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A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: Esther 4:1-17

18. THE BOOK OF ESTHER

It was an hour of crisis. A situation had arisen in which the destiny of the United Kingdom was in the balance. The morning of the 10th May 1939 dawned in London with the news of a German offensive. Holland and Belgium had been invaded, and France was soon to be trodden under by the rapidly advancing Nazi boot. At six o'clock that morning a message summoned Churchill to the Buckingham Palace. There the King asked him to mobilise the government against Hitler. By the end of the day Churchill had accepted a position he would hold for the duration of the war, one that would secure him a place of honour in history. His journal records his feelings of that fateful night.

During these crowded days of the political crisis, my pulse had not quickened at any moment. I took it all as it came. But I cannot conceal from the reader of this truthful account that as I went to bed at about 3 am I was conscious of a profound sense of relief. At last I had the authority to give directions over the whole scene. I felt as if I were walking with destiny, and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial.

It was an hour of crisis. A situation had arisen in which the destiny of the Jewish nation was in the balance. Ahasuerus or Xerxes the King of Persia (3:1) had consented to sign a decree at the request of the wicked Haman (3:10) the implacable enemy of God's people that on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (3:13) *all Jews somewhere in the region of 15 million, throughout his vast empire should be slain.* It seemed that certain judgement was about to overwhelm God's people, and that the lamp of Israel would be put out for ever. God in His purposes had decreed that the Jewish people would be indestructible. In fact, God promised that the Jewish nation would be as lasting as the sun, moon, and stars. (Jer 31:35) God had said “ *no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper.* ” (Is 54:17) Yet now in this book of Esther we find the purpose of God and the plan of man on a collision course. The atmosphere is one of bewilderment. The capital city is thrown into a state of confusion.

Can this really be true ? Can there be no appeal ? Can there be anyone who could change the plan ? Amend it ? Delay it ? Abolish it ? My for the Jews the sky was falling and there was no place to hide. But then, God is always standing somewhere in the shadows, ruling and overruling. In the wondrous providence of God a Hebrew orphan girl, had been brought into a unique relationship with the king. Ahasuerus had chosen Esther as his bride. He had set the royal crown on her head and made her Queen. (2:17) My God had so ordained that she should come to the kingdom for such a time, that out of desperate weakness His people might be made strong.

That in an hour of impending judgement, there might arise deliverance to the Jewish people. ***It is such an hour of crisis today.*** Satan, “ *the Haman,*” of the people of God knows that his time is short. From within and without he is making a last desperate bid to overwhelm the church. Surely it is obvious to every thoughtful mind that the situation is desperate. Time is running out. World events on this very day are moving fast. The nations are lining up for the last great conflagration. Only a last great sweep of the Spirit of God can meet the need. My this is indeed the hour of crisis and “ *who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this ?*” (4:14) Now the book of Esther is one of two books in the Bible named after women, Ruth was a Gentile woman who married a Jew, Esther was a Jewish woman who married a Gentile.

1. The Place of this Story:

Is Shushan. This was located 150 miles east of Babylon, in modern Iran not far from the Iraqi border.

2. The Period of this Story:

The events of Esther occur between the first return of the Jews under Zerubbabel in 538 BC, and the second return led by Ezra in 458 B.C. Ahasuerus ruled from 486 B.C. to 465 B.C. and Esther covers the 483 – 473 B.C. portion of his reign. *Now this story takes place among the Jews who decided to remain in Babylon.* They felt that life was too good in Babylon and so they decided they would remain there and not be part of the remnant that went back to the

land of promise. Of course you can see from the opening verse that's its no longer Babylon but Persia that is now in control. My the Persian Empire was the largest the world had ever seen. It covered modern day Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel and parts of Egypt, Sudan, Libya and Arabia. Millions of people speaking a multitude of languages all owed allegiance to their sovereign lord the king. Ahasuerus was known as “ *The Great King, the King of kings.*” 1, 2,

3. The People of this Story:

Now there are several main characters in this book. There is Ahasuerus the king, his Greek name is Xerxes. There is Vashti his Queen in (Ch 1) her name means “ *beautiful.*” We also find Haman, who hated the Jews. We find Mordacai, the Jewish cousin of Esther and then we find Esther herself, which is her Persian name and means “ *Star.*” But what's,

