,16-19). The ungodly may seem to have an advantage now, but they will lose in the end. That is why Solomon tells us the "*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth*" (Ecc.12:1).

The word, "*pacified*" means "to cease". King Ahasuerus, like a spoiled child that finally got what he wanted, was content.

These events should teach us that we can depend on God's protection when we do that which pleases Him. And, we should learn the wicked schemes of wicked men have no power over our God.

13. THE REMARKABLE DELIVERANCE 8:1-9:32

The death of Haman is not the end of this book. One of the villains may have been dealt with but there was much more left to the story.

Since the laws of the Persians and the Medes could not be altered (Est.1:19; Dan.6:8), the death of Haman did not undo his decree against the Jews. The day of their slaughter was still set as planned.

How will God change that which cannot be changed? In the verses ahead, we will see how He delivers His people from destruction and destroys their enemies in two days. God not only saved His people from Haman's plan but He got rid of Haman himself.

Thank the Lord for His mercy on undeserving people. God moved on their behalf and delivered them from certain death even though some of them had gotten satisfied in the worldly land of Persia and refused to return to the Promised Land as He had instructed them. So many times we deserve justice but receive mercy.

Continuing with my belief that Mordecai is a picture of the Holy Spirit and King Ahasuerus is a picture of the devil we are about to see how the Holy Spirit, who is God, deals with the devil. This conflict started when Lucifer tried to overthrow God (Isa.14:12) and will not end until God overthrows him and casts him into the

Lake of Fire (Rev.20:10).

We will find Mordecai and Esther affirming their Jewish nationality. We will also see that they are blessed as a result. God has special blessings reserved for those who are willing to stand unashamedly for Him.

King Ahasuerus gives to Esther and Mordecai:

Es 8:1 On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman the Jews' enemy unto Esther the queen. And Mordecai came before the king; for Esther had told what he was unto her.

This was the first time Mordecai actually appeared before King Ahasuerus in this book.

The word "house" is referring to all the property and possessions of Haman. The Persian custom was that the property of a traitor would be given to the king. In this case, King Ahasuerus gave it all to Esther.

Esther told King Ahasuerus what Mordecai "was unto her". She had already told him she was a Jew (7:3). Now she told him Mordecai was her cousin and adopted father (cf. 2:7). This disclosure caused King Ahasuerus to promote Mordecai.

Es 8:2 And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.

The significance of this verse cannot be overstated. It is a picture of the devil losing the fight with the Holy Spirit. With that in mind, we see two things taking place here.

One, King Ahasuerus gave Mordecai that which had been Haman's. As mentioned earlier, the king's signet "ring" was a symbol of his authority. The authority that had been Haman's now belonged to Mordecai.

Two, Esther gave Mordecai that which had been Haman's. It is so easy to miss the importance of this comment. This was a life-changing event for Esther. The influence and control Haman had had on her life were over. She was free from his evil authority.

Esther won a victory over her enemy and instantly become a rich woman. The believer who breaks free from the control of their human nature will experience spiritual riches from another world. No doubt, she was glad she had done what was right. In like manner, a child of God can win their fight over the flesh and the devil by being obedient to God. And, the reward will be worth the effort.

Haman had caused Esther grief for years, but now he was gone and she was set free from his bondage. The believer who finally decides to reckon their old nature dead will enjoy the benefits of a freedom that had seemed unattainable. So many believers live in misery because they are controlled by their old human nature instead of the Holy Spirit.

It is a grand day when a believer transfers the control of their lives from the flesh to the Lord. Paul said, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Ga 5:16). The bible has much to say about walking in the Spirit and not the flesh (Gal.5:25; 6:8; Rom.6:6; 8:1; Eph.4:22-24).

The end of Haman's life was indeed a sad one. He had worked hard trying to accomplish what he wanted, but never attained it. This is a perfect picture of a life lived with the human nature in control. It devours and destroys and leaves nothing but emptiness. Some think they have the world by the tail, but God can cut them down to size. Earthly glory may burn bright but it always burns out. This is why Solomon tells us to "Fear God and keep his commandments" (Ecc 12:13).

Things were beginning to look up. Haman had been hanged on the gallows he prepared for Mordecai, Mordecai had taken the place of Haman, and Esther was in a position where she could help her people. God has a way of making things right.

Someone may ask why God did not simply stop Ahasuerus and Haman so Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews would not have to endure any of this. That is like asking why God doesn't get rid of the devil so our problems will go away. God was working in such a way to where He could judge the ungodly Persians and bless the Jews at the same time. He did the same when He took Israel into the Promised Land. Only God can do such a wonderful thing.

Esther asks King Ahasuerus to stop the attack on the Jews:

Es 8:3 And Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews.

Esther was still having to deal with King Ahasuerus. By the way, while we are on earth, we will always have to battle the devil. It will take heaven for us to escape his influence.

Esther approached the king on behalf of her people. Certainly, we should not approach the devil and ask him to do what we desire, but Esther approaching the king does remind us of how we are in a continual

battle with the devil. Like Esther, we should not let him have his way without a fight. He is our enemy and the enemy of our Lord, we should resist him with all of our hearts.

Esther's humility was evident by how she "*fell down at his feet*". She recognized the authority of the king. We must never forget the power of the devil. We need not fear him but we had better respect his power.

Esther's burden was evident by how she "*besought him with tears*". She realized Haman's death had done nothing to change his decree. The Jews would still die if someone did not do something to stop it. She cared enough to try.

Nothing replaces true compassion. Jude said compassion makes a difference (Jude 22). Unfortunately, compassion is all but gone in our day. Our hard hearts and dry eyes are a testimony against us.

