



Esther

Queen for God

Louis Nel

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**A series of Devotions
on the Book of Esther**

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Queen for God

Introduction to the Book of Esther

About the book of Esther there are discourse among theologians. Some believers, even feel a bit uncomfortable about it. Does this book really belong in the Bible? Nevertheless, this inspirational book stands out very prominently between Nehemiah and Job.

In the first place, it seems as if Esther was written specifically to boost Jewish Nationalism. In addition, the book seems to have little to do with faith. In fact, the name of the Lord does not appear once in the book! Although in some translations the Name of the Lord is mentioned in Esther 9:31, in fact it is only implied, because it does not really say so directly in the basic text.

Another reason some theologians are sceptical about Esther is the fact that when the Kumran scrolls were discovered, there was no sign of the book of Esther. It was the only book not among the valuable writings. Why? Doesn't that perhaps imply that Esther

doesn't belong in the Bible?

Yet, despite all these arguments, it is extremely important that Esther be part of the Bible. First of all, the book plays a very important role in Jewish history and their experience of festivals. When Esther and Mordecai bring about salvation for the Jewish people, the Purim Feast was introduced to commemorate the events. It is still celebrated today during March.

The events are so important to the Jews that they associate the Hebrew name for Esther, Hadassah, with their important buildings and institutions. Esther is a true role model for every honest Jewish girl!

All very well for the Jews. But is this book of any value to us today as Christians? Isn't this just a good story for us today?

Esther is also important to us as Christian believers, because the message that the story emits is a motivation for every believer. And even though God's name is not pertinently mentioned, we still see His omnipotence throughout the story. We are

stunned when we once again see how God has control over even world events and powerful leaders and even kings. Where things sometimes seem totally impossible, we must watch Him do the impossible. It is not through breathtaking miracles that God works here, but He uses ordinary people. He uses an old Jew who is banished from his land and is exiled somewhere far away from all his friends and family in a pagan land where idols are worshipped. God uses an orphan who has absolutely no status in life, a young girl raised by her uncle. These simple people are used by the Lord to accomplish His purpose. With such nonsensical people He achieves the impossible.

The message for us today is that He still uses the common people to often do impossible tasks.

The message of Esther for us today is that we as believers often feel threatened when we are engulfed by the things that are happening around us. When the Covid 19 virus hit us, all our courage sank into our

shoes. And when lock down time was announced by the president, we were shocked and dismayed. What are we going to do?

It is in such times that we must then be prepared to accept the responsibility that God places on our shoulders. This is when we must begin to think creatively in full dependence on God. We must surrender to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and then do what He asks of us. If only we are willing, He is faithful and will give us the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit to perform His miracle. It was precisely during these lock down time that wonderful initiatives came to light.

But there is a third reason why Esther is in the Bible: the Holy Spirit at that time led the compilers of the Bible to make Esther part of the Bible as well. And with that I rest my case without asking further questions on the subject. Who am I to question His decision?

Esther's story takes place during the exile, circa 480 BC. During this period, most of the

Old Testament is put in writing - even books such as Genesis were finally seized.

However, Esther was only finally processed and put into writing during the period of the Maccabees in the second century BC. It was probably the last book inserted in the Jewish canon. That is probably why Esther was the only Old Testament book not found among the Qumran scrolls. This community probably did not use Esther as part of the Old Testament, yet it only became part of the canon after their time.

Today, Esther is an exciting and inspiring book to read. I want to invite you to enjoy it with me.

Prayer:

Lord, Esther is such an inspiration to every believer. Thank you for that, and please open my eyes so that I can see Your message to me in it.

Ahasuerus

Esther 1: 1-8

It is the year 484 BC. The flamboyant King Ahasuerus, also known as Xerxes 1, is sitting on the throne of the mighty Persian Empire. It is now his third year on the throne. Since the dynamic king Cyrus the Great ascended the throne of Persia 70 years before, the empire expanded at a frightening rate until it eventually became the world empire of its time. The empire extends from Greece, right around the Mediterranean to Egypt and borders India in the east - truly a mighty empire! Ahasuerus is now the fifth king to be seated on that prestigious throne in the capital, Susa.

In the first scene of our story, we see Ahasuerus in all his splendour and beauty. For a full six months, the city is being transformed into a marvellous world of colour and wealth. Bright white and crimson linen cloths are draped on marble pillars, decorated and fastened with purple linen ropes and silver rings. Silver and gold

couches adorn the paving - of course no plain ordinary paving. It is artfully laid out, and carved from various types of precious stone. Preparations are being made for festival of astronomical scope!

The highlight of the festival is a week-long reception. No expense and effort is missed. Wine is plentiful, of course only the very best for the most powerful king on earth. And of course it is served in golden goblets designed specifically for the occasion. All the who's who is there, all the high officials from the empire from all over the world. And of course it's not just the men who are spoiled. Elsewhere, Queen Vashti is doing her own thing. She welcomes all the influential women of the Persian Empire.

And the king is very happy, because the company is good and the wine even better! A jovial bully, this cheerful king who freely opens his doors to all his noble subjects. No effort is spared to make them happy. And of course to win their favour! The palace servants are instructed to treat his guests like

kings. All their wishes must be taken care of. Kind-hearted, cheerful, generous and jovial, that's Ahasuerus! But be careful of him, only trust him as far as you see him. He is a very dangerous man! Don't get on the wrong side of him, because you're definitely going to get second best! Moreover, he easily lends his ears to other influential men. Unknowingly, he allows cunning men to manipulate him, and then he does things that make your hair stand on end!

And then there is Esther, the beautiful female leading character in our story. She learns of her responsibilities to take control of a situation in the hard way, even in the face of death. As a woman with no status or authority, she takes her position in a world dominated by the power structures of men. Like a Moses of old, she leads her oppressed people out of the tribulation. Through her gentle words she changes the course of history. Then it is actually this fragile, gentle woman who is, in effect, swinging the sceptre in the realm of this dangerous king

Ahasuerus.

But now I am running ahead of my story.

We realize all too thoroughly that those with the reins in hand, the rulers, have power over other people. We deal with it daily. The power-hungry traffic man who makes life difficult for you. And if he has a corrupt attitude, he might even blackmail you into doing the wrong thing. It is especially the great leaders in Africa who have tremendous power over their subjects. Even if they disagree with his policy, they will still follow him faithfully, because he has such a strong hold over them.

Our entire lives are governed by laws and regulations - some of which we don't even agree with. Often laws are made that believers have to disagree with. Just think about the abortion law. The question is, how do I handle it? Good laws are for everyone's benefit, but what about laws that are not in honour of God, or which are a disadvantage to many? What do you and I handle such laws?

Jesus taught us that there are certain things that you will not meddle with, even though they may seem bitterly unfair to you. If the bombastic soldier with the power in his hands tells you to carry his baggage for a mile, then you do it with a smile, even offer to carry it for two miles - with a broad smile! And if the emperor says you have to pay taxes, then you pay without a fuss, even though he is a heathen who worships idols.

By holding protest actions and petitions and strikes, you are only aggravating the authorities. Even drastic steps like a hunger strike give the men enough reason to mock and laugh at you.

Come with me and see how Esther approached a sensitive case. Many people's lives were at stake, but she had a plan!

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for the beautiful story of Esther, and that I can learn from it.

Queen Vashti's Revolt

Esther 1: 9-22

The social status of women has always been a major challenge for them over the centuries. Often, she was simply regarded as her husband's property and had to do as her husband says. In Muslim countries, women have absolutely no rights. Children often have the same fate, and they are despised.

