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• EAST AFRICA •

ESTHER

by

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The story of Esther takes place in in Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire, during the reign of the Persian king Ahasuerus (also known as Xerxes I), who ruled from 486-465 BC. Esther is the one book of the Bible in which God is never named. The circumstances and actions appear purely “natural,” without God’s overt appearance or supernatural interventions. Nevertheless, God is clearly present “behind the scenes.” The existence of multiple “coincidences,” irony, and ironic reversals necessary to the story, show that God is the one driving the plot. In these ways, Esther mirrors the book of Ruth, the only other book in the Bible named after a woman. Both Esther and Ruth involve God’s salvation of his people from actual or threatened disasters. Esther also explains the origin of the Jewish feast of Purim. Esther raises, but does not necessarily answer, important issues concerning how we should act in a pagan culture. It also includes a number of veiled foreshadows of the church and the gospel.

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I. Introduction

A. *Author and date*

The story of Esther takes place in Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire, during the reign of the Persian king Ahasuerus (also known as Xerxes I), who ruled from 486–465 BC.¹ The author is not named and is unknown. Some have attributed the book to Mordecai, based on **Est 9:20** (“*Then Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far*”).² However, that is a misunderstanding of **vv. 20–32**, which only refer to Mordecai’s writing to the Jews of Persia, to recount the victory of the Jews over their enemies and obliging them to celebrate the holiday of Purim and detailing what Purim should involve. It is also unlikely that he would have praised himself, as recorded in **Est 10:2–3**. In any event, it is likely that Mordecai was a primary source for the information contained in the book.

The author clearly was a Jew, both because of the subject matter of the book and its accounting for the origin of the Jewish festival of Purim. The author also undoubtedly was a resident of the Persian Empire, and probably of the city of Susa, because of his knowledge of Persian life, customs, and the details of the events recorded in the book. **Est 10:2** suggests that the reign of Ahasuerus had ended. Therefore, the earliest the book could have been written would be 465 BC. The latest the book likely was written probably would have been before the Persian Empire fell to Greece in 331 BC.

The Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT, completed by 132 BC; also known as the LXX) and our contemporary Christian Bibles attempt to order the books of the Old Testament in essentially chronological order. Esther is placed after Ezra and Nehemiah as one of the “historical books.” The Hebrew Bible, on the other hand, places Esther in the *Ketuvim*, or “Writings,” along with Ruth and Daniel.

B. *Purpose and themes*

The book of Esther is the one book of the Bible in which God is never named—neither Elohim (God) nor Yahweh (Lord) is mentioned; and God never makes an appearance.³ The circumstances and events of the book all appear to be purely “natural,” without God’s overt appearance or supernatural interventions. Also, prayer is never mentioned throughout the book, although fasting is (**Est 4:16**). Nevertheless, God is clearly present “behind the scenes.” The existence of multiple “coincidences” necessary to the story show that God is the one driving the plot. As one Rabbi says, “the slogan of the Book seems to be that, ‘*the Guardian of Israel neither slumbereth, nor sleepeth*’ (*Psalms cxxi: 4*)” (Lehrman 1958: 58). The book of Esther shows that God is at work even in the most “secular” and “unspiritual” situations; he uses the choices of people—even their sinful actions—as his means to bring about his will. The book demonstrates God’s providential care of his people. His will ultimately overrules all things. Even though his people are in a foreign land, yet they are in his hands; even though God appears to be absent, yet he is present. God does intervene in human affairs, but he typically does so using human and other apparently “natural” means. Esther serves as an encouragement to the faithful who find themselves in situations where the world around them is contrary to their core beliefs and values.

Related to this is the fact that Esther is an example of God’s repaying people “according to their deeds.” That principle is found throughout the Bible (see, e.g., **Matt 16:27; 25:14–30; Luke 12:47–48; John 5:28–29; Acts 10:42; Rom 2:1–8; 12:19; 1 Cor 3:8, 11–15; 2 Cor 5:10; 11:15; Gal 6:7–8; Eph 6:8; Col 3:25; 2 Tim 4:1, 14; Heb 10:26–27; 1 Pet 1:17; 4:5; 2 Pet 2:20–22; Jude 14–15; Rev 2:23; 14:13; 20:11–13; 22:12**). God demonstrates this principle of judgment even when he does not overtly appear.

Another purpose of the book is to explain the origin of the feast of Purim. Purim (along with Hanukkah) was not part of the system of festivals, Sabbath years, and years of Jubilee established in the Torah (the Mosaic Law). Purim celebrates the Jewish victory over Haman as a result of Esther’s going into the king’s inner court at the risk of her life and inviting the king and Haman to a banquet at which she revealed the plot against the Jews; that caused the king to hang Haman and permit the Jews to defend themselves (**Est 4:1–9:17**). The name “Purim” comes from **Est 3:7**, “*In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King*

¹ “Ahasuerus” is the Hebrew transliteration of the Persian for “Xerxes” (“Ahasuerus” 2023). It should be noted that some argue that Ahasuerus actually refers to king Darius I, Xerxes’ father (see Austin 2023; Jordan 1996).

² Unless otherwise noted, the New American Standard Bible will be used throughout.

³ Some contend that God’s name also does not appear in the Song of Solomon. Indeed, his covenant name, Yahweh, does not appear in that book. However, the end of **Song 8:6** says, “*Jealousy is as severe as Sheol; its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD.*” The word translated “Lord” are the last few letters of the word *salhebet^{yah}*. Yah is an abbreviated form of Yahweh. However, some point out that “the word is probably better translated as a ‘God-like flame’ [or ‘a vehement flame’]. In context, since God’s love for us is deep and enduring, so must our love be for our spouses.” (Nally 2023; see also Bible Gateway 2023).

Ahasuerus, Pur, that is the lot, was cast before Haman from day to day and from month to month, until the twelfth month, that is the month Adar.” Purim is one of the most popular festivals among Jews. Mordecai had prescribed that the days of Purim were to be “*days of feasting and rejoicing and sending portions of food to one another and gifts to the poor*” (**Est 9:22**). Fasting is done on 13 Adar⁴ in commemoration of Esther’s 3-day fast (**Est 4:15-17**). Then on 14-15 Adar, Scripture verses are read, gift-giving is “an essential part of the celebration,” and “it is obligatory to eat, drink and be merry on Purim” (Lehrman 1958: 60, 65). Although Purim is not named elsewhere in the Bible, **John 5** recounts that Jesus went to Jerusalem to celebrate a feast of the Jews (**John 5:1**). At that time, he healed a lame man at the Pool of Bethesda. The feast was on a Sabbath (**John 5:9**). “The only feast day to fall on a Sabbath between AD 25 and AD 35 was Purim of AD 28” (Franz 2023: Jesus and Purim).

Esther foreshadows Jesus. Timothy Keller notes that “Jesus is the true and better Esther, who didn’t just risk losing an earthly palace but lost the ultimate heavenly one, who didn’t just risk his life but gave his life—to save his people” (Keller 2015: 78). Similarly, the Jews in the book of Esther foreshadow the church. In Esther, the Jews are not in Israel, but are living among the Gentiles throughout the Persian Empire. The Jews were living in a society, the spiritual and moral values of which were considerably different from theirs. Likewise, the church is present throughout the world, a world in which the spiritual and moral values of virtually all cultures and societies are considerably different from those of the church. In fact, **James 1:1** addresses the church in terms that echo the diaspora Jews (Jews living outside of Israel) of Esther’s day, i.e., “*to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad.*” Thus, the book of Esther raises, but does not necessarily answer, the question of how we relate to a culture and society whose values are different from our own.

The book of Ruth mirrors Esther. Esther and Ruth are the only two books of the Bible named after women. Although God is occasionally named in Ruth, unlike in Esther, all of the circumstances and events in Ruth (as in Esther) appear to be “natural.” Both books involve God’s salvation of his people from actual or threatened disasters.

C. The storyline

The book of Esther unfolds chronologically in a number of distinct episodes. The main characters are Mordecai, Esther, Haman, and the king. The plot revolves around the king deposing Queen Vashti and Esther becoming the new queen; then Mordecai becomes aware of a plot against the king and foiling the plot by informing Queen Esther. Haman is promoted by the king but develops a grudge against Mordecai, who refuses to bow to him. As a result of his hatred of Mordecai, Haman plots, with the king’s approval and edict, to destroy all of the Jews in the kingdom. After Esther learns of Haman’s plot, she plans a banquet for the king and Haman. In the meantime, the king is reminded that Mordecai had saved his life and, in a paradoxical turn of events, the king honors Mordecai by having Haman parade Mordecai through the streets to be honored by the people. At the banquet, Esther reveals that she is a Jew and that Haman’s plot would result in her own death. In another ironic turn of events, the king orders Haman to be hanged on the very gallows he had erected on which to hang Mordecai. The king then appoints Mordecai as his chief advisor. Although the king’s initial edict for the destruction of the Jews cannot be revoked, he issues a new edict allowing the Jews to defend themselves and to kill all those who try to kill them. On the appointed day, the Jews destroy their enemies, and Haman’s ten sons are all hanged. Mordecai and Esther then institute the feast of Purim as a perpetual celebration. The book ends with a tribute to the greatness of Mordecai.

From a storytelling point of view, “The storyline of Esther relies on twists and turns embedded in a kind of hiddenness. . . . This hiddenness sets the stage for the many delightful reversals. At first, no one except Mordecai knows who Esther is. . . . The queen of Persia, it turns out, was a humble Jewish woman. Mordecai is the hidden one who initially directs Esther; he is furthermore in the dark shadow as Haman’s opponent, the one whom Haman will slaughter along with all of the Jewish people. Yet, eventually, Mordecai comes to light as the one who had earlier saved the king from assassins. The behind-the-scenes uncle of Esther becomes one of the king’s right hand men. Chosen for her beauty, the submissive young queen of Persia nonetheless, in an extraordinary gesture, offers her life for her people: ‘if I perish, I perish’ (4:16).” (Newman 2021: 189)

D. Structure and outline

One writer’s detailed analysis of the book’s structure reveals that Esther is composed of thirteen episodes in a chiasmic pattern (Dorsey 1999: 162).⁵ He also concludes that the book also divides into two halves,

⁴ The Jewish month of Adar begins with the new moon of February-March.

⁵ A “chiasm” is when different concepts are repeated in inverted order, i.e., in the pattern: A-B-C-C’-B’-A’ or A-B-C-D-C’-

1:1-22—6:1-14 and **6:1-14—9:20-10:3**, each half forming its own chiasmic pattern, with chapter 6 acting as the turning point of the story and doing double duty as both the end of the first section and the beginning of the second section (Dorsey 1999: 162). One way to outline the book is as follows:

I. The King's and Queen's banquets, Queen Vashti's refusal, and the king's proclamation in response (1:1-22)

- Introduction, invitees, and the king's wealth (1:1-4)
- Description of the banquet (1:5-8)
- Queen Vashti's banquet for the women (1:9)
- The king's request; the Queen's refusal (1:10-12)
- Advice to the king and the king's decision (1:13-20)
- The king's proclamation (1:21-22)

II. Esther becomes the new queen (2:1-20)

- The king agrees to hold a nation-wide beauty pageant to replace Vashti as queen (2:1-4)
- Mordecai and Esther are introduced to us (2:5-7)
- Esther finds favor in the king's palace (2:8-11)
- The procedure for the young women with the king (2:12-14)
- Esther becomes the new queen (2:15-18)
- Esther does not reveal that she is a Jew (2:19-20)

III. Mordecai saves the king's life from a plot by two of his officials (2:21-23)

IV. Haman's plot against the Jews (3:1-15)

- Haman is promoted, but Mordecai refuses to bow to him, which fills Haman with rage (3:1-6)
- Haman plots to kill all the Jews in the kingdom (3:7-11)
- An edict is sent throughout the kingdom to kill all the Jews on 13 Adar (3:12-15)

V. Esther learns of Haman's plot and plans to intercede (4:1-17)

- Mordecai and the Jews learn of Haman's plot and lament (4:1-3)
- Mordecai informs Esther of the situation (4:4-9)
- Esther agrees to go before the king at the risk of her life (4:10-17)

VI. Esther's first banquet for the king and Haman; Haman's response (5:1-14)

- Esther hosts a banquet for the king and Haman (5:1-8)
- Despite his wealth and position, Haman is dissatisfied whenever he sees Mordecai (5:9-13)
- At his wife's suggestion, Haman constructs a gallows 50 cubits high on which to hang Mordecai (5:14)

VII. The king requires Haman to publicly honor Mordecai; Haman's downfall is predicted (6:1-13)

- The king learns that Mordecai had never been honored for saving his life (6:1-3)
- Haman unwittingly proposes the means and honors Mordecai (6:4-11)
- Haman's wife predicts Haman's downfall if Mordecai is a Jew (6:12-13)

VIII. Esther's second banquet results in Haman's execution (6:14-7:10)

- At her second banquet, Esther exposes Haman as the person behind the plot to kill her and her people (6:14-7:6)
- The king orders Haman to be hanged on the gallows that had prepared for Mordecai, and he is (7:7-10)

IX. Mordecai is promoted to Haman's place, and the Jews are authorized to defend themselves and destroy their enemies (8:1-17)

- Mordecai is promoted to Haman's place (8:1-2)
- Esther implores the king to revoke the letters devised by Haman (8:3-6)

B'-A'. The central element may be the point of emphasis.

- The king authorizes letters to be sent throughout the kingdom granting the Jews the right to defend themselves and destroy their enemies (8:7-14)
- Response of the people to the king's new decree (8:15-17)

X. The Jews destroy their enemies throughout the kingdom, Haman's sons are hanged, and the feast of Purim is instituted (9:1-32)

- The Jews destroy their enemies (9:1-10)
- Esther petitions the king to order that Haman's ten sons be hanged and the Jews of Susa be granted another day to kill their enemies; those petitions are granted (9:11-15)
- The Jews make 14-15 Adar days of feasting and rejoicing (9:16-19)
- Mordecai and Esther send letters throughout the kingdom establishing 14-15 Adar as the feast of Purim (9:20-32)

XI. The greatness of Mordecai (10:1-3)

- The power of the king (10:1)
- The greatness of Mordecai (10:2-3)

II. Commentary on Esther

A. *The King's and Queen's banquets, Queen Vashti's refusal, and the king's proclamation in response (1:1-22)*

This opening section of the book sets the scene, which ultimately leads to Esther becoming the new queen of the Persian Empire.

