

GOD IS SOVEREIGN

The book of ESTHER

It was a dark time in the history of Israel. The nation had been taken captive over one hundred years before, and apart from a few people left to till the land, the people were carried away to Babylon. Ahasuerus (Xerxes), the powerful, impulsive Persian ruler was in an on-going conflict with the Greeks. Thousands of Jews had been permitted to go back to Israel led by Zerubbabel and Joshua a little over fifty years before the time of Esther. Her family had stayed in Babylon for some reason, although as many Jews as wanted to, did go back. Likely the time spent in Babylon became normal living for many. Mordecai, Esther's cousin, had become a government official. Others probably started businesses and made their homes there and in other parts of the world. It was during the time between the first return and the second return under the leadership of Ezra, that the events in recorded in the book of Esther took place.

Esther 1

SELF-CENTERED MEN

It is possible for God's people to get used to the ways of the world enough that they establish a certain degree of comfort even though sin abounds all around us. As we live from day to day among the people who have no interest in God or spiritual things, it is possible for us to adapt our own thinking enough to coexist without a lot of difficulty. As long as we keep to ourselves and don't upset people by presenting the Gospel to them, or pressing on them the urgency of preparing to meet God, usually we are not bothered. However, that is not the reason our Lord has left us in this world. It is our calling to "preach the Gospel," "make disciples," "baptize" them, and "teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." God did not condemn Esther and/or her family for not returning to Israel. Actually, the scriptures say nothing about why they stayed in Babylon. God, in grace, can use His people in any way He chooses even though they may not be doing what He has called them to. How gracious it is of God to allow us to continue on in a half-hearted way, and snared by the fear of man.

Ahasuerus led the Persians against Greece two years before the events written in the book and had won. At the second battle, he was defeated and had to retreat to Persia. The "feast" that lasted six months he made for his servants, was likely a planning session for further warfare in view of a future attack, and to strengthen his own leadership. War was a means of acquiring wealth as well as land and power. Many soldiers in those days carried gold on them when they went into battle as a talisman or good luck charms. The leaders wore jewelry as a sign of their rank. Nations survived on the booty they got from victory over other nations.

That gathering must have been coming to a close because Ahasuerus removed restrictions on excessive drinking by his men. The king and those people became intoxicated to the extent they ignored Persian protocol. Persian women did not appear before a public gathering of men, so when beautiful Vashti the queen, was called to parade before a lot of drunk men, she refused. Her action put Ahasuerus in a difficult position before all of his leading men. His authority and credibility as a ruler and military leader were at stake. Decisions made by a Persian ruler were irreversible. To a man who always got what he wanted, Vashti's action was a personal challenge to his authority.

Men who are used to being obeyed, find it a serious challenge to their perception of themselves and their manhood when people don't agree with them. They take a disagreement as a personal affront and resist any different opinion, especially when it comes to their leadership. Respect and submission in marriage cannot be dictated by laws, edicts and demands. Respect comes from appreciation and consideration of each other with a mutual regard for the well-being and desire of both partners.

The book of Esther teaches by illustration, the fact that God is in control of every situation. In the dark time of Gentile domination over the children of Israel, the account of events during this brief ten years or so, brightens Jewish history. Even today this event is celebrated yearly in Jewish families and Jewish tradition. A Jewish woman married to a Gentile king preserved the nation from annihilation. A similar situation occurred at an earlier in the time of the judges when Ruth, a Gentile woman, married Boaz, a Jewish man, and through her the lineage of the Messiah was preserved.

Even though the names and titles of God are not recorded in the book of Esther, that doesn't mean that God was not involved in the lives of His people as well as the nations. This is not an omission of something that should have been included, but is rather consistent with the fact that God is behind the scenes directing and

guiding the course of history. In this book He controlled the events in a nation even through the leadership of a drunken king. He controls individuals in ways they do not even know. He has ways of bringing His will to pass without most people even knowing it.

However, people of faith like Mordecai, and those of little faith at first like Esther, know that it is God who brings about the right conclusion to a matter. Even though we may be fearful, God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. He can use our frailty to accomplish His own purposes. The references in the Apocrypha to Esther are obvious additions made to give a more religious bent to a historical event, and are inconsistent with the purpose of the book of Esther being written. God's sovereignty isn't put out in the open to focus on certain events. Every event of every day is under the sovereign control of God and is not advertised as some unique thing. "Our times are in Thy hands" includes everything happening in our lives as individuals, and also through the history of nations.

Esther 1:2-3. *"That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace, 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 the princes of the provinces, being before him."*

BACKGROUND TO CRISIS TIMES.

We may never know this side of heaven what made these things to be.
Behind the scenes of history where only God can see -
Are events that seem so far removed they are unknown to me -
But in God's way His truth unfolds - truths that set men free.

How could we know God allows some things that to us seem, O so wrong -
To bring to pass His purposes using the noisy worldly throng.
The moral weakness of most men, contrasts with those whom God made strong,
Their faith and works display, God was moving events all along.

Then, there steps into the affairs of men, a simple obedient child of God.
It may be a man of experience, or a young person who believes in the Word.
She gives the allegiance He deserves and wants to honor her Lord,
And submits her will to that of God as an obedient servant should.

Out from obscurity into the front of the battle between evil and good,
There comes a saint of God, stepping out alone - acting as she should,
When a crisis arose, she was ready to go and do whatever she could
To preserve the people of God from the threat of shedding their blood.

We don't have to know all the answers that perplex us here in this life.
We don't have to know all the reasons why on earth there's so much sin and strife.
All I really have to know is God knows, and someday may give me some light.
But for now, it is enough, that I be always be willing to do what I know is right.

"Father in heaven, as You look down here on us: consider our weakness and inability to put things always in the right order. You know we who love You want to see You honored, and yet there are sometimes when we have our doubts about the way things are going. Please forgive me such a foolish thought as to doubt Your plans. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Esther 2

"IN HIS TIME"

Four years had past since Vashti had been banished and Ahasuerus was again defeated by the Greeks and was likely unhappy and feeling sorry for himself. He "remembered Vashti" likely with a longing for the comfort of intimacy he was missing. He would have remembered the person of graceful beauty and enough character to refuse his demand when he was drunk. The event of the great feast must have made him ashamed of himself as he looked back at the choice he had made and the unchangeable edict he had put into effect. It is not uncommon for a man to be trapped by his own words when he acts foolishly on a spur-of-the-moment.

Advisors still manipulate leaders today. Some advice is good and some is bad. In that day women in the harem had very few rights. They were brought there through no will of their own. They had little or no say in their own lives as to what they wanted. The king's demands were law. Even though the queen had a bit more say in things because of her position, her freedom and authority were limited, and when one became assertive, she was at the mercy of the king. By the time four years were past Ahasuerus was needing more than mere physical satisfaction or the company of men, so when his advisors suggested a way to get a new

queen to be with him, he was ready and willing for that to happen. Our sovereign God knows what is needed and how to attain that by using men to do His will even when they think the decision is theirs.

The young women who came to the house of women at Sushan, were from all parts of the country to prepare themselves for an audience with the king. The twelve months of preparation would have been a training time, a testing time and a trying time. Waiting can be a benefit if it makes us more conscious of what we need to learn and prepare for. To waste the waiting times of life doing nothing is useful time lost that will never be recovered. Filling waiting times with thoughtful consideration of that which is ahead of us can be the key to usefulness for God. Esther was one of those who was called there to prepare herself for the unseen future.

There is no divine sanction for the practices of the heathen nations and the ungodly things they do. Idolatry leads to absurdity in lifestyle and practices that are acceptable by unbelievers. When believers today try to copy the ways of the world, they become like the world in thought as well as deed. For His own sovereign reasons, the Lord allowed Esther to be there at that time, under the guidance of Mordecai. The Jewish population after one hundred years in Babylon would have been an accepted part of the community. Some would have been in business and some like Mordecai who would have been born in Babylon, were able to hold responsible positions in the government. He would have been used to the city, government protocol and the lifestyle of the royalty.

For us as believers, we need a strategy for living in order to reach acceptable goals. We will need to prioritize all that is before us and be able to identify meaningful, measureable and manageable objectives. To reach them we need to plan a course of action as to how to begin, and then the order in which each action should be taken. Then we need to act on what we know is right in the sight of God and go forward with confidence. In the practice of living there are times to be quiet and times to speak out. Silence can be an excuse and on the other hand, to be outspoken can be unnecessarily offensive. A testimony of faith may be as effective when one knows it is time to be quiet. Then to speak when spoken to, especially by those in authority, can be suitable because the subject has been carefully thought over in one's mind.

