

VISIBLE EVIDENCE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD

Esther 4:13, 14

Intro: We come today to the book of Esther. Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther form a trilogy of late OT history. Chronologically Esther belongs between Ezra and Nehemiah. The books of Ezra and Nehemiah have to do with the Jewish exiles who returned to Jerusalem from captivity. The book of Esther has to do with the Jews who remained in captivity. Why Esther and Mordecai did not return to Jerusalem, we do not know. What we do know is that this book of Esther shows God's providential protection of the Jews in captivity just as the books of Ezra and Nehemiah show His providential protection over the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem.

Matthew Henry's comment on this is worth noting. He said, These [speaking of those who did not return], one would think, should have been excluded the special protection of Providence, as unworthy the name of Israelites; but our God deals not with us according to our folly and weakness (Vol. II, p. 1121).

We have become familiar with the names of three Persian kings thus far in our study of Ezra and Nehemiah. They are:

- 1) Cyrus.
- 2) Darius.
- 3) Artaxerxes.

In Esther we meet a fourth. Actually he was mentioned in Ezra 4:6--the only time his name is found in Scripture outside of the book of Esther. His name is Ahasuerus. And in the order of the kings, he comes third. So we have:

- 1) Cyrus II, the Great (559-527 B.C.).
Note: Cambyses (527-521 B.C.), the son of Cyrus, is not mentioned in Scripture.
- 2) Darius Hystaspis (521-486 B.C.). Early in his reign we have the writings of Zechariah and Haggai, and that the Temple was finished.
- 3) Ahasuerus, who was also known as Xerxes.
- 4) Artaxerxes Longimanus (465-425 B.C.). During his reign the walls of Jerusalem were finished.

The date usually given to Malachi's prophecy is sometime between 455 and 432 B.C.

And so it was during the reigns of Cyrus and Darius that we read of the rebuilding of the Temple. Then it was during the reign of Artaxerxes that the walls were rebuilt. The story of Esther and Mordecai comes in between those two important events. Ahasuerus reigned from 486 to 465 B.C.

One of the most important facts regarding the book of Esther is that Deity is not mentioned by name any place in the book. There is no mention of God; no mention of the Lord. But,

although God is not mentioned, it is evident that God is at work through all of the circumstances of the book, protecting and delivering His people in one of their greatest times of need. In fact, this is the main purpose and message of the book.

And, to be sure, this is one of the main values of the book for us today. We do not see the amazing evidences of God's presence that often were very visible in OT times. But God is at work today in much the same way that He worked in those days of Esther and Mordecai. The sovereignty of God, and His providential intervention in the affairs of even ungodly men and nations, as well as in the affairs of His people, is one of our greatest sources of personal peace and encouragement that we have today.

Nothing could be more appropriate for the situation in the world today. As I speak this morning we are waiting to see what it going to happen between the US and Iraq. Iraq wants to drag Israel into the discussions. So far our President has said, "No!" There is no question but that Israel is in a very precarious position. She does not deserve the help of God, and we know from Scripture that there are some very bad days ahead for Israel. But God is at work, we can be sure of that. And He is not going to fail Israel, nor is He going to fail His church. The book of Esther should be a great encouragement to all of us, and I trust that we all will be blessed by what we are going to learn.

I am not going to do a verse-by-verse exposition of the book like I would do if we were a smaller group. However, without ignoring anything in the book, I am going to consider all of the book, but some parts more in detail than others.

My text for the morning is Esther 4:13, 14, but let us look at the circumstances which lead up to those two verses.

First of all, let us get acquainted in chapter 1 with King Ahasuerus.

I. KING AHASUERUS (Esther 1).

He was king over the whole Persian and Median empire. This was early in his reign, probably about the year 483 B.C. His kingdom extended from Ethiopia on the west to India on the east. There were 127 provinces in his kingdom. The capital city was Shushan which was located several miles east of Babylon. He was a great king, and he knew it.

So he planned to celebrate his greatness for six months. It was a very lavish affair--probably one of the greatest events

in the history of the world. The people were free to participate or not, as they chose. But his purpose was to impress everyone with his great wealth and his great power.

At the end of the long party, he planned a special banquet in Shushan which was to last for 7 days. The small and the great were there. At the same time Vashti, his wife, the queen, made a great feast for the women.

On the last day when the king was drunk with wine, he called for Vashti to come in to display her beauty before all of the men. Just what they meant, we do not know, but it probably meant more than that she would just walk back and forth in front of those drunken men. She refused to come!