In the kingdom of Persia, it was no different at that time. However, one woman put her foot down - Queen Vashti. When Ahasuerus held his great feast only for men, she decided to hold her own feast for all the prominent women, since all the women were excluded.

Vashti was a beautiful woman! But such exceptional beauty often has its drawbacks as well. Just look at how the most beautiful girls are often abused, like show animals!

And that was exactly Vashti's fate. King Ahasuerus was very merry from all the wine, and he also wanted to brag about his beautiful wife. He sends palace officials to

fetch Vashti so that she can parade in front of the men, according to later Jewish writings without clothes, with only the crown on her head! She had to come and show all the drunken men how beautiful Ahasuerus' wife is. So she was just another of the treasures of the splendour and pomp of Ahasuerus that had to be exhibited to the world to see how powerful he was.

When Vashti gets this message, she is the elegant hostess at her own reception. Many prominent women sit there at her glamorous festive event. What a humiliation to be told now that she had to be exhibited like a cheap street woman before the greedy eyes of a bunch of drunk men.

Queen Vashti faces a very difficult decision. If she yields before her husband's abuse of power, she will make herself cheap. If she refuses, then she loses everything, her esteem, her status, maybe even her life. She decides to lose everything rather than make herself cheap. So she refuses to obey the command of the mighty King Ahasuerus.

When the palace officers arrive empty-handed to Ahasuerus, he is furious. How could his wife disobey his orders? To him it was certainly a terrible embarrassment! All the distinguished men are ready to watch the spectacle, and now Vashti comes and ruins everything. He calls his advisers: "What should I do?"

Then one of the smart advisers comes forward. He cunningly explains that this case is actually much bigger than the king thinks. "Actually, we are facing an enormous state crisis here!" he pointed out. He begins to paint a picture of how those prominent women with Vashti are going to gossip with their husbands about what happened. This story is going to spread like wildfire throughout the entire kingdom. "Majesty, just think what crisis this is going to cause, because if the king's wife doesn't even want to listen to him, what about all the other women? This is going to cause a huge crisis over the length and breadth of the Persian Empire, because no woman will ever obey her husband again. This crisis must now be

smothered immediately before it is too late! ”

And so one woman's wish not to be abused is blown up to a huge catastrophe.

However, the fact is that the king's authority is challenged by his own wife. After all his display of power, his wife refuses to listen to him. What does it say about his power over the world? It makes him laughable before his subjects! How should anyone who cannot even handle power in his own home handle state power over a kingdom extending from Greece to India? That great power of him is unmasked by Vahsti as a farce! His great power is just an empty shell!

To try to alleviate the terrible crisis, Ahasuerus is told by his advisers to get rid of Vahsti. She no longer dares to serve as Queen of this kingdom! She had to be replaced by someone else who might have behaved better. He is further requested (actually instructed) to issue a royal decree to be sent throughout the world, stating that each man is now master in his own home. How absurd!

Now I ask you: who actually had the power in Persia? The king?

It doesn't look like that to me! He was just a pawn in the hands of his officials! Moreover, he could not even control his own home. What about the officials then? Did they have all the power? At first glance it appears so. But if we read the story further, we see that it was actually God who was in complete control of the situation. He was shifting things in place so that the oppression of His people could come to an end. God is using these power-possessed people in the fulfilling of His counsel.

So know that even when corruption and abuse of power prevail, we can still trust in God. God is in complete control!

Prayer:

Lord, thank you that I can know today that You are still in control, even though it sometimes feels like everything is going wrong.

King Seeks Wife

Esther 2: 1-7

King Ahasuerus is like a bear with a sore head. Did he make a mistake by listening to his "smart" officials' advice? For four years now he has been without his wife since that disastrous party when he chased Vashti home. And now he misses her! The worst is that he can't do anything about it! That's done! Written in the law of the Medes and Persians. Oh, yes, he was annoyed with her when she refused to show off to the men. But he did not have to listen to his officials' advice. He always listens to their advice! Vashti, dear Vashti - why should life be so cruel? He wishes he could just hold her in his arms again

In the courtrooms of King Ahasuerus' palace, officials are bitterly concerned. For months now the king has just sat there pitying himself. "If we do not do something very soon, our kingdom will perish!" the men whispered to one another. "What will we do to get the smile back on his face again?"

"We haven't had a decent party for years. Ahasuerus is a real old sour puss nowadays!"

"Can't we get Vashti back again?" one wants to know.

"Never! Vashti is history - if we put her back in the picture we are going to look like a bunch of old fools!"

"The big secret is that we urgently need to bring a new young woman into the king's life. The problem is: how do we get someone to his liking? "

"A beauty contest!"

"And then? What are you going to achieve by that? "

"The thing works like this: we appoint men throughout the kingdom to look for the most beautiful girls, and then the king must choose one from the bundle. Simple!"

And so came a delegation of palace officers before King Ahasuerus. They explain that he urgently needs a woman in his life. They will go and find him the most beautiful women in

the kingdom, and he can choose one for him. Immediately, Ahasuerus is delighted with the idea. "Why couldn't I even think of such a brilliant idea?" he wonders in his silence. "Start right away!" he urged the officials. "Can I see the first girls tomorrow already?" He is now like a little boy who can't wait to get his presents.

"No, Majesty, unfortunately it can't work that way. Unfortunately, it's not that easy! It is going to be a long process, because men will have to be appointed first, and it will take months to get everyone organized. After all, a government always has a lot of red tape! And then also you are working with raw material. These girls must first be prepared for the palace. They will all have to go on a strict diet and get all kinds of beauty treatment before they will be good enough for the royal court. The first ones will only be ready in a year! " And so the very first Miss World competition is launched.

Ahasuerus is depressed! He has always been used to getting absolutely everything

his heart desires immediately. And now he has to wait! His officials are not playing fair with him

Our scene now shifts to a totally different situation, in a shabby house, that of the Jew, Mordecai. At that time he was banished from his beloved homeland. Now he sits in a foreign country, amongst foreign people and under a foreign king, without a house and without a homeland. But he still has one great joy left in his life, the beautiful girl he looks after. She is not only beautiful - she is very beautiful! She makes all the young men's heads turn, and Mordecai is very proud of this beautiful girl. Hadassa, or Esther, an orphan who's parents both died, and Mordecai was given the task of raising her. He adopted her as his own daughter. Esther is indeed a daughter to be proud of!

The news of the big beauty pageant also reaches Mordecai's ears. Would his beautiful little girl stand a chance to participate in this competition? But then he realizes that they are Jews, and a Jew has no status in this

foreign land. So it is a big surprise to Mordecai. When the competition official sees Esther, she is instantly very excited, but what will dad Mordecai say about this?

When she tells Mordecai that she was summoned to Susa for the competition, he can't stop his excitement. But then he gets serious: "Esther my child, you must always remember where your roots are. Remember: you are part of the people of God. But you must not tell anyone that you are an Israelite, because it will certainly be to your disadvantage."

And so Esther leaves for the glorious city of Susa. What will be waiting for her there?

Prayer:

Lord, You had a wonderful plan for Esther's life. I also know that You have a wonderful plan for my life. Please always keep me aware of this.