- Introduction, invitees, and the king's wealth (1:1-4)

¹Now it took place in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia over 127 provinces, ²in those days as King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne which was at the citadel in Susa, ³in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his princes and attendants, the army officers of Persia and Media, the nobles and the princes of his provinces being in his presence. ⁴And he displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty for many days, 180 days.

Assuming King Ahasuerus to be Xerxes I would mean that he was the grandson of Cyrus the Great and son of Darius I. In 538 BC, Cyrus had authorized the Jews to return to Israel from their exile in Babel and rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-11). Darius reauthorized the building of the temple after it had been stopped (Ezra 4:8—6:12). The king's power was immense, as indicated by the size of his empire (Est 1:1), the amount of his riches (Est 1:4), his gathering beautiful young virgins from all over the empire for himself (Est 2:3-4), his decree to annihilate the Jews (Est 3:12-13), and his decree that the Jews could defend themselves and annihilate their enemies (Est 8:8-10). Susa was located in what is now the southern part of Iran, approximately 150 miles (240 kilometers) north of the western tip of the Persian Gulf.

- Description of the banquet (1:5-8)

⁵When these days were completed, the king gave a banquet lasting seven days for all the people who were present at the citadel in Susa, from the greatest to the least, in the court of the garden of the king's palace. ⁶There were hangings of fine white and violet linen held by cords of fine purple linen on silver rings and marble columns, and couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and precious stones. ⁷Drinks were served in golden vessels of various kinds, and the royal wine was plentiful according to the king's bounty. ⁸The drinking was done according to the law, there was no compulsion, for so the king had given orders to each official of his household that he should do according to the desires of each person.

There is a question of whether or not the banquet referred to in v. 5 is the same as the banquet referred to in v. 3. The word "banquet" in the two verses "is the same Hebrew word . . . but different Greek words are used by the Septuagint to translate these two uses. The Greek word in Esther 1:3 is **dochē** (a feast) and here in Esther 1:5 is **potos** which signifies a drinking party or a carousing, which fits perfectly with the description in Esther 1:8." ("Esther 1-2" 2021: Partying for Seven Days Straight) If there was only one feast, then vv. 5-8 amount to a description of the banquet first mentioned in v. 3. If that is the case, then the king displayed his

wealth for 180 days and then gave one feast that lasted for seven days. On the other hand, **v. 3** indicates that the first banquet was for government officials and army officers, whereas **v. 5** indicates that the second was for the people of Susa, “*from the greatest to the least.*” If there were two banquets, the first may have been for planning military strategy or dealing with other governmental or military issues. First century historian Josephus said that there were two banquets, the first long one for Persian government officials and the second week-long feast for representatives of other nations who were in Susa (Josephus 1987: *Ant.* 11.186-87).

- Queen Vashti’s banquet for the women (1:9)

⁹ *Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the palace which belonged to King Ahasuerus.*

Persian law and custom did not require men and women to celebrate separately. It may be that Queen Vashti and the women may have felt uncomfortable in the presence of a large number of drunken men. That is suggested by the reason why the king summoned her to come to his banquet (“*to display her beauty to the people and the princes,*” **v. 10**) and her refusal to do so.

- The king’s request; the Queen’s refusal (1:10-12)

¹⁰ *On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus,* ¹¹ *to bring Queen Vashti before the king with her royal crown in order to display her beauty to the people and the princes, for she was beautiful.* ¹² *But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king’s command delivered by the eunuchs. Then the king became very angry and his wrath burned within him.*

King Ahasuerus’s command that Queen Vashti present herself to show off her beauty appears to have been a rash decision while he was drunk (“*merry with wine,*” **v. 10**). According to *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, his command was also contrary to law, because “it was unlawful, on pain of death, for anyone but the king, close relatives, and eunuchs to see the royal wives and concubines” (“Courts and Courtiers” 2011: The Royal Household). He apparently wanted to display her beauty to his guests just as he had displayed his other riches. In fact, “Some Jewish sources interpreted the order to mean that she was to appear nude, except for her crown” (Huey 1988: 800; see also Josephus 1987: *Ant.* 11.191n.b).

Wine had been a part of Persian culture for thousands of years; “one of the world’s earliest known wine-making artifacts originates in Neolithic Persia (in modern day Hajji Firuz, Iran) from around 5,000 BCE” (“Persian Decision Making” 2022: Persian Wine) Interestingly, the king’s decision was somewhat in keeping with Persian culture. Ancient Greek Historian Herodotus reports that it was the custom of the Persians “to deliberate about the gravest matters when they are drunk; and what they approve in their deliberations is proposed to them the next day, when they are sober, by the master of the house where they deliberate; and if, being sober, they still approve it, they act on it, but if not, they drop it. And if they have deliberated about a matter when sober, they decide upon it when they are drunk.” (Herodotus 1920: 1.133.3-4) However, in this case the king did not wait until the next day when he was sober to reconsider the matter.

Xerxes’ becoming “*very angry*” at the queen’s refusal to come and display herself was in keeping with his character. When he invaded Greece, he had his men construct a bridge across the Hellespont. A storm destroyed the bridge. Herodotus reports, “When Xerxes heard of this, he was very angry and commanded that the Hellespont be whipped with three hundred lashes, and a pair of fetters be thrown into the sea. I have even heard that he sent branders with them to brand the Hellespont. He commanded them while they whipped to utter words outlandish and presumptuous, ‘Bitter water, our master thus punishes you, because you did him wrong though he had done you none. Xerxes the king will pass over you, whether you want it or not; in accordance with justice no one offers you sacrifice, for you are a turbid and briny river.’ He commanded that the sea receive these punishments and that the overseers of the bridge over the Hellespont be beheaded.” (Herodotus 1920: 7.35.1-3)

- Advice to the king and the king’s decision (1:13-20)

¹³ *Then the king said to the wise men who understood the times—for it was the custom of the king so to speak before all who knew law and justice* ¹⁴ *and were close to him: Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media who had access to the king’s presence and sat in the first place in the kingdom—* ¹⁵ *“According to law, what is to be done with Queen Vashti, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus delivered by the eunuchs?”*

¹⁶ *In the presence of the king and the princes, Memucan said, “Queen Vashti has wronged not only*

the king but also all the princes and all the peoples who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus. ¹⁷ For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women causing them to look with contempt on their husbands by saying, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in to his presence, but she did not come.' ¹⁸ This day the ladies of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's conduct will speak in the same way to all the king's princes, and there will be plenty of contempt and anger. ¹⁹ If it pleases the king, let a royal edict be issued by him and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media so that it cannot be repealed, that Vashti may no longer come into the presence of King Ahasuerus, and let the king give her royal position to another who is more worthy than she. ²⁰ When the king's edict which he will make is heard throughout all his kingdom, great as it is, then all women will give honor to their husbands, great and small."

In v. 13, the reference to the men “*who understood the times*” suggests that they were astrologers (see Baldwin 1970: 415; Huey 1988: 801). The seven princes or counselors of v. 14 are also referred to in **Ezra 7:14**. The laws of Persia and Media not being able to be repealed is corroborated in **Est 8:8** and **Dan 6:8, 12, 15**.

The interchange between the king and Memucan is interesting for at least two reasons. First, as Lois Semenyé points out, “It seems that the king made no attempt to ask Vashti why she had not come. This suggests a certain arrogance, which is also not unknown in Africa. Men should not only ask advice from their friends or counsellors but also from the ones who are closest to them, their wives. Vashti may have had good reason for refusing to appear.” (Smeenyé 2006: 560) Up until now, Vashti had always been referred to as Queen Vashti (**Est 1:9, 11-12, 15-17**). Beginning in v. 19 and in all subsequent references to her (**Est 2:1, 4, 17**), Vashti is no longer referred to as “Queen.” That indicates that she had been demoted from being queen. This sets the stage for the beauty pageant of chapter 2, which results in Esther becoming the new queen.

Second, Queen Vashti's refusal to obey the king's command was seen by the King's advisors, not as a private or personal matter but as a matter that went to the heart of all marriages and the relationship between all husbands and wives. Memucan viewed Vashti's action as threatening male dominance in marriage. The resulting edict and law required all wives throughout the kingdom to honor their husbands.

- The king's proclamation (1:21-22)

²¹ *This word pleased the king and the princes, and the king did as Memucan proposed. ²² So he sent letters to all the king's provinces, to each province according to its script and to every people according to their language, that every man should be the master in his own house and the one who speaks in the language of his own people.*

The king's edict requiring all wives to honor their husbands provides the background for some of the ironic reversals found in this book. Gabriel Hornung explains, “Turning his personal insecurity into unbendable but also completely untenable state policy, Ahasuerus demands that, as long as the deposed queen disobeyed him, then all the wives in his entire empire must always obey their husbands (Esth 1:16-22). That this foolish edict is so thoroughly inverted throughout the rest of the book shows the embarrassing mirror between inner and outer: as Zeresh [Haman's wife] commands Haman to erect a stake (Esth 5:14), and Esther dictates the terms of her people's deliverance to the king himself (Esth 8:5-8).” (Hornung 2020: 575)

The Persian view of male dominance is indicated by the Hebrew word for “husband” in **vv. 17, 20**. The word is *ba'al*, “which means ‘lord’ or ‘owner.’ It is also the name of the Canaanite deity Baal.” (Huey 1988: 803) This idea of a husband's dominance is reinforced by the king's edict in v. 22, where he refers to the husband as the “master” in his own house.

This is considerably different from the biblical view of the relationship between husbands and wives. God ordained marriage when he created Adam and Eve, and said that the two would become “*one flesh*” (**Gen 2:24; Matt 19:5**). God made Eve from Adam's own substance, his own body, his rib, a substance different from animals. That implies: (A) She is not to be identified with the animal world; (B) She is not a beast of burden, despite many cultures that treat women as such; and (C) She is not to be beaten, physically or verbally. Instead, “*husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church.*” (**Eph 5:28-29**) As someone wisely said, “The woman was not made from man's head, to rule over him, or from his feet, to be crushed by him, but from his side, to complement him as an equal partner, but with a different role.”

Males and females *equally* bear the “image of God.” **Gen 1:26** says, “*Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.*” The basic meaning for “man” (*adam*) is the collective “mankind, people,” which includes both males and females. That is made clear in the next clause, which says, “*and let them rule . . .*”

Gen 1:27 makes explicit that both males and females are included equally, since it says, “*And God created man [adam] in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*” Further, in **Gen 1:28** God blessed “them” (the man and the woman) equally and spoke to “them.” In **Gen 1:29**, when God says “*I have given you every plant yielding seed,*” the “you” is plural, not singular. Thus, as Hoekema explains, “*Man and woman together are the image of God. . . . Man’s having been created male and female is an essential aspect of the image of God. . . . Man’s existence as male and female means that man as a masculine being has been created for partnership with another being who is essentially like him but yet mysteriously unlike him. It means that woman is the completion of man’s own humanity, and that man is wholly himself only in his relationship with woman.*” (Hoekema 1986: 97, *emph. in orig.*)

While **Eph 5:23** says that “*the husband is the head of the wife,*” the biblical view of the relationship between husbands and wives is considerably different from the Persian view. Although most translations of **Eph 5:22** say something like “*Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord,*” the words “*be subject*” are actually not in the Greek of **5:22**; they are only found in **Eph 5:21**, which refers to *mutual* submission as being one of the signs that people are filled with the Holy Spirit. Nowhere in **Ephesians 5**, or elsewhere, does the Bible tell husbands to “make” or “force” their wives to “submit” or “be subject” to them, or even to “make sure” that they submit. A wife’s submission is a choice she makes, and ultimately it is an issue between her and God. Paul’s instructions to wives to submit to their husbands are instructions *to the wives, not to the husbands*. On the other hand, **Eph 5:25** instructs husbands to “*love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.*” Christ’s love for his wife, the church (see **Rev 21:2, 9-10**), is both unique and sacrificial. It is unlike his love for anyone or anything else. He left heaven, gave up all he had, and sacrificed everything, including his life, for the sake of his bride. In short, he put her interest and wellbeing over his own. Christ’s actions toward us and his relationship with us—and the biblical commands for husbands to treat their own wives the way Christ treats the church—are virtually the exact opposite of the Persian view of a husband’s dominance over his wife.⁶

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the wealth and power of King Ahasuerus described in **vv. 1-8** and what he does with them relate to the gospel and what we should do to the extent God has blessed us financially and in other ways in this world?

2. In Christ, “*there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (**Gal 3:28**). Nevertheless, there are profound differences between males and females. To what extent and in what ways do you think males and females in the church should have their own separate ministries (e.g., Vashti’s separate banquet for the women) versus having common ministry, and why?

3. Discuss the communication—or lack of communication—between the king and Vashti.

- What problems do lack of communication cause in our marriages, and what are specific ways in which we can improve communication between husbands and wives?

4. Discuss the Persian versus the biblical view of the relationship between husbands and wives.

- To what extent does our culture lead us to have a more Persian, rather than biblical, approach to marriage relationships?
- What are specific ways in which husbands can “*love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her*”?

B. Esther becomes the new queen (2:1-20)

This section, like chapter one, sets the stage by introducing us to two of the main characters in this drama, Mordecai and Esther. It also details the procedure of how Esther became the new Queen of Persia and the crucial fact that she did not disclose that she was a Jew.

⁶ For a comprehensive discussion of biblical marriage, see Menn 2016.

- The king agrees to hold a nation-wide beauty pageant to replace Vashti as queen (2:1-4)

¹ *After these things when the anger of King Ahasuerus had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what had been decreed against her.* ² *Then the king's attendants, who served him, said, "Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king.* ³ *Let the king appoint overseers in all the provinces of his kingdom that they may gather every beautiful young virgin to the citadel of Susa, to the harem, into the custody of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let their cosmetics be given them.* ⁴ *Then let the young lady who pleases the king be queen in place of Vashti."* And the matter pleased the king, and he did accordingly.

"After these things" (v. 1) suggests the passage of some time. That is confirmed by the fact that the king's banquet had taken place in the third year of his reign (1:3), but Esther became the new queen in the seventh year of the king's reign (2:16). One reason for the delay is that the second Greco-Persian War, in which Xerxes personally led the Persian invasion of Greece, took place from 480-478 BC. After their initial victory over the Greeks at the battle of Thermopylae, the Persians were defeated and withdrew from Europe.

Just as the king's command to Vashti was apparently contrary to Persian law, so was this procedure for getting a new queen. The reason is that, while the king had several wives and many concubines, "he could marry women only from the six leading Persian noble families." ("Courts and Courtiers" 2011: The Royal Household) The girls who were to become part of the king's harem were not volunteers. Instead, they were, in essence, kidnapped. Apparently, they had no right to return to their homes if they did not please the king.