Esther went "*again*" to King Ahasuerus. This was not the first time she had come before the king (5:1-2; 7:1-4). She refused to give up. She stood up to King Ahasuerus for herself and her people. We must do the same with our enemy, the devil. We are admonished to resist our enemy like a soldier (Jam.4:7). I say often, we are soldiers, not girl scouts. War is not easy but it is necessary.

Haman was called the "*Agagite*" to remind us how wicked he was. We had better not forget how wicked our human nature is (Gen.6:5; Isa.6:5; Jer.16:12; 17:9; Job 14:4; Ps.51:5; Pro.28:26; Ecc.9:3; Mt.12:34; Jam.1:14).

Es 8:4 Then the king held out the golden sceptre toward Esther. So Esther arose, and stood before the king,

Esther had, once again, approached King Ahasuerus without an invitation. The king holding out his golden sceptre was granting her permission to come closer.

Es 8:5 And said, If it please the king, and if I have found favour in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the king's provinces:

Esther's wisdom is once again seen by how she approached King Ahasuerus (cf. 7:3).

- Esther said, "*If it please the king*"

She knew his major goal in life was to get what pleased him. This phrase is found six times in the book of Esther. Four of these times, it was spoken by Esther to the king (5:8; 7:3; 8:5; 9:13).

- Esther said, "*If I have found favour*" in your sight

She knew she had been a good wife.

- Esther used the name "*Agagite*" in describing Haman

She was hoping King Ahasuerus would see how he had been used by Haman to advance his personal hatred of the Jews.

- Esther described the decree as "*devised by Haman*"

She was careful to not accuse King Ahasuerus of being the creator of the decree. She knew if she made the king mad he would not reverse Haman's decree.

- Esther used the word "*reverse*" and not overturn

There was no legal way to overturn the decree (1:19). However, a counter decree that would override Haman's decree was possible (8:8,11,12).

The believer needs God-given wisdom when dealing with the devil. He is smarter than us and we had better not forget it.

Es 8:6 For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?

Esther opened her heart to King Ahasuerus here. She had given legal reasons but now she gave her personal reason. She loved her people.

The bible is silent about how the Jews were treated during the months before the attack. More than likely, there was a growing anti-Jewish attitude. The Jews were probably mocked and ridiculed daily.

Mordecai writes a decree to aid the Jews:

Es 8:7 Then the king Ahasuerus said unto Esther the queen and to Mordecai the Jew, Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and him they have hanged upon the gallows, because he laid his hand upon the Jews.

Haman died "*because he laid his hand upon the Jews*" No one messes with God's people without serious

consequences.

Es 8:8 Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring: for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse.

According to the law of the Persians and the Medes, the king's original decree could not be changed (1:19). How could they undo a decree that could not be undone? The first decree could not be changed, but a new decree could be written that would supersede the original.

Amazingly, King Ahasuerus told Esther and Mordecai to write a decree in whatever manner they desired and he would endorse it. Sealing this decree with the "*king's ring*" would make it official and unalterable.

We dare not miss what was happening here. For years, Esther had been under the authority and control of King Ahasuerus. But now she was no longer being controlled by the king. In fact, she had become the who was in control. She had become the means of accomplishing God's will in spite of the king's desires. It will be a happy day in our lives when we cease being controlled by the devil.

Es 8:9 Then were the king's scribes called at that time in the third month, that is, the month Sivan, on the three and twentieth day thereof; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded unto the Jews, and to the lieutenants, and the deputies and rulers of the provinces which are from India unto Ethiopia, an hundred twenty and seven provinces, unto every province according to the writing thereof, and unto every people after their language, and to the Jews according to their writing, and according to their language.

Verse nine is the longest verse in the bible.

As with Haman's decree (3:12), the "*king's scribes*" penned down exactly what they were told to write. Having a written record was vitally important for accuracy and permanence.

The month of "*Sivan*" is the third month in the Jewish calendar and is equivalent to our late May to early June. It had been two months and ten days since Haman's decree had gone out (cf. 3:13-15).

This writing, like Haman's, was for all the people in their own languages. Everyone needed to be aware of its contents. The Persians needed to know they were not going to be able to attack the Jews without a fight. Notice, the Jews were named specifically this time. There was an emphasis on the Jews to make sure they got the message and began to prepare themselves for the attack against them.

Es 8:10 And he wrote in the king Ahasuerus' name, and sealed it with the king's ring, and sent letters by posts on horseback, and riders on mules, camels, and young dromedaries:

These letters, like the original decree (3:13) were sent out by the king's pony express. The letters were carried on "*horseback*" also, "*mules, camels, and young dromedaries*". These animals were a wonderful combination of speed, agility, and endurance to make sure they accomplished their goal.

Getting this information to the Jews was vital for it contained the way of deliverance for all the Jews. The decree would be useless if it did not get to the people. In like fashion, the gospel provides the way of salvation to lost sinners but will do them no good if someone doesn't tell them.

The Jews are given the right to defend themselves:

Es 8:11-12 Wherein the king granted the Jews which were 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, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey, Upon one day in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, namely, upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar.

The words, "*stand for their life*" mean the Jews could defend themselves against anyone who attacked them. The previous decree to put the Jews to death could not be annulled, but the king could allow the Jews to defend themselves. The message to the Persians was, "If you attack a Jew, you are doing so at your own risk".

The words "*destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish*" were in the original decree by Haman (3:13). This time, however, they were for the benefit and not the detriment, of the Jews.

The Jews were also given permission to take the "*spoil*" of those they slew, but they took none (9:10,15,16). This shows their actions were totally self-defense and for personal gain. They simply wanted to be left alone and allowed to survive.