God, in a sovereign act of His divine will, arranged that an orphaned, Jewish exile would be raised up "for this time" to become queen of a heathen nation. He arranged events by placing Esther on the throne as queen before the planned annihilation of the Jews by the powers of darkness could happen. Neither Haman nor anyone else could stop God's plan for Christ, the Messiah, to come to the world in the future. We may have to make changes in our lives at times and we don't know the reasons until later. Some are even out of our own control so we need to remember our sovereign God is in control.

From the lineage of Mordecai, we learn that Esther was from the line of Saul who led God's people away from trusting the sovereign God. Now Mordecai and Esther were used by the sovereign God to preserve His people. One's background doesn't need to hinder our usefulness in the present. God uses who He chooses to fulfill His work. He knows every person and determines who is the one to do His will in any particular case. It was Esther He used and she "obtained favor in the sight of all who looked upon her."

Looks are one thing. Character is another. Attitude and personality often go together in making a public person appreciated. It was not wrong for Esther to accept the kindness, pity and favor of Hegai. She must have been an unassuming person who did not use her beauty as leverage to get what she wanted. A winsome personality removes many obstacles in life. Even as a young woman she listened to the advice of Mordecai and acted on what he said, even to the hiding of her nationality. Her Jewish practices were not obvious like Daniel's who was in Babylon before her, but she maintained her own personal consciousness of God being with her.

Mordecai held a position that enabled him to keep contact with Esther even when she was the queen of Persia. Practices of ungodly people around us are not consistent with the life, conduct and testimony of a believer. Because others do certain things, they think is okay, does not give God's people the right to do what is forbidden by God. The promiscuous life of an ungodly king did not mean that God could not use her as the deliverer of His people. When Ahasuerus saw Esther, he loved her and the selection process stopped right there. She did not have to wait for a comparison verdict. God in His sovereignty made the king to love Esther above all others and he set the crown upon her under divine guidance even though he wasn't aware of it.

It is of interest that the feast at that time was called "Esther's feast." It was attended by the king's men who were there, but her ascendancy to the throne was felt by everyone in the provinces because there was a

"release." Likely it was a lowering of taxes or something similar that gave some relief to the rank and file of the population. In God's sovereign way He put Esther right where He wanted her.

The "king's gate" was probably a place where a lower court dealt with the day to day affairs of government. People with minor issues could come there and have a hearing. God again in His sovereign will had Mordecai there in the right place at the right time to hear the plot against the king. God knows people and has purposes for them that override all the best laid plans people have. Mordecai was a known Jew and that may have been why his advice for Esther was to not make her nationality known too quickly until she was well established in her new role. The fact that Mordecai told Esther of the plot of two of the king's security guard to kill the king, and of her giving the information to the king in Mordecai's name, would have given her a great deal of credibility as a person to be trusted.

It is important that we start early in our Christian life to build a good solid reputation as a person to be trusted. Not everyone who says they are a Christian really will speak up when someone who we may not like is in a situation that may be perilous to them physically or spiritually. Some will say, "Well, they deserve what's coming to them. It is none of my business what happens to them." One or two times like that and a person's trustworthiness is gone pretty much forever.

The investigation into the matter proved Mordecai's warning was a real threat, and steps were taken to remove the threat permanently. Again, God in a sovereign act arranged that the event was recorded for His divine purpose at a later time. As each day comes and goes in the life of a believer, we can be thankful that an omniscient God has everything under His control. Even when it comes to pain and suffering, often in a far greater measure than we expect, we need to remember that not all God's dealings with us are pleasant and comfortable because in His sovereign will He is preparing us for some future service.

The words of our Lord Jesus Christ to Peter and His other disciples when He washed their feet can be applied in this instance. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." Many of the situations in life we will find ourselves in may be beyond our understanding, but we can rest assured, God does have a reason behind what He allows, and if He thinks we need to know that reason, He can make it known to us. If we never learn the reason, we will still trust Him because we know Him.

Esther 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 into the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed, and Esther obtained favor in the sight of all them that looked upon her."*

MODESTY.

There is an inward beauty that may not be quickly seen.
It comes from a sense of worth and desire to stay morally clean.
It cannot be put on or taken off at one's will.
It is there in public, and in private it remains still.

Its nature comes from an awareness of the omnipresent God.
Coupled with that is an inner desire to sincerely please the Lord.
The peace that God gives is seen in a person's face -
And joy accompanies peace when His ways with us we trace.

What is inside a person is bound to sometime come out.
It most likely won't be accompanied by a self-serving shout.
But people will turn to look at the dignity in a person.
And want to watch carefully to discern their motivation.

Perhaps it will be the dress - the obvious outward expression
Of an inward modesty that appreciates how God has blessed them.
They don't feel the need to display a whole lot of skin,
Because they know God looks upon what they really are within.

A modest person is aware of this undeniable fact -
What I am inside as a person dictates as to how I act.
If one is aware of the value of inward moral beauty -
They won't think conforming to the world is a right or a duty.

Modesty displays itself in a person's face and the hands.
Those two body parts are not kept in fetters or in bands.
They are the "comely parts" that expose what is in one's soul.
They reveal the person's interests and what makes that person whole.

The people who truly count will look on with great favor
At a person of modesty who represents their Lord and Savior
With dignity and grace, morality and kindness -
And are not moved by fashion and its desire to blind us.

A modest person is one who walks in reverence to God.
Such a person is attractive because even when they nod
It is not a signal to come and make lewd advances -
But it is an agreement in a graceful way that morality enhances.

“Father, Thy children all need a good measure of modesty. I know I certainly do. Help me to treat people with dignity and respect in spite of who they are. But in a special way, give me the sense of modesty I need to honor Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Esther 3

AN EVIL MAN - A RIGHTEOUS MAN

From our perspective as citizens of a modern republic, we normally think it would be impossible for a man with such an evil nature to be able to rise to the pinnacle of power as did Haman the Agagite. But then we stop to consider the facts that during the last one hundred years, men have risen to leadership of nations and have done worse than Haman. They have sought to exterminate those of a different religion, those who have different political opinions and those of a different race. Leaders have exterminated millions of their own countrymen.

The heart of natural man is evil by nature, craving their own exaltation in the same way Lucifer wanted to "be as God." Millions of people believe there is no God. Millions of other people believe they have only to answer to their own opinions as to what is right and wrong and choose to believe God is who they perceive Him to be. They are in essence making themselves their own god. Even those who call themselves Christians believe the One True God is merely a god of their own imagination who they can worship as serve in their own way without paying any attention at all to His own will revealed in the Bible.

When Mordecai refused to bow to Haman, he was not arrogantly taking a stand against the king's right-hand-man who had been appointed second in the kingdom. He was obeying the command of God to not have any gods above "The Lord God Almighty." Haman was an ambitious and arrogant man it is true, but also when he passed by, he expected people to do bow before him as they would to a god. The Persian officials who sat in the "king's gate" with Mordecai considered Haman to be of the same status as a god. When they prostrated themselves before Haman, they were giving reverence and honor to a false god. Mordecai, a known Jew, knew that was breaking the first of the Ten Commandments. He refused to give reverence to Haman who thought himself worthy of worship.

To even act like we are giving honor where honor is not due, and knowing that what we are doing is false adherence to the ungodly, is compromise for one's own purpose. It may be that a person does not want to be embarrassed by being different from everyone else around. It may be an act of belligerence as a challenge to embarrass someone else. It may be that one wants to be accepted as just one of the crowd; so we go along with that which we know is wrong. When the name and Person of our Lord Jesus Christ is involved, we dare not adapt to what is happening just for our own convenience or to escape censure. There are times when we must stand up and be counted as one who belongs to God no matter what others may do. Our God is a sovereign God and we must trust Him and be committed to do His will in spite of what it may cost us and whatever the consequences may be.

Mordecai was not going to acknowledge Haman as a god following the example of other faithful men before him. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would not bow to the image Nebuchadnezzar had set up in the plain of Dura a number of years before. We too must worship God only. No man on earth, or institution, or government should ever take God's place in our lives. Others may try to get you submit to some decree that is contrary to God sovereign authority. Our loyalty belongs to God. Our first responsibility in duty is to "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." If anything is pressed on us that takes God's place, or in which we cannot honor God by doing it, must be rejected. We should not give in to pressure to compromise our convictions and faith. There are times when we must stand alone for God against evil and compromise.