- Mordecai and Esther are introduced to us (2:5-7)

⁵ *Now there was at the citadel in Susa a Jew whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite,* ⁶ *who had been taken into exile from Jerusalem with the captives who had been exiled with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had exiled.* ⁷ *He was bringing up Hadassah, that is Esther, his uncle's daughter, for she had no father or mother. Now the young lady was beautiful of form and face, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.*

As a Benjamite, Mordecai was of the same tribe as Israel's first king, King Saul. His name is the Hebraized form of the Babylonian god Marduk. This practice of giving Babylonian and Hebrew names to the same person arose during the exile of Israel in Babylon (see Huey 1988: 805; see also **Dan 1:6-7**). He may have been a minor official in the Persian government; his "sitting at the king's gate" (2:19, 21) hints at this. He also may have been a eunuch, because no wife or family is mentioned in v. 7, and he may have had access to the women's quarters (v. 11).

Since Esther was the daughter of Mordecai's uncle, Mordecai and Esther were first cousins.⁷ Hadassah was Esther's Hebrew name and means "myrtle." Myrtle is an evergreen shrub which has glossy aromatic foliage and white flowers followed by purple-black oval berries. "Throughout Europe and across the Middle East, the folklore associated with myrtle suggests a common symbolism of romance, devotion, beauty and love. To the Persians, Jews and Arabs, myrtle was a symbol of paradise. In a spiritual context, the myrtle flower can also symbolise purification and rebirth, while in the language of flowers, the white or creamy colour of its blossoms represent purity, hope and innocence." (Lawless 2022: n.p.) The name Esther "probably derives from the Persian word for star, though some connect it with the Babylonian goddess Ishtar" (Baldwin 1970: 416).

- Esther finds favor in the king's palace (2:8-11)

⁸ *So it came about when the command and decree of the king were heard and many young ladies were gathered to the citadel of Susa into the custody of Hegai, that Esther was taken to the king's palace into the custody of Hegai, who was in charge of the women.* ⁹ *Now the young lady pleased him and found favor with him. So he quickly provided her with her cosmetics and food, gave her seven choice maids from the king's palace and transferred her and her maids to the best place in the harem.* ¹⁰ *Esther did not make known her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make them known.* ¹¹ *Every day Mordecai walked back and forth in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and how she fared.*

Josephus reports that 400 young ladies were brought to Susa under Hegai's care as part of the beauty

⁷ Josephus calls Mordecai Esther's uncle (Josephus 1987: *Ant.* 11.198, 207).

pageant (Josephus 1987: *Ant.* 11.200). In addition to being beautiful, Esther also had a winning personality. She pleased the eunuch in charge of the women, who provided her with special favors. Unlike Daniel, she did not protest against the food that was given her (see **Dan 1:8-16**). In fact, in every way (her name change, eating the food given her, taking advantage of the other benefits Hegai conferred on her, not revealing that she was Jewish, and ultimately marrying the Gentile King Xerxes, Esther appears to have used her beauty without protest and accepted the advancement it provided to her).

With respect to Esther's not revealing that she was a Jew, F. B. Huey observes, "She would have stood little chance to be selected queen if she were not Persian, but why would Mordecai want her to marry a Gentile? Such a marriage was a violation of Jewish laws. Also there was no threat by Haman or known antipathy to the Jews at the time to warrant his secrecy." (Huey 1988: 806) On the other hand, **Est 4:14** suggests that the providence of God was at work in this and, indeed, in all of the other events of the book. In fact, that is one of the major themes of the book: God is always at work; he is bringing about the execution of his plan through seemingly "natural" means even when he does not appear to be present. "Coincidences" really are not coincidences. The king got drunk at his party. If he hadn't gotten drunk, he probably wouldn't have demanded that Vashti come and exhibit herself in front of a bunch of drunken men. Vashti had the character to refuse to do that. But because she refused the king's demand, it was determined that she would be deposed as queen and a new queen selected. Ultimately, the one selected was Esther, a Jew. That fact was necessary for the Jews to be saved when Haman plotted to have them all killed. In all of these events, we cannot see God's hand at work, and many of these events may appear to go against God's will, just as Joseph's brothers' selling Joseph into slavery was a sin; yet God was present in that and used it to save a multitude of people from starvation (**Gen 45:5-7; 50:20**).⁸

- The procedure for the young women with the king (2:12-14)

¹² *Now when the turn of each young lady came to go in to King Ahasuerus, after the end of her twelve months under the regulations for the women—for the days of their beautification were completed as follows: six months with oil of myrrh and six months with spices and the cosmetics for women—¹³ the young lady would go in to the king in this way: anything that she desired was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. ¹⁴ In the evening she would go in and in the morning she would return to the second harem, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not again go in to the king unless the king delighted in her and she was summoned by name.*

These verses detail the process of preparing the young women for their time with the king. In v. 13, Lois Semenyé says that each girl could "take whatever she wanted with her to enhance her beauty" (Semenyé 2006: 561). Josephus states that a new girl was sent to be with the king in his bed "every day" (Josephus 1987: *Ant.* 11.201). Whereas the NASB translates v. 14 as saying that in the morning the girl would return "to the second harem," the Interlinear Bible and Young's Literal Translation translate it as "to the second house of the women." Those rejected by the king and not summoned by him again, essentially lived the rest of their lives like widows (see **2 Sam 20:3**).

- Esther becomes the new queen (2:15-18)

¹⁵ *Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai who had taken her as his daughter, came to go in to the king, she did not request anything except what Hegai, the king's eunuch*

⁸ There are a number of commonalities between Joseph and Esther: "Joseph finds favor in the eyes of others as does Esther. Joseph is loved by the father figure, Jacob (Gen 37:3), as Esther apparently is by Mordecai. And, like Esther, Joseph is physically beautiful, of 'pleasant shape and pleasant appearance' (39:6 [my translation]; cf. Esth 2:7), and attracts sexual attention (Gen 39:7-12). More to the point, it is said repeatedly that Joseph "finds favor [יָצָא חֵן]" in the eyes of his superiors (39:4) or that he is 'given favor [נָתַן חֵן]' by superiors (39:21), ultimately winning even Pharaoh's favor and trust (41:37-43), just as Esther wins the favor of Hegai and the favor and devotion of Ahasuerus." (Cho 2021: 670) Gabriel Hornung adds, "From a beauty queen without the necessary courage to defend her people, she, much like Joseph before her, must develop into a leader capable of achieving hard-fought victory" (Hornung 2020: 579n.29) The overall pattern of reversals in the two stories are strikingly similar. Hornung explains, "Reunited with Joseph and the two sons he had worried about losing (Gen 42:36, 38; 45:28; 46:29-30), Jacob's expectation of bereavement is completely upended by a familial reunification in Egypt that also delivers the entire Israelite clan from the famine (Gen 47:3-6, 12). And, convincing the king to rid himself of Haman and his vicious threat (Esth 7:3-10), Esther's grave fear of death is turned entirely upside down by the elevation of Mordecai and the overwhelming Jewish triumph that ensues (Esth 8:2; 9:1-17)." (Hornung 2020: 581)

who was in charge of the women, advised. And Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her. ¹⁶ *So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus to his royal palace in the tenth month which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.* ¹⁷ *The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she found favor and kindness with him more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti.* ¹⁸ *Then the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet, for all his princes and his servants; he also made a holiday for the provinces and gave gifts according to the king's bounty.*

Note that Esther complied with all the requirements of the beauty pageant: she began as a beautiful girl and went through the year-long beautification and dietary process without complaint. She went along with whatever Hegai said. She was able to use all of that to her ultimate advantage. On the other hand, Esther's modesty in not requesting anything other than what Hegai advised is in contrast with the other girls who were given anything that they desired (v. 13). Thus, although she was physically beautiful, it primarily was because of her character that "*Esther found favor in the eyes of all who saw her*" (v. 15). In fact, the typical Hebrew expression for "*found favor in the eyes of*" is in the passive tense. In Esther, however, the narrator consistently uses an awkward and more active construction ("*rose in favor,*" 2:9, 15, 17; 5:2). Paul Cho points out, "The active construction, which appears only in Esther and whose oddity draws attention to itself, suggests that Esther does not passively find favor but actively wins, herself pulls and lifts it out of others. That is, the phrase *הָיָה לָהּ חֵן* suggests that Esther, in some mysterious way, exercises agency to win favor from others and does not passively receive it on account of her outward beauty alone." (Cho 2021: 668) She knew how to use what she had, i.e., what God had given her (her beauty; her personality), even though some of what she had was derived from human technology (the cosmetics and food). That is a lesson for all of us.

One thing this should cause us to reflect on is that, much like Persian society in Esther's day, our cultures and societies today largely value externals: wealth, power, possessions (i.e., the king) and physical beauty and refinement (Esther). To one degree or another, everyone is influenced and affected by these cultural values (see 1 Sam 16:7). This raises the issue of how we relate to our culture and its values. To what extent do we "go along to get along" with the culture? To what extent do we withdraw from the culture or do various forms of protest against the culture? If we do not think about these things, we are likely to be enslaved by the culture and its values without even realizing it.

As a final note, the holiday and gift-giving by the king in honor of Esther foreshadows the manner of celebrating the feast of Purim (9:22).

- Esther does not reveal that she is a Jew (2:19-20)

¹⁹ *When the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate.*

²⁰ *Esther had not yet made known her kindred or her people, even as Mordecai had commanded her; for Esther did what Mordecai told her as she had done when under his care.*

The gathering of the virgins the second time is unclear. Semenyne and Baldwin think this refers to the king's continuing to have sex with others despite his having married Esther (Semenyne 2006: 562; Baldwin 1970: 416). Mordecai's sitting at the king's gate indicates that he was a man of importance. It is possible that he was appointed to an official position by Esther or at her request. This is the second time we are informed that, per Mordecai's command, Esther did not reveal to anyone that she was a Jew (see also v. 10). Although we do not know the specific reason for this secrecy, it forms an important part of the plot of the story.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Greco-Persian War had important geopolitical consequences; however, it is not even mentioned in the Bible. What does that tell us about the things that are so important to us compared to that which is important to God? And how should that affect us?
2. Much like Persian society in Esther's day, our cultures and societies today largely value externals: wealth, power, possessions (i.e., the king) and physical beauty and refinement (Esther). To one degree or another, everyone is influenced and affected by these cultural values. This raises the issue of how we relate to our culture and its values. To what extent do we or should we compromise with the culture, i.e., "go along to get along"? To what extent do we or should we withdraw from the culture or do various forms of protest against the culture?
3. Assess Esther's character and conduct (e.g., not revealing she was a Jew, taking a new name, participating in

the beauty pageant, eating the Persian food she was given, complying with whatever Hegai said, sleeping with a Gentile before marriage, and then marrying a Gentile unbeliever) compared to the character and conduct of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (although serving in the Babylonian court, they made clear that they were Jews by obeying the Mosaic food laws and not eating the Babylonian food, they refused to bow down to the golden idol, and continued to pray to God in violation of the king's order). What lessons can we learn from this?

4. What do you think of Esther's not revealing the fact that she was a Jew?

5. Discuss how God operates "behind the scenes" using seemingly "natural" means, events, and "coincidences" to effectuate his will and plan. As you think back to your own life, do you see similar phenomena?

C. Mordecai saves the king's life from a plot by two of his officials (2:21-23)

- ²¹ *In those days, while Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king's officials from those who guarded the door, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. ²² But the plot became known to Mordecai and he told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name. ²³ Now when the plot was investigated and found to be so, they were both hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the Book of the Chronicles in the king's presence.*

The Bible does not say why Bigthan and Teresh became angry with the king. In v. 21, the Septuagint says that the reason was because Mordecai had been promoted. Plots against Persian monarchs were not uncommon. Xerxes was, in fact, assassinated by one of his officials in 465 BC. Although Mordecai's saving the king's life by revealing the plot was recorded in the official records, the king did not reward him at that time. This is similar to what had happened to Joseph, whose interpretation of the chief cupbearer's dream was forgotten by the cupbearer after his release from prison (**Gen 40:23**). Again, however, this proves to be important to the plot of the story and shows the providence of God in operation. Although God's timing may not be our timing, he is always at work in carrying out his plan.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss God's providence, his working "behind the scenes," and his timing. Looking back on your own life, how do you see these things in operation?

D. Haman's plot against the Jews (3:1-15)

In this chapter we see how and why the great plot to destroy all the Jews is formed. The rest of the book details the response to this plot.

- Haman is promoted, but Mordecai refuses to bow to him, which fills Haman with rage (3:1-6)
¹ *After these events King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and established his authority over all the princes who were with him. ² All the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman; for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage. ³ Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why are you transgressing the king's command?" ⁴ Now it was when they had spoken daily to him and he would not listen to them, that they told Haman to see whether Mordecai's reason would stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew. ⁵ When Haman saw that Mordecai neither bowed down nor paid homage to him, Haman was filled with rage. ⁶ But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him who the people of Mordecai were; therefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.*

"After these events" indicates the passage of time. Haman was promoted sometime between the seventh year of Xerxes' reign (**2:16**) and the twelfth year of his reign (**3:7**). Haman is described as an Agagite. Most commentators conclude that Haman was a descendant of the Amalekite king Agag, the enemy of Israel during King Saul's reign (**1 Sam 15:7-33**). If that is the case, the author may be indicating that the ancient hatred between the Amalekites and the Jews had been inherited by Haman. Josephus states that Haman was an

Amalekite and was naturally an enemy of the Jews because the Amalekites had been destroyed by Israel (Josephus 1987: *Ant.* 11.211).