The Interview

Esther 2: 8-10

Esther's mouth hung unashamedly as she entered the city of Susa. Everywhere she looked there were groups of young girls, all her age. And one wants to be more beautiful than the other! However, when she gives a friendly greeting, she notices that no one understands her! Everyone speaks different languages. The girls gathered here from all over the world for the big beauty pageant. She is urged by the official in the direction of a large building. Everything is so beautifully decorated, the artificial stone work is painfully neat. Everywhere she looks, it is marble and gold, and the most beautiful sculptures. But it is only when the giant heavy doors swing open on their decorative copper hinges swing open that she sees the true beauty of the building. She gasps for breath. Silver chandeliers with oil lamps illuminate the colossal room with its marble floors and rows of sculptures. "So that's what the king's palace looks like!" In her wildest dreams,

Esther couldn't have imagined such a breathtaking picture!

They walk through endless corridors until they come across a heavy door with two guards guarding the entrance. In a lush room, a man sits busy behind his desk. The officer clears his throat nervously to catch the man's attention. When he looks up, the officer bends deeply. "It's Hadassa," he announces.

The man behind the desk looks up at Esther, and then a smile forms on his face - a smile of total appreciation. "Where did you find her?" he wants to know, "She's beautiful, very pretty!"

If Esther wasn't so afraid of this man, she would have burst out laughing. She had never heard a man speak in such a high-pitched voice in her life!

"Hadassa? Come closer so that I can see properly. I'm Hegai. All the king's wives are under my care." Hegai inspects Esther from all angles, feels here, presses there, until she later feels like a sheep in the market being

inspected by it's buyers. "Hmm, nothing that a little oils and herbs can't fix. Take her to the women's quarters, she is definitely a very good candidate! "

When they walk down the aisle, Esther wants to know, "What is wrong with Hegai that his voice sounds so funny?"

"He had to pay an expensive price to get this appointment," the official explained. "To be in charge of the king's wives, he first had to be rendered harmless, if one could put it that way. He is now a Eunog." The official shook his head solemnly.

Esther shivers at the mere thought, but then they are again in front of giant, heavily guarded doors. The official may not enter, and Esther is placed in the care of a woman who looks very important.

There are a lot of women together in a large room, and everyone seems to have nothing to do. All eyes are on Esther, and suddenly she feels terribly self-conscious. Then one of the young girls breaks the ice when she gets up and introduces herself to Esther and

welcomes her. "Who are you and where are you from?" the girl wants to know.

"Hadassa," she says, and then she begins to tell, "I am an Israelite, one of the People of God," she wants to tell the girl proudly, but just in time she remembers what dad Mordecai said, that she should tell no one what her origins are.

The next morning, Esther wakes up early, "The matron is looking for you!" she is told. As she walks into the room, no less than seven women wait for her, all dressed in the neat uniform of palace attendants. "They will take care of you from now on," the matron tells her. "You are a very privileged girl, you are now being moved to the best quarters. Old Hegai must be very impressed by you to receive such treatment! "

Her new quarters are very luxurious. But Esther barely has time to stare in wonderment all the beauty, because she has to start her first beauty treatment right away. "Hegai's orders!" the maids informed her. She is massaged from head to toe with myrrh

oil. Never in her life has Esther felt so special. The delicious aroma of the oil fills the entire room, a smell almost like moss. She could actually feel the oil making her supple skin even more firm.

That night, Esther prays to the God of her ancestors, and she says thank you for spoiling her. It is not nice to be an outcast in a foreign country, but now she is getting such wonderful treatment. "Lord, what have I done to earn it? It is only Your grace alone. Even though I am here alone among all the pagan girls, I know that You are still God. I will never forget You Lord, and I will never forget My people - Your people. Please help me to always keep you in my thoughts. "

Prayer:

Lord, when we are well, it is so easy to forget about You. Please keep me focused on You every moment of the day so that I never forget You.

Beauty Queen

Esther 2: 11-19

Mordecai's life was characterized by several crises, some of them very large. Why should he, a simple Jew, true to his Jewish tradition, go through so much trauma? It all started when he was abducted from his beloved homeland against his will. His roots were cruelly and violently plucked from the land God gave him and his forefathers. Then a close relative and his wife both died suddenly when their little girl was still small. Mordecai was tasked with raising little Esther. He really loved this kid. And now he is plunged into a crisis again, when the royal official comes to fetch her for the beauty pageant.

With mixed feelings he lets her go. His heart is broken to lose her! But wouldn't it be great if she is the chosen one? Then Mordecai makes the decision: he goes after her. He wants to see what they do with his beloved little girl!

When the task team of seven maids prepares Esther for her beauty treatment, Mordecai

paces up and down in front of the palace doors, hoping to pick up something about his child.

What Mordecai does not realize, however, is that his little girl is torn from him with a purpose. God has a huge task waiting for her. But the Lord also has a task for Mordecai. He also is sent to the palace after her with a purpose, though he may not quite experience it that way. He has to hear conversations, and he has to live out his loyalty to the pagan king, because only then can his people be saved.

Indeed, the Lord uses ordinary people to carry out His holy counsel. Not kings and moderators and professors and heads of state, but ordinary people like you and me. Esther was not only a despised Israelite, but also an orphan, and Mordecai a prisoner of war in a foreign country. How about you and me?

In the luxurious women's quarters in the palace, the task team is working hard to prepare Esther for the big day. It will take a

full year to get the girls ready, because only the very best is good enough for King Ahasuerus. His officials told him that!

For the first six months, Esther is treated with the wonderful myrrh oil with its many medicinal uses for a myriad of ailments. It also does wonders for a woman's skin and can even get rid of stretch marks. No wonder Esther is treated with it for six full months!

Then follows another six months of treatment with all kinds of cosmetics and fragrances. In addition, all the girls are on a strict diet to make them supple and give them a glowing skin. And all the while, old Mordecai is dutiful at his post at the king's palace.

Then the big day finally arrives. Each one of the beautiful girls is hopeful that the honour will be hers, that King Ahasuerus of Susa will choose her as the next queen. The girls are free to choose in which way they want to impress the king. They can use whatever they want for their purpose.

However, when Esther asks for advice from the overseer, Shaashgaz says to her:

“Esther, forget all the nicknacks, just be yourself. You are beautiful enough! Just let your inner beauty radiate.”

Finally Esther's turn comes, and she follows Shaashgaz's advice. The butterflies flutter wildly in her stomach, but she holds her head high and does everything she learned. Like a light breeze, she floats into the throne room. The important officers gasp for breath as they see the beautiful girl come in so confidently and graciously. The most important thing, however, happens: she knocks King Ahasuerus' feet clean out from under him! It's love at first sight!

The marriage is consummated and Esther is crowned Queen over the mighty Persian Empire. Then the mother of all parties follows, because now Ahasuerus has another reason to throw a wild party, this time in honour of Esther. Ahasuerus is so happy with his new bride that he makes tax allowances for everyone and distributes numerous gifts.

And through it all, old Mordecai still sits at his post at the gate of the king's palace. But that

will all change when a conversation in that same gate reaches Mordecai's ears, and he can save the king's life.

God places people where they are needed. He put Esther and Mordecai in exactly the right place. He also puts you and me in exactly the right place. Be mindful of that, and be ready for the day when the Lord wants to use you for a special task. And when the day comes, tackle your task with grace and confidence like Esther.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for giving me a task too. Please give me the zeal to do it with grace.

Assassination Attempt

Esther 2: 20-23

Esther still cannot truly believe that she is now the queen of the mighty Persian Empire. Isn't that all just a dream? Within a single year, everything changed. Her impoverished house, she suddenly exchanged for a palace where everything was bathed lavishly in wealth and luxury. She has everything a woman's heart can desire, and she often wonders what she did to earn it all. But just when she wants to indulge in all the luxury, she remembers Dad Mordecai's words: "You must never forget where your roots lie!"

