

Noble Ladies:

Class Studies
in **Ruth &
Esther**



***Louis
Rushmore***

***Special
Applications:***

***Bonnie
Rushmore***



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World Evangelism Publications

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Publisher's Statement

In this, the 21st century, most of the world's population is extremely blessed to have access to the completed Word of God in one's own language of birth. Historically, how many in Moses' day — following the completion of the five books of law — could read or had a copy of even a small portion of the inspired record?

Subsequently, as the centuries passed with the addition of the books of poetry, prophecy, and history, how many even among the Israelites would have had a copy of any of those scrolls to read at leisure in their own home?

At the beginning of the New Testament era, again, illiteracy and scarcity of copies of the individual books would have limited the Christian's access to them. Most people probably learned the message of the Scriptures as they were taught in the weekly assembly. Perhaps there were spiritually hungry individuals who would meet whenever possible with elders or leaders in the church who had a copy of one or more of the growing list of inspired writings. Certainly, we know that with the passing of time thousands of hand written copies were made. Many of these remain today, authenticating the complete record that has come down to us.

What an age of blessing is ours! Not only do I have a treasured copy of the entire Old and New Testaments in my mother tongue, but I have multiple versions from the original Hebrew and Greek languages for comparison of content and correctness of translation. I also have concordances and commentaries and word studies and interlinear Testaments — and there's always "Google"! Literally, there is no excuse for ignorance of God's will for us. Yes, I admit that not everybody in the world has our advantages for study, but the situation everywhere is better than it has ever been. Through the Internet, even people in "closed" countries can access messages of Truth.

Why is this such a victory? Because we learn from Scripture not only what God *requires* of us and *promises* to us, but we can also read *His history of dealing with humanity*. From such studies as this one by Louis and Bonnie Rushmore, we can see God's interaction with situations and humans, we can see His providential responses to their needs, and we can know that He is still involved in His children's lives today. Jesus promised, **"If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever — the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you"** (John 14:15-18).

I commend this study to you for your growth and comfort in the Scriptures.

Betty B. Choate

World Evangelism Publications

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Devoted Lady: Ruth

Louis Rushmore

***Special Applications:
Bonnie Rushmore***

Introduction to Ruth

The Book of Ruth is one of the shortest books in the Bible, containing only four chapters populated with a mere 85 verses. However, the impact of the brief volume maintains an essential relationship both to the Old Testament in which it appears as well as to the New Testament. The significance of the Book of the Ruth to the New Testament is not confined to the paltry cross-references between the testaments. “There are hundreds of quotations in the New Testament from the Old Testament books. ...4 to the book of Ruth...” (Nichols 128). For the Old Testament, the Book of Ruth bridges the gap between the Book of Judges and 1 Samuel, and it announces the pedigree (though somewhat undistinguished) of a favorite Jewish king (David). For the New Testament, the Book of Ruth announces the pedigree (no less undistinguished) of the Messiah.

The most memorable or outstanding passage in the Book of Ruth is:

... Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.” (Ruth 1:16-17)

Though addressed by Ruth to her mother-in-law, Naomi, this deep sentiment of heartfelt love has often adorned jewelry of lovers. The theme of Ruth’s love fittingly applies to any number of scenarios where supreme love deserves the forefront (e.g., spouses and other family members, friends, descriptive of the kind of love God exhibits toward unworthy man, ought to be descriptive of the depth of love by mankind toward the inexhaustible God of love).

Title

“The Book of Ruth is named after its heroine, a Moabitess who, after the death of her husband, journeyed to Bethlehem with her widowed mother-in-law. Ruth occupies an important place in Israelite history because she became the ancestress of King David (Ruth 4:18-22) and of Jesus (Matt 1:1, 5)” (Wycliffe). It may be of some interest that “[t]he name Ruth is found in the Old Testament only in the book which is so entitled” (*ISBE*). Definitions for the name “Ruth” include “... ‘comrade, companion, or neighbor’” (Winter) and “a female friend” (*New Unger’s*).

Bible Characters

Many Bible characters whose names appear in Scripture have an infamous mention, while other names preserved in Holy Writ evidence diverse dispositions, only sometimes less than admirable. Ruth, though, numbers with the few whose deeds published by the Bible are only commendable. *Thompson’s Chain Topics* observes Ruth maintained “A Spotless name.”

The importance of Ruth to the larger scheme of things relates to her relationship to both the genealogy of her descendants, King David and King Jesus. “She became the mother of Obed, the grandfather of David. Thus Ruth, a Gentile, is among the maternal progenitors of our Lord (Matt. 1:5)” (Easton). Ruth is “...one of the four women (Tamar, Rahab, and Uriah’s wife being the other three) who are named by Matthew in the genealogy of Christ” (*McClintock and Strong*). Additional sections following will treat the Messianic significance of Ruth’s appearance in history and the Holy Bible; examination of verses throughout the Book of Ruth, also following, appreciate the integrity and character of Ruth herself.

Inspiration

Numerous resources consulted, not any of them impugned the inspiration of the Book of Ruth. It seems that the Jewish community, the original recipients of the treatise, has always acknowledged

the Book of Ruth's rightful membership in the Old Testament canon of Scriptures. Only persons who would assail the Bible in its entirety and decrying the Great God of the Universe himself might decry the inspiration of the Book of Ruth.

Further, internal biblical references confirm the inspiration of the Book of Ruth.

The inspiration of this book is attested by the fact of Ruth's name being inserted by Matthew in the Saviour's genealogy...One additional element of credibility is found in the circumstance of Ruth, a Moabitess, being an ancestor of David; and as this was considered a disgrace...This descent, then, so little flattering to the renowned king of Israel, affords internal evidence of the truthfulness of the book which records it. (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*)

Author

The Book of Ruth is not unique among Bible books wherein the author is not known with certainty. "When and by whom the book of Ruth was written, are points not agreed on among critics and commentators" (Clarke).

The integrity of Bible books irrespective of what authorship they claim, if any, is the canonical test of whether a manuscript deserves a place along side other inspired volumes in the Holy Bible. Many, though, suppose that the prophet Samuel authored the Book of Ruth. "The author of this book was probably Samuel, according to Jewish tradition" (Easton). "Since history knows no other authors, Samuel should be regarded as the writer of the book of Ruth" (Winter). Samuel may have penned the Book of Ruth, but the volume evidences Divine penmanship irrespective of whom the human author may have been.

Date

When the Book of Ruth was written is as elusive as knowing who the human penman of the volume was. "As to the author, he is as uncertain as the time" (Clarke). "Its date and author are quite uncertain. Tradition is in favor of Samuel" (Smith). "The date of composition of the Book of Ruth is unknown" (*Wycliffe*).

The Book of Ruth records events that occurred probably a considerable time before the volume was written; the contents and context of the Book of Ruth would have had no contemporary significance to the time and people recorded in the book. Only when the volumes preceding and following it were penned, and especially after the inauguration of David as King would there have been a near contemporary purpose for the Book of Ruth. In addition, the Book of Ruth finds significance respecting the Messiah. Of course, the principles exemplified by Ruth and companion Bible characters extend to contemporary application with us. Of the events recorded in the Book of Ruth, Smith notes: "This was probably about the time of Gideon, B.C. 1250."

The incidents described in the book fall within the times of the judges (Ruth 1:1), and most probably in the time of Gideon (see at Ruth 1:1); and the book itself forms both a supplement to the book of Judges and an introduction to the books of Samuel, which give no account of the ancestors of David. (*Keil & Delitzsch*)

Several generations may have intervened between the events recorded in the Book of Ruth and the actual writing of the volume. "...[A]n interval of 150 to 180 years between the events themselves and the writing of the book..." (*Keil & Delitzsch*). "It could scarcely have been written before the reign of David; for it was David's reign that gave public interest to his genealogy" (McGarvey). "A date of 1015 B.C. is probably the best suggestion one can make for the time of writing" (Winter).

Edward Young, calling attention to the absence of Solomon's name in the genealogy, suggests that since a later writer would have extended his genealogy beyond the time of David, the book was probably written some time during the reign of David (*Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 358). (*Wycliffe*)

Interestingly, the fact that the author of the Book of Ruth sensed the need to explain traditions and procedures implies those references were not commonly practiced when this Scripture was penned. “The writer found it necessary to explain certain customs which he regarded as archaic (4:6-8), a fact which indicates that the book was written some years after the customs fell into disuse” (*Wycliffe*)

Writing Style

The Book of Ruth is not especially symbolic or prophetic, though elements relating to the Messiah, namely contributions to the geology of Christ, appear in the Book of Ruth. The epistle is not especially poetical, but rather aside from its appeal as a love story it is a history. “The book is planned as a straightforward historical narrative... As far as history is concerned, the contents of the book pass beyond the time of the Judges” (Winter).

Purpose

A stated non-purpose of the Book of Ruth provides passing amusement along with acknowledging the noble purpose of the book.

Some might suppose that the book of Ruth was included in the Old Testament canon so that there would be material for ladies’ classes, but Ruth is the great-great-great-great grandmother of David and Ruth (a Gentile), and is thus in the family tree of Jesus (Ruth 4:18-22). Truly, the whole world is loved by God and therefore, He sent His Son for Jew and Gentile alike (John 3:16). To read Ruth is, therefore, like looking at a family album of the Lord. (Mosher 49)

“The purpose of the book of Ruth is to give a biographical sketch of the righteous ancestors of David, the man destined to be Israel’s second king” (Winter).

Further, though the Book of Ruth provides an intriguing “love story,” that must not be the real purpose of its inclusion in Holy Writ. “This precious book is universally acclaimed as one of the most beautiful stories ever to make its way down the centuries to us in the sacred pages of the Bible. Although the book is primarily a love story, it is far more than that” (Coffman).

Functionally within the Old Testament, the Book of Ruth hinges Judges and prior Israelite history with subsequent Israelite history. In the course of providing this continuity, the Book of Ruth necessarily includes the lineage of King David, and by extension the lineage of Jesus Christ, too. “Ruth is historically a supplement to Judges and an introduction to 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel, which give no account of David’s ancestors” (*Fausset’s*). “This short history of the domestic affairs of one particular family fitly follows the book of Judges (the events related here happening in the days of the judges), and fitly goes before the books of Samuel, because in the close it introduces David...” (Henry).

The Book of Ruth is historically important as giving the lineage of David through the whole period of the rule of the Judges Ruth 1:1, i.e. from Salmon who fought under Joshua, to “Jesse the Bethlehemite” 1 Sam 16:1; and as illustrating the ancestry of “Jesus Christ, the son of David,” who “was born in Bethlehem of Judea” Matt 1:1; 2:1. ...The genealogy with which the Book closes Ruth 4:18, is also an important contribution to the chronology of Scripture history. We learn from it, with great distinctness, that Salmon, one of the conquering host of Joshua, was the grandfather of Obed, who was the grandfather of king David... four generations...” (Barnes)

The genealogy in 4:17-22 may actually be the main reason why the book of Ruth was written. It shows that Ruth and Boaz had a son, Obed, whose son was Jesse, whose son was David. Boaz was a descendant of Rahab, the prostitute from Jericho (Joshua 2:1; Matthew 1:5; see on Joshua 2). Thus David’s great-grandmother, Ruth, was a Moabitess, and his great-grandfather, Boaz, was part Canaanite. The chosen family within the Chosen Nation thus has Canaanite and Moabite blood in its veins. It is fitting that from this

bloodline would come the Messiah for all nations. Rahab and Ruth became part of God's promises and His plan, not by birth but by their faith in, and their practical commitment to, God and His people—the same way in which people from all nations still can share in God's eternal promises. (Halley 213)

Interestingly, the Book of Ruth has important ramifications regarding the underlying concept of “redemption,” which may often be lost on modern man. “The central theme of the book of Ruth is redemption. The Hebrew word for redemption occurs 23 times in the book of Ruth. Ruth may be considered a ‘type’ of the Christian church, while Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer, is a type of Christ who is our Redeemer” (Halley 211). Though one must be careful not to allegorize Scripture, by which it is often made to mean either more than God intended or less than God intended, the rescue afforded the helpless Ruth by her rescuer Boaz provokes interesting parallels, especially in light of “redemption” in Ruth.

Messianic Significance

Analysis of the Messianic significance of the Book of Ruth can hardly be avoided, though Ruth is not primarily Messianic like the Book of Isaiah (e.g., Chapter 53). Further, the acknowledgment of non-Israelite parentage in the Messianic line stimulates reflection on the scheme of God for human redemption. “Therefore, the great-grandparents of the royal Messianic line had roots OUTSIDE Israel. How fitting it is that Jesus, the Son of David, descended from such a family (Matt. 1:5-6)!” (Morris). “In the conversion of Ruth the Moabitess, and the bringing of her into the pedigree of the Messiah, we have a type of the calling of the Gentiles in due time into the fellowship of Christ Jesus our Lord” (Henry). “The book of Ruth introduces us to the final stages of the historical line of Jesus Christ” (Colley 1022). Consequently, Halley avows, “Boaz is a type (foreshadowing) of Christ, who was born 1,100 years later in Bethlehem” (494).

History & Customs

The Book of Ruth provides an insight into ancient customs with which contemporary humanity has no experience, namely the “...Hebrew law of LEVIRATE MARRIAGE (Deut 25:5-10) (*Nelson's*). “LEVIRATE The name applied to the custom among the Hebrews that when an Israelite died without leaving male issue, his nearest relative should marry the widow and continue the family of his deceased brother through the firstborn son of their union, he becoming the heir of the former husband” (*New Unger's*).

LEVIRATE MARRIAGE A form of marriage prescribed by the Law of Moses in which a man was required to marry the widow of a brother who died with no male heir. The term levirate means “husband's brother.” The purpose of the law was to provide an heir for the dead brother, thereby preserving his name and estate. The law also was designed to provide for the welfare of the widows (Deut 25:5-10). The story of Ruth and Boaz, recorded in the Book of Ruth, is a good example of the levirate form of marriage. Reference to levirate marriage was also made by the Sadducees, who tested Jesus with a question about the resurrection. (*Nelson's*)

The brother fulfilling the Levirate Marriage was also known as “kinsman-redeemer” (*New Nave's*). A penalty incurred for the brother unwilling to comply with the Levirate Marriage Law. “If he was unwilling to do so, he could only be released from the obligation by undergoing a species of insult (Deut 25:9)” (*McClintock and Strong*).

Practical Use

Aside from the purpose for which the Book of Ruth was originally penned, principles therein easily lend themselves to teaching successful family life today, and into the future. “The book of Ruth is required reading for those who wish to major successfully and satisfactorily in the marvels of matrimony” (R. Taylor 8). “The devotion of Ruth has been an ideal for married couples through

the years, and a song based on her statement of faith is quite often heard in a wedding ceremony. Although Ruth's statement was not made to her husband, her love for a member of his family was the kind of love which must undergird solid, Christian homes" (Winter).

Lessons

Besides practical use, lessons abound from the short Book of Ruth. Consider some of them in the following observations.

Ruth was great because she made a decision and **never looked back**. When we become Christians, we need to walk worthy of our calling (Ephesians 4:1). We need to walk in the light (I John 1:7). We need to walk in truth (II John 4). We need to live daily to glorify our Father in heaven (Romans 12:1). We need to study to show ourselves approved unto God (II Timothy 2:15; I Timothy 4:16). ...Ruth was great because she **handled the problems of life and moved on**. ...Ruth was great because of her **love for others**. Some of the most tender words ever recorded are those spoken by Ruth to her mother-in-law. ...Ruth was great because she was **a busy, industrious person**. Ruth became busy upon her arrival in Bethlehem, doing an honest job to take care of herself and Naomi. (Mathis emphasis added)

The Book of Ruth is probably the finest example in the scriptures of **in-law relations**. Reread the book and try to answer the following questions in light of the Book of Ruth: a. What was Orpah's attitude toward her mother-in-law? b. What was Naomi's attitude toward her daughters-in-law? c. What was Ruth's attitude toward her mother-in-law? (Tollerson 288 emphasis added)

The events reported in this book take place at the end of the age of the Judges, a dark era when the Israelite tribes were weak and divided and frequently abandoned the religion established through Moses. Against this background, the Book of Ruth is far more than a love story. It shows that, **even during Israel's darkest time, individuals like Boaz trusted God and lived upright lives. In times of national decline, God preserved a remnant who could serve as the core of a future revival**. (Parson's emphasis added)

Bearing in mind the general characteristics of the period, and such terrible instances of religious apostasy and moral degeneracy as those recorded in the two Appendices to the Book of Judges (Judges 17-21), we turn with a feeling of intense relief to the picture of Jewish life presented to us in the Book of Ruth. Sheltered from scenes of strife and semi-heathenism, the little village of Bethlehem had retained among its inhabitants the purity of their ancestral faith and the simplicity of primitive manners. (*Bible History*)

...1. **There can be a loving, mutually rewarding relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.** 2. **Only by living a faithful, dedicated life according to God's plan can we hope to influence others to obey Him.** 3. **The decision to serve God must be from the heart to be lasting.** (I. Taylor 565 emphasis added)

Conclusion

A little book with a big impact, Ruth is well worth the visit by the Bible student. Not only the Bible character Ruth, but others provide useful instruction for us today. Naomi is one of those outstanding characters. "We are made more aware of the wisdom shown by Naomi when she insisted that Orpah and Ruth make an independent decision about accompanying her to Bethlehem" (I. Taylor 564). Consider the fateful decision of Orpah, the determination of Ruth and the invaluable contribution of Boaz. "Ruth's firm decision" Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God' (Ruth 1:16) - brought a rich reward. She became an ancestor of David and Jesus (Matt 1:5)" (*Nelson's*)

...the book of Ruth is a picture of a peaceful, virtuous, filial obedience, and the rich

reward of choosing the Lord at the sacrifice of all else. Orpah's end is shrouded in darkness, while Ruth is remembered to all generations as chosen ancestress of Messiah. Boaz' name is immortalized by linking himself with the poor Moabitess, while the kinsman who would not mar his own inheritance is unknown. (*Fausset's*)

The godly character of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz when it was not convenient or even popular deportment assures each of us we can serve God faithfully in every avenue of life irrespective of external circumstances. "...[T]he Book of Ruth, lifting up the curtain which veiled the privacy of domestic life, discloses to us most beautiful views of piety, integrity, self-sacrificing affection, chastity, gentleness and charity, growing up amidst the rude scenes of war, discord, and strife. (Barnes)

Questions

1. The Book of Ruth has how many chapters?
2. What was the relationship to Ruth of the one to whom she eloquently expressed her heartfelt love?
3. Ruth was a native of what nation neighboring Israel?
4. What does the name of Ruth mean?
5. How many women are cited in the genealogy of Jesus Christ? Who are they?
6. Has the Book of Ruth always been recognized by the Israelites as inspired by God?
7. How does the New Testament confirm the inspiration of the Book of Ruth?
8. Why does not being able to identify the author of a Bible book not disqualify it from inclusion in the biblical canon?
9. About when did the events chronicled in the Book of Ruth occur?
10. About when was the Book of Ruth written?
11. The Book of Ruth is written in what style?
12. True/False. In part, the Book of Ruth provides a biographical sketch of the ancestors of Israel's second king.
13. True/False. The Book of Ruth is a love story.
14. What is the relationship of the Book of Ruth to the Bible books that come before and after it?
15. What contribution does the Book of Ruth make to the genealogy of the Messiah?
16. True/False. The genealogy of Jesus Christ contains one or more Gentile members?
17. What Hebrew law did Boaz fulfill when he married Ruth?
18. Describe a practical use for the Book of Ruth today.
19. List five useful lessons from the Book of Ruth for application today.
20. How was the near kinsman who did not marry Ruth fearful he would mar his inheritance?

Chapter One

1:1 “Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons” (KJV).

“**In the days when the judges ruled**” refers to the time covered by the Book of Judges, which in our English Bibles precedes the Book of Ruth.

“**There was a famine in the land**” means the famine was in “...the land of Israel, and not merely in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem. ...the famine must have been a very serious one, and not only have extended over the whole of the land of Israel, but have lasted several years, since it compelled Elimelech to emigrate into the land of the Moabites; and it was not till ten years had elapsed, that his wife Naomi, who survived him, heard that Jehovah had given His people bread again, and returned to her native land” (*Keil and Delitzsch*). “Rainfall in Palestine is never plentiful, and quite frequently it is insufficient to provide adequately for the basic crops. Famines took place during the lifetimes of Abraham (Gen 12:10), David (2 Sam 21:1) and Elijah (1 Kings 17:1)” (*Wycliffe*). Besides the natural occurrence of famines attributable to nature, famines often occurred because of crop destruction or at least interruption due to warfare. The period of the Judges was heavily attended by war between Israel and her Gentile neighbors in and surrounding Canaan.

“**Bethlehem**” Interestingly, there was no bread to be found in the city (Bethlehem) whose meaning was “the house of bread” (*Bible History*).

A Judean town about 6 miles (9 km) SW of Jerusalem, notable as the birthplace of Jesus. In patriarchal times, it was known as Ephrath, and later became known as Bethlehem in Judah or Bethlehem Ephrathah to distinguish it from the Zebulunite city of the same name. ...David was born and raised in Bethlehem, and it was here that Samuel anointed him the successor of King Saul. In accordance with Micah’s prophecy, the Messiah, a descendent of David, was also born in Bethlehem. (*Parson’s*)

“**Went to sojourn**” “Some believe that Elimelech was NOT justified in making this move. Matthew Henry labeled it as ‘unjustified.’ And the Targum [translation or paraphrase of parts of the Old Testament] suggests that the death of all three of these men was due to their leaving the land of Israel in the case of Elimelech and because of their marrying strange women in that of the two sons” (Coffman).

“**The country of Moab**” Following quotations provide useful background information respecting Moab, as well as provoke reflection respecting the displaced Jewish family in Moab with which the Book of Ruth begins.

Moab was a son of Lot, the evil fruit of the incestuous relation of Lot with one of his daughters (Gen 19:36-37). Moabites had hired Balaam to curse Israel (Num 22:1-8), during Israel’s pilgrimage to Canaan. Under normal circumstances Moabites were barred from participation in the national, corporate life of Israel (Deut 23:3-6). There were friendly relations between some individual Israelites and Moabites, however. When fleeing the wrath of Saul, David found a friend in the king of Moab (1 Sam 22:3-4). (*Wycliffe*)

Nation in the Transjordan, inhabited by the descendants of Moab. Its territory at the time of the conquest lay S of the Arnon River and N of the Zered, bounded by the Dead Sea to the W and the Arabian Desert to the E. Before this, the Moabites also possessed the territory that comprised the kingdom of Sihon, king of the Amorites, and at several times during Israelite history, the Moabites extended their territory to the N, seizing and occupying

towns beyond the Arnon. In Moses' time, Balak, king of Moab, hired Balaam to curse the Israelites as they passed through the kingdom on their way to the Promised Land. In the time of the Judges, Eglon, king of Moab, oppressed Israel for a period of 18 years. Moab became a tributary nation under David and Solomon, but regained its independence after Solomon's death. The Moabites were again subdued by Omri, and remained under Israelite domination until the rebellion of Mesha, about 850 B.C. The Moabite Stone records his revolt against Israel and the capture of many cities in Reubenite territory. Moab became a tributary of Assyria, and thereafter successively came under the control of the Babylonians, Persians, and Nabateans. (*Parson's*)

The scene for this narrative is the high plateau east of the Dead Sea and south of the Arnon river, some sixty miles from Bethlehem, and on a clear day it was visible from Bethlehem. ...The Moabites were descendants of Lot and his incestuous union with one of his daughters (Gen. 19). They accepted the pagan deity Chemosh as their god, and as a whole, the Moabites were perpetual enemies of Israel. However, there were notable instances of exceptions, as in that episode in which David's parents were cordially received by the king of Moab (1 Sam. 22:3-4). (Coffman)

1:2 “And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites of Bethlehem Judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.”

“Elimelech...Naomi...Mahlon and Chilion” *Keil and Delitzsch* define these Hebrew names respectively as Elimelech, “to whom God is King”; Naomi, “gracious”; Mahlon, “the weakly” and Chilion, “pining.” Adam Clarke defines the names: Elimelech, “God is my king”; Naomi, “Beautiful or amiable”; Mahlon, “Infirmary” and Chilion, “Finished, completed.” *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* say of the Elimelech, “My God is king,” and of Naomi, “fair or pleasant.” *Wycliffe* comments respecting the sons' names: “The names of the two sons of Elimelech and Naomi are expressive of physical weakness. Mahlon means ‘sickly’ and Chilion, ‘wasting.’ As a matter of fact they did not live long after settling in Moab.

“Ephrathites of Bethlehem Judah” One commentator offers: “The family is described as ‘Ephrathites of Bethlehem-Judah.’ The expression is apparently intended to convey, that the family had not been later immigrants, but original Jewish settlers” (*Bible History*).

“Continued there” The NKJV reads “remained there” and the NIV reads “lived there.”

1:3-5 “And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. 4 And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years. 5 And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.”

“They took them wives of the women of Moab” “There is no specific condemnation of these marriages, although they would surely have been frowned upon by the orthodox in Israel” (*Wycliffe*). “Speaking of the marriage of the two sons to Moabite women, this was NOT forbidden in the Law of Moses at the early period of this narrative, but severe restrictions against Moabite descendants were later imposed” (Coffman). Barnes explains:

Marriages of Israelites with women of Ammon or Moab are nowhere in the Law expressly forbidden, as were marriages with the women of Canaan (Deut 7:1-3). In the days of Nehemiah the special law (Deut 23:3-6) was interpreted as forbidding them, and as excluding the children of such marriages from the congregation of Israel (Neh 13:1-3). Probably the marriages of Mahlon and Chilion would be justified by necessity, living as they were in a foreign land. Ruth was the wife of the older brother, Mahlon (Ruth 4:10).

However, other commentators, especially Jewish commentators, do not make the distinction be-

tween wives gotten in Canaan versus strange wives acquired outside of Canaan proper. Indisputably, later interpretation of biblical marriage restrictions included marriages with the people of Moab. “This was a violation of the Mosaic law (Deut 7:3; 23:3; Ezra 9:2; Neh 13:23); and Jewish writers say that the early deaths of both the young men were divine judgments inflicted on them for those unlawful connections” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*). Another commentator sees the death of Elimelech as “the judgment of God,” but excuses the marriages of Elimelech’s sons:

For there really was no express command against such unions. The instances in Scripture (Judges 3:6; 1 Kings 11:1; Nehemiah 13:23), which are sometimes quoted as proof to the contrary, are not in point, since they refer to the marriage of Hebrews in the land of Israel, not to that of those resident outside its boundaries (comp. Deuteronomy 7:3)... (*Bible History*)

Another commentator muses regarding the calculated affect of the move to Moab on Elimelech’s family.

What was the danger of this move to Elimelech’s sons? He was taking his family into a pagan country. The young men were of marriageable age, and there was a danger of their marrying pagan wives. This they did. Under usual circumstances these wives would have a great influence upon the young men, running almost always to the point of leading them away from the faith of their parents. In fact such was so often the case that God forbade the Israelites to marry among the Canaanite people into whose midst they came. (Winter)

1:6-7 “Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread. 7 Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.”

“**She might return from the country of Moab**” Wycliffe observes reasonably: “Being a widow with family ties there, she prepared to return home.”

“**The Lord had visited his people in giving them bread**” The famine had lasted at least ten years. One commentator suggests why such a length of famine and how Moab, in the vicinity of Israel, was not also affected.

Why was there a famine in Judah and not in Moab? 1:6 If the famine were inflicted by the Midianites, Moab would not have been affected. The terrain of the two areas was not particularly different. The latitude of Moab and Judah was almost the same, the two areas being parallel and directly across the Dead Sea from each other. Since the Moabites were not a part of the commonwealth of Israel, the Midianites would have little reason to attack them. The Midianites were sent as a plague against the Israelites, who had turned their backs on God. (Winter)

“**She...and her two daughters in law with her**” One historian notes: “According to eastern fashion, her daughters-in-law accompanied her on the way” (*Bible History*). Coffman adds: “The widowed wives of her two sons, at this point, were merely extending the ancient oriental courtesy of going part of the way as an escort for their mother-in-law, a custom which ordinarily would have ended at the border of Moab.”

1:8-9 “And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother’s house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. 9 The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.”

“**Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return**” “When Naomi deemed that duty of proper respect sufficiently discharged, she stopped to dismiss them” (*Bible History*).

“**Each to her mother’s house**” *Keil and Delitzsch* observes why “mother’s house” instead of

“father’s house” appears here; “maternal love knows best how to comfort a daughter in her affliction.”

“The Lord grant you” Coffman makes a powerful observation in the simple statement of Naomi. “Naomi’s faith shines in these words. According to the usual thinking of that time, Chemosh was considered the God of Moab, but no such nonsense as that entered Naomi’s mind. She recognized Jehovah as the true God of all lands.”

“Ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband” The meaning is “that ye may both be happily married again” (*Keil & Delitzsch*). Wycliffe notes regarding Naomi’s encouragement of her daughters-in-law: “Naomi thought that the girls would wish to remarry. As they had been faithful in times of adversity she prayed that God would grant them days of prosperity and blessing in second marriage.”

“She kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept” The event here signals a point reached in the three’s travel toward Israel. “This indicates that the little company had reached the border, or the turning point, from which the friendly escort might have turned back. The simple meaning here is that Naomi kissed her daughters-in-law goodbye” (Coffman).

Coffman quotes another in an interesting sidebar: “Over fifty out of the total of eighty-five verses in the whole book are taken up with dialogue” (Morris qtd. in Coffman).

1:10-13 “And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.

11 And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? 12 Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons; 13 Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me.”

“My daughters” The love that Naomi had for her daughters-in-law, which doubtless contributed to the mutual love of her daughters-in-law toward her, is expressed three times as “my daughters” in verses 11-13 (Coffman).