The fact that the king had to command his servants to bow down to Haman (v. 2) suggests that they were reluctant on their own to honor him. The reason why Mordecai refused to bow to Haman is not entirely clear. Mordecai had told the king's servants that his refusal to bow and pay homage to Haman was related to the fact that he was a Jew (v. 4). However, the act of bowing or prostrating oneself to a superior, in and of itself, was not against any OT law. There are several examples of God's people prostrating themselves before kings or other people (see **Gen 23:7; 27:29; 1 Sam 24:8; 2 Sam 14:4; 18:28; 1 Kgs 1:16**). It may have been Mordecai's pride that led him to refuse to pay homage to a member of the ancient enemy of the Jews whom God had devoted to destruction (**Exod 17:14-16; Deut 25:17-19; 1 Sam 15:18**). On the other hand, it is idolatry to worship another person. Josephus indicates that the bowing to Haman was, in fact, a form of worship, and that is why Mordecai refused (Josephus 1987: *Ant.* 11.209-210). The Septuagint contains additions to the Hebrew text of Esther, including a prayer of Mordecai which explains why he refused to bow to Haman: "*I have done this, that I might not set the glory of man above the glory of God: and I will not worship any one except thee, my Lord, and I will not do these things in haughtiness.*" (**Est 4:17e, LXX**).⁹ Josephus similarly indicates that Haman sought to be worshipped (Josephus 1987: 11.277). It is also interesting that Mordecai, who had told Esther to keep her Jewishness a secret, here exposes the fact that he himself is a Jew. Upon learning this, Haman viewed Mordecai as representative of all Jews and generalized his hatred of Mordecai to all Jews. Although the text does not say that anyone except Mordecai refused to bow to Haman, Baldwin points out, "If fear of idolatry lay behind the refusal to bow down then no Jew would bow down, and Haman's decision to take vengeance on the whole people becomes understandable" (Baldwin 1970: 417).

The fact that Haman was filled with rage as a result of Mordecai's not bowing to him (v. 5) tells us something very important about Haman. Pride (sinful pride) essentially is an unremitting concentration on the self, i.e., self-absorption.¹⁰ There are different types of pride. One type of pride is where the person feels he or she is superior to others; he or she tends to be arrogant and look down on everyone else. On the other hand, there is a form of pride based on feelings of inferiority; the person feels he or she is never good enough, is very self-conscious, and is always beating him- or herself up; that is just as self-absorbed as the person who thinks he or she is better than everyone else. That form of pride can be just as deadly as the first, since "self-contempt can be made the starting point for contempt of other selves, and thus for gloom, cynicism, and cruelty" (Lewis 1961: 63). C. S. Lewis observes, "As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things or people [either others or himself]: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you." (Lewis 1996: 111) There is also a national/racial/tribal type of sinful pride. It may be expressed by assertions of superiority while at the same time be based on feelings of inferiority. This can, of course, result in tremendous evil, even genocide, as was seen in the Germans' attitude toward the Jews (and others) in the 1930s-1940s and the Rwandan Hutus' attitude toward the Tutsis, both of which culminated in genocide.

Sinful pride is the opposite of humility. Lewis characterizes humility this way: a truly humble person "will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all. If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realise that one is proud. . . . At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed. . . . The next step is to make some serious attempt to practice the Christian virtues. . . . The main thing we learn from a serious attempt to practice the Christian virtues is that we fail. . . . Then comes another discovery. Every faculty you have, your power of thinking or of moving your limbs from moment to moment, is given you by God." (Lewis 1996: 114, 125) That realization, when it sinks in deeply enough, enables us to draw on *him* (his heart, **Ezek 36:26**; his mind, **1 Cor 2:16**; his Spirit, **John 14:17**; his Word, **John 8:31-32**; and his body, **Col 1:18**) in a way that we forget about ourselves and let God "*work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure*" (**Phil 2:13**). Christ wants to turn our minds from absorption with ourselves to him and our neighbors.

⁹ The Septuagint is canonical in the (Eastern; Greek; Russian) Orthodox churches. Sidnie White Crawford states, "The purpose of the Additions in the Septuagint Esther is straightforward. Masoretic text Esther is notorious, both today and in the past, for its lack of religious language, particularly its omission of any mention of God. The Additions supply this lack, containing prayers and a prophetic dream, and giving credit for the salvation of the Jews entirely to God. Further, the Additions heighten the dramatic interest of the story by emphasizing the emotions of the characters." (Crawford 2000: 1) The Septuagint's additions to Esther are so numerous and significant that "it should be considered a separate literary work from the Masoretic text Esther" (Crawford 2000: 1).

¹⁰ There is, of course, a benign, non-sinful, or positive type of pride, e.g., "I am proud of my son or daughter or father"; "I am proud of my school or country." Such warm-hearted affection is not the type of pride we are dealing with here.

His heart, his mind, his Spirit, his Word, and his body are his means of grace to enable us to do that. Christ did for us what we never could do for ourselves—he lived the life we should have lived and he paid the price for our sins that we could never pay. The fact that he had to die on the cross to save us should humble us; but the fact that he did it voluntarily because he loves us should affirm us. When we take this deeply into ourselves and draw on his means of grace, we can forget about ourselves and focus our lives on him and on our neighbors. In the end, the truly humble person “could design the best cathedral in the world, and know it to be the best, and rejoice in the fact, without being any more (or less) or otherwise glad at having done it than he would be if it had been done by another” (Lewis 1961: 64).¹¹

Lewis points out that “Pride is essentially competitive in a way the other vices are not” (Lewis 1996: 110). For example, two men may want the same girl, “but a proud man will take your girl from you, not because he wants her, but just to prove to himself that he is a better man than you” (Lewis 1996: 110). Thus, we see Haman—the most honored man in the entire Persian Empire—not content with and rejoicing in all the favor the king has shown him. Instead, he is enraged because one man has not bowed to him. In other words, one single person was not doing something Haman thought he deserved, and that, in essence, nullified Haman’s entire life. He was so wrapped up in himself that he could find no peace, or joy, or happiness, or contentment in his life of blessing, honor, power, and wealth. Pride like this is fundamentally an anti-God frame of mind. Hence, as **Jas 4:6** says, “*God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*”

- Haman plots to kill all the Jews in the kingdom (3:7-11)

⁷ *In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, Pur, that is the lot, was cast before Haman from day to day and from month to month, until the twelfth month, that is the month Adar.* ⁸ *Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, “There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of all other people and they do not observe the king’s laws, so it is not in the king’s interest to let them remain.* ⁹ *If it is pleasing to the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who carry on the king’s business, to put into the king’s treasuries.”* ¹⁰ *Then the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews.* ¹¹ *The king said to Haman, “The silver is yours, and the people also, to do with them as you please.”*

Casting lots was a common method in the ancient world to determine the will of the gods or, in Israel, the will of God (see, e.g., **Lev 16:8; Num 26:55-56; 1 Sam 14:41-42; Prov 16:33; 18:18**). Haman used a mixture of truth and untruth in presenting his plan to the king. In **v. 8** it is true that the laws of the Jews “*are different from those of all other people*”; however, it is untrue that “*they do not observe the king’s laws.*” Haman does not name the Jews by name and does not name Mordecai, who was the source of his rage. He also appeals to the financial interest of the king by offering to pay ten thousand talents of silver to finance his plan. The signet ring was used to seal official proclamations and shows the king’s approval of Haman’s plan, as the Septuagint makes explicit (**Est 3:10, LXX**; see also **v. 12**). Interestingly, the king asks no questions and does nothing to independently verify what Haman was saying, even though Haman’s plan amounts to mass murder. The king’s statement to Haman in **v. 11** has been interpreted in two different ways: the Septuagint interprets the statement as meaning “*keep the silver*” (**Est 3:11, LXX**); on the other hand, Huey says that “the king’s rejection of Haman’s silver may have been only an example of Oriental politeness that did not actually mean he rejected the payment (cf. 4:7, where it seems the bribe was paid)” (Huey 1988: 814).

- An edict is sent throughout the kingdom to kill all the Jews on 13 Adar (3:12-15)

¹² *Then the king’s scribes were summoned on the thirteenth day of the first month, and it was written just as Haman commanded to the king’s satraps, to the governors who were over each province and to the princes of each people, each province according to its script, each people according to its language, being written in the name of King Ahasuerus and sealed with the king’s signet ring.* ¹³ *Letters were sent by couriers to all the king’s provinces to destroy, to kill and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to*

¹¹ Every aspect of the above paragraph is important. The reason is that, if one only makes a “serious attempt to practice the Christian virtues,” i.e., becomes “religious,” or “starts taking religion seriously,” that—in and of itself—likely will make one’s pride *worse*. There is no pride like religious pride and no prouder people than Pharisees. The reason is that the person now will think, “I have the truth,” “I am doing it the right way,” and “God is on my side.” In other words, the person is still absorbed with him- or herself, but now thinks he or she has the backing of God.

seize their possessions as plunder. ¹⁴ *A copy of the edict to be issued as law in every province was published to all the peoples so that they should be ready for this day.* ¹⁵ *The couriers went out impelled by the king's command while the decree was issued at the citadel in Susa; and while the king and Haman sat down to drink, the city of Susa was in confusion.*

By giving the signet ring to Haman, the king permitted Haman to word the edict any way he wanted to. He made the decree as clear and comprehensive as possible: it went to every province of the kingdom, it was written in all of the languages used in the kingdom, it specified the date when the mass murder was to take place, it specified who the victims were to be, and it gave incentive to the people to carry out the slaughter by saying that those loyal to the king and the empire were “*to destroy, to kill and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, women and children, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to seize their possessions as plunder.*” The piling up of the nouns “*all the Jews, both young and old, women and children*” and the verbs “*destroy, kill, and annihilate*” demonstrates the thoroughness of the edict. The fact that “*the city of Susa was in confusion*” (v. 15) indicates that the people of Susa did not share Haman’s virulent anti-Semitism.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think of Mordecai’s refusal to bow to Haman (remember, it was a command of the king that Mordecai was disobeying in not showing honor to Haman)? Presumably he could have done so without thereby admitting that Haman was a god (see **2 Kgs 5:17-19** [Naaman was free to bow to a pagan god in a pagan temple without incurring guilt]). Wouldn’t Mordecai’s bowing to Haman have prevented Haman’s rage and his edict to destroy all the Jews?
 - Discuss how we should act and react in different social and political situations today. Do you see Mordecai’s refusal to bow as the same as or different from Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego’s refusal to bow to the golden statue (**Dan 3:4-12**), Daniel’s continuing to pray in violation of the king’s order (**Dan 6:6-13**), and Peter and John’s refusal to obey the Sanhedrin’s edict to not teach in the name of Jesus (**Acts 5:17-20**)?
 - What principles can help us know where to “draw the line” in whether or not we obey various government edicts?
2. Discuss the issue of pride and Haman’s pride. How does pride show up in you, people you know, and in the church?
3. Many people think that humility is having a low opinion of your one’s talents, looks, brains, and/or character. The discussion of humility above indicates that that is not correct, since it is not a truthful description of reality. Discuss the nature of humility.
 - How do pride and humility relate to the gospel?
 - What can we do to help ourselves and others become truly humble?
4. Haman’s rage at Mordecai caused him to generalize his hatred to include all Jews. How do people do the same type of thing today? How do you do that type of thing?
 - This raises the issue of tribalism. The NT repeatedly says that all are equal in Christ’s kingdom, regardless of their ethnic or tribal background (see, e.g. **Gal 3:28; Eph 2:11-19; Col 3:11**). What can and should the church do to make sure that all people are treated fairly and that special favor or discrimination is not shown to people because of their ethnic or tribal background?
5. Some Christians (and Jews) attempt to defend all the actions and character of both Mordecai and Esther because they are biblical characters. On the other hand, every biblical character except Jesus Christ was flawed and sinful. In light of that fact, assessing the actions and character of Mordecai and Esther may need to be more nuanced. Discuss this.

E. Esther learns of Haman's plot and plans to intercede (4:1-17)

In this section, Mordecai learns of the plot to kill all the Jews. He informs Esther and tells her that she must petition the king to save the Jews. He also warns her that her position as queen will not enable her to escape the fate of the rest of the Jews. **Verse 14** is probably the key verse in the book, *“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?”*

- Mordecai and the Jews learn of Haman's plot and lament (4:1-3)

¹ *When Mordecai learned all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city and wailed loudly and bitterly.* ² *He went as far as the king’s gate, for no one was to enter the king’s gate clothed in sackcloth.* ³ *In each and every province where the command and decree of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping and wailing; and many lay on sackcloth and ashes.*

Tearing one’s clothes and putting on sackcloth and ashes were traditional signs of humbling oneself, repentance, mourning, lamentation, and grief (see **Gen 37:34; 44:13; Josh 7:6; Judg 11:35; 2 Sam 1:11; 13:31; 1 Kgs 21:27; 2 Kgs 2:12; 5:7; 6:30; 19:1; 22:11; 2 Chron 23:13; 34:19, 27; Isa 37:1; 58:5; Jer 6:26; Dan 9:3; Jonah 3:6; Matt 11:21; Luke 10:13**). That Mordecai and the rest of the Jews did all of these things, along with fasting and publicly weeping and wailing shows the deadly seriousness of the situation. Mordecai apparently went to the king’s gate so that Esther would know that he was there and that something was amiss.

- Mordecai informs Esther of the situation (4:4-9)

⁴ *Then Esther’s maidens and her eunuchs came and told her, and the queen writhed in great anguish. And she sent garments to clothe Mordecai that he might remove his sackcloth from him, but he did not accept them.* ⁵ *Then Esther summoned Hathach from the king’s eunuchs, whom the king had appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what this was and why it was.* ⁶ *So Hathach went out to Mordecai to the city square in front of the king’s gate.* ⁷ *Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact amount of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king’s treasuries for the destruction of the Jews.* ⁸ *He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict which had been issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show Esther and inform her, and to order her to go in to the king to implore his favor and to plead with him for her people.* ⁹ *Hathach came back and related Mordecai’s words to Esther.*

Although Esther was the queen, she had not seen the king for the last 30 days (**v. 11**) and was unaware of the edict to kill all the Jews. Mordecai’s not removing his sackcloth indicated that something was seriously wrong. Consequently, Esther sent the eunuch Hathach to find out what the problem was.

- Esther agrees to go before the king at the risk of her life (4:10-17)

¹⁰ *Then Esther spoke to Hathach and ordered him to reply to Mordecai:* ¹¹ *“All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that for any man or woman who comes to the king to the inner court who is not summoned, he has but one law, that he be put to death, unless the king holds out to him the golden scepter so that he may live. And I have not been summoned to come to the king for these thirty days.”* ¹² *They related Esther’s words to Mordecai.*

¹³ *Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, “Do not imagine that you in the king’s palace can escape any more than all the Jews.* ¹⁴ *For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?”*

¹⁵ *Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai,* ¹⁶ *“Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.”*

¹⁷ *So Mordecai went away and did just as Esther had commanded him.*

Mordecai himself could have dressed in proper clothes and attempted to go to the king to intercede on behalf of the Jews. However, he naturally wanted Esther to intercede with the king on behalf of the Jews because of her position as queen and because she was the king’s wife. In **vv. 10-12** she informed him that doing so was not as easy as he might think. Indeed, even though she was the queen and the king’s wife, to go to the

king on her own might put her own life at risk. When she mentioned that she had not been summoned by the king for the past 30 days, what she was saying was that, since the king had a large harem and large number of concubines and undoubtedly did not sleep alone, the fact that he had not called on her for a month likely meant that she had fallen out of his favor. Consequently, if she did go to the king without being summoned, there was a good chance that he would not hold out his scepter to her and she would be executed.