And then there is the dark secret that she carries with her, that she is actually not part of this pagan world with all its idols and pagan festivals. However, she is not allowed to share the secret with anyone, not even her valets and girlfriends!

Esther's thoughts are always with Dad Mordecai. He has now permanently moved into the gate of the royal palace. He is there almost every day, and he enjoys all the hustle

and bustle there. There is not a single boring moment in this busy gate. Mordecai hopes to see his little girl occasionally, and then his heart swells with pride. In fact, Mordecai became such a part of the gate's activities that no one was paying any attention to him, as if he no longer existed. And it fits Mordecai very well, because the less he deals with the gentiles, the better for him.

One day, Mordecai noticed that two of the gatekeepers were in deep conversation with one another. He could see that something very serious was bothering the two rough men. In short, they are continuously in each other's company, and from the way they talk, it is very clear that there is serious plotting going on. Why do they glance so nervously over their shoulders, as if they are afraid someone might hear them? Mordecai smells a rat!

Mordecai moves unnoticed to within earshot of the two, pretending to be nonchalant, the innocence himself! What he hears, however, makes his blood turn cold. Mordecai shook

his head to make sure he heard correctly. The two men are now in such serious conversation that they don't notice him at all. Mordecai heard right! These two men are planning an assassination, on none other than King Ahasuerus himself!

Mordecai is so frightened that he actually feels dizzy. He was trembling with shock. "I must go and warn the king!" But he has a problem: what king will listen to an ordinary old man sitting around the gate day after day? No, it won't work! They'll throw him out without ceremony!

Then suddenly he gets an idea: "Esther! She can go and warn the king! Ahasuerus will listen to her! " When one of the maids passes by, Mordecai beckons to her: "Please give Queen Esther a message. Say it's vital that she come to see me very urgently. "

At first the girl is very reluctant to take a message from the old man, but when she sees the pleading look in his eyes, she rushes to the queen. Esther feels her knees go numb when Dad Mordecai tells her the

news. "How am I going to convey it to the king?" she wonders. Esther is very well aware of all the protocol and red tape in the palace, and that it is actually the officials who control the king's life.

When Esther wants to convey the news, she must explain to the important men very clearly that it is a matter of life and death. They still want to umm and aah, but Esther puts her foot down. If she does not speak to the king now, it may mean his death!

It is with fear and trembling that Esther tells King Ahasuerus of the plot to kill him. A huge burden falls off her shoulders as he responds by ordering his officials to investigate the matter. The culprits are arrested and then Mordecai's allegations are found to be true. The assassins are executed.

Mordecai's loyalty to the pagan king who was partly responsible for his exile leaves us ashamed. No matter who is being wronged, it is still wrong! So often we want to look the other way when an injustice is committed against someone we have no love for. That's

his business, after all! Maybe he deserves it! Jesus made it very clear that not only should we love our friends or fellow believers, but also our “neighbour,” and that includes our enemy. Yes, he is also my neighbour, no matter who he is.

Prayer:

Lord, give me true love in my heart - love, even for my enemies.

Bow Before Haman!

Esther 3: 1-6

Mordecai is blissfully sitting in his new home, the palace gate, and watching all the activities. Here, of course, he gets all the latest news, fresh from the horse's mouth. And he is satisfied, because here he was also able to save King Ahasuerus's life through his attentiveness!

Despite the fact that Mordecai is so closely intertwined in the activities at the gate, he remains very well aware of his origins. After all, he is and remains an Israelite, and nothing can ever change that! And on top of that, there is his religious conviction, he is trusting in the Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The fact that God allowed him to be abducted from his country only makes him cling more tightly to his faith. He believes that it was precisely because of his people's faithlessness to follow other gods that they were exiled from their beloved homeland in captivity. If only everyone would want to turn back to God, they will have their freedom

again. This is God's way of drawing them to Him!

One day, the news reached Mordecai's ears, that the king was planning to give Haman a big promotion. Mordecai is straight away disgusted - this guy is an Amalakite! For as far back as Israel's history dates, the Amalakites and the Israelites have been earth enemies. It all started when Israel roamed the wilderness, before entering the Promised Land. There, for the first time, the Amalakites made war against his people. Haman is bad news - out and out!

The day of Haman's promotion begins, and then Mordecai learns via the grapevine in the gate that Haman is now the head of all the king's officials. King Ahasuerus must have been in a very jovial mood, for he also announces that when Haman passes, one and all must kneel before him and pay tribute to him.

Mordecai is shocked to his soul. How can he kneel before anyone? That's idol worship! "You must not bow down to them and not

serve them ..." so the Lord God clearly commanded Moses.

"I will never bow before him!" Mordecai is adamant. "Of course, being an Amalakite has nothing to do with it! I bow before no man, only before God! "

Mordecai's thoughts are barely cold, then the inevitable happens. With great fanfare Haman comes out of the palace. Everyone kneels in front of him, and Haman waves friendly to his "admirers".

Mordecai gets a huge lump on his stomach: "What should I do?" Now he is in big trouble! "They're going to kill me if I don't bow down!"

But then he remembers the words of the Law of Moses. He stood upright, as if he had swallowed a ramrod. The gatekeepers look at Mordecai with big eyes. They try to tell him to bow. But Mordecai looks the other way, as if he doesn't even notice Haman.

Later that day, when Haman returns to the palace, the same thing again. Everyone kneels except Mordecai. One of the gatekeepers walked toward Mordecai

afterwards: "Have you not heard of the king's command?"

"Oh yes!" says Mordecai, he is well aware of it, "But I am a Jew, and our God forbids us to kneel before any man or god except before Him alone."

"You're going to get into big trouble!"

Day by day it continues like this, and Mordecai refuses to kneel before Haman. And then the inevitable happens: someone goes to Haman to complain that there is a man in the gate who refuses to show him any honour. Haman is furious! "Who is this man?" he hisses through his teeth.

"A man named Mordecai. He says he is a Jew and that

"I should've known!" yelled Haman. "It can only be a Jew doing such exepctable things!" Haman's face is red with anger. The age-old hatred for the Jewish people bubbles over his lips: "I'm going to have every Jew on earth destroyed, roots and all!"

How far are you and I prepared to go to stand up for God? We all remember Daniel's

friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who ended up in the fire because they refused to bow before another god. And Daniel himself later ended up among a bunch of starving lions because he was faithful to God. Are we willing to do the same? The problem is that most of us do not even have the courage to respond when God's holy name is abused. Many believers still collude with the things of the devil - astrology, calling up sprits, playing sinister games, etc. It is none other than bowing down to other gods. Let's do like Mordecai and make that decision to stand firm, come what may!

Prayer:

Lord, You are the only God - I will only bow before You and serve You. Please give me the power and courage to do so with full dedication.

Haman's Revenge

Esther 3: 5-15

Haman is furious when he learns that Mordecai refuses to bow before him: "I'm going to exterminate all the Jews!" he yelled. A few years earlier, King Ahasuerus had reacted just as furiously when Queen Vashti refused to come and parade in front of his drunken friends. You will still remember that the king's counsellors inflated this incident to a huge state crisis. And now Haman comes and he does exactly the same. One single man refuses to honour him, and he runs to the king and tells of the dreadful extent of the situation. That the entire Jewish nation living throughout the kingdom refuse to obey the king's orders! They are like a bunch of fickle donkeys, refusing to mix with all the other people, and they are differing with everyone! It is in the public interest that they be eradicated!