Stated, Naomi could not provide future husbands for her daughters-in-law, perhaps alluding to the Israelite Levirate Marriage Law. **Implied**, Naomi’s daughters-in-law would surely desire to remarry. **Unspoken**, Naomi’s daughters-in-law would have little prospect of marrying Israelites in Judah. “[O]n account of the Moabitish descent of her daughters-in-law...she saw that there would be an obstacle to their being married in the land of Judah” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

“The hand of the Lord is gone out against me” Naomi’s tragedy was (1) her husband was deceased, (2) her only two sons had died, (3) she had no grandsons and no prospect of grandsons to continue her husband’s family, (4) as a widow (“indeed,” 1 Tim. 5:3-5), she was destitute in a foreign land. However, Coffman notes that God actually had quite a benevolent future in store for Naomi.

At the very moment when Naomi had been tempted to believe that God was against her, He was preparing wonderful things for her future. “In her old age, Naomi was honored and nourished in the house of the wealthy Boaz where she became the nurse of Ruth’s son, the grandfather of King David (Ruth 4:16)”... In the dramatic events of this Book, God was in the process of founding the family among the children of Israel who would eventually bring about the birth of the Holy Messiah unto the redemption of all mankind who would receive him. This family came from a BLENDING of both Jews and Gentiles—Ruth the Moabite appearing here as one of its mothers, and her husband Boaz also having come of the Gentile Rahab, the harlot of Jericho!

1:14-18 “And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her. 15 And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law. 16 And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following af-

ter thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: **17** Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me. **18** When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.”

“The LORD” The uppercase spelling of “LORD” in the KJV indicates, as translated in the ASV, that the reference means “Jehovah.” On this usage of “LORD” or “Jehovah” here by Ruth, Coffman quotes another, saying, “Ruth does not say [‘Elohiym] (God) as foreigners do, but [Yahweh] (Jehovah), indicating that Ruth is the follower of the true God.”

“The Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me” The words “the Lord do so to me, and more also” are a common formula for making an oath (1 Sam. 3:17; 14:44; 20:13; 1 Kings 2:23). Together with the phrase “if ought but death part thee and me,” Ruth essentially meant what contemporary persons might express in the statement, “cross my heart and hope to die.”

“Stedfastly minded” *Keil and Delitzsch* defines “stedfastly minded” from Hebrew as “to stiffen one’s self firmly upon a thing.”

Adam Clarke says of Ruth’s remarkable discourse of affection: “A more perfect surrender was never made of friendly feelings to a friend... This was a most extraordinary attachment, and evidently without any secular motive.” Although intermarriage with ungodly people predictably costs the souls of God’s people (Gen. 6:2, 5; Exod. 34:15-16; Deut. 7:3-4; Judges 3:6; 1 Kings 11:1-5; Ezra 9:1-2; 2 Cor. 6:14-17), in some cases, as with Ruth, one outside Israel (formerly physical Israel, now spiritual Israel) proselytes to the faith.

Ruth’s faith was deep enough to cause her to leave her family behind, to go out of her native country into a strange land, and to seek a new life in a community where she had no prospect of happy married life. Her experience as the wife of Mahlon had brought a big change in her life. (Winter)

1:19-22 “So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? **20** And she said

Ruth Believed in the One True God of the Bible

Bonnie Rushmore

We can learn many valuable lessons from this remarkable young woman. One lesson is the need to follow the God of the Bible.

Ruth the Moabitess was reared in a land that worshipped idols. The Moabites were descendants of Lot and his incestuous relationship with his daughter. Being descendants of Lot, these people should have had knowledge of the God of the Bible and His prohibition about worshipping idols. However, over the course of time, they neglected God and turned their affections to the idol Chemosh.

Sometime during Naomi’s ten-year stay in Moab, her family influenced Ruth to leave the false religion of her people and obey the God of the Bible – the God Who created the universe and all that is in it (Genesis 1:1-2:25). God had said, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Deuteronomy 5:7 NKJV).

The New Testament clearly teaches there is one God. Consider the following verses: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4-6). “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3). “Yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live” (1 Corinthians 8:6).

Romans 1:17-32 teaches that one can see the power of God by observing the created world. Furthermore, a correlation is made between the unrighteous who worship things made by the hands of men and their evil activities. When mankind forgets God, evil abounds!

unto them, **Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. 21 I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? 22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.**"

"The city was moved about them" Feminine words in the original indicated that "chiefly the female portion of the inhabitants, who were the most excited at Naomi's return" (*Keil & Delitzsch*). The brief animation of the residents surely subsided, for the people of Bethlehem would return to the normal fare of daily living, and the widows newly arrived could not evade the soberness of their plight. "[T]he temporary excitement of her arrival soon passed away, and the widow and her Moabite companion were left to struggle on alone in their poverty. Apparently no other near relatives of Elimelech were left..." (*Bible History*).

"Is this Naomi" "[T]he present condition of Naomi, a forlorn and desolate widow, presented so painful a contrast to the flourishing state of prosperity and domestic bliss in which she had been at her departure" (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*).

"Call me not Naomi, call me Mara" "Naomi said, in effect, that the experiences in Moab had brought such grief into her life that she could no longer bear the name Naomi" (*Wycliffe*).

"Went out full...home again empty" The wealth with which Naomi's family had departed famine-struck Israel for Moab was not especially monetary or earthly possessions, but Naomi refers here to having departed Israel with a husband and sons, but returns without either (*Keil & Delitzsch*). "She was bereft of both husband and sons" (Winter). In addition, any material property with which Naomi and Elimelech had departed Israel over a decade before was consumed, perhaps in Naomi and her daughters-in-law's subsistence following the death of their husbands; Naomi (and Ruth) came to Judah destitute, 'widows indeed' (1 Tim. 5:3, 5).

"In the beginning of the barley harvest" "This was in the beginning of spring, for the barley harvest began immediately after the passover, and that feast was held on the 15th of the month Nisan, which corresponds nearly with our March" (Clarke). *Jamieson,*

Ruth left the worship of idols to worship the God Who created the universe. God is clearly defined throughout the pages of the Bible.

With this knowledge of God, Ruth realized that simply following the religion of her parents was not good enough. She understood the need to abandon her ancestral religious practices and turn to the One True God. Ruth determined to leave her family, homeland and all that was familiar so that she could serve the one and only God. She did not sit back and say, "What is good enough for mom and dad is good enough for me." She realized the need to change in hope of a heavenly reward.

The Old Testament plainly teaches that we cannot allow family members to influence us to sin. "If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go and serve other gods,' which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, of the gods of the people which are all around you, near to you or far off from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth, you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him" (Deuteronomy 13:6-8).

Jesus gave the same lesson in the New Testament. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). The word "hate" means to "love less." To be a faithful follower of God, the love and obedience one has for family members must be less than the love and obedience one has for God.

Are you willing to follow the example of Ruth? Do your religious practices follow the one true God of the Bible? Have you studied the Bible to know what God wants from you, or are you simply following the example of your parents?

Fausset and Brown dates “the beginning of the barley harvest” “corresponding to the end of April.” Coffman notes the importance of this one phrase to the balance of the Book of Ruth. “The skill of the narrator appears in the introduction of this fact just here in the story, because the barley harvest was the occasion for all of the dramatic developments that came quickly afterward.”

Questions

1. Generally, in what time period did Elimelech and Naomi with their sons migrate from Israel to Moab?
2. What was the reason that Elimelech and Naomi with their sons migrated from Israel to Moab?
3. What two circumstances could result in a famine?
4. What does the word Bethlehem mean?
5. Where in Judah was the city of Bethlehem located?
6. List three important events associated with Bethlehem.
7. Moab was on the east side of what large body of water?
8. About how far was the border of Moab from the city of Bethlehem?
9. Name the pagan or idol god of Moab.
10. What do the names, respectively, Elimelech and Naomi mean?
11. What in the meaning of the names of Elimelech and Naomi’s son reflects on their general health?
12. What in the reference to Elimelech and Naomi suggest that they were descendants of the original Israelite settlers of Judah and Bethlehem?
13. What is the danger of marrying persons who do not faithfully worship the true God? Give biblical examples respecting this danger.
14. How long did the famine in Israel last?
15. Where were Naomi and her daughters-in-law probably when Naomi released the daughters-in-law to return to their families?
16. True/False. Naomi expected and encouraged her daughters-in-law to remarry.
17. What is unique about the “dialogue” in the Book of Ruth?
18. What expression by Naomi indicates the love she had for her daughters-in-law?
19. What is a plausible reason that Naomi did not suggest that her daughters-in-law consider returning with her to Judah and remarrying there?
20. What word did Ruth use that, along with her other statements and actions, indicated that she was willing to proselyte to Judaism?
21. How did Ruth emphasize her commitment to her avowed care for Naomi?
22. Describe the wealth with which Naomi had left Judah, but had lost while in Moab.
23. What is the significance of the last phrase in Chapter One to the balance of the Book of Ruth?

Chapter Two

2:1 “Naomi had a kinsman of her husband’s, a mighty man of wealth, of the family of Elimelech; and his name was Boaz.”

“**A kinsman**” Barnes notes of the word for “kinsman” here: “More literally ‘an acquaintance’; here (and in the feminine, Ruth 3:2) denoting the person with whom one is intimately acquainted, one’s near relation. The next kinsman of Ruth 2:20...is a wholly different word.” “The account of this occurrence commences with a statement which was necessary in order to make it perfectly intelligible, namely that Boaz, to whose field Ruth went to glean, was a relative of Naomi through her deceased husband Elimelech” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

2:2 “And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.”

“**Let me now go to the field**” The Law of Moses (Judaism) provided for the poor by permitting them to harvest the edges of the fields of others; God’s welfare program required able-bodied people to participate in their acquisition of a charitable livelihood (Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut. 24:19-22).

“**Glean ears of corn**” The “corn” refers not to what we call corn, but “[c]orn here signifies grain. It is barley that is meant (cf. Ruth 1:22)” (*Wycliffe*).

“**In whose sight I shall find grace**” Not surprisingly viewing the chaos and disregard for God often characteristic of the period of the judges, it was not certain that a farmer would allow the poor the leftovers in the field, as the Law of Moses prescribed. Ruth “...purposed to go out where they were now reaping, and glean after any person who might permit her, or use her in a friendly manner. The words seem to intimate that, notwithstanding the law of Moses, the gleaners might be prevented by the owner of the field” (Clarke).

2:3 “And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.”

“**Her hap was**” “She had not determined to go to a particular field, but ‘happened’ to go to the field of Boaz. What appeared to be an accident is seen in the light of the whole story to be the providence of God” (*Wycliffe*). Clarke concurs: “So she was acci-

Ruth Accepted Responsibility

The word “responsibility” means, “the state or fact of being responsible, answerable, or accountable for something within one’s power, control, or management” (*Dictionary.com*). Once Naomi and Ruth reached Bethlehem, Ruth accepted her duty to provide food for herself and Naomi. Since they had no males to care for them, the responsibility to provide daily needs fell on Ruth, the younger of the two. Ruth willingly went into the fields without Naomi needing to ask her to do so.

Jesus condemned the Pharisees for giving gifts to the Lord instead of caring for their parents. “For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’ But you say, ‘If a man says to his father or mother, “Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban” — (that is, a gift to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do”’ (Mark 7:10-13).

Paul admonished us to honor widows and to care for our parents and grandparents. “Honor widows who are really widows. But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God” (1 Timothy 5:3-5).

dentally or providentially led to that part of the cultivated country which belonged to Boaz.”

“A part of the field belonging unto Boaz”

“Fields in Palestine being unenclosed, the phrase signifies that portion of the open ground which lay within the landmarks of Boaz” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*).

2:4-7 “And behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The LORD be with you. And they answered him, The LORD bless thee. 5 Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this? 6 And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab: 7 And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves: so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house.”

“The LORD be with you. And they answered him, The LORD bless thee.” “When Boaz came from the town to the field, and had greeted his reapers with the blessing of a genuine Israelite, ‘Jehovah be with you,’ and had received from them a corresponding greeting in return...” (*Keil & Delitzsch*). Coffman adds: “It seems that these were customary salutations, acknowledging the blessing of the Lord in the abundance of the harvest.” Matthew Henry observes in his commentary that there is no evidence of anything but mutual respect between the laborers and the master, Boaz; this is as it ought to be between employees and employers, especially when either or both are the children of God.

“Whose damsel is this?...” Coffman notices that Boaz did not ask, “Who is this,” but he inquired, “Whose damsel is this?” Anciently, persons and especially women were identified by their association with their families and the patriarchs of those families.

It is evident from this answer of the servant who was placed over the reapers, (1) that Boaz did not prohibit any poor person from gleaning in his field; (2) that Ruth asked permission of the overseer of the reapers, and availed herself of this permission with untiring zeal from the first thing in the morning, that she might get the necessary support for her mother-in-law and herself; and (3) that her history was well known to

All individuals need to take responsibility for their own salvation. “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself” (Ezekiel 18:20).

Each Christian has the responsibility to reach out to the lost. “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned’” (Mark 16:15-16).

Christians need to accept personal responsibility in all aspects of their lives – providing for their daily needs, their sinful actions, seizing opportunities to teach the Gospel to the lost and caring for loved ones.

Ruth Was a Hard Worker

Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem without husbands to care for them and very little if any money to sustain them. For this reason, Ruth went into the fields to gather grain along the edges, which was left for the poor. The Scriptures show that she daily appeared in the fields with the servants of Boaz and worked diligently throughout the day.

Wise King Solomon said, “Laziness casts one into a deep sleep, And an idle person will suffer hunger” (Proverbs 19:15). Ruth was not lazy; she volunteered to go to the fields and gather food for her and her mother-in-law.

The New Testament also teaches that one is to provide for himself. “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness

the overseer, and also to Boaz, although Boaz saw her now for the first time. (*Keil & Delitzsch*)

“Moabitish damsel” Coffman comments on the disdain the Israelites maintained toward other nationalities of people. “Note the frequency of this designation ‘Moabites’ or its equivalent in this narrative. It occurs no less than five times in these four chapters. The inherent hostility of Israel to all people of other races is indicated by this.”

“She said, I pray you, let me glean...” “When the overseer of the reapers gave her permission to do so, she worked diligently” (*Wycliffe*). Ruth did not possess an entitlement mentality so common in our day. She was polite, unassuming and courteous; she asked permission to enter the fields of another, there to glean, despite the implicit permission of Judaism to which she had proselyted.

“She came, and hath continued from the morning until now...” Ruth lingered but little in “the field tent, erected for the occasional rest and refreshment of the labourers” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*). Whatever usual bias Israelites had toward people of other nations, Ruth’s reputation respecting devotion to her mother-in-law and here her industry softened it in the eyes of the field overseer and the master, Boaz.

“Little house” Apparently, a tent, probably the three-sided variety common in that part of the world, to which the workers could approach occasionally for temporary relief from the heat of the day. Water and any other refreshments would be there, too.

2:8-14 “Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens: 9 Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them: have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn. 10 Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger? 11 And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore.

and eat their own bread” (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12). Apparently, there were some Christians in Thessalonica who instead of working, spent their time going “house to house” gossiping. Paul stated these individuals were disorderly – not living as they should – and commanded that they get to work and provide for themselves. Those capable of working should not sit back and wait for others to provide food for them. Under the Old Testament laws, the act of benevolently providing food for the poor still required them to gather it themselves. It was not delivered to them!

Paul stated, “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8). Today’s Christians need to work and provide for their families. We need to take the initiative of Ruth and work – not wait for someone to take care of us.

Ruth Showed Respect

When Ruth refused Naomi’s plea that she return to her parents’ home, she exhibited great love and respect for Naomi as well as love for the one true God of the Bible. The word respect means, “the condition of being esteemed or honored: to be held in respect” (*Dictionary.com*).

One should live life in such a way that others respond with honor and admiration. Likewise, we should show respect to those around us, especially to the elderly.

Moses commanded by inspiration, “You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 19:32). Moses taught that each

12 The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust. 13 Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens. 14 And Boaz said unto her, At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left."

"My daughter" Coffman comments as to one reason Boaz may have been kinder to Ruth than his other countrymen, and kinder than Ruth (or Naomi) expected. "Boaz himself was a descendant of Rahab the Gentile of Jericho, and it might have been that he was more readily disposed to accept such a foreigner as Ruth than other Israelites might have been."

"Glean...fast by my maidens...after them" Ruth was an indigent guest in another's field; her place in the field of harvesters with their varied duties was at the back of the procession of workers. "When the maidens had gathered up the scattered handfuls thrown down by the reapers, Ruth picked up any straggling heads or ears which they had left" (Clarke).

"Charged the young men that they shall not touch thee" Ruth lacked either father or husband to whom anyone troubling her would be answerable. "This was peculiarly necessary, as she was a stranger and unprotected" (Clarke). Wycliffe supposes that the expression further appoints the young men responsible for Ruth's safety. "Boaz directed his workers to keep Ruth from harm."

"Athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink" "If Ruth were forced to provide her own jug for drinking water, she would be handicapped in this respect. It was a fine concession which Boaz made to her in this regard" (Coffman).

"She fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground" Ruth "[p]rostrated herself, as was the custom in the East when inferiors approached those of superior rank" (Clarke).

"Why have I found grace in thine eyes" Ruth expressed humility, not viewing herself worthy of notice, and certainly not of the kindness demonstrated toward her.

"Recompense thy work" The "work" under consideration was "[t]he dutiful respect which thou hast paid to thy husband, and thy tender and affectionate attachment to thy aged mother-in-law" (Clarke).

"A full reward be given thee" Clarke comments that "[t]his is spoken with great modesty and piety: The kindness I show thee is little in comparison of thy desert; God alone can give thee a full reward for thy kindness to thy husband and mother-in-law; and he will do it..."

"The LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust" *Keil and Delitzsch* compare the reference to Jehovah and his protective wings to similar passages in the Old Testament (Deut. 32:11; Psa. 91:4). Adam Clarke summarizes the application of this statement. "The metaphor is taken from the young of fowls, who, seeing a bird of prey, run to their mother to be covered by her wings from danger, and also to take shelter from storms, tempests, cold, etc. It is evident from this that Ruth had already attached herself to the Jewish religion."

individual should show respect to those older than him or her.

This command was reiterated by Paul in Romans 12:10, "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another." Paul further stated in Philipians 2:3, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself." Consider Peter's words, "Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king" (1 Peter 2:17). Paul and Peter taught that Christians should choose to spend time with other Christians, showing respect to all with whom we come in contact.

Ruth showed respect to Naomi, Boaz and the workers in the fields in which she gleaned. We should follow her example and show respect to family members, coworkers and strangers alike, even if we think they do not deserve it.

“Not like unto one of thine handmaidens” “Her appearance was evidently different enough to set her apart,” perhaps including “different facial characteristics” (Winter), attire, jewelry, adornment, “language [accent]” (Henry), etc.

“At mealtime...she did eat” The food and refreshments allotted the field hands were generously afforded Ruth, a poor person gleaning the leftovers in the field. In yesteryear of early American life, threshing crews would attend a farm’s harvest, during which womenfolk prepared extensive meals for all. This even gave rise to an expandable leaf table referred to as a threshers table.

“Parched corn” The meal in the field here was “roasted grains of wheat...Lev 2:14...” (*Keil and Delitzsch*).

2:15-16 “And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not: 16 And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.”

“Let her glean even among the sheaves” *Keil and Delitzsch* comments about the extraordinary treatment of Ruth by Boaz. “These directions of Boaz went far beyond the bounds of generosity and compassion for the poor; and show that he felt a peculiar interest in Ruth, with whose circumstances he was well acquainted, and who had won his heart by her humility, her faithful attachment to her mother-in-law, and her love to the God of Israel...”

“Reproach her not” The original language word for “reproach” means “taunt or insult” and sometimes is translated “shame” (*Biblesoft’s*). Ruth was permitted this exceptional opportunity, a privilege she could not claim for herself, and therefore, Boaz cautioned his employees not to use it as an occasion of speaking unkindly to her. Coffman puts it this way: “...he instructed them not to hinder or embarrass her in any manner whatever.”

“Let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her...” Wycliffe restates the verse to explain: “The reapers were told to provide in a special way for Ruth (without her knowing it). She had the legal right to take all that was accidentally left behind. The reapers saw to it that an abundance of grain was left for her.” Coffman adds: “He took pains to give her a special portion of food, so large that she was able to take part of it to Naomi. Boaz then instructed the young men harvesting his barley to aid Ruth by purposely leaving handfuls of grain.”

“Rebuke her not” Here Boaz essentially repeats himself to his workers that they should not express disdain toward Ruth for this favor he allowed her, by which she could provide for herself and her mother-in-law. Occasions of benevolence sometimes are marred by improper attitudes of the benefactors, whereas on other occasions benevolence sometimes are marred by improper attitudes of the beneficiaries. Ruth was grateful; Boaz was generous, and Boaz would not have either his generosity or Ruth’s humility tarnished by his laborers.

2:17-23 “So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned: and it was about an ephah of barley. 18 And she took it up, and went into the city: and her mother in law saw what she had gleaned: and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed. 19 And her mother in law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she shewed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man’s name with whom I wrought to day is Boaz. 20 And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen. 21 And Ruth the Moabitess said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest. 22 And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter in law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field. 23 So she kept fast by the maid-

ens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and dwelt with her mother in law.”

“Gleaned in the field until even” Ruth devoted all of the daylight hours, as did the reapers, to harvesting the field; she was not shortsighted or lacking in industry, but looked to the long-term care of Naomi and herself.

“Beat out...had gleaned” Barnes says of the original word for “beat”: “Namely, with a stick, as the word implies (compare Deut 24:20; Isa 27:12). This method is still commonly practiced.” The manner by which the grain was separated from the chaff depended upon the amount of grain to be processed: “When the quantity of grain was small, it was beaten by means of a stick to separate the grain from the chaff” (*Wycliffe*).

“An ephah of barley” *Keil and Delitzsch* calculate Ruth’s harvest that day to be “20-25 lbs.” Clarke quantifies Ruth’s daily harvest as “[n]ot less than seven gallons and a half.” Barnes puts the quantity of grain into perspective: “Ruth gleaned enough to support herself and her mother-in-law for five days (Ex 16:16).” *Wycliffe* concurs and presents the quantity from another perspective: “This amounted to approximately three pecks, dry measure. It was enough to support Ruth and Naomi for about five days.” *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* approximates the quantity gleaned on this occasion to “about a bushel.” Another commentator writes: “An ephah equals three pecks and three pints. It was almost a bushel” (Winter). It is little wonder that the approximations of how much Ruth gleaned vary, owing to some variables; we are fortunate to have a National Bureau of Measurements and Standards.

Scholars give various answers regarding the exact size of an ephah, but the measurements range between four gallons and seven gallons. This is due to the fact that the ephah itself was a handmade vessel of variable sizes. It seems that this first day’s gleanings by Ruth netted something in the vicinity of two-thirds of a bushel, enough to support two people for about five days. (Coffman)

“Reserved after she was sufficed” *Keil and Delitzsch* notes that Ruth has saved some of the food bestowed upon her while in the field (i.e., the roasted grains) and gave them to Naomi to eat; a greater devotion to an adopted mother that Ruth found in Naomi could hardly be imagined.

“Where hast thou gleaned to day...” Naomi sensed by the quantity of grain Ruth obtained in the day that special kindness and generosity has been bestowed upon Ruth, and subsequently upon Naomi.

“Blessed be he of the LORD” Naomi surmised that God, really, had been and was their true benefactor; Boaz, as such, was the instrument of God for Ruth and Naomi. We, too, ought always to thank God for all that we receive, notwithstanding any industry we may need to expend or despite kindnesses and generosity afforded us by our fellows. Naomi adjusts her attitude about her relationship with God from her former complaint. “In her weakness, Naomi had murmured; in her unbelief, she had complained; she had deemed herself forsaken of God and afflicted. All the while, however she and hers might have erred and strayed, God had never left off His kindness either to the living or to the dead!” (*Bible History*).

“Keep fast by my young men” Clarke notes from the original that the phrase “should be translated servants, both the male and female being included in it; the latter especially, as we see in Ruth 2:22-23.” Coffman explains, “‘Young men’ in this sentence is a general expression that includes both sexes, as is found often in Hebrew. This is indicated by Naomi’s mention of the command in the very next verse, where it is evident that Boaz had commanded her to stay near his maidens.”

“Kindness to the living and to the dead” Ruth and Naomi were the direct beneficiaries of God’s goodness through Boaz, whereas Elimelech and Mahlon were the indirect beneficiaries of the same kindness.

Naomi admits it was kindness done to her and to Ruth, the living. God was showing kindness to Elimelech and his sons inasmuch as He was caring for their widows. The property was still in the name of Elimelech, and Ruth was still known as the wife of Mahlon. The kindness of Boaz to Ruth was a remembrance of both the living and the dead. (Winter)

“The man is near of kin unto us” Naomi recognized that Boaz was a close relative to Ruth and Naomi through Naomi’s deceased husband, Elimelech. As such, Boaz, then, was a potential redeemer of Elimelech’s inheritance, including fulfilling Levirate Marriage toward Ruth. (See the comments of William W. Winter’s *Studies in Joshua, Judges, Ruth* respecting the association of redemption of property rights and the additional responsibility toward a childless widow.) However, Boaz was not Elimelech’s brother, and the woman of marriageable age was not Naomi, but Ruth, widow, not of Elimelech but of Mahlon. “Thus, Naomi had no legal claim upon Boaz—not to speak of the fact, of which she must have been aware, that there was a nearer kinsman than he of Elimelech in Bethlehem. Lastly, in accordance with the law, it was not Naomi but Ruth who must lay claim to such marriage (Deuteronomy 25:7, 8).” (*Bible History*).

“Go out with his maidens” “Naomi declared herself fully satisfied with this [the kind overture of Boaz for Ruth to confine her gleaning to his fields], because Ruth would be thereby secured from insults, which she might receive when gleaning in strange fields” (*Keil and Delitzsch*). Naomi knew that Ruth might be ill-treated by other field owners, or at least would not be so generously and kindly treated. For Ruth’s protection and for a greater productivity that would furnish Ruth and Naomi, Naomi encouraged Ruth respecting Boaz’s offer. In addition, *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* comments that Naomi’s counsel was:

... a prudent recommendation to Ruth to accept the generous invitation of Boaz, lest, if she were seen straying into other fields, she might not only run the risk of rude treatment, but displease him by seeming indifferent to his kind liberality. Moreover, the observant mind of the old matron had already discerned, in all Boaz’ attentions to Ruth, the germs of a stronger affection, which she wished to increase.

“End of barley harvest and of wheat harvest” “Throughout the harvest season Ruth continued to work with the maidens by day and to return to the home of her mother-in-law each evening” (*Wycliffe*). Respecting the second of these two harvests, *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* says, “The latter was at the end of May or the beginning of June.” The two grains were harvested one after the other; “The reaping of barley commenced the harvest (2 Sam 21:9), and that of wheat followed almost without any interval” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*).

Barley harvest was early spring (March, April). Wheat harvest was in the summer. Altogether harvest lasted from three to four months. These were important events in the lives of this agricultural people. ... These people were accustomed to noting time by making reference to the progress of their crops. Such activities as the harvesting of the grain were very important to the lives of these people. (Winter)

Questions

1. How was Boaz distantly related to Naomi, and subsequently to Ruth?
2. How did God’s welfare program for the underprivileged differ from typical welfare programs in our day?
3. How does the word “corn” differ in meaning between its appearance in Scripture and contemporary usage?
4. What indicates the possibility of a Jewish farmer in Ruth’s day not practicing God’s law respecting gleaners and permitting gleaners into his field?
5. When is a coincidence really providential?
6. What in Chapter Two indicates that fields in Ruth’s day were identifiable in a different way than in our day?
7. Describe the admirable interaction between Boaz and his employees, contrasting it with common interaction between employers and employees today.

8. Why did Boaz ask, “Whose damsel is this?”
9. What attribute throughout the Book of Ruth is associated with the name Ruth and may have been used somewhat derogatorily?
10. How did poor Ruth’s attitude differ toward the generosity of others from the attitude often demonstrated today by under privileged persons?
11. What two things may have softened Israelite bias toward Ruth, a Moabitess?
12. What about Ruth prompted Boaz to have a good first impression of Ruth after meeting her?
13. What about Boaz’s family tree may have contributed to the kindnesses he extended toward Ruth?
14. Where in the field among the others present would gleaners, such as Ruth, correctly position themselves?
15. List some reasons why without Boaz’s address to the young men in his field Ruth may have experienced difficulty with other persons.
16. How useful was Boaz’s permission to Ruth to drink the laborers’ water?
17. How did Ruth demonstrate her acknowledgement of her inferior circumstance to that of Boaz?
18. Of what “work” pertaining to Ruth did Boaz speak for which he said she would be rewarded?
19. Whose reward would exceed the generosity of Boaz toward Ruth?
20. What phrase in Chapter Two indicates that Ruth was a proselyte?
21. List some ways in which Ruth may have obviously differed from other maidens in Bethlehem.
22. What benefit did Boaz grant Ruth regarding mealtimes in the field?
23. Describe the “parched corn.”
24. What privilege in her gleaning did Boaz permit Ruth beyond what gleaners were normally allowed?
25. True or False. Ruth gleaned in the field for only the part of the day, when the sun was not as intense.
26. How many days worth of food did Ruth harvest in the first day?
27. What did Ruth do with the mealtime food she had not eaten while in the field?
28. Contrast Naomi’s attitude about her relationship with God before and after Ruth gleaned in the fields.
29. How had God through Boaz been generous to the living and the dead?
30. Boaz was potentially a kinsman-redeemer to whom?
31. How many months did Ruth labor in the fields through the end of Chapter Two?

Chapter Three

3:1 “Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee?”

“Seek rest for thee” “Rest here is equivalent to marriage. Naomi felt that Ruth should not remain a poor gleaner in the fields. Since Ruth had no mother (in Judah, at any rate), Naomi determined to take the initiative to arrange a marriage” (*Wycliffe*). It was not the usual and official place of a woman to go about arranging marriages anciently.