Crucially, in **vv. 13-14** Mordecai points out that her life was at risk even if she did not go to see the king. He was pointing out that, yes, if she risked going to the king she might lose everything, including her life; but if she did *not* go to see the king, she would be a traitor to her people, her Jewish identity would be discovered, and she certainly *would* be killed. **Verse 14** is the key verse in the entire book. It puts Esther's life in proper perspective. Even though God is not mentioned in **v. 14**, given the complete helplessness of the Jews, deliverance of the Jews arising from "another place" can ultimately only refer to God. In other words, if Esther does not act, God will use someone else to save the Jews, but Esther and her family will perish.

The principles enunciated by Mordecai in **v. 14** apply to all of us. God is sovereign over and active in the affairs of people. For example, he is ultimately in charge of life and death (**Gen 20:17-18; Exod 4:11; 2 Sam 12:15; Neh 9:6; Job 12:9-10; Isa 44:24; Ezek 24:15-18**). He stirs up people's spirits, puts thoughts in their minds, and turns their hearts (**Ezra 6:22; Neh 2:12; 7:5; Ps 105:25; Isa 44:28; Hag 1:14**). Typically, God acts *through* his creatures, not immediately and directly: "God causes everything in nature to work and to move in the direction of a pre-determined end. So God also enables and prompts His rational creatures, as second causes, to function, and that not merely by endowing them with energy in a general way, but by energizing them to certain specific acts." (Berkhof 1949: 189) Given God's comprehensive sovereignty, plan, and his active involvement in the world while at the same time humans retain their integrity as human beings, the Bible repeatedly presents a *dual explanation* for events: God is sovereign and has ordained all events (that, in one sense, is a full explanation for all events); yet that is compatible with and does not in any way diminish people's responsibility for the choices they make and the things they do (that, in another sense, is also a full explanation for all events). This is known as the doctrine of *concurrency*, i.e., "the co-operation of the divine power with all subordinate powers, according to the pre-established laws of their operation, causing them to act and to act precisely as they do" (Berkhof 1949: 187; for multiple examples of the Bible's dual explanation of events, see Menn 2021: 118-19).

One writer uses this analogy to explain the dual action of God and people in the same act: "A metaphor that captures this understanding of divine and human action is a stereoscopic image. A stereoscope brings two pictures of the same object taken at different angles together, creating a sense of depth and of greater solidity. Stereoscopic vision refers to the ability of our brains to register three-dimensional shapes. In common usage, it refers to the sense of depth derived from having two eyes. Looking from different angles, our eyes give us the capacity to see the depth of three dimensions. Analogously, divine and human agency, considered together, create a sense of depth and solidity. An action occurs, for example Esther's going before the king. Readers can see this as only a human act. . . . To see Esther's faithfulness also through the lens of divine action is to see Esther as one who lives inside of God's covenant with a people. She is thus sustained and compelled by Another even as she herself acts/moves." (Newman 2021: 191)

Each of us has been placed in his or her own situation, by God, for particular purposes. Esther was placed in her position ultimately by God through the use of human mediators and human means. She used the resources she had, ultimately to save her people. We need to think about why we are where we are and act as God's agents to do good for others. Our positions may not be as exalted as was Esther's and our situations may not be as dramatic as the one she faced. Nevertheless, the principle that we are where we are, not by accident but by God's design, equally applies to us. God has placed us where we are and given us influence over various people and events, not just for our own benefit but to serve others, to advance his kingdom in our own spheres of influence, to be his instruments to lead others to the life that is only found in Jesus Christ, and to disciple them in that new life.

This is not to say that we should "be like Esther." She is not our example. Rather, she is a pointer to the real Esther—Jesus Christ. He was in the real palace, heaven itself. He had the ultimate wealth and power, yet left it all for us; he did not have to be cajoled into doing it, but he did it voluntarily. He identified with us and took our condemnation onto himself, not at the risk of his life but at the cost of his life (**Phil 2:5-8**). He is our savior and now lives before the Father always to make intercession for us (**Heb 7:25**). He does all this so that we would be rich in the new life only he can give us and give of ourselves just as he did (**2 Cor 8:9**). He gives us a new identity and a new security that can never be taken away (**Rom 8:28-39**). More than that, he doesn't leave us on our own. When we are in him, he takes our heart of stone and gives us a heart of flesh, like his own (**Ezek 36:26**). We receive his mind, so we can think as he does (**1 Cor 2:16**). He comes to live inside of us in the

person of the Holy Spirit (**John 14:17**). He opens his Word to us and adopts us into his family, so we now have our brothers and sisters in Christ to help us. These are his means of grace that we should draw on. Additionally, all that he calls us to do, he does in us, as **Phil 2:13** says, “*for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*” In Christ, life becomes a calling. As Mordecai said to Esther, by one means or another, God will work out his will. May his will be worked out through us.

Esther’s calling for a period of fasting is reminiscent of the people of Nineveh and the king calling for a fast when Jonah proclaimed that Nineveh would be overthrown (**Jonah 3:3-8**). Fasting is typically accompanied by prayer to God (see **Ezra 8:23; Isa 58:2-5; Jer 14:12; Dan 9:3**). As mentioned previously, the text does not refer to prayer or to God. However, after v. 17 the Septuagint includes prayers of both Mordecai and Esther.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the doctrine of concurrence. Have you experienced God’s working through people in your own life?
2. Mordecai told Esther, “*And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?*” Can you think of examples in your own life where someone has been put in a particular position for a special purpose at a particular time?
3. Esther’s position as queen gave her access to the king that most people did not have. That gave her the opportunity to influence the king and governmental policy that most people did not have. This raises the issue of Christians in government. Some Christians do not get involved in politics or government because they think that politics is “worldly” or corrupt. However, if Christians are not involved in politics and government, then all political decisions will be made by non-Christians and anti-Christians. Discuss this.
 - What do you think the role of Christians should be with respect to politics, government, and influencing governmental policies?
 - How can Christian influence with respect to government and governmental policies be increased?
 - What do you think the role of the church should be with respect to these things?
4. Our positions may not be as exalted as was Esther’s and our situations may not be as dramatic as the one she faced, but God has placed each of us in his or her own situation for particular purposes.
 - How should we act in our situations? Give examples.
 - What resources has God given us to enable us to effectuate our callings?

F. Esther’s first banquet for the king and Haman; Haman’s response (5:1-14)

Esther now does what she had prepared to do at the end of chapter 4; at the risk of her life, she approaches the king to intercede on behalf of the Jews. However, she does so in a thoughtful and roundabout way. She evidently had thought a lot about how best to petition the king. The result is that she will host two banquets for the king and Haman on successive days. The storyline is advanced in that Haman’s hatred of Mordecai is further revealed, but the extra day between the banquets allows a new fact also to be revealed.

- Esther hosts a banquet for the king and Haman (5:1-8)

¹ *Now it came about on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace in front of the king’s rooms, and the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room, opposite the entrance to the palace.* ² *When the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, she obtained favor in his sight; and the king extended to Esther the golden scepter which was in his hand. So Esther came near and touched the top of the scepter.* ³ *Then the king said to her, “What is troubling you, Queen Esther? And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be given to you.”*

⁴ *Esther said, “If it pleases the king, may the king and Haman come this day to the banquet that I have prepared for him.”*

⁵ *Then the king said, “Bring Haman quickly that we may do as Esther desires.” So the king and Haman came to the banquet which Esther had prepared.* ⁶ *As they drank their wine at the banquet, the*

king said to Esther, “What is your petition, for it shall be granted to you. And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be done.”⁷ So Esther replied, “My petition and my request is:⁸ if I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and do what I request, may the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king says.”

The “third day” refers to when the three-day fast requested by Esther (4:16) had been completed. Esther had violated the law by coming to the “inner court” without being summoned (4:11). However, she showed discretion by waiting there instead of simply coming into the king’s immediate presence. The king’s offer to give her anything up to “*even half the kingdom*” (5:3; see also Est 5:6; 7:2) is probably an oriental courtesy, not to be taken too literally (see Mark 6:23).

Once again, the Septuagint makes a number of additions to the text. It adds v. 1α to the effect that Esther first “called upon God the Overseer and Preserver of all things.” It then adds, “1γ And having passed through all the doors, she stood before the king: and he was sitting upon his royal throne, and he had put on all his glorious apparel, [covered] all over with gold and precious stones, and was very terrible. 1δ And having raised his face resplendent with glory, he looked with intense anger: and the queen fell, and changed her colour as she fainted; and she bowed herself upon the head of the maid that went before [her]. 1ε But God changed the spirit of the king to gentleness, and in intense feeling he sprang from off his throne, and took her into his arms, until she recovered: and he comforted her with peaceable words, and said to her, 1ζ What is [the matter], Esther? I [am] thy brother; be of good cheer, thou shalt not die, for our command is openly declared [to thee], Draw nigh. 2 And having raised the golden sceptre he laid it upon her neck, and embraced her, and said, Speak to me. 2α And she said to him, I saw thee, [my] lord, as an angel of God, and my heart was troubled for fear of thy glory; for thou, [my] lord, art to be wondered at, and thy face [is] full of grace. 2β And while she was speaking, she fainted and fell. Then the king was troubled, and all his servants comforted her.”

Esther had done more than relying on prayer and fasting alone; she had clearly thought a great deal about how best to approach the king. That was necessary, since the matter she was approaching the king about was a matter of life and death, both for herself and for her people. Lois Semenyne notes that Esther “dressed formally for the occasion in her full royal robes, as if she were appearing at a state function (5:1). This also suggests that she adorned herself in a way that she knew would please the king.” (Semenyne 2006: 564) We have already noted her prudence in not immediately walking up to the king. Further, when the king said that he would grant whatever request she had, “she did not immediately make her real request. Instead she invited the king and Haman to a banquet (5:4). Esther was following Middle Eastern custom, where business deals traditionally followed meals. She may have felt this was not the right time to make her request. She wanted the right time, God’s time.” (Semenyne 2006: 564) Cho discusses the tactical and strategic significance of Esther’s not stating her request in the king’s court but, instead, inviting the king and Haman to a banquet, “Esther’s invitation to a feast likely struck the king as inconsequential. This explains why he asks the queen again to state her (real) request during the first feast (5:6; see also 7:2). From Esther’s perspective, however, the request to host a feast for the king and Haman is neither a squandered opportunity nor a delaying tactic. It is a tactical deployment of her momentary access to power to redefine and manipulate the power relations among the king, Haman, and herself in and through a space over which she exercises control. That is, she transforms a tactical opportunity into a strategic advantage.” (Cho 2021: 677)

In all of this, Esther provides a good example for us, particularly when we are in situations that involve risk. First, even though she was the queen and lived in the palace in the “lap of luxury,” Esther was willing to risk all of that (and risk her life) for the sake of her people and to be faithful to God. All Christians need to remember that, although we may have success, power, wealth, health, and other benefits of this life, our faithfulness to God comes first and is more important than all of those things (see Mark 8:36-38). All the good things of life have been given (actually, lent) to us by God. He is primary. If we love him first, we have to be willing to give up everything for him, the gospel, and our family, the church. Our willingness to do so reveals whether or not our “faith” is true or is just a matter of lip service. There may be some very hard choices to make. But we are not alone. He is with us and, if we trust him—all the way to the end—we will make the right choice. As Paul said, “to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). Second, “She did not act casually, but put in many hours of prayer and fasting before risking her life. When it was time to act, she used the resources and skills she had in determining the best way to act. She had beauty, she also knew the king loved good food and good wine, and she was able to organize a banquet. We, too, need to consider how we can most effectively use the skills and resources the Lord has given us to serve his kingdom.” (Semenyne 2006: 564)

This is telling us one more thing. It is telling that God did not give up on Esther. He also does not give

up on us. At the beginning of the book, Esther completely sold out to or compromised with the pagan, Persian system. She used her beauty without protest and accepted the advancement it provided to her by not revealing she was a Jew, taking a new name, participating in the beauty pageant, eating the Persian food, complying with whatever Hegai said, sleeping with a Gentile before marriage, and then marrying a Gentile unbeliever. To one degree or another we all compromise with the world. Yet the message of the gospel is not that God only blesses and saves those who live morally upright and impeccable lives; it is that God gives his grace to people who do not ask for it, do not deserve it, and often do not even fully appreciate it when they receive it. He knows we are dust (**Ps 103:14**). He knows that our spirit may be willing, but our flesh is weak (**Matt 26:41**). He continues to work in us and through us to slowly-by-slowly turn us into the people he created us to be in the first place. He transformed Esther from a compliant beauty queen into a woman of courage, strength, and character, and he can transform us.

Interestingly, even though her banquet was a success, Esther did not immediately make her request known to the king. By requesting that the king and Haman come to another banquet and promising to reveal her request at that time, she was creating suspense within the king. And in the providence of God, that one day's delay proved important, because it was only after the first banquet that the king discovered that Mordecai had not been rewarded for saving the king's life. It is with that discovery that Haman's downfall began and Mordecai's rise, and Esther's further influence on the king, began.

- Despite his wealth and position, Haman is dissatisfied whenever he sees Mordecai (5:9-13)
⁹ *Then Haman went out that day glad and pleased of heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate and that he did not stand up or tremble before him, Haman was filled with anger against Mordecai.*
¹⁰ *Haman controlled himself, however, went to his house and sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh.*
¹¹ *Then Haman recounted to them the glory of his riches, and the number of his sons, and every instance where the king had magnified him and how he had promoted him above the princes and servants of the king.* ¹² *Haman also said, "Even Esther the queen let no one but me come with the king to the banquet which she had prepared; and tomorrow also I am invited by her with the king."* ¹³ *Yet all of this does not satisfy me every time I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."*

This episode shows us the utter malignancy—and irrationality—of hatred and pride. Haman recounted to his wife and friends all the blessings and honors that had been bestowed upon him. In the entire Persian Empire, he was second only to the king himself. However, as was true in **Est 3:5**, in Haman's heart and mind, all of those blessings and honors paled in comparison to his hatred of Mordecai. Even the sight of Mordecai took away all his pleasure from all the blessings and honors of his life. Haman's state of heart and mind, and his response to seeing Mordecai, is similar in principle to that of our first parents, Adam and Eve. They, too, had been blessed in every possible way by God himself. They had, essentially, perfect bodies, had direct communion with God, even walking with him in the garden, lived in a perfect environment, had satisfying and fulfilling work to do, had no enemies, and had the entire world at their command. Yet it was the one and only negative command, to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (**Gen 2:16-17**), upon which they fixated. The rest, as they say, is history.