Haman's accusations are totally out of context. Moreover, he does not even mention the name of this "terribly dangerous" people

before the king, and tragically, the king does not even enquire who they are. If he had asked, he would surely have laughed at Haman: "The Israelites? Oh no Haman! They are a pathetic lot! Now, how can they be a threat to any community?" But it does not happen! And with an argument teeming with half-truths and outright lies, Haman paints the king the picture of this great threat.

It is so ironic that it was precisely Potiphar's wife's outburst of anger against Joseph that initially put him in prison, but indirectly it caused Joseph to be appointed as prime minister of Egypt. The outburst of Ahasuerus caused Esther, the Jewish orphan, to become queen of Persia.

The question is, what would the results be of Haman's anger towards Mordecai and the Israelites? Would that mean the end of them, or would God once again intervene and use the man's anger to his people's advantage?

Haman wants to make sure King Ahasuerus listens carefully to what he tells him, so he offers to deposit 352 tons of silver into the

country's treasury. No, not 352 kilograms, TONS! That's a huge amount of money! That's almost as much as the state's annual revenue! Ahasuerus doesn't even listen anymore, for all his greedy eyes can see now is the ching of mountains of money!

Many years before, the Pharaoh gave Joseph his signet ring to do what he liked. Now King Ahasuerus is also giving his signet ring to Haman to do what he pleases. Joseph with his seal ring (and wisdom) saved a whole nation from famine. Haman plans to totally exterminate an entire nation with his signet ring. And his hate!

And so a nation is sold for a pile of money to be slaughtered like sheep.

So ironically, the King of all kings, Jesus the Christ, Saviour of the world, God Almighty is sold a few hundred years later for only a few pieces of silver - to be slaughtered like a lamb!

The state machinery is underway. Haman's command, of course, with full authority of the king, is sent to all corners of the Persian

Empire. An entire nation must be totally exterminated. "Is it ever possible?" we want to ask. But then, the horrific reality of events during the Second World War surfaces again, when Hitler wanted to do exactly the same thing with that same nation. Six million Jews were exterminated!

What makes Haman's command even more horrifying is the fact that this terrible massacre had to be done on one specific day. On that same day, every Jew, man, woman, child and baby around the world had to be killed.

And all this happens while the king and Haman sit calmly together enjoying a glass of wine, as if nothing is happening. And still, the king is not even aware that it is the Jewish people who are threatened to be exterminated. Now it makes me wonder, did the mighty King Ahasuerus ever have any idea of what was actually going on in his kingdom?

However, elsewhere in the city, it is not as quiet as in the palace. In fact, the whole city

was in turmoil when they heard about the horrific legislation. And Mordecai also heard of the terrible fate that would befall him and his people, as well as his darling daughter Esther, the queen of Persia!

And now we will have to wait until tomorrow to find out whether or not the Jewish people will survive!

Would the Lord really be able to stop such a terrible disaster? Is the Lord ever able to stop the Covid 19 pandemic? All I can say is that absolutely nothing is impossible for the Lord. His omnipotence knows no bounds. So it was at that time, and so it is today. We can still trust in Him today for everything. As we see the hand of God in the story of Esther, so we still see the hand of God in today's history, if only we open our eyes to it.

Prayer:

Lord, I praise You because nothing is too great for You. You are the Almighty!

Esther's Assignment

Esther 4: 1-17

Mordecai feels uneasy. Then he hears it: the disturbing news that Haman plans to wipe out the entire Jewish people with roots & all!

Mordecai tore his clothes, threw ashes on his head, and wandered through the city. Everything is so terribly unfair! He realizes all too thoroughly that it is his fault and due to his stubbornness that Haman is planning this genocide. All he wanted, was to do what the Lord asked of him. And now this happens! With mourning clothes on, Mordecai squats in front of the gate to the king's palace. And there he stays! Immovable!

The news spreads like wildfire throughout the Persian Empire. From Greece to Ethiopia and from Egypt to the border of India, every Jew hears the terrible news: On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, every Jew on earth will be exterminated. No one will escape!

In King Ahasuerus's palace, however, everything is very peaceful. Nothing will

upset the residents of this luxury building. Even vanities such as genocide and other tragedies do not even reach the courtyards of the palace, because they are mere annoyances.

But then Queen Esther comes to hear of old Mordecai sitting in the gate in mourning clothes. When she inquires what's wrong with him, one of the maids tells her that the old man has lost his marbles. He walked through the streets and howled with ashes on his head. "Something must have upset him terribly!" she thought. "He can't sit in mourning clothes like that!" She sends him a set of cheerful clothes to put on, with one of the maids, but Mordecai refuses to accept it. Then Esther realizes that there must be something terribly wrong. She asks one of the palace officials to find out what is wrong with Mordecai.

When the man returns, he bows deeply to Esther. He tells her that Mordecai told him that plans are being made to exterminate the entire Jewish people, and that Haman

promised the king a huge sum of money to carry it out. The officer fumbled in his clothes, and took out a copy of the royal proclamation that Mordecai had given him.

When Esther reads the document, she feels the blood drain from her head. She feels sick. "How can one be so unscrupulous!" she thought.

"Mordecai asked that you go to the king and beg him for mercy, Your Majesty." The official communicates Mordecai's pleading message to Esther.

Esther feels powerless. Yes, even though she is now the queen of Persia, she is still only a woman. This world is controlled, dominated by men! The king has all the power! Even with her high position as queen, she is still powerless. No one may appear before the king unless he has summoned the person. Not even she, the queen, his own wife! For the past month he has not yet called her. If she now went to him uninvited, she could be killed straight away.

"Go tell Mordecai, I can't do it, I'll lose my

life!"

When he returns, he is very embarrassed: "Majesty, that old man says not to think that you will escape just because you stay in the king's palace, because you are also an Israelite!" Esther goes numb from fear! The man continues: "He says that if you do nothing and salvation comes from elsewhere for the Jews, then you and your family will be exterminated. He says that this is the reason why you have now become queen, you must save the people! "

Esther trembled as she heard the harsh words of her beloved Daddy. But then she knew he was right. Stuttering, she sent a message to Mordecai with the official: "Go and gather all the Jews in Susa. Everyone should fast for three days. My room staff and I will do the same. Then I will go to the king and talk to him. If I have to perish, then so be it!"

When Mordecai receives Esther's answer, he knows that the Lord is almighty. Naturally, his beloved daughter was placed on the throne

to save God's people. So he uses people, ordinary people, even a Jewish orphan to do His task on earth.

For what reason are you there where you are? What is your purpose where you might be sitting now during lock-down time? It is no coincidence that you are in the situation where you are now. The Lord has a purpose for your life. Maybe He has told you long ago already what He expects from you, but like Esther, you are too scared to accomplish the task. Do not wait until it is too late before you want to begin to carry out God's command. If you don't, He will eventually find someone else to do it, as Mordecai made Esther understand. Don't later regret it, pleading for forgiveness when it's too late.

Prayer:

Lord, You have placed me here with a purpose, and You have given me an instruction to carry out. Please give me the zeal to do it with full dedication.