Haman's bitter antagonism was not only against Mordecai but against all Jews. The historic hatred of the Amalekites for the Jews went all the way back to when the children of Israel escaped from bondage in Egypt centuries before. Saul, the first king of Israel, did not fully deal with the Amalekite problem. A deep-seated hatred for Jews was in Haman's heart and he believed he had a way to deal with the Jews once for all. He

was lifted up in pride at being the second in authority in Persia and wanted the reverence and personal prestige he felt was due him from everyone. To him the Jews were a threat to his power and authority, and he was consumed with hatred for them - all of them - men, women and children.

Even though the Jews had settled down and become like the people around them, they still had the heritage of their fathers. They recognized God as the only One to whom they could give reverence. Those who have been raised in Christian homes by God-fearing parent today, may not have any evidence of saving faith in Christ. But still they know, and can't forget what they have been taught. There may be rebellion and professed disbelief, but even though there may be bitterness against Christians and the assembly of God's people, they do not ignore what they have been taught as a standard of life for them. Many will take a position of indifference, but inwardly they know what is true when they hear it.

The plan devised by Haman to exterminate the race, began with him "casting pur," from which we get the name "The Feast of Purim." Pur is a way of casting lots like dice which number from one to twelve. When pur was cast it fell on the twelfth month. That meant there was nearly a year before his diabolical plan could be carried out. The sovereign God was again controlling even the times when such a plan could be carried out according to His divine purposes. He can even control the throw of dice.

Perhaps Haman was aware of the impulsive actions of the king, so he subtly brought into his request for permission to exterminate the Jews, the promise of a great deal of money that would come to the king. Without consideration or advice from other advisors, the king not only gave permission, but he also gave him the ring that gave the king's seal as the final word from the highest authority in Persia.

We have heard the adage, "Act in haste, repent in leisure" which must be avoided by those who serve the Lord. When making decisions that affect the public, counsel should be taken from other trusted and wise people before taking action. A point perhaps should be made here, that those who lead God's people need to consider that what they decide to do, should be consistent with what they know to be God's will. To act independently and then expect the Lord's people to give their wholehearted support just because one person wants that, is not realistic thinking.

Doubtless there was great consternation everywhere when the edict was made to kill all Jews. Men, women and children were to slain in one day on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month. Everything that belonged to the Jews would then be confiscated. It was made known to everyone throughout all the provinces of Persia that this was going to take place and when. In Susa, the people were very upset and concerned by the news because many Jews lived there, did business there, and likely intermarried to some extent. Who would live and who would die would be foremost on the minds of all the common people. The foolish deceived king and the sneaky, cruel Haman sat down to eat as if nothing out of the ordinary was going to happen. How far self-deception can go is amazing. The god of this world truly blinds the minds of unbelievers until the acts of genocide seem to be legitimate based on the whim of one man.

It is important for believers to keep in mind, that even in the most dire circumstance, the sovereign God is in control of events, and people, and nations.

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

BOWED NOT.

Not standing tall in arrogance or as an insubordinate, self-important man,
But with dignity, he remains erect while others, fawning, bow.
He knows who he is; he knows his God; he knows what to God is right.
In a foreign country he may be, but his God is the same everywhere.
And he is God's child, a son, and that fact does not, nor cannot change -
Not if he is a free man, nor even when he is in the bondage of slavery.
Above it all - he remains God's own, and is solely responsible to Him.
Above it all - he must love, obey and honor God supremely, above all else.

Reverence for God is different than reasonable respect for honest men.
Reverence claims worship that rises far higher than even a moral man's right.
He stood quietly, unbowed, respectful - without sarcastic words that despise.
Looking straight ahead - and straight through Haman's dark hatred;
He sees a heart blackened with malice, deceit, the darkness of hell itself.
A higher allegiance commands, yea demands, his reverence and honor -
A greater service filled the heart of the man of God standing alone in the gate.
God, and God alone moves his knees and heart to bow together in reverence.

Many claims will try to demand my heart and will to bow in submission -
The voices that each day call out seem reasonable to all around my life.
There is only One whose Person and place do rightly claim my reverence -
My Lord and my God has brought the unbent knees of the high to bow down low.
The heads of compromise that bow in acquiescence to the pressures all around -
Cannot dictate to me, that I must submit to every claim men may make for my allegiance.
I must reserve the reverential worship of my heart and life for Him - my Lord - alone.
Jesus is my Lord - I dare not allow anyone else or anything to claim that special place.

“O Lord, my God: Thou art the One to whom I bow in adoration and reverential respect, for Thou art God and there is none other - in my life. No other claims that place in this heart that is reserved for Thee alone. I am Thine, O God; I exalt and honor Thee here even as my heart is bowed to Thee as Lord of my heart, my life, my all. Amen.”

Esther 4

A TIME TO PREPARE

There will come into the lives of God's people, occasions that are of extreme importance over which we have no control. It may be sickness, injury or the unexpected death of a loved one. It may be some natural catastrophe because of weather, floods, fire or an earthquake. It may be when someone for whom we have responsibility has a great need that must be met, that we are faced with the fact that it is up to us to meet that need. On occasions there are divisive issues among God's people that we never expected and we have to make a decision that will affect our life and that of many others. These times cannot be ignored and action must be taken.

Mordecai understood what would happen when the edict of Haman was stamped with the king's seal. There was no reversing of the decision by the authority of any man. Only God could do what was needed. He did not wait silently or acquiesce with a fatalistic attitude toward what some people likely would say would end in death inevitably. Right away he took the place of a mourner and made public his response to the evil edict. He did not foment rebellion but made it plain to all with a loud voice exactly what would happen. He left his job at the king's gate because the present distress was far more important than his own personal position and comfort.

When one person is prepared to face an imminent danger and take public action, others will be inclined to join that person and do what needs to be done. The result of Mordecai's loud and bitter protest spread until all the city and then all the provinces the fasting, weeping and wailing of thousands of Jews disrupted the normal life of all the citizens. A protest against great wrong is understandable. Many public protests today are against sensible legal actions. Believers need to realize that our sovereign God can direct us to that which is right even in times of national unrest.

Those in high places often do not know what is going on among their constituents. It is not uncommon for them to forget who they are representing and simply do what they want for their own personal reasons. Esther and those with her were unaware of the edict against the Jews and all that was going on outside of their cloistered dwelling. When Esther was told of the mourning of Mordecai just beyond the king's gate, and that he was dressed in sackcloth, she feared for him and wanted to protect and preserve him personally from the consequences of bringing the sound of mourning close to where the self-centered king could hear it.

When we know there is cause for sorrow and there is suffering in the life of one of the Lord's people, it is our responsibility to find out the problem if we can, and help bear that person's burden and alleviate the consequences caused by the event. God's people need each other. Love for one another is a way we testify to others that we belong to Christ. Demonstrations of care and concern for the welfare of others has an impact on the lives of those who are self-centered and expect others to be self-sufficient.

By refusing Esther's offering of clothes and aid, Mordecai was able to communicate the seriousness of the cause of his mourning. Wisely Esther sent a trusted person who had a legitimate reason to be in the street to enquire as to what was happening. The great tumult would have become a real concern to Esther particularly when Mordecai was right in the middle of it. To Hatach, Mordecai gave a verbal report of all that was happening as well as an actual copy of the decree against the Jews. In that way Esther came to realize how serious the problem was and the consequences that would come upon all the Jews including her.

We may think that some things are none of our business, but when it affects God's people, we are affected because we are one with them. To seek to distance ourselves from everything is not right. It is wrong to push into matters that don't concern us, but seeking to avoid those that do concern us is wrong also.

The exchange of communication through the intermediary, Hatach, was obviously one of fear on the part of Esther and faith on the part of Mordecai. He was sure there would be deliverance from God in some way because he trusted in the sovereign God. However, he didn't sit back in complacency when he realized there was a way, he could do something about the whole matter. He also knew Esther could do what he could not. So, he urged her to get involved and participate in seeking a solution to a very threatening matter in spite of her fears.