Haman's response to Mordecai is also a warning and lesson for us not to exaggerate the slights done to us, as many lesser and self-centered men do. Pride focuses on itself and can never be satisfied. Humility focuses on others. We need to keep matters in proper perspective. Overlook the slights, extend grace to people, and "major on the majors," i.e., concentrate on the important things. If we have been blessed materially and in other ways, it is perfectly all right to be happy and grateful about that. But to have that happiness and gratitude nullified by what others have or do reveals a pride which is like a cancer in the soul.

- At his wife's suggestion, Haman constructs a gallows 50 cubits high on which to hang Mordecai (5:14)
¹⁴ *Then Zeresh his wife and all his friends said to him, "Have a gallows fifty cubits high made and in the morning ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on it; then go joyfully with the king to the banquet." And the advice pleased Haman, so he had the gallows made.*

The suggestion of Zeresh and Haman's friends to construct a gallows 50 cubits high is in keeping with Haman's own arrogance. It is constructed so high so as to be a sign to the people of Susa, a public sign of Haman's importance, and a public humiliation of Mordecai. Notice that it was suggested that Haman have the gallows constructed first, and only after that tell the king about it. Although this translation says "*and in the morning ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on it,*" the word is typically translated "say" or "speak." Thus,

the ESV brings out the real significance of what is going on by saying “*and in the morning tell the king to have Mordecai hanged upon it.*” That again shows Haman’s arrogance and self-importance. It also shows how hatred can warp us. Haman cannot wait until 13 Adar to have Mordecai killed. Instead, he resolves to do it now and, only in that knowledge, can he go joyfully to Esther’s second banquet, not so much because of the honor being shown him, but because he thinks the person he hates is about to be executed. However, as will prove to be the case beginning in chapter 6, Haman is a perfect example of how “*pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling*” (**Prov 16:18**).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Some Christians seem to think that praying to God is sufficient for their needs to be met; they think that thought, planning, strategizing, and working exhibit a lack of faith or somehow are “worldly.” Consider how Esther went about approaching the king, and discuss the relationship and interaction of prayer and thought, planning, strategizing, and working to get your needs met.
2. Have you known people who have given up much for the sake of obedience to God? Are you willing to give up all the good things of this life for the sake of obedience to God and the gospel?
3. Despite our compromises with the world and our ongoing sins, even after we become Christians, discuss how God has continued to work in you and in others you know to transform our character, similar to how he transformed Esther from a compliant beauty queen into a woman of courage, strength, and character.
4. How does hatred warp us?
 - Do you know people who have been obviously warped by hatred?
 - How should we deal with the hatreds in our heart so that we are not warped by them?
5. Consider Haman’s view of himself and his own importance. What can we—especially successful, blessed, powerful, and talented people—do to not let ourselves be altered, turned, or corrupted by feelings of self-importance?

G. The king requires Haman to publicly honor Mordecai; Haman’s downfall is predicted (6:1-13)

This book contains a number of seeming coincidences and ironic reversals. This section highlights some of the most important of these. As a result of his inability to sleep, the king learns that Mordecai had never been properly honored for saving the king’s life. Haman, who came to the court to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai, instead unwittingly decides how Mordecai should be honored and is required to lead the procession honoring Mordecai. At the end of the section, Haman receives no comfort from his wife and friends, but they prophetically announce his doom.

- The king learns that Mordecai had never been honored for saving his life (6:1-3)

¹ During that night the king could not sleep so he gave an order to bring the book of records, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. ² It was found written what Mordecai had reported concerning Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’s eunuchs who were doorkeepers, that they had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus. ³ The king said, “What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?” Then the king’s servants who attended him said, “Nothing has been done for him.”

This is another one of those seeming “coincidences” that shows God’s providence behind the scenes. It “just happened” that the king was unable to sleep. And it “just happened” that it was the night before Esther’s second banquet for the King and Haman.” And it “just happened” that the king asked for the book of records to be read to him. And it “just happened” that the portion of the records reporting how Mordecai had saved the king’s life was the portion that was read. And the king “just happened” to inquire about that and was informed that nothing had been done to honor Mordecai. And Haman “just happened” to have “*just entered the outer court of the king’s palace to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai*” (**6:4**). And Haman “just happened” to misread the king’s intentions about who the king desired to honor (**6:6**). David Dorsey observes, “It is significant that the turning point of the story (chap. 6) does not involve the brave actions of either Mordecai or

Esther (although we have every reason to expect this), but rather an ironic twist of fate in which the fortunes of wicked Haman begin to turn. Up to this point in the story everything has gone well for Haman, and his schemes against Mordecai and the Jews appear to be working without hitch. This episode [which concludes at **6:11**], in which Haman's advice to the king backfires on him, marks the turning point of Haman's success. From this point on, his schemes begin to unravel. By designing the story with this episode as the turning point, the author implies that the real reason the Jews were saved was (divine) providence." (Dorsey 1999: 164)

One reason the king probably inquired about what had been done to honor Mordecai was that "any person who had rendered important service to the king was called a 'benefactor', and his name was entered on a special list. Royal benefactors were rewarded with special clothing, horses, golden ornaments, vast landholdings, and the like. They included foreigners who lived at court and who might also receive entire villages and cities as gifts. According to Xenophon, the normal way in which a Persian king showed favor was through such gifts as a horse with a bridle ornamented in gold, a golden torque, bracelets, a golden *akinakes* (dagger), and a robe." ("Courts and Courtiers" 2011: Courtiers, citations omitted)

- Haman unwittingly proposes the means and honors Mordecai (6:4-11)

⁴ *So the king said, "Who is in the court?" Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace in order to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows which he had prepared for him.* ⁵ *The king's servants said to him, "Behold, Haman is standing in the court."* *And the king said, "Let him come in."* ⁶ *So Haman came in and the king said to him, "What is to be done for the man whom the king desires to honor?"* *And Haman said to himself, "Whom would the king desire to honor more than me?"* ⁷ *Then Haman said to the king, "For the man whom the king desires to honor, ⁸ let them bring a royal robe which the king has worn, and the horse on which the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown has been placed; ⁹ and let the robe and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble princes and let them array the man whom the king desires to honor and lead him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him, 'Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor.'*"

¹⁰ *Then the king said to Haman, "Take quickly the robes and the horse as you have said, and do so for Mordecai the Jew, who is sitting at the king's gate; do not fall short in anything of all that you have said."* ¹¹ *So Haman took the robe and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and led him on horseback through the city square, and proclaimed before him, "Thus it shall be done to the man whom the king desires to honor."*

This section is one of the great ironies in the book. Haman "just happened" to have arrived at the court "in order to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows which he had prepared for him" (v. 4). Instead of that, Haman's pride again shows itself. Haman pridefully thinks that the man the king wants to honor can only be himself. Haman did not need money (see **3:9**); he needed respect (see **3:2, 5**). Consequently, he suggests that the king place a royal robe on the man, seat the man on a royal horse (which would be the position of a conquering king), and have the king's most noble prince assume the position of a servant and lead the honored man through the city, proclaiming how the king honors him. All of this would demonstrate how the king personally feels about the man. In a supreme reversal of fortune, Haman unwittingly decides how the man he desired to hang would be honored, and then was required to himself lead the procession through the city square as a servant would do and publicly proclaim the honor given to Mordecai.¹² From this point on, he must know that his other plans are thwarted and he will not be able to kill Mordecai and the Jews.

This episode is an illustration of the biblical principle, "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted" (**Matt 23:12**; see also **Prov 29:23**; **Luke 1:52**; **14:11**; **18:14**; **Jas 4:10**). It also is a pointer to the gospel. Haman was seeking the approval of the king, but ended up being humbled involuntarily. However, the ultimate king, Jesus Christ, voluntarily humbled himself and took on the role of a servant to that we would be exalted (**Phil 2:5-11**; see also **2 Cor 5:21**).

It is strange that the king would knowingly honor a Jew after so recently enacting an edict to kill all the Jews in the kingdom. However, since Haman had never mentioned the Jews when he spoke with the king (he had only mentioned "a certain people" to the king, **3:8**), the king never inquired who the "certain people" were, and Haman had drawn up the written decree with the king's signet, it is likely that the king had not seen

¹² This honoring of Mordecai is another commonality with the story of Joseph. Mordecai was dressed in royal robes with a golden crown upon his head and rode on one of the king's horses. Similarly, when Joseph was promoted to the second position of authority in Egypt, he was dressed in royal garments, a gold necklace was put around his neck, and he rode in a royal chariot (**Gen 41:42-43**).

the written decree and was unaware that the “*certain people*” to be annihilated were the Jews. Further, there is nothing to indicate that the king knew of Haman’s hatred of Mordecai (and the Jews).

- Haman’s wife predicts Haman’s downfall if Mordecai is a Jew (6:12-13)

¹² *Then Mordecai returned to the king’s gate. But Haman hurried home, mourning, with his head covered.* ¹³ *Haman recounted to Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and Zeresh his wife said to him, “If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish origin, you will not overcome him, but will surely fall before him.”*

The king’s honoring Mordecai does not appear, at that time, to have made any change in Mordecai’s circumstances. He remained a Jew awaiting execution pursuant to Haman’s edict. Mordecai’s elevation in position does not occur until **8:1-2**. Consequently, Mordecai returned to the place where he had been when he learned of the edict to kill the Jews—the king’s gate (see **4:1-2**).

Haman returned home in humiliation. Covering the head was a way to express mourning, shame, and humiliation (see **2 Sam 15:30; Jer 14:3-4**). He received no comfort from his wife and friends. Instead, they prophetically announce Haman’s doom.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the way God uses seeing “coincidences” to advance his plan in the world. Have you seen this phenomenon in your own life?
2. Discuss the way God uses irony and ironic reversals to advance his plan in the world. Have you seen this phenomenon in your own life?
3. Note and discuss the fact that God can use non-Christians to truly prophesy (see also **John 11:49-51**).

H. Esther’s second banquet results in Haman’s execution (6:14-7:10)

Esther had promised to reveal her request at her second banquet. At that banquet she expertly made her request in such a way that the king became incensed at the plot, and Esther was able to accuse Haman as a foe, an enemy, and wicked. This led the king to order Haman’s execution on the very gallows he had had erected on which to hang Mordecai.

- At her second banquet, Esther exposes Haman as the person behind the plot to kill her and her people (6:14-7:6)

¹⁴ *While they were still talking with him, the king’s eunuchs arrived and hastily brought Haman to the banquet which Esther had prepared.*

¹ *Now the king and Haman came to drink wine with Esther the queen.* ² *And the king said to Esther on the second day also as they drank their wine at the banquet, “What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be done.”* ³ *Then Queen Esther replied, “If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me as my petition, and my people as my request; ⁴for we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed and to be annihilated. Now if we had only been sold as slaves, men and women, I would have remained silent, for the trouble would not be commensurate with the annoyance to the king.”*

⁵ *Then King Ahasuerus asked Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who would presume to do thus?”* ⁶ *Esther said, “A foe and an enemy is this wicked Haman!” Then Haman became terrified before the king and queen.*

Typically, guests were escorted to oriental feasts, so **v. 14** is not unusual. However, the reference to the “haste” with which Haman was brought to the banquet may suggest that he did not have time to compose himself following his humiliation and his wife’s prophecy of doom.

Note how wine has been important to the plot of the book. It was when the king was “*merry with wine*” (**1:10**) that he issued the order that Vashti appear and display herself; her refusal resulted in Esther becoming the queen. Now, as they drink wine, the king again asks Esther what her petition is; this time she answers, and her answer will result in the death of Haman and the saving of the Jews.

Note also how carefully Esther proceeded to answer the king. His repeating to her that he would give

her “*even half of the kingdom*” (v. 2) was a good sign that she still retained his favor. However, she did not immediately mention the edict to kill all the Jews and request that the king revoke it. Instead, she was very deferential. She begins in v. 3 by saying, “*If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king.*” She then asked for something that, without the king’s knowing any more, he would have to grant, i.e., “*let my life be given me as my petition.*” She then immediately couples her own life with the lives of her people, “*and my people as my request.*” Even now, she does not specifically mention that she is a Jew.

Further, without giving the king time to respond, she immediately proceeds with an explanation of why this is her petition. In doing so, she subtly argues that it is in the king’s own self-interest to grant her petition: “*for we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed and to be annihilated. Now if we had only been sold as slaves, men and women, I would have remained silent, for the trouble would not be commensurate with the annoyance to the king.*” (v. 4) Her reference to “sold” alludes to the 10,000 talents of silver Haman had promised to pay for the destruction of the Jews (3:9). Her saying that if “we” had only been sold as slaves links her to her people. But note that she, again, has not specifically named herself or her people as Jews. As noted previously, since Haman had never specifically told the king that the people he wanted to destroy were Jews, the king still may not have known that the people to be killed were Jews. Esther is making her petition as “personal” as possible. Her saying that she would not have bothered the king “*if we had only been sold as slaves*” subtly suggests both her own reticence about bothering the king but also the fact that, if her people were the king’s slaves, he would have the benefit of their service; however, by being marked for death, the king will lose a vast amount of labor and income.