4. The Purpose of this Story:

To show us that though God is invisible He is invincible. Here is a story about how God preserved the nation of Israel from annihilation. It's a story that was not new to Esther. Indeed it's a story that has continued to this very day. It started in the land of Egypt when Pharaoh set out to destroy the Jewish people. It continued in modern history when Hitler gassed six million Jews. *Indeed, is this story not continuing to this very day ?* But thank God, He is in control. For though the name of God appears

nowhere in this book, the hand of God appears everywhere. Now for some,

5. The Problem of this Story:

Is this very thing. God's name nowhere appears and this has made some to question whether this book should be included in the divinely inspired Scriptures. *Martin Luther is reputed to have disliked the book and wished that it did not exist.* But if the name of God is not mentioned in the book of Esther His finger certainly is. But why is God never mentioned ? Well, here's the biggest surprise, **God is mentioned.** God is actually mentioned five times but few are able to spot it. The secret hiding of God's name is not evident in the English Bible, but scholars tell us in the Hebrew Bible the name of God (Jehovah) does appear in acrostic form. (1:20, 5:4, 5:13, 6:7 7:5) One thing is certain the key to understanding the book of Esther is one word. Do you know what it is ? **Providence.** That word providence comes from two words, the word "*pro*," meaning "*before*," and the word "*video*," meaning "*to see*." Providence simply means to see beforehand and to provide for what is seen.

Do you hear that word "*provide*," in the word providence ? The providence of God simply means that God see's every event before it occurs and provides for that event and makes sure that it fits into His plan for your life. Louis Berkhof says "*providence is that work of God in which He preserves all His creatures, is active in all that happens in the world and directs all things to their appointed end.*" Providence has also been defined as "*the*

hand of God in the glove of history." Now keeping that in mind we can divide this book into three sections which show us three aspects of God's providence.

(1) THE PREPARATION FOR GOD'S PROVIDENCE Ch's 1:1-2:20

It all begins with Queen Vashti's refusal to obey King Ahasuerus. I mean who can blame her ? Her sense of purity and dignity in refusing to attend this drunken orgy is used by God to cause the king to look for another Queen. Esther, a Jewess is chosen. You see, it is essential for the Lord's purposes that one of his own people should have the ear of this pagan monarch. The book of Esther begins with a feast. Actually there are three feasts in this book.

- 1. The Feast of the King: Ch's 1-2**
- 2. The Feast of the Queen: (Ch's 3-7)**
- 3. The Feast of Purim: (Ch's 8-10)**

Now what this purpose behind this banquet in (Ch 1) ? Scripture does not tell us but secular history does. Herodotus, the ancient Greek historian, mentions a great gathering of officials in Shushan in the year 483 B.C.. to consider the war against Greece. You see, Greece had soundly defeated the Persians at Marathon in 490 B.C. when Darius I, Ahasuerus' father attacked them, and Darius had died several years later when preparing to return to Greece to get revenge for the loss. *So now his son feels compelled to avenge his father and expand his*

empire at the same time. So to help gain the support of the rulers of the various provinces, Ahasuerus wined and dined these officials with much feasting to break down any resistance they had to his wishes. It's a bit like the salesman who takes you out to an exclusive restaurant for an expensive dinner. Ahasuerus is simply using his prosperity and luxury to soften them up. Here was a man who had trouble with wine. He liked to drink (3:15) and he drank too much. Indeed (1:10) says “ *when the heart of the king was merry with wine,* ” he called on his wife to display herself. I mean do you see here,