When we have a difficult and maybe dangerous matter before us to deal with, we need first to calculate the cost of doing or not doing something about it. Life-threatening matters cannot be ignored. After facing the need and committing ourselves to get involved, each action we plan to take should be prioritized. Most problems can't be solved at once. Thirdly we need preparation of our own soul and plan the most effective way in which we can be involved, and then seek the support of others. Once a course of action has been decided on, don't wait to go ahead. To linger and procrastinate instead of acting on the solution right away means we may second-guess ourselves or get cold feet and not go ahead. Sensitive matters may seem hard when we think about them, but confidence in God who is in control of every situation gives us the courage to deal with the matter as soon as possible.

Esther needed God's protection even though she was the queen. The king had not called for her for a month likely because she had been queen for about five years and he had some other newer paramours. One's position, wealth and personal honor does not entirely protect us from being manipulated by Satan. In the urgent matters of life, we know that our only sure hope is in God. Our "God is able" to deliver us. We can rest in the assurance that He knows all that is unknown to us.

When it is within our power or reach to do something about a problem, we must not withdraw from taking action to correct it. Neither should we feel sorry for ourselves and allow discouragement and despair to make us hide. Mordecai first, and then Esther under his urging, took action by faith in God. It would have given courage to Esther to hear that she may have been put in that place and position several years earlier "for such a time as this" and such a meaningful purpose as this. She was not there just for the pleasure or whims of one man, but for the sake of thousands of others. For the sake of others, and for our own sake there comes a time when we must seize the moment with courage, conviction and grace.

The challenges of living will surprise us and concern us at times. We may not know now or ever why things come upon us, but trusting in the sovereign God, we must believe, take the action decided upon, and then wait on God for the outcome He desires to bring about. Prayer and fasting takes a matter off the "back-burner" and puts it in the place where it becomes first and foremost in our thoughts. Esther wisely got the Jews to think about the solution rather than just mourning over the problem. Thousands of people praying and fasting has a big impact on the outcome of a problem. Most solutions come to us when we can very precisely define the problem. That is why fellowship with believers is a great support in times of difficulty.

After thinking the matter through carefully, Esther took an action that could have cost her life, but she knew what needed to be done and was prepared to do it. Her brave attitude of trust was expressed in her words, "If I perish, I perish." She did not say that to be pitied because she knew what she was going to do was right no matter what the outcome would be. When our turn comes to take action on some serious matter, the pattern is simple. Know precisely what the problem is; determine the only sensible solution is what God wants; trust Him; and then go forward in faith.

Esther 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 knowest whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"*

SUCH A TIME AS THIS.

Each day that passes in life's hurried pace, makes claim,
"This is the day that is important, nothing else will ever be the same.
Stop what you are doing; think of what you'll miss!"
Fortune raises its voice to say, "There'll never be such a time as this!"

Fame with subtlety begins its stealthy moves to claim my choice.
It has attractions, for those who go in front of crowds have the voice -
The place of leadership leads to fame, and Satan joins the throng with evil hiss -
"This is right, after all, those wandering sheep need you for such a time as this."

People claiming places in my life as those who profess to be much needed friends.
Their suggestive tones and words lead the way as each one tries to be the one that bends
My will to theirs, selling wares of this or that with promises of lasting bliss.
I am thankful for the Spirit true, and real friends who know the danger of such a time as
this.

There is One who knows the end from the beginning: who plans and guides and ultimately
controls.

For the Lord Himself who oversees all the works of men, both good and bad - truly knows.
He was the One who knew ahead of time, the evil works of Satan - betrayed by awful kiss,
But never turned aside his head, for He knew He alone was able for such a time as this.

Whether it be the Lord Himself, or a beautiful woman, made strong by prayer and
confidence -
Confidence in God alone, that made her - life in hand - move to the place of human
dominance,
And there, as intercessor, state her case, and win; or you and I moving in humility to throne
of grace;
Each one has a role to fill, a work to do - we are rising up on bended knees to meet a need
in such a time as this.

**“There are times, gracious Father, when I wonder is there no one who can meet the
need of this place and of these people. Who will help them to hear the Gospel in their
own tongue? Is it possible, that even at my age, I should seek to learn another tongue?
Am I the one to meet this need in such a time as this? This is an honest request, in the
name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”**

Esther 5

GOD IS IN THE DETAILS

Even when the step of faith is taken in fear and trepidation, once a child of God has demonstrated trust in Him, we can move forward with assurance. "He knoweth the way that I take" includes the seemingly small things as well as the things of obvious importance. When the three days of fasting had passed, it was plain to Esther the time had come to go forward and she had taken time to plan how to go forward. Time taken before God in preparation for important activity is never wasted time.

Esther's understanding of her position and the dignity expected of a person in that position, dons her best royal apparel. When we take an event seriously, such as meeting with the Lord and His people, and understand the significance of that meeting, then it is only right to dress accordingly. Dignity, integrity, respect and reverence all go together to give a positive testimony and weight to what we are doing.

There is also appropriate body-language when we are seeking to gain approval, or at least acceptance, when we are not really sure how we will be received. Quiet dignity and humility without groveling, indicates a sincerity and seriousness as it relates to the matter at hand. Esther demonstrated all of this when she came to the king's house, far enough away to not be intrusive, yet near enough to be seen.

After not seeing her king-husband for thirty days, her approach was very appropriate to the time of absence. If she had come in a demanding way with an "attitude," she likely would have been put to death. Her dignity, distance and demeanor were such that she was pleasing to the king when he saw her. Common sense linked with confidence in the sovereign God, can change what may appear at first as an intrusion into another person's life, into a welcome acceptance.

As he held out the golden scepter to Esther, she came close enough to reach out her hand to touch the end of it, but not close enough to seem aggressive. When one is in fellowship with God, we can expect to know what to do at any given time, how far to go, and when to stop. It was obvious by the way Ahasuerus addressed Esther, that her sense of what was the right way to approach him was spot on. Her position was acknowledged by the king when he addressed her first as "Queen Esther." The second time he used her name he used the more personal name "Esther." The comment he made to her was an extravagant remark that would assure her she was safe.

Esther had learned some basic principles of diplomacy from someone, likely Mordecai, that let the king know her request was important enough to take more time than a brief appearance before his throne. Also, she implied by asking that Haman also attend the banquet she was going to prepare, that it was an official matter that needed to be witnessed. This was not a desire for some romantic interlude with her husband.

When we trust God to do what we cannot do, we do not have to waste our time or emotions on the "what ifs" that might come to our mind later.

When God's people are willing to do His will, He can guide us in ways that we may never have thought of if we were only acting on our own volition. Extremes of acting too fast and doing everything ourselves, or acting too slow and expecting others to do what we do not want to do are both to be avoided. Waiting for a miracle from God to accomplish His will may not be His will either, because we may be the answer to our own prayer. By acting in a way consistent with our character, ability, testimony and commitment to the word of God, we can expect the right outcome even though we do not know how it will happen. The response and opinion of others may be critical but as long as we know this is what God wants from me at this moment, that is enough to move us ahead.

Haman's pride at being invited to the banquet with the royal couple was obvious. When he was invited to the second banquet, he likely thought the sky was the only limit to his ambition. Pride and arrogance go together, and Haman had both. "Pride goeth before a fall" is not just a proverb but a principle that works. Bitterness and vengeance also go together and Haman had both against Mordecai. Mordecai must have changed from sackcloth to regular clothing after the third day of fasting was past because he was at the king's gate. Likely it was in faith that he anticipated the outcome of Esther's part in the whole dramatic event.

"The root of bitterness" defiles many and its roots are very deep. If we ever become aware of bitterness raising its head in us, we are in danger of losing our testimony as a believer. One who trusts God when a wrong or perceived wrong has been done to them, can leave that whole matter and rest in the sovereignty of God to deal with the matter in His own time and way - either in us or in others. Haman's bitterness as an ungodly man who had a vindictive spirit against Mordecai, one of God's people, was evil enough. But when it expanded to include a whole race of people, there was no question that the powers of darkness were arrayed against God. As it was, he passed on that bitterness to his wife and friends along with his pronouncements of his importance at being the only guest invited to feast with the king and Esther.

The hatred and bitterness that was in Haman was passed on to his wife and friends. When they told him to make a gallows seventy-five feet high as a warning to others not to mess with Haman, they had hitched themselves to his "band-wagon." People who speak words in bitterness can expect others who favor them to go even farther than they had planned. Haman was going to wait to carry out his bitterness against Mordecai when the Jews were decreed to die. Those people associated with him made the consequences of that bitterness to escalate to immediate action. Once evil is allowed to go unchecked in any of us, it has a snowballing effect that spreads like cancer.