Normally it was the responsibility of the father to arrange for a marriage of his daughters. Laban was anxious to see his daughters provided for in this way, and excused himself for deceiving Jacob in giving him Leah instead of Rachel by saying it was not customary for the younger daughter to be given in marriage before the older daughter was married (Genesis 29:26). When the father was dead, the responsibility for arranging these marriages fell to the oldest son who received the father’s birthright and blessing. Since both Mahlon and Chilion were dead, no one was left to care for the welfare of the widows except Naomi. (Winter 610)

Coffman quotes another in his commentary respecting the relationship between the activity of man and the activity of God to achieve some purpose. “‘Divine and human actions work together’ in the achievement of God’s purpose. This teaches that, ‘Believers are not to wait passively for events to happen, but they must seize the initiative when the opportunity presents itself.’”

3:2 “And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast? Behold, he winnoweth barley to night in the threshingfloor.”

“Kindred” Boaz was a relative by whom, if Ruth and Boaz were willing, the Levirate Law could be fulfilled. This would provide new hope and livelihood first for widowed Ruth and indirectly for widowed Naomi.

“Winnoweth barley...in the threshingfloor” “The simple manners of Boaz and his times are here before us. This ‘mighty man of wealth’ assists personally in the winnowing of his barley, which lies in a great heap on the floor (Ruth 3:15), and sleeps in the open threshing-floor to protect his grain...” (Barnes).

“to night” Barnes observes the Boaz was using the night “breeze” to separate the grain from the chaff. Besides this, the daylight hours were used for the harvest throughout the fields where fire-light could not be as easily or as safely used as in the case of lighting the threshing floor. The whole process is not much different from the manner in which former years saw our forefathers process their grain.

It is very likely that the winnowing of grain was effected by taking up, in a broad thin vessel or sieve, a portion of the grain, and letting it down slowly in the wind; thus the grain would, by its own weight, fall in one place, while the chaff, etc., would be carried to a distance by the wind. It is said here that this was done at night; probably what was threshed out in the day was winnowed in the evening, when the sea breeze set in, which was common in Palestine; and as this took place in the evening only, that was the time in which they would naturally winnow their grain. (Clarke)

Grain was thrown into the air with winnowing fans. Threshing floors were nothing more than level places in the field which had been trodden smooth. The surface was generally quite hard. A level spot was selected, and the threshing floors were generally close together. They were circular in form, sometimes fifty feet in diameter. Grain was thrown onto the ground. Animals

walked over it and crushed out the grains from the head of the stalks. A wooden fork was used to throw this mixture of chaff and grain into the air. As the wind blew away the chaff, the grain settled to the ground. Sometimes a carpet was placed under the threshers' feet so the grain fell onto it whence it could be easily placed in bags. (Winter 610-611)

3:3 “Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor: but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking.”

“Wash thyself...anoint thee and put thy raiment upon thee” Naomi prompted Ruth to present herself to Boaz in a better form than the sweaty garb of a day laborer. “She made Ruth put on her best dress, that Boaz might, in the course of the day, be the more attracted by her person, and be the better disposed to receive her as Naomi wished” (Clarke) “In context, the ‘raiment’ here is a reference to her best clothes, and the anointing is a reference to the use of perfumes. Although Naomi did not expect Boaz to give way to his sensual lust in the situation, she wisely calculated that the physical desirability of Ruth would enhance the probability of a favorable response from Boaz” (Coffman).

“Get thee down to the floor” With Wycliffe we feel it important to emphasize, especially in a world then and now that desires to think and do otherwise, that Ruth and Naomi were neither unscrupulous nor immoral. “The record is clear that both Naomi and Ruth had the purest of motives in their plans.”

3:4 “And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do.”

“The place where he shall lie down” *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* remind us that: “Resting, as the Orientals do at night, in the same clothes they wear during the day, there was no indelicacy in a stranger, or even a woman, putting the extremity of this cover over her.”

“Uncover his feet” Barnes notes that the expression is literally, “the place of his feet,” and it refers to “the foot of his bed.” Coffman adds: “By lying at Boaz’ feet, Ruth perhaps intended to present herself as a humble petitioner for his protection.”

3:5 “And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me I will do.”

“...Naomi had instructed Ruth to ask Boaz to marry her as her redeemer” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

3:6 “And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother in law bade her.”

“Did according to all that her mother in law bade her” Naomi’s plan was not without possible peril to Ruth, especially were Ruth to fall victim to unscrupulous persons in her travel to and from the threshing floor, or if there had been less reason to have confidence in the sterling moral fiber of Boaz. “The plan that Naomi proposed was full of risk and danger. Ruth would expose herself to the evident possibility of humiliation or the violation of her chastity, but Naomi knew the character of Boaz and rested the whole scheme upon what she knew to be his honor and integrity.”

3:7 “And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down.”

“Eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry” This only has reference to the satisfaction of a complete and hearty meal.

“Came softly” These words refer to how quietly Ruth came to where Boaz was sleeping (Coffman).

3:8 “And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid, and turned himself: and, behold, a woman lay at his feet.”

“Afraid” Boaz was startled upon waking in the night to find someone, a woman, lying at his feet (*Keil & Delitzsch*). Clarke observes the passivity of Boaz in any consideration of a proposed

marriage between himself and Ruth: “It is fully evident Boaz had no intimation of the present proceedings.” We might say that Boaz was the last to know or the last to suspect the master plan of Naomi for providing for Ruth’s and her future happiness and necessities.

“**Turned himself**” Barnes observes: “Rather, ‘bent forward,’ so as to feel what it was which was at his feet. The same word is translated ‘took hold of,’ in Judges 16:29.”

3:9 “And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.”

“**Spread...thy skirt over thine handmaid**” The garb of men and women at this time resembled the other so that the robe with which both men and women were clothed had a “skirt.” The words used here compose an idiom: “The phrase indicates receiving and acknowledging her as a wife” (Barnes). *Wycliffe* adds: “The custom of a man’s placing a corner of his garment over a maiden as a token of marriage is known among the Arabs.” “...Ruth entreated Boaz to marry her because he was a redeemer” (*Keil & Delitzsch*). “Ruth reminded Boaz that he was ‘a near kinsman,’ one who had the right and the duty to redeem a deceased kinsman’s land and marry his widow” (Winter 612). According to William Winter in his commentary, the redemption of a deceased family member’s real estate to keep it in the family and the practice of marrying a family deceased member’s widow to rear offspring in the name of the departed husband were customs that predated but were regulated by Judaism; further, the two customs were often quite naturally considered as companion to the extent that they were accomplished together (613-614).

“**Skirt**” Coffman records in his commentary: “The same word in the plural is translated ‘wings’ in Boaz’ prayer (Ruth 2:12), where he speaks of ‘Jehovah, under whose wings thou (Ruth) art come to take refuge.’ The metaphor comes from the protection that a mother hen provides for her chickens.”

3:10 “And he said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich.”

“**Followedst not young men**” Boaz evidently is much older than Ruth, and Boaz expresses his positive reception of essentially Ruth’s proposal of marriage. “A tradition states that Boaz was eighty years old when he married Ruth. She is here commended for not seeking the company of the youthful men who, presumably, would have been more attractive to her” (*Wycliffe*). Coffman adds that choosing to marry for the purposes of continuing her deceased husband’s posterity and providing for her widowed mother in the Jewish faith was nobler than simply marrying to satisfy youthful desire on her part (which she might have done had she sought to marry a poor man whom she could have loved). “This was the greater kindness to Naomi than the other wonderful things she had done for her mother-in-law” (Coffman).

3:11 “And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.”

“**I will do to thee all that thou requirest**” “...Boaz saw nothing wrong in the fact that Ruth had come to him, but regarded her request that he would marry her as redeemer as perfectly natural and right, and was ready to carry out her wish as soon as the circumstances would legally allow it” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

“**Thou are a virtuous woman**” “All qualities which are admirable in a woman were found in Ruth, according to this testimony” (*Wycliffe*).

3:12 “And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman: howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I.”

Boaz’ sense of right and wrong prevented him from presumptuously circumventing the then prevail-

Ruth Was Virtuous

Synonyms for the word “virtuous” are good, worthy, righteous, honorable, moral, upright and honest. The root word “virtue” means “moral excellence or goodness (Philippians 4:8). Virtue is considered a necessary ingredient in the exercise of faith (2 Peter 1:3, 5). Sometimes the Greek word for virtue is used to express the idea of power or strength

ing legal fulfillment of redemption of property and widows. Commentators note that the references to Levirate Marriage in the Book of Ruth differ from the specifics for it outlined in the Law of Moses (i.e., possibly a nephew of a brother in Boaz instead of a brother to a deceased husband).

3:13 “Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman’s part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the LORD liveth: lie down until the morning.”

“If he will not do the part of a kinsman...I will do the part of kinsman” “The closer relative should have first opportunity, but Boaz expressed a willingness to act as (go’el) if the close relative chose not to do so” (*Wycliffe*).

“As the LORD liveth” *Keil & Delitzsch* observes that Boaz made “a strong assurance, as after the formula used in an oath” respecting his willingness to fulfill the Levirate Marriage. “Thus he bound himself, by an oath to take her to wife if the other should refuse” (Clarke).

3:14 “And she lay at his feet until the morning: and she rose up before one could know another. And he said, Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor.”

“Know another” *Wycliffe* observes correctly the meaning is “discern another.”

“Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor” “Though no overt sin had been committed, Boaz was concerned lest people misunderstand the presence of Ruth at the threshing floor” (*Wycliffe*). There were two reputations to protect: “For this would have injured the reputation not only of Ruth, but also of Boaz himself” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

Boaz also was careful to protect Ruth’s reputation. Although he was willing to keep her safe from harm during the middle of the night, he counseled her to leave his threshing floor early in the morning before the sun was risen. In this way, any who saw her leave would not be able to discern who she was and would not point a finger of scandal in her direction. (Winter 614-615)

3:15 “Also he said, Bring the vail that thou hast upon thee, and hold it. And when she held it, he measured six measures of barley, and laid it on her: and she went into the city.”

“Six measures of barley, and laid it on her” This was “...twice as much as she gleaned (Ruth 3:17), and a heavy load to carry; for which reason he laid it on her...” (Barnes). However, Clarke notes: “We supply the word measures, for the Hebrew mentions no quantity.”

3:16 “And when she came to her mother in law, she said, Who art thou, my daughter? And she told her all that the man had done to her.”

“Who Art thou, my daughter?” Per verse 14, it was dark so that one could not be identified by sight, so that recognition by voice was necessary for Ruth to gain admittance into Naomi’s home.

(Luke 6:19)” (*Nelson’s*). Boaz stated that Ruth was virtuous. The *American Standard* uses the word “worthy.”

King Solomon discussed virtuous women in Proverbs 12:4 as he compared the virtuous woman to a shameful one. The “ideal woman” of Proverbs 31 is called virtuous in verses 10 and 29-31. In verse 10, Solomon says a virtuous woman is worth more than precious gems. In verse 29, we are told that the “ideal woman” exceeds the virtue of all other virtuous women.

In the opening verses of Philippians Chapter Four, Paul encouraged two Christian women to settle their differences and learn to get along. Then in verses 4-7, Paul urged Christians to be joyful. In verse eight, he listed several qualities that each Christian should possess. The phrase “if there is any virtue” is equal to all of the characteristics listed and would include all similar qualities not listed. “The Christian should be a pattern and an example of every virtue” (Barnes).

However, more is meant as well, "...as what person, in what circumstances dost thou come? The real meaning is, What hast thou accomplished? Whereupon she related all that the man had done (cf. vv. 10-14), and that he had given her six measures of barley for her mother" (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

3:17 "And she said, These six measures of barley gave he me; for he said to me, Go not empty unto thy mother in law."

"These six measures...Go not empty unto thy mother in law" Certainly, Boaz realized the complicity of Naomi in Ruth's overture to marry him. Doubtless, all the virtues that Ruth had exhibited previously were traits she had gleaned from her mother in the Jewish faith, Naomi.

She must have rehearsed every detail and finally called attention to the six measures of barley as concrete evidence of the favor which Boaz had bestowed upon her. The concern of Boaz reached not only to Ruth's needs, but to the immediate needs of both Ruth and Naomi. Ruth recited how Boaz had told her not to go empty to her mother-in-law. In a sense, the gift of six measures of barley was more for Naomi than for Ruth herself. (Winter 616)

3:18 "Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day."

"How the matter will fall" Naomi advised Ruth further respecting the outcome of Ruth's invoking her rights pertaining to Levirate Marriage, "whether he who is nearer of kin than Boaz will take thee to wife; do not return again till this thing is determined" (Clarke).

Questions

1. Ordinarily who in a family anciently saw to the arrangement of marriages for daughters?
2. True or False. Mankind should expect to participate with God in His providence toward His children.
3. Describe the process of winnowing grain.
4. How might Ruth's presence seemed different when she went to the threshing floor from when she gleaned in the fields?
5. Why does the narrative in Chapter Three repeatedly emphasize that neither Naomi, Ruth nor Boaz were prone to immorality?
6. What is the significance of Ruth lying at the feet of Boaz?
7. How can one know that Ruth had full confidence in Naomi's interest in her overall welfare?
8. What perils did Ruth risk by going to the threshing floor at night?
9. Who proposed marriage to whom?
10. True or False. Marriage included the sense of protection and provision for a woman.
11. What were Ruth's priorities in pursuing remarriage?
12. How did Boaz affirm with certainty to Ruth his willingness to marry her?
13. Why did Boaz send Ruth home before daylight?
14. How did Boaz acknowledge and approve of Naomi's participation in Ruth's proposal of marriage?

Chapter Four

4:1 “Then went Boaz up to the gate, and sat him down there: and, behold, the kinsman of whom Boaz spake came by; unto whom he said, Ho, such a one! turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down.”

“Gate” As Barnes noted in his commentary, the elders (Deut. 19:12; Judges 8:14) of the cities customarily gathered at city gates anciently to transact legal matters affecting the respective communities. “The gate is the place of concourse, of business, and of justice in Oriental cities.” Note Deuteronomy 16:18 reads, “Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment.” William Winter further describes what is meant by the word “gate.”

The gate was the open space before the city gate. It was the forum of the city, the place where public affairs were discussed. ...Lot was sitting in the gate of the city of Sodom when the two angels came to him (Genesis 19:1). The husband of the virtuous woman described in the book of Proverbs was “known in the gates when he sitteth among the elders of the land (Proverbs 31:23).” (620)

“Ho, such a one!” Coffman explains why this odd address appears between these two relatives of Elimelech. “We may be sure that Boaz addressed him by name, but the author of the Book of Ruth was either ignorant of his name or simply did not wish to mention it, which is the more likely.”

4:2 “And he took ten men of the elders of the city, and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down.”

“Ten men of the elders” *Wycliffe* commented that the number of men selected was significant. “Judaism considered ten men as the quorum required for a synagogue. Ten also were required among the Jews for the marriage benediction.” Barnes agrees and writes, “Probably the presence of, at least, ten elders was necessary to make a lawful public assembly, as among modern Jews ten are necessary to constitute a synagogue.” Interestingly, William Winter remarks, “Certainly none could say the matter was done ‘in a corner’ when such a large number of people were involved in the decision” (621).

“Sit ye down here. And they sat down.” No greater formality or proclamation was needed than this impromptu assembly. “In a short conversation the matter was stated and arranged...” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*). Adam Clarke contrasts this legal proceeding with what might be a similar one in contemporary courts.

Probably it required this number to constitute a court. How simple and how rational was this proceeding! 1. The man who had a suit went to the city gates. 2. Here he stopped till the person with whom he had the suit came to the gate on his way to his work. 3. He called him by name, and he stopped and sat down. 4. Then ten elders were called, and they came and sat down. 5. When all this was done, the appellant preferred his suit. 6. Then the appellee returned his answer. 7. When the elders heard the case and the response of the appellee, they pronounced judgment, which judgment was always according to the custom of the place. 8. When this was done, the people who happened to be present witnessed the issue. And thus the business was settled without lawyers or legal casuistry. A question of this kind, in one of our courts of justice, in these enlightened times, would require many days, previous preparation of the attorney, and several hours, arguing between ...[attorneys], till even an enlightened and conscientious judge would find it extremely difficult to decide... O, glorious uncertainty of modern law!

4:3 “And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech’s:”

“Selleth a parcel of land” “According to the law (Lev 25:25-28), if any Israelite, through poverty, would sell his possession, the next of kin...had a right to redeem it by paying the value of the number of years remaining until the jubilee...” (Barnes). “She was reduced to want; the immediate inheritors were extinct; and it was now open for the next heir to purchase the land, and thus preserve the inheritance in the family according to the custom of Israel” (Clarke).

Wycliffe correctly asserts that the land was announced by Boaz as about to be offered for sale. “The context implies that selleth means ‘intends to sell’ or ‘has offered for sale’ (cf. v. 5). It was the concern of the community that a family be preserved from extinction. For this reason the problems of Naomi and Ruth were matters of community interest.”

“Our brother Elimelech’s” The word “brother” is used anciently and now in a number of ways, depending upon the context or circumstances. “The term ‘brother’ is used here in the sense of ‘brother Israelite,’ as frequently in the Bible” (Coffman).

4:4 “And I thought to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it: but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know: for there is none to redeem it beside thee; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it.”

“I will redeem it” Adam Clarke astutely observes that the “redeemer” expressed his willingness to buy the real estate in question, before he was aware that as we would say, there were strings attached. “I will pay down the money which it is worth. He knew not of the following condition.” “Both the alienation of land and the extinction of a family were to be prevented by the law of the [redeemer]. The [redeemer] would not come into possession of the land himself, but would hold it in trust for his son by Ruth, who would inherit the name and patrimony of Mahlon (her first husband)” (*Wycliffe*). It seems certain that Coffman is correct when he observes of Boaz (respecting the man who was a closer kinsman-redeemer): “He had no doubt anticipated this answer.”

4:5-6 “Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabite, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance. 6 And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance: redeem thou my right to thyself; for I cannot redeem it.”

“Ruth...the wife of the dead” William Winter notes reasons obvious to the community of Bethlehem why Boaz only considered Ruth as marriageable in his discussion. “*Naomi* was past the age of raising up children. The whole purpose of the Levirate marriage was to raise up children in the name of a deceased brother who had died without heirs. Boaz naturally married Ruth instead of Naomi, who had earlier indicated she was not considering marriage for herself” [Ruth 1:11-12] (621).

“Raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance” The young, childless widow, Ruth, associated with the land in question complicated the transaction.

Observe the action of the Levirate law. If there had been no one interested but Naomi, she would have sold the land unclogged by any condition, the law of Levirate having no existence in her case. But there was a young widow upon whom the possession of the land would devolve at Naomi’s death, and who already had a right of partnership in it, and the law of Levirate did apply in her case. It was, therefore, the duty of the [redeemer] to marry her and raise up seed to his brother, i.e. his kinsman. And he could not exercise his right of redeeming the land, unless he was willing at the same time to fulfill his obligations to the deceased by marrying the widow. This he was unwilling to do. (Barnes)

“I cannot redeem it” Coffman’s wording is amusing but perhaps fairly accurate respecting the kinsman-redeemer’s second thoughts about and withdrawal from redemption of Elimelech’s land if

he must also marry Ruth. “These words scared the near kinsman right out of the transaction. It was public opinion in Bethlehem that Chilion and Mahlon had died for marrying Moabitish women, and when the near kinsman found out that buying the land meant also marrying a Moabite, he dramatically withdrew his offer.”

4:7-8 “Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things; a man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour: and this was a testimony in Israel. 8 Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe.”

“Former time” This indicates that taking one’s shoe off to symbolize the completion of a transaction was no longer the custom when the Book of Ruth was written. Ruth was written several decades after the events recorded within it.

“Drew off his shoe” Removing his shoe was symbolic that the transaction was complete, namely that the closest kinsman here voluntarily forfeited any claim on the property and responsibility to marry Ruth to provide an heir to her dead husband.

The law of such a case is given at large in Deut 25:5-9. It was simply this: If a brother, who had married a wife, died without children, the eldest brother was to take the widow, and raise up a family to the brother deceased; and he had a right to redeem the inheritance, if it had been alienated. But if the person who had the right of redemption would not take the woman, she was to pull off his shoe and spit in his face; and he was ever after considered as a disgraced man. In the present case the shoe only is taken off, probably because the circumstances of the man were such as to render it improper for him to redeem the ground and take Ruth to his wife; and because of this reasonable excuse, the contemptuous part of the ceremony is omitted. See the note on Deut 25:9. (Clarke)

4:9-10 “And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech’s, and all that was Chilion’s and Mahlon’s, of the hand of Naomi. 10 Moreover Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place: ye are witnesses this day.”

“Ye are witnesses this day” “Boaz publicly stated that he had taken possession of the property and assumed the responsibility for Naomi and Ruth” (*Wycliffe*). William Winter notes that property was owned and passed through inheritance to sons, but “the widow remained in possession of the property as long as she lived” (624).

“Purchased” “Purchase” means “procure” and can mean “redeem” when applied to one’s brethren (Neh. 5:8).

4:11-12 “And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The LORD make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel and like Leah, which two did build the house of Israel: and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Bethlehem: 12 And let thy house be like the house of Pharez, whom Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the LORD shall give thee of this young woman.”

“We are witnesses” The transaction respecting the transfer of property and proposed matrimony was the subject of an oral contract rather than a written contract. “There was no signing of deeds; yet was the transfer made, and complete security given, by the public manner in which the whole matter was carried on and concluded” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*).

“Make the woman that is come into thine house...” “This was the usual bridal benediction” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*). **“Be famous in Bethlehem”** Coffman supposes that the expression amounts to well-wishing. “The good will of all the city appears in these expressions of prayerful best wishes.”

4:13 “So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son.”

“The LORD gave her conception” “The marriage was blessed of God. In characteristic Biblical teaching the Lord gave her conception. Children are looked upon as a sacred trust from the Lord” (Wycliffe).

4:14 “And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel.”

“And the women said unto Naomi” William Winter observes that Naomi rather than Ruth was addressed because it was Naomi, being of the older generation, who was faced first with seeing the end of her husband’s family tree. “Her family was not extinct” (625).

4:15-16 “And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him. 16 And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.”

“A nourisher of thine old age” Coffman writes: “Until the birth of this grandson, the prospect of an old age for Naomi in those times and environment was bleak and threatening indeed; but the birth of Ruth’s child had changed all that dramatically. As a prospective heir of perhaps both Mahlon and Boaz, the child Obed would indeed be a source of powerful strength and support for Ruth and for his grandmother Naomi.”

“Better to thee than seven sons” “Seven sons would be indicative of the blessing of God... Naomi, however, had a daughter-in-law in whose child she found consolation for the loss of her own sons” (Wycliffe).

4:17 “And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.”

“The women her neighbours gave it a name” “This does not mean that Ruth, Boaz and Naomi had no part in the choice of the name, but that they consented to go along with the suggestion of the neighboring women” (Coffman). One of the meanings of the name “Obed” is servant, which when grown, whether Naomi were dead or alive, would serve Naomi at least by extending the family tree (which extended through the time of Jesus Christ).

“Born” The word “born” here emphasizes the lineage under consideration.

“Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David” Keil & Delitzsch note that reference to King David occurs here to:

Ruth Loved Others

The English word “love” has many meanings. We say, “I love ice cream,” “I love my children,” “I love my husband” or “I love God.” The word “love” has a different meaning with each of these examples. The Greek language uses various words to describe different types of love.

One Greek word is “phileo,” meaning “to be a friend to (fond of [an individual or an object]), i.e. have affection for (denoting personal attachment, as a matter of sentiment or feeling)” (*Biblesoft’s*). Another is “agape,” meaning “affection or benevolence; specially” (*Biblesoft’s*). “Phileo” love is brotherly love, while “agape” love goes beyond brotherly love to a higher level – an unselfish, ready to serve love.

Jesus showed the difference in these two Greek words in His discussion with Peter in John 21:15-17. “Jesus asked, ‘Simon, do you love [esteem] me?’ But Peter replied, ‘You know that I love [have ardent affection for] You.’ Then Jesus asked, ‘Simon, do you love [have ardent affection for] Me?’ And Peter responded that his love was agape love – a love that held Jesus in high esteem and which was more than a fleeting feeling” (*Nelson’s*).

In Titus 2:4, the older women were told to teach the younger women to love their husbands and to love their children. While the word “love” comes from the same Greek root word “philos,” – “properly, dear, i.e. a friend; actively, fond,

...show the object which the author kept in view in writing down these events, or composing the book itself. This conjecture is raised into a certainty by the genealogy which follows, and with which the book closes. ...The genealogy closes with David, an evident proof that the book was intended to give a family picture from the life of the pious ancestors of this great and godly king of Israel. But for us the history which points to David acquires a still higher signification, from the fact that all the members of the genealogy of David whose names occur here are also found in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. (*Keil & Delitzsch*)

4:18-22 “Now these are the generations of Pharez: Pharez begat Hezron, 19 And Hezron begat Ram, and Ram begat Amminadab, 20 And Amminadab begat Nahshon, and Nahshon begat Salmon, 21 And Salmon begat Boaz, and Boaz begat Obed, 22 And Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David.”

“Boaz...Obed...Jesse...David”

Matthew has preserved the additional interesting information that the mother of Boaz was Rahab (Josh 2:6). It is possible that the circumstance that the mother of Boaz was a Canaanite may have made him less indisposed to marry Ruth the Moabitess. As regards the whole genealogy in Ruth 4:18-22, it should be remarked that it occurs four times in Scripture, namely, here, 1 Chron 2:10-12; Matt 1:3-6; and Luke 3:32-33, and is of course of singular importance as being the genealogy of our Lord. (Barnes)

i.e. friendly” (*Biblesoft’s*), they have different meanings. The love for one’s husband is an affectionate love between husbands and wives, while love for children is a maternal love.

As you can see in the previous passage, there is a place in our lives for “phileo” love. However, we need to be like Ruth and develop an “agape” love toward all. True love puts the needs of others above one’s own needs (Romans 15:2; 13:8-10). In Colossians 3:12, Paul listed characteristics that each Christian should develop in his or her lives: tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering and forgiveness. In verse 14, Paul said that the greatest characteristic each Christian should develop is “agape” love.

First Corinthians 13 gives a detailed description of love. Verse three teaches that many good works are useless in God’s eyes if love is not the motivation. Paul sums up the description of love in 1 Corinthians 13:13, “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

Questions

1. Why did Boaz go to the gate of the city instead of some other location in the city?
2. What is a plausible explanation for the odd address attributed to Boaz toward the nearer kinsman than himself?
3. Whom did Boaz cause to convene or assemble for the purpose of transacting legal business?
4. What advantage did the legal assembly in Ruth Chapter Four have over contemporary legal proceedings?
5. What about the pending sale of land made it a matter of “community interest”?
6. In what way was Elimelech “brother” to the Jews gathered at the city gate?
7. Comment on the way Boaz carefully and cleverly devised his two-part presentation of information to the kinsman-redeemer who was a closer relative to Naomi and Ruth than himself.
8. Why was Naomi not eligible for participation in the Levirate Marriage?
9. What complicated the transaction of redeeming the land so that the nearer kinsman-redeemer

decided not to redeem the real estate?

10. What symbolic action finalized the legal matters that day at the city gate?
11. Of what were the ten elders and possibly others present at the city gate witnesses that day?
12. Was an oral contract binding on this occasion? If so, how was the oral contract made sure or validated?
13. List one or more blessings realized by Naomi upon the birth of a grandson.
14. List two famous descendants of Obed, doubtless for which the family tree in the Book of Ruth appears.
15. Name the mother of Boaz and how the ancestry of Boaz may have influenced his decision to marry Ruth.

Courageous Lady: Esther

Louis Rushmore

***Special Applications:
Bonnie Rushmore***

Introduction to Esther

Title

The title of the Book of Esther derives from its chief personality, Esther. “The book is named after its principal character, Esther. This is a Persian name and means star. Her Hebrew name was Hadassah, (myrtle) (see Est 2:7)” (*Wycliffe*). However, the volume has born different names.

Bible Characters

Obviously, the principle character is Esther herself, closely followed in importance by Mordecai. In addition, three other named characters are especially essential to the Book of Esther: Haman, Vashti and Ahasuerus.

Inspiration

Hostile Bible critics have especially attacked the inspiration of the Book of Esther, but the original recipients of the volume and the custodians of Old Testament Scripture always received it as inspired of God. “The Jews have always accepted the Book of Esther as canonical” (*Wycliffe*). “The book of Esther has always formed a portion of the Hebrew canon. It is included also among the twenty-two books which, according to Josephus, c. Ap. i. 8, were acknowledged by the Jews...” (*Keil & Delitzsch*). “Of the canonicity of the book there is no question. That there was a distinct guardianship of the Canon by the Jewish priesthood has figured less in recent discussions than it should” (*ISBE*). *McClintock and Strong* says, “Among the Jews this book has always been held in the highest esteem.” Further, no inspired person under either the Old Testament or the New Testament cast any suspicions or complaints upon the Book of Esther.

Critics of the Bible in general and of the Book of Esther in particular defame the Book of Esther because it does not directly mention God. “It should be noted that the Gk. versions of Esther contain 107 extra verses, which do include references to God by name” (*New Bible Dictionary*).

One unusual fact about this book is that it never mentions the name of God. For this reason some people believe Esther has no place in the Bible. They see it as nothing but a fiercely patriotic Jewish book that celebrates the victory of the Jews over their enemies. This harsh criticism is unfair to Esther. A careful reading will reveal that the book does have a spiritual base. Queen Esther calls the people to prayer and fasting (4:16), and God’s protection of His people speaks of His providence. The book also teaches a valuable lesson about the sovereignty of God: although the enemies of the Covenant People may triumph for a season, He holds the key to ultimate victory. (*Nelson’s*)

Michael Hatcher notes that God is apparent in the Book of Esther despite the absence of a direct reference to him. “Even though the name of God is not found in the book of Esther, His hand is seen working behind the scenes to save His people through whom He will send the Savior” (319).