(a) *THE QUEEN THAT IS DETHRONED: Exit Vashti:*

Look at (1:11-12) Here's an old boy that wants his wife to show off her beautiful body to the lustful, drunken men at his feast. *Some Jewish scholars believe the text of Scripture meant that Vashti was to come nude with only her royal crown on.* But Vashti was a Queen who preferred to lose her crown of royalty rather than her crown of integrity. She said “ *No,* ” to something wrong knowing that she risked her crown. *I mean do you not admire Queen Vashti ? She set her modesty above the goal of career advancement.* Is it not sad that we have lost modesty in ***the nation*** ? We are living in a culture when people take their clothes off and pose for Playboy magazines and become instant celebrities ? “ **Oh, be careful little eyes what you see,** ” on the television, in the magazine, on facebook, the internet, the film. Is it not sad that we have lost modesty in the ***church*** ? Yet the Word of God says, “ *In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel.* ” (1 Tim 2:9) The Greek

word for “ *Adorn,* ” means to “ *arrange,* ” “ *To put in order,* ” or “ *to make ready.* ” A woman is to arrange herself appropriately for the worship service which includes wearing decent clothing which reflects a properly adorned chaste heart. My I am all for the covering of a Christian's ladies head, for I believe the head covering is Scriptural, but what about the covering of a Christian's ladies body ? *Ladies, when you dress for a worship service so as to attract attention to yourself, you have violated the purpose of worship.* You need to examine your motives and goals for the way you dress. Is your intent to show the grace and beauty of womanhood ? Is it to show your love and devotion to your husband ?

Is it to reveal a humble heart devoted to worshipping God ? Or is it to call attention to yourself and flaunt your shape, your wealth, your beauty ? Like Vashti is your conduct modest ? Are you prepared to take a stand for decency, purity and modesty ? Can you see these old boys now ? One woman has said “ ***no,*** ” and they are in real trouble. So what do they do ? They reward good with evil. The King and his counselors make a decision “ *That Vashti come no more before King Ahasuerus and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she.* ” (1:19) In other words, you see here (a) and then,

(b) *THE QUEEN THAT IS ENTHRONED: Enter Esther:*

Now what you have to keep in mind is that Esther does not have the foggiest idea of anything that is going on. She knows nothing of the events that are taking place in

the royal palace. She knows nothing about this “*royal edict*,” which will set events in motion that will totally change her life. Now who was Esther ? Well, she was a cousin of Mordecai whose family had been taken into captivity in 597 B.C. Her Mum and Dad were dead so he took her into his own home and reared her as his own daughter. Her Hebrew name Hadassah means “*myrtle*,” her Persian name Esther means star. Now can you see,

1. Her External Beauty:

The Bible says she “*was fair and beautiful*,” the Hebrew means she had a pretty face and figure. Josephus says that “*she surpassed all women in beauty*,” in the entire habitable world. My Satan is always using beautiful bodies to promote his work. But Satan is here outmaneuvered by God in the beautiful body business for God uses a beautiful body to defeat one of Satan’s major plans for destroying the Jewish race. I mean Esther won the Miss Persia beauty contest. Look at (2:17) But then Esther had had not only external beauty, for there was,

2. Her Internal Beauty:

You see, she captured the attention of the king’s servant Heganai and he promoted her (2:9) moreover she was a woman of self control. (2:10) She could keep a secret, she has self control, she was not a blabbermouth. Thanks to tell all tabloids, and hide nothing television shows. Nothing is restrained. Does it bother to see all these blabbermouths on television ? Then you have the internet, and facebook, and social media, and its just blabber,

blabber and more blabber. My are we marked by self control ? Now do you see what God is doing here ? He is putting the right people in the right places to accomplish His sovereign purpose. (1)

(2) THE DEMONSTRATION OF GOD’S PROVIDENCE Ch’s 2:21-7:10

For through seemingly coincidental circumstances the Jews are delivered from certain annihilation. Now it seems that there are four strands to this displaying of God’s providence. Notice it begins with,

(a) AHASUERUS PRESERVATION:

A plot to assassinate the king was foiled. Mordecai in a place of position and honour (2:21) gets hold of the information goes to Esther his adopted daughter. She in turn informs the king. They put the S.A.S. on the job. They discover its true and the two conspirators are hanged on a tree. Now something was recorded. Look if you at, (2:23) “*And it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.*” (2:23) These chronicles were a historical diary of important government happenings. Do you recall later on when King Ahasuerus could not sleep and had some of these chronicles read to him which brought his attention to Mordecai at a most opportune time ? (6:1–3) “*And it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.*” Does that not seem incidental ? What has this got to do with God ? What has it do with Esther ? What has it do with us ? Well, for the

believer nothing is unimportant. The little things in life are just as important as the big things in life. Someone has said, “***God swings big doors on little hinges.***” Your whole life can change on one little thing. One little phone call. One little visit. One little text message. One little email. One little word. And your whole life can change. Will you put it into your memory ? “*And it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.*” (2:23) (a)