The king’s asking who had presumed to do this indicates he had not yet fully comprehended that Esther was referring to the edict to destroy the Jews—and Esther never specifically referred to that edict or to the king’s complicity in it. When asked by the king, however, Esther immediately responds, “*A foe and an enemy is this wicked Haman!*” Haman became terrified, because he knew his fate had been sealed by what Esther had said. The entire scene is reminiscent of the prophet Nathan telling the story of the rich man who took the poor man’s little ewe lamb to feed to the rich man’s guest (2 Sam 12:1-4). When Nathan had set the scene and David became very angry, Nathan then exclaimed “*You are the man!*” (2 Sam 12:7)

- The king orders Haman to be hanged on the gallows that had prepared for Mordecai, and he is (7:7-10)
⁷ *The king arose in his anger from drinking wine and went into the palace garden; but Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that harm had been determined against him by the king.*
⁸ *Now when the king returned from the palace garden into the place where they were drinking wine, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, “Will he even assault the queen with me in the house?” As the word went out of the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face.* ⁹ *Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs who were before the king said, “Behold indeed, the gallows standing at Haman’s house fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai who spoke good on behalf of the king!” And the king said, “Hang him on it.”* ¹⁰ *So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, and the king’s anger subsided.*

The king’s leaving to go into the palace garden may have been because he was too angry to speak and/or he needed time to consider what to do to Haman. Note that Haman has not yet spoken. Again, the scene mirrors the book’s opening scene with Vashti. There, the king acted in haste and did not ask Vashti her reasons for refusing to come to the king’s banquet. Here, the king abruptly left and never asked Haman, “*How could you have done such a thing?*” Had he done so, Haman may have pointed out everything he had told the king in 3:8-9, could have told the king that the king had given the king’s signet ring to enact the decree and had specifically told Haman that “*the people also [are yours] to do with them as you please*” (3:11), could have reminded the king that the two of them had had a drink over the decree (3:15), and could have concluded by saying something like, “*I had no idea that Esther was a Jew. She never has even hinted at that—to me or to you. Had I known that, I never would have issued that decree (in the form in which it was issued).*”

The king’s abrupt departure for the palace garden also may have given him time to think things over, put things together, realize that what Esther had been talking about was the decree which he, himself, had approved, and granted Haman leniency. As things happened, however, Haman never had the chance to make his defense. All he could do was to beg for his life, since “*he saw that harm had been determined against him by the king*” (v. 7). However, as he fell on the couch where Esther was reclining, the king misinterpreted Haman’s action as an attempt to sexually assault the queen. The “word” which went out of the king’s mouth—“*Will he even assault the queen with me in the house?*”—was his judgment of death to Haman. The covering of Haman’s face indicates that he was to die. This sequence of events suggests that the reason for the death sentence was the

king's mistaken belief that Haman had tried to sexually assault the queen, not the edict to kill all the Jews including the queen. Note something about this: "Esther was silent when the King accused Haman of dishonorable intentions toward her (perhaps one of the most eloquent silences in history), when a word of defence on her part might have changed the whole turn of events" (Lehrman 1958: 92).

With respect to the execution of Haman recounted in **vv. 9-10**, Josephus states that one of the eunuchs who had brought Haman to the banquet had seen the gallows Haman had erected for Mordecai and had learned from one of Haman's own servants the purpose of the gallows; hence, he was able to report this to the king (Josephus 1987: *Ant.* 11.260-268). This is the first indication that the king had learned of Haman's desire to kill Mordecai. Since the king had just recently honored Mordecai for saving his life, it explains his quick response, "*Hang him on it.*" This is one of many biblical examples of the principle, "*Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling*" (**Prov 16:18**). Semenyé observes, "If he [Haman] had been prepared to ignore the fact that Mordecai was not paying homage to him, he would never have plotted against the Jews and we would be reading a different story" (Semenyé 2006: 566). The events that took place here also exemplify the related principles, "*In the work of his own hands the wicked is snared*" (**Ps 9:16b**) and "*His mischief will return upon his own head, and his violence will descend upon his own pate*" (**Ps 7:16**).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss how carefully and expertly Esther presented her petition to the king. Are there any lessons in this for us?
2. Look at the role haste and rash action has played in this story. The king rashly called for Vashti to display herself at his banquet; when she refused, he did not ask her reasons but hastily and rashly deposed her as queen. When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow to him, he did not let that pass, and did not even do something directed to Mordecai, but rashly plotted to kill all the Jews. When Esther accused Haman at her second banquet, the king hastily left the banquet and when he returned hastily jumped to the conclusion that Haman was sexually assaulting Esther and ordered Haman's immediate execution—all without giving Haman the opportunity to explain any of his actions.
 - What lessons can we draw from this?
 - How do these actions contrast with the way Mordecai and Esther acted?
 - How would the story of Esther have been different if, at any point along the way, the king and/or Haman had not acted rashly and in haste?
3. Discuss other examples from the Bible and your own life of the principles, "*Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before stumbling*" (**Prov 16:18**), "*In the work of his own hands the wicked is snared*" (**Ps 9:16b**), and "*His mischief will return upon his own head, and his violence will descend upon his own pate*" (**Ps 7:16**).
4. This episode raises another issue: Esther's silence when the king wrongly assumed and accused Haman of attempting to sexually assault her. Was she right to remain silent? Why or why not?
 - Esther's silence is similar to the Egyptian midwives who lied to the Pharaoh to let the Hebrew baby boys live (**Exod 1:15-21**) and Rahab who lied to the king of Jericho and his men about the Israelite spies whom she had hidden (**Josh 2:1-22**). In each case, God blessed those who lied or kept back the truth. How do you put these examples together with biblical passages that tell us we should not lie (e.g., **Exod 20:16; Lev 19:11; Ps 119: 163; Prov 12:22; John 8:44; Eph 4:25; Col 3:9**)?

I. Mordecai is promoted to Haman's place, and the Jews are authorized to defend themselves and destroy their enemies (8:1-17)

In chapter 8, a great reversal occurs. All the wealth, power, and position that Haman had possessed has been taken from Haman and given to Mordecai and Esther. Esther and Mordecai prepare a new edict that mirrors Haman's edict—on this time the Jews are permitted to defend themselves and "destroy, kill, and annihilate" their adversaries. While the Jews rejoice, many of the non-Jews now are in dread, and many of them

convert to Judaism.

- Mordecai is promoted to Haman's place (8:1-2)

¹ *On that day King Ahasuerus gave the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Queen Esther; and Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had disclosed what he was to her. ² The king took off his signet ring which he had taken away from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.*

In these verses, another great reversal takes place. Esther discloses her relationship with Mordecai. Then the king gives his signet ring, which he had previously given to Haman, to Mordecai. Thus, Mordecai becomes, in effect, the Prime Minister of Persia. The wording of v. 2b suggests that, since the king had given the “house of Haman”¹³ to Esther, her giving it to Mordecai indicates that she retained ownership but appointed Mordecai as administrator of the estate. As a result, all of Haman's wealth, title, position, and power now belonged to his enemy, Mordecai the Jew.

- Esther implores the king to revoke the letters devised by Haman (8:3-7)

³ *Then Esther spoke again to the king, fell at his feet, wept and implored him to avert the evil scheme of Haman the Agagite and his plot which he had devised against the Jews. ⁴ The king extended the golden scepter to Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the king. ⁵ Then she said, “If it pleases the king and if I have found favor before him and the matter seems proper to the king and I am pleasing in his sight, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the king's provinces. ⁶ For how can I endure to see the calamity which will befall my people, and how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?”*

Even though Haman's estate was given to Esther and Mordecai was given the royal signet ring, the laws of the Medes and Persians could not be revoked (Est 1:19; 8:8; Dan 6:8, 12, 15). Consequently, the edict to annihilate all the Jews was still in effect. Although Esther and Mordecai personally might be safe, their fellow Jews throughout the empire were still in as much danger as they had been since the edict had been issued. Consequently, Esther pleads with the king on behalf of the Jews. As she did in making her request of the king at her second banquet, Esther again mentions “the letters devised by Haman” (v. 5), but does not refer to the king's involvement. She again makes her plea very personal. She both fell at the king's feet and wept (v. 3) and stated, “How can I endure to see the calamity which will befall my people, and how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?” (v. 6) Josephus adds that, when she made this plea to the king, she also “showed him what had been written over all the country by Haman” (Josephus 1987: Ant. 11.270). Although that is not in the biblical account, it is consistent with the king's not previously being aware of the terms of the edict or of the fact that the people slated for destruction were the Jews.

- The king authorizes letters to be sent throughout the kingdom granting the Jews the right to defend themselves and destroy their enemies (8:7-14)

⁷ *So King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, “Behold, I have given the house of Haman to Esther, and him they have hanged on the gallows because he had stretched out his hands against the Jews. ⁸ Now you write to the Jews as you see fit, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring; for a decree which is written in the name of the king and sealed with the king's signet ring may not be revoked.” ⁹ So the king's scribes were called at that time in the third month (that is, the month Sivan), on the twenty-third day; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded to the Jews, the satraps, the governors and the princes of the provinces which extended from India to Ethiopia, 127 provinces, to every province according to its script, and to every people according to their language as well as to the Jews according to their script and their language. ¹⁰ He wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, and sealed it with the king's signet ring, and sent letters by couriers on horses, riding on steeds sired by the royal stud. ¹¹ In them the king granted the Jews who were in each and every city the right to assemble and to defend their lives, to destroy, to kill and to annihilate the entire army of any people or province which might attack them, including children and women, and to plunder their spoil, ¹² on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar). ¹³ A copy of the edict to be issued as law in each and every province was published to all the*

¹³ The “house of Haman” implies his entire estate.

*peoples, so that the Jews would be ready for this day to avenge themselves on their enemies.*¹⁴ *The couriers, hastened and impelled by the king's command, went out, riding on the royal steeds; and the decree was given out at the citadel in Susa.*

As was the case when Haman prepared the edict to annihilate the Jews, the king plays no part in preparing a new edict to counteract Haman's edict. Instead, he places the responsibility to do so with Mordecai and Esther.¹⁴ As with Haman's decree, this new decree was written in the name of King Ahasuerus, was sealed with his signet ring, and was directed to all 127 provinces and every language in the empire (**vv. 9-10** compare **3:12**). This new decree also mirrored Haman's decree in that it specified that on 13 Adar the Jews were granted the right to *"destroy, to kill and to annihilate the entire army of any people or province which might attack them, including children and women, and to plunder their spoil"* (**vv. 11-12**; compare **3:12-13**).¹⁵ The decree was issued in every province *"so that the Jews would be ready for this day to avenge themselves on their enemies"* (**v. 13**), just as Haman's decree was issued *"so that they [all the non-Jews in the empire] should be ready for this day"* (**3:14**). The decree was distributed by royal couriers in all the provinces and in Susa, just as had been the case with Haman's decree (**v. 14**; compare **3:15**).

The decree was issued on 23 Sivan, 70 days after Haman's decree (**v. 9**; compare **3:12**). Stephen Noll states that the 70 days "would suggest to Jewish readers the predicted seventy years of exile (Jer. 29:10; cf. Dan. 9:2)" (Noll 1989: 332). However, the allusion to the seventy years of exile also "may imply that God's new act of salvation and covenant happens to the Jews as they continue to live among the nations. No return to Israel is envisioned." (Noll 1989: 332) If this is the case, it is a veiled allusion to the church and the new covenant. The Jews of Esther were living among the Gentiles throughout the Persian Empire. They were living in a society, the spiritual and moral values of which were considerably different from their own. Likewise, the church is present throughout the world, a world in which the spiritual and moral values of virtually all cultures and societies are considerably different from those of the church. In fact, in many respects, the church is the new, true, spiritual Israel—the fulfillment of which OT, physical Israel was a "type" and "shadow" (see Menn 2021: 26-93).

- Response of the people to the king's new decree (8:15-17)

¹⁵ *Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white, with a large crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced.* ¹⁶ *For the Jews there was light and gladness and joy and honor.* ¹⁷ *In each and every province and in each and every city, wherever the king's commandment and his decree arrived, there was gladness and joy for the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many among the peoples of the land became Jews, for the dread of the Jews had fallen on them.*

As was true when he was led by Haman through the streets of Susa when honored by the king for saving the king's life (**Est 6:10-11**), Mordecai leaves the king's presence *"in royal robes of blue and white, with a large crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple"* (**v. 15**). What a reversal for a man who, shortly before, had torn his clothes and worn sackcloth and ashes (**Est 4:1**). The rejoicing of the people in Susa probably refers to the Jews in Susa, since the new decree had the potential to be used against the non-Jews of Susa. That is what **vv. 16-17** as well as Josephus indicate (Josephus 1987: 11.284-85).

Yet another great reversal is indicated in **v. 17**. Earlier, it was the Jews who were in *"great mourning"* and were *"fasting, weeping and wailing; and many lay on sackcloth and ashes"* (**Est 4:3**). Now, *"there was gladness and joy for the Jews, a feast and a holiday."* On the other hand, now it is the non-Jews who are in dread of the Jews. As a result, *"many among the peoples of the land became Jews"* (**v. 17**). Josephus reports that *"many of other nations circumcised their foreskin for fear of the Jews, that that they might procure safety thereby"* (Josephus 1987: 11.285). This suggests that, although some of the conversions to Judaism were genuine, other such conversions were simply a means of self-protection. The fact of such conversions again is a

¹⁴ The verbs in **v. 8** are in the plural.

¹⁵ Question has been raised concerning the provision that the Jews could *"destroy, to kill and to annihilate the entire army of any people or province which might attack them, including children and women."* Huey notes that the new decree "is only quoting Haman's decree that would have resulted in the destruction of the Jewish women and children: . . . The new allowed the Jews to defend themselves and 'to destroy . . . any . . . that might attack their women and children' (8:11)" (Huey 1988: 831n.11). Thus, the new decree appears to be a decree to protect Jewish women and children, not a decree to kill non-Jewish women and children. Some support for this interpretation is found in **Est 9:15-16**, which states that when the day of destruction came, the Jews *"did not lay their hands on the plunder."* Huey states, "If Mordecai's order had included the killing of women and children, surely booty would have been taken" (Huey 1988: 831n.11).

veiled pointer to the church, which consists of people “*from every tribe and tongue and people and nation*” (**Rev 5:9**). It is also true that the outward, visible church consists of people who have been truly converted to Jesus Christ, but also includes those who have gone through the outward signs of conversion, including baptism, but have never been truly converted (see **Matt 7:21-23**). Only the Holy Spirit can truly regenerate a person’s heart.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Even in her triumph over Haman, Esther still exercises caution and wisdom in appealing to the king to save the Jews. What can we learn from this?
2. What do you think of the possible allusions to the church in this chapter, i.e., the 70 days and the conversion of many of the non-Jews?

J. The Jews destroy their enemies throughout the kingdom, Haman’s sons are hanged, and the feast of Purim is instituted (9:1-32)

In accordance with the king’s second edict, the Jews defeated and killed their enemies on 13 Adar. Per Esther’s request, the king even gave the Jews an extra day in Susa to kill their enemies. Mordecai and Esther then formalize Purim as a great feast of the Jews, to be characterized by Scripture reading, gift-giving, and celebration.