Butler pieces some of the facts about the Book of Esther together that contribute to one’s confidence in the divine inspiration of the volume.

The scientific scholarship of 20 centuries (manuscript discoveries, archaeological discoveries) has amassed an accumulation of evidence to convince any honest student that Esther is truly a part of God’s revelation to man. One of the most significant arguments for the canonicity of the book of Esther is that there is no reasonable explanation for the historic fact of the Feast of Purim as observed by succeeding generations of Jews except that such remarkable events as recorded in this book actually took place there and then.

Author

Though various opinions abound, one cannot be absolutely sure who was the human penman of the Book of Esther, though its divine authorship as far as Bible believers is concerned unquestionably is God. There are other Bible books that do not identify within themselves their respective authors and that modern man does not know who were the respective human penman (e.g., Hebrews). However, each Bible book, passing the so-called tests of canonicity, evidences a divine author. *ISBE* says: "By whom was the book written? This is a point in regard to which no help is afforded us either by the contents of the book or by any reliable tradition." *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* says of the Book of Esther: "The book is anonymous." However, the time during which it was written can be ascertained, and the content gives some clues generally as to who wrote the Book of Esther. "The author was probably a Persian Jew. Familiarity with Persian life and customs forces that conclusion" (Butler 261).

Date

The date for the Book of Esther can be fairly reliably ascertained based on its relationship to the Persian king whom Esther married who also appears in the secular historical record. "Ahasuerus had just returned from his invasion of Greece when the story of Esther begins to unfold" (Doran 192).

It is quite certain that the book was written after 465 BC, for the reign of Xerxes (486 BC-465 BC) is spoken of in the past tense (Est 10:2). But the author shows too intimate a knowledge of the events of Xerxes' reign and of the furnishings of the palace in Shushan (which was destroyed by fire about 435 BC) to permit a date for the book after the time of Artaxerxes I (464 BC-424 BC). (*Wycliffe*)

Therefore, Adam Clarke assigned the writing of the Book of Esther thus: "About...462 before Christ, the history of Esther begins..." Clarke is also famous for assessing how various Bible events correspond to other important Bible and secular history events.

Year from the Creation, according to Archbishop Usher, 3540. – Year before the birth of Christ, 460. ... Year since the flood of Noah, 1904. ... Year from the vocation of Abram, 1458. ... Year from the foundation of Solomon's temple, 547. – Year since the division of Solomon's monarchy into the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, 511. ... Year since the destruction of the kingdom of Israel by Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria, 258. ... Year from the destruction of Solomon's temple by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, 125. -- Year since the publication of the famous edict of Cyrus, king of Persia, empowering the Jews to rebuild their temple, 72. ... Year before the era of the Roman emperors, 433.

Albert Barnes, though, said of the date for the writing of the Book of Esther: "...the earliest date that can reasonably be assigned to the book is 464 BC; and it is, on the whole, most probable that it was composed 20 or 30 years later (444 BC - 434 BC)." *New Unger's Bible Dictionary* reads respecting the date of Esther: "It is to be placed sometime during or near the reign of Artaxerxes Longimanus (c. 464 BC - 425 BC)." Summarized: "The question of date can be answered with greater certainty. The reign of the Persian king Xerxes (Est 1:1, NIV) lasted for about 20 years, beginning about 485 BC So Esther must have been written some time shortly after 465 BC" (*Nelson's*). Butler writes:

The book was evidently written after the death of Ahasuerus (Xerxes). We set this date because 10:2 implies that the official state history of the reign of Ahasuerus had already been written when the book of Esther was composed. Ahasuerus died by assassination in 465 B.C. Scholars have pointed to the absence of any traces of Greek influence either in language or thought as evidence that the book of Esther may *not* be dated any later than 330 B.C. While on the other hand, the intimate and exact knowledge of Persian culture of the fifth century B.C. indicates the most likely date to be somewhere between 460-450 B.C. (261)

To help put the date of the writing of the Book of Esther in a perspective that we can mentally grasp, consider Brenda Rutherford's observation. "Mordecai's great-grandfather Kish, a Benjamite, had been carried away into Babylonian captivity about 114 or 115 years before the book of Esther was written" (588).

Writing Style

The Book of Esther is one of the Old Testament books of history. "This book completes the historical books of the Old Testament" (*ISBE*). It is an historical narrative and lacks paragraphs that might be considered poetical. "The Book of Esther reports on actual events, but it is written like a short story" (*Nelson's*).

Purpose

The purpose of the Book of Esther seems to be make a strong statement about the reliable providence of God, and that God's purposes cannot be thwarted by Satan or his minions. "The purpose of the book is to demonstrate God's providential care of His people in their trials and persecutions and to furnish an explanation of the origin of the important feast of Purim..." (*New Unger's*). Kenneth Jones makes an important observation respecting not only providence in the Book of Esther, but also respecting the very nature of God's providence versus mankind's participation in that providence.

Mordecai suggested the possibility of God's providence in placing Esther in the strategic position that she occupied, but he was not so bold as to assert that it was the case. He said "...who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esth. 4: 14). It is a misconception to assume that providence directs and overrules every decision and act of one's life. (Jones 54)

David O'Connell makes a useful affirmation about providence throughout the Bible, including the contribution realized in the Book of Esther (Rom. 8:28).

The wonderful providence of God is seen all through the Bible. Joseph looked back on his life and told his brothers that even though they had intended their actions for evil, God had used them for good (Gen. 50:20). The whole book of Esther relates to God's providence in putting the right person in the right place at the right time to serve his purpose (Est. 4:14). Paul also addressed this in looking back on his life. The inspired apostle stated that "the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel" (Phil. 1:12). Even Paul's imprisonment worked out for brethren to be more bold "to speak the word without fear" (Phil 1:14). When one considers the enormous amount of suffering that Paul went through (2 Cor. 11:23-29), one sees that Paul must have trusted in God's working everything out for his good. (324)

Messianic Significance

While the Book of Esther is not primarily Messianic, indirectly it has Messianic significance in that Esther is in the family of King David through whom the Messiah came to earth via the Virgin Birth. Therefore, the ten chapter episode in the Book of Esther is another of many wrangles between Satan and God where Satan had high hopes of derailing the long-range providence of God to redeem humanity through the Son of God. Appropriately, *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* says that Esther is "[a] historical book of the Old Testament that shows how God preserved His Chosen People."

History & Customs

The history and customs of the Jewish nation (in exile) and Persia commingle respecting the efforts of Satan through Haman to exterminate God's remnant by manipulating Persian law. In addition, the existence of the Jewish feast, the Feast or Fast of Purim, finds its historical origin in the

events within the Book of Esther. “The Feast of Purim, which is mentioned in II Maccabees 15:36 as being observed about 160 BC, could hardly have been established for no reason at all. The most logical explanation is that it was instituted in commemoration of the events described in this book” (Wycliffe).

A brief reminder as to how the Jews had become displaced in Persia (modern Iran) is in order.

Historical Background. As far back as 722 BC, Israelites from the northern tribes were transplanted as captives to “the cities of the Medes” among other places (2 Kings 17:6). Furthermore, after the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus in 539 BC, some of the Jews who had been transported to Babylonia by Nebuchadnezzar probably moved eastward to Shushan and other cities in Medo-Persia, as Mordecai did (Est 2:5-6). But of the millions of Jews who had been dispersed throughout the Near East, only about 50,000 chose to return to the Promised Land with Zerubbabel and Joshua in 536 BC (Ezra 2:64-67). ... According to Ezra 6:15, the second Temple was completed in 515 BC, in the sixth year of Darius I. It was just thirty-two years later that Xerxes, the son of Darius I, “made a feast unto all his princes and his servants” (Est 1:3). The events of this book cover a period of ten years, from the great feast of Xerxes (483 BC) to the Feast of Purim (473 BC). Sixteen years after the first Feast of Purim, Ezra led his expedition back to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:9). Thus, the events of this book fit in between the sixth and seventh chapters of the Book of Ezra. (Wycliffe)

Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary summarizes the backdrop of history respecting the Book of Esther.

The Book of Esther is valuable historically because it gives us a view of the Jewish people who were scattered throughout the ancient world about 475 BC. The events in the book occurred about 100 years after the leading citizens of the Jewish nation were carried into exile by Babylon in 587 BC. Shortly after the Persians overthrew the Babylonians, they allowed the Jewish exiles to return to their native land. Many did return to Jerusalem, but thousands of Jewish citizens chose to remain in Persia, probably because this had become home to them during their long separation from their native land.

Butler provides some additional incidental, but useful, information regarding the Persia of Esther’s day.

...There were three capital cities in Persia. This made it possible for the emperors to travel throughout their empire and keep “in touch” with their subjects. ...If even those who make the laws could not change them to suit their own fancies, it tended to, make for laws that were more just for everyone. ...In order to create a good economic base for the empire, Persian rulers instituted a standardized currency, built an empire-wide road system and policed it with soldiers so that it was said a woman could travel across the country in safety. They set up a type of “pony express” whereby the emperor could be in touch with information from any part of his empire within almost one week. Every 14 miles along the main roads was an express station where messengers would change horses so they could travel the 1600 miles between Sardis (in Asia Minor or Lydia) and Susa in one week. ...The science of archaeology has provided undeniable evidence of the historical accuracy of the book of Esther.

Practical Use

The most obvious practical use of the Book of Esther pertains to establishing the child of God’s confidence in the providence of God. Secondly, valuable lessons abound respecting appropriate conduct by the children of God, especially under duress. How, then, shall we who have little to no duress respecting our Christian faith arise to the occasions and opportunities to valiantly serve our God? “If God could save an entire nation through one Esther, and spare an entire nation through the

prayers of one Moses, who knows but that our prayers, our godliness, and our dedication to God will go a long way in keeping our nation safe with God?" (Bailey 414).

Lessons

Lessons must include a complete confidence in the providence of God. God purposes that not only He, but His faithful devotees, will prove victorious in the end.

The Book of Esther is a major chapter in the struggle of the people of God to survive in the midst of a hostile world. Beginning with the Book of Genesis, God had made it clear that He would bless His Covenant People and bring a curse upon those who tried to do them harm (Gen 12:1,3). The Book of Esther shows how God has kept this promise at every stage of history. Just as Haman met his death on the gallows, we can trust God to protect us from the enemy, Satan, and to work out His ultimate purpose of redemption in our lives. (*Nelson's*)

Further, beauty and opportunity to enjoy the good life cannot be allowed to interfere with being all that we can and ought to be as faithful children of God. Another lesson is that we ought to serve God despite any inconvenience or peril that may trouble us.

Still another lesson from the Book of Esther is the godliness we may instill in others who will perform invaluable service to God and his kingdom.

The success stories of godly young are actually success stories of godly parents. When we read of Joseph, we are also reading of Jacob and Rachel; when we read of Moses, we are reading of Amram and Jochebed; when we read of Esther, we are reading of Mordecai; and when we read of Timothy, we are reading also of Lois and Eunice. God's concern for parental responsibility can clearly be seen in the numerous passages of scripture which refer to training children. (Vaughn 26)

The story of Esther is also a story of successful, godly womanhood, versus womanhood in ruin. "The Bible is filled with examples of women and their dedicated lives. There is Deborah, who was a judge and prophetess (Judg. 4:5). There is the mother of Samson (Judg. 13:93). Naomi, Ruth, Hannah the mother of Samuel, Vashti (Est. 1:11), Esther, and many, many others whose lives teach valuable spiritual lessons" (Laws 14).

Esther used her crown, Dorcas used her needle, and Lydia used her home. All Lois and Eunice had in their hands was a baby boy, but what a blessing Timothy was to the early church, and what an inspiration to us today. What is in your hand? Whatever it is, give of your best to the Master. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might" (Eccl. 9:10). (Elkins 430)

There were a number of Jewish women who gained prominence outside the home: Deborah, Esther, Miriam, and Huldah for example. In studying their lives, it is, therefore, abundantly evident that the God who made woman, endowed her not only with a spiritual personality, but also with considerable intellect, sensitivity, and will. Then he gave her the cause and occasion to demonstrate them. It is also clear that God placed man in the dominant role, with woman as his help-meet, not to be trodden upon, but loved and respected as an individual. (Harris 357)

Esther demonstrated that one's good deeds and influence can have further than imagined affect for good that actually affects others, perhaps people with whom one is personally unfamiliar. "Esther is another woman whose influence had a direct bearing on the outcome of one entire nation" (Cates 812).

Incidentals

Not sure where else to record the following information in the preceding headings, yet curious enough to warrant inclusion somewhere in our consideration of the Book of Esther, please consider:

Fragments of every book except Esther have been identified there [Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran]. ... The New Testament cites from all books of the O.T. except Obadiah, Nahum, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Zephaniah, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Yet not any N.T. speaker or writer hints that any matter or any book of the O.T. is unreliable or unauthoritative. This is one basis upon which we accept the O.T. as authoritative. ... Some few books like Esther and the Song of Songs do not contain the name of God; do not refer to religious exercises beyond fasting; and also do not make explicit claims to be authoritative. Yet they also form a significant part of the totality of the Old Testament. (Lewis 25-27)

“The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1946 has brought to light a great deal of information regarding the ancient scriptures. Parts of every book of the Old Testament [except Esther] have been found in the caves” (Pryor 377).

Further, this handy categorization of Bible books may prove helpful, not only regarding the nature of the Book of Esther, but all Bible books.

The following simple outline is immensely helpful in recognizing how the Bible is organized: Old Testament 1. Law of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) 2. History of Israel (Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings, I Chronicles, II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther) 3. Poetry (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon) 4. Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel) 5. Minor Prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) One can easily remember the number of books in each section with the easy count of 5, 12, 5, 5, 12. A knowledge of these divisions will always be helpful in understanding the content and structure of the scriptures. New Testament 1. Life of Christ (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) 2. History of Church (Acts) 3. Specific Epistles (Romans, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I Thessalonians, II Thessalonians, I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews) 4. Generic Epistles (James, I Peter, II Peter, I John, II John, III John, Jude) 5. Prophecy (Revelation) (Highers 1-2)

Winfred Clark, likewise, provides a tidbit of information to ponder what significance and application may possibly be made today. “Ruth was a Gentile who comes into the royal line from a far country. Esther was a Jew in a far country who marries into a Gentile family” (45). Maggie Colley notes: “The five Bible maidens who are called beautiful are all from different periods of time and lived under dissimilar conditions. They are: Rebekah, Rachel, Tamar (David’s daughter), Abishag, and Esther” (762). Kirk Brothers adds: “Esther and the apostle Paul (Saul) were from this tribe” (Brothers 20).

Conclusion

Easton’s Bible Dictionary well summarizes several particulars of the Book of Esther.

The authorship of this book is unknown. It must have been obviously written after the death of Ahasuerus (the Xerxes of the Greeks), which took place 465. The minute and particular account also given of many historical details makes it probable that the writer was contemporary with Mordecai and Esther. Hence we may conclude that the book was written probably about 444-434, and that the author was one of the Jews of the dispersion. This book is more purely historical than any other book of Scripture; and it has this remarkable peculiarity that the name of God does not occur in it from first to last in any form. It has, however, been well observed that “though the name of God be not in it, his finger is.” The book wonderfully exhibits the providential government of God.

Smith’s Bible Dictionary adds: “**Es’ther** (*a star*), the Persian name of HADASSAH (*myrtle*), daughter of Abihail, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite. ... The Jews still commemorate this deliverance in the yearly festival Purim, on the 14th and 15th of Adar (February, March).”

The incidents surrounding Joseph and, much later, Esther are two of the most outstanding biblical demonstrations of divine providence. “No study of providence would be complete without a reference to the Old Testament narratives concerning Joseph and Esther” (Jackson 269). “Joseph hurt; but God providentially worked in his behalf. Esther hurt; but God, providentially worked in her behalf. When I hurt, God providentially works for me. How assuring is Romans 8:28 and 2 Corinthians 4:17” (Winkler *Where* 462).

The Book of Esther, companion with some other Old Testament volumes, escapes mention in the New Testament. “All but eight books of the Hebrew Bible are quoted in the New Testament. The books not cited are Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Ezra, Nehemiah, Obadiah, Nahum, and Zephaniah” (Winkler *Restore* 526).

Although the Book of Esther does not directly mention God, God is clearly on every page and behind the plot of the entire volume.

The Old Testament story of Esther illuminates this issue. It is a most unusual book in our Bibles for it never once mentions “God,” “the Lord,” “prayer,” “worship,” “word of God,” or “the Law.” It is so devoid of explicit religious references that it could probably be approved by the American court system for use in public schools! Yet, from the perspective of faith, it is clear that God was directing the events in Esther’s life. Though his actions were certainly not as clear and obvious as the miracles of Jesus, they still drive us to the conclusion that God was orchestrating the events and saving his people. (McLarty 267)

Finally, the usefulness of the Book of Esther includes biblical information not elsewhere available in Scripture. “Esther is the only record we have of those years between the rebuilding of the temple after the first expedition under Zerubbabel to the second expedition under Ezra. The completion of the Restoration is recorded in the book of Nehemiah” (Luper 174).

Questions

1. Name five principle characters in the Book of Esther.
2. Despite some critics’ complaints against the Book of Esther, how can we be assured that it is an inspired Old Testament book?
3. What does the Book of Esther not directly mention that fuels critics of this Bible book?
4. List two activities of humans and one activity of God evidenced within the Book of Esther that indicate indirect references to God.
5. What Jewish feast has no explanation for its origin without acceptance of the Book of Esther?
6. Though the human penman of the Book of Esther is not known for certain, the author was probably a _____.
7. True or False. The Book of Esther was probably written shortly following the death of Ahasuerus.
8. About how many years after creation was the Book of Esther written?
9. About how many years before the birth of Jesus Christ was the Book of Esther written?
10. What is the purpose of the Book of Esther, besides its historical value?
11. What is the modern name for the land of Persia?
12. True or False. Persia had three capital cities.
13. True or False. Currency had not been developed yet by the time of the Persian Empire.
14. True or False. The Persians had their own version of “Pony Express.”
15. True or False. Though we believe that the Book of Esther is divinely inspired, it is obvious from

- archaeological discoveries that the Book of Esther is historically inaccurate.
16. True or False. God does not expect a child of God to risk his or her life in serving him.
 17. True or False. Parents can contribute little to the good of others by the way in which they rear their children.
 18. True or False. The Bible says little about faithful women who served God.
 19. True or False. As long as a woman fulfils the role that God intended for her in the home (if she is married or has children), she may gain some prominence outside the home.
 20. What relationship does the Book of Esther have to the Dead Sea Scrolls?
 21. List the eight Old Testament books that are not mentioned in the New Testament.
 22. In what category of Old Testament books is the Book of Esther included?
 23. List the five Bible maidens who are called beautiful.
 24. From what tribe was Esther?
 25. What does the name Esther mean?
 26. When is the Jewish Feast of Purim observed?
 27. Who besides Esther is an outstanding demonstration of God's providence?
 28. The history recorded in the Book of Esther transpires between the expeditions of what two religious leaders back to Jerusalem?

Chapter One

1:1 “Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus, (this is Ahasuerus which reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces:)”

“From India even unto Ethiopia” This description of territory over which Ahasuerus (Xerxes) reigned may be mentioned, in part, to distinguish this king from other kings of similar names among the Persians. The mere size of the Persian kingdom under Xerxes is hard to imagine, but maintaining control over the same was no easy challenge. “It had become an over-grown kingdom, which in time would sink with its own weight, and, as usual, would lose its provinces as fast as it got them” (Henry). Coffman quotes another respecting archaeological and historical validation of references to the vast lands over which Xerxes ruled. “A foundation tablet has been recovered from Xerxes’ palace at Persepolis which lists both India and Ethiopia as provinces of Xerxes’ realm. Also Herodotus mentioned that both the Ethiopians and the Indians paid tribute to Xerxes.”

The Hebrew word translated “India” refers to the Indus River (Butler 273), the headwaters of which are in Tibet but flows (with its tributaries) through both Pakistani and Indian controlled areas of Kashmir before flowing most of its course through Pakistan and emptying into the Arabian Sea.

“An hundred and seven and twenty provinces” The “provinces” “are governmental districts” and amount to “a division of the kingdom into geographical regions, according to the races inhabiting the different provinces” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

The expanse of territory ruled by Ahasuerus (Xerxes) and the number of provinces appear again in Esther 8:9. Given the vastness of the geography over which Xerxes wielded control, Jews living anywhere from India to Ethiopia were both imperiled by the rash law enacted by the king at the bidding of Haman, as well as rescued from certain death by the subsequent and countermanding law of the king at the incitation of Esther and Mordecai. Satan may well have reveled in the anticipated extinction or wholesale genocide of the Jewish race at this juncture in history. Had Satan’s minion, Haman, prevailed and the Jews were annihilated, the prophesied Messiah as a descendant of David could not have come to earth through the vehicle of the virgin birth.

Butler notices in his commentary the suspicious conditions under which the Persian kings made some of the most important or far-reaching decisions (e.g., to wage war against Greece, to annihilate the Jewish race, to allow the Jews to defend themselves). “This was the setting and these were the circumstances surrounding critical decisions made by the emperor Xerxes” (276).

1:2 “That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace”

“Sat on the throne” *Keil and Delitzsch* notes the special references to Persian kings and the their thrones respecting an emphasis on “being seated on the throne with royal authority. Thus the Persian kings are always represented upon a raised seat or throne, even on journeys and in battle.” Persian kings had their thrones transported to battle sites where they sat on their respective thrones in full command by regal authority of their armies as they waged war.

“Shushan” “Shushan (or Susa) was one of the main capitals of the Persian Empire, the others being Ecbatana (Ezra 6:1-2) and Persepolis. To this city Daniel was once carried in a vision (Dan 8:2); and later Nehemiah served there as Artaxerxes’ cupbearer (Neh 1:1; 2:1)” (*Wycliffe*). Coffman lists four capital cities of the Persians: “There were four capitals of Persia; and the king, at times, reigned in each of them. These were, ‘Shushan, Babylon, Ecbatana, and Persepolis.’” *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* states that Shushan was “the favourite winter residence of the Persian kings.”

“Palace” Butler comments that the word translated “palace” really means “fortress” (274). However, naturally there was a palace in the city. “The ancient palace of Susa has been recently

disinterred from an incumbent mass of earth and ruins; and in that palace, which is, beyond all doubt, the actual edifice referred to in this passage, there is a great hall of marble pillars” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*).

1:3 “In the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him:”

“In the third year of his reign” Commentators suppose that the assembly of persons under consideration here pertains to internal preparation for what proved to be a failed assault on Greece to extend yet further the domain of Persia. “In this year, 483 BC, Xerxes assembled the governors of provinces at Susa, in connection with his contemplated expedition against Greece” (Barnes). “This feast (literally, a drinking feast) took place in the year 483/482 B.C., and it was certainly the one referred to by Herodotus (7,8), in which Xerxes laid plans for the great invasion of Greece” (*Wycliffe*).

“Feast” “This ‘feast’ was, in Hebrew, a *mishetteh*. *Mishetteh* is from a root word meaning, to drink wine; hence it is a banquet whose main feature is a drinking bout (cf. 1:7-8)” (Butler 275).

“The power of Persia and Media” The order of the two aligned clans to make this nation relates to which one at a given time was dominant. “In the days of Cyrus, Media was mentioned before Persia (Dan 6:8), but now Persia was far more prominent in the dual monarchy” (*Wycliffe*)

1:4 “When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even an hundred and fourscore days.”

“Riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty” Ancient Persians are famous for extravagance and flamboyant display. Who among those principals gathered in the midst of such manifestation of regal power and wealth would offer caution that the king of all the Persian domain could not dominate Greece also? “The emperor’s ‘image building’ had also the pragmatic motive of ‘psyching’ his fighting force up for the coming invasion of Greece” (Butler 275).

“An hundred and fourscore days” The overall period during which principal political leaders and military commanders throughout the Persian Empire cycled through Shushan for an audience with the king involved six months. Commentators generally agree that Xerxes did not leave his kingdom defenseless and chaotic by assembling his chief governing servants and his generals of the armed forces at one time in one place.

1:5-6 “And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king’s palace; 6 Where were white, green, and blue, hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble: the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black, marble.”

“When these days were expired, the king made a feast...seven days” An obvious distinction occurs between the 180 days and the feast with which the extended period was climaxed and concluded.

“Unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace” Butler comments: “The feasting passion of the Persians was insatiable. Some of these feasts had as many as 15,000 guests at one time...” (275).

“White, green, and blue, hangings” *Keil & Delitzsch* writes that white, green and blue were “the royal colours of the Persians.”

“The beds were of gold and silver” The beds were couches on which guests reclined while attending a feast.

“A pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black, marble” The pavement refers to a mosaic floor.

The spade of archaeology continues to provide independent validation of the biblical, historical record, including the splendor Xerxes flaunted in Shushan.

It must be mentioned as a remarkable confirmation of the truth of this record, which the Providence of God has furnished to the church in this sceptical age, that Susa, like Nineveh has recently been exhumed from the accumulated rubbish of ages, and the very spot where the royal festivities were held has, within the last few years, been actually revealed. There have been discovered the remains of the ancient palace of Shushan, some of the marble columns in the garden, and the small coloured stones or painted tiles which formed the tessellated pavement. That pavement is still in existence; and in the marble pillars in the sculpture, and the other relics of royal grandeur that here been found lying about the place, there has been obtained an unexpected confirmation of the truth of this singular record. (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*)

1:7-8 “And they gave them drink in vessels of gold, (the vessels being diverse one from another,) and royal wine in abundance, according to the state of the king. 8 And the drinking was according to the law; none did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man’s pleasure.”

“Gave them drink” Duly noted, the so-called feast under consideration here was less eating and a lot more drinking of alcoholic beverages. “There is reason to believe from this account, as well as from Est 5:6; 7:2,7-8, where the drinking of wine occupies by far the most prominent place in the description that this was a banquet rather than a feast” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary*). Simply put, this feast was “a drinking bout” (Butler 275).

“Vessels of gold” The worldly affluence especially ancient Persian kings sought to flaunt included furnishing some of the most expensive chalices from which to drink their beverages.

“Vessels being diverse one from another” Commentators agree that the Persian demonstration of luxury included at their flamboyant feasts drinking from many different and unique goblets.

“None did compel...according to every man’s pleasure” Adam Clarke comments that unlike often the ancient custom at feasts, on this occasion, guests were not required to match drink for drink with their companions in order to continue in the part. “Among the Greeks, each guest was obliged to keep the round, or leave the company: hence, the proverb...Drink or begone.” Barnes observes: “An exception to the ordinary practice of compulsory drinking had been made on this occasion by the king’s order.”

1:9 “Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to king Ahasuerus.”

“Vashti” Commentators agree that the name Vashti meant beautiful woman.

“Made a feast for the women” The previous references to the feast pertained to males only. Parallel to the feast for the men, Vashti provided a feast for the women.

“In the royal house” The respective locations of the two feasts were nearby but the male and female guests did not commingle; the feast for the men was outdoors (in the palace garden) and the feast for the women was indoors (in the palace chambers). “Since the women of the East never mingle with the men in public, Vashti made a feast for the Persian ladies by themselves, and while the men were in the court of the garden, the women were in the royal house” (Clarke). “That there was no mixed dancing; for the gentlemen and ladies were entertained asunder, not as in the feast of Belshazzar, whose wives and concubines drank with him (Dan 5:2), or that of Herod, whose daughter danced before him. Vashti feasted the women in her own apartment; not openly in the court of the garden, but in the royal house, v. 9” (Henry).

“This statement serves as an introduction to the scene which follows” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

1:10-11 “On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king,

11 To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on."

"On the seventh day" "As the feast-days advanced, the drinking was more freely indulged in, so that the close was usually marked by great excesses of revelry" (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*). "On the last day of the feast, the inebriated king (Judg 16:25; 2 Sam 13:28) sent his seven chamberlains (or eunuchs; cf. Est 1:12,15), who constituted his means of communication with the harem, to fetch Vashti" (*Wycliffe*)

"When the heart of the king was merry with wine" This is a colloquial expression referring to the king's intoxication or drunkenness, and as *Keil & Delitzsch* notes, it compares with similar references in 2 Samuel 13:28 and Judges 16:25.

"Seven chamberlains" No significance can certainly be drawn from the names or number of these styled as "chamberlains," but they were apparently eunuchs since they served to communicate between the king and his wife or harem.

"With the crown royal...her beauty..." Comparable to flaunting his *other possessions* by which his wealth and worldly success were evident, Xerxes wanted to flaunt before all present the exquisite beauty of his queen or chief wife. According to the Targum, the Xerxes required that Vashti appear before the drunken assembly of males and her drunken king wearing only her crown, otherwise nude (Clarke); the Targum is "an Aramaic translation or paraphrase of a portion of the Old Testament" (*Merriam-Webster*). Butler also observes that "[t]he Jewish Talmud and other Jewish commentators think the command to be that Vashti should be brought in with *only* the royal crown, that is, naked" (277). The Talmud is a "collection of books and commentary compiled by Jewish rabbis from A.D. 250 AD-500" (*Nelson's*).

Considering the sensual appetite for alcoholic beverages already embraced in the so-called feast, it would be but a little extension of such sensual appetite for the king to make such an unreasonable request and affront to eastern modesty. Barnes writes that the king's command was "evidently related as something strange and unusual. Otherwise, the queen would not have refused to come." The *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary* records an excellent assessment of the circumstance at hand.