When a path of evil is started like it did with Haman, there is really no going back. He was pleased with the terrible suggestion of his foolish wife and fawning friends. Heady with his authority as the second in the kingdom, he felt he had no restraints. When one starts on a downward course away from God, against God's people and favorable to the evil world, seldom is there any stopping it. Usually it goes farther, faster and lower than ever thought possible. But our sovereign God can intervene and change the normal course of events to that which brings glory to His name.

Esther 5:7. *"Then answered Esther, and said, 'My petition and my request is;'"*

WHAT IS THY REQUEST?

I ask but do I really want the answer? Am I afraid that I'm the one that my Lord will choose?

The need is great around me; the voices of the people make it clear there is a need.

If my answer is to stop all that I've been doing, and make a change; what will I gain or lose?

My Father God, I know that in this life I live, I will not live in doubt when to Thee alone I heed;

The problems that confront me are my age, and things committed to, that still are left undone.

These are obligations made over many years of labor, that seem to me to be not yet fulfilled,

Or partially finished at the best - and still I wonder, 'If I don't do that work, is there another one?'

Is it possible I am impeding the progress of some waiting servant wanting to do his Master's will?

Here and now there is a field untouched by hands of harvest laborers who are not found.

The season to reap is passing by and the heads of wheat waiting for the sickle, start to bow.

I haven't a freshness in my brain to quickly gather verbs and tenses, and memorize the nouns

That must be known and placed in order so that to the lost the message of salvation I can
 show.
 Should I leave to others the problem of the harvest left unreaped, and go my way, and
 watch and pray?
 I do pray Lord, for laborers to see and learn and know and go; it seems they're going to
 another place.
 But what about the millions here I see with older eyes, am I to try to learn new words - how
 to say
 The Truths of God in a language I know not, and with young laborers, try to keep the pace?
 Esther knew, the urgency of the moment motivated her to act and put into words, her
 hurting heart.
 I feel too, Lord, the need around does not leave me unmoved as I look ahead to fleeting
 years.
 There's not much time for me to begin again to do the job I see needs doing; I fear to make
 a start,
 That beginning to open doors without Thy mind made clear, I find my hand turns the knob:
 not Yours.
 She acted in cautious faith; I too know what that faith is like, for I have found that I'm not
 bold.
 Her request was couched in means unusual, but her goal was plain - people will die if I
 don't speak.
 From the view of moving through life learning from day to day to work hard before I'm too
 old;
 People must hear the Gospel; my request is that young people loving God, will seek lost
 souls to reach.

"I am still not sure Father, if I am to try to learn Spanish or not. It seems to me it would be a waste of my time and others if I stopped what I am doing to try to open Latino doors in this country. I will seek, by Thy grace to reach out to young men and women and urge them to look on the white harvest fields and step out in the full assurance of faith in Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Esther 6

GOD OPENS THE EARS OF MEN

No matter how lofty a person's position on earth may be, there is no way he can control his sleep by the force of his own will. Sleep is taken away "from the wicked" and "the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep." Ahasuerus was deprived of needed sleep because a sovereign God was not done using him to bring about His divine purposes for His people. It is not uncommon for events of the past day, or uncertainty about the future to keep people from the rest and recovery of a sound sleep. The uniqueness of Esther's request, and the fact that it was to be revealed the next day at the second banquet perhaps gave the king a sense of something serious that was about to happen.

When the "records of the chronicles" were read to him, it is plain to us the sovereign God even arranged the passages that were read to him. It was the work of ancient scribes to make the events of the kingdom as interesting as possible and they were to write the history accurately. That is why the scriptures of truth in the Bible, both historically and doctrinally are written in such an engaging way. Boredom in reading the Bible is usually because a person is not a believer, or a believer has matters that to him or her are more important to them at the moment.

"Thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against Thee," is an important part of the daily life of a child of God. The light of truth brings understanding, and acting on the truth brings success to the labor put forth in the service of the Lord. It is of special interest that the reading to the king was so appropriate for the events of the day before him, that we know God was guiding it. If He can guide an unbeliever through words written by another unbeliever, how much more can we be guided by words written by "holy men of old" who were guided by the Holy Spirit of God.

God is always at work in the lives of His people. With patience when we are impatient, and with the quietness of holiness when we are agitated, God uses specific commands from His word to direct our ways, and simple illustrations from His written word to help us apply His truth to our own daily living. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word."

It becomes obvious to us when events in our lives come "together for good," that these are not just coincidentally appropriate to the need of the moment, but are in fact God's working in sovereign grace for

our blessing. He does have control over the lives of people and can use events in general, and circumstances in particular to produce which is needed.

Why the king overlooked rewarding Mordecai for giving the information about the threat on his life when the event took place, seems strange until we understand the sovereignty of God. It was left unrewarded until a greater need arose. Of special interest is that in half a day the dream took place, the reading of the chronicles was done, Haman entered the outer court early, and the course of history was changed. Again, there is evidence of the unseen and unnamed God at work behind the scenes of human history. This should encourage us to know that what we do not know, we may not need to know. All we have to know is our God is in control, and we rest there.

Haman's plan unraveled in the time it takes to say one sentence. "What shall be done to the man the king delighteth to honor?" greeted Haman as he was called into the king's presence. Money, success and pride cannot buy respect. Power does not buy, earn or guarantee popularity with the people. In fact, the desire for the praise of men can lead us down a wrong path to do that which is wrong. To flaunt one's position and power can quickly lead us to being resented and despised.

Haman wanted Mordecai dead and disgraced. God wanted him alive, in the king's gate and honored. Haman had his plans made and prepared to be carried out. God had His sovereign plans already in effect and was using the evil enemy as His tool. There would be no hanging on the gallows for God's man, but rather honor given to a humble man. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." One person well wrote, "God is determined to bring a proud man down, and lift a humble man up."

To wear royal clothes and a royal crown on a royal horse made it obvious to all the citizens of the city that Mordecai had royal approval. And well he might because he was the instrument God used to preserve the king's life. Whether people at large knew the reason for the demonstration or not is not made clear in the narrative, but they did know that "Mordecai the Jew" was in the king's good graces and was held in the favor of an ungodly leader. "The wrath of man" cannot thwart the purposes and praises of our sovereign God. Haman's humiliation was complete when he was the one appointed to publicly declare the honor of the king on the righteous man, he had intended to kill that day.

When the parade of honor was completed, Mordecai simply went back to doing that which was his responsibility before the big parade. The momentary exaltation did not go to his head, likely because he knew that honors from men are temporary and fleeting. Faith in God and the security that brings is lasting and real. "Them that honor Me, I will honor. They that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed." He did not go back to wearing sackcloth. He did not continue to mourn openly and loudly. There was a time for that, but it had passed. Now was the waiting time, and the expectation that God was soon going to do what was needed for His people. When we do that for which we are responsible to the best of our ability, then is the time to quietly wait on the Lord to accomplish His work according to His will.

Haman on the other hand, who was only living for self and selfish ambition, could not handle the humiliation with any sort of dignity. His "balloon was popped." "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" will always bring about the downfall of a man's soul. Immoral living, ungodly talk, self-centered motivation is doomed to failure in the end. His mourning and humiliation were obvious to his wife and friends. They had more sense than he did as they looked ahead into his future and recognized the fallout of his openly arrogant plans. For some reason they knew he was going down. Again, the answer to how they knew that was that is was another act of the sovereign God who was working for His people.

Without any opportunity to make alternate plans, Haman was called to the appointment with the king at the banquet Esther had prepared. Like the actions recorded in the book of Revelation, once the sovereign God begins to take action against the ungodly, things happen quickly. There is a time God gives for repentance and usually that is quite lengthy. But when that opportunity has been refused and the justice of God steps in to carry the responsibility of righteousness against evil, events begin to follow one after another in rapid succession.

Esther 6:6. *"So Haman came in. And the king said unto him, What shall be done unto the man who the king delighteth to honor? Now Haman thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honor more than to myself?"*

REVERSALS.