This made the king very angry. But it also upset his men because they knew, in spite of the condition that they were in, that if the Queen got away with this, none of them would be able to control their wives. Memucan and the princes strongly advised him to divorce Vashti, and to let the whole kingdom know what she had done, and what he had done to punish her.

And so the King divorced Vashti. This is where chapter 1 ends.

II. ESTHER, THE NEW QUEEN (Esther 2).

Verse 1 seems to indicate that when King Ahasuerus sobered up he began to regret what he had done to Vashti. And so the King's servants moved quickly to get another Queen for the King. A search was to be made throughout the whole kingdom for the most beautiful young women. They were to be brought to the palace, each girl went through a year of purification, and then one by one they each spent a night with the king. It sound dreadful to us, and it was!

But it is in chapter 2 that we are introduced to one of those young women, a Jewess, who had been raised by her cousin, Mordecai. The Jewess' name was Esther. How Esther got involved in this, we do not know, except it must have been that she was so beautiful that she was brought to Shushan even though she may not have wanted to do it. I cannot defend her, not can I explain why Mordecai did not try to get her out of it.

However, when her time came, she went in to the King, and she pleased him more than any of the others. Therefore, she became the new Queen of the Persian Empire. One thing is emphasized. Mordecai refused to let her tell that she was a Jewess. We need to keep this in mind because it is important

as the story unfolds. Mordecai could not possibly have known how significant this would be in the days ahead because he did not know the trouble that every Jew in the Empire would soon face.

- The chapter ends with another thing that was to prove very important. Mordecai discovered a plot by two of the King's chamberlains to kill the King. He told Esther. Esther told the King. And the two rebels were hung, and the King's life was spared.

So far we have met Ahasuerus, Esther, and Mordecai. In chapter 4 we meet another person who played an important part in this story. He is:

III. HAMAN, THE ENEMY (Esther 3).

The Jews have always had their enemies--and they always will. They have their enemies today. But none in Scripture stands out any more for his wickedness and viciousness than does Haman, the Agagite. Agagite means that he was a member of the family of King Agag of the Amalekites. Agag was the king whom Saul spared in his battle with the Amalekites, and who was later killed by Samuel. Cf. 1 Samuel 15. The Amalekites were the first enemies the Jews had to fight after they had been delivered from Egypt. Cf. Exodus 17:8-16.

Haman was second only to Ahasuerus himself. In those days the kings were actually worshiped, and Ahasuerus had ordered that the people bow down to Haman and reverence him.

This, Mordecai refused to do. He was a faithful man of God, and, although it is not stated here, he was a worshiper of one God, the true God, the Lord God of Israel. He was true to his God. God had told His people in giving them the Law,

Thou shalt have no other gods before me...

Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them,

nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God

am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me;

And shewing mercy unto thousands of them

that love me, and keep my commandments (Ex. 20:3, 5, 6).

Mordecai also knew those words of Deut. 6, verses 4 and 5 which said,

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord:

And thou shalt love the Lord thy God

with all thine heart, and with all thy soul,

and with all thy might.

Mordecai was determined to be faithful to his God.

His purpose was not to be rebellious against Ahasuerus and Haman, but to be faithful to the Lord. When he was faced with the problem of being faithful to God, or faithful to man, when they conflicted with each other, Mordecai chose to be faithful to God!

Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman infuriated Haman. Consequently, after Haman was told that Mordecai was a Jew, Haman was determined not only to do away with Mordecai, but to destroy every Jew throughout the whole Persian Empire. (From this we can see how widely dispersed the Jews were.) He even offered to pay two-thirds of the amount that Ahasuerus would collect in a year as taxes from the people. This would run into millions of dollars. Haman probably knew that he would collect more than this as spoil from the Jews. At any rate, it shows his great determination to get rid of the Jews.

Haman was smart enough to know that there was one chief reason for Mordecai's refusal to worship him. It is stated in Esther 3:8: "...and their laws are diverse from all the people; neither keep they the king's laws...." The first part of that statement was true; the second was false. Their laws were the laws of God, which (it is interesting to note) the people sought to obey even in captivity. But they were obedient to King Ahasuerus except when his decrees ran contrary to the laws of God.

This is important for us to note. It is the Word of God, and obedience to that Word, which is to be a distinguishing characteristic of the Lord's people. Our love for the Lord is to be shown by our loving obedience to His Word! It is good for us to make sure of our obedience to the Word while things are going well in order that, if they should change, there will be no question about what we should do, and how we should live.