These were the eunuchs who had charge of the royal harem. The refusal of Vashti to obey an order which required her to make an indecent exposure of herself before a company of drunken revellers was becoming both the modesty of her sex and her rank as queen; because, according to Persian customs, the queen, even more than the wives of other men, was secluded from the public gaze: and had not the king's blood been heated with wine, or his reason overpowered by force of offended pride, he would have perceived that his own honour as well as hers was consulted by her dignified conduct.

1:12 "But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains: therefore was the king very wrath, and his anger burned in him."

Matthew Henry in his commentary supposes that Vashti's refusal to come as summoned and Xerxes' subsequent open anger dampened the boisterous celebration, embarrassing the king and bringing an uneasiness to each guest. Refuse, though, Vashti did. With Butler we must agree that one can only speculate why she refused. We can imagine a number of valid reasons for which a modest, God-fearing person might refuse such a demand, but we do not know why Vashti refused. The feast she sponsored for the women was characteristically the same kind, primarily drinking

Vashti's Modesty

First Timothy 2:9 instructs women to dress in modest apparel. The Greek word for modest in this passage is "kosmikos," meaning "orderly, i.e. decorous:" (*Biblesoft's*). This definition does not describe what is considered modest dress. However, God has not left us wondering if certain clothing is modest or immodest. Genesis Chapter Two clearly defines modest dress. When Adam and Eve sinned, they discovered their nakedness and made aprons of fig leaves. God

alcoholic beverages, as the feast hosted by the king for the men. At the very least, as Butler notes, Vashti refused because she was to comply with the king's intemperate order, whereby she suffered reduction to the low level of a prostitute, never again would she be able to command the respect due her as both queen and wife to the king. It was actually in Vashti's as well as Xerxes' best interest that she not comply with the summons; however, she could have suffered death to save the embarrassment to the king, and did suffer royal divorce or banishment. The Book of Esther revolves around, first, the search for a replacement, beautiful queen. Coffman interjects that Vashti on this dated occasion was probably pregnant with and soon to birth Artaxerxes I.

1:13-15 “Then the king said to the wise men, which knew the times, (for so was the king's manner toward all that knew law and judgment: **14** And the next unto him was Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, which saw the king's face, and which sat the first in the kingdom;) **15** What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law, because she hath not performed the commandment of the king Ahasuerus by the chamberlains?”

“Wise men...” “Wise men” were consultants to the king. “These wise men are v. 13 designated as those ‘who knew the times,’ i.e., astrologers and magi, who give counsel according to celestial phenomena; comp. the wise men of Babylon, Dan 2:27; 5:15; Isa 44:25; 47:13; Jer 50:35. ... These seven princes are the seven king's counsellors of Ezra 7:14...” (*Keil & Delitzsch*). Barnes denies that the persons under consideration were astrologers. “Not ‘astrologers,’ who were unknown in Persia; but rather men of practical wisdom, who knew the facts and customs of former times.”

“Which saw the king's face” “They who see the face of the king, i.e., are allowed direct intercourse with him” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

“What shall we do” Through the king's request for advice and the subsequent advice offered, the occasion was promoted to a circumstance of widespread domestic and national crisis (see *Wycliffe*). Butler puts the situation into perspective.

When Vashti disobeyed the emperor's order, panic ensued. The image he had built for himself by this grandiose feast was destroyed in one stroke. It was such an unprecedented response, the emperor did not know how he should act. He knew the queen's actions

clothed them in coats made from animal skins. The coats covered both male and female from the shoulders to the knees. Since God portrayed modesty from the beginning of time and did not alter that description, it still stands today. God's purpose to cloth Adam and Eve was to cover their nakedness; short shorts or skirts, low cut tops, see through clothing and skin tight clothing are considered immodest in God's eyes.

Some try to justify clothing choices according to the circumstances in which the clothing is worn. Thus, in their eyes, God's standard for modesty does not apply at the beach, pool, sports, etc. Paul told Timothy that godly women are to dress in modest apparel. He did not make an exception for certain locations.

Husbands and fathers, as heads of the home, it is your responsibility to ensure your wife and daughters are dressed modestly when in public. You best know what an immodestly dressed woman does to the thoughts and desires of men. Why would you encourage your loved ones to expose themselves in such a manner?

Currently clothing styles make it difficult for godly women to dress modestly. With effort and creativity, women can dress stylishly and be modest. It may take some work, but if women want to be pleasing to God, they will make the effort.

Queen Vashti refused to come before the King at his drunken brawl improperly clothed, and we must dress modestly when in public. She was willing to be executed for refusing to obey the king. Are you willing to lose your soul “to be comfortable in the heat,” for a few admiring looks from strange men or to fit in with the crowd?

would be known sooner or later throughout the empire. Along with the gossip must go a story of the emperor handling the situation. But how shall it be handled? He hastily convened a meeting with his “wise” men. These are well-known men who are “next unto him” and probably would be likened to our President’s “cabinet members.” They were not astrologers or magi as the Talmud thinks. They are men learned in the laws and customs of Persian government—familiar with all precedents set in the past and presently having the power of law.

“According to the law” Clarke identifies these men as essentially lawyers to the king respecting the king’s question to them about Persian law.

1:16-18 “And Memucan answered before the king and the princes, Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people that are in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus. 17 For this deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported, The king Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not. 18 Likewise shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king’s princes, which have heard of the deed of the queen. Thus shall there arise too much contempt and wrath.”

First, discussion centers on the anticipated, far-reaching ramifications of Vashti’s disobedience of her husband, the king. Butler surmises that the real problem was not how women in the Persian Empire might react respecting Vashti’s disobedience, but how men throughout the kingdom might react. “Vashti’s defiance caused more of a stir in the hearts of men of the empire than in the women. The contempt and wrath Memucan feared was that of the men of the empire” (Butler).

1:19-20 “If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, That Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she. 20 And when the king’s decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all his empire, (for it is great,) all the wives shall give to their husbands honour, both to great and small.”

Next, a proposal is put forth and considered whereby the affect of Vashti’s disobedience might be both duly punished and prevented from encouraging other men’s wives to disobey their husbands.

“Royal commandment...” The spokesman for the king’s counselors advised that “an irrevocable edict is to be published decreeing the divorce of Queen Vashti, and this law published throughout the whole realm, that all wives may show honour to their husbands” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

1:21-22 “And the saying pleased the king and the princes; and the king did according to the word of Memucan: 22 For he sent letters into all the king’s provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man should bear rule in his own house, and that it should be published according to the language of every people.”

“Every people after their language” “The practice of the Persians to address proclamations to the subject-nations in their own speech, and not merely in the language of the conqueror, is illustrated by the bilingual and trilingual inscriptions of the Achaemenian monarchs, from Cyrus to Artaxerxes Ochus, each inscription being of the nature of a proclamation” (Barnes). The sheer practical aspect of addressing subject nations in their native languages is inescapable. To use the language of the conquering nation for communication to subject nations would essentially bring to the surface already painful awareness of that subjection. Besides, communication in the language of the recipients promised better understanding more quickly and corresponding compliance also more quickly.

Halley and others held the opinion that one of the last actions of Xerxes before he left on that four-year campaign against Greece was the deposition of Vashti, and that, “He did

not marry Esther until four years later in 478 B.C., after he returned from the Grecian campaign.” This accounts for the four-year gap between this chapter and the next one. This conclusion is fully supported by the writings of Herodotus. (Coffman)

Vashti disappears from the biblical record and little more of her is known in the secular, historical record.

What happened to Vashti? There is no record. So far as we know, Vashti was never given an opportunity to speak in her own defense. Nor do we find anyone else speaking out on her behalf. Her fate was decided according to the whim of an egotistical and intemperate tyrant. Jewish tradition believes she was executed. The history of deposed kings and queens of the East would substantiate that tradition. (Butler 283)

Questions

1. The dominion of King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) extended east to west from what two countries?
2. How many provinces or geographical divisions were within the Persian Empire when Xerxes ruled?
3. Given the great expanse of the Persian Empire, how endangered were the Jews when later in the Book of Esther a Persian law prompted the extermination of Jews?
4. What would have been the affect for humanity for all time had all of the Jews been killed at this time in history?
5. How literal were statements that the Persian kings ‘sat on their thrones’?
6. How many capital cities were their in ancient Persia?
7. Describe the “feast” mentioned in Esther Chapter One.
8. The great feast hosted by Xerxes was in preparation for what significant event?
9. What is the significance of the order in which the names Medes and Persians appear when referring to their kingdom?
10. How many months did the overall feast continue while political and military leaders from around the Persian Empire gained an audience before the Emperor?
11. A Persian feast might have how many guests at one time?
12. What contribution has archaeology made to the account of Esther Chapter One?
13. How did the circumstances under which men drank at Xerxes’ feast on this occasion differ from how drinking at banquets usually occurred anciently?
14. How can one know that the king’s feast was for male guests and not female guests?
15. What does Scripture means when it reads “the king was merry with wine”?
16. True or False. No one knows for sure why Queen Vashti refused to be summoned to the King Ahasuerus’ feast.
17. True or False. Queen Vashti probably knew that she could face severe punishment for not obeying her husband king.
18. True or False. The phrase “which saw the king’s face” refers to those sitting around the king observing the expression on his face when he was informed that Vashti refused to come.
19. What predictable affect did Vashti’s refusal to be summoned have on the festivities?
20. What was the reason given for harsh punishment of Vashti?
21. What was the purpose of making Vashti’s punishment a “royal commandment”?

22. In what language was the Persian decree from the king to the various countries under his control?
23. What is the explanation for a perceived gap between Esther chapters One and Two?
24. What was usually the fate of disgraced royalty?

Chapter Two

2:1 “After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her.”

“Wrath...appeased, he remembered Vashti” Not inebriated anymore, aware of both his rash command of Vashti and his equally rash, harsh treatment of her, the king desired to resume a favorable relationship with Vashti. “The king found himself a victim of his own drunken and extravagant decree against Vashti; but there was nothing he could do about it” (Coffman). Evidently, the king’s counselors earlier had anticipated this, and for that reason they previously sought a royal law from the king respecting deposing Vashti, knowing that such a law was irrevocable or permanent. Consequently, to remove the king’s concentration and stewing about the circumstances surrounding Vashti, the king’s counselors changed the subject and directed the king to entertain the selection of a new queen from among the most beautiful virgins in his empire. “When Xerxes longed for Vashti again, it was proposed that a new queen be chosen for him from among the most beautiful virgins in the land” (*Wycliffe*)

On recovering from the violent excitement of his revelry and rage, the king was pierced with poignant regret for the unmerited treatment he had given to his beautiful and dignified queen. But, according to the law, which made the word of a Persian king irrevocable, she could not be restored. His counselors, for their own sake, were solicitous to remove his disquietude, and hastened to recommend the adoption of all suitable means for gratifying their royal master with another consort of equal or superior attractions to those of his divorced queen. (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*)

2:2-4 Then said the king’s servants that ministered unto him, Let there be fair young virgins sought for the king: 3 And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the palace, to the house of the women unto the custody of Hege the king’s chamberlain, keeper of the women; and let their things for purification be given them: 4 And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so.

“Let there be fair young virgins sought...in all the provinces of his kingdom” There were likely two items that greatly troubled King Xerxes about this time, his feelings toward Vashti that Verse One declares and his ill-fated attempt to conquer Greece. The king’s counselors greatly desired to redirect the thoughts of the king lest regarding either event over which he was troubled the king considered the culpability of his closest advisors.

...the king’s desire for Vashti must have become known while he was still engaged in the great campaign against Greece (481 BC - 479 BC). 2-4. Realizing that the restoration of Vashti would spell doom for them...the princes abandoned the precedent of providing a queen from among their own daughters, and suggested that the king choose a new queen from among the most beautiful virgins in the empire. (*Wycliffe*)

The Persian monarch could legally choose a wife only from six noble families (Herodotus, iii., 84). But, of course, in the exercise of absolute power, he could break through this restriction; and in existing circumstances, irritable, and depressed by the disastrous issue of his expedition into Greece, he was urged by his politic counselors, who were desirous of diverting his mind from gloomy reflections, to search the kingdom for a queen. (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*)

“Hege the king’s chamberlain” “‘Hege, the king’s eunuch;’ so the Septuagint, the Vulgate, the Targum, and the Syriac. In the Eastern countries the women are entrusted to the care of the eunuchs only” (Clarke)

“Purification”

It is *not* the Hebrew word used to legislate religious or ceremonial purification, therefore it probably had to do with some form of beauty treatment such as diet, training in royal behavior, anointment of the body with perfume, and facial make-up. It may also have been a sort of quarantine that would allow time for any latent disease or blemish to show up before the emperor made his selection. (Butler 287-288)

“Queen instead of Vashti” The queen was the primary wife usually selected from among royalty, whereas secondary wives or concubines comprised the harem. Special privileges attended the chief wife or queen that were not enjoyed by secondary wives. “This was the usual way in which the harem or seraglio was furnished: the finest women in the land, whether of high or low birth, were sought out, and brought to the harem. They all became the king’s concubines: but one was raised, as chief wife or sultana, to the throne; and her issue was specially entitled to inherit.” (Clarke)

2:5-6 Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite; 6 Who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away.

“Mordecai” *Wycliffe* observes that with the introduction of Mordecai we have in the Book of Esther by now emphasis upon the two chief and most laudable characters in the volume. “The true hero and heroine of the book are now introduced. Mordecai, of the tribe of Benjamin, was the great-grandson of a man named Kish, who had been carried off to Babylon with King Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) in 597 BC. Upon the death of his uncle Abihail (Est 2:15), Mordecai took his uncle’s orphaned daughter into his own home and brought her up.”

Esther and perhaps Mordecai were Jews who were born after the forefathers had been taken away from Judah and Jerusalem into Babylonian captivity. Persia had since conquered Babylon, and now they were members of the Persian Empire.

2:7 And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle’s daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter.

The actual relationship between Esther and Mordecai is disputed among commentators. They may have been first cousins with Mordecai being senior to Esther by about 10 years.

2:8-9 So it came to pass, when the king’s commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was brought also unto the king’s house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women. 9 And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, which were meet to be given her, out of the king’s

Esther Was Beautiful on the Outside and on the Inside

Esther’s beautiful exterior may have initially appealed to King Ahasuerus, but her inward beauty is what held his interest. Hegai, the keeper of the women, saw the inward beauty of Esther when she was brought to him. She was given preferential treatment because of her inward attractiveness.

King Solomon warned, “Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, But a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be

house: and he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the house of the women.

“Many maidens” “There must have been hundreds of young women gathered to the emperor’s palace. The word *ravvoth* means *large number, great number, myriads*” (Butler 291).

“Were gathered” The words “were gathered” indicate the compulsory nature of the episode under consideration.

It seems clear from these verses that this was no ordinary beauty contest. These contestants had not entered by their own choice. The fact that the many were “gathered” and Esther was “taken” indicates they were compelled to be made part of the emperor’s harem. In the Jewish Targums there is a story that Mordecai tried to hide Esther from the emperor’s servants when they came in search of beautiful maidens. Not only were these maidens forced to compete for the emperor’s favor, the losers were probably not allowed to return to their homes but retained in his harem. ...It is doubtful that Esther would have chosen to become a member of Xerxes’ harem. But she had no choice, except death to herself and probably to her family. (Butler 291-292)

“Best place of the house of the women”

Esther and the female servants assigned to her were given preferential treatment, including lodging accommodations. “[H]e took them out of the ordinary rooms and placed them in the best apartments, probably in the state-rooms, where those who were accustomed to be brought to the king used to dwell” (Keil & Delitzsch).

2:10 Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew it.

“Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred” “Since both Persians and Jews were of Semitic origin their physical features were enough alike to present no problem for Esther” (Butler 293).

Wycliffe notes that having not disclosed her ethnicity and corresponding Jewish faith, she doubtless ate food and beverages that were religiously unsuitable.

Unlike Joseph and Daniel, however, she did not identify her nationality, and may therefore have partaken of ceremonially unclean food. Why Mordecai charged her to keep her nationality secret (v. 20) is not easy to determine. Perhaps he feared for her safety (v. 11). Or possibly he was granted by the Lord a special premonition of coming trouble for Israel and the part Esther might play in delivering her people (Est 4:14). (*Wycliffe*)

“Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew it” Commentators ponder with no decisive answer as to why Mordecai advised Esther to conceal her ethnicity. Perhaps Mordecai had some revelation from God or simply pragmatic reasons for the times governed such a course.

praised” (Proverbs 31:30 NKJV). The husband of 300 wives understood what is on the inside is of greater importance than outward beauty.

As Samuel looked for a replacement king for Saul, God said, “But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart’” (1 Samuel 16:7).

When it was Esther’s turn to visit the king, she did not ask for any extra jewels, fancy clothes or perfumes. She readily accepted what Hegai provided since she was less concerned with how she appeared on the outside than with possessing a kind, humble spirit.

Paul discussed women’s clothing with Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:9-11, “in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.” This passage teaches that women should dress modestly – orderly and decorous. However, our emphasis should be on godly behaviors and good works.

Yes, Esther was beautiful to look at, but her true beauty was her meek and quiet spirit.

2:11 And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her.

Mordecai would not have had direct contact with or access to Esther, but parental-like love for his foster daughter prompted him to visit the exterior of Esther's royal confines to inquire of her. Through intermediaries of either eunuchs or female servants they doubtlessly communicated with each other. Besides, Mordecai may well have enjoyed some official capacity in the royal court that facilitated visitation of the palace.

2:12-13 Now when every maid's turn was come to go in to king Ahasuerus, after that she had been twelve months, according to the manner of the women, (for so were the days of their purifications accomplished, to wit, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odours, and with other things for the purifying of the women;) 13 Then thus came every maiden unto the king; whatsoever she desired was given her to go with her out of the house of the women unto the king's house.

"Twelve months" Such a duration of time was prudent to clearly ascertain that the women under consideration were not pregnant by another before the king entertained possible selection from among them to be his queen or otherwise added to his harem. "This space was sufficient to show whether the young woman had been chaste; whether she were with child or not, that the king might not be imposed on, and be obliged to father a spurious offspring, which might have been the case had not this precaution been used" (Clarke).

"Oil of myrrh" "Instead of the oil of myrrh, the Targum says it was the oil of unripe olives, which caused the hair to fall off, and rendered the skin delicate" (Clarke).

2:14-15 In the evening she went, and on the morrow she returned into the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's chamberlain, which kept the concubines: she came in unto the king no more, except the king delighted in her, and that she were called by name. 15 Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her.

"In the evening she went, and on the morrow she returned" "Where are there any sadder words than these? One frightful night in the bed with Ahasuerus, and the next morning relegated to the status of a concubine, never more to see him, unless called by name; and the odds are that he did not even remember the names of half of them. The text states that there were many of these women" (Coffman).

"Required nothing but...appointed" Unlike the other maidens who perhaps lavishly sought to

Esther Showed Humility When Interacting with Others

Humility is "a freedom from arrogance that grows out of the recognition that all we have and are comes from God. ...Jesus is the supreme example of humility... Biblical humility is not a belittling of oneself (Matt 6:16-18; Rom 12:3), but an exalting or praising of others, especially God and Christ (John 3:30; Phil 2:3). A humble person, then, focuses more on God and others than on himself" (*Nelson's*).

Humility is probably one of the most difficult characteristics for Christians to obtain. Modern society teaches that "my wants and needs are greater than your wants and needs." We have become a society of arrogant egotists with little thought how our actions affect those around us. While trying to teach our children the value of self-esteem, we have failed to teach them that humility is coupled with understanding one's value.

Peter taught the need for humility

adorn themselves from the treasures afforded them in the king's palace, Esther contented herself with only the minimum extraneous adornment required of her before presenting herself to the king. "She was not solicitous, as the rest of the maidens were, to set herself off with artificial beauty; she required nothing but just what was appointed for her and yet she was most acceptable" (Henry). "...[S]he obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her, namely, by her modesty and humility" (*Keil & Delitzsch*). Clarke adds the observation: "She left this entirely to her friend Hege, who seems to have been intent on her success. She therefore left her decorations to his judgment alone, and went in that dress and in those ornaments which he deemed most suitable." Barnes supposes that Esther relied more on herself than on the wisdom and discretion of the Hegai. "The other virgins perhaps loaded themselves with precious ornaments of various kinds, necklaces, bracelets, earrings, anklets, and the like. Esther let Hegai dress her as he would." Wycliffe comments:

After an entire year of preparation, the turn of each maiden came to go to the king. For this visit she could have any ornaments, jewelry, or apparel that she wanted. Esther revealed a unique spirit in that she was not concerned to please the king by the "outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel," but by "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Peter 3:3-4).

The whole procedure by an ancient emperor of selecting concubines and wives seems barbaric to us, and decidedly is not at all what God intended for humanity, as evidenced abundantly in both testaments of the Bible.

Each maiden, in the turn appointed her, presented herself before the emperor in the evening, stayed with the emperor that night, and returned on the next day to the "second house of the women." The Persian emperor's harem was apparently divided into three "houses": (1) a royal residence for the queen; (2) a house for the "women" (secondary wives or concubines); and (3) a house for the virgins. On returning from her first visit to the emperor's chambers, a girl ordinarily returned to the "second house" because she was no longer a virgin. It must be assumed that the emperor's purpose in keeping these virgins over night in his chambers was sexual intercourse. The "second house" was under the supervision of Shaashgaz, another of the emperor's eunuchs. Once a maiden had been granted her night with the emperor, she was never permitted to be in his royal chambers again unless the emperor called for her by name. If a young virgin was not chosen as queen, she returned to the harem of concubines for the rest of her life. They were virtual prisoners. They would never be allowed to return to the world outside the palace and marry after consorting with the emperor for that would be degrading to the sovereignty and glory of the emperor. (Butler 296-297)

in 1 Peter 5:5-7, "Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, 'for God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.' Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." James also said we are to "humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up" (James 4:10).

In Colossians 3:1-17, Paul compared the attitude and the behavior of mankind before obeying the Gospel with that of a Christian. After listing the actions of the ungodly, Paul said this is what Christians should do, "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do" (12-13).

Humility is an important characteristic in the life of a Christian that requires one to diligently apply it to his or her life. Let us all strive to apply it to ourselves.

2:16-17 So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus into his house royal in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. **17** And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti.

“**Tebeth**” Clarke assigns “Tebeth” to our calendar corresponding to “our December and January.”

“**Seventh year of his reign**” So far in the Book of Esther, internal dating provides the interval of time between the deposing of Vashti and the coronation of Esther. Secular history, though, provides additional information to explain the time lapse intervening the two events.

It seems strange that a period of four years should intervene between the repudiation of Vashti in the third year of Ahashverosh and the elevation of Esther in the seventh, an interval whose length cannot be adequately accounted for by the statements of the present book. ...The long interval which elapsed between the repudiation of Vashti and the elevation of Esther, can only be satisfactorily explained by the history of the reign of Xerxes; in fact, by the circumstance that his campaign against Greece took place during this time. (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

In the month of December, 479 BC, just four years after his divorce from Vashti, Xerxes made Esther his queen. During those four years, the emperor had hurled one of the greatest armies of ancient history against the Greeks, only to suffer humiliating and crushing defeats at Salamis and Plataea. Esther afforded him a measure of the consolation that he so greatly needed. (*Wycliffe*)

That Grecian campaign was an unqualified disaster for Xerxes: (1) At Thermopylae, a handful of Spartans under Leonidas checked and delayed his mighty army; and (2) later that same year Xerxes’ navy of 1,400 ships was unable to overcome 380 ships of the Greeks in the Battle of Salamis. (3) In 479 B.C., at Plataea, “The bulk of the Persian army was destroyed. Meanwhile, the Greek fleet commanded by the king of Sparta drove the Persian fleet to the Asian mainland at Mycale. Leotychidas, the Spartan king, landed his sailors and marines farther up the coast, destroyed the Persian fleet and inflicted heavy casualties on a supporting army. The Ionians and the Aeolians [populations in western Asia Minor (today, Turkey) until this time under Persian rule] at once rose in revolt, thus ending the Persian invasion of Greece in the final disaster for Persia.” (Coffman)

“**He set the royal crown upon her head...**” “The meaning evidently is, that the king, immediately after their first meeting, bestowed his affections upon Esther in preference to all the women and maidens, and chose her queen” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

The providence of God seems evident in the whole episode under consideration. It was not that God desired or approved of polygamy and lust evidenced by King Xerxes, but that God used circumstances perpetrated by evil persons to further his overall plan for humanity.

It was always thus when God in his infinite wisdom laid his plans to preserve the chosen people from destruction. He sent Joseph to be seated next to the throne of Egypt; he brought up Moses in the palace of Pharaoh and made him an heir to the throne; in the land of their captivity, he made Daniel the third ruler in the kingdom; and now, when Satan would again make a move to destroy Israel, God placed Esther in a strategic position to prevent it; and it happened again with both Ezra and Nehemiah who had earned and received the respect of Artaxerxes; nor can we rule out the very great probability that it was the influence of Esther that, in part at least, had resulted in the honors that came to them. (Coffman)

2:18-19 Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther’s feast; and he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts, accord-

ing to the state of the king. **19 And when the virgins were gathered together the second time, then Mordecai sat in the king's gate.**

“Esther’s feast” The king celebrated the selection of a new queen.

“Made a release to the provinces” *Keil & Delitzsch* notes that this phrase pertains to “either of a remission of taxes or a remission of labour, a holiday.” Not everyone throughout the empire could participate actually in Susa at the feast celebrating the elevation of Esther to queen, but everyone in the kingdom could observe the event through, for instance, a vacation from work to correspond with the day of the feast.

“The virgins were gathered together the second time” Commentators cannot agree to what this phrase has reference. It simply may be a sidebar referring to different times of arrival of maidens from distant parts of the empire, included in previous references but highlighted here to give occasion to mention the deed of Mordecai.

2:20 Esther had not yet shewed her kindred nor her people; as Mordecai had charged her: for Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him.

The placement of information here that Esther’s ancestry remains a non-issue at this time and unknown is important to later unfolding events in the volume.

2:21-23 In those days, while Mordecai sat in the king's gate, two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those which kept the door, were wroth, and sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus. 22 And the thing was known to Mordecai, who told it unto Esther the queen; and Esther certified the king thereof in Mordecai's name. 23 And when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out; therefore they were both hanged on a tree: and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.

“Mordecai sat in the king's gate” To sit at the king’s gate was an euphemism for occupying some official royal function. “Mordecai might have been one of the officers of the king, as the gate was the place where such usually attended to await the king’s call. It is not likely that he was the porter, had he been only such, Haman could have removed him at once” (Clarke).

“Chamberlains...sought to lay hand on the king” Internal upheaval and turmoil within ancient kingdoms was often the way kings were replaced (e.g., even Roman emperors much later). The king’s servants waited for opportunity to murder the king. “Conspiracies inside the palace were ordinary occurrences in Persia. Xerxes was ultimately murdered by Artabanus, the captain of the guard, and Aspamitras, a chamberlain and eunuch” (Barnes).

“Was known to Mordecai...in Mordecai's name” The only reason for the inclusion of this information here is to provide the backdrop and explanation for the elevation of Mordecai later in the book, and the unfolding of God’s plan to thwart the unfolding of Satan’s plan, which was to destroy any possibility of Messianic fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and the salvation of humanity.

This good service which Mordecai did to the government, in discovering a plot against the life of the king, is here recorded, because the mention of it will again occur to his advantage. No step is yet taken towards Haman’s design of the Jews’ destruction, but several steps are taken towards God’s design of their deliverance, and this for one. God now gives Mordecai an opportunity of doing the king a good turn, that he might have the fairer opportunity afterwards of doing the Jews a good turn. (Henry)

With Coffman we must concur that even this event is more than mere coincidence.

“Written in the book of the chronicles before the king” Though not rewarded presently for his part in saving the king’s life, Mordecai’s deed was recorded in the historical annals of the Persian monarch. Later, this leads to the promotion of Mordecai.

All affairs of state were entered into the king's personal chronicles (somewhat like our Presidential Papers) and whenever the king wanted to be reminded of past events they would be read out to him. The information given by Mordecai about the assassination plot was very important information! Xerxes intended that this event be permanently recorded for future reference and use. Xerxes probably did not record it for Mordecai's benefit, but this event later played a crucial part in the survival of Mordecai, Esther and the whole Jewish community (6:1ff). (Butler 305)

Questions

1. Though King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) apparently changed his mind respecting his treatment of Queen Vashti, why did he not simply retain her as his queen?
2. What two things probably troubled King Xerxes as Chapter Two begins?
3. True or False. The king's counselors suggested a beauty pageant of sorts to take the king's mind off of the things that troubled him.
4. How did the selection of candidates for a Persian queen differ on this occasion from the ordinary pool of candidates to be queen?
5. In the context of Chapter Two, to what does the word "purification" mean respecting preparation of the candidates to be queen?
6. Describe the distinction between wives of an ancient king under the system of polygamy.
7. How did Mordecai and Esther happen to be living in a land away from Palestine and controlled by the Persians?
8. What is the other name for Esther?
9. True or False. All the candidates for this beauty pageant of sorts voluntarily participated.
10. True or False. Esther received preferential treatment among the candidates to be queen.
11. True or False. Esther did not have to declare that her race or ethnicity differed from Persians because it was obvious that she did not resemble Persians.
12. True or False. No one knows for sure why Mordecai instructed Esther not to disclose her race or ethnicity.
13. What indicates the parental-type love that Mordecai had for Esther?
14. How many months were the candidates for queen sequestered before presented to the king for possible selection to be queen?
15. True or False. Whereas virgins were kept together in one house, after spending a night with the king, in the morning a maiden (no longer a virgin) went to a second house where secondary wives or concubines lived.
16. True or False. Though other maidens may have selected lavish clothes and expensive jewels with which to adorn themselves in hopes of persuading the king to select them to be queen, Esther did not seek such extravagant adornment.
17. The third house for the king's harem was for whom?
18. True or False. Any maiden not selected to be queen by the king could return to her family or may have chosen to marry another man.
19. At what time of the year did Esther appear before King Xerxes?
20. How many years after deposing Queen Vashti was Esther made queen?