God doesn't always allow us to see all that's going on -
If He did, we might all get too impatient.
But in quietness and confidence we must remain strong -

He does have plans that are to Him quite intimate.
For me to know today all God is going to do tomorrow -
May sometimes be more than I could bear.
Because often joy and success come following after sorrow -
And in this way, He is taking every care.

It may seem like we are losing every battle in life's war -
But the just are called to live their lives by faith.
Along about the time when we are sure we can take no more -
God showers us with more abundant grace.
Later we look back and consider all that's done -
And we can see God's wisdom in bringing these things to pass.
If it had been different who knows where we'd have gone -
So, God arranged the trial and just how long it would last.

We had hoped that we would be spared some physical pain -
But God had a different plan for us in mind.
I am not sure even yet if in some way I had failed Him -
But I know there are lessons from it I'd never find
Unless I passed this way and learned God has the right
To do whatever He wants that my life would be
Full of experiences real that brings results so very bright-
And looking back at events God's leading I can see.

When a moment seems so bad and the normal reaction would be sad,
To God's well of living water I will flee.
When I trace the way He guided me today, I know all this will make me glad.
Not all He allows to be will fill my soul with glee
But there is coming a day when all will be revealed.
In my Lord I confidently trust, knowing that He must
In His plans for me often keep some things concealed -
And the outcome of the event will be more trust.

**“O God my Father: today we are going to perhaps weep with those who weep. Give me
I pray the wisdom to be silent or to speak as Thou dost lead. In the name of the Lord
Jesus Christ, Amen.”**

Esther 7

PAYDAY SOMEDAY

A well thought out plan of action to deal with a serious problem is the only way to find the right solution. Once Esther had decided on a course of action and had taken the first step in her plan, it seems like she was able to go ahead in confidence. The first steps of faith are often taken in fear and trembling with uncertainty about the outcome. But when that first step demonstrates trust in God, there is an intelligent boldness to go forward to bring the issue to a conclusion. Esther did this with a certain dignity and grace in a diplomatic way that let king Ahasuerus know that this meeting was not just a friendly husband and wife talk. So his first comment two days earlier was again repeated. "What is thy petition, queen Esther?"

When important things are to be discussed that is going to affect the lives of other people for good or bad, that is not just a casual chat to be taken lightly or unadvisedly. Respect for each other is important, and an awareness of the position of responsibility each one has, is in order. When the time is right to make an important statement that gets right to the crux of the matter, do it as precisely and succinctly as possible. Too much background can be irrelevant, and can cause impatience and frustration unless it is absolutely necessary to finding a solution to the problem. To tell the story of the Jews and to go into a lot of details would have distracted the king from the desired decision.

If the king knew Esther was a Jewess, it could not have crossed his mind when he okayed the edict written up by Haman that became law when his seal was put on it. Life and death of people to those ancient kings was not as important as their prestige, standing in the eyes of the people, and their plans. Esther proceeded with her request in a carefully planned way. She first made a plea for her own life to be spared. The shock effect must have left the king momentarily speechless. "Who would dare to kill my wife?" would have immediately come to his mind. Intrigue in the palace had been read to him that night and it was on his mind to the extent that he had Mordecai honored shortly before the banquet. And now this threat on his queen!!

But Esther had not finished. The second part of her petition was to spare the lives of thousands of her people. After stating the basic problem, and appeal for her life and then the life of her people, she then took

the place of less than a slave. If she and all her people were to be sold, she wouldn't have said anything. It would have a great impact on the nation to lose much of its workforce and business people, but to spare him any discomfort she would not have brought the matter to his attention. To annihilate the whole race of people would be a greater loss with no compensation whatever. Not groveling as a dog before its master, but with enough bite in her words to awaken his conscience without making an accusation, she spoke further. She wouldn't have wanted to disturb the king's lofty complacency by telling him of the danger of losing a whole lot of people for a sum of money. That was his business. But to bankrupt the nation for some other man's pride and bitterness by killing thousands of people would have a negative effect for which there would never be adequate compensation.

After a bad night, and uncertainty about the obviously serious request that was coming from queen Esther, the king was understandably shocked when she articulated precisely the petition. In his state of mind there would likely have raced thoughts like, "What ... who... how... could such a thing be? How could this happen right under my nose and I not know it?" The first comment he made revealed his state of mind. "Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" Such thoughts come to our minds when we are startled, shocked, and in a sort of oblique way, accused. The calmness of Esther's request and attitude, and the careful way she worded her request is evidence that behind this scene the sovereign God was giving the right words to say in the right way. He was controlling the emotions and putting the whole matter in context in a very brief way and amount of time. She had "uped the bottom" in two sentences.

The answer to the king's question, "Who is he, and where is he...?" was neither hesitant nor fearful. "The adversary and enemy" description was pointed and precise. An adversary is one who is opposed. An enemy is one who is out to destroy. "Wicked" is the nature of the adversary and enemy in the sense of him being a vile person. Deep-seated evil in character was her description of Haman in eight succinct words. This was the king's second in command and perhaps he was considered a friend.

Betrayal, deceit and underhanded subtlety, when exposed by truth, has nowhere to go. The humiliation of Haman earlier in the day was almost more than he could take. Now in a moment of time he knew his very life was in jeopardy. The silent smoldering rage of the king was obvious as he stood and left the room abruptly. Haman also stood up to plead for his life, not from Ahasuerus but from Esther. Likely if he had followed the king he would have died on the spot. In a desperate attempt to save his life he fell in terror on the couch on which Esther was reclining. When "sin finds you out," there is no where to turn to escape righteous wrath. For sinners who repent of their sin and fall in repentance before God, there is a "last call of mercy" if and when they accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their own Savior from sin and its consequences. If that does not happen, justice and judgment for sin will prevail.

Esther had no word for Haman, and in his fear, he compromised his position to make an appeal for his life by physically touching her. That should never be done in any case, particularly when a husband's wrath is already directed toward such an evil person. Ahasuerus had a few minutes in the garden to think the whole situation over. He likely realized he was part of the problem because he had not taken time to think of the consequences on Persia if all the Jews were exterminated. Now he knew he had been "used" by his friend and counselor. His reaction at seeing Haman on Esther's couch when he returned to the banquet room was total outrage.

Hatred and malicious planning against others with evil intent, will usually return and capture the schemer. To try to trap others leads to being trapped yourself. The results wanted when we try to take vengeance into our own hands will be felt more by the schemer than the intended victim. "Vengeance is mine," says the sovereign God.

As soon as the king spoke his condemning words when he reentered the room, all who were there knew Haman was as good as dead right then. The chamberlains quickly covered his head because Persian kings would not look at the face of a condemned criminal. Harbonah, a chamberlain, had witnessed the whole event and knew what was going to happen after Esther's request was made known. He also knew Haman had planned to hang Mordecai that day on his high gallows. "Behold also," indicates that there are more people aware of problems and unsolved issues than we may know. Most things have a way of being leaked out that we had thought were private. Idle words and observant people come together in a conclusion quickly. "Every idle word that men shall speak; they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."

Ancient kings had the power of life and death over people, and could use it without the checks and balances of modern judicial systems. However, Haman's guilt was obvious and his attempt at genocide was worthy of death. A poisoned mind in a leader has far-reaching and long-lasting effects. The death sentence, "Hang

him thereon," was justified, and it needed no adjudication. His guilt was obvious and his duplicity, even to the king, was reason enough for the just sentence he was given.

For Haman to be publicly led away covered, and hanged on a seventy-five foot-high gallows of his own making, was a righteous act. But it did not solve the problem facing Esther, Mordecai and thousand of Jews in Persia. The king was acquainted with the edict to kill all the Jews, and by the laws of that land could not rescind it. Even though his "wrath was pacified," the problem remained. There is a saying that has real value: "Act in haste - repent in leisure." To jump ahead to accomplish something without taking time to consider well the effects of that action, may result in an outcome which we had not thought about that could end in a more serious problem than the original matter. It can take a long time to recovery from a hasty decision. To recovery from a physical illness or injury takes far longer than it does to get it. The same principle applies to spiritual health and growth in the lives of God's people.

Esther 7:3. *"Then Esther the queen answered and said, 'If I have found favor 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:'"*

WHAT IS THY PETITION?

To draw near to some is a fearsome act; when the position they hold is very high. The space around them is guarded well, lest someone planning mischief is drawing nigh. The only difference that is allowed is if the one coming near is his wife or child - Then the one so high, changes the protocol, and reaches out to them with his arms held wide.