The fact the Jews were permitted to slay even the "*little ones and women*" may seem harsh. But, we must realize, any woman left alive could seek revenge later, and sweet little children grow up to be adult monsters. When God sent the flood, all the children died with the adults. As bad as it sounds, it would have been better for people like Adolph Hitler to have died at birth. As we will discover, it appears the Jews allowed the women and children to live. (9:6). We are not capable of understanding all the ways of God. In

spite of all we do not know, we can know, God never does anything wrong.

The right to defend themselves sounds inadequate, but there is more to this than it seems at first glance. The word, "*gather*" is a word that refers to a military assembly or militia. To say the least, they were not powerless nor feeble. This gathering together in their cities had a uniting effect. They were able to meet together, plan ahead, and get ready. Had they remained scattered across the land at their homes they would have been easy prey.

Without the king's decree, this gathering would have the appearance of an uprising and rebellion. Haman's decree promised heartache, misery, and death. Mordecai's decree promised joy, hope, and deliverance.

Again, simply being able to defend themselves may seem a small thing to us, but when you have God on your side there is no question about who is going to win. The Jews had no reason to fear. Neither do we.

A look at Israel's history will prove beyond all doubt that God has kept His promise and has protected His chosen people (Gen.12:1-3).

On May 14, 1948, Israel was declared an independent State and became an autonomous nation. The simple fact of them still existing as a nation is a sign of God's power.

- Israel's population reveals God's power

The Jewish population has increased by an astounding 7,700 percent over the last 100 years. In 2021, the Jewish population of Israel was over 7 million, which is more than a 10-fold increase since Israel became a nation in 1948.

In 1947, the Jewish population in Israel was 32.0 %. In 2021, the Jewish population had grown to 74.1%.

- Israel's provision reveals God's power

The land of Israel is only 10,762 square miles, which is slightly larger than New Jersey. The land is located in the middle of a desert and is not rich in natural resources. Yet, God has blessed this nation abundantly with financial success.

- Israel's protection reveals God's power

God has miraculously protected the Jews. Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Titus, and Hitler, have all tried to annihilate Israel. All failed miserably.

1948-49: When Israel was declared a nation, they were immediately invaded by five Arab armies (Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq). The Arab leaders had promised to wipe Israel off the face of the earth, but they were in for a rude awakening. Part of Israel's arsenal was Piper Cub airplanes, homemade bombs, and molotov cocktails. Israeli farmers joined with soldiers to resist the enemies' attack.

1967: In the Six-Day War, Israel soundly defeated the armies of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Egypt had approximately 100,000 troops and over 900 tanks. They had 600 planes compared to Israel's 200. Israel not only won this war but gained a good bit of land in the process.

1973: On October 6, 1973, Egyptian and Syrian forces attacked Israel on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year for the Jews. Even though Israel was resting in observance of their holy day, they soundly defeated the enemy.

- Israel's prophecy reveals God's hand

The God who has taken care of His people in the past will continue to do so in the future. He made a promise and He has not forgotten.

Mordecai's decree is sent throughout the provinces:

Es 8:13 The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people, and that the Jews should be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.

A writing of Haman's decree had been sent out earlier (3:14-15). Now, copies of Mordecai's decree were made and sent to every province.

The word, "*ready*" means "prepared" and carries with it the idea of being prepared for something in the future. Mordecai's decree was sent out to info the Jews so they could prepare and be ready when the attack came.

The Hebrew word translated "*avenge*" is a word that implies a prior wrong. As already mentioned, the Jews could defend themselves but not initiate an attack. This was not a time for them to get rid of those they did not like.

Es 8:14 So the posts that rode upon mules and camels went out, being hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment. And the decree was given at Shushan the palace.

As mentioned before (8:10) the "mules and camels" had relatively good speed but they were especially stable animals and an excellent choice for such travel.

King Ahasuerus gave strict instructions that these letters be sent out with haste.

The word, "*hastened*" carries with it the idea of trembling inwardly. The responsibility of any task for the king was daunting, but this one was even more so.

The word, "*pressed*" means "to urge" and carries with it the idea of being under pressure. These riders had one thought in mind, get their cargo out and get it out as quickly as possible. Failure for any reason would not be accepted.

Why were these letters sent out in such haste seeing there was still several months before Haman's decree would be initiated? I can think of three reasons.

One, to give them time to reach the most distant and secluded areas so no one would be missed.

Two, to give the Jews as much time as possible to prepare. Preparations for such a vast battle would take time.

Three, to encourage the Jews. No doubt, the news of Haman's attack had disheartened them. This gave them the hope they so desperately needed. We can face impossible obstacles as long as we have faith.

Mordecai goes before the people:

Es 8:15 And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple: and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad.

As mentioned earlier, a change of clothes in this book is an indication of a change of circumstances (4:1; 4:3; 5:1; 6:11; 8:15).

Mordecai had worn sackcloth and ashes (4:1), but now he was wearing clothing that displayed his royal position. Blue and white were colors of royalty in the Persian Empire. God's plan involved more than just delivering the Jews from death, He determined to exalt Mordecai to the place of leadership that had been held by Haman. Once again, we see the Holy Spirit replacing our human nature.

The "*crown*" spoken of here was different than the crown of a king.

Mordecai's exaltation and Haman's demise caused the "*city of Shushan*" to rejoice and be glad. Jews and Persians were weary of Haman's selfishness and greed.

These events should remind us how the Lord will protect and promote His church (Mt.16:18).

Es 8:16 The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour.

By faith, the Jews had joy before they overcame the enemy.

They had "*light*" means the dark cloud of gloom that had been hanging over them had been lifted. Thank the Lord for the times He lifts our clouds of gloom.

