

Esther

Esther was probably the most beautiful young woman of the period in which she lived. From what we know about her, she was also exceedingly brave, intelligent, resourceful, and obedient and God honoring. Applying all of these qualities, God used her as His instrument to actually save the entire Hebrew race from extinction. Beyond that, it may be that without her strong God-given influence, Jerusalem and the Temple would have not been rebuilt as they were after the Babylonian captivity, at least in the same time frame. Furthermore, the seventy-week prophecy of Daniel would not be as we find it. That all sounds pretty incredible, but, I believe true, as we shall see as we examine a few snapshots of just one 10 year portion of her life. God even gave her a place of her own, in the Holy Bible, between the Books of Nehemiah and Job.

Sadly, Christian history has not been very kind to this book as evidenced by the fact many biblical scholars, even Martin Luther, questioned why this book was even included in the sacred Canon. God is not mentioned, not even once. Neither is prayer, nor any of the religious messages or expressions as are found in the other Old Testament books. It seems secular all the way. For those who merely skate across its surface, it's understandable why they regard it in this manner. It's only when one probes that surface are the strong biblical aspects revealed.

The purpose of this commentary is to focus on the woman Esther and examine how God used her to His greater glory as He shaped this particular portion of the history of the Jewish race. The story the Book presents is superior to any Agatha Christy novel, in terms of its entertainment value, with its mysteries, intrigues, suspense, and a surprise ending. For that purpose, the prose is very clear, and a simple reading is sufficient without any depth of study or repetition in this commentary. However, some of the story must be related, at least in summary form, in order to establish the context and circumstances where her God orchestrated historic role might best be appreciated.

If we are to understand the beauty and richness of what God has given us in this Book and how exquisitely He used Esther for the fulfillment of His greater purpose, we need to first examine what we might call “peripheral history”. From this we can learn something about the players involved in perhaps what is one of the greatest dramas in all of Old Testament Scripture. While Scripture provides all the essentials, the writings of Herodites, Josephus and others provide useful detail. Herodotus spoke with considerable detail about the events of this period. The key players in the drama are of course, Esther, her guardian Mordecai, the king Ahasue’rus, and Haman, who was “The enemy of the Jews.”

Esther was orphaned at an early age, and Scripture tells us that Mordecai, her father’s brother’s son, that is her cousin, took her to raise as his own. Scripture tells us that Mordecai was the son of Jair, the son of Shmei, the son of Kish of the tribe of Benjamin as we learn in Chapter 2, verse 5. The genealogy may seem irrelevant, but God doesn’t deal in trivia. Such details all have meaning and are there to enrich our understanding, if we seek it. Keep this bit of genealogy in mind because it will reveal itself to be of great significance as we will see later. The Babylonian captivity occurred in three segments. In 606 when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Egypt he also took Judea, the southern kingdom. At that time he installed a vassal king of the line of David and left with much of the wealth and a number of captives, including Daniel. Eight years later he returned a second time to put down an insurrection and again replaced that king. This time he took the Prophet Ezekiel and some more captives very likely including the ancestors to Mordecai and Esther.

It was Nebuchadnezzar’s policy in both raids to take captive the best of the best for the enhancement of his kingdom. Fifty years after the destruction of the Temple which occurred in 586 BC, Darius the king of the Mede/Persian Empire conquered the Babylonians. Four years later Cyrus, king of the Persian/Mede Empire freed the Jews, allowing them to return to their homeland. However, only about 50,000 chose to return. The rest remained by the rivers of Babylon, and other parts of the pagan empire having established themselves as pilgrims rather than slaves in the prevailing society. Mordecai

and Esther were of those families that remained in Persia. They had been settled in Susa, a city about 200 miles east of Babylon. This was the location of the summer palace which was called Shushan. History records that many of the Jews that had been assimilated into the Babylonian empire attained considerable wealth and occupied important positions within the governmental structure. Mordecai was one of those who held some such position under the Medes. Here we get a glimpse of this aspect of the life of the Jews in “captivity”.

