

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS: THE STORY OF ESTHER

Text: Esther 4:11-16; 9:22

In all the Bible there could not be a story more relevant and up-to-date than the story of Esther. The time is over five hundred years before the birth of our Lord. In all sixty-six books of the Bible, this book has the distinction of being one of the two books in the Bible where the name of God is not mentioned, the Song of Solomon being the only other one. All Bible scholars say the same thing about this phenomenon; they all agree that God is so present and so powerfully manifested behind the scenes that his name is not mentioned because of the overwhelming observation that He lives and He defends His people, whether you see Him behind the scenes or not. The events of this book center in the city of Shushan, within the borders of modern Iran, formerly Persia. In many ways, what we have in the book of Esther is a reminder that if we learn nothing from history, we will be forced to repeat it.

Mordecai, the older cousin of Esther was responsible for her welfare after the decease of her parents. Esther's Hebrew name was Hadassah. This is a beautiful name that means "myrtle," as in the tree. The sages in the Midrash make this statement concerning her name: "Just as a myrtle has a sweet smell and a bitter taste, so too Esther was good and listened ("sweet") to the righteous Mordecai, and was adverse ("bitter") to the wicked Haman." The Persian name Esther means "star" referring to the Planet Venus. It also means "myrtle leaf."

The wicked king, Ahasuerus had deposed the queen, Vashti and in his search for a new queen to rise above a mere harem member found the beautiful Esther "to his liking"; actually he fell head-over-heels for this young Jewish maiden. There was a beauty that Esther possessed that defied the world of Persian wisdom; she was endowed with the inward beauty that Peter talked about when he said, *"Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament*

of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (I Peter 3:3, 4).

Great and incomprehensible wickedness had been planned by the incomparably wicked Haman to be loosed upon the Jewish people. It was at this time, Mordecai said to Esther, “...*And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*” (Esther 4:14b). Let’s examine this time of which Mordecai spoke and see if we cannot take some encouragement for the time in which we now live.

1. It was a time when the works of the flesh were flagrantly rampant.

Esther 1:5,10 and 22. We see the king was so filled with pride that he threw a party lasting for 180 days just to flaunt what he had. This was a dangerous move, for the Bible says, “*When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom*” (Proverbs 11:2). “*Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall*” (Proverbs 16:18). Ahasuerus should have learned from the history of only fifty years earlier what happened to his neighbor Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:28-37) when that king was lifted up with his pride. We observe that a foolish decision was made when he gave himself to alcohol. Then we see the lack of respect given to women in this debased culture.

2. It was a time of the weaving of Divine Providence.

In Esther 2:17, Esther represents the woof (horizontal). And in Esther 2:21, 22 Mordecai represents the warp (vertical). Even before the vile plans of Haman were under way, even before Haman had personally fallen into hatred for Mordecai, God was setting things up ahead of time. I love the word “providence.” It means to view ahead of time. In the etymological makeup of the word we see this in the breakdown of the word: video (to see); pro (before).

3. It was a time of potential genocide.

Esther 3:1, 2, 7 and 13. The definition of genocide is as follows: the deliberate killing of a large group of people, especially those of a particular ethnic group or nation. This was most definitely the plan of Haman and he had the subtlety to bring Ahasuerus into his evil plot. It appeared all was going to be working in Haman’s favor.

4. It was a time of courageous, but calm action.

Esther 4:14-16 and Esther 5:8. This was a most frightening time for the young queen. Esther 4:11 says, *"All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days."* The ruthless king was known to put people to death on the spot for daring to enter his presence without permission. Esther was nervous. One queen had already been deposed for a senseless reason and now it had been a month since Ahasuerus had asked for Esther's company. This could have been a sure sign that she was no longer welcome in his court. We see, however that favor was granted to Esther and not only did she not perish, but she was able to lay forth a plan to get Ahasuerus and Haman together for a banquet that was going to turn Haman's plans on his heels.

5. It was a time when heaven's will was being accomplished in an inhospitable earth.

Esther 6:1-3. God used the insomnia of Ahasuerus to get the records read to him that revealed the assassination conspiracy of Bigthana and Teresh that was dispelled by Mordecai. This is a great example of the fulfillment of Proverbs 21:1. There is no king so powerful that God is restricted from manipulating him to God's plan and pleasure. If there can be a humorous part of this story, chapter 6 has to be the place. This is when Haman was humiliated to the very core of his being as he had to be the servant to Mordecai, telling all the kingdom what a great man Mordecai was.

6. It was a time when history's perceived path was overturned and reversed.

Esther 7:10; 9:1,13, 14 and 22. Amazing! The very gallows that stood hauntingly high at 75 feet were the very gallows in which Haman was hung. He had made his own vehicle of execution. God's word says of the wicked, *"He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate"* (Psalm 7:15, 16). The day is never so dark, the circumstances are never so gloomy, that God cannot overturn everything to His own design. As a

matter of fact, God incorporates the very deeds of the ungodly into His overall plans. *"The LORD hath made all things for Himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil"* (Proverbs 16:4).

7. It was a time of revival, evangelism and foreign mission work.

Esther 8:6, 16, 17; Psalm 97:10, 11; Esther 10:2, 3. Esther speaks of not being able to endure if God doesn't change the plans that have been laid for the demise of her people. It is this kind of desperation that gets prayers answered and ushers in revival. The light and joy that radiated among the Israelis gave desire for others, even non-Jews, to come into covenant with God through conversion. Finally, Mordecai and the people of God were not only saved but also prospered tremendously in Persia. No matter how far away we are from our roots, God can move in any environment, in any culture, in any place. Jeremiah said, *"And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace"* (Jeremiah 29:7).

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in black ink and features a large, decorative initial "J" and a long, sweeping horizontal line at the end.