The word "*honour*" means "value". The Jews were respected by the people in a way they had not been before. The world may make fun of us, but if we live right, they will have to respect us.

All these were the result of them believing and being willing to follow the decree of Mordecai. Many blessings await those who are willing to trust and obey the Holy Spirit.

Es 8:17 And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.

That which Haman meant for evil, God turned into something good. God has a habit of doing such a thing (Gen.50:20; Acts 3:15; Rom.8:28).

The Jews had mourned, wept, and wailed about Haman's decree (4:3) but were full of "*joy and gladness*" about Mordecai's decree.

The attack by the Persians was still coming, but they had hope now. What made the difference?

First, they heard. They heard about being able to defend themselves. Does this not remind us of the importance of hearing the truth? Jesus said, "*And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*" (Jn 8:32).

Second, they believed what they had heard. Hearing the truth will mean nothing until we believe it.

Hearing, and believing, the truth will set us free from all our fears.

The word, "*whithersoever*" is the key to the change in their emotions. There was joy whithersoever the information about Mordecai's decree arrived. Those who did not hear did not know and were not changed.

So it is with God's truth. How shall they hear unless someone tells them? As Paul reminds us, "*how shall they hear without a preacher*" (Rom.10:14).

Many of the Persians "*became Jews*". They turned from their dead religion to the belief system of the Jews. The fact is, when God's people get right, there will always be an effect on those who are lost.

Some wonder if this change was genuine because it says they became Jews "*for the fear of the Jews*". Undoubtedly, this means the Persians were afraid of what the Jews might do if they attacked them.

Certainly, being afraid of being killed could cause someone to pretend to transfer to the other side. But, this verse does not say they made pretense or tried to deceive. It says, they "*became*" Jews. I believe if God says they became Jews, we can believe they did. It certainly sounds real to me. Later, God would say those who "*joined themselves unto them*" should partake in the Feast of Purim (9:27). If these professions were not real, it would be unlikely that God would include them in a Jewish celebration.

The fact that fear was a reason for their change does not make it false. Many have gotten saved because they were afraid they were going to go to hell. I was certainly in that number.

The Jews gather together:

The following verses mark an important part of this book. The Jews go from the pit of despair to the height of delight. God definitely turns things around for them.

The first ten verses of this chapter tell us what happened on the first day of the attack on the Jews.

Es 9:1 Now in the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution, in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them, (though it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them;)

The day of the execution of Haman's decree finally came (cf.3:13).

The decree that originated from Haman was called the "*king's*" commandment and decree because King Ahasuerus had agreed to it and sent it out in his own name (3:9-15). Haman was dead and gone but his decree was still alive and well.

The month of "*Adar*" is equivalent to our late February through early March.

The Jews' enemy "*hoped*" to overcome them. The word "*power*" means "to dominate or overpower". Perhaps they even boasted to the Jews about how they would defeat them when the time came. They would be sadly disappointed.

The word, "*turned*" means "to turn over". The Persians expected victory, but the tables were about to turn. Little did they realize, they were doomed to lose.

The word, "*hated*" means "detest, hostile, to be an enemy". It speaks of an emotion that is revealed by action. In other words, these particular Persians did not like the Jews and they proved it.

New Testament believers, like the Jews, will have their enemies. The devil, the flesh, and the world are dead set at doing us harm. However, we have someone on our side who is greater than them all.

Es 9:2 The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt: and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people.

Gathering together in their cities had a uniting effect. Had they remained scattered across the land at their homes they would have been easy prey.

Once again, we are told the Jews were against only those who attacked them. They gathered "*in their cities*" throughout "*all the provinces of king Ahasuerus*". They were protecting that which belonged to them.

The Jews killed only those who "*sought their hurt*". This was not a time for them to settle personal vendettas or seek revenge against someone they did not like.

No man could "*withstand*" them. The Psalmist said, "*He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber*" (Ps 121:3). Jesus promised the same assistance to the New Testament church. He said, "*upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*" (Mt 16:18). Certainly, the Lord will take care of His own.

If I understand the statement, "*no man could withstand them*" properly, it means not one Persian overcame one Jew. It was an absolute victory. God always makes a majority.

There is no wonder "*fear*" fell upon them all. Their king had submitted his authority to Mordecai, Haman, their former leader was dead, their queen was herself a Jew, and now the Jews seemed to have a power that had to come from another world. It was time to be afraid.

These promises are truly comforting at the time I am writing this. Everything on earth seems chaotic, the

Coronavirus is killing people around the world, the future of America seems uncertain, and the church, for the most part, is asleep. If ever we need to rely on Jesus' promise to take care of his church, it is now.

Es 9:3 And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them.

The Persian officials (3:13; 8:9) "*helped the Jews*". This is another big little event (cf. 1:10-12; 1:19-21; 2:9; 2:15-17; 2:21-22; 2:23; 3:1-2; 3:7; 5:1-2; 6:1; 6:2; 6:3; 7:10; 8:3-8; 9:11-12,15,17; 10:1-3). These officials had been devout servants of King Ahasuerus and totally devoted to Haman. But now, they gave their allegiance to Mordecai.

They switched sides because of their "*fear of Mordecai*". They saw something special in Mordecai and it had a major effect on them. They saw his wisdom in how he devised the plan of self-defense for his people. They saw his courage in how he stood against the king. They saw his compassion in that he did not use his position for selfish purposes. This combination demanded fear from his enemies and respect from his friends.

Mordecai's decree that gave the Jews permission to defend themselves changed the circumstances completely. The Jews would not be sitting ducks as before. If attacking a Jew could cost them their lives, they would certainly be less likely to do so.

Es 9:4 For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater.

Mordecai being "*great in the king's house*" is something we dare not rush by quickly. To have such influence in a king's house was no small feat. This should remind us how the Holy Spirit has authority over the devil. Believers can experience that authority through the power of the Lord (Eph.6:13).

Mordecai waxed "*greater and greater*" refers to his influence among the people and not to his person. As I mentioned earlier, Esther and the Jews were the only ones who change in this book. Mordecai remained the same even when his circumstances changed.

So it is with the Holy Spirit. He never changes no matter what the circumstances. That is just one of the reasons why we need to give Him control over our lives. We need to be unchanging in this whirlwind world. Paul said, But none of these things "*move me*" (Acts 20:34).

The Jews overcome the Persian aggressors:

Es 9:5 Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them.

Notice how the Jews engaged only those who were their "*enemies*" and those who "*hated them*". They fought only those who attacked them. They actually showed great restraint by not using this opportunity to get rid of those who they did not like.

The word, "*slaughter*" speaks of deadly intent. The word, "*destruction*" speaks of having no way to flee. This certainly sounds heartless but we must remember the Jews were not the aggressors. They were the ones attacked, they were simply protecting themselves.

Things have not changed for the nation of Israel. They are still falsely accused of being the aggressor and bloodthirsty when, so often, they are the ones being attacked.

The Jews did "*what they would*" to those who attacked them. King Ahasuerus had given Haman permission to do with the Jews as it seemed good to him (3:10). God turned it around to where the Jews were the ones doing what they wished to those who attacked them. It means the Persians were totally at the mercy of the Jews.

Es 9:6-8 And in Shushan the palace the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men.

There were 500 "*men*" who died in Shushan on the first day of the attack. This seems to indicate the Jews did not kill any women or children, even though they had permission to do so (8:11).

The average person breaths a sigh of relief when they learn no women or children were slain. But, we should realize, the little children of today grow up to be our enemies tomorrow. Saul learned that the hard way (1 Sam.15:3).

This fighting took place in "*Shushan the palace*". The palace was where the king lived. This was like 500 being killed in front of the White House.

Es 9:7-10 And Parshandatha, and Dalphon, and Aspatha, And Poratha, and Adalia, and Aridatha, And Parmashta, and Arisai, and Aridai, and Vajezatha, The ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews, slew they; but on the spoil laid they not their hand.

The "*ten sons*" of Haman were killed also. These sons of Haman were merely an extension of his evil. This reminds me of the works of the flesh the bible talks about (Gal.5:19-20).

It may seem harsh for all these sons to be put to death but it was actually a wise decision. Had any of them been allowed to live, they probably would have sought revenge later.

Haman had bragged about his riches, his family, and his authority (5:10-11). All those things of which he was so proud had been stripped from him.

Why did the Jews refuse to take the spoil when they had permission to do so (8:8, 10-11)?

- Refusing the spoils set the Jews apart from other nations

Most, if not all, the other nations would have taken the spoils of their rivals without hesitation. The Jews refusing the spoils showed the world they were different. God tells His people to be different (Lev.18:2-5). The Jews refusing the spoils would be the topic of discussion by people around the world.

- Being alive was enough

The fact that God was good enough to spare their lives was reward enough. So often, we overlook God's blessings because we want more.

- Because it was not right

Taking spoils would have been legal, but it would not have been right. The legal thing is not always the right thing. Someone doing us wrong does not give us the right to do them wrong. Proverbs says, "*Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work*" (Pr 24:29). The bible has a good bit to say about not striking back (Lev.19:18; Pro.20:22; Mt.5:38-41; Lk.6:36; Rom.12:17-21; 1 Th.5:15).

The bible has much to say about self-control. More often than not, our worse enemy is ourselves. Biblical self-control does not mean we are in control of ourselves. It means we have given ourselves over to the power of the Holy Spirit and are being controlled by Him. The person without self-control is open to the full attack of the devil. Proverbs says, "*He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls*" (Pr 25:28).

King Ahasuerus is informed about the slaughter in Shushan:

Es 9:11 On that day the number of those that were slain in Shushan the palace was brought before the king.

A report of the attack was brought to King Ahasuerus telling him how many Persians had been killed.

Es 9:12 And the king said unto Esther the queen, The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the palace, and the ten sons of Haman; what have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? now what is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: or what is thy request further? and it shall be done.

King Ahasuerus told Esther the results of the first day of fighting between the Persians and the Jews.

By this time it seems that Esther had an advantage over King Ahasuerus. Blessed is the believer who realizes their authority over the devil.

King Ahasuerus told Esther there had been 500 Persians killed in Shushan and asked her how many had been killed throughout the provinces.

He also asked Esther what her request was and promised to grant Esther's request before he even knew what it was. He had promised up to half of his kingdom before (5:6; 7:2), but he set no limit this time.

The king's question asked here is answered in verse 16.

Esther requests another day for the Jews to defend themselves:

We will find there were ended up being three days involved with Haman's decree against the Jews. In the city of Shushan, there were two days of fighting (13th and 14th of Adar) and one day of celebration (15th of Adar). In the rural areas throughout the empire, there was one day of fighting and one day of celebration (13th and 14th of Adar).

Es 9:13 Then said Esther, If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews which are in Shushan to do to morrow also according unto this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows.

Once again, we see the wisdom of Esther. As before, she said, "*If it please the king*". She used this phrase four times (5:8; 7:3; 8:5; 9:13). For a man whose number one goal was to please himself, this was a good way to start a discussion.

Esther asked that the decree King Ahasuerus had granted for one day, be extended another day. The

terms would be the same. The Jews would defend themselves only against those who attacked them.