In the King's name, and with the King's seal, it was determined that all of the Jews throughout the Empire would be put to death on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which was the month Adar. It looked as though the obedience of Mordecai would bring about the destruction of the whole nation! Humanly speaking, it seems that it would have been far better for Mordecai to conform outwardly, but in his heart to be faithful to the Lord. That is the way many of the Lord's people would certainly have argued. But that is not how Mordecai felt.

This brings us to chapter 4. Here we will see how Mordecai behaved in Israel's day of her greatest trouble.

IV. MORDECAI AND ESTHER (Esther 4).

When Mordecai heard what Haman and the King had done, did he recant? Did he agree to bow down to Haman in order to spare himself and his people? No! What did he do? He humbled himself before His God, AND PRAYED! And the Jews throughout the Empire did the same. See Esther 4:3.

Here is one blessing that usually only comes through trials and testings: the people began to seek the invisible God. There was no special revelation of God, nor any special revelation from God. But the Lord turned the hearts of His people toward Himself in this time of great need.

He did not even tell Esther. But she was told by her attendants. When she knew what Mordecai was doing, she sent Hatach to find out what was wrong. He came back with all of the information along with a "charge" that she go to the King to appeal to him for her people.

Note what is recorded in Esther 2:20 relative to Esther's relationship with Mordecai who was like a father to her.

Esther sent word back to Mordecai reminding him of the law of the Empire regarding one who goes into the King without being invited. Although Esther was his wife, his favorite wife, she had not been called to go in to him for a whole month!

Mordecai responded in the words of our text. (Read Esther 4:13, 14.)

Up to this point there had been no connection between the exaltation of Esther to be Queen, and the exaltation of Haman, but at this time it all began to fit together in the mind and heart of the godly Mordecai. He saw the hand of God working through circumstances that were abominable to God to bring about, possibly, the deliverance of His people.

This does not justify wrongdoing, but it shows that God is not kept from accomplishing His purposes because of the failure of His people. In fact, He uses our failures for the glory of His own name. Mordecai could not, and would not, say for certain, but it appeared that the Lord had put Esther where she was so that she could appeal to her husband in this time of crisis for the Jews.

The last three verses of chapter 4 tell us Esther's decision. She would go in to Ahasuerus. But Mordecai must get the Jews to pray. She would get her maidens (evidently Jewish) to pray. In three days (see 5:1) she would go to the king. And we see her trust in the Lord in the words, "And if I perish, I perish." There had been a time for Mordecai to stand for the Lord; now it was Esther's time.

Concl: Although the Lord would not have used the method that was used to bring Esther to the throne, yet it was obviously His will for her to be there, and to be there at that particular time. The testing was to strengthen Mordecai's faith, and to strengthen Esther's faith. But she had to cast herself completely upon the mercy of the Lord. What she did was a work of faith. What Mordecai had done proved that he belonged to the Lord; now Esther was proving that she, too, belonged to the Lord, and was trusting Him to help her. From all outward evidence it seemed that God was judging His people, and that He would not help them. Mordecai took the little ray of hope that he had, asked Esther to do what she could, and then they would wait to see what the Lord would do.

Matthew Henry said that this was like Abraham binding Isaac on the altar. It was all in God's hands.

Mordecai did what Esther wanted him to do. Esther prepared herself to do what Mordecai wanted her to do. Both of them were doing what they believed the Lord wanted them to do. And so they cast their burden upon the Lord, and made their appeal to the court of heaven for divine help and deliverance.

May we all learn from this that in times of trouble we do what we can do, seeking to please the Lord and trusting in Him, leaving the outcome in His hands. The evidence may be against us, we may have failed the Lord in many way, but God is a God of mercy, and He will always be faithful to His Word, and to His people, even if we have not been trusting Him.

In our times of testing we also need to make sure that we are living in obedience to the Word. And then we can look carefully at our lives to see, for the encouragement of our faith, the VISIBLE EVIDENCE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD.

GOD ANSWERS PRAYER

Esther 5, 6, 7

Intro: The book of Esther is different from all of the other books of the Bible because in it God is working behind the scenes. His name never appears in this book. We have no special appearances of God. No prophet appears to give a message from the Lord. In many respects, in the book of Esther we have an OT example of the way the Lord works today.