Regardless of the brutal treatment of them early on, they seemed to have proven themselves to have abilities and values that were soon recognized and utilized by their captors who don't seem to have discriminated against them, but instead took full advantage of what they had to offer as free citizens. We see this dramatically represented in the cases of Moses, Joseph, Daniel and others, all of whom rose mightily, even against such great odds as being captive slaves in strange cultures and under foreign domination. Hasn't this been true throughout all of history? God has blessed them with special talents that enable them to rise out of the depths of the most awful pits of hatred, vicious discrimination and atrocities, and into positions of earthly power and authority, usually to sit quite quietly behind the visible seats of authority. The history of the Rothschild's is one of many modern day examples of such successes. Here at the beginning of this story we see the Jew, Mordecai, in a minor governmental position, and his beautiful orphaned cousin as his ward. By the end of the story we find that the young Jewish girl had become queen of the world's greatest empire and Mordecai had become the Prime Minister, the second most powerful man, directly under the king in a position similar to those of Daniel and Joseph in their times.

In the very first verse of this precious Book we are introduced to Ahasuerus the then reigning king of the Persian Median Empire. Who was Ahasuerus? I believe that the answer must be of some significance, or God wouldn't have included the identifying parenthetical statement that “*(this is Ahasuerus which reigned from India even unto Ethiopia, over a hundred and seven and twenty provinces,)*” Why are we given this clue unless it has significance and therefore something for which to pursue a better

understanding? Remember that God told us through Paul in 2Timothy 3:16 that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God for our learning. Therefore, I believe that it behooves us to look further into this matter if the Spirit prompts us to do so. However, I find only one thing more of relevance in Scripture regarding who he was. Strong's (325) defines Ahasuerus as "Achashverosh i.e. Ahasuerus, but in this case he was also called Xerxes. Ahasuerus was a title rather than name of a Persian king. The fact is that Ahasuerus, Darius, Cyrus, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes can be titles and not specific names of individuals. This of course makes any actual identification very difficult. History tells us that there were several Cyruses and Dariuses

There are a number of things mentioned in Scripture that seem to leave us "hanging" for want of understanding. When this occurs, I believe God sometimes provides us with answers through secular writings. However, we must examine all such evidences with prayer and the resulting God-given power of discernment before we accept such answers. One classic example of this is where the Historian Falvius Josephus gives us the answer regarding how Aaron and Miriam could have correctly accuse Moses of marrying an Ethiopian. (See study called: Jochabed) It is with this in mind that I find it consistent with God's will for us to seek, but with great care, information from secular sources as to where in history this Ahasuerus had his place. Some will probably wonder why one should go through this effort when there is no doctrinal or other significant issue involved. Hopefully, I'll answer this convincingly a little later.

Secular writing has quite a bit to say about this period in history. Regarding our quest, I believe that the 490 AD battle of Marathon between the Medes and Greece is a most important anchor point. History tells us that the numerically superior forces of the Median Empire, on both land and sea were severely beaten by the much smaller military forces of Greece. Darius the Great is most likely to have been the ruler at the time. He is said to have lived between about 550 BC and 486BC. Therefore, he died about four years after this defeat. I believe that it's quiet evident that the Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther is Xerxes, the son and heir of this Darius. The basis for this conclusion is as follows:

1. Verse one tells us that the Ahasuerus reined over zenith period of the Mede/Persian Empire. It was Darius the Great who probably brought it to its zenith, and then tried in 490 BC to extend it into Europe. After his father's failure, it was Xerxes who tried again to extend it into Greece. Its continued greatness is reflected here by the mention of the 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia.
2. The events recorded in the Book of Esther indicate that they began in Ahasuerus's or Xerxes's third year as king. Given that Darius died in 486, this would likely be the year Ahasuerus / Xerxes began his reign.
3. Esther 1:3 tells us that in his third year (483 BC), that he had called all of his Satraps, that is the Governors of his 127 Provinces to a six month long gathering. During the 7 day feast that followed this gathering, is when the events regarding his queen Vashiti and his call took place to bring to the court all of the prettiest maidens from within the whole empire.
4. Here is where things get interesting. We read nothing further about Ahasuerus until chapter 2 verse 16 where we are told that it was in the eleventh month of the seventh year of his reign is when he chose and married Esther. What was he doing during those 4 years while the maidens were waiting for the selection process to begin? This seventh year was 479 BC.
5. History tells us that ten years after the battle of Marathon, that is in 480 BC, the Medes again attacked Greece in what is called the battles of Thermoplae Salmis and Plataea. So what's the point? It is that this 480 BC invasion of Greece took place during the reign of Ahasuerus. The six month assembly of governors took place in the year 483 BC four years before the invasion which would have been in 479 BC. His marriage to Esther also took place 7 years into his reign, that is in 479 BC. When rounding to years, when the months are unknown, a variance of one year is quite common. He returned home and married Esther the same year that is in 480 BC, rather than 479 BC.
6. Does this explain why it took four years after he divorced Vashiti before he married Esther? I believe so. I believe that the six month meeting of the