This request dealt only with the Jews who were in the city of "Shushan". There would not have been enough time to deliver the message throughout the provinces as before (cf. 8:13-14).

Some have criticized Esther for her request saying she was seeking revenge. I believe the opposite is true. As before, the Jews could only defend themselves against those who attacked them first. Esther refused to settle for anything less than total victory knowing the Jews could not be at peace as long as any of their enemies were alive.

Esther requested the dead bodies of the ten sons of Haman, who had been killed earlier (9:7-10) be "*hanged upon the gallows*". This request was not out of anger but as a message to anyone who might be thinking about attacking the Jews. This probably saved many lives because it kept some from attacking.

The details of the second day of fighting were described in verses 14-19.

King Ahasuerus grants Esther's requests:

Es 9:14 And the king commanded it so to be done: and the decree was given at Shushan; and they hanged Haman's ten sons.

King Ahasuerus granted both of Esther's requests.

Es 9:15 For the Jews that were in Shushan gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and slew three hundred men at Shushan; but on the prey they laid not their hand.

There were 300 Persians killed on the second day of fighting making the total 800 for both days (cf. 9:12).

It is a good thing Esther asked for the second day to defend themselves. The fact there were 300 killed the second day shows there were some who still sought the death of the Jews.

The word, "*prey*" is the same word translated as "spoil" in verse 10. As before, the Jews refused to take any of the spoils.

Es 9:16 But the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of their foes seventy and five thousand, but they laid not their hands on the prey,

This verse describes what happened throughout the provinces of the Persian Empire and outside of the city of Shushan.

The "*other*" Jews throughout the provinces had "*stood for their lives*". This tells us had they not taken a stand they would have surely been put to death. It was nothing more than self-defense.

The Jews had killed 75,000 of those who attacked them.

Once again, we see one of God's big little events (cf. 1:10-12; 1:19-21; 2:9; 2:15-17; 2:21-22; 2:23; 3:1-2; 3:7; 5:1-2; 6:1; 6:2; 6:3; 7:10; 8:3-8; 9:11-12,15,17; 10:1-3). God had promised He would curse those who cursed the descendants of Abraham (Gen.12:3). He had not forgotten His promise.

There was no record of any Jew being killed which was nothing short of a Divine miracle. The 75,000 Persians had prepared for months, equipped themselves with the necessary weapons, and came with the intent of killing as many Jews as they could. Yet, they failed. The powers of evil may come against the believer, but God can keep them safe (Ps.91:1-16; Pro.18:10; 29:25; Mt.16:18; 2 Th.3:3).

The word, "*rest*" means "quiet". It carries with it the idea of ceasing to fight.

The Jews were given "*rest from their enemies*". This means the battle was over and they ceased fighting. It is the same word used to describe how God would give His people rest inside the Promised Land (Dt.25:19).

Notice this rest did not come until they obeyed the Lord. Only God can give true rest but He gives it only to those who trust and obey (Dt.12:10; 25:19).

This is the third time it is mentioned that the Jews did not take any spoils (9:10,15,16). It is possible, though we are not told, that Mordecai encouraged the Jews to refuse the spoils when he sent the letter out to the Jews (8:10-11). It seems unlikely that all of the Jews would refuse to take any spoils on their own. What a wonderful picture of how the Holy Spirit can unify the body of Christ when they yield themselves to Him.

The celebration of Purim is established:

The next few verses tell us about the Feast of Purim and why it would be celebrated two days instead of one. Those in rural areas fought for one day while those in the city of Shushan fought for two.

Es 9:17 On the thirteenth day of the month Adar; and on the fourteenth day of the same rested they, and made it a day of feasting and gladness.

The Jews in the rural areas away from Shushan won the victory on the thirteenth day of Adar and celebrated their victory the next day. They were certainly not wrong to celebrate. They, and their families, had escaped certain death, and they had rid themselves of their enemies at the same time. It was time to celebrate.

Es 9:18 But the Jews that were at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day thereof, and on the fourteenth thereof; and on the fifteenth day of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness.

The Jews inside the city of Shushan fought on the thirteenth and fourteenth day of Adar and celebrated the fifteenth day.

Es 9:19 Therefore the Jews of the villages, that dwelt in the unwalled towns, made the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another.

The Jews in the rural areas and small villages (unwalled towns) celebrated on the 14th day of Adar.

As mentioned (cf. 9:13) there was no fighting the second day in the rural areas throughout the provinces. Esther's request for a second day of fighting (9:13) was restricted to the local area in Shushan. There would not have been enough time to send the information throughout the provinces.

Notice, the celebrations did not happen until the victory had been won. The victory was not won until they fought the fight. Too many believers want to celebrate before the victory and without fighting the fight.

Mordecai writes a letter to the Jews throughout the provinces:

The importance of the celebration of Purim is emphasized in this letter. It is mentioned five times in seven verses.

Es 9:20 And Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all the Jews that were in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, both nigh and far,

Mordecai wrote a letter describing the past events and sent copies to all the Jews. In this letter, he instructed the Jews to establish a day of celebration to remember the victory over their enemies. This celebration was called "The Festival of Purim" (9:26).

In this letter, Mordecai was not mentioned. This is understandable since the Holy Spirit is usually the One who works silently.

Even though He was never mentioned by name, the real hero of the story was God. He was the lead character throughout the entire drama.

Es 9:21 To stablish this among them, that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly,

An annual celebration was to be established and observed by all the Jews on the "*fourteenth*" day of Adar in the rural areas and on the "*fifteenth*" in the city.

The establishment of Purim was made by Mordecai (9:20-28) and by Esther (9:29-32) not by the Mosaic Law. This does not make it wrong or unimportant. This celebration pleased the Lord.