In this book we see God as the God of providence. We see the evidence of God's work, but we do not see God. We see proofs of His faithfulness, but we do not see Him. We see answers to prayer, but no appearance of the God Who answers prayer--not even His name! In the book of Esther we see how Mordecai and Esther walked by faith, not by sight. Shortly before the time of Mordecai and Esther the Lord had spoken through the prophets Haggai and Malachi, but, as far as we know, there was no such ministry for Mordecai and Esther. They were like we are. They sought to do what was right in the sight of God, but they had to commit what they did to God to work as He saw fit.

Therefore, the story of Esther should be a great encouragement to us today. God was teaching them what Moses had to learn, what every child of God has to learn, to endure "as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27b). Or, as the Apostle Paul said in 2 Cor. 4:18,

While we look not at the things which are seen,
but at the things which are not seen:
for the things which are seen are temporal;
but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Do we not read in Heb. 11:1 that "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"? Hope and faith are companion virtues. We believe in the promises of God, and trust the Lord to do what He has said that He would do.

We have seen that at this period in Israel's history, the nation was in deep trouble, the worst in their history. Haman, second in power only to Ahasuerus in Persia, had gotten the King to agree to destroy all Jews throughout the empire on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month of the year. This decree was drawn up on the thirteenth day of the first month. Cf. Esther 3:12, 13. So this terrible slaughter of the Jews was eleven months away.

Haman had sought this because of his hatred for Mordecai who refused to bow down in worship before Haman. He knew that Mordecai was a Jew, and probably thought that all Jews felt

the same way about him that Mordecai felt.

Before all of this, Esther, who was a Jewess (but her nationality was not known), had been chosen to replace Vashti the original Queen who refused to come in to the men's banquet to show off her beauty. We cannot defend the way that Esther got to the throne (although it was not of her choosing), yet the whole thing must have remained a mystery until the trouble with Haman developed. Then it was evident that Esther was in a most important place, and that was probably the first time that he was able to understand why she was where she was. Mordecai, who was more like a father to Esther than a cousin because he had raised her, charged her to go in to the king to plead with him for her people.

However, there was one problem. No one, including the Queen, was supposed to go in to the King unless called--and the King had not called for her in a month. If the King did not want to receive her, death was the penalty. If he held out his golden scepter to her, she was safe. So Esther was risking her life to go into the King.

Nevertheless, she said that she would go. And she said, "If I perish, I perish" (Est. 4:16b). But she placed this request upon Mordecai: She told him to get all of the Jews in Shushan to fast for her for three days. This meant that she wanted them to pray for her. Chapter 4 closes with the information that Mordecai did what Esther wanted him to do just as she was prepared to do what he wanted her to do. It was a very delicate and very crucial situation for Esther to be in.

Did God hear the prayers of His people? Was prayer a mighty force exercised by the people of God? What can we learn from chapters 5, 6, and 7?

Actually there were several answers. God was blessing step by step.

I. THE KING'S FAVOR (Est. 5:1-5).

The King extended his scepter to her. (Read verses 1, 2.) Her life was spared.

The King knew that she must have come on a very important mission, and so he asked her what it was. And, in characteristically royal style he promised to grant her request. See v. 3.

She wanted the King and Haman to come that very day to a banquet, a dinner, which she had prepared for them. The King

agreed to come, and commanded Haman to do the same.

The Jews were not safe yet, but it appeared that Esther had some proof that the Lord was working for her, that He had heard her prayer.

II. ESTHER'S FIRST DINNER (Est. 5:6-8).

Why a dinner?

I feel sure that this was protocol. This was royal etiquette. Esther would not go into the King to present such a request with all of the court attendants around and listing. She needed a special time when she could be alone with the King and with Haman to tell the King what she wanted.

Why she did not give the King her request at this first dinner, we can only guess. It certainly would have been a very difficult thing for her to do, and possibly she could not bring herself to tell the king at this time.

Matthew Henry has another idea that may have been combined with the one I have just suggested. He said that POSSIBLY ESTHER'S HESITATION WAS PROVIDENTIAL! That would certainly be in harmony with the way in which God was dealing with them. Two things needed to be done:

- 1) The scaffold upon which Haman was going to hang Mordecai had to be built. We read about this in Est. 5:9-14.
- 2) The Lord was going to give King Ahasuerus a night of insomnia. We read about this in chapter 6.

Let us see why the scaffold was built.