(b) HAMAN’S PLOT:

My everything about Haman is hateful. He is the “***baddie***,” in the story. Because of his lineage from Agag, Haman carried deep hostility toward the Jews. (Deut 25:18 1 Sam 15:32-33) The flash point here came when Mordecai refused to offer Haman the reverence and adoration which was due to God alone. (Ex 20:3-4) You see, everyone else was bowing down in worship to Haman but Mordecai was standing up. Now that’s not easy. It’s not easy to go against the crowd. It’s not easy to be a non-conformist. But here was one man who would not bow. The world said to him, “*Bow down you stupid fool.*” But he said, “*I will not bow.*” So Haman asks that all Jews should be slain. My here is the ultimate in Anti-Semitic action in the Old Testament. Here is the Old Testament Adolf Hitler, here is a picture of “*the man of sin*,” who will one day appear and ruthlessly reign over humanity. (2 Thes 2:4 Rev 13:7) Do you see Haman as he goes in to make a proposal to the king ? He talks to the king about,

1. A People:

“*Whose laws are diverse from all the people,*” (3:8) Their laws were different because they were God’s chosen people who alone received God’s law from His hand.

2. A Price:

Haman offers to pay the king, 10,000 talents of silver for the privilege of getting rid of the Jews.

3. A Permission:

“*If it please the king let it be written that they be destroyed,*” (3:9) A nation is about to be eradicated yet no question is asked.

4. A Proclamation:

“*Death to the Jews,*” can you imagine the grief, the anguish as the royal couriers take this message to every part of the empire ? Can you see the Jews now ? Haman not only wants to destroy this people, but he wants to terrorize them for a solid year. (3:12-13) My Satan is determined to destroy the Jews because salvation is of the Jews. Satan was behind the slaughter of the boys in Egypt, he was behind the slaughter of the babies in Bethlehem. There is something demonic about Anti-Semitism. Pharaoh tried to drown the Jews, Haman tried to destroy the Jews, Herod tried to murder the Jews, Hitler tried to gas the Jews. “*Death to the Jews,*” keeps popping up in history because salvation is off the Jews. We ought to be very grateful to the Jewish people. Everything we know about God came through them and our Saviour was and is

a Jew. My without the Jews we wouldn't have a Bible at all. No wonder they are hated more than any other people. And yet as J. Vernon McGee used to say, "*the Jew has attended the funeral of every one of the nations that has tried to exterminate him.*" (a) (b) Do you see,

(c) MORDECAI'S PLAN:

For he calls,

1. Esther to Utilize Her Special Position:

He cries, "*Go in unto the king,*" (4:8) You see, she was to use her unique position with the king for the deliverance of her people. So he says, "*Esther be active, be decisive, go into the king.*" For far too long Christians have been indecisive and inactive in a worsening world situation and in a deteriorating church situation. My what we need is to be awakened to the perils of the hour and to the possibilities of revival. This is not a time for sitting back, this is call from God to intervene, to get involved, to do something for God before He calls you home.

2. Esther to Recognize God's Sovereign Purpose:

"*And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this ?*" (4:14) "*Esther can you see God in all of this ? Can you see His hand in your appointment and elevation to the palace ? Do you see that God is behind all of this ?*" My do we always discern God's hand in the "ordinary," affairs of everyday life ?