Almost 2,500 years later, the Jews still celebrate the "Festival of Purim" (also called the Feast of Lots) to remember God's protection from Haman's attack. It is one of the two festivals not designated in the Mosaic system that is still celebrated in Israel (the other is Hanukkah).

The modern version of Purim is held on the 14th day of Adar except in the city of Jerusalem where it is observed on the 15th day of Adar to commemorate the extra day of fighting in the city of Shushan. The celebration includes reading the book of Esther, parades, giving to the needy, sending food to friends, feasting, drinking alcohol, dressing up in costumes, and giving gifts. The Talmud encourages those celebrating to get so drunk they can not discern the difference between the words, "Blessed is Mordecai" and "Blessed is Haman". Some Jews still observe a fast the day before the celebration begins.

The name of Haman is still detested by the Jews. At the celebration of Purim, they read the book of Esther aloud. When the name "*Haman*" is read, they stamp their feet, yell, and use noisemakers, trying to drown out the reader so his name will not be heard. When the name of Mordecai is read, they all cheer.

This celebration was observed as a reminder of that which God had done for His people. We are prone to forget how low we have been (4:3) and how good God has been (9:16). God established the Communion

Service to help us remember what it cost to provide us with a way of forgiveness (Lk.22:19; 1 Cor.11:24-25).

Es 9:22 As the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day: that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor.

The Jews celebrate Purim because they were given rest from their enemies. Their "sorrow" had been turned to "joy". They went from fear to freedom.

Notice, the emphasis was on the rest and joy, not the sorrow, of the Jews. Too often, we focus on the negative aspect of our circumstances. There is always something to rejoice about.

Their celebration included the giving of "gifts to the poor". Those who are blessed of the Lord should pass on their blessings to others.

Es 9:23 And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them;

The Jews willingly submitted to Mordecai's instructions and continued what they "had begun". Almost 2,500 years later, Jews still celebrate the "Festival of Purim" to remember God's protection from Haman's attack. Please read the comments on Esther 9:21.

Es 9:24 Because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is, the lot, to consume them, and to destroy them;

This verse mentions the negative part of their experience. The ungodly Haman, who was the "enemy of all the Jews" had done his best to annihilate all the Jews.

We should not ignore the negative events of our lives. God never asked His people to bury their heads in the sand and pretend everything is alright. Honestly facing the negative helps us see our need and devise a plan toward victory.

Es 9:25 But when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked device, which he devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.

This verse mentions the positive part of their experience. We certainly do not want to forget when God intervenes on our behalf and gives us victory.

Esther was remembered for the good she did. Our works follow us and are not forgotten.

Es 9:26 Wherefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. Therefore for all the words of this letter, and of that which they had seen concerning this matter, and which had come unto them,

The Jews named this celebration "Purim", which is the plural form of "Pur". They did so because Mordecai instructed them to in the "words of this letter", because "they had seen" the events themselves, and because of that "which had come to them" (what they had been told by others). What more reason would they need?

It seems a little strange that they would call this celebration Purim? After all, Purim means "lot" and it reminded them of an ungodly man who believed fate would guide him (3:7-9). I believe it was because, even though Haman did cast the lots, the Lord was the One who controlled them. Mordecai was telling them, and us, to not miss the unseen hand of God.

Es 9:27 The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so as it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to their writing, and according to their appointed time every year;

The Jews, their families, and those who "joined" them dedicated themselves to honor this time of victory. This verse shows a unity among the Jews that is vitally important in the family of God (Acts 4:32; Rom.12:16; 14:19; 15:6; Eph.4:3; Phil.2:2).

Those who "joined themselves unto them" probably refer to the ones who became Jews (8:17). If so, this would indicate their profession was genuine.

Mordecai instructed the Jews in this regard so "it should not fail". As the next verse makes clear, this wasn't something they were to do a time or two and quit.

Es 9:28 And that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed.

The celebration of Purim was to be "remembered and kept" by all Jews in every place for all times. Please read the comments on Esther 9:21.

These instructions were given as a "*memoria*". Once again, we find the emphasis on not forgetting. Mordecai knew, as we should, that humans, even God's people, are prone to forget unless they have a constant reminder.

A second letter is written:

A second letter, written by Esther and Mordecai, was sent to the Jews throughout all the provinces.

Since the exact words of these letters were not given to us, they were not to be included in the canon of Scripture (2 Tim.3:16). However, these letters did contain the message God wanted His people to have at that time. Anytime God speaks, the message is important. He speaks to us personally, and exactly, what we need to hear.

Es 9:29 Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority, to confirm this second letter of Purim.

The first letter was described in verses 20-28. This "*second letter*" went out with the "*authority*" of Esther as the queen and Mordecai as the Prime Minister of the empire. To say the least, it was official.

This letter agreed with what Mordecai had written in the first letter and instructed the Jews to follow Mordecai's instructions.

Esther was referred to as the "*queen*". She was no longer the little orphan girl who had to depend on an older cousin to take care of her. In like fashion, the grace of God will take the obedient believer to a higher plane.

Es 9:30 And he sent the letters unto all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth,

These letters went to "*all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus*". Everyone was included and not one was excluded because everyone needed to hear what God had to say.

We are not given the exact words of these letters but we are told they contained "*peace and truth*".

Mordecai and Esther wanted to affect the lives of the Jews. They sent these letters in an effort to do so. These letters were nothing more than written words. But words, whether spoken or written, have power. They are able to influence and cause change. They can lift up or tear down. They can encourage or discourage.

Es 9:31 To confirm these days of Purim in their times appointed, according as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had enjoined them, and as they had decreed for themselves and for their seed, the matters of the fastings and their cry.