The king on his throne holds lives in his hands; people live or die at his command. The fear those have when petitions they bring, are granted or denied by a move of his hand.

When Esther moved near to plead for her life, the king was moved to grant her request. The act of her faith kept her people alive, and the enemy died at the king's behest.

When I have petitions to make to my King, I am able to come to Him without any fear - For the One I make request to hears every one, He is my Father and bids me draw near. So, whether my needs are large ones or small, I go to the throne and find there only grace. To the Father-King I confidently make my appeals, knowing I am welcomed at His heavenly place.

"Heavenly Father, who hears and answers prayer: I am coming to give Thee thanks for all of the multitudes of answered prayers. I must sound foolish to Thee at times with my childish words, but I am thankful that Thou art longsuffering to me still. The awareness of contact on a 24/7 basis makes it impossible to me to delineate all the answers. Some though, stand out because of the circumstances surrounding them and I still review with a grateful heart the way the answers came at just the right time. I give Thee thanks and honor, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Esther 8

"A GOOD DAY"

Jews all over the world have a special day to celebrate a "good day" that happened in the time of Esther. They call it "The Feast of Lights." Hanukah is a feast day on the thirteenth of December which is to remember the second decree that was made under the reign of Xerxes in which they were able to defend themselves against their enemies who had received an earlier edict instructing the Persians to exterminate all the Jews - men, women and children in all the provinces of Persia from India to Ethiopia. By the intervention of our sovereign God, what would have been a tragic disaster became a time of celebration.

To be an enemy of the Jews is to be an enemy of God. Haman was named as "the Jews enemy" and he lost everything including his own soul. History shows that even though the Jews are as sinful in doctrine and practice as other nationalities, the nations that oppose them are destined to fail. When God chose them out of all the nations to be His earthly people, He committed Himself to preserve their identity in spite of all attempts to annihilate them. Through that nation Christ would come, and under His reign peace will finally come to the world. Nations who favor them will be favored and those who oppose them will be opposed by God and will fail.

Esther was given "the house of Haman" by king Ahasuerus as her own to use as she would. Likely it was more than just a dwelling place for her but would be more like property holdings, and so she put Mordecai in charge over it all - property, household, estate and all that was Haman's. The king must have believed she was due this consideration because of all she had done to expose Haman's duplicity. Not likely many

women would have had such a place of their own in that day and age. Her association with Ahasuerus was more of a ruler and his queen rather than husband and wife. Respect and honor between them and the previous acceptance of Esther made her accepted when she came "again before the king" to plead for the Jews.

Ahasuerus now knew the relationship of the man who had been instrumental in saving his life and Esther the queen. The "man whom the king delighteth to honor" was a brave and trusted man, and his queen was a wise and honorable woman to whom he gave places of responsibility and authority. When people are faithful to God and are willing to risk their own lives for the welfare and safety of others, they can be trusted in other things as well. One's reputation and trustworthiness are more often proved in times of difficulty and stress, than when life is moving along normally and pleasantly.

When Mordecai "came before the king," he was given a place of special privilege. It was even a greater privilege and responsibility when the king gave him "his ring." That identified the position he now held which Haman had before him, as a counselor and adviser. He was also the administrator of the property given to Esther. In a very short time the political climate changed, personal life was changed and responsibility was changed. Time is no obstacle when the sovereign God works His will in a nation, an assembly, a family or an individual's life.

Faithfulness and loyalty are never out of vogue with people and are never ignored by God when His people stand firm in spite of all that goes on around them. When we are faithful to the Lord's people and God's assembly, we are faithful to God. Any service or labor done for those who belong to Christ and for the furtherance of the Gospel is acknowledged as done for our Lord. That should motivate us to be alert and ready for any way we can promote the interests of the kingdom of God.

The next time Esther approached the king in her concern for the preservation of the Jews, it seemed even more important than the first time. There was a greater urgency on her part that caused her to fall before the king and shed tears of concern. Her humble position and tears were not merely affected, but demonstrated the reality and urgency of her request. Now that Haman was gone, the undercurrent of animosity and bitterness was also gone. But the problem coming nine months later was still there and was utmost in the mind and heart of Esther. What needed to be done was plain. In some way the consequences of the edict had to be lifted. How it could be done was not known to her but she was sure that there had to be a way.

When the scepter was held out to her as an assurance of her acceptance, the king had nothing to say. When Esther stood before the king with dignity and respect to plead the cause of her people, he permitted her to make her request again without interruption. She seemed to know what to say, how to say it with tact and be effective with wise and plain words. Everyone involved: Ahasuerus, Mordecai and Esther knew the first edict was irreversible. Even so; the king seemed to have taken a position favorable to the Jews by this time. In His sovereign authority, God is able to change a king. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever He will."

The king must have thought Esther's request through, and gave Mordecai permission to make a plan to deal with the problem. So, in the name of Ahasuerus the king, Mordecai wrote a new decree which was worded in such a way as to not condemn the first one, and yet made it possible to deal with the challenge that was before the Jews. They were now able to legally defend themselves against those who wanted to kill them. They were now able to prepare nine months in advance for the coming attack and band together to defend themselves with the king's authority behind their actions. The second decree did not annul the first one, but gave the right to do whatever was needed in defense against those who would assault them.

A person once wrote, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity." The book of Esther abounds with illustrations of how our sovereign God is able to control situations in our lives both small and great. We become conscious of the fact that He is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent when we open our eyes of faith. We often learn God in ways that are so far out of the ordinary that there is no way we can doubt Him.

The news of the new decree reached the far reaches of the Persian empire in plenty of time for the Jews to prepare themselves, and so the enemies of the Jews could change their minds about what action they would take against them. Some of the words of the second decree were the same as the first one as to what they could do to those who came against them, except this time they were against the persecutors instead of the defenders. When the news was first heard in the city of Sushan, instead of weeping and wailing as happened when the first edict was known, now the city "rejoiced and was glad." What a difference there is when God is behind a matter compared to when Satan is behind it seeking to get his way.

At the close of the chapter we see Mordecai going "out from the presence of the king" with honor, dressed in the garments of those associated with royalty and with the symbol of authority on his head. No longer was he despised and oppressed, but was recognized as a man to be trusted and obeyed. He had been faithful when he was in obscurity and was now given the role of trusted leadership because he was willing to risk his life for his king, his relatives and all his people.

The relief of the Jews was called light, gladness, joy and honor. The darkness of despair gave way to the light of life being restored to them. Gladness took the place of sadness. Joy took the place of fear and honor instead of hopelessness. The whole nation who had thought of them as enemies, now knew God's people were a force to be reckoned with to the extent that many became Jews. They realized that only the sovereign God of the Jews could have brought about these events in such a remarkable way.

Esther 8:16-17. *"The Jews had light, and gladness and joy, and honour. 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 people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them."*

HANUKAH.

What to do when there seems to be no hope?
How can we reverse the irreversible?
The day draws near - danger looms darkly -
Where to go? What to do? Who has an answer?

There is a light that comes from God -
Not the Shekinah, but a light in the soul.
For God has imparted His Spirit within -
There is an inward light that ends in glory.

There is a gladness that comes from God -
The dark way cannot hide the path of His choosing.
A way has been devised, though dangerous -
It calls for standing up and being counted - by faith.

There is a joy that comes from God -
His joy came from enduring the cross - the shame,
And that is available to us when we too endure
Reproaches, opposition, persecution - and find victory in Christ.

There is an honor that comes from God -
Not because of human endeavor -
Not because of victory or defeat of others -
But because of the reflection of divine light in the face - and life.

Where there was darkness and despair and defeat -
Now there is light and life and love.
Not produced by victories won over bitter animosity,
But because of standing and defending the honor of our God.

His people can have joy and gladness - it comes from God.
This is a good day - God has worked in His sovereignty.
A feast of fat things is enjoyed as we delight in our Savior.
And God is glorified as His light shines all around the world.