I mean "*who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this ?*" (4:14) What a choice Esther had to make. I wonder have you ever thought about the choice that's facing you to day ? You see, there is a sense in which God's servants have all been born "*for such a time as this.*" We should all be asking whether we are younger like Esther or older like Mordecai, "*What work has the Lord especially for me to do because He has allowed me to be alive at this particular time.*"

My do you realise that this is your time ? ***In such a time as this what are you standing against what are you standing for ? Does the Lord want you to stand against pornography ? Does He want you to speak a word in opposition to abortion ? Does the Lord want you to help the alcoholic or the abused children ? What about the disabled ? What are you doing to stand up, to stand alone, to answer the call of God in this hour ?*** Are you there ready to be salt and light in such an hour ? Esther was, for do you see what she said ? "*So will I go in unto the king and if I perish, I perish.*" "*Enough of the easy life,*" says Esther. "*Its time to my put name on the line. I am Jewish and I believe in the living God. I am ready to stand alone for my people and if I perish, I perish.*" (a) (b) (c) and now,

(d) ESTHER'S PLEA:

Will you notice how carefully, calmly and skilfully Esther approaches this problem. Although the days are precious, she does not rush into the matter. You see, God is at work in it all and He gives the Queen favour (5:2) and the

King insomnia. (6:1) As a possible cure for his sleeplessness he orders that the state records be read, surely they will send anyone off to sleep. He is made aware of Mordecai's kindness, and realizes that the loyal Jew has never been rewarded. Events move swiftly after this. At the banquet Haman is exposed as the originator of the plot against the Jews (7:3-6) and the judgment is reversed so that Haman is hanged from the very gallows he had hoped to use for Mordecai. Now I want to see here,

1. The Sleeplessness of the King:

“ On that night could not the king sleep,” (6:1) It was the night before the day that Haman planned to hang Mordecai. What kept the king awake ? Was it the cares of state ? Maybe it was the weekend and he had a Chinese take away the night before. My does the perfect timing of God not take your breathe away ? I mean on no other night was Mordecai in such danger as this night ? I love the first three words of this chapter. *“ On that night.”* The sixteenth century Richard Sibbes says this,

Nothing so high, that is above His providence, nothing so low that is beneath it, nothing so large but it is bounded by it, nothing so confused but God can order it, nothing so bad but He can draw good out of it, nothing so wisely plotted but God can disappoint it.

Can you see the king now ? He sits up in bed and says, *“ Have we rewarded this man ?”* What man ? Mordecai. Do you see what God is doing ? He is preparing the heart

of the king for the request of Esther, for we see here not only 1. but,

2. The Brokenness of the Queen:

Look at (7:1- 4) Do you see (8:6) Do you feel like that ? I mean Esther approaches the King selflessly, with a burden for others. My is this how we approach the King of Kings and Lord of Lords ? Weighed down with a burden, for the salvation of others. Do you recall Paul's passion for the lost ? He says, *“ I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh.”* (Rom 9:2-3) Sheer heaviness of spirit brought Paul to tears, real tears. On another occasion he could remind his brethren that *“ by the space of three years,”* he *“ ceased not warn every one night and day with tears.”* (Acts 20:31) What about the Saviour Himself ? Do we not read that He was a Man of *“ strong crying and tears,”* (Heb 5:7) He was a Man of *“ sorrows and acquainted with grief.”* (Is 53:3)

My are you like the Saviour ? Do you have a heart of concern for the lost ? When was the last time that we had such a concern for lost friends that we actually shed real tears of concern that they might be saved ? William Burns as a lad of 17 years, visiting Glasgow for the first time, was overwhelmed by so many sad faces. He got separated from his mother but eventually she found him weeping bitterly, *“ What ails you lad,”? Are you ill ?”* she asked. *“ Oh, mother, mother,”* he sobbed. *“ The thud of those many Christless feet on their way to hell breaks my*

heart.” Does Christless feet on the way to hell break your heart ? Like Esther, are you concerned for your fellow country men and women ? Now isn’t this interesting ? Haman had been furious because a Jewish man would not bow down to him, and now Haman was prostrate before a Jewish woman begging for his life. My its all over for Haman. You see, in the end God always wins. So we see in this book (1) (2) and now,

(3) THE CELEBRATION ABOUT GOD’S PROVIDENCE Ch’s 8-10

For through a grateful Gentile king Israel receives a perpetual memorial of their miraculous existence. You see, once Haman is out of the way, peace reigns in the palace.