III. HAMAN'S SCAFFOLD (Est. 5:9-14).

When Haman left Esther's first banquet, he saw Mordecai sitting in the King's gate. Mordecai refused stand up or to bow down to Haman, and this made Haman all the more furious!

He went home controlling himself, boasted that he was the only one who had been invited to the next day's dinner with the King, but could not hide his hatred for Mordecai.

Haman's wife, Zeresh, and his friends suggested to him that he build a gallows 50 cubits high (75 feet), then go to the king to request that Mordecai be hanged before Haman would go to the Queen's banquet. Haman was delighted with the idea, and the gallows was constructed. This brings us to the end of chapter 5. As the account progresses, we can see the hand of the Lord even in this.

IV. THE KING'S INSOMNIA (Est. 6:1-3).

At the end of chapter 2 we had three verses which I mentioned as almost parenthetical when we consider the history which led up to it, and followed after it. Est. 2:21-23 told about a conspiracy against the life of the King. The would-be assassins were two of the King's chamberlains: Bigthan and Teresh. Mordecai found out about the plot, told Esther, who told the King, and the two conspirators were hung.

In chapter 6 when the King could not sleep, the chronicles of the King were read, and Ahasuerus was reminded of the part that Mordecai had in sparing his life. He asked what had been done to honor Mordecai, and found out that nothing had been done.

This led to:

V. MORDECAI'S HONOR (Est. 6:4-11).

Haman had come to the court that morning to request permission to hang Mordecai on his gallows before going to the dinner which Esther was preparing. The King called him in, and before Haman could present his request, the King asked him what should be done to a man the King desired to honor. Thinking that the King was thinking of him, he said that the King should:

- 1) Attire the honoree in the King's apparel.
- 2) Set him on the King's horse.
- 3) Put the royal crown on his head.
- 4) Cause one of the "most noble princes" to lead the horse and its rider through the streets while he proclaimed, "This shall be done to the man the king delighteth to honour" (Est. 6:9b).

To Haman's great dismay the King told him to do all of this for Mordecai!

Afterwards he went home to his wife and his friends thoroughly humiliated. They saw in this an indication that Haman would fall before Mordecai.

Thus, we can see how providentially the Lord protected Mordecai from the evil plan that Haman had.

As the chapter ends, one of the King's chamberlains came to conduct Haman to Esther's special dinner.

VI. ESTHER'S SECOND DINNER (Est. 7:1-6).

The King wanted to hear her request. For the first time

Esther revealed that she was a Jewess. She pled with the King for her life, and the lives of her people. When the King asked her who had ordered all of this, Esther said, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman" (Est. 7:6a).

It seems that the only way that we can explain Ahasuerus' surprise is that the order was actually an order to kill the Queen. Ahasuerus had not known the Queen's nationality when he consented to the massacre of the Jews.

VII. HAMAN'S DEATH (Est. 7:7-10).

The King went out into the garden in his fury, but returned to find Haman restraining the Queen, pleading with her to intervene with the King for his life. It seems very unlikely that he was trying to attack the Queen. That would have made his doom that much more certain.

The end: Haman was put to death on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai.

Matthew Henry mentioned that this accomplished three things:

1) Pride was brought down.

Est. 5:11, 12 tells of his pride.

When the King asked what should be done for the man the King wanted to honor, Haman could not think that person was anybody but himself.

Solomon wrote many years before this:

Pride goeth before destruction,
and an haughty spirit before a fall (Prov. 16:18).

He also wrote,

When pride cometh, then cometh shame:
but with the lowly is wisdom (Prov. 11:2a).

Pride has been called "the root sin." It was the reason for Lucifer's downfall, and it has been the reason for the downfall of countless others ever since. A proud man is never a God-fearing man.

Haman's death was God's testimony against pride.

2) Persecution was punished.

God has not promised that our lives will be trouble-free, but God has promised to take care of His people. He never lets the enemy have an entirely free hand against His people. There have been many attempts to destroy the people of

God and the work of God, but none has ever succeeded, and none ever will! God's purpose in persecution is always to glorify Himself, and to draw His people to Himself. It would take a very superficial reading of the book of Esther not to be able to see the hand of the Lord in the protection of His people.

Most of us know Isa. 41:10,

Fear thou not; for I am with thee:
be not dismayed; for I am thy God:
I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee;
yea, I will uphold thee
with the right hand of my righteousness.

But do you know the verses that follow?