21. What do we call the apparent involvement of God behind the scenes in the Book of Esther or elsewhere in the Bible respecting other Bible characters?
22. How could persons distant from the king's palace participate or observe the coronation of Queen Esther?
23. What is the significance of the reference to sitting in the king's gate?
24. How did King Xerxes finally die?
25. How was Mordecai's involvement in helping the king avoid assassination documented?

Chapter Three

3:1-2 “After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him. **2** And all the king’s servants, that were in the king’s gate, bowed, and revered Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence.”

“After these things” *Wycliffe* provides a relative date for the elevation of Haman and the ensuing events. “According to Est 3:7, the events of this chapter occurred in 474 BC, more than four years after Esther became queen (cf. 2:16).”

“The Agagite” Several commentators suppose that the word “Agagite” relates to the king, Agag, of the Amalekites. King Saul spared his life, but the prophet, Samuel, killed him per the instructions of God (1 Sam. 15:8-33). If Haman were a descendant of Agag, Haman could have had a special disdain for Jews, and given the elevated position just acquired, had opportunity to punish the Jews. However, there is as much reason to suppose other associations for “Agagite” besides referring to Agag of the Amalekites.

Some Jewish tradition would have Haman descended from the Amalekites (of king Saul’s day) whose king was Agag. But the scriptures indicate that when Agag fell, he was the last of his house (1 Sam. 15:33). The Assyrian King Sargon, father of Sennacherib, left an inscription (at Khorsabad) indicating that Agag was a territory adjacent to that of Media. (Butler 308)

“Servants that were in the king’s gate” This phrase refers to “court officials” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

3:3-4 “Then the king’s servants, which were in the king’s gate, said unto Mordecai, Why transgressest thou the king’s commandment? **4** Now it came to pass, when they spake daily unto him, and he hearkened not unto them, that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai’s matters would stand: for he had told them that he was a Jew.”

“They told Haman” “Tale bearers in all generations have deserved the contempt in which they are generally held. These tale bearers were the cause of many thousands of deaths which ultimately resulted from Haman’s hatred. Haman might never have noticed Mordecai’s refusal to bow down, had it not been for the gossips” (Coffman).

“To see whether Mordecai’s matters would stand” Barnes phrases this statement: “whether, that is, his excuse, that he was a Jew, would be allowed as a valid reason for his refusal.”

“For he had told them that he was a Jew” Evidently, what was required that Mordecai refused to do was more than equivalent to a salute or common respect due a dignity (1 Pet. 2:17).

It is obvious from this, that Mordochai had declared to those who asked him the reason why he did not fall down before Haman, that he could not do so because he was a Jew—that as a Jew he could not show that honour to man which was due to God alone. Now the custom of falling down to the earth before an exalted personage, and especially before a king, was customary among Israelites; comp. 2 Sam 14:4; 18:28; 1 Kings 1:16. If, then, Mordochai refused to pay this honour to Haman, the reason of such refusal must be sought in the notions which the Persians were wont to combine with the action, i.e., in the circumstance that they regarded it as an act of homage performed to a king as a divine being... this Mordochai could not do without a denial of his religious faith.” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

Other Jews, likewise, had occasion to obey God rather than man respecting chief homage to God rather than to man (Dan. 3:12; 6:10). Christians, too, must reverence God before mortal men (Acts 5:29).

Wycliffe insightfully speaks to Mordecai's declaration that he was a Jew respecting his refusal to reverence Haman. "Since his loyalty to Jehovah was the basis for his refusal to bow before Haman, he had to divulge his nationality at last. At the time, this must have seemed disastrous to Mordecai; but God ultimately brought greater blessing through it, for he delights not in silent witnesses (cf. Est 8:17)."

3:5-6 "And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath. 6 And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had shewed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai."

"And when Haman saw...full of wrath" "Apparently Haman was not aware of Mordecai's irreverence until told by the other gatekeepers. When Haman saw it for himself he was infuriated. The Hebrew word *chemah* is translated *wrath* and means literally, *on fire, inflamed, burning with anger*" (Butler 310).

"Scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone" Coffman writes that "ashamed to kill just one man, Haman decided to exterminate the whole Israel of God."

"Destroy all the Jews" Haman realized that Mordecai's actions predicated upon his beliefs represented the sentiments of all conscientious Jews. Doubtless, many Jews, out of concern for their safety, would have succumbed to the requirement to render worship to a mere mortal. *Keil & Delitzsch* notes that citizens of other nations likewise in that era also would have refused such a requirement (e.g., Greeks). *Wycliffe* comments respecting Haman's inclusion of all Jews in his master plan to punish Mordecai. "Discovering that Mordecai's refusal to bow was based upon religious motives, Haman realized that nothing less than a nation-wide program would finally solve this problem." "It is very evident that Haman's first reaction was from wounded pride. And if one Jew refused to honor Haman's position, they all would, reasoned Haman, therefore they shall all be slain" (Butler 310).

3:7 "In the first month, that is, the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar."

"Nisan" Clarke identifies Nisan as corresponding "to a part of our March and April." Consequently, modern Jews celebrate the deliverance from certain annihilation in what they call the Feast of Purim. "Present, the Jews keep three days-the 13th, the 14th, and the 15th of Adar-as connected with 'the Feast of Purim;' but they make the 13th a fast, commemorative of the fast of Esther (Est 4:16), and keep the feast itself on the 14th and 15th of Adar. (Barnes) .

"They...the lot" Astrologers cast lots to ascertain which day of the year was best suited for executing the Jews.

The words 'from day to day, from month to the twelfth month,' must not be understood to say, that lots were cast day by day and month by month till the twelfth; but that in the first month lots were at once cast, one after the other, for all the days and months of the year, that a favourable day might be obtained. ...Haman having by means of the lot fixed upon a favourable day for the execution of the massacre, betook himself to the king to obtain a royal decree for the purpose. (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

Haman was bent on destroying the Jews and made his plans to do so before he craftily persuaded the king to be not only complicit but appear to be the prime mover toward that end.

3:8-9 "And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom;

and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. 9 If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries."

"There is a certain people" *Keil & Delitzsch* comment that Haman first maligned the Jews, after which he petitioned the king for a remedy: "...Haman, by exciting the suspicion of the king against the Jews as an exclusive and law-opposing people, obtained from him an edict..." Maligning often precedes ill treatment of God's children (Acts 16:20-21).

"Let it be written" Clarke notes the sly maneuver of Haman to accomplish his design toward Mordecai and the Jews without appearing to be the principle perpetrator. "Let it be enacted that they may all be put to death. By this he would throw all the odium off himself, and put it on the king and his counselors; for he wished the thing to pass into a law, in which he could have but a small share of the blame."

"That they may be destroyed" This was genocide Haman proposed against the Jews virtually everywhere.

He is about to call for the extermination of the whole world-wide Jewish community. "All the provinces of thy kingdom" would include the vast territory from India in the east, to Asia Minor in the west, Ethiopia in the south and the Caucasus Mountains (of southern Russia) in the north. It would include the Jews who had returned to Palestine a hundred years earlier. ...The magnitude of the atrocity is almost incredible when it is realized that Haman is planning to eradicate a whole race of people—all because his pride has been wounded by one man! (Butler 313)

"Ten thousand talents of silver...the king's treasuries" Haman appeals to the king's increase in his personal wealth to peak his interest in the proposal to exterminate the Jews. King Xerxes was guided to make a rash royal decree by inciting his lusts just as formerly occurred regarding his queen, Vashti.

This proposal was very subtly calculated. First Haman casts suspicion on the Jews as a nation scattered abroad and dwelling apart, and therefore unsociable-as refractory, and therefore dangerous to the state; then he promises the king that their extermination will bring into the royal treasury a very considerable sum of money, viz., the property of the slaughtered. (*Keil & Delitzsch*)

Barnes puts some perspective on the amount of money Haman proposes will enrich the king by the murder of the Jews and acquisition of their property. "According to Herodotus, the regular revenue of the Persian king consisted of 14,560 silver talents; so that, if the same talent is intended, Haman's offer would have exceeded two-thirds of one year's revenue..."

Haman guarantees the amount of money that will proceed to the king, Haman counting that his share of the plunder he will receive personally will amply pay the amount he stipulated.

Haman's rage is so consuming he is willing to pay a tremendous bribe to the emperor. Haman's offer is ten thousand talents of silver. This is a sum equivalent to approximately \$10,000,000 U.S. currency. Herodotus estimated the sum equal to the annual revenue in silver of the whole Persian empire. Haman's offer was probably tempting since Xerxes' recent military fiasco in Greece had drained the Persian royal treasury. When Xerxes gave his signet ring to Haman he was allowing Haman to do what he asked with full sanction and authority of the imperial crown. The immediate response of Xerxes to the request of Haman, without any royal questions or investigations into the ethics or practicality of such genocide, reinforces the characterization of Xerxes as an immature, quick-tempered, vacillating despot. (Butler 314-315)

3:10-11 “And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews’ enemy. **11** And the king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee.”

“**The king took his ring from his hand**” Official documents and letters were validated by pressing the king’s signet ring into soft clay, and the royal decrees of the Persians, as noted formerly regarding Vashti, could not be changed; “by the impression of the royal seal the authority of an irrevocable decree” (*Keil & Delitzsch*) against the Jews was effected.

3:12-15 “Then were the king’s scribes called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and there was written according to all that Haman had commanded unto the king’s lieutenants, and to the governors that were over every province, and to the rulers of every people of every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language; in the name of king Ahasuerus was it written, and sealed with the king’s ring. **13** And the letters were sent by posts into all the king’s provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to take the spoil of them for a prey. **14** The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people, that they should be ready against that day. **15** The posts went out, being hastened by the king’s commandment, and the decree was given in Shushan the palace. And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city Shushan was perplexed.”

“**Thirteenth day of the first month**” “Haman, without delay, causes the necessary writings to be prepared, and sent into all the provinces of the kingdom” (*Keil & Delitzsch*). *Wycliffe* cites the day on which this deed was perpetrated: “the thirteenth day of Nisan (April 17, 474 BC).”

“**The letters were sent by posts**” The Persians maintained a sort of pony express by which official mail was distributed throughout the wide expanse of the Persian kingdom.

Herodotus wrote: “Nothing mortal travels so fast as these Persian messengers. The entire plan is a Persian invention; and this is the method of it. Along the whole line of road there are men (they say) stationed with horses, in number equal to the number of days which the journey takes, allowing a man and horse to each day; and these man and horse to each day; and these men will not be hindered from accomplishing at their best speed the distance which they have to go either by snow, or rain, or heat, or by the darkness of night. The first rider delivers his dispatch to the second, and the second passes it to the third; and so it is borne from hand to hand along the whole line, like the light in the torch-race, which the Greeks celebrate to Hephaestus” (8,98). (*Wycliffe*)

The documents were sent out into the provinces of the empire through the Persian postal system. This was one of the outstanding contributions of the Persian culture to the civilizations following theirs—a fast and proficient postal system. The Persian emperor could expect to be in touch with the farthest reaches of his vast empire within one week’s time (see Introduction, page 264). Persian mail-carriers were mounted on fast horses and had relay stations every 14 miles, much like the Pony Express in 19th century America. (Butler 317)

“**To kill...all Jews...to take the spoil of them for a prey**” The edict called upon the people throughout the empire to participate in the murder of the Jews and the plundering of their property. Everyone except the Jews would profit, distributing the seized wealth among the murderers of the Jews, Haman and King Xerxes.

Haman having held out the prospect of a large sum as the result of exterminating the Jews, and the king having bestowed this upon Haman, the plundering of the Jews, thus permitted to all the inhabitants of the kingdom who should assist in exterminating them,

must be understood as implying, that they would have to deliver a portion of the booty thus obtained to Haman. (*Keil & Delitzsch*)

The providence of God unfolds throughout the Book of Esther.

God's people never faced a more terrible threat than this one. The egomaniac Haman had engineered that which might easily have destroyed the entire race of the chosen people; but there was no way that God would have allowed such a thing to happen; because all of the glorious promises of Messiah to redeem men from their sins were contingent upon the preservation of the Israel of God until that Messiah was born in Bethlehem. God had foreseen this threat. ...God used the drunken request of Xerxes to degrade Vashti the queen; he elevated an orphan Jewish girl to take her place; he planted the name of Mordecai in the chronicles of the king; and he would remind Xerxes of that fact at precisely the proper instant. Oh yes, for all of his power and hatred, Haman had undertaken to do that which was impossible. (*Coffman*)

“Thirteenth day of the twelfth month” Perhaps providentially, ten or eleven months intervened between the issuing of the decree to kill the Jews and the date on which the decree was to be fulfilled. This provided ample opportunity for the remedy to be established so that the Jews might not face genocide. “This would have been March 7, 473 BC, nearly a year later” (*Wycliffe*).

The ancients placed great confidence in astrology and divination, but little did they realize that when “the lot is cast into the lap...the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord” (Prov 16:33). God's overruling was particularly evident in this case, for as they cast the lot concerning each subsequent day of the year, it fell upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth and last month, allowing time for Haman's plot to be overcome and a counter decree to be issued! (*Wycliffe*)

“The King and Haman sat down to drink” Alcohol again appears in a prominent place associated with rash and poor judgments by the king and his advisors, Haman this time. The last record of Xerxes resorting to drink while making irrevocable laws was when he banished his queen and made battle plans for the invasion of Greece, both of which decisions brought grief to the king. “Orders had been officially sent throughout the empire to massacre perhaps millions of people and the emperor and his prime minister sit down to feast and drink. How brutally callous!” (*Butler* 318).

“The city of Shushan was perplexed” No citizens of the kingdom would feel more threatened by the irrational and deadly behavior of the king than those who in proximity were closest to him. Who could be safe from future rash executions of deadly edicts? Xerxes was a loose cannon fairly easily aimed in about any direction at the will of the king's malicious advisors. Clarke brings to mind another consideration by which non-Jews would be troubled by the decree against the Jews: “...many Persian families had, no doubt, become united by intermarriages with Jewish families, and in such a massacre they would necessarily share the same fate with the Jews.” “It was an ominous decree for any citizen to read. If Haman was capable of such ruthless rage against the Jews, he could vent the same rage on any other segment or people within the vast empire of Persia” (*Butler* 318).

Questions

1. About how long after Esther became queen was Haman promoted above the other princes of the land?
2. To whom does the phrase “servants that were in the king's gate” refer?
3. Who first noticed that Mordecai was not bowing when Haman came by?
4. What was Mordecai's response when the other servants questioned him daily as to why he did not bow before Haman?
5. How did Haman first discover that Mordecai was not bowing as Haman passed by?
6. What reason did Mordecai offer for not bowing before Haman?

7. What is implied by Mordecai's refusal to bow before Haman?
8. How did Haman propose to appease his wrath toward Mordecai for not bowing before him?
9. What came first, Haman's permission to have the Jews destroyed or his decision on what date to have the Jews destroyed?
10. The Jewish month of Nisan corresponds to what month(s) on our calendar?
11. What Jewish feast celebrated in our time commemorates events taking place in the Book of Esther?
12. True or False. Haman, with his astrologers, engaged in a procedure over the space of a few hours in a single day where they appealed to chance to determine what day would be the best choice to have the Jews destroyed.
13. What often occurs before ill treatment of the children of God?
14. Who did Haman dupe into appearing primarily responsible for the planned extermination of the Jews?
15. True or False. Even if the mass murder of Jews had occurred only within the borders of the Persian Empire, it would have meant the near extinction if not the complete extinction of the Jewish race?
16. What patterns are observable between Xerxes' royal decrees respecting Vashti and the edict to have the Jews killed?
17. About how much money was involved in Haman's estimate of spoils attainable for the king were the Jews throughout the Persian Empire murdered and the property taken? This was about how much to the annual income of the Persian Empire?
18. What significant financial drain to the royal treasury had occurred not long before this?
19. What is the significance of the king handing his ring to Haman?
20. What great boon to civilization did the Persians contribute that relates to Esther Chapter Three?
21. How far apart were the horse stations for the Persian version of the Pony Express?
22. How would Haman's plan to have all the Jews murdered have affected God's plan to redeem humanity?
23. How is God's providence apparent in the Book of Esther through Chapter Three?
24. What emphasized the callous unconcern of the king toward millions of his subjects?
25. List one or two reasons why non-Jews, especially in Shushan (Susa) might be alarmed by Xerxes command to murder the Jews.

Chapter Four

4:1-3 “When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry; **2** And came even before the king’s gate: for none might enter into the king’s gate clothed with sackcloth. **3** And in every province, whithersoever the king’s commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.”

“When Mordecai perceived all that was done” *Keil & Delitzsch* observes that Mordecai was aware of more than just the open proclamation to destroy the Jews, which itself was sufficient reason for great alarm. “Mordochai learnt all that was done-not only what had been openly proclaimed, but, as is shown by v. 7, also the transaction between the king and Haman.” The grief and sorrow of Mordecai may have been heightened above his fellow Israelites, knowing that his refusal to bow to Haman and relating his non-compliance to being Jewish was Haman’s excuse for the proposed mass murder.

“Rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes” Eastern people have always been and remain highly demonstrative of symbols, especially concerning personal conduct and interaction with one’s fellows (e.g., the sole of the foot aimed at another is an act of extreme disdain, observed in modern history when Iraqis were seen on world news beating the fallen statute of Saddam Hussein).

The tearing or rending of clothing, putting on sackcloth and throwing of ashes on the head were all actual, though symbolic, rites practiced by Jews (and other Semitic peoples) expressing grief and contrition. The English word is derived from the Hebrew word *saq* which describes a coarse, dark cloth, usually made of goat’s hair. It was worn by mourners (II Sam. 3:31; II Kings 19:1-2), often by prophets to symbolize the actions they sought from their audiences (Isa. 20:2; Rev. 11:3), and by exiles (I Kings 20:31). (Butler 320)

Coffman puts perspective on the sackcloth and ashes.

This great mourning prevailed in every province of the vast empire, including Jerusalem and Judaea of course. Although the name of God is not mentioned in Esther, this outpouring of grief on the part of the Chosen People was nothing at all unless it was an appeal for God’s intervention to save his people from their threatened destruction. The sackcloth and ashes were universally recognized as signs of extreme grief and distress.

“Before the king’s gate” Mordecai lamented in “the open space before the entrance to the royal palace” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

“Great Mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes” “The same loud piercing funeral wailings and death cries were heard in every province where Jews lived throughout the vast Persian empire. People fasted and wept and lay in sackcloth and ashes. Literally, the Hebrew phrase is ‘sackcloth and ashes were spread out as a bed under many’” (Butler 321).

4:4-6 “So Esther’s maids and her chamberlains came and told it her. Then was the queen exceedingly grieved; and she sent raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take away his sackcloth from him: but he received it not. **5** Then called Esther for Hatach, one of the king’s chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her, and gave him a commandment to Mordecai, to know what it was, and why it was. **6** So Hatach went forth to Mordecai unto the street of the city, which was before the king’s gate.”

“She sent raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take away his sackcloth from him” Esther was unaware of the reason for Mordecai’s lament at this point, but doubtless with her love for her

adopted father and the resources at her disposal as queen, she hoped to comfort Mordecai respecting whatever was the source of his sorrow.

“Then called Esther for Hatach, one of the king’s chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her” “Communication with the women in the harem is hardly ever to be obtained, and only through the medium of the keepers” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*). “So strictly did the laws of Persia confine the wives, especially the king’s wives, that it was not possible for Mordecai to have a conference with Esther about this important affair, but divers messages are here carried between them by Hatach, whom the king had appointed to attend her, and it seems he was one she could confide in” (Henry).

4:7-9 “And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and of the sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king’s treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them. 8 Also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, to shew it unto Esther, and to declare it unto her, and to charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people. 9 And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai.”

“Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him” Mordecai related how he had refused to bow before Haman, apparently because it conflicted with the religion of the Jews, and that for this reason Haman determined to kill all Jews throughout the empire.

“The sum of the money that Haman had promised” Mordecai had insider information beyond what the proclamation pronounced. Maybe the great amount of money stressed the likelihood and hence urgency to counteract the genocide Haman had in mind.

“Declare it unto her” Butler comments that some believe Esther was unable to read Persian, the likely language of the copy of the decree circulating in Shushan (Susa) (324).

“Charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him” Mordecai surmised that Esther was the best positioned person in the empire to intercede on behalf of the Jews.

4:10-12 “Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai; 11 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. 12 And they told to Mordecai Esther’s words.”

“Not called...put...to death”

The Persian kings surrounded themselves with an almost impassable circle of forms. The law alluded to was first enacted by Deioces, king of Media, and afterward, when the empires were united, adopted by the Persians, that all business should be transacted and petitions transmitted to the king through his ministers; and although the restriction was not intended, of course, to apply to the queen, yet from the strict and inflexible character of the Persian laws, and the extreme desire to exalt the majesty of the sovereign, even his favourite wife had not the privilege of entree except by special favour and indulgence. (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*)

Coffman notes that there were a number of valid concerns Esther harbored respecting Mordecai’s instruction to Esther.

Esther did not by this reply refuse to accept Mordecai’s charge; she merely apprised him of the extreme danger to herself in such a request. Esther was also apprehensive that the king had not invited her into his presence in a month, indicating that his love for her had cooled, and that at that time the king might have been sensually involved with someone else. There was certainly no guarantee that the king would be pleased by her coming uninvited into his presence.

4:13-14 “Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king’s house, more than all the Jews. **14** For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

“Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king’s house, more than all the Jews”
“Mordochai does not reproach Esther with being indifferent to the fate of her fellow-countrymen, but rather calls her attention to the fact that her own life is in danger” (*Keil & Delitzsch*). Coffman quotes another to make an excellent point: “Mordecai’s argument here was brutal in its clarity. Death awaited Esther whether or not she went in to the king. She had nothing to lose. If she failed, deliverance would come from some other place; but maybe, who knows, maybe God had made her queen just for the purpose of rescuing his people.”

“Deliverance arise to the Jews” “The thought is: the Jewish nation cannot perish, its continuance is guaranteed by the divine promise. ... Though Mordochai neither speaks of God, nor alludes directly to His assistance, he still grounds his hopes of the preservation of his people upon the word and promise of God...” (*Keil & Delitzsch*). “This passage is a key to the basic meaning of the entire book, namely, to demonstrate the unfailing providence of God in behalf of his people Israel” (*Wycliffe*). The reason in particular that God’s providence was certain to preserve the Jews against the proposed genocide was that the mass murder of the Jews would have thwarted the prophetic plan of God to save mankind through a Messiah, the descendant of Judah. Since the Messiah, Jesus Christ, has already come, there is no remaining certainty that God will preserve from extinction the Jews or any other race or nation.

“Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” “In the turn thus given to the sentence it contains the most urgent injunction to Esther to use her high position for the preservation of her fellow-countrymen” (*Keil & Delitzsch*). “That divine Providence had an eye to this in bringing her to be queen: ‘Who knows whether thou hast come to the kingdom for such a time as this?’ and therefore, (1.) ‘Thou art bound in gratitude to do this service for God and his church, else thou dost not answer the end of thy elevation.’ (2.) ‘Thou needest not fear miscarrying in the enterprise; if God designed thee for it, he will bear thee out and give thee success’” (Henry).

This phrase places a sense of responsibility with an added idea of urgency to the willingness of the people of God in all ages to determine to be useful tools in the hands of God for the unfolding of His providence. Why not me? Why not now? Yet, if we do not accept the challenge or opportunity of service before God, through His providence, God will use others, but we will suffer God’s disfavor for not arising to the occasion.

4:15-17 “Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, **16** Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish. **17** So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.”

“All the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me...I also and my maidens will fast”
“Though ‘God’ and ‘prayer’ are not here mentioned, it is yet obviously assumed that it was before God that the Jews were to humble themselves, to seek His help, and to induce Him to grant it” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

Esther Was Prayerful

When Esther faced a difficult task, she turned to God in prayer for strength. We too need to turn to God in prayer. One of the first verses we teach our children to memorize is, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). However, we need to go beyond memorizing to putting the verses in practice in our lives. We need to have an attitude of prayer at any time for any reason.

The Scriptures record that Jesus frequently prayed to the Father in heaven.

“Esther’s request for fasting is for the very purpose of intercession and supplication to Jehovah—there can be no other objective in mind!” (Butler 32).

“I also and my maidens will fast likewise”

Shut up in the king’s harem, Esther and her attendants could not participate directly with other Jews in Shushan in the fast and prayers. It seems doubtful that Esther was fortunate to have assigned to her Jewish maidens as her attendants, but her influence over her attendant maidens appears obvious, perhaps even indicating that they had proselyted to Judaism.

“If I perish, I perish” The devotion to God and God’s kingdom irrespective of personal peril adorns saints in both testaments (Dan. 3:17-18; Acts 20:24; 21:13; Phil. 2:30). “It was certainly her wisdom rather to expose herself to a conditional death from her husband than to a certain death from her enemy” (Henry). Butler notes respecting Esther’s decision to intercede: “Esther had to decide between the crises of her personal danger and the danger to the whole race of her people. Would she be willing to lay down her life for others? Would you?” (324).

With Butler we must concur: “Great biblical heroes and heroines were as human as we are” (330). The Bible is filled with accounts of men and women who though as ordinary as any other human rose to do the bidding of God; Hebrews 11 is one such summary of several of these. Coffman extols great praise on Esther.

For sheer courage, for faithful acceptance of an assignment fraught with mortal danger, for filial obedience to her beloved foster-father Mordecai, for her patriotic zeal and determination to rescue her people from massacre, yes, and for evident trust in God, and confidence in his blessing, Esther’s action here equals or surpasses anything ascribed in the literature of all nations to the greatest heroes of the human race. What a marvel was Esther!

After one of Jesus’ prayers, the disciples asked Him to teach them to pray. They realized that if Jesus needed to pray to His Heavenly Father that they certainly needed to pray accordingly. In Luke 11:1-4, Jesus taught the disciples how to pray. Jesus began His prayer with praise to God – the One Who created all. Then, He submitted His will to God – Jesus acknowledged that He would accept whatever God chose. Only after Jesus showed that He understood God’s power and authority did Jesus acknowledge requests as part of prayer – daily needs, forgiveness of sins and help to overcome obstacles in life.

Our prayers can be long or short, and they can be in the spur of the moment or at a set time. Prayers to God can be offered at any place and at any time. The key is to pray to our Heavenly Father with sincerity, humbleness, without doubting and not for show.

Let us follow the example of Esther and Jesus. Fill our lives with prayer – in the good times and the bad times, too.

Questions

1. True or False. Mordecai only knew about the fate Haman proposed for the Jews from the proclamation circulating in Shushan.
2. Why might especially Mordecai have felt a personal responsibility for the impending genocide of the Jewish race?
3. What does “rent his clothes” mean?
4. What is the purpose of renting one’s clothes, wearing sackcloth and sitting in ashes?
5. Contrast the typical manifestation of mourning in western society with mourning in the Middle East.
6. How did Esther show her family love toward Mordecai?
7. Why did Mordecai not communicate directly with Esther, but the two communicated with each other through go-betweens?

8. Why may it have been necessary for a chamberlain or eunuch to read the proclamation to Esther?
9. What charge did Mordecai give to Esther?
10. True or False. Mordecai realized the strong influence Persian queens had on their husband kings, so he directed Esther to have the king reverse his decree.
11. Give two reasons that Esther was reluctant to enter into the king's presence without an invitation.
12. True or False. Esther, being a Jew as well, was in as much danger as other Jews throughout the Persian Empire.
13. What in verse 14 indicates that Mordecai had confidence in God's providence?
14. True or False. Mordecai perceived that Esther was obligated to try to intercede on behalf of the Jews, or otherwise God would providentially punish her and her relatives.
15. Why was it so important from God's perspective to preserve the Jews, which reason Mordecai realized?
16. What part of verse 14 essentially calls upon all of God's children in every generation to arise to the occasion of service to God?
17. What in verse 16 indicates that Esther and the Jews generally in Shushan were careful practitioners of Judaism and had faith in God?
18. What is noteworthy about the maidens attending to Esther in verse 16?
19. What words of Esther indicate her determination to do what she perceived to be the will of God irrespective of the outcome for her personally?

Chapter Five

5:1 “Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king’s house, over against the king’s house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house.”

“On the third day” Comparing this verse with 4:16, following the fast that Esther proclaimed, she proceeded on her anxious mission to intervene on behalf of the Jews. The fast was now over, and it was time to seek a remedy for the great peril facing all the Jews.

“Esther put on her royal apparel” *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* notes the propriety of dressing for the occasion. Especially during the time of fast, Esther’s manner of apparel was likely much more conservative, though perhaps the sackcloth and ashes were not afforded her within the royal palace. In addition, the queen’s attire out of the eye of the public may have been more commensurate with daily life.

It was not only natural, but, on such occasions, highly proper and expedient, that the queen should decorate herself in a style becoming her exalted station. On ordinary occasions she might reasonably set off her charms to as much advantage as possible; but on the present occasion, as she was desirous to secure the favour of one who sustained the twofold character of her husband and her sovereign, public as well as private considerations... (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary*)

Matthew Henry cites the reason behind Esther’s selection of this clothing. “She put on her fine clothes, not to please herself, but her husband...”

“Stood in the inner court of the king’s house”

Butler comments on the subtleness with which Esther approached the king rather than through direct communication (howbeit through intermediaries).

The king’s throne is opposite an open doorway leading into the inner court of the palace. Esther was using all her womanly intuition in simply standing so she might be seen by the emperor instead of sending word that she wished an audience with him. Esther was well aware of the fact that no one gained audience with the emperor unless he invited them! Besides, Vashti had recently been deposed because of her precociousness. Oriental men (and especially potentates) did not look favorably upon precocious wives. (333)

Esther Was Courageous

Courage is, “the strength of purpose that enables one to withstand fear or difficulty. Physical courage is based on moral courage – a reliance on the presence and power of God and a commitment to His commandments” (Nelson’s). Queen Vashti exhibited great courage when she refused to appear before drunken King Ahasuerus and his revelers. She knew her refusal could mean her execution. Later, it took great courage for Esther to go before King Ahasuerus when she had not been requested to appear, knowing that if the King did not wish to see her she could be killed. Esther’s courage was a result of her reliance on God for strength.