- **The Jews destroy their enemies (9:1-10)**

¹ Now in the twelfth month (that is, the month Adar), on the thirteenth day when the king’s command and edict were about to be executed, on the day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, it was turned to the contrary so that the Jews themselves gained the mastery over those who hated them. ² The Jews assembled in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm; and no one could stand before them, for the dread of them had fallen on all the peoples. ³ Even all the princes of the provinces, the satraps, the governors and those who were doing the king’s business assisted the Jews, because the dread of Mordecai had fallen on them. ⁴ Indeed, Mordecai was great in the king’s house, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces; for the man Mordecai became greater and greater. ⁵ Thus the Jews struck all their enemies with the sword, killing and destroying; and they did what they pleased to those who hated them. ⁶ At the citadel in Susa the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men, ⁷ and Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, ⁸ Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, ⁹ Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha, ¹⁰ the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Jews’ enemy; but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

In these verses we see how quickly circumstances can change. These verses expose the fact that hatred of the Jews had not been limited to Haman. Instead, their enemies existed across the empire (see vv. 1, 2, 5, 6; see also v. 16). Because of the rise of Mordecai, the provincial leaders now assisted the Jews. Although the king’s edict in favor of the Jews had granted them the right to take the plunder of their enemies (**Est 8:11**), they did not do so. This indicates that their motive was not personal enrichment.

- **Esther petitions the king to order that Haman’s ten sons be hanged and the Jews of Susa be granted another day to kill their enemies; those petitions are granted (9:11-15)**

¹¹ On that day the number of those who were killed at the citadel in Susa was reported to the king. ¹² The king said to Queen Esther, “The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men and the ten sons of Haman at the citadel in Susa. What then have they done in the rest of the king’s provinces! Now what is your petition? It shall even be granted you. And what is your further request? It shall also be done.” ¹³ Then said Esther, “If it pleases the king, let tomorrow also be granted to the Jews who are in Susa to do according to the edict of today; and let Haman’s ten sons be hanged on the gallows.” ¹⁴ So the king commanded that it should be done so; and an edict was issued in Susa, and Haman’s ten sons were hanged. ¹⁵ The Jews who were in Susa assembled also on the fourteenth day of the month Adar and killed three hundred men in Susa, but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.

After reporting that the Jews had killed 500 men and the ten sons of Haman in Susa, the king granted Esther the right to petition him again. She requested that the Jews be granted yet another day to kill their

enemies in Susa and that the ten sons of Haman—despite the fact that they had already been killed—be hanged on the gallows that Haman had erected. The king granted the request. The hanging of Haman’s ten dead sons was a form of public degradation of Haman’s household, a warning to the people of Susa, and/or may have served as a deterrent to further persecution of the Jews. The extra day enabled the Jews to kill another 300 of their enemies. Again, however, they refused to take any plunder.

- The Jews make 14-15 Adar days of feasting and rejoicing (9:16-19)

¹⁶ *Now the rest of the Jews who were in the king’s provinces assembled, to defend their lives and rid themselves of their enemies, and kill 75,000 of those who hated them; but they did not lay their hands on the plunder.* ¹⁷ *This was done on the thirteenth day of the month Adar, and on the fourteenth day they rested and made it a day of feasting and rejoicing.*

¹⁸ *But the Jews who were in Susa assembled on the thirteenth and the fourteenth of the same month, and they rested on the fifteenth day and made it a day of feasting and rejoicing.* ¹⁹ *Therefore the Jews of the rural areas, who live in the rural towns, make the fourteenth day of the month Adar a holiday for rejoicing and feasting and sending portions of food to one another.*

Because of the extra day granted to the Jews of Susa to kill their enemies, the celebrations of the rural and urban Jews fell on different days: 14 Adar in the rural areas and 15 Adar in Susa. In all, 75,800 non-Jews were killed. But, again, the Jews did not seize the plunder of their enemies.

- Mordecai and Esther send letters throughout the kingdom establishing 14-15 Adar as the feast of Purim (9:20-32)

²⁰ *Then Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far,* ²¹ *obliging them to celebrate the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same month, annually,* ²² *because on those days the Jews rid themselves of their enemies, and it was a month which was turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and rejoicing and sending portions of food to one another and gifts to the poor.*

²³ *Thus the Jews undertook what they had started to do, and what Mordecai had written to them.*

²⁴ *For Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the adversary of all the Jews, had schemed against the Jews to destroy them and had cast Pur, that is the lot, to disturb them and destroy them.* ²⁵ *But when it came to the king’s attention, he commanded by letter that his wicked scheme which he had devised against the Jews, should return on his own head and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.* ²⁶ *Therefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. And because of the instructions in this letter, both what they had seen in this regard and what had happened to them,* ²⁷ *the Jews established and made a custom for themselves and for their descendants and for all those who allied themselves with them, so that they would not fail to celebrate these two days according to their regulation and according to their appointed time annually.* ²⁸ *So these days were to be remembered and celebrated throughout every generation, every family, every province and every city; and these days of Purim were not to fail from among the Jews, or their memory fade from their descendants.*

²⁹ *Then Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter about Purim.* ³⁰ *He sent letters to all the Jews, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, namely, words of peace and truth,* ³¹ *to establish these days of Purim at their appointed times, just as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had established for them, and just as they had established for themselves and for their descendants with instructions for their times of fasting and their lamentations.* ³² *The command of Esther established these customs for Purim, and it was written in the book.*

The celebration of the feast of Purim was formalized by Mordecai and Esther (vv. 20, 29-32). The name Purim comes from the casting of the lot, called the “Pur,” that Haman had done to determine the day (13 Adar) when the Jews would be attacked (vv. 24-26). Purim would be celebrated on both 14 and 15 Adar, thus combining the days on which the rural Jews and the Jews in Susa celebrated (vv. 20-21). Purim is a mandatory and a perpetual celebration (v. 21, 28, 31). It is to be characterized by “*feasting and rejoicing and sending portions of food to one another and gifts to the poor*” (v. 22). The apocryphal book of **2 Maccabees** calls Purim the “Day of Mordecai” (**2 Macc 15:36**).

Purim is celebrated to this day by Jews around the world. It is a very popular festival. It, along with

Hanukkah, is referred to as a “minor” festival “only because work is permitted thereon” (Lehrman 1958: 70). Rabbi S. M. Lehrman states that Purim is “not intended to commemorate revenge, vindictiveness and the downfall of our enemies, but to keep ever-green in our minds the hope of the ultimate triumph of that which is just” (Lehrman 1958: 62). Fasting is done on 13 Adar in commemoration of Esther’s 3-day fast (**Est 4:15-17**). Then on 14-15 Adar, Scripture verses are read, gifts are given, and “it is obligatory to eat, drink and be merry on Purim” (Lehrman 1958: 65). With respect to the Scripture reading, Rabbi Menachem Posner states that “per Mordechai’s instruction, the Megillah [i.e., Book of Esther] is read on Purim: once on Purim night, and again on the following day. The Megillah reading is preceded and followed by special blessings”; further, “It is a mitzvah [commandment] to hear all of the Megillah reading” (Posner 2024: What We Do With It) With respect to the gift-giving, Posner states that the following are mitzvahs: “Sending *mishloach manot* (food gifts), at least two portions of food to one person. Distributing *matanot la’evyonim* (gifts to the poor) to at least two needy Jews.” (Posner 2024: What We Do With it) In short, “Purim is a festival in which is integrated the essential teachings of Judaism, faith, hope and charity” (Lehrman 1958: 70). Lehrman concludes by commenting, “We observe Purim to recall lessons we cannot afford to forget. Chief among them is that the Jew can never substitute trust in human power for unshakable faith in God” (Lehrman 1958: 95). That lesson applies to Christians as well.

Turning “*from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday*” (**v. 22**) is another theme or example that subtly points to the gospel. One reason is that, as Rabbi Lehrman observes, there are “categorical statements in the Talmud and Midrash that the festival [of Purim] will, like the Jews themselves, exhaust Eternity. Poet and philosopher join in acclaiming Purim as eternal.” (Lehrman 1958: 60) Moses ben Maimon (1138–1204), commonly known as Maimonides, one of the most prolific and influential Torah scholars of the Middle Ages, wrote, “Although all memories of the difficulties endured by our people will be nullified, . . . the celebration of the days of Purim will not be nullified” (Maimonides 2024: 2.18).

As was true of the Jews in connection with Purim, in the Beatitudes Jesus said, “*Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh*” (**Luke 6:22**). This was anticipated in OT references to the coming of the Messiah (see **Isa 9:3; Zech 9:9**). We are in the Messianic Age now. However, we continue to experience sin, problems, sorrows, and death. Consequently, the laughter Christ refers to will preeminently be experienced for all of eternity, first in heaven and then on the new heaven and new earth. Then there will be no more mourning, crying, pain, death, curse, or sin (see **1 Cor 15:26; Rev 21:4; 22:3**). As Cornelis Venema states, “Absent the presence of sin and its consequences, God’s people will know only unending joy and delight in God’s presence” (Venema 2021: A New Heaven And A New Earth).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think of Esther’s request that the Jews of Susa be granted an extra day to kill their enemies and that the bodies of Haman’s ten dead sons be publicly hanged on the gallows?
2. What do you think of a holiday based on the killing of tens of thousands of one’s enemies?
3. Rabbis Lehrman and Posner detail the requirements and lessons of Purim. How do these compare with the Christian celebrations of Christmas and Easter?
4. Purim was not a feast established in the Torah (the five books of Moses), but was established considerably later. Do you think there are any Christian celebrations that might be celebrated other than Christmas and Easter? If so, what might they be and how do you think they should be celebrated?

K. The greatness of Mordecai (10:1-3)

This last chapter amounts to an epilogue to the story. The statement about the king in **v. 1** ends the book on the same note as the book began, by commenting on the king’s power and his ability to obtain wealth. On the other hand, the statements about Mordecai in **vv. 2-3** end the book by summarizing the great reversal of fortune; Mordecai began as an exiled Jew in a foreign land taking care of his orphaned cousin to become the second most powerful people in the entire Persian Empire and preeminent among all the Jews.

- **The power of the king (10:1)**

¹ *Now King Ahasuerus laid a tribute on the land and on the coastlands of the sea.*

The book began by talking about how the king displayed all “*the riches of his royal glory and the*

splendor of his great majesty” for 180 days (**1:4**). The book ends by telling us one important way how he obtained all that wealth—by “laying a tribute” on the land and the coastlands. The word for “tribute” is used elsewhere of “forced taxation or involuntary labor” (Huey 1988: 839; see **Exod 1:11; 1 Kgs 5:13; 9:15, 21; 2 Chron 8:8**). Thus, the king’s wealth was not actually “*the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty*” but was forcibly obtained from the wealth and labor of others. Taxation may be necessary for governments and countries to exist, but ultimately all taxation and all governments are backed by power and force. Some are more blatant about it and some are more subtle, but the ultimate basis is the same (see **Rom 13:4**).

- The greatness of Mordecai (10:2-3)

² *And all the accomplishments of his authority and strength, and the full account of the greatness of Mordecai to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia?* ³ *For Mordecai the Jew was second only to King Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews and in favor with his many kinsmen, one who sought the good of his people and one who spoke for the welfare of his whole nation.*

Just as the king’s wealth was not really “his,” so the greatness of Mordecai was not really “his.” As **v. 2** says, “*the king advanced him.*” It is similar for all of us. Everyone has certain gifts, abilities, positions, responsibilities, etc. However, ultimately, they are not ours. God is sovereign over everything and actively involved in all aspects of the life of the world; his plan is absolute and comprehensive, and he decrees and acts to bring that plan to completion (see **1 Chron 29:11-12; Job 12:13-25; Ps 103:19; Isa 40:21-26; 46:9-11; Dan 4:35; Acts 4:27-28; Rom 9:14-24; Eph 1:11; Rev 17:14-17**). He raises some up and puts others down (**1 Sam 2:7**); He rules over the nations (**2 Chron 20:6; Ps 33:10-11; Isa 40:23-25**); He stirs up people’s spirits, puts thoughts in their minds, and turns their hearts (**Ezra 6:22; Neh 2:12; 7:5; Ps 105:25; Isa 44:28; Hag 1:14**). His sovereignty includes sovereignty even over the sinful decisions of people (**Gen 45:5-8; Luke 22:22; Acts 2:23-24; 4:27-28; 13:27; Rev 17:17**). As **2 Pet 1:3** says, “*His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness*” (see also **Rom 11:36**).

We have seen this play out throughout the book of Esther. The seeming “coincidences” throughout the book, were not really coincidences. God used even Haman and his sin to bring about the great reversal of the fortunes of Mordecai and the Jews. Even the date determined by Haman’s casting of the “Pur” was not an accident (**Prov 16:33**). It is true, of course, that many of us have worked hard and done well in school or business or elsewhere. Ultimately, however, God gave us the abilities to do so. We did not cause ourselves to be born into our particular families, countries, or times, with the particular physical characteristics, personalities, and “natural” abilities we have. All of that comes from God.

Our responsibility is to be faithful with what God has given us. Mordecai demonstrated this in his own life. He used his “*authority and strength*” to bring about great accomplishments (**v. 2**). He found “*favor with his many kinsmen*” because he “*sought the good of his people and one who spoke for the welfare of his whole nation*” (**v. 3**). Even though he was a Jewish exile in a foreign land, he saved the life of the Persian king (**Est 2:21-23**). His life epitomized what the apostle Paul said in **Gal 6:10**, “*So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.*” As a result, Mordecai was “*great among the Jews and in favor with his many kinsmen*” and his deeds were “*written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Media and Persia.*”

Most of us will never have such position and authority as Mordecai or Esther had. Nevertheless, we are called to be faithful, doing good to all people, especially to those who are of the household of the faith, knowing that our “*Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you*” (**Matt 6:4, 6, 18**). Our rewards will be openly displayed and will last forever (see **Matt 10:26-27; Mark 4:21-23; Luke 8:16-18; 12:2-3**). Our lives are far more important than we may think. Even the smallest acts of kindness and faithfulness may have unanticipated and long-lasting consequences, both in this life and in the life to come. Consequently, we should remain faithful in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. God thereby will be glorified through us, just as he was through Mordecai and Esther.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. We all live in different societies with different governments, which ultimately are based on and backed by power and force. Does this mean we are to submit to and obey every government edict? Discuss the nuances of this.

- Can we gain any insights, either positive or negative, from how Mordecai and Esther dealt with these issues?

2. How, if at all, does God’s omniscience, omnipotence, sovereignty over everything, and comprehensive plan affect our responsibilities to act?

3. Discuss the interplay between what we have received, even though we have not worked for it, and what we should do with what we have.

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