Behold, all they that were incensed against thee
shall be ashamed and confounded:
they shall be as nothing;
and they that strive with thee shall perish.
Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them,
even them that contended with thee:
they that war against thee shall be as nothing,
and as a thing of nought.
For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand,
saying unto thee, Fear not, I will help thee
(Isa. 41:11-13).

It is very likely that Mordecai and Esther knew these verses as well as many other promises of Scripture which gave them hope.

3) Haman was killed as he had expected to kill Mordecai.

In our Scripture reading today we had this statement in Psa. 10:2,

The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor:
let them be taken in the devices
which they have imagined.

In the Psalm before this (9:15) we read,

The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made:
in the net which they hid is their own foot taken.

Psalm 7:16 is another example of this divine principle:

His mischief shall return upon his own head,
and his violent dealing shall come down
upon his own pate [crown of his head].

David prayed in Psa. 35:8,

Let destruction come upon him at unawares;
and let his net that he hath hid catch himself:
into that very destruction let him fall.

We have David again praying this prayer in Psa. 57:5, 6,

Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens;
let thy glory be above all the earth.

They have prepared a net for my steps;
 my soul is bowed down:
 they have digged a pit before me,
 into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves.
 Again in Psa. 141:10 David prayed in a similar way,
 Let the wicked fall into their own nets,
 whilst that I withal escape.

Solomon saw the same truth when he wrote in Prov. 26:27, ^{Prov. 28:10}
 Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein:
 and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him.
 In Ecc. 10:8 we are told, "He that diggeth a pit shall fall
 into it."

These Scriptures show how God judged Haman. Haman built his
 gallows for a man of God, but Haman was the one who died on
 it!

The Lord's people are very precious to Him. Our Lord said
 while He was here on earth that no one can pluck us out of
 His hand, nor out of the Father's hand—that He and the
 Father were one in their intention to keep their people.

Concl: The death of Haman did not solve all of Israel's
 problems. The decree calling for the death of all
 Jews was still in effect. But the book of Esther would teach
 us to look for even the smallest evidences of the Lord's
 presence and blessing, and take from them encouragement to
 believe that the Lord will finish what He has started.

The story of Esther is not only a story of divine providence,
 but it is a story of divine grace. The people did not
 deserve the protection of the Lord, but they were miracu-
 lously given it anyway. They were in exile, separated from
 their land, but not separated from their God. The Lord was
 teaching them to trust Him when they could not see Him, to
 count on Him as the living God, the faithful God, the omni-
 potent God.

GOD DOES ANSWER PRAYER! He blesses united prayer. It is not
 that many people can persuade God to do something that He did
 not intend to do, but the heart of God is moved when His
 people, united in their desire to seek Him and His blessing,
 set aside time to cry out to God. HE DOES ANSWER PRAYER!

May He enable us to follow the example and the faith of
 Mordecai and Esther in the trials and testings which we
 experience day by day.

THE OVERRULING HAND OF GOD

Esther 8, 9, 10

Intro: The book of Esther is the story of God's preservation of His people Israel during the time of their captivity in the Persian Empire. We do not see God manifesting Himself in any special appearances. Nor do we have any prophet appearing to the people. The name of God does not appear in any way throughout the entire book. And yet it is clear as we read the book that God was present with His people in those days, defending them, blessing them, and using them in the highest positions of the Empire. Esther, a Jewess, became the Queen of Persia. We are going to learn today in the chapters we will be considering that Mordecai also was given a very high position in the Persian government. There can be no question but that this was all due to the mighty hand of God working on behalf of His people. It does not mean that the Lord sanctioned all of the ways in which these things were accomplished, particularly the method that King Ahasuerus used to select Esther as his Queen. Nevertheless, the hand of God was evident. The things which took place never could have happened if the Lord had not been intervening on behalf of His people.

There is another unseen actor in this interesting story. That was the Devil. He is not mentioned. His name does not appear. But it is equally evident that he was working behind the scenes, especially working in the heart of Haman, the enemy of the Jews.

Haman, because of his hatred for Mordecai who refused to worship him, was able to get an edict from King Ahasuerus that all of the Jews throughout the 127 provinces of the Empire, from Ethiopia to India, would be put to death on the 13th day of the last month of the year, the month of Adar. Never before nor since has there been such a terrible plot against the people of Israel. Hitler may have approached it during World War II, but nothing in Scripture can compare with what Haman was attempting to do. The Devil has always hated the people of Israel because they were the nation chosen by God to give us the Word of God, and they are the people chosen by God to give us the Messiah, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So let us not be under any illusion regarding what was going on in the book of Esther. We have the Devil seeking to destroy to Lord's people; we have the Lord marvelously intervening on behalf of His people.

When Mordecai learned of the plot, he went to Queen Esther, whom he had raised because she was an orphan. He was her

cousin, although older than she was. He told her that she must go to the King to intercede for her people. She had not told the King that she was Jewish, and so he did not know that the plot against the Jews was also a plot against her life.

I won't go into the details of how Queen Esther told her husband about the plot. As we learned last week, it is a story of answered prayer. The Lord worked in a special way against Haman. The result was that Haman was hung on a scaffold he had prepared to hang Mordecai. This brought us to the end of chapter 7.

However, as one commentary has expressed it, the plotter was gone, but the plot remained. (See MH, II, 1144.) The edict was still in effect that all of the Jews would be killed on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month of that year. What could be done to save them? It was a law of the Medes and the Persian that an edict of the King could not be changed. See verse 8 of chapter 8.

At the beginning of chapter 8 it is clear that the Lord is still at work. We have:

I. THE PROMOTION OF MORDECAI (Est. 8:1, 2).

In a most amazing turn of events Mordecai was promoted to take the place that had formerly been held by Haman, the Jews' enemy. Mordecai became second in authority over the Persian Empire.

In addition to this, Haman's estate, of which he had been so proud (as we saw in chapter 5) was given to Esther. She, in turn, gave it to Mordecai.

This had to be of the Lord. It is true that Mordecai had been instrumental in saving the life of the King, and that the King had honored him for that. But for Mordecai to be given such power in a Gentile government had to be an act of Almighty God.

However, as wonderful as all of this was, Esther was anything but happy and satisfied. Her people were still under the sentence of death. And so let us consider:

II. QUEEN ESTHER'S GREAT DISTRESS (Est. 8:3-6).

She went in before the King. Again, this was at the risk of her life because the King had not sent for her. Neither does it seem that Mordecai commanded her to go at this time although it was seen from verse 7 that Mordecai was there

with her. This time Esther went in, not standing before the King, but having fallen down at his feet, weeping in great anguish. The King held out his scepter to her, and she presented her request. She wanted another decree from the King which would reverse the terrible plot that Haman had made against her people. Verse 6 tells of her anxiety. Perhaps we have felt this in something of the same way when we think of our men and women in the armed forces going to war in Saudi Arabia. It would have killed her to see her people die.

III. THE KING'S RESPONSE (Est. 8:7-14).

The King said that he had given Haman's estate to the Queen to compensate for what Haman had done to the Jews. But now he realized that was not enough.

He could not undo his first decree, but he could issue another decree even though he had to leave the first decree in effect. This second decree was issued on the 23rd day of the third month (see verse 9), 2 months and 10 days after the first decree was issued. This second gave the Jews the right to defend themselves against anyone, man, woman, or child, who attempted to kill them. The Jews could kill their enemies, and could take their possessions for themselves. And this decree was good on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the day that Haman had determined to kill the Jews.

Mordecai was given authority to write this decree in the King's name, to seal it with the King's seal, and to send copies of it throughout the Empire in the shortest possible time.

Again it is clear that God was at work. The King's heart was in the Lord's hand, and the Lord turned it in favor of the Jewish people. Cf. Prov. 21:1.

The last three verses of chapter 8 tell us:

IV. THE REACTION OF THE PEOPLE (Est. 8:15-17).

Have you ever been in a situation which looked hopeless, and all of sudden it changed? Have you seen the clouds of gloom and doom change in a moment--the clouds are gone, and the light was shining again? We never can really know that God is the God of the impossible until we find ourselves in an impossible situation, and then see the Lord at work!

Look at Mordecai's ecstasy as recorded in verse 15.

Just a short time before Mordecai had been in sackcloth and

ashes, crying out in such bitterness that people all around him heard his cry. Now that is all changed. Joy has taken the place of sorrow.

— Mordecai must have felt like David did when he wrote Psalm 30. Listen to part of that Psalm:

...weeping may endure for a night,
but joy cometh in the morning...
Thou hast turn for me my mourning into dancing:
thou has put off my sackcloth,
and girded me with gladness;
To the end that my glory may sing praise to thee,
and not be silent. O Lord my God,
I will give thanks unto thee for ever (vv. 5b, 11, 12).

According to what our Lord said in John 16:24, one way that full joy comes to us is through answered prayer. And we certainly see that in Mordecai at this point in this wonderful story.

But look also at how the people felt according to verses 16 and 17a.

Matthew Henry made this comment:

— If they had not been threatened and in distress they would not have had occasion for this extraordinary joy. Thus are God's people made to sow in tears that they may reap in so much more joy. The suddenness and strangeness of the turn of affairs in their favour added to their joy (II, 1147).

Psalm 126:1-3 says:

When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion,
we were like them that dream.
Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
and our tongue with singing:
then said they among the heathen,
The Lord hath done great things for them.
The Lord hath done great things for us;
whereof we are glad.

The people had been under heavy darkness; suddenly they "had light," as well as "gladness, and joy, and honour."

Notice what happened to "many of the people of the land."

— They "became Jews." This is the equivalent of saying that they were saved! Haman tried to exterminate the Lord's people. Instead, what he did, and the way in which the Lord overruled actually increased the number of the Lord's people. It is important for us to see that joy in the hearts of the

Lord's people is used by the Spirit of God to draw others to Christ.

But notice the last statement of the chapter: "For the fear of the Jews fell upon them."

Who did this? It had to be the Lord. The Lord had promised to make His people a blessing to others, and here again we see the Lord, behind the scenes, working for His people, and working through His people.

V. THE DELIVERANCE OF THE PEOPLE (Est. 9:1-17).

Chapter 9 moves us quickly from the third month to what was supposed to have been the fateful twelfth month. But it was anything but ominous. Instead of a day of national defeat and death, it was a day of victory and great joy.

Again the Lord was at work.

Look at the last part of verse 2. And then look at verse 3.

Their enemies were determined to kill them. Instead hundreds of their enemies were killed. The Lord was on their side and fought with them and for them.

But notice something else.

Although the King's edict had said that the Jews could take the spoil, see what we read at the end of verse 10, and the end of verse 15, and then verse 16.

Do you suppose they felt like Abram dealing with the King of Sodom after Abram had defeated Chedorlaomer and his allies. Abram refused to take any of the spoil, and this is what he said,

I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord,
the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth,
That I will not take from a thread
even to a shoelatchet,
and that I will not take anything that is thine,
lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich
(Gen. 14:22, 23).

The Jews were not after possessions; they only wanted their lives and their freedom. With the King's permission the decree was extended to include the fourteenth day. Among those who were killed were the ten sons of Haman who must have been just as wicked as he was, and who, if they had lived, would have tried to accomplish what their father had tried to do, but failed. This chapter is a marvelous testimony of God's faithfulness to His people, Israel, and to

those of us who are His people today.

Such a day and such a time were not to be forgotten. And so we have:

VI. THE FEAST OF PURIM (Est. 9:18-32).

(Read verses 18-22.) Verse 22 gives us the purpose of Purim.
(Read also verses 24-28.)

Throughout the book of Esther we are concerned with the decrees of King Ahasuerus. As the book ends we have the decrees of Queen Esther and (can we call him?) Mordecai, the Prime Minister.

The Lord was obviously behind this also. We should never forget the blessings of the Lord upon our lives. Psalm 105:1, 2 are two verses that we all should remember, and they are supported by this ninth chapter of the book of Esther.

O give thanks unto the Lord; call upon his name:
make known his deeds among the people.
Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him:
talk ye of all his wondrous works.

The book ends with:

VII. A TRIBUTE TO THE GREATNESS OF MORDECAI (Est. 10:1-3).

Mordecai became greater and greater, but he never forgot his people. He kept seeking their good. He was not only great in the eyes of Ahasuerus, but he was great in the eyes of his people. He had been honored earlier by King Ahasuerus; here we see that he was honored by the Lord God of heaven and earth. Mordecai was a man who feared the Lord, and honored the Lord, and the blessing of God was upon him to the great profit of his nation, the people of Israel.

Concl: There are so many lessons in this book of Esther that I cannot possibly summarize them all. But I hope that it has taught all of us that God does not have to be visible nor audible in order to be present with us and working for us. He never leaves us. And sometimes He takes us through deep waters, as He did the people of Israel, not to see us destroyed, nor His work come to an end, but so we will really trust Him and see that, when we can't do anything, what He does is more than enough. He delights to turn night into day for His people.

Let us trust Him whatever our present trial might be, and then be prepared to praise Him for the rest of our lives for all of His goodness to us.