governors of his 127 provinces was to plan for the gathering assembly, deployment and 480 BC attack by the massive army, with which he attacked Greece so as to avenge his father's defeat and also to further extend his own empire. Like father, like son, he too was defeated and returned to Shushan, his palace in Susa, which, by the way, is over 1400 miles from Greece. That, I believe is what happened during those four years, which God so graciously mentioned.

So what is the relevance of all this that makes it worthy of such attention? As an answer, let us consider this: Ahasuerus must have had an heir, because that dynasty is known to have continued. There is no Scriptural evidence that Esther ever had any children, even though she may have. If she did, it's almost certain that none would not have been heirs to the throne. Their laws required that the king could only be succeeded by a son from a wife of royal ancestry. I believe that Vashti was of royalty and that she had given him that son. Some commentaries suggest that Vashti was a daughter of Nebuchadnezzar. However, I believe that chronology makes this very unlikely because he died in 562 BC. If he had her during his last year of life, she would have been around 80 years old during the 3rd years of Xerxes reign.

Others claim that Vashti gave him a son during the 2nd year of his reign, or a little earlier. When we again examine the relevant chronology we must conclude that Artaxerxes Longimanus was very likely that son, and was the first of five kings who were called Artazerzes. If so, and I believe so, than Esther would have been his step mother. Could it be that this is why he was so accommodating to the Jews? Isn't it likely that she had considerable influence on him regarding the Jewish culture, and why he was so accommodating to both Ezra and Nehemiah? As a side bit of trivia, Longimanus means "long hand." There is a name for this disorder. It is called "neurofibromatosis." It is a heredity disease, one form of which is called Proleus Syndrome named after the Greek sea god who changes his shape. It seems to manifest as a distorted bone development.

There were four decrees given to the Jews, which allowed and helped them rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple.

1. Decree by Cyrus (Ezra 1:2-4) this was the result of Jeremiah's prophecy naming Cyrus. 1Chronicles 36:22 tells us that this "stirred up the spirit of Cyrus." The king therefore made a proclamation freeing the Jews to return to their land and to rebuild the City and Temple.
2. Later with things not going well with the Jerusalem project, Darius, was asked for assistance to carry out Cyrus's decree of which he knew nothing until it was found in the archives. Darius then confirmed that decree and amplified that assistance by his own decree (Ezra 6:12)
3. Next we find in that about 458 BC, Artaxerxes issued the third decree (Ezra 7:11-16) whereby he provided much, silver, gold, animals and other supplies with which to finish the Temple.
4. Finally, in 445 BC, in his 20th year as king, Artaxerxes Longimanus issued the fourth decree which was to finish the walls and the streets of Jerusalem.

His order to this last effort is what triggered the prophesy by Daniel which predicted that from the day the order was issued, it would be 483 years to the day that Jesus would declare Himself the Messiah! That is why this and all genealogy-chronology is so worthy of a detailed study! As everything in Scripture is, one way or another, of relevance, what we find here is vital to our being able to determine biblically the "when" of Jesus' earthly life and ministry.

As we read of the selection process to find a new queen, we get our first glimpse of Esther and some of her qualities. Obviously she was a young girl in her prime, as one of outstanding physical beauty. She also seems to have endeared herself to her "handlers" during the year- long preparation process that was required before she could be presented to the king. This would speak well for her general demeanor which probably expressed a warm friendliness, humility, concern, compassion, caring etc. That made her stand out from the rest of the candidates in the hearts of those who had contact with her during that

year of preparation. Later we will see her blossom into a loyal, obedient, extremely brave, shrewd woman of clear judgment, great self control, and capable of the noblest self sacrifice. What a woman! What an outstanding person! We will see each of these qualities manifest as we get to know her.

We don't get these earlier descriptions of her directly from Scripture, but some measure of these can be inferred by how Hegai the "keeper of the women" treated her (2:8) obviously it was something more than her beauty that made her by far the favorite to this eunuch. The keeper of the women was a big and important job. There were three houses for the king's women that were in his charge. First, there was the queen's apartment where she lived alone with her maids subject to the king's calling. He had his own private chambers. They didn't even eat together, except on special occasions. Then there was the place where the king's other wives and concubines dwelt. A third place was where his concubines-in-training were kept. That is where Esther and all the other contestants stayed and were prepared until called by the king for their "interviews", after which they returned to the second house as part of his assortment of concubines.

Of course, after the king had made his selection, Esther graduated to the long empty queen's chamber. We should take note that no one in authority knew that Esther was a Jew, not even the king, for Mordecai had commanded her not to reveal this to anyone. It seems quite strange and fortuitous that it wasn't already known, given that Mordecai her cousin was well known to be a Jew. As we will soon see, God chose to keep this fact secret until the time was right. As already noted, Persian law held that one of the royal line must marry only a woman belonging to a royal family. Could her being a Jew disqualify her even under the rules his advisors devised for him, that is, to simply choose a virgin that pleased him most? I doubt it. While we shall see evidence that there was some small localized pockets of discrimination against Jews, across the empire the ruling hierarchy except for Haman seems to have had no such attitude. Keeping her ethnicity secret however was of great importance in God's plan, as we will soon see.

We now have another little “set aside” event that becomes important a little later. After Esther became queen it appears that she used her influence to improve Mordecai’s job description. He now “sat at the king’s gate.” While in that place he became aware of a plot to kill the king. This he reported to Esther who conveyed the message to the king giving Mordecai full credit for the discovery. With the plot exposed, the plotters were executed and the king’s life saved. That is another little event, that effects of which God chose to “shelve” for a while until the time was right.

Now we come to the fourth and last of the main characters in the story, the villain Haman. Notice that his introduction includes a brief genealogy that identifies him as an Agagite. Why did God insert this, if not for some reason that we ought to accept as being of significance? Remember how God instructed Saul to kill every member of the extremely wicked Jew-hating tribe of Agagites, and how he disobeyed by sparing the life of king Agag? Well, here we discover that because this hater of the Jews was not dealt with as God had directed his line of descendants was able to continue. Because of this, Haman, who was also “a hater of the Jews” was able to be there, and to resume Satan’s attack on the Jews. We know that soon after Saul’s transgression, Samuel killed Agag. However, because it is evident that Agag’s seed continued, Saul’s failure was not limited to dealing only with Agag, but also some offspring as well. Apparently, it was some descendant of Agag who was not known to Samuel, and therefore survived to continue the line to Haman.

I believe that it’s important to understand who Agog was. It’s important because it may shed some light on why God ordered Saul to destroy and totally obliterate every aspect of them ever to have existed. Lack of knowledge as to why has led many to believe that God rather than kind and loving is arbitrarily brutal and vindictive, and therefore not worthy of worship. As best as I can determine, Agag was an Amalekite tribal chief, who ruled a portion of what we might call the Amalekite Empire. As we read about the conquest of Canaan we read of people called the Amalekites mentioned as occupying land in parts of Canaan as well as northern Sinai. We find in Number 24:20 that

“Amalek was the first of the nations.” If that can be interpreted chronologically, then they preceded Egypt as a nation entity.

Genesis 36:12 tells us that Amalek was the son of Eliphaz, the son of Esau. It seems evident that Agag was a son of Amalek. This makes sense and explains how and why he was one of the tribal leaders of the Amalekites. It appears that the eastern border of Agag’s “fifedom coincided with the westerly border of Eden. Some maps refer to it as the Wilderness of Zen. It appears that they were a most primitive, extremely hostile and vicious people who lived in caves, with very little that might be called a civil structure. Their hatred of Jews seems to have been much stronger than other Amalekite tribes. I suspect that it may have been in part, a somewhat greater than the normal response to what they were taught about how their ancestor Esau was deprived by Jacob of his “rightful” blessing as a first born son. Regarding God’s “brutality” His reason for ending the very existence of all Agagites was an act of love. In His foreknowledge, God knew that none of these people would ever come to repentance. He therefore ordered their complete extermination thereby having prevented any more souls to be born unto eternal damnation.

With this in mind, when we go back to Mordecai’s little genealogy, we find this guy, Shimei. What’s that have to do with anything? It has a great deal to do with the very existence of the Jews! If we look back to Samuel 16:5-10 we find Shimei cursing King David to the point where execution appeared to be an appropriate punishment. Because Shimei was a descendant of Kish, as was King Saul, he wanted Saul’s dynasty to continue and therefore resented David. However, David sensed it was God at work and spared his life, thus providing for the existence of Mordecai and Esther. Putting all of this together we find that because Saul disobeyed God, there was a Haman to create a seemingly perfect plan to kill every Jew on earth. However, because David saved Shimei there was a Mordecai to thwart that plan, to stop Haman, and to finally eliminate the line of Agag. What an incredible set of “coincidences” that brought all of this about! Dr. Missler has a great line regarding this: “Coincidence is when God is working

undercover.” As we’ll see, God’s “undercover” work manifests greatly in this Book, as well as in every Book of the Bible.

Unfortunately, we cannot leave this Mordecia–Haman relationship as is, because there is a conundrum to deal with. When we examine the relevant chronology related to this period in history, we find what seems to be a big problem. Please be patient and stay with me. What follows may seem boring irrelevant and too complicated to bother with. It is complicated and therefore also difficult to explain. However, I assure you that it is relevant, as will become evident. As noted, Shimei is called the son of Kish. When Scripture speaks of someone’s son or father, it does not always speak of his next of kin. He may be an ancestor of one or even many earlier generations. Today we call such a relative, grandfather or great grandfather, and so on. As we read 1Samual 9:3 we discover that king Saul was also the son of Kish. In this case, whatever generation either may have been after Kish, they were, or were very close, to being contemporaries. This is evidenced by the fact Shimei was a contemporary of King David, as we learn in 2Samual 16:5

From all of this it becomes evident that Agag, Saul and Shimei were effectually contemporaries. The conundrum lies in the fact that the Agag event occurred in the 1050’s BC while the events in the Book of Esther took place in and around the 330 BC some 700 years later. Knowing that Scripture is inerrant, we can safely conclude that the genealogies of Mordecai and Haman, as given to us in Esther, are not complete listings of their ancestors. Here God only gave us a short sampling, yet enough for us to understand where they came from. None of the names in between were relevant, and so God didn’t list them. As an example of how Mordecai’s geology is here truncated, we find in 2Samuel 16:5 that Shimei’s father was Gera, and that he was of the family of Saul.

There also we find Shimei cursing David for having taking the throne from Saul’s rightful successors who should, by right, have continued Saul’s dynasty which he believed was God ordained. In fact it was as we read in 1Samuel 13:13, 14. There Samuel, speaking through the Lord’s guidance told Saul that if he had not done foolishly,

that is spared Agag, the Lord would have established Saul's kingdom upon Israel for ever. This seems to be paradoxical, given that it is David's dynasty that had been preordained to last forever. For a better understanding of this, see my study called "What Might Have Been".

As already mentioned, soon after Esther was established as queen, Mordecai was promoted to a higher government position at the city gate. That's how he was able to over hear the plot to kill the king. It seems that in all the early cultures, such as the Assyrian, Persian, Babylonian and Hebrew cultures, the city gate was equivalent to "city hall", the place where much of the governmental activity took place. It was also where such intrigues might be plotted. He reported this to Esther who reported to the king what, and from whom, she had heard of the plot. The attempt on the king's life was thwarted and the traitors executed.

Sometime after this event Haman was promoted to the chief of princes, a position that warranted a bow of respect from those who saw him pass by. Because Mordecai refused repeatedly to bow, Haman became incensed and vowed to kill him. At the same time he devised a plan whereby he could exterminate the entire Jewish race and acquire for himself their accumulated wealth. For this he needed a royal decree, so he brought his proposition to the king as a good thing for the kingdom. Not naming the race, which he personally hated, he told the king that "*there is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws; therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them*" (3:8) By the way, as verse 7 of chapter 3 informs us, this was about 5 years after the assassination attempt.

The king, being careless, forgetful, impetuous, erratic, and not very bright, made no inquiry into the validity of the matter and simply signed the decree, as Haman had fashioned it. Decrees by the king could not be revoked, not even by the king himself. No doubt Haman's bribe of 10,000 talents of silver helped make that quick decision. At today's price of about \$20.00/oz, that would be over three billion dollars. It is likely that

the treasury was still suffering from the cost of his great military defeat by the Greeks that had taken place about six years earlier. As a point of interest, Haman cast dice, or as they were called, “pur” in order to determine the date the “gods” would find best for this great massacre. The Jews even today remember and celebrate the date and the outcome of this plan. They call it the feast of Purim where they applaud any mention of Mordecai and hiss and boo at the mention of Haman. Can you imagine the amount of wealth Haman estimated he would net from his confiscation of all the Jewish properties, given that ten thousand talents of silver was what he would have given to the king?

Next we come to a rapid chain of events that the best human dramatists could not have conceived. If ever there was a clear evidence of God “working undercover” (and there are many), this must be considered as being among the most evident and complex of them all. First, notice that the decree was signed and sent out to all the provinces on the 15th of the first month (3:12) while the “death date” was set to be in the 12th month, almost eleven months into the future. You can see that God controlled the “pur” in that He provided plenty of time for His servants Esther and Mordecai, through His guidance, to somehow neuter this irrevocable decree. What happened next is an incredible two-day chain of rapid fire events that turn this darkest hour for the Jews, to one of their brightest, thanks to the Holy Spirit finally unleashing the spiritual qualities that He had built up in Esther and Mordecai for this very purpose.

With the advent of the decree, we see Mordecai appealing to Esther to seek relief from the king. (4:8). This, as we learn from Esther and other sources, wasn't that easy. No one went to the king unless invited to do so. Death was the penalty, unless the king was in a good mood, or had a reason to allow such an intrusion. If he was, it was evidenced by the way he held out his golden scepter and thus allowing them audience. This rarely happened. To come uncalled and unannounced was to invite almost certain death, even to the queen. (3:12) Mordecai's response was for her to try nevertheless, because of her being a Jew she would lose her life anyway, in that the decree would effect her as well (3:13). Then he said an interesting thing in verse 1, when he said in effect, if you don't save them, “...then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from

another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

WOW! Let us not miss the great significance of these words! When he says the Jews' deliverance will come from another place, he is speaking of his certainty of God's intervention! While God is never mentioned, this man knew God and His power and promise. They both did! What he says in effect is that if she won't do this, God will do it in some other way, but she and he wouldn't be among those saved. Then he expresses another God-given insight about which we should take heed. He expresses the possibility that God put her here at this appointed time for this very specific purpose. We can see in him, evidence of a very solid faith and trust in God, one surely shared by Esther, the now mature woman.

That last phrase should echo and reverberate in every redeemed soul. Who knows what God has put any of us here for at any moment, at any place? Many of His purposes are served in this same manner. Therefore we need to be ready and discerning of that likelihood lest we miss those precious opportunities to serve him as He would have us serve. It is likely that this was but a reminder for Esther of something she knew quite well, as Esther reply indicates. *"Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish."*(4:16)

Here we are blessed to witness the final turn that the Master Potter had applied to His vessel, as He brought to perfection this most exquisite expression of His handiwork. This is Esther, whom He had so perfectly formed and then put into service to execute His will at this exact moment in time. While as we have seen, there is no direct mention of prayer, or of God, it seems evident that her actions, as well as those of Mordecai, revealed the redeeming faith of the remnant of Israel that had always existed, even from the time of Abraham. It was a remnant that took God seriously and lived their lives in prayer and obedience as they had been taught through Moses at Mt. Sinai. The sackcloth

and ashes of Mordecai and the three days of fasting as directed by Esther are indicative of that fact. When these rituals were applied, prayer was such an essential part of the process that it goes without saying, and so God simply didn't say it. They were descendants of those who were dispersed from Judea over 100 years earlier, and were also related to those who had been scattered another 120 years earlier by the Assyrians who had conquered the Northern Kingdom. Because Haman could still identify all of these as separate peoples, it is evident that they had all retained some portion of their Hebrew heritage. As a collective group, they seemed to have been well schooled in the ways of fundamental Judaism. We see here in our hero and heroine, a well developed sense of how to worship and petition. There is also no evidence that they had succumbed to any form of pagan idol worship such as they and their ancestors had been exposed to for so many years. Only a true remnant could have done this, for isn't Judah's departure from God and into idol worship the reason for the destruction of the Temple and of the national disintegration?

Again, another "aside": we may feel critical of the Jews, given their pathetic response to Cyrus' decree allowing them back to their home land, when only 50,000 of at least a half of million or more chose to return. But think about it, what were they to go back too? To return was to go back to rubble, desolate barren land, hostile neighbors, and no Jerusalem or temple in which to worship. Most had established themselves and were by then well integrated into the various cultures and were living "good" lives from economic and social perspectives. That they had preserved their identity as Jews and kept to their traditions and various levels of spiritual beliefs, is evident in this Book as we can see based on how Haman describes them. It was not until this particular period of time, which was generally concurrent with Ezra's efforts in rebuilding the Temple and the City, that Jerusalem could begin offering any strong attraction.

Now the great moment of truth was at hand. As Esther walked into the throne room, her future existence, that of Mordecai, and of the entire Hebrew race would depend on the king's arm and how God would direct it. If it moved forward extending his golden scepter toward her, she would be safe, at least for a while. If it did not, she knew the

king's guards would seize her, place a hood over her head, and escort her to a place of immediate execution. Of course we know that he welcomed her and asked her what she wanted, promising to grant it, whatever it was. Most people requesting an audience with the king were there with petitions or requests for favors. In this case, he knew very well that her petition was to her, an extremely important one for her to have risked her life coming into his presence without permission. But then she merely asked that he and Haman come to a dinner that she would prepare for them for that evening. It's evident that she intended to "face up" to Haman in front of the king regarding the decree. This was not the work for a timid, frightened, weak soul, but one of outstanding bravery and assurance that only a trust in God would provide. She would be facing the king's favorite, the man the king had recently appointed to be his number one man. At the dinner the king asked of her the true nature of her petition. Esther response was to ask for a similar dinner for the next evening, at which time she would reveal her petition.

Why did she choose to play this protracted and dangerous game with the king? A question from the king required an immediate answer. She was trying a patience that was so erratic that no one knew when he would go into a rage; he could do so for far less an affront. Of course, the preface to her put-off, "*If I have found favor in the sight of the king,...*" no doubt helped soften his heart, so that he agreed to come back. This indicates that this first event was pleasant enough to him to warrant a second event. But, why the second dinner, and this delay to reveal her request? We are not told of her reason, assuming that she even had one. I doubt that she did. We might reason that she was struck by fear, or suddenly felt that she needed more time in which to better structure her petition, and fend off the attack with which Haman was likely to respond. It seems evident to me however, that it was the Holy Spirit who guided her in that strange decision for a reason that only He knew. If she had accosted Haman that first night, her odds of success of her mission would have been quite unlikely. The God-ordained one-day delay laid an unusual groundwork that would assure her success, beyond her highest hopes.

What happened to cause this? We might say it was the king's insomnia, or we might say that it was an example of the way God sometime chooses to micro-manage the affairs of

man. That night, the night before the second dinner, the king couldn't sleep, so he called his record keepers to read to him the book of records. (That should have been pretty good going-to-sleep reading for anyone!) What a "coincidence" it was, that they should just happen to turn to where events which happened over five years ago had been recorded. These just "happened" to tell of the assassination attempt that was thwarted by Mordecai's reporting of it. However what caught the king's attention was that Mordecai had never been rewarded for his service. This over-sight shocked the king because the laws of the kingdom required all such acts be rewarded immediately. At that time he didn't know that Mordecai "the Jew," and Esther were related. What happened after that need not be repeated here. However, the relevance is of great importance because it brought Mordecai to the king's attention as a hero worthy of honor and respect. This is what made the one day delay of Esther's petition to the king of great significance, and assured the incredible success of her mission. Had she mentioned Mordecai the previous day, the king wouldn't have even remembered who he was. Now he was a national hero to be esteemed, not killed. So when she revealed both her and Mordecai's race and that they would be among those killed, the king was well conditioned to become enraged.

Notice how disarming and persuasive her petition was presented. (7:3) She simply asked that her life and her people's lives be given back, and that had the decree been only to sell her and them into slavery, she wouldn't have bothered him. Even though I believe her every word was spoken in total sincerity, the way she structured her petitioning was a spirit-directed psychological master stroke. He had chosen her to be queen based mostly on her carnal attributes, but by now he must have noticed those majestic inner qualities that made her more lovable and worthy of far more respect than for just a pretty trinket to be shown off and to be played with at his whim. Thus there was a degree of rage engendered in him sufficient to produce this latest knee-jerk reaction, which was to kill the man who he thought well enough of a short time ago to have made him his chief prince. At any rate, with the wave of his hand, the hood went over Hamens head unto death, and Esther's service to the Lord had been most elegantly carried out, while Mordecai replaced Hamen, and became the number two man of the entire empire.

During Esther's brief hour on the stage of history she readily accepted the challenge and the dangers of the mission for which God had called her. Yours may not be as glamorous or history changing as hers, but are you a ready and willing agent of the Lord when He calls you into service? All who are His have a calling, if we will but look for it, recognize it, and accept it. Failure to do so can only result in "The Bema Seat blues". God didn't need Esther or Mordecai to eliminate the threat to the Jews. He did not need Saul to eradicate all the Agagites, or to have David spare Shemini. God needs nothing from any of us, yet he calls many to participate in His plan. Scripture is full of stories of such callings and their results. The callings are tests of an individual's spiritual character. Those we find in Scripture are meant to be examples for our learning. In this story, we find Saul called, and while accepting the calling failed the test through disobedience. David's life was filled with tests that he passed magnificently; nevertheless he proved his fallen nature by failing many others. In saving Shemini, his sensitivity to God's involvement in things, made him recognize what he needed to do, and he did it. In the case of Esther and Mordecai, God set up a long and intricate series of events befitting the magnitude of the purpose which led to Esther's calling. She heard the call, understood it and the danger involved, and made the positive choice God had wanted and had prepared her for.

Here, to me at least, is the greatest message in this story. Beyond the obvious, it has to do with all who are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). For those who are saved, as we read the whole of this most precious Book and its comforting verses, perhaps we miss the significance of the "called for His purpose." It is essential to realize, that for each of us, there is a godly calling, a special calling that He expects us to hear, to understand, and to apply to our lives. We must stay alert at all times, lest we miss hearing it. It may be frightening, as we wonder what God will want us to do. It can be so frightening, that we stop our spiritual ears and pray that He will pass us by. What do we fear? We fear that it will be beyond our ability, or our strength, or it will be too painful, etc. However Scripture assures us that His assignments will never be beyond our capacity. How can they be, with the indwelling Holy Spirit just waiting for that one signal, that is our choice to accept the assignment, so that He can go to work

strengthening, protecting, and guiding each volunteer to complete His task, according to God's will.

In the days of Esther, the Holy Spirit did not make it a practice of dwelling full time in the hearts of His chosen, as He has since Pentecost. Read again those stress-filled moments as recorded in the last verses of chapter 4, it is here where we find that Esther made her choice. In my mind's eye, I see the Holy Spirit sitting somewhere nearby, sitting with his bags packed just waiting for that signal so he can go and take up His residence in her heart, and to get to work. I am sure it was His presence that gave her the strength and volition to walk so bravely into the throne room and then to speak through her to the king. Of course it was also His continued involvement that protected her and gave her everything she needed to carry out all that God had given her to do.

None of us are likely to be given assignments having such far reaching ramifications, but be assured that there will be assignments. Remember again, God does not need us for anything. He simply chooses assignments for us, as a way to involve us in His program. In doing so, we are given opportunities to prove our love, loyalty and faith, as well as to earn crowns to one day place at His feet. Knowing that all Scripture is for our learning, we should take from this a better understanding regarding what His calling is all about. All those who are His, have this obligation, privilege, and blessing that we should treasure and never shirk from accepting.