These letters were sent out "*To confirm these days of Purim in their times appointed*". The celebration spoken of in these letters was supposed to make the Jews relive their experience.

God wanted His message to get to all the Jews because He knew they, like all of us, were prone to forget.

These letters were for them and "*their seed*". It was good for them, and for their children, and for their children's children.

Today's generation should always recognize its responsibility to the next generation (Dt.4:9; 6:6-9; 11:19; Pro.22:6; Joel 1:3; Tit.2:4).

Es 9:32 And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book.

The "*book*" refers to the book of the Persian records mentioned elsewhere (2:23; 6:1; 10:2).

14. THE REWARDED DIPLOMAT 10:1-3

A diplomat is a government-appointed individual who works for the good of his country. Mordecai will be rewarded for his service and sacrifice.

As this book comes to a close, we need to realize what has happened. The Jews had been saved from certain destruction. And, their enemies had been defeated. As He always does, God had taken care of His people.

The book ends in an unexpected manner.

First, Esther is not mentioned. It would seem she would be recognized for her courage and assistance in saving all the Jews. However, there is not a single word mentioned.

Second, King Ahasuerus is still in control and doing what he had always done.

Third, Mordecai is recognized. But, is that not how it should be? The Holy Spirit should get the honor and not us. When this life comes to an end, it will be God who gets the glory and not us. The day will come when we will lay our crowns at Jesus' feet and give Him praise (Rev.4:10).

It is wonderful that Mordecai finally got recognized for all he had done. But, the sad thing is the fact that it took the Jews so long to see this. They needed to see this when their circumstances were the worse. And so it is with the New Testament believer. We need to trust God and know He is at work even when we are in the worse of battles.

Ahasuerus is still ruling:

Es 10:1 And the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea.

King Ahasuerus imposed a tax on all the parts of his empire. We are not told why this was recorded here. It may be just to remind us how the experience with Esther and Mordecai did not change King Ahasuerus. He was still the evil tyrant he had always been.

This should remind us how the devil never changes. He will always be the evil enemy of God and His people.

Sadly, less than ten years later, King Ahasuerus was assassinated. One day, the devil will lose his battle and God will cast him into the Lake of Fire forever (Rev.20:10).

Es 10:2 And all the acts of his power and of his might, and the declaration of the greatness of Mordecai, whereunto the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia?

Once again, we find words being "*written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia*". This probably refers to the book of the Persian records mentioned elsewhere (2:23; 6:1; 10:2).

This certainly reminds me of how our lives are being recorded. God has recorded our every deed (Rom.14:12), word (Mt.12:36), and thought (Mt.5:28).

God is recording the life of every saint. A believer will not be judged for their sin because Jesus paid for their sin (Rom.3:24; 2 Cor.5:21; Col.2:12-13; 1 Pet.2:24). However, every saint will gain, or lose, rewards according to the record of their lives (1 Cor.3:11-15; 2 Cor.5:10),

God is recording the life of every sinner. A sinner will face what is recorded in God's record books (Rev.20:12-13; Lk.12:47).

Mordecai is second in command:

Es 10:3 For Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed.

As I have mentioned several times, I believe Mordecai is a picture of the Holy Spirit.

Like the Holy Spirit, Mordecai accomplished great and wonderful things. He was lifted higher than any other man. He was "*next unto king Ahasuerus*". The Holy Spirit is, and always will be, very God (Gen.2:1; Acts 5:3; 1 Cor.6:19; 2 Pet.1:21). Through all the events of this book, Mordecai remained the same. The highs did not spoil him and the lows did not defeat him. So it is with the Holy Spirit. Circumstances never affect him.

Like the Holy Spirit, Mordecai was "*great among the Jews*" and "*accepted of the multitude of his brethren*". All believers love the Holy Spirit and recognize His greatness.

Like the Holy Spirit, Mordecai was "*seeking the wealth of his people*". He was still the selfless man who was willing to raise a girl who wasn't his and put others before himself. The Holy Spirit wants to bless God's people.

Like the Holy Spirit, Mordecai sought "*peace*" for his people. The Holy Spirit is our "*Comforter*" (Jn.14:16).

CONCLUSION OF THE BOOK OF ESTHER

THE BOOK OF ESTHER TEACHES US:

- GOD IS WORKING EVEN IF WE DON'T SEE ANY EVIDENCE

God is working to accomplish good things in His people. Like Joseph of old, we can rightfully say, "*God*

meant it unto good" (Ge 50:20).

- WHAT WE DO MATTERS

The decision of two people determined so much in this book. Vashti's decision had a negative effect, Esther's decision had a positive effect. That certainly reminds us of two other people in history. The bible says, "*Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life*" (Ro 5:18).

So many of the things done in this book seem small and unimportant. Yet, from small actions came great and mighty things. What you do matters, so do right and keep doing it.

- GOD USES PEOPLE TO HELP ACCOMPLISH HIS WILL IN OUR LIVES

We may see only people and problems, but God puts both in our lives to help us. All the main characters in this book were greatly affected by what others did. If they saw only the people and not God, they were worse off for it. If they saw God working through others, they were benefited.

- WE DON'T HAVE TO KNOW WHY

Esther is full of events and actions with no explanation as to why. We are not told why people did what they did, or said what they said. The important thing is not why, but what will we do with the circumstances that come our way.

- LITTLE THINGS CAN HAVE BIG CONSEQUENCES

As I have mentioned several times in our walk through this book. God does some of His greatest work through what seems to be small circumstances.

- GOD ALWAYS WINS IN THE END

When it seems like there is no hope, we should keep trusting God. He always wins in the end.

And so, we end our look at the book of Esther. May our walk through this book make a difference in our daily walk with our Lord.