It takes courage to step out of our comfort zones to reach out to the lost (Mark 16:15-16). It is easier to sit back with the attitude, “They know where the church building is located. They can come here to hear the Gospel preached by our capable preacher.”

It takes courage to stand up for what is right when all our peers – even Christians – are succumbing to the temptations of the devil. Satan would have us believe that behaviors or practices are not really sinful, just an alternative lifestyle or an illness that one cannot overcome. The Scriptures are quite clear as to what is sin and what is not sin (Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

Courage comes through a study of God’s Word and prayer. Associating with strong, faithful Christians will assist us in our walk with God.

5:2 “And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre.”

“She obtained favour in his sight” Upon seeing Esther, the king exhibited again the interest he demonstrated toward her upon their first meeting (Esth. 2:19).

“Touched the top of the scepter” “This was the usual way of acknowledging the royal condescension, and at the same time expressing reverence and submission to the august majesty of the king” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary*). Matthew Henry contrasts the actions of Vashti and Esther and the respective reactions of Ahasuerus (Xerxes). “He that had divorced one wife for not coming when she was sent for would not be severe to another for coming when she was not sent for.” Historical references and wall carvings pertaining to Persian kings cite the knob topped, six-foot-tall or better gold staff without which they went nowhere.

5:3-5 “Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom. 4 And Esther answered, If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him. 5 Then the king said, Cause Haman to make haste, that he may do as Esther hath said. So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared.”

“What wilt thou, queen Esther?” Due to the unlikely approach to the king by someone not summoned by the king because of the penalty of death (Esth. 4:11), the king senses that only a critical concern would prompt Esther to risk her life so.

The king, concluding from the circumstance of her appearing there unsummoned, that she had some urgent matter to bring before him, said to her: “What wilt thou, Queen Esther? and what is thy request? To the half of the kingdom it shall be granted thee.” ... Esther, however, for the present requested nothing further, than that on that day (to-day) the king and Haman should come to the banquet she had prepared. (*Keil & Delitzsch*)

“To the half of the kingdom” *Wycliffe* observes that this common expression was not to be understood literally, but nevertheless it did represent some genuine generosity. “Even though this expression was hyperbole, it was never thought to be a light promise (cf. 5:6; 7:2; Mark 6:23...)” In other words, to offer “half the kingdom” was “a proverbial expression, by which he assured her that he would deny her nothing in reason” (Henry). Coffman concurs: “Such a kingly oath was hyperbole, of course; nevertheless it was a mighty promise indeed. See Mark 6:23 where such an oath resulted in the murder of John the Immerser.”

Butler comments that “[i]t is interesting to note also that the emperor offered to grant Esther’s request before she made it.” The king did not absolutely promise to fulfill Esther’s petition unconditionally, but he did indicate his strong likelihood of granting her request.

“Come this day unto the banquet I have prepared” Matthew Henry provides a plausible context to Esther inviting the king to a banquet rather than directly making her plea on behalf of all the Jews. “She would try how he stood affected to her; for, if he should refuse this, it would be to no purpose as yet to present her other request. She would endeavour to bring him into a pleasant humour, and soften his spirit, that he might with the more tenderness receive the impressions of the complaint she had to make to him.”

“Cause Haman to make haste” *Keil & Delitzsch* comments that this literally means “fetch him quickly.”

Butler notes the irregularity of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament for this passage.

And it came to pass on the third day, when she had ceased praying, that she put off her domestic apparel, and put on the glorious things she had. And being splendidly arrayed, and

having called upon God the Observer and Savior of all things, she took her two maidens, and she leaned upon one of them, in all her delicate femininity, while the other maiden followed holding the train of her royal robe. She radiated the perfect beauty of youthfulness and cheerfulness and grace, but her heart shrank with fear. And having passed through all the doors, she stood before the king: and he was sitting upon his royal throne, and he had put on all his glorious apparel, covered all over with gold and precious stones, and was very awesome and frightening. And having raised his face to look at Esther with all his majestic mien, he looked with intense anger: and the queen fell, and grew pale and fainted; and she leaned her head against the head of the 'maiden that accompanied her. But God changed the spirit of the king to gentleness, and in intense feeling he sprang from off his throne; and took her into his arms, until she recovered: and he comforted her with words of peace; and said to 'her, What is the matter, Esther? I am your brother; be of good cheer, you shall not die for our command is openly declared to you, Draw near. And having raised the golden sceptre he laid it upon her neck, and embraced her and said, Speak to me. And she said to him, I saw you, my lord as an angel of God, and my heart was troubled for fear of your glory; for you, my lord, are to be wondered at, and your face is full of grace. And while she was speaking, she fainted and fell. Then the king said, What do you wish Esther? and what is your request? ask even to the half of my kingdom, and it shall be yours. And Esther said, Today is my great day: if then it seem good to the king, let both him and Haman come to the feast which I will prepare this day. (334-335)

5:6-8 “And the king said unto Esther at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed. 7 Then answered Esther, and said, My petition and my request is; 8 If I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition, and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do tomorrow as the king hath said.”

“Banquet of wine” Barnes explains the distinction in the banquet between the main dishes and what here is styled “the banquet of wine.” “After the meats were removed, it was customary in Persia to continue the banquet for a considerable time with fruits and wine. During this part of the feast, the king renewed his offer.”

“What is thy petition?” The king repeats the earlier question to Esther, now at the banquet later in the day that Esther approached the king at his throne.

“Tomorrow” Esther invites the king and Haman to yet another banquet on the following day, at which time she avows that she will make her petition known to the king. Adam Clarke suggests possible reasons for the delay to yet another day for Esther disclosing her request of the king.

She saw she was gaining on the king's affections; but she was not yet sufficiently confident; and therefore wished another interview, that she might ingratiate herself more fully in the king's favour, and thus secure the success of her design. But Providence disposed of things thus, to give time for the important event mentioned in the succeeding chapter.

Butler summarizes the meeting of Esther and the king.

It is evident from the emperor's immediate reaction that his curiosity is aroused. He knew that Esther had not risked her life just to invite him to a banquet! Xerxes insists that Haman ***hurry to*** the banquet. Esther has again used her female wiles to good advantage. Xerxes can hardly wait to find out Esther's real reason for approaching him. The Hebrew text uses not only the word ***mishetteh*** (drinking bout, see 1:8-9) but also uses the word *yayin* (wine) to describe Esther's feast. It was a party! Xerxes repeats his grandiose promise of half his kingdom if Esther shall request it. ...Dangerous as it must have been to keep this impetuous monarch hanging on the hooks of curiosity, Esther postpones a

second time the revelation of her real reason for violating the sacred law of the Persians about approaching the emperor uninvited. Esther begins as if she is about to divulge her secret request and then cleverly holds the king in suspense. (336)

5:9-10 “Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai. **10** Nevertheless Haman refrained himself: and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife.”

“Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart” “Haman being the only invited guest with the king and queen on the occasion referred to, it was natural that he should have been elated with the honour” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*). “He was exhilarated that he had been singled out by the queen for special favor this day and tomorrow also. The Jewish Haggadah [legends] also theorizes that Haman thought Esther prepared the banquet in his honor, little realizing that she had set a trap for him” (Butler 339).

“Full of indignation against Mordecai” The severe agitation of Haman because Mordecai refused to give him the degree of reverence he demanded speaks to “proud wrath” (Prov. 21:24). Butler defines “indignation” with the word “fury” (339).

“He sent and called for his friends and Zeresh his wife” “All that is needed is a spark of self-justification and that is often supplied by sympathetic friends or ‘Yes’ men. That is where Haman went. He called in his ‘friends’ and his wife for supportive rationalizations to justify what he had already made up his mind to do” (Butler 339).

5:11-12 “And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. **12** Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to morrow am I invited unto her also with the king.”

“The multitude of his children” “From Est 9:7-10 we learn that Haman had ten sons; and many sons were not looked upon as a great blessing from God by the Israelites only, but were also esteemed a signal prosperity among the Persians, the king annually sending presents to him who had the greatest number of sons” (*Keil & Delitzsch*). “Herodotus tells us that, next to prowess in arms, it was regarded as the greatest proof of manly excellence in Persia to be the father of many sons. Haman had ten sons...” (Barnes).

5:13-14 “Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate. **14** Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and tomorrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made.”

“Yet all this availeth me nothing” “Pride will ever render its possessor unhappy. He has such a high opinion of his own worth, that he conceives himself defrauded by every one who does not pay him all the respect and homage which he conceives to be his due” (Clarke). What a horrific, bad attitude that made Haman not even anything like the father or husband he should have been. “The shameful character of Haman is featured in this verse. In spite of innumerable blessings and preferments above all others except the king, he was an egomaniac” (Coffman).

This little affront which he received from Mordecai was the dead fly which spoiled all his pot of precious ointment; he himself owned in the presence of his wife and friends, to the everlasting reproach of a proud and discontented mind, that he had no comfort in his estate, preferment, and family, as long as Mordecai lived and had a place in the king’s gate, v. 10-13. (Henry)

Mordecai the Jew” *Wycliffe* makes a valuable observation regarding the known ethnicities of Esther and Mordecai at this point. “Although Esther’s attendants knew of her relation to Mordecai (cf. note on Est 4:4-8), Haman obviously did not. This ignorance proved to be his undoing.” “No matter how much he bragged about his own importance, he really didn’t feel important so long as there was one person who did not agree with his own estimate of himself” (Butler 340).

“Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him”

The counsellors take it for granted that the king will without hesitation agree to Haman’s proposal to execute Mordochai, and therefore advise him at once to make the necessary preparations, so that the hated Jew may be hanged on the morrow before the banquet, and Haman may then go with the king to the feast prepared by the queen, free from all annoyance. (*Keil & Delitzsch*)

“Hanged” *Keil & Delitzsch* comments that rather than hanged to impale on a stake is meant, as that was the practice of public execution then among the Persians and others. Already in the account in Esther, two others were “hanged” (Esth. 2:23). Clarke concurs and elaborates some: “The word ‘eets, which we translate gallows, signifies simply wood, a tree, or pole, and this was to be seventy-five feet high, that he might suffer the greater ignominy, and be a more public spectacle. I believe impaling is here also meant.” Barnes corroborates understanding of the type of execution intended in the passage. “A gallows, in the ordinary sense, is scarcely intended, since hanging was not a Persian punishment. The intention, no doubt, was to crucify (see the Est 2:23 note) or impale Mordecai; and the pole or cross was to be 75 feet high, to make the punishment more conspicuous.” Coffman notes that the height of the place of execution is not actually disclosed. “Some critics have found fault with the height of the gallows mentioned here, making it either imaginative, untrue, or ridiculous, but they overlook the key fact that the text does not say how high the gallows was. The text only states that Haman’s advisers recommended a gallows that high.”

But the suggestion is not for a gallows upon which a person is hanged by a rope because hanging was not a Persian form of execution. What is meant is either crucifixion or impalement. Fifty cubits high for the impaling stake or cross seems excessive to us. If the cubit is 18 inches, it would make the “tree” 75 feet high; if the cubit is 21 inches it would be 88 feet high. (Butler 341)

“He caused the gallows to be made” “Construction began that very night because Haman was supremely confident that the king would grant his request...” (*Wycliffe*).

Questions

1. Why did Esther wait three days before going about to save the Jews from genocide?
2. What was the significance of wearing different clothing than characterized her adornment over the past days?
3. What is a possible reason that Esther paused in the court rather than either continuing into the throne room or sending immediate communication to the king?
4. What instrument was an ever-present reminder of the royalty of a Persian king?
5. What made the king think that Esther had some urgent request to make of him?
6. With what figurative expression did the king indicate his willingness to be generous in granting whatever request Esther would make of him?
7. How does Jewish legend differ from the biblical text regarding Esther’s approach of the Persian king in this chapter?
8. True or False. The banquets to which Esther invited Xerxes and Haman were parties.
9. Describe the emotional roller coaster on which Haman’s ego was a dedicated rider.

10. How objective were the friends and wife of Haman respecting Haman's complaints against Mordecai?
11. What was the significance of mentioning one's great number of children along with mentioning one's wealth and honor?
12. True or False. For all of his attributes and achievements, Haman failed to take notice of the relationship between "Mordecai the Jew" and his adopted daughter, queen Esther.
13. True or False. The Persians did not use gallows and hanging with ropes as a mode of execution.
14. True or False. Scripture does not state exactly how high the so-called gallows were.
15. True or False. As much as Haman wanted to execute Mordecai, he refrained from having the so-called gallows built until he could hopefully obtain permission from the king to have Mordecai killed.

Chapter Six

Coffman prefaces the chapter with an overview of the cataclysmic fall of the high official Haman. “There is hardly anything in the literature of mankind that presents a more dramatic contrast of the highest status and the lowest ever attained by a man on one single day than that which is here revealed in the person of Haman the great Prime Minister of the Persian Empire under Xerxes.”

6:1-3 “On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. 2 And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’s chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus. 3 And the king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king’s servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him.”

“On that night could not the king sleep” Doubtless the providence of God is as clearly responsible for the king’s sleeplessness and subsequent attention to amusing himself with the historical records as anything else of a providential nature in the Book of Esther. One more day or night beyond this occasion of sleeplessness and Mordecai may not have been alive to reward. “On that night between Esther’s first and second banquet, the king’s sleep fled, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles and to read there from” (*Keil & Delitzsch*). “...[I]t was the providence of God, for apart from this, the king would never have heard the account of Mordecai’s deed as recorded in ‘the book of records of the chronicles’ (cf. Est 2:23)” (*Wycliffe*).

There was, therefore, nothing uncommon in this Persian monarch calling for the court journal. But, in his being unable to sleep at that particular juncture, in his ordering the book then to be read to him, and in his attention having been specially directed to the important, and as yet unrewarded, services of Mordecai, the immediate interposition of Providence is distinctly visible. (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*)

The Book of Esther is really a textbook for the examination of divine providence. “It is among the objects of the writer of Esther to show how the smallest circumstances of life, those most generally regarded as left to chance, work together for good to such as deserve well, and for evil to such as deserve evil” (*Pulpit Commentary* qtd. in Butler 343).

“The chronicles; and they were read” *Keil & Delitzsch* indicates that the verb choice in the original language for “read” means there was a “long continuance of reading.” Perhaps the king thought that having historical annals read to him would bore him to sleep, but God evidently had a different purpose in the reading of those records. “The Hebrew verb *nigera’im* is an imperfect participle and should be translated, ‘...they kept on reading them before ‘the king.’ He probably expected the monotonous intonation of the reader’s voice to lull him to sleep. But his insomnia was providential” (Butler 344).

“Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh...” This is the account introduced to the reader in Esther 2:21-23. Whereas it seemed calloused to overlook Mordecai’s good deed then, providentially, rewarding the deed later proved more beneficial for the bigger picture of securing the salvation of the Jews from annihilation.

6:4-6 “And the king said, Who is in the court? Now Haman was come into the outward court of the king’s house, to speak unto the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him. 5 And the king’s servants said unto him, Behold, Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him come in. 6 So

Haman came in. And the king said unto him, What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour? Now Haman thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself?"

"Now Haman was come into the outward court" The night has passed sleeplessly for the king and as morning comes Haman is early in the outer court for the purpose of requesting the death of Mordecai. How ironic, since Mordecai is the very one that the king wants to honor.

"And the king said unto him..." Clarke observes that Haman did not have an opportunity to pose his request, which would have been a very interesting and awkward moment had Haman been permitted to speak first. "He did not give him time to make his request; and put a question to him which, at the first view, promised him all that his heart could wish." "...[T]he king knew nothing of any quarrel he had with Mordecai" (Henry). One might conservatively say that the moment was now inopportune to request the death of Mordecai: "But how is he thunderstruck when the king bids him not to order all this to be done, but to do it himself to Mordecai the Jew, the very man he hated above all men and whose ruin he was now designing! Now, it is to no purpose to think of moving any thing to the king against Mordecai when he is the man whom the king delights to honour" (Henry).

"Now Haman thought in his heart..." Pride truly sets one up for a horrendous catapult to sinister depths (Prov. 16:18; 18:12). The contrast between Mordecai and Haman is easily drawn. Consider the comparisons of Butler. "Mordecai chose a righteous life and did good in saving the emperor's life; Haman chose evil and attempted to destroy Mordecai's life. Mordecai was protected and exalted by the hand of Providence; Haman was thwarted and destroyed by the same Hand" (345).

6:7-9 "And Haman answered the king, For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, 8 Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: 9 And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour."

"Haman answered the king..." Haman flattered himself as the one to whom the king would bestow high honors, so he chose those accolades and adornments that he most desired for himself. *Wycliffe* astutely comments that all of what Haman rattled off in answer to the king must have been on Haman's personal wish list, maybe which he had gone over and over in his mind from time to time. "Haman immediately began to list those honors which would be most highly esteemed in the Orient, as though he had often meditated on this possibility and was ready to give an answer if the king should ever ask him!" However, Xerxes, per Haman's suggestion, honored Mordecai instead.

Joseph was acknowledged in a similar way by Pharaoh in Egypt (Gen. 41:42-43). "As a consequence of Haman's egotism in thinking that his suggestions would be applied to himself, he really went all out with what he proposed" (Coffman); but it was not Haman who received the honors he had concocted.

"Crown royal" Commentators disagree whether reference to the crown pertains to a crown the king would wear or whether reference is to royal adornment of the king's horse.

"Bring him on horseback through the street of the city" "On grand and public occasions, the royal steed is led by the highest subject through the principal streets of the city; a ceremony which may occupy several hours" (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*). "Only the king seems to have been ignorant of the feud between Mordecai and Haman; certainly everybody in Shushan must have been aware of it. 'Thus the king had no idea of the irony of the situation in which he placed his favorite minister.' However, the whole city of Shushan would have been astounded at this development" (Coffman).

"Horse" Horses were numerous among the Persians and that part of the world. "Persia was a country of horses, and the high-bred charger the king rode upon..." (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*).

6:10-11 "Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou has spoken. 11 Then took Haman the

apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour.”

“Mordecai the Jew” “How the king knew that Mordochai was a Jew, and that he sat in the king’s gate, is not indeed expressly stated, but may easily be supplied from the conversation of the king with his servants concerning Mordochai’s discovery of the conspiracy, vv. 1-3” (*Keil & Delitzsch*). It seems impossible for the king to have signed a decree for the extermination of the Jews and apparently without considering the connection between that deed and the present honor to bestow on Mordecai to draw some connection and the impropriety of the former edict; however, it does not appear to have dawned on the king that his purposes in the two deeds are at odds with each other. “Doubtless the king had discovered that Mordecai was a Jew from conversation with his courtiers concerning the good deed he had done (Est 6:1-3). But being a fickle and forgetful monarch, he had failed to connect this fact with the decree he had recently issued commanding the extermination of the Jews! (cf. 3:11)” (*Wycliffe*). Coffman, on the other hand, supposes that Xerxes was not as naïve as it appears, and that he was probably not only aware after rehearsing the chronicles that Mordecai was a Jew, but that his adopted daughter, his queen, was also a Jew. “Therefore, we believe that, contrary to what some writers have written, Ahasuerus had already made up his mind to put the hook in the nose of Haman, even prior to that second banquet. His order for Haman to honor Mordecai certainly did that very thing” (Coffman).

“Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour” Clarke colorfully muses about the providence of God versus the hopelessness of human efforts to derail it. “How astonishing is the conduct of divine providence in all this business! From it we plainly see that there is neither counsel nor wisdom against the Lord; and that the one who digs a pit for his neighbour is sure to fall into it himself.”

Matthew Henry observes that the honors bestowed by the king through Haman may have been equally difficult to appreciate by both Haman and Mordecai.

It is hard to say which of the two put a greater force upon himself, proud Haman in putting this honour upon Mordecai, or humble Mordecai in accepting it: the king would have it so, and both must submit. Upon this account it was agreeable to Mordecai as it was an indication of the king’s favour, and gave hope that Esther would prevail for the reversing of the edict against the Jews.

6:12-13 “And Mordecai came again to the king’s gate. But Haman hasted to his house mourning, and having his head covered. 13 And Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends every thing that had befallen him. Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him.”

“Mordecai came again to the king’s gate” Clarke observes that the honors bestowed on Mordecai (and any person desires rightful appreciation, and Mordecai deserved thanks from the king for saving his life) did not materially change him, but it had a devastating affect on Haman. “He resumed his former humble state; while Haman, ashamed to look up, covered his face, and ran home to hide himself in his own house.” Barnes, likewise, compliments the stable character of Mordecai: “It is quite consonant with Oriental notions that Mordecai, after receiving the extraordinary honors assigned him, should return to the palace and resume his former humble employment.” Matthew Henry, likewise, commends the deportment of Mordecai.

How little Mordecai was puffed up with his advancement; he came again to the king’s gate (v. 12); he returned to his place and the duty of it immediately, and minded his business as closely as he had done before. Honour is well bestowed on those that are not made proud and idle by it, and will not think themselves above their business.

It is worth noticing that Mordecai, after the parade, put off the royal robes and returned to his lowly place of service at the “king’s gate.” Most men would have been so intoxicated with the excitement they would have sought more recognition or, at least, promotion. It is interesting, in retrospect, that Mordecai, after saving the emperor’s life, did not seek reward or recognition. This sharpens even more the contrast in the characters of Haman and Mordecai. (Butler 350)

“Haman hastened to his house mourning and having his head covered” “A deeper mortification he could not have experienced than that of being obliged, by the king’s command, publicly to show the highest honour to the very individual whose execution he was just about to propose to him” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

“Thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him” Perhaps Haman’s advisors perceived some providential protection toward the Jews and especially for Mordecai; they may not have recognized it as divine providence in the truest sense, but merely some sort of fate, leaving God out of the picture. “The revival of the Jewish people since the times of Cyrus was sufficient to induce, in the minds of heathen who were attentive to the signs of the times, the persuasion that this nation enjoyed divine protection” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

Some commentators think the miraculous nature of Mordecai’s victorious exaltation over Haman impressed the truth upon Haman’s advisors and wife that the Jews must be under special divine protection. Such an impression is not altogether improbable. Pharaoh’s magicians were compelled to explain: “This is the finger of God . . .” and the Egyptians cried: “Let us flee before Israel, for the Lord fighteth for them” (Ex. 8: 19; 19:25). (Butler 350)

6:14 “And while they were yet talking with him, came the king’s chamberlains, and hastened to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared.”

“And while they were yet talking...” “During this conversation certain courtiers had already arrived, who hastily brought Haman to the banquet of the queen, to which he would certainly go in a less happy state of mind than on the preceding day” (*Keil & Delitzsch*). “Besides the invitation given to an entertainment, a message is always sent to the guests, immediately at the day and hour appointed, to announce that all things are ready” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*); compare the same practice from a narration of Jesus (Matt. 22:2-4).

Haman was about to get his due. Jesus said, “For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again” (Matt. 7:2).

Questions

1. With what apparent act of divine providence does Chapter 6 open?
2. True or False. As soon as the Persian chronicles were begun to be read the account of Mordecai surfaced?
3. How many hours sleep intervened for the king between his insomnia and the arrival of Haman in the morning?
4. True or False. Haman couldn’t get a word in edgewise, and he wouldn’t have tried after he received the charge from the king.
5. Why might Mordecai have had as much difficulty appreciating the honor bestowed upon him by the king as Haman?
6. How did Mordecai conduct himself after being honored so highly?
7. True or False. Haman was suddenly disposed to attend his next appointment before he could sufficiently recoil from his embarrassment.

Chapter Seven

7:1-2 “So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. **2** And the king said again unto Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom.”

“To banquet...at the banquet of wine” The original means they came “to imbibe” (*Biblesoft’s*), i.e., “to drink” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

“What is thy petition?” King Ahasuerus repeated his inquiry asked the day before at the first banquet prepared by Queen Esther (5:6). Matthew Henry notes that this is now the third time that the king has inquired of Esther concerning her petition, as well as the third time that he had promised to fulfill her desire.

“Queen Esther” Butler thinks Ahasuerus’ address to Esther was phrased to prompt her to request something stupendous. “Note that the king addressed her as ‘queen’ probably tacitly inviting her to make her request great and promising the certain granting of the request” (353).

“It shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom” Though the statement is hyperbolic as noted earlier when the king uttered this sentiment, it nevertheless indicates the favorable disposition of Ahasuerus toward Esther for any request she might make at that time.

7:3-4 “Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request: **4** For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king’s damage.”

“Then Esther the queen answered and said” *Wycliffe* comments that Esther may have been “[e]mboldened by Mordecai’s sudden change of fortune” and “identified herself with the people of Israel...”

“If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king” *Keil & Delitzsch* remark that Esther prefaced her request with “usual introductory remarks.” “[S]he controls her emotions and produces the proper protocol in addressing the king” (Butler 353).

“Let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request” It was already obvious that Ahasuerus had no regard for Esther’s people (though he may not have known they were Esther’s people), so the part of the queen’s request that moved him was relative to her personal well being. “This was very artfully, as well as very honestly, managed; and was highly calculated to work on the feelings

Esther Exhibited Faith by Her Works

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). The balance of this chapter lists Bible characters who exhibited their faith through works. Although Esther is not listed in this chapter, she could have been because her faith was shown by her works.

James 1:21-27 compares the man who hears God’s Word and does not practice it with a man who looks in a mirror, sees his hair out of place but does not comb it. Verse 25 says the man who hears God’s Word and does the work he is commanded to do will be blessed. Verse 27 says the works Christians are to do are helping the orphans and widows and to remain pure while living in a wicked world.

James 2:14-26 shows the correlation between faith and works. Three times in this passage James says, “faith without works is dead.” In verse 18 he wrote, “Show me your faith without

of the king. What! is the life of the queen, whom I most tenderly love, in any kind of danger?" (Clarke). Barnes comments: "The king now learned, perhaps for the first time, that his favorite was a Jewess." "She must now acknowledge her genetic origin if she is to secure the salvation of her kinsmen" (Butler 353).

Matthew Henry contrasts what doubtless the king expected, if he could imagine what could be so important for Esther to brave the possibility of death to petition the king. "Esther, at length, surprises the king with a petition, not for wealth or honour, or the preferment of some of her friends to some high post, which the king expected, but for the preservation of herself and her countrymen from death and destruction, v. 3, 4."

"For we are sold...to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish" Coffman comments on Esther's use of the word "sold"; "[s]he displayed perfect knowledge of Haman's immense bribe, noting that she and her people had been 'sold.'" In addition, "[s]he here repeats the words which Haman put into the decree. See Est 3:13" (Clarke).

"If we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen..." Esther's observation regarding the present status of the Jews in captivity contrasts with another posture, slavery, which would still have been preferable to experiencing genocide.

Apparently the Jews, even though a people in exile, and technically 'prisoners of war,' were not looked upon as prisoners but were given privileges of freedom practically equal to Persian citizenship so long as they did not seek to disobey the laws of Persia. Esther indicates that she, at least, might have accepted a change of social status to that of bondage or slavery for her people. (Butler 353-354)

"The enemy could not countervail the king's damage" Commentators disagree regarding the interpretation of this sentence. It may refer to the greater loss of wealth and productivity to the Persian Empire by the annihilation of the Jews than the bounty Haman proposed to compensate the royal treasury.

7:5-6 "Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so? 6 And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen."

"Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said...Who is he, and where is he..." "The king, evidently shocked at such a petition, asked who was the originator of so evil a deed..." (*Keil & Delitzsch*). It seems preposterous at first glance that the king couldn't add, we would say, two plus two in these circumstances and piece together the relevant facts—in which he was ignorantly complicit. Haman had successfully petitioned the king explicitly for the slaughter of the Jews throughout the entire Persian Empire; lately, the king came to know that Mordecai was a Jew; and, with a little astuteness, surely Ahasuerus could have known of the family relationship between Mordecai and Esther. To note that the king was somewhat inattentive and over dependent on untrustworthy advisors is an understatement. Clarke adds: "There is a wonderful abruptness and confusion in the original words, highly expressive of the state of mind in which the king then was..."

The king, learning for the first time that his queen was a Jewess, was overwhelmed by the thought that she and her people had been sold unto destruction by an unalterable decree. To be sure, he had originally consented to Haman's plot without much deliberation (3:10-11); but it is difficult to imagine that he didn't know who had been responsible for initiating this pogrom only two months before (cf. 3:7; 8:9). (*Wycliffe*)

your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." Verse 24 says, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." We cannot have a true faith in the God of the Bible without exhibiting that faith.

Paul wrote in Romans 2:13, "for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified." Our salvation requires more than attending worship and listening to the Word of God preached. We must apply the lessons to our lives and serve God with works.

“The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman” “Esther carefully built up her case before finally naming Haman” (*Wycliffe*). Matthew Henry notes that Esther accused Haman to the king in Haman’s presence. Rather than a woman completely driven by fright, after she had determined to intervene on behalf of her people even if it cost her life, Esther carefully planned the subsequent events including to have Haman present when she accused him of his crimes.

“Haman was afraid before the king and the queen” The helpless and reluctant harem girl elevated to favored rank of queen smartly became a force with which to be reckoned and for which Haman was no match. Haman could only survive were Esther to relent and now intervene for him, too. Matthew Henry summarizes Haman’s predicament that “the queen was his prosecutor, the king his judge, and his own conscience a witness against him...”

7:7-8 “And the king arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath went into the palace garden: and Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king. 8 Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther was. Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the word went out of the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face.”

“In his wrath” The king’s wrath must have included the knowledge of his own misguided complicity in the scheme which when enacted would murder his queen and cause irreparable loss to his empire. “At this juncture, the king began to get the whole picture. Indeed it had been Haman who had concocted that evil story about the Jews, had advised their destruction, and with the king’s ring had himself mailed out the decree calling for their slaughter. In his anger, the king arose and left the banquet; and Haman was astute enough to know that his goose was indeed cooked” (Coffman).

“Into the palace garden” *Wycliffe* thinks that King Ahasuerus retreated to the garden temporarily to regain self-control from his exceeding anger.

“Request for his life” There is evident an interesting progression from heaping extreme honor on Mordecai to begging favorable intercession from Esther when Haman had proposed and schemed for the acute opposite treatment of Israelites. “Haman pled with Esther for mercy, realizing that he could now find no favor from the king apart from her intercession. The day before, he had led a Jew in triumphal procession through the streets of the city, and now he was pleading with a Jewess for his very life!” (*Wycliffe*).

“Evil determined against him” *Keil & Delitzsch* notes that the intent of the king toward Haman was obvious in that it was as “completed... and hence that he had no mercy to expect from him, unless the queen should intercede for him.”

“Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther was...” Barnes gives perspective to the “bed” (KJV) or “couch” (ASV and NKJV) present at the banquet. “Like the Greeks and Romans, the Persians reclined at their meals on sofas or couches. Haman, in the intensity of his supplication, had thrown himself upon the couch at Esther’s feet.” When Ahasuerus returned and found Haman on the furniture with Esther where she had been seated for the banquet, the king mistook the intentions of Haman, “crediting Haman in the heat of his anger with the worst designs...” (*Keil & Delitzsch*). Haman was guilty at that moment of violating the decorum that demanded distance between men and the sequestered queen of the king’s harem; the king, however, apparently was incensed more not only by that infraction of protocol, but imagined that Haman proposed to proposition or perhaps harm Esther. Haman worsened his circumstance, if that were possible. *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* delicately words what the scene upon the king’s return appeared to be. “Haman, perhaps, at first stood up to beg pardon of Esther; but driven in his extremity to resort to an attitude of the most earnest supplication, he fell prostrate on the couch where the queen was recumbent. The king returning that instant, was fired at what seemed like an outrage on female modesty.”

Butler observes that the original language here does not lend the idea that the king suspected Haman of attempting to rape the queen, but that Ahasuerus accused Haman of assaulting Esther,

language that means to “subdue by conquest” (357). However, “Haman committed a serious faux pas (error, blunder, mistake) when he fell upon Esther’s feasting couch. Apparently his only intention was to beg Esther to spare his life. He had no sooner fallen down beside her than the king entered the room having returned from the garden” (Butler 357).

“The word went out of the king’s mouth” Coffman observes that “the word” is singular and correctly rendered, meaning “the judgment” or sentence was pronounced by the king. Whereas words may have been spoken, the result of those words was a judgment, in Haman’s case, a death sentence.

“They covered Haman’s face” The record implies that Ahasuerus immediately sentenced Haman to death. “Without waiting for an explanation, the king, still more infuriated, passes sentence of death upon Haman” (*Keil & Delitzsch*).

7:9-10 “And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. Then the king said, Hang him thereon. 10 So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king’s wrath pacified.”

“Harbonah, one of the chamberlains” This servant was introduced already earlier (1:10).

“Behold” Coffman comments that “the word behold indicates that it was visible from the palace.”

“The gallows...which Haman had made” With co-workers like Harbonah, Haman didn’t need any more enemies. Apparently, there wasn’t any love loss between Haman and his fellow servants or ministers; we don’t imagine that Haman was especially gracious to anyone with whom he worked who was beneath his rank.

“For Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king” An obvious contrast in character suggests itself respecting the good Mordecai did for the king opposed to the evil of which Haman was guilty.

“They hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai” Nothing could be more ironic or fitting for such an evil man as Haman to be the recipient of his own evil design and for Mordecai to escape the torturous death Haman had in mind for him. See Psalms 7:15-16, 9:15-16 and Proverbs 26:27 for divine perspective on such ironies.

“The king’s wrath was pacified” Coffman writes that the appeasement of the king’s wrath at the execution of Haman was hardly the solution itself for which Esther petitioned. The edict to have the Jews throughout the Persian Empire slaughtered, an unalterable, royal Persian law, remained a grave threat to every Jew and the queen herself.

Questions

1. Describe the nature of the banquet with which Chapter Seven opens.
2. How many times did King Ahasuerus ask Queen Esther to reveal her request?
3. What is a plausible explanation for Ahasuerus addressing his favorite wife as “Queen Esther”?
4. What indicates that King Ahasuerus is favorably disposed to grant whatever Esther requests?
5. Describe the likely affect of Mordecai’s being honored the previous day on Esther’s resolve to intervene with the king for the preservation of her people.
6. What two requests did Esther make to the king?
7. To what does the word “sold” in Esther’s speech have reference?
8. How can we know that the Jews in captivity (first under Babylon and subsequently under Persian rule) had freedom to conduct their affairs and work for a living with little or no interference?
9. Was Haman capable of offsetting through monetary compensation to the royal treasury the loss the empire would incur from the extermination of the Jewish race?

10. True or False. Esther accused Haman to the king in Haman's absence.
11. Why was there a bed or a couch associated with the banquet to which the king, queen and Haman had gone?
12. What did placing a hood over the head of Haman imply?
13. What was prominently visible from the queen's apartment where the banquet was held?
14. What did the execution of Haman leave unresolved?

Chapter Eight

8:1-2 “On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman the Jews’ enemy unto Esther the queen. And Mordecai came before the king; for Esther had told what he was unto her. **2** And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.”

“Give the house of Haman...unto Esther” Not merely physical property but everything monetary and otherwise over which Haman had exercised control was forfeited and initially given to Esther. “Not only the building and the furniture, but the household—the vast train of attendants of all kinds that was attached to the residence of a Persian noble” (Barnes).

“Esther told what he [Mordecai] was unto her” Esther related to the king that Mordecai was her “kinsman and foster-father, Est 2:7” (*Keil & Delitzsch*). *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* observes that Esther chose the most opportune time to acknowledge to the king her relationship to Mordecai. ...Esther displayed great prudence and address in acknowledging Mordecai’s relation to her at the moment most fitted to be of eminent service to him.”

“The king took off his ring...and gave it unto Mordecai”

This information effected Mordechai’s appearance before the king, i.e., his reception into the number of the high dignitaries who beheld the face of the king, i.e., were allowed personal access to him; comp. 1:10,14; 7:9...By this act [giving Mordecai the king’s ring] Mordechai was advanced to the post of first minister of the king; comp. Gen 41:42...The king’s seal gave the force of law to royal edicts, the seal taking the place of the signature. See ... Est 3:10.” (*Keil & Delitzsch*)

Matthew Henry notes that the reasons for the king to honor Mordecai are magnified and several. “Now the king finds himself, for his wife’s sake, more obliged than he thought he had been to delight in doing honour to Mordecai. How great were the merits of that man to whom both king and queen did in effect owe their lives!” Further, “All the trust he [the king] had reposed in Haman, and all the power he had given him, are here transferred to Mordecai...” (Henry).

“Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman” Esther essentially made Mordecai “her steward...to manage the large and opulent estate which had been assigned to her” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*). She made Mordecai “administrator of Haman’s estate. Mordecai moved into the palatial dwellings formerly occupied by Haman and was thus provided a residence befitting his new position” (Butler).

Adam Clarke summarizes the events of the first verse:

Since Haman was found guilty of treasonable practices against the peace and prosperity of the king and his empire, his life was forfeited and his goods confiscated. And as Mordecai had been the means of preserving the king’s life, and was the principal object of Haman’s malice, it was but just to confer his property upon him, as well as his dignity and office, as Mordecai was found deserving of the former, and fit to discharge the duties of the latter. (Clarke)

Matthew Henry adds the contrast between the temporary honor Mordecai had received the previous day and the lasting honor given him here, more than simply honor but great substance as well.

Burton Coffman assesses the first two verses: “Summarizing the consequences in evidence here: (1) Haman’s vast properties were conferred upon Esther; (2) Mordecai was given the management and control of them; (3) Ahasuerus bestowed the office of Prime Minister upon Mordecai when he gave him the ring that had been worn by Haman. (4) The ring gave Mordecai the power to seal documents and to convey with them the authority of law.”

8:3-6 “And Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews. **4** Then the king held out the golden sceptre toward Esther. So Esther arose, and stood before the king, **5** And said, If it please the king, and if I have found favour in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the king’s provinces: **6** For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?”

“**To put away the mischief of Haman**” Barnes concisely defines the remaining problem. “Though Haman was dead, his work was not yet undone.” “In spite of Haman’s death and Mordecai’s exaltation, the Jews were still doomed to destruction by an irreversible decree. Therefore Esther’s task was not yet completed. In Est 8:3 the general contents of her petition are outlined, but in 8:5-6 her actual words are given” (*Wycliffe*). “Many a man’s mischief survives him, and the wickedness he devised operates when he is gone. What men project and write may, after their death, be either very profitable or very pernicious” (Henry).

“**If...the thing seem right before the king**” The word “right” here “does not mean right in the sense ethical right, but in the sense of advantageous, successfulness, propriety” (Butler 363).

“**Haman...wrote to destroy the Jews**” Several commentators observe that though the king was complicit in this evil, his participation in Haman’s scheme is omitted from Esther’s petition.

“**For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people...**” “She enforces her petition with a pathetic plea...” (Henry).

8:7-8 “Then the king Ahasuerus said unto Esther the queen and to Mordecai the Jew, Behold, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and him they have hanged upon the gallows, because he laid his hand upon the Jews. **8** Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king’s name, and seal it with the king’s ring: for the writing which is written in the king’s name, and sealed with the king’s ring, may no man reverse.”

“**Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king’s name...**” “...[T]he king was unable to reverse his decree against the Jews; so he empowered Mordecai to issue a new decree to counteract the first. This was quickly done, and the Jews were now permitted to defend themselves on the thirteenth of Adar, the date which Haman had originally set for their destruction” (*Wycliffe*).

“**May no man reverse**” The law system of the Medes and Persians was that once a royal law had been decreed that it could not be changed, even by the king (Dan. 6:15). Though the former edict could not be annulled directly, the second edict “consequently placed [the Jews] on an equal footing with their enemies” (Clarke).

8:9-12 “Then were the king’s scribes called at that time in the third month, that is, the month Sivan, on the three and twentieth day thereof; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded unto the Jews, and to the lieutenants, and the deputies and rulers of the provinces which are from India unto Ethiopia, an hundred twenty and seven provinces, unto every province according to the writing thereof, and unto every people after their language, and to the Jews according to their writing, and according to their language. **10** And he wrote in the king Ahasuerus’ name, and sealed it with the king’s ring, and sent letters by posts on horseback, and riders on mules, camels, and young dromedaries: **11** Wherein the king granted the Jews which were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey, **12** Upon one day

in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, namely, upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar."

"The month Sivan..." The counter edict to preserve the Jews was written and distributed "about two months after the promulgation of the former, but nine months before the time set for its execution..." (Henry). Clarke writes that Sivan "answers to a part of our May and June." Wycliffe speaks to the timing thus: "The date was June 25, 474 BC, a little over two months after the first decree was issued, allowing more than eight months for the Jews to prepare their defenses (v. 9)."

"Unto every people after their language" Matthew Henry diverges to make an important point respecting divine revelation based on the fact that the new edict was "published in the respective languages of all the provinces. Shall the subjects of an earthly prince have his decrees in a language they understand? and shall God's oracles and laws be locked up from his servants in an unknown tongue?"

"Mules" Clarke notes that the word translated "mule" means "a swift chariot horse."

"To stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey" Matthew Henry correctly comments that the Jews were allowed, first, to defend themselves. Secondly, the Jews were permitted to take the offensive against those who attacked them, acquiring the property, possessions and people pertaining to any that would attack them. Clarke observes that respecting the words "to destroy, to slay and to cause to perish," they were "[t]he same words as in Haman's decree: therefore the Jews had as much authority to slay their enemies, as their enemies had to slay them." "This decree followed very closely the language of the edict of Haman (Est. 3:13) in order to nullify it to the fullest extent possible" (Coffman).

"The power of the people" *Wycliffe* interprets "the power of the people" to mean their attackers' "military forces."

"Little ones and women"

This was the ordinary custom, to destroy the whole family of those convicted of great crimes, and whether this was right or wrong, it was the custom of the people, and according to the laws. Besides, as this edict was to give the Jews the same power against their enemies as they had by the former decree against them, and the women and children were there included, consequently they must be included here. (Clarke)

8:13-14 "The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people, and that the Jews should be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. 14 So the posts that rode upon mules and camels went out, being hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment. And the decree was given at Shushan the palace."

King Ahasuerus essentially permitted his empire a day of anarchy or "civil war" (Butler 367; Barnes).

8:15-17 "And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple: and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad. 16 The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honour. 17 And in every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day. And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them."

"Mordecai...royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple" "These were probably his own official robes as prime minister rather than the special attire that was granted to him on his previous day of exaltation (6:8) (*Wycliffe*). "The variety and the kind of insignia worn by a favourite at once makes known to the people the particular dignity to which he has been raised" (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*).

“Many of the people of the land became Jews” *Wycliffe* notes that “many [Gentiles became] Jewish proselytes.” What passed for Jewish or passes today for Jewish is not at all limited to nor can it be proved pertains solely to a pure Jewish parentage from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

According to Jacob Gertenhaus (in *Christianity Today*, 3-13-70), no Jew today can trace his ancestry beyond 200-300 years backward. Exclusive genetic purity of the Jewish race began to disappear as a result of the Assyrian and Babylonian exile. The many Gentiles who became Jewish proselytes here in the days of Esther is a case in point! Most Jews today are no more genetically pure Israelite than Americans are genetically pure Englishmen! (Butler 370)

“For the fear of the Jews” This speaks to the flawed motivation of many who newly professed Judaism from among the ranks of Gentiles. “These were a species of converts not likely to bring much honour to true religion: but the sacred historian states the simple fact. They did profess Judaism for fear of the Jews, whether they continued steady in that faith or not” (Clarke).

Questions

1. Explain what was involved in giving Haman’s house to Esther.
2. Why in Chapter Eight was it especially an opportune time for Esther to acknowledge her relationship to Mordecai?
3. What was the significance of the king giving his ring to Mordecai?
4. Give two reasons for which King Ahasuerus has reason to especially honor Mordecai.
5. True or False. Esther gave Haman’s house to Mordecai.
6. How did the honor bestowed on Mordecai in Chapter Eight differ from the honor bestowed upon him the previous day?
7. What unfinished business respecting the preservation of the Jews remained though Haman was dead?
8. What detail about the edict to destroy the Jews did Esther omit from her petition to her husband, the king?
9. True or False. Esther passionately pled with the king for a remedy to the edict to destroy the Jews.
10. Since royal laws of the Medes and Persians could not be rescinded, what remedy did the king suggest for annulling the affect of the edict to annihilate the Jews?
11. About how long elapsed between the first and second decrees respecting the slaughter against the Jews?
12. True or False. King Ahasuerus essentially permitted a single day of civil war throughout the Persian Empire for the purpose of annulling the decree to annihilate the Jews.
13. For what reason did many Gentiles apparently become Jews religiously?

Chapter Nine

9:1-2 “Now in the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king’s commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution, in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them, (though it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them;) **2** The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt: and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people.”

“The twelfth month...thirteenth day” The day designated corresponded to both the first decree authorizing the slaughter of the Jews throughout the Persian Empire as well as to the second decree authorizing the Jews to defend themselves. *Wycliffe* puts for the very day of these decrees: “Finally, on March 7, 473 BC, the fateful day arrived, and the Jews gathered into compact groups within the various cities to await their attackers.”

Matthew Henry makes the interesting observation that neither side in the one-day civil war was caught unawares as though ambushed suddenly, and that from several considerations the opposing forces were on equal ground. “Neither side was surprised; for both had notice of it long enough before, so that it was a fair trial of skill between them. Nor could either side call the other rebels, for they were both supported by the royal authority.” “The Jews prepared as their enemies prepared and they were surely aware of one another’s preparations for they both had nearly nine months to make preparations for the great struggle” (Butler 373). However, “[t]he enemies of the Jews were the aggressors” (Henry).

“Commandment... decree” The word translated “commandment” means “a matter” whereas the Hebrew translated “decree” means “a royal edict” (*Biblesoft’s*).

“Enemies” The word “enemies” means “hating; an adversary” (*Biblesoft’s*).

“The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities” Jews residing in various cities throughout the Persian Empire banded together in those respective cities to more ably resist any and all who would assail them. “At this point in history, there were no exclusively Jewish cities outside of Judea” (Coffman). Butler speaks to the motivation with which the Jews fought evidently with their all, as well as the mentality of their enemies.

They fought with such ferocity, all the people of the Persian empire stood in awe and fear of them. The Jews were faced with the possibility of total extinction. It was all precipitated by personal prejudice and a personal vendetta. There were no great issues of territorial infringements, rebellions, or national sovereignty involved. The war against them was irrational, unjust and genocidal. They had done nothing whatsoever to deserve such murder. Right was on their side. **They fought with abandon to preserve their race** and to uphold the justness of the cause. (373 emphasis added)

“Man” The word “man” here refers to “male” (*Biblesoft’s*).

“Fear” The word “fear” means “alarm” (*Biblesoft’s*).

9:3-5 “And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. **4** For Mordecai was great in the king’s house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater. **5** Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them.”

“And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews” “[T]he Persians, who formed the standing army which kept the Empire

in subjection, and were at the disposal of the various governors of provinces, took the Jews' side" (Barnes).

"Rulers" means "a head person (of any rank or class)" (*Biblesoft's*).

"Lieutenants" A "lieutenant" here is "governor of a main province" (*Biblesoft's*).

"Helped" The word "helped" here means "to lift" (*Biblesoft's*).

"Because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them" We might say, the various levels of government officials and others in the employ of the king knew on which side was there best interest served.

The tenor of the second decree made it perfectly clear to Persian officials that the king, to say nothing of Mordecai, his prime minister, now favored the Jews. To have joined in the attack against the Jews now would surely have brought wrath upon them. Perhaps they remembered the fate of those rulers who had opposed the true wishes of Darius the Mede in a somewhat similar situation (Dan 6:24). (*Wycliffe*)

"Destruction" The word "destruction" means "a perishing" (*Biblesoft's*).

"What they would" The phrase "what they would" comes from a Hebrew word meaning "delight" (*Biblesoft's*).

"Unto those that hated them" This phrase comes from a Hebrew word that means "to hate (personally)" (*Biblesoft's*).

9:6-10 "And in Shushan the palace the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men. 7 And Parshandatha, and Dalphon, and Aspatha, 8 And Poratha, and Adalia, and Aridatha, 9 And Parmashta, and Arisai, and Aridai, and Vajezatha, 10 The ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews, slew they; but on the spoil laid they not their hand."

"Slew" The word "slew" means "to smite with deadly intent" (*Biblesoft's*).

"Men" The word "men" means "a male" (*Biblesoft's*).

"But on the spoil laid they not their hand" Butler notes that the Jews were permitted to enrich themselves with the wealth of their fallen enemies, but the Jews restrained themselves from doing so. "[T]he Jews did not plunder their enemies [sic] property—although the Jews had official sanction to do so!" Not taking the spoil of battle underscored that the Jews' fight was motivated by self preservation rather than greed. "The Jews refrained from taking advantage of their rightful privilege, in order that the purity of their motives might be made evident to all" (*Wycliffe*).

And it is remarked here, and in Est 9:16, where the account is given of the number slain in the provinces, that the Jews laid no hands on the spoil. They stood for their lives, and gave full proof that they sought their own personal safety, and not the property of their enemies, though the decree in their favour gave them authority to take the property of all those who were their adversaries, Est 8:11. (Clarke)

However, Matthew Henry thinks that the Jews did not exercise the fullest aspect of the decree for their defense, which mimicked the decree for their destruction, and did not destroy the families of the Jews' armed enemies. "Their commission empowered them to destroy the families of their enemies, even the little ones and the women, Est 8:11. But their humanity forbade them to do that, though that was designed against them. They slew none but those they found in arms; and therefore they did not take the spoil, but left it to the women and little ones, whom they spared, for their subsistence..."

9:11-14 "On that day the number of those that were slain in Shushan the palace was brought before the king. 12 And the king said unto Esther the queen, The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the palace, and the ten sons of Haman; what have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? now what is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee: or what is thy request further? and it shall be done. 13 Then said Esther, If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews which are in Shushan to do tomorrow also according unto this day's

decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows. 14 And the king commanded it so to be done: and the decree was given at Shushan; and they hanged Haman's ten sons."

"Provinces" The Hebrew for "provinces" here means "jurisdiction" (*Biblesoft's*).

"What is thy petition?" Butler comments that the king was aware that all the resistance to the Jews in Shushan (Susa) had not been extinguished in a single day, permitting Esther to make further request (377).

"Let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows" The sons of Haman were already dead per verses 9-10 as they had been among the 500 in Susa who had been killed in their attempted slaughter of the Jews in that city. There is precedent under Judaism for this procedure (Deut. 21:22; Ezra 6:11).

"The king commanded it so to be done..." Esther's request of extending within the capital city alone the retaliation of the Jews against their enemies for an additional day was granted by the king; and, the dead sons of Haman were impaled.

9:15-16 "For the Jews that were in Shushan gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and slew three hundred men at Shushan; but on the prey they laid not their hand. 16 But the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew of their foes seventy and five thousand, but they laid not their hands on the prey."

"Three hundred men" The total in Shushan (Susa) of enemies of the Jews killed in two days was 800.

"Seventy and five thousand" Barnes pens: "The Septuagint gives the number as 15,000; and this amount seems more in proportion to the 800 slain in Susa." However, the maybe 200 acres comprising Shushan (Barnes) contrasted with the expanse of the Persian Empire from India to Greece and Ethiopia could allow for the higher number it seems to me.

When one considers the vastness of the empire, the wide dispersion of the Jewish communities within that empire, the fact that the Persian officials throughout the empire gave aid to the Jews (probably with their troops), and the fact that the Persian officials were not all that careful to preserve the lives of "provincials," one must admit that the number 75,000 is more credible than 15,000. The Jews killed 800 in the city of Susa alone. Multiply that number by 94 cities and you have slightly over 75,000. Do not forget there were 127 *provinces* in the empire (8:9). (Butler 379)

9:17-19 "On the thirteenth day of the month Adar; and on the fourteenth day of the same rested they, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. 18 But the Jews that were at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day thereof; and on the fourteenth thereof; and on the fifteenth day of the same they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. 19 Therefore the Jews of the villages, that dwelt in the unwall'd towns, made the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another."

"Feasting" The word "feasting" refers to "drink" (*Biblesoft's*).

"A good day" Matthew Henry distinguishes the Feast of Purim from other religious holidays under Judaism. "It was not a divine institution, and therefore it is not called a holy day, but a human appointment, by which it was made a good day, v. 19, 22."

"Rested" The celebration of rest or cessation from hostilities differing between the capital city and the balance of the empire resulted in confusion for commemorating the event.

The circumstances of the struggle within the city of Susa (two days duration) resulted in a difference regarding the date of the day of rejoicing between the Jews of the capital city

Susa, and the Jews of the provinces. The Jews of Susa could not “rest” until the third day which was the 15th of Adar; the provincial Jews rested on the 14th of Adar. When Esther and Mordecai attempted to set up a national celebration for this great deliverance some difficulty arose as to which day would be set aside for all Jews to commemorate it. It was diplomatically decided that both days would be kept (9:21). (Butler 379)

“Portions” The word “portions” means “something weighed out” (*Biblesoft’s*).

“Another” The word “another” means “an associate (more or less close)” (*Biblesoft’s*).

9:20-23 “And Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters unto all the Jews that were in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, both nigh and far, 21 To stablish this among them, that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly, 22 As the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day: that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor. 23 And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them.”

“Things” The word translated “things” here means “a matter” (*Biblesoft’s*) and was translated as “commandment” in verse one.

“Sent letters...to stablish this...that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly” “This letter marked the beginning of the Jewish feast of Purim. ...Later, when Mordecai’s suggestion was favorably received, he issued an order enjoining its observance” (Coffman).

“To stablish” The Hebrew here means “to rise” (*Biblesoft’s*). We might say that by his letters Mordecai gave rise to or caused to be initiated the object of those letters—the Feast of Purim.

“Sorrow” The word “sorrow” means “affliction” (*Biblesoft’s*).

9:24-25 “Because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is, the lot, to consume them, and to destroy them; 25 But when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked device, which he devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows.”

“Devised” The Hebrew for “devised” means “to plot” (*Biblesoft’s*).

9:26-28 “Wherefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. Therefore for all the words of this letter, and of that which they had seen concerning this matter, and which had come unto them, 27 The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so as it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to their writing, and according to their appointed time every year; 28 And that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed.”

“They called these days Purim after the name of Pur” “The feast of Purim is today observed by the Jews; and it has been continually observed throughout history, from the times of Xerxes (who was assassinated in the year 465 B.C.) until the present day, for almost twenty-five centuries...” (Coffman).

Pur, in the Persian language, signifies lot; and the feast of Purim or lots has a reference to the time having been pitched upon by Haman through the decision of the lot. In consequence of the signal national deliverance which divine Providence gave them from the infamous machinations of Haman, Mordecai ordered the Jews to commemorate that at

event by an anniversary festival which was to last, for two days, in accordance with the two days' war of defense they had to maintain. There was at first a slight difference in the time of this festival; because the Jews in the provinces, having defended themselves against their enemies on the 13th day, devoted the 14th day to festivity; whereas their brethren in Shushan, having extended that work over two days, did not observe their thanksgiving feast until the 15th day. But this was remedied by authority, which fixed the 14th and 15th days of Adar. It became a season of sunny memories to the universal body of the Jews; and, by the letters of Mordecai, dispersed through all parts of the Persian empire, it was established as an annual feast, the celebration of which is kept up still. (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*)

“The words” Here, “the words” means “a matter” and is translated as “commandment” in verse one and as “things” in verse 20.

“Letter” The word translated “letter” means “epistle” (*Biblesoft's*).

“This matter” The words “this matter” come from another Hebrew word than just noticed, and the Hebrew here means “referring to the previous or following context” (*Biblesoft's*).

“These days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation” “[T]he annual celebration of this feast was instituted for a perpetual memorial to all Jews at all times” (*Keil & Delitzsch*). The memorial Feast of Purim is not today what it began to be.

What it has since degenerated to... Their own writers acknowledge that this feast is commonly celebrated among them with gluttony, and drunkenness, and excess of riot. Their Talmud says expressly that, in the feast of Purim, a man should drink till he knows not the difference between Cursed be Haman, and Blessed be Mordecai. See what the corrupt and wicked nature of man often brings that to which was at first well intended... (Henry)

9:29-32 “Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority, to confirm this second letter of Purim. 30 And he sent the letters unto all the Jews, to the hundred twenty and seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth, 31 To confirm these days of Purim in their times appointed, according as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had enjoined them, and as they had decreed for themselves and for their seed, the matters of the fastings and their cry. 32 And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book.”

“Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority” The institution of a religious feast day was the matter pertaining to the Jews alone, and King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) need not and could not involve himself in such an affair. “There is no mention of their receiving the approbation of any high priest, nor of any authority beyond that of Mordecai and Esther; the king could not join in such a business, as he had nothing to do with the Jewish religion, that not being the religion of the country” (Clarke).

“Authority” The word translated “authority” means “might or (figuratively) positiveness” (*Biblesoft's*).

“To confirm this second letter of Purim...” “To make this appointment binding upon all the Jews in all provinces of the Persian monarchy, Esther and Mordochai published a second letter, which was sent by Mordochai throughout the whole realm of King Ahashverosh” (*Keil & Delitzsch*). Barnes explains the difference between the two letters: “Mordecai’s first letter (Est 9:20) was to some extent tentative, a recommendation. The Jews generally having accepted the recommendation (Est 9:23,27), he and Esther now wrote a second letter which was mandatory.”

Keil & Delitzsch wonderfully summarizes the events of Esther 10:

On the day appointed by both edicts, the Jews assembled in the towns and provinces of the kingdom to slay all who sought their hurt, and being supported by the royal officials, inflicted a great defeat upon their enemies (vv. 1-10). At the queen’s desire, the king

granted permission to the Jews in Susa to fight against their enemies on the following day also (vv. 11-15), while in the other towns and districts of the kingdom they fought for their lives only on the 13th of Adar; so that in these places they rested on the 14th, but in Susa not till the 15th, and consequently kept in the latter the one day, in the former the other, as a day of feasting and rejoicing (vv. 16-19). The observance of this day of resting as a festival, under the name of Purim, by all the Jews in the Persian monarchy, was then instituted by Esther and Mordochai (vv. 20-32).

Wycliffe provides an equally useful summary of Chapter 9 plus emphasizes the firm establishment of a perpetual feast among the Jews to commemorate their delivery from the intended genocide.

When the fateful day arrived, the Jews successfully defended themselves with the aid of government officials and slew five hundred men in Shushan, including the ten sons of Haman. Esther obtained permission for the Jews to defend themselves a second day as well, and three hundred more enemies were slain in Shushan. In the provinces, seventy-five thousand enemies were slain. The Feast of Purim was then established by special letters to commemorate this tremendous deliverance. A second letter confirmed the first and provided for a fast as well. Mordecai's greatness and his love for Israel were recorded in the chronicles of the kingdom.

Questions

1. True or False. The 13th day of the 12th month was both the day decreed for the attack on the Jews as well as the day decreed for the Jews to defend themselves.
2. About how long had the two opposing forces had to prepare for the day of civil war within the Persian Empire?
3. True or False. The Jews had their own Jewish cities throughout the Persian Empire.
4. What would explain the ferocity with which the Jