

### ESTHER

#### Week 6, Chapters 4 and 5

If there is one theme woven through the Book of Esther that brings it all together it is that of God's determination to preserve the Jewish nation from extinction, and thus the reason for the celebration of Purim. Never before in the history of the Hebrews, prior to this incident in Esther, was there such a blatant, unswerving, plainly stated desire from a gentile government to wipe out the Jewish race. In the days of their Egyptian captivity the goal of the Pharaoh was never genocide, but rather to keep his hold upon a permanent class of Hebrew slaves in order for him to achieve his goals of building roads, canals, and grand edifices, thus releasing Egyptian workers to form a nationalist army that could defend and extend Egypt's boundaries. In the Babylonian captivity the goal was not to wipe out the former citizens of Judah but rather to punish them for their rebellion, They were indeed removed from their homeland and sent to Babylon but the purpose was to assimilate the Jews, use their talents and abilities, and add to economy of the Greater Babylon that Nebuchadnezzar envisioned; not to kill them. Thus they were treated quite well.

Ironically, the Jews' greatest danger has now come not during a time of captivity or oppression (because the Persian King Cyrus had 50 years earlier freed the Jews), but rather it has come during a time of their freedom and well being. A time when they felt secure and at home. Out of the clear blue comes a highly placed, influential, Persian government official who has some inexplicable deadly bent against the Jews that results from a personal feud with a single Jewish person: Mordechai. But when we find out in chapter 3 verse 1 that this government official is called Haman the Agagite, we then understand that Haman is an Amalekite; he is carrying a spirit of Anti-Semitism that even he doesn't recognize as having come from his family heritage. He harbors a hatred of God and God's people that began when God separated and divided the twin brothers Esau and Jacob into two very different spiritual destinies. Jacob would carry forth God's covenant promise made to Abraham, while Esau would represent those who oppose God's people and God's covenant with them. Amalek, Esau's grandson, became the epitome of that spirit of opposition such that in Exodus 17:16 the Lord says this of Amalek:

***"Because their hand was against the throne of Yah, ADONAI will fight 'Amalek generation after generation."***

Thus the story of Esther is but a continuation of the everlasting enmity and war between Amalek and the Kingdom of God. And of course, the story ends in victory for God's people.

Since the celebration of Purim is upon us, the question that arises is: why should gentile Christians think we ought to celebrate an observance that has always been about God rescuing Jews? And I think the answer is clear: because without the Jews, none of us have a Savior. Bible prophecies predicting the source of our Savior as the tribe of Judah begin as early as Genesis 49. Later we find out that Messiah must come from a specific clan of Judah, that of King David's. And then the New Testament gives us a lengthy genealogy of Yeshua to prove that He met those requirements.

Satan using his human minions has thus always tried to thwart God's plan for Messiah. If the Jewish race could be exterminated, then there would be no Savior and God would be defeated. So in our story of Esther we read last week of Mordechai telling Esther in Chapter 4 verse 14 that:

***14 For if you fail to speak up now, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from a different direction; but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows whether you didn't come into your royal position precisely for such a time as this."***

And the idea is that whether Esther takes up the fight and gets involved in saving her people the Jews from the coming genocide or not, the Jews will survive. As Mordechai says, "relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from a different direction". So the continuing existence of the Jewish people is divinely guaranteed; it has not been placed solely upon Esther's delicate shoulders to bear as the only means to their survival. Rather it is that since God has put her (miraculously) in a position to be able to help His chosen people (her own people), then if she doesn't she and her father's family will perish as a consequence. God has blessed Esther with a unique opportunity that has come in a sliver of time to serve Him in a great way; but that opportunity comes with danger and it comes with a caveat. And the Lord is **not** pushing all His chips to the center of the table: win with Esther or go bust.

So why should Christians love and comfort the Jewish people? Because we can. Because as Christians we have been given the knowledge and now the opportunity to be used of God to help deliver His chosen people. And that is what Seed of Abraham Ministries is all about. Why should we join with the Jews and celebrate God's victory over the intended Persian genocide of the Jewish people (Purim)? Because our Savior is Jewish, and He can only be Jewish. No Jews, no Christ, no eternal security for any of us. The Story of Esther couldn't be more relevant for those who call Jesus, Lord; whether Jew or gentile.

But today, since the Devil has already lost because the Jews did produce God's Messiah and Messiah's work on the cross can't be undone, there are only two remaining battlefields where the fight is ongoing: the souls of human beings and the land of Israel. Every human that dies without Christ is a victory for Satan and we must work tirelessly, beginning with our own families, to prevent any more losses to the Evil One than has to be. And if Satan can somehow get the Jews to lose their modern nation of Israel to pagans, then the place where Christ shall return and set up His kingdom can't be used and the Evil One will have won another battle.

Am I saying that victory over Satan regarding the land of Israel is in doubt? No. I'm saying that the Lord has allowed us to live at a time, and has offered us the unmerited opportunity, to help and comfort His people and to join in the fight to save His land from the enemy. If we choose not to, is the Holy land lost? No. Like Esther was told: "relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from a different direction.....but you and your father's family will perish". Fellow Believers I'll say this to you unequivocally: you, we, have been given an opportunity to help God's people to stay in their own land, the Promised Land, God's Kingdom land. But with that opportunity comes a price: it is dangerous and we will not make many friends if we do help. And if we don't help when we have the knowledge that we can and should, clearly there will be divine consequences for shying away. As for me and my family, we stand with God and with His people and for His land. And since this principle is at the very heart of this ministry, if you feel otherwise, then I have no idea why you are listening or why you are here.

We're now going to re-read Esther chapter 4, and I'm going to include the Greek additions (that we didn't read last week) and we'll discuss them briefly.

### READ ESTHER CHAPTER 4 WITH GREEK ADDITIONS

These two additions are known as Mordechai's Prayer and Esther's Prayer. We'll not study them, but I do want to make a couple of brief comments about them. Clearly the goal of whoever the writer might have been of the Greek additions was to add direct references to God in a book that (in the Hebrew version) is otherwise devoid of them. But when read carefully, we also find that the writer of the Greek essentially alters the character of this story in some ways with these additions.

In Mordechai's Prayer we read: ***"But what I did, I did rather than place the glory of man above the glory of God; and I will not bow down to any but you, Lord; in so refusing I will not act in pride"***.

On the surface this sounds wonderfully pious until we understand that the writer is here saying that Mordechai is refusing to bow down to Haman for no other reason than because Haman is a man and no good Jew would ever bow before any human but only God. And as we discussed last week, that is simply factually incorrect, doesn't represent reality, and we have been given example after example in the Bible of Jews, appropriately and customarily, bowing down to kings, potentates and even aristocrats. Rather there was but **one specific man** of authority to whom Mordechai would not bow: Haman. And the reason for this is that Haman was known to be an Amalekite, the sworn enemy of God. Therefore while most of the sentiments expressed in the Greek additions to Esther are quite good, it is my opinion that they are merely uninspired glosses; they are editorial opinions that should have been recorded as footnotes of commentary and never included in the passage as though they were Scripture. And by the way, we find this same sort of thing in a couple of critical places in the New Testament.

Esther's Prayer also takes us down a different road than where the Hebrew text alone has led us. In the Hebrew texts we see an Esther who is not at all melancholy, nor resistant, nor feeling like a prisoner as Queen of Persia. In fact we see a tone of doing what must be done to become the King's wife, not trying to throw the contest so that some other virgin girl gets the

prize. In fact, almost all films and plays based on Esther adopt the Greek additions as the theme and tone for their script due to the drama they inject. Thus in Esther's Prayer we hear: ***"You know I am under constraint, that I loathe the symbol of my high position bound round my brow when I appear at court; I loathe it as if it were a filthy rag and do no wear it on the days of my leisure. Your handmaid has not eaten at Haman's table, nor taken pleasure in royal banquets, nor drunk the wine of libations"***. So with these Greek additions we now hear of an Esther who has been coerced into everything; she hates her position, hates wearing the crown, and goes to banquets but doesn't enjoy them. So as with Mordechai's Prayer a different Esther emerges in the prayerful words placed into her mouth by the unknown editor; words that would please the Rabbis in a later era who despise gentiles and find fault with every element of non-Jewish life. So it is my opinion that these Greek additions need to be set on the shelf.

So as chapter 4 opens Mordechai has learned of the decree to murder all Jews in Persia, and he is dressed in sackcloth, mourning and walking around the city of Susa, shouting bitterly to the city's inhabitants. As he arrived near the place where he often sat as a Persian official he had to turn away because it was the law that no person dressed in mourning garb could be present at the King's Gate. The news had by now reached most of the provinces and districts and the shocked Jews reacted much as Mordechai did.

Verse 4 explains that because Esther was in the Queen's quarter she was shielded from the public and the outside world in general and only heard about Mordechai's distress through her servants. Since Mordechai was her adoptive father she sent fresh clothes to him that he might be presentable enough to enter the royal harem and come to her to explain the matter. She probably assumed that something of a personal nature had happened to him or perhaps some family member had passed and she wanted to know about it. They tried, but Mordechai refused. As a side note: as of this time Mordechai's relationship with Esther must not have been known inside the palace, otherwise Esther's Jewishness would have been assumed from the beginning. So it must have been disturbing to these servants that Mordechai refused the Queen's call to come to her. Yet, this would have seemed thoroughly in character for this stubborn old man who had precipitated this madness in the first place by refusing to show respect and courtesy to the man who was 2<sup>nd</sup> in command over the Persian Empire, Haman.

Esther cannot leave the harem so she sends Hatakh, a higher official who had been assigned to do her bidding, to Mordechai. Mordechai opens up and tells Hatakh about the decree and even about the 330 talents of silver that Haman used to ply the king into agreeing with his request to annihilate the Jews. Since this issue of the silver wasn't included in the decree but had been a private matter between King Xerxes and Haman, no doubt Mordechai had close contacts within the palace that he might find out this sensitive information that was not public knowledge.

Hatakh had to meet Mordechai at the courtyard near the King's Gate because Mordechai was still wearing sackcloth. He also gave him a copy of the decree to take to the Queen. Esther was supposed to then go to her husband and plead with him to call off this coming atrocity. Hatakh did as he was asked, but Esther was none too keen on the idea. She more or less says: as any court official knows, one doesn't just invite oneself to go see the king. That in fact

there is a legal code about how this is to be done, and it is that only when summoned may anyone have an audience with the king. And if anyone comes uninvited, the penalty is death. The only exception is if the king extends his scepter to the uninvited visitor indicating that he takes no offense at this. But, says Esther, the king has not called for her in a month. Not good. 30 days is a long time for this king not to at least want to feast his eyes on whom he had not long ago determined was the most beautiful girl in his empire. No hint of what the trouble might be, but Esther saw it as a bad sign. And she had no interest in being executed for her trouble.

But Mordechai isn't taking no for answer; the matter is too important. Esther represents a dilemma that most of us face at one time or another. A situation suddenly arises that we intensely want to avoid; but we are caught as a fish on a barbed hook. Circumstances demand that we act, even if the outcome is unknowable. Our courage to act could mean loss of friendships, status, wealth, health, maybe even life and freedom. Exercising faith suddenly changes from a comfortable theoretical to an uncomfortable reality. As any Believer has learned after living long enough, doing God's will is no guarantee of a satisfactory outcome for us, at least on this present earth. So Mordechai offers Esther 3 very good reasons why she needs to take the risk and go see the king. First, she isn't to think that while all of her Jewish friends and family will be destroyed, she will somehow be spared. She is after all a Jew; and the king's decree is that ALL Jews everywhere are to be killed; no exceptions. And in Persia, we've already seen that not even the king goes against the law, no matter how ridiculous the law might be in afterthought.

Mordechai's second reason is the one we discussed at the beginning of today's lesson. It is that if Esther decides not to conquer her fears and instead hopes that someone else picks up the ball and runs with it, she should not assume that the Jews are done for. And this is because Mordechai is certain that God will use another means to deliver His people from this unprecedented calamity they face. However if she does decline to help, she can be assured that she and her family will be destroyed. The reason for her and her family's demise is not directly stated, but the context is self evident that the one who will save the Jews no matter what (the Lord) will see to it personally that Esther and her family suffers death for her unfaithfulness.

The third reason is one that has become a well-known saying in Judeo-Christianity: for such a time as this. Mordechai infers that it was no random happenstance that Esther, a Jew, was deemed the most beautiful and winsome girl in all of the Media-Persian Empire. It was not a coincidence that in a contest of the most beautiful girls, and among the king's many wives, that she was given the crown as Queen of Persia. No, she did not set out to enter the royal harem or to become the Queen. But the Lord had equipped her for the position even if she had never recognized it before that moment she left Mordechai to enter the Miss Persia pageant.

On the surface becoming the Queen seemed so selfish, so decadent and frivolous. In God's eyes it must have seemed trivial and unimportant, she probably thought. But Mordechai tells her that perhaps THIS moment is what it was always going to be about. The unmerited genetics that made her stunningly beautiful; the inner character that raised her above and separated her from all the other equally beautiful girls; and then the absurd antics of a drunken and narcissistic king who had committed the rash act of dishonoring his wife Vashti, and now



needed a replacement that turned out to be Esther. Could it be that all these seemingly disconnected things and random acts had been orchestrated by God to achieve but one purpose for a fleeting moment in history? To deliver His people from genocide at the hands of Haman? Mind boggling.

I can tell you without hesitation that while my personal story is nothing as dramatic or important as Esther's, I can identify to a degree with what Mordechai and Esther must have been reflecting upon. How did we get here from there? I could never have foreseen the winding road of my life leading to standing before you today as a minister and a Bible teacher. First being educated at University in archaeology and Egyptology before settling on business; of racing cars for a number of years to satisfy nothing but a selfish ambition; starting my own hi tech company simply because I was too bored at my job, and then later selling it to a larger one only to find myself managing a substantial number of manufacturing locations in the US and Europe. Marrying my wife who was a staunch Believer, a people person who loved the Lord and had prayed for years for a way to serve Him in a more substantial way. Then suddenly, unexpectedly, finding myself retired, lost and directionless in my mid 40's; chancing upon a small book called the Jewish New Testament in the library of dear friend (a retiring Bible teacher and pastor), discovering my Hebrew Roots, and teaching a Sunday School class at a Baptist church. Then due to the subject matter of that class causing doctrinal issues within that church reluctantly leaving it to keep peace. But when we left 100 people insisted that they want to continue studying God's Torah. This resulted in the formation of Seed of Abraham Ministries, and now we are privileged to lead and serve a congregation, an online retail store, an online Bible teaching ministry, and 2 vibrant ministries in Israel. Nothing I aimed for, prepared for, or sought. Nothing I could ever imagine myself doing (or even wanted to do). And yet, here we are. For a such a time as this. A ministry full of people with a heart to help and comfort God's chosen when once again they are under rising pressure from a world that wants rids of them.

All I can tell you is: no matter what is going on in your life, what has happened up to now, if you love God be prepared for a surprise. It is amazing how a bunch of disjointed experiences, false starts and stops, personal failures and inexplicable triumphs can come together at precisely the right moment not to achieve something YOU planned for, but rather something else that God planned for you that you never saw coming. But as it was for Esther, there is always a catch. Whatever purpose that God has determined to use you to bring about is going to happen..... with or without you. I have no doubt that if my wife and I had not said "yes" to God's plan to create this ministry, having no idea what it would mean or where it would lead us, He would have used someone else. Probably someone else better and more qualified. As the passage in verse 14 says so clearly, God **will** bring about His purposes even if you're not willing to obey Him, take a risk, and accept the assignment. But don't ever think you might have another opportunity if you decline the one that is offered. For it was for such a time as THIS that you were created; not for some other time of your choice and your design.

In verse 15 Esther responded as Mordechai hoped she would. Yes, she will take a risk and take the matter of the Jews to the king. But Esther also orders that all the Jews of Susa join her and her servants in a fast. This is a long fast, really. No eating or drinking for 3 days. What is the exact purpose for the fast? It isn't stated. But we must always take the Bible in its Hebrew

context unless it is otherwise stated. A fast is invariably for the purpose of preparing oneself to petition God for His favor, and to accept the result.

The final words of Esther that end this chapter are: ***“Then I will go in to the king, which is against the law. And if I perish, I perish”***. While there is a great spiritual element to this statement of putting her fate into God’s hands after fasting and praying, Esther is also speaking on a practical level. What she is about to do violates the laws of Persia. Violating civil laws to do what seems right to us, or to do what God seems to be telling us to do, is a dilemma for followers of Christ. Sometimes we forget that there are other civil law codes in this world than the laws of the United States of America. They are just as valid, and often just as justifiable. And it was so in ancient times as well. So what was Esther to do, and what are we to do when there is a direct conflict between God’s Laws and our nation’s laws? This problem has divided the church on numerous occasions, and regularly divides families. Usually this problem is called a matter of conscience. On the one hand the Lord told us to obey our governments because God has established them. And yet on the other He instructed us to faithfully obey God’s commandments regardless of the earthly consequences. Yeshua anticipated this problem among His followers and promised that when facing our civil authorities for refusing to obey civil laws that fly in the face of God’s laws, He will give us the words to say. And yet, make no mistake: He never assured us that these words He gives us would lead to our acquittal. Rather these words are to establish God’s truth among people who have perhaps never heard it, not to save us from a bad circumstance.

Esther was doing what she knew she must in order to try to save her people; but it violated the civil laws of Persia to do so and there were no guarantees it would work. Therefore she has determined to step forward, take the lead, and assume the responsibility for her actions. She fully understood that it could easily result in the loss of her life. Who knew what this fickle king might decide?

Let’s move on to chapter 5.

### **READ ESTHER CHAPTER 5 all**

Esther did more during those 3 days of fasting than pray. She worked on a plan of just how to approach the king, and how to circumvent the problem of Haman and the king’s certified decree to destroy the Jewish people. She engineers the circumstances under which she might turn the tables on the evil Haman. Mordechai is nowhere in the picture; whatever we see Esther doing it was on her own. Or better, as I think is the point of the 3 day fast, she was given direction by the Lord. There is no mention of direct inspiration but her plan came together too perfectly to be anything other than by God’s providence.

Not surprisingly, banquets are involved since banquets and drinking parties have been the backdrop of nearly every circumstance that has arisen in this book. If we can back away from the text far enough to see it as it is, what happens in this and the next couple of chapters reads like a comedy.

Verse 1 tells us that the 3 day fast ended and immediately Esther sprang into action. Esther

put on her royal robes and went to the inner courtyard of the king's hall. This indicated that her visit was official business, not a lonely wife looking to spend a little time with her husband. It was respectful and it told all present that it was a formal audience that she sought with the king. However by going to the inner court, this means she went where only a person who was summoned may go; it was a bold move. Immediately Esther caught the king's attention, and we're told that immediately she won his favor. He was happy to see her. In keeping with protocol, the king extended his golden scepter towards her, which forgave her for appearing without being called. Esther touched the top of the scepter, which apparently was the proper response.

The king then asked Esther, in the most literal translation, "What will thou Esther?" Our CJB says that he said, "What do you want?" That is the wrong tone. The better meaning is "what's the matter" or "what is troubling you?" He knows Esther and Esther is not one who asks for favors or would bother the king for something trivial. Rather her appearance tells him that she is troubled and the matter is important or she wouldn't think to approach him. He asks a second question: "What is your request?" To show how pleased and attentive he is to her, he is gracious to say that whatever it is it can be up to half his kingdom and he'll give it to her. Without doubt, this is an expression of grand courtesy and affection, and not literal. He is willing to be very generous towards her but he is not about to give her up to half of his kingdom merely because she'd like to have it. Nonetheless it means that Esther has not fallen out of favor; some unspoken circumstance has caused the king to not call for her for 30 days. OK. She's made it to first base.

Next week we'll watch her clever plan unfold as Haman entraps himself.