(a) A NEW DECREE IS COMMUNICATED:

Which give the Jews the right to defend themselves. (8:11) Do you know what the first edict of the king was all about ? Condemnation. Do you know what the second edict of the king was all about ? Salvation. You see, the law of the Medes and Persians was like some Baptist churches. It never changed. (Dan 6:8) King Ahasuerus couldn’t legally revoke his edict, but he could issue a new decree that would favour the Jews. My this was good news and you’ll notice they wanted to get the “ *good news*,” out urgently. “ *The posts being hastened and pressed on by the king’s commandment.* ” (8:14) If only the church today were like those couriers. How we need to

tell the peoples of the world in their own language the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. But for some reason we linger, we hesitate, we procrastinate. We say “ *the time is not come, the time that the Lord’s house should be built.* ” (Haggai 1:2) (a)

(b) A NEW DAY IS COMMEMORATED:

Now the feast of Purim was ordained by the Jews rather than by God. (9:27) To this very day the Jews keep the feast of Purim. It’s the plural of the word “ *pur*,” which means “ *lots*.” (9:24 3:7) And each year the Jews celebrate this deliverance in the festival of Purim. For Jews and their family it’s very much a day of celebration. Every time Haman’s name is mentioned there is hissing and booing and every time Mordecai’s name is mentioned it is greeted with cheers. Children take gifts of food to the elderly, and the day is spent in a party atmosphere. One of the purposes of the book of Esther is to explain how this non-Mosaic feast of Purim became part of the Jewish calendar. My over the Feast of Purim we can write one word. Do you know what it is ? “ *Remember.* ” (Ps 106:13) Over the Lord’s Supper we can write one word, “ *Remember.* ” For the Lord Jesus said, “ *this do in remembrance of me.* ” (Lk 22:19)

Is it not astonishing that we who are redeemed need a reminder ? Yet such is the Lord’s understanding of our weakness and the treachery of our own hearts that He has made provision for us to be reminded in this “ forget me not feast.” You see, He wants us to keep the centrality of His death ever before our minds.

**Remember Thee and all Thy pains
And all Thy love to me
Yea, while a breath, a pulse remains
Will I remember Thee**

(c) A NEW DIGNITY IS CIRCULATED:

Who would have guessed that the one time gate keeper would be promoted to Prime Minister ? “ *For Mordecai the Jew was next unto King Ahasuerus and was great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren seeking the wealth of his people and speaking peace to all his seed.* ” (10:3) Can you imagine the headlines of the Susa Daily Sun ? “ ***Gentile King chooses new Prime Minister a Jew.*** ” How unchanging is the principle “ *them that honour me I will honour.* ” (1 Sam 2:30) And so the book ends and so our Bible Class ends. But what a way to end ? In the end God wins. My God will always win, for He is in control. Sure the name of God is not mentioned here, but the hand of God used this woman of God to spare the people of God so that the Son of God might come to demonstrate the love of God. God took the Wrong man out so He could ultimately bring the Right man in.

Amy Carmichael as a little brown eyed girl prayed that God would give her blue eyes. She even asked her mother to pray with her that God would give her blue eyes. Her mother said, “ *But honey, God gave you brown eyes. He wanted you to have brown eyes and He gave you brown eyes for a reason.* ” Years later, while a missionary in India, Amy Carmichael realized the truth of her mother’s

words. When persecution broke out, the Christians were some of the first that were arrested. Amy Carmichael overheard a group of soldiers talking, “ *Get all the Christians, especially the Carmichael woman.* ” One soldier asked, “ *How will we know her ?* ” He was answered, “ *She is a foreigner. All foreigners have blue eyes. Look for everyone with blue eyes.* ” Amy Carmichael finally understood why God gave her brown eyes.

My the book of Esther reminds us that even when we can’t see God’s hand, we can trust God’s heart. Even if we can’t hear His name, we won’t forget His nature.

Truth forever on the scaffold wrong forever on the throne

Yet that scaffold sways the future and behind the dim unknown

Standeth God within the shadows keeping watch above His own

He was God all day yesterday, He is God all day today, and, He will be God all day tomorrow. He is the God of history, of prophecy, of eternity. He’s still on the throne, still in control, still in charge. Trust Him. (Rom 8:28)