Esther on the Red Carpet

Esther 5: 1-3

For three days the Jewish people in Susa are fasting and praying. Three full days nobody eats and drinks. Everyone realizes that their lives are in the balance, and Esther is the only person who can do something about it. "Lord, please give Esther the wisdom to deal with this matter", many Jews pray for those three long days. Their fasting and prayer reminded me of Nineveh when Jonah told them that the Lord would wipe them out of their sin. They humbled themselves before God, wore sackcloth, fasted and prayed, and begged the Lord for mercy. Now the Jews in Susa are doing exactly the same. Will the Lord hear their prayer as He listened to the prayer of the Ninevites?

Esther too, isolates herself, and with fasting and prayer, she prepares herself for the most important appointment of her life, an appointment not yet made. So far, her life as queen of the mighty Persian Empire has been one big celebration. She is pampered

and she enjoys all the honour she receives. Everyone is passionate about her, and all that attention is delightful. But suddenly she realized that the honeymoon was over! The Lord God has placed her with a purpose here, and it is not necessarily that she should have a royal life. With a shock, she realizes that the task the Lord has given her is far too great for herself to handle. "Lord, how can I, simple girl, save a whole nation from extinction?" begged Esther. "The king is a very difficult man, he will kill me if I turn up with him un-asked!"

Esther cries for three nights. She is despondent! But then, slowly, an idea begins to take hold of her. When she gets up very early on the third day, she knows exactly what to do. She calls her room staff together: "Come on, we need to get to work right away. You must make me more beautiful than you have ever done. And get my royal clothes ready, I have to go see the king today. "

"You can't do that, Majesty!" they plead. She is facing her death! "After all, you were not

invited. The law says very clearly

"Don't worry," Esther reassured them. "The Lord my God will protect me. He is the One who sends me to Ahasuerus. "

The preparation for her visit to Ahasuerus feels like an eternity to Esther. Everything must be perfect when she stands there in front of him.

Esther prays fervently as she walks down the hall to the king's reception hall. She glides into the courtyard of the hall, looking breathtaking. All the heads turn to her. Her knees want to give way under her and she would rather turn and run away. But then a wonderful calm comes over her as she stands across the king, fierce and upright and with her chin high and confident.

When Ahasuerus lifts his eyes to see who is disturbing him now, his knees become lame, but not with fear, pure admiration! He has already forgotten how beautiful Esther is. He holds out his scepter to invite her inside. "What can I do for you, Queen Esther? Just ask what you want, even if it's half my

kingdom, I'll give it to you. "

A few years ago, Queen Vasti challenged the king's authority. When she was summoned, she refused to come. In doing so, she unmasked him, but she had to pay an expensive price for it. Now Esther comes and challenges the king's authority by going to him uninvited. Esther wins his matchup, however, with her beauty and charm. The king is as tame as a lamb!

We also sometimes like Esther, find ourselves in a situation where something wonderful happens to us. Then we shrug our shoulders and say that luck was on our side. However, Esther had to realize that she had been placed as a queen with a very specific purpose for the sake of other people. She must use her position and be of service. So the Lord also expects you and me to use what the Lord gives us for the purpose the Lord has given it to us.

For example, if He gave me a nice, spacious home, then it wasn't just so I could stay there. I need to sit down and reflect on what

the Lord really wants me to do with the house. Isn't it maybe so that I can make the space available so that people can gather there to use for cell meetings or Bible study or something similar? Or if I receive wealth - is it just so I can live luxuriously? Or is the purpose maybe so that I can help others who are suffering? And if I'm good at technology, is it only so I can get a good job or apply the technology for myself? Or is it perhaps so that I can use my knowledge to expand the Kingdom?

Let us honestly reflect on what the Lord has given us, and how He wants us to use it.

Prayer:

Lord, You have given me talents. Please show me how to use them.

Esther's Trump Card

Esther 5: 4-6: 12

Esther successfully crossed the first bridge. King Ahasuerus's legs became jelly when she appeared before him in all her beauty. He is like putty in her hands, promised her to give her anything she asked!

But now she also has to tame Haman before she can play her trump card. Esther invites the king and Haman together for a meal. Now Esther is in complete control of the situation, and the two men are literally eating out of her hand. Her charm overwhelms them. The wine flows and the king becomes more generous. For a second time, he tells Esther that she can ask whatever she wants, he will give it to her, even if it is half his kingdom. And then she's ready to strike the final blow. She once again invites the king and Haman for a meal that she will prepare specially for them the next day. She waits patiently for the last devastating blow.

This invitation comes as a complete surprise to Haman. He is in the clouds, because only

good things can come from this! Happy and cheerful, he walks out of the palace to his house. But then he sees Mordecai again where he sits in the gate. Suddenly Haman is bitterly upset, because once again Mordecai refuses to honour him. Now this puts a damper on all the beautiful things that are happening in the palace. He'll have to do something about Mordecai! He still wants to scream at Mordecai, but grits his teeth, bites his tongue and restrains himself. "I must not mess things up now! His time will come, the low dog! "

With a black cloud hanging over his head, Haman enters the house. But then he remembers Esther and the king and the next day's dinner. "Something very big is being planned for me!" he sings to himself, forgetting the simple old Mordecai.

"Go get my friends!" he commands a slave. "We have reason to celebrate!"

There was great merriment in Haman's house that night. Full of himself, he boasts about everything he has achieved in life, his

breathhtaking wealth, all his successful children and the way the king has already honoured him. "And that's not all," he boasts. "Queen Esther has invited the king and I to a special meal. He's going to honour me even more!"

But then the black cloud dropped over Haman's head again. "What is wrong, my old man?" Mrs. Seres wants to know.

"It's Mordecai! That Jew embitters my life! "

"But that's easy," his friends laughed, "get rid of him!"

"A gallows," one of the men laughs, "a three-meter-high gallows!"

"Make it rather twenty-three feet tall, then the whole city can see him hanging!"

"First thing tomorrow morning we will build Mordecai's gallows and hang him. Then I can enjoy my meal with Esther! "

Meanwhile, King Ahasuerus tosses and turns on his bed. There is something bothering him, but he just can't put his finger on it. Then suddenly he sits upright. He knows exactly

what it is! He rumbles down the corridor that he must see one of his officials immediately. A frightened and half-asleep man shows up. "Who is it that saved my life when those two scoundrels were trying to kill me?" he wants to know.

No, the man does not know, but he will quickly fetch the annals for them to look. Minutes later, he returns: "It was a man named Mordecai," the king is told.

"How was he rewarded? What kind of honour did he receive? Has he ever been recognized for his bravery?"

No, he never got any reward.

Ahasuerus was still sitting in his throne room early in the morning when Haman arrived to arrange for Mordecai to be hanged. "Haman, my friend, come in!" Ahasuerus kindly invites him, "Tell me, what does one do with someone who really deserves great honour? What would you say would be an appropriate way to honour him? "

Haman smiles from ear to ear. Who else can the king be talking about than him, the

wonderful Haman? "A royal robe, of course one that the king himself has worn." Haman is on a high. "And a horse, the king's personal one, with his emblem of course. And people who walk before him and sing his glory!"

"I like your proposal, you are brilliant! Haman, go and fetch that old man in the city gate, Mordecai, and we'll deal with him exactly as you suggested. He deserves such treatment!"

Haman wants to sink into the face of the earth! What humiliation! And on top of that, he also has to honour Mordecai!

Do not do to someone else what you do not want done to you. In other words: live love, not hate.

Prayer:

Lord, teach me to truly live Your love and not carry any thoughts of hate in me.

Haman Meets his Match

Esther 6: 10-7: 6

Haman's mouth hangs open when he hears that it is Mordecai who needs to be honoured, and not him. "Take my royal robe and my personal horse immediately and do exactly as you suggested with the Jew Mordecai. You should not neglect what you have suggested!" King Ahasuerus chatters excitedly while Haman feels he can scream with frustration! But he dare not show anything. He must not even argue, because he must remain in the king's good books!

However, the greatest humiliation of all awaits him. Haman storms out of the palace straight to Mordecai. Mordecai gets the fright of his life when this very important man charges straight at him. "My last day has arrived!" Mordecai wants to moan, but then, to his greatest surprise, Haman arrives and he places a royal robe around Mordecai's shoulders, King Ahasuerus's own personal robe at that!

"Climb up!" Haman commands angrily, and

only then does Mordecai see the horse standing next to him, adorned with a beautiful drape. He has never seen such a beautiful thing in his life. The horse trips proudly as Mordecai ascends. He feels very uncomfortable on this beautiful royal showpiece, Ahasuerus' own horse!

"Lord, what have I done to earn it?" Mordecai cries gratefully as he is escorted through the streets of Susa with great fanfare. "Lord God, I do not understand! First Haman wants to kill me, and now he is the forerunner to sing praises of me in front of the whole city. I don't understand at all, Lord!"

When they are finally back at the palace, Mordecai gets off the horse. "Thank you Haman, I really didn't deserve you" But Haman turns his back on Mordecai and walks away angrily without answering or greeting. Now Mordecai is even more in the dark. "What is happening?"

Haman steams inside his house. Everyone can see that something has upset him terribly, he is actually trembling with anger.

"What's wrong my dear?" his wife tries to soothe, but Haman is like a bear with a sore head.

"I've never been so humiliated in my life!" he roars, his eyes two pools of fire.

"Be calm and come and tell us what happened." His friends try to calm him down, without success.

Then Haman sits down and tells them the whole story, of how he was still on his way to the king to arrange for Mordecai's execution, when the king interrupted him and told him to go and honour that very Jew, Mordecai!

"Such audacity!" His friends are shocked to their foundations. "But now you have a problem my old friend, a very big problem!" They argue that if the king uplifts Mordecai like that, Haman would definitely come off second best. This is a very dark picture they are painting for Haman, not exactly what he needs right now!

But they do not have much time to contemplate the tragedy, because at that moment the palace officers arrive to fetch

Haman for the grand reception which Queen Esther has arranged. "Now I have to put on my old cheerful face again, even though I feel like I want to murder!"

King Ahasuerus is in an exuberant mood again today. Together with Haman, they walk into Esther's quarters. She made a very special effort to make everything perfect, and her breathtaking beauty once again astounds Ahasuerus. "What can I do for you, my beautiful bride? Just say what you want, and you'll get it, even if it's half my kingdom!" By this time Ahasuerus has given away his kingdom numerous times!

"All I ask is that my people and I are allowed to live. That is my wish and my request." A shocked silence dropped over the banquet hall. King Ahasuerus's mouth hung open when he heard this shocking request. Now, who would want to kill his beautiful bride?

"I ask for it, because we, my people and myself, have been sold to be exterminated." Esther continues, "If only we had been sold as slaves and maids, I would have stayed

silent, because then the disaster would not have caused so much damage to the king's interests."

"Who's planning such a shocking thing?"

Haman's face is white with fright when Esther looks him straight in the eye and points her finger at him.

What you sow you will reap! Haman sowed hatred, and all of a sudden it all turned against him, and he is in dire need! However, Jesus taught us to sow love. And no, it is not just a law, it must be a way of life. Not only do you live according to God's will, but for yourself you make life a song! It does wonders for your state of mind. Moreover, people experience and accept you completely differently. The reward for living love is great!

Prayer:

Lord, I want to be bubbling with love and joy. Thank you for making it all possible for me.

Haman's Gallows

Esther 7: 5-8: 2

Esther explodes the bomb, that there is someone planning to exterminate her and all her people. King Ahasuerus gasps in shock: "Who would want to do such a terrible thing?" And then Esther points her finger at Haman: "He's the one! He's that mean man!"

King Ahasuerus jumps up in shock and runs into the night, to the palace garden to recover. "How can Haman do such a mean thing? And this after all I did for the man? I trusted him then! I made him prime minister! I sat down to dinner with him! "

When Ahasuerus has cooled down to some extent, he enters the room again. The scene he finds there shocks him even further. He is just in time to see Haman flinging himself down next to his beautiful wife! "And then you try to assault her too!" Now Ahasuerus is furious!

What Ahasuerus found there was actually innocent, all Haman wanted to do was to plead with Esther for mercy, to plead that she

would not kill him. To Ahasuerus, however, it looks like something completely different, and when he sees Haman falling down next to the queen, his beautiful Dove, the first thought going through his head is that Haman is on his way to rape Esther.

"And this even here in my own palace!" Ahasuerus is hysterical: "Guards! Guards! "

A garrison of armed guards descends on Haman and drags him blindfolded out of the room. Ahasuerus trembles with anger: "How could he"

When everything more or less returns back to normal and King Ahasuerus calms down, his officials and advisors are buzzing around him. "I heard that Haman had planned to execute old Mordecai this morning," tells one of the men.

"Is this the same old Jew who rode through the streets this morning on the king's horse?"

"Yes, I heard from one of Haman's friends that he has built a terribly tall gallows for the poor man. They say the thing is twenty-three meters high! That's enough to make the man

die from fear of heights even before he is hanged! ”

Everyone laughs at his joke, but Ahasuerus doesn't even listen, he's too upset.

"Majesty"

"What is it Garbona?" Ahasuerus doesn't feel like idle chatter.

“Majesty, Haman built that gallows to hang Mordecai. Let's hang Haman on his own gallows so that he can pay for the terrible thing he has planned against the queen.”

Ahasuerus gets a sparkle in the eye again:

“Good idea, Garbona! Hang the dog! Hang him on his own gallows! That will teach him!”

And then Ahasuerus suddenly remembers a very important thing: “My ring! My signet ring! That Haman louse still has the ring I gave him! Go get it from Hamman immediately before you hang the man!”

Suddenly King Ahasuerus gets a new zest for life again: "And fetch Queen Esther for me, I have a thing to discuss with her." Ahasuerus sits deep in thought for a while, and then he calls one of the men: "Go and fetch old

Mordecai too, I have some business to settle with him."

For the second time in one day, Mordecai is summoned, this time by the king in person! The simple old Jew does not know much about palace protocol, and he feels very embarrassed to walk into this opulence in his simple old clothes. His knees are shaking when he appears before the glorious king. He bows deeply in reverence for the mighty man. His mouth hangs open in wonder at the lavish gold and marble decorations. Only then does he notice that Esther is there too.

"Esther, my sweet bride," croons Ahasuerus. His anger from a moment ago is completely stifled by the mere presence of Esther. "Come and sit here next to me. I have a gift for you. From now on, all of Haman's fabulous wealth belongs to you. "

Then Ahasuerus beckons to Mordecai, "Here, take this, my friend." Mordecai is stunned as the king puts his signet ring on his finger. "This ring gives you the power to manage all of Haman's property on Queen Esther's

behalf."

Mordecai can't believe what he's hearing. "Thank you Lord!" he prays to God through his confused beard, "Thank you, you're so good to me!"

That night, Mordecai is too excited to sleep. But suddenly he sits up: "My people!" he gasps, "My people are still in danger of being exterminated, because the king has not yet withdrawn the order!" But then he lies down again with a smile on his face: "But the Lord will provide! He is faithful, He will provide! "

Prayer:

Lord, how wonderful it is for me to know at all times that I can trust in You. You provide at exactly the right time.

Salvation Lies Ahead

Esther 8: 3-17

Haman is dead, hung on his own gallows. Mordecai's life was saved. But the end of the nightmare isn't even over yet. Mordecai recalls with shock that the king's proclamation that all Jews should be exterminated on the thirteenth of the twelfth month. Any person who encounters a Jew on that day can summarily kill him, right then and there. It was a huge task to pass on the message to the farthest corners of the earth. It was delivered over many thousands of kilometers on foot or on horseback in a myriad of different languages.

Mordecai calls Esther, he is in great distress. "There is only a few months time, and we will have to act quickly if we want to stop this assignment. But first you have to go to the king and explain to him what our dilemma is, and ask him to stop the decree."

Esther is already seeing millions of Jews around the world being exterminated like animals, including women and innocent

children. She cried herself to sleep. Early the next morning she goes to King Ahasuerus again. This time, she is not even afraid of the consequences, she walks straight to him and kneels before him. Now the tears flow down her cheeks as she pleads with him for her people. "Please my dear King, undo Haman's evil plan. Please write letters that stop the stupid slaughter of my people. How could I watch my people suffer such a disaster? How could I watch my family being exterminated?"

King Ahasuerus feels very sorry for Esther. But there is a problem - what is written is written! The law of the Medes and Persians states that when the king issues a decree, then it is irrevocable, no matter how insane it is, and not even the mighty King Ahasuerus can change it. Ahasuerus shakes his head compassionately.

Suddenly, for the first time in his life, he devises something himself without first calling in his counsellors. "Esther, I gave Mordecai my seal ring. I give you permission today that you can write a letter to the Jews

in my name. Just write what you want, and seal it with my ring, and it will be seen as an invariable proclamation of the king, something that cannot be revoked. You may use my personal writers to help you with that."

Esther is in the clouds when she tells Mordecai the good news. And then begins the gigantic task, a task that seems almost humanly impossible. The Persian Empire is made up of a hundred and twenty-seven provinces speaking a babbling confusion of languages, spread over an area of almost seven thousand kilometers from one point to another. How are they going to get their message to all these people in time?

The king's decree stated that any person could kill any Jew if he met him on that black day. Mordecai's letter empowers any Jew to defend himself on that day with everything at his disposal, and he can kill anyone who wants to harm him, and then he can still seize that person's possessions. This letter is translated into every conceivable language,

and then it is distributed to every corner of the kingdom. The king puts his thoroughbred racehorses at the disposal of the messengers so that the message can reach every destination on time, to Greece, Ethiopia and the borders of India.

The humanly-impossible task takes shape, and then Mordecai stands out as an excellent organizer who handles a huge task with flying banners.

Mordecai's good work does not go unnoticed, and soon he also gets appointed in a very high position in the service of the king. He wears a royal robe of blue and white linen with a large golden crown, and a purple robe to show that he is a very worthy man.

In the city of Susan, a big party is celebrated when the locals hear the good news. There is again a light shining in front in the dark tunnel for the Jews.

Sometimes things look pitch-black and totally lost to us. It seems impossible that this will ever come right again. It feels like lock-down time will go on forever and there is no

stopping the deadly virus, it's just raging forward! But then, the Lord brings us salvation, often from a totally unexpected source. This does not mean that we can now sit back and watch God perform the miracle. God usually does miracles by using people, people who often need to put their shoulders to the wheel and work very hard.

Indeed, we must also be prepared to pull our hands out of our sleeves, the day the Lord asks us to do a great job. The consolation is that the Holy Spirit is always there to give us the wisdom and power, if only we are willing to do what He asks.

Prayer:

Lord, I praise You, for You can do the impossible, and when everything seems hopeless to us, You can still bring relief.

From Fear to Joy

Esther 9 and 10

In the fortified city of Susa there is great joy among the Jewish population. It has just become known that Mordecai and Esther persuaded the king to save the Jews. Although the decree is not repealed, the Jews are now allowed to defend themselves. As the message spreads further and further to other cities and provinces, the bonfires burn high. The people rejoice and dance and sing and make music, because the great judgment is something of the past.

Mordecai may have been a little worried at first about the outcome of everything, as the Jews are but a very small minority compared to the other powerful peoples of the world. But then in Susa he sees something of fear in the eyes of the other people when they see a Jew - as if the Jews just seem invincible to them. Mordecai smiles, he understands all too well. Actually, it's not about being Jews that scares people. The real reason is the God they worship! Yes,

God is much, much greater than any of the heathen idols, and it instills fear in the people. They have heard all the stories of how this God of the Jews can do wonders. The city of Jericho's walls that simply crumbled to God's command. The Reed Sea and the flood waters of the Jordan that split in front of the Israelites are enough to make anyone tremble. This God is mighty!

And then an inexplicable thing begins to happen: one by one, the gentiles begin to convert to the Jewish faith. "If we want to stay alive, then we must become Jews! Then we will also have to start worshipping the God of Israel!"

Meanwhile, Mordecai is appointed second in command to the king. From an ordinary old Jew who spends his days in the gates of the palace to the position of power of second in command in the Persian Empire. From someone who very almost swung from the gallows, to ruler in the mighty Persian kingdom. And he did not achieve this with a large money-market or because he was

terribly influential or because he won mighty battles. Not even because he was so smart, but because God wanted him there, and put him there!

The terrible day of the thirteenth of the twelfth month is slowly approaching. Day by day the tension is rising higher and higher. Will the handful of Jews survive in this battle? Officials in high positions are increasingly beginning to realize that they are dealing here with a mighty man in Mordecai. They get scared of the guy who has risen so rapidly in a total inexplicable way above all others who have been working hard for many years to gain something in life. Rather than oppose him, they decide to support Mordecai and the Jews. They do not want to get into his bad books.

Then the fatal day arrives. In spite of everything, there are still many people who perceive their opportunity to take on the Jews. However, they realize very soon, too late, that they are dealing with Someone much greater than the Jews. Throughout the

kingdom, many thousands of people who attacked the Jews died that day. Seventy-five thousand people died on that day because they tried to lift their hand against Almighty God. However, for the Jews, the bonfires burned high, for God saved them from total annihilation.

We want to recoil as we read the last chapters in the book of Esther, for in this we see how the Jews are told to kill their enemies without hesitation. However, we need to read this section in its context to get the complete picture.

You will remember that Haman made the proclamation in which all the Jews across the Persian Empire should be exterminated - men, women and children. The Jews just defended themselves.

The Purim festival commemorates the day of salvation for the Jews. The day tragically determined by destiny to become the downfall of the Jews becomes a feast day as a testimony of God's work. It began with fasting, prayer and humbling themselves

before God when the terrible fate became known, and it ended with celebration and rejoicing. It is not about the victory they have achieved, but about God who changed everything.

In the same way, there was great fear in my own heart for the devastating power the devil had over my life. No, I did not overcome him, but it is God who overcame him for me and gave me true freedom and peace as I accepted Jesus' gift of eternal life that day.

The question is, have you achieved that victory? To be able to be a part of the redeemed crowd also asks for a single "Yes!" to Jesus knocking on the door of your heart!

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for the wonderful story of Esther, and all I could learn from it. Thank you for making that old, old story fresh and new again today so that we can still get spiritual food from it today.

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