"O Lord God of heaven and earth: let Thy light which was seen in Thy people in the past, shine from Thy people now, that sinners may see Thy glory, experience Thy love, taste of Thy grace - and be caused to turn in real faith to Thee and trust in Thy Son alone for eternal salvation. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Esther 9

LEGAL SELF DEFENSE

Deep seated animosity against God's people on the part of people who love the pleasures of sin and want to live as if there is no God, is to be expected. That animosity was there in the days of Esther and Mordecai and it is here in our day. The truth that there is a God everyone will meet is so unacceptable to guilty people, that they deny the existence of God as a way to avoid their accountability to Him for their sin, unbelief and conduct. But the fact remains, "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

Enemies of the Jews hoped to eliminate them all: men, women and children on the thirteenth day of Adar (the last month of the year). So they prepared to attack the Jews without mercy. On the other hand, the Jews who had been given the right to defend themselves and time to prepare their defenses gathered in bands to present a unified force against their enemies. The sovereign God had taken control of the whole event so that the Jews had the upper hand against all the opposition throughout the whole Persian empire. Those who had hoped to destroy all the Jews did not have a chance. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

All the people feared the Jews because of the position held by "Mordecai the Jew." Their own defensive action and the power of God's intervention for them, preserved the Jews then, and it still does today in spite of all who have tried to destroy them down through the centuries. In ways that can only be defined as "divine intervention" the relatively small number of Jews in the world have survived until this day. Not only have they survived, but they are a force to be reckoned with among all the nations. The significance of their impact on the world in science, education, invention and military areas is far greater in proportion than their size compared to all other people.

The important position held by Mordecai, and the exalted position of Esther as the queen of the Persians, and the fact of them being relatives, was an intimidating power that had been totally unexpected when the first edict was given. Government officials helped the Jews because of their fear of Mordecai as the second in place of authority. Still there were those who thought they could prevail against the Jews and seventy-five thousand died in a vain attempt to carry out Haman's first edict. Even though the Jews had been given permission to take the possessions of those who opposed them, they took nothing because their purpose was survival, not conquest. One is struck in reading this account of such a marvelous victory of survival, that there is not a hymn of praise to God from the Jews nor a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord. If this omission was due to the written record or to a lack of understanding on the part of the Jews is not stated. One thing we do know - God was at work of behalf of His people in spite of what they might have overlooked. God is faithful to us even when we are unfaithful to Him.

Sushan must have been a hotbed of anti-Semitism because right in the palace, or at least in the city, five hundred were slain including Haman's ten sons. These ten men may have been the reason for such a large number of the opposition being in one place even after nine months from the time of the death of their father. Another three hundred had escaped either to blend in with the population or to go to some secure place. Esther was obviously informed of all that was happening around her. She was aware of the fact that the only way to deal with the undercurrent of opposition that remained was to make public what happens to those who "toucheth the apple of His (God's) eye." So, the bodies of the sons of Haman were impaled so all could see them.

The other part of Esther's request was for another day to be added to the decree in Sushan. The large Jewish population in that city would have known who were opposed to them and who of their enemies had not yet been dealt with. So only in the city was the decree continued for another day until the three hundred were found and put to death. The point is made several times in the narrative that the reason for the slaying of the Jews enemies was for defense, not for gain by taking their spoils for themselves.

Often, we are saddened when we hear of the passing of those who have openly opposed the Gospel and publicly demeaned the children of God. We know they suffer the consequences of their own choices, but we also know the value of a human soul to God who gave them life. For a person to live and die without Christ is an unspeakable loss of one who could have been saved but rejected the light they had been given. "If that light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness."

There was a "good day" nine months earlier when the second decree was sent out to the provinces, and the fourteenth day of the last month was another "good day." The evil intention against the Jews in Persia had finally come to an end - at least for that time. Their joy moved them on this good day to send gifts of appreciation to others, and give money to the poor and a memorial of this great event in Jewish history. It is still a special two days in Jewish families today as they keep the feast of Purim. They exchange gifts and give money as they celebrate this great event of deliverance. Mordecai wrote the account of the events of this time, and people still read them during these two days.

When God's people stop to remember His faithfulness and goodness to us, it is cause for rejoicing. The Jewish Feast of Lights has become part of their tradition when they celebrate on the fourteenth and fifteenth of December. Believers in Christ have some days we set aside a part of our tradition. Christmas and Easter are not called to be times of celebration by God, but by our own choice we remember the birth, death and resurrection of Christ. These are merely cultural events. Of far more importance to us as children of God is

the feast of remembrance in which we take the bread and cup in remembrance of Christ and to "show His death until He come." This is a command of our Savior and is of far greater importance than any mere cultural practice.

To reaffirm the fact that the Jews would not forget this great deliverance by the power of the sovereign God through the human instruments of His choosing, Mordecai and Esther, they wrote a second letter. This was to make sure the Jews understood this observance was to continue annually as a remembrance for this event. Lessons from the past are important for us to learn so we don't think of past events as unrelated to our lives today. The same God who was unseen then but in control of all that happened in Persia, works in our nation and the nations of the world today. He controls the leadership of nations as well as those of us who live in obscurity. The wickedness and actions of some leaders are astounding in the extreme to which they choose to go. Sometimes God allows what they want to happen. People seldom pay much attention to what they are taught nor do they learn unless there are severe consequences for their sinful actions. God in His sovereignty allows people to go far enough to make their own decisions and thus seal their own fate.

Esther 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."*

THESE DAYS.

Special things happen that we should never forget -
The event, not the day is what's important.
For us and our children we need to remember what God sent -
And express our appreciation in words and deportment.
For when God drew near to meet our need from His supply -
He knew our need and showed us what to do.
In these special days, our time we do apply
To consider things of the past so grace our children know.

Some days come once a year, an anniversary of sorts.
We stop what we usually do to this event consider.
In our extremity as a nation we look back in grateful thought
To how we were preserved from something very bitter.
A Thanksgiving Day is when families unite and come together.
And hopefully go over the many blessings we've received.
On that day we review the things that really matter,
And give thanks to our God in whom we have believed.

We take a special day to celebrate the advent
Of our Savior when He came in grace down to earth below.
The Bible makes it plain that God the Father sent
His only begotten Son to be the only Savior of the world.
We stop to read the words that tell us about His birth.
We consider that the purpose was He came to die for us.
His coming we celebrate as we consider the great worth
Of the One who wants us to in Him put our trust.

There is the call to remember Christ on the first day of the week
There we remember His Person and proclaim His atoning death.
For those who look on as observers, we pray that they will seek
The Lord and through His salvation will for their souls find rest.
These special days help us to remember what really counts,
In this journey of life where we daily live and walk.
The practice of remembering on these days when we recount -
Gives great meaning to these events of which we should take stock.

"Lord God in heaven, these days of stopping to consider Thee and the events Thou didst use to bring about Thy plans, are very important to me. May I always be appreciative of Thy blessings, of the coming of the Lord Jesus and of His death, burial and resurrection for me. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Esther 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."*

HOW ARE YOU KNOWN?

We all have a reputation we are building in day-to-day life. Our reputation is the result of the character traits being built by our response to life situations. The main characters in the book of Esther give insights into each person.

Ahasureus: "...sat on the throne... he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honor of his excellent majesty many days."

Vashti: "...the queen before the king with the crown royal, to show the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on... refused to come."

Mordecai: "...a certain Jew... took her for his own daughter... walked every day before the court... to know how Esther did, and what should become of her... sat in the king's gate... bowed not, nor did him (Haman) reverence... rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes... went out... cried with a loud and bitter cry... told him of all that had happened... came before the king... set Mordecai over the house of Haman... fear of Mordecai... Mordecai was very great... waxed greater and greater... Mordecai wrote these things... the greatness of Mordecai... next unto the king... great among the Jews... accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed."

Esther: "... fair and beautiful... pleased him... obtained kindness... preferred her... she required nothing... obtained favor... the king loved Esther and she obtained grace and favor in his sight... he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen... Esther certified the king thereof in Mordecai's name... exceedingly grieved and she sent raiment... she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people... fast for me... put on her royal apparel, and stood... she obtained favor in his sight... drew near... answered... Esther prepared... my petition, and my request... let my life be given me... my people... for we are sold... to be destroyed... to be slain... to perish... the adversary and enemy... set Mordecai... if it please the king, let it be granted... Esther the queen... wrote with all authority... had enjoined them... the decree of Esther the queen confirmed these matters."

Esther and Mordecai kept their responsibility to their own people and their uniqueness, before them at all times. The king and first queen were the center of their own lives. A strong sense of identity with God and His people, defines true believers.

"Holy God: keep all of Thy people with a sense of the dignity and responsibility of being one of Thy children. Keep us all from being occupied with how we appear to others and/or how we look in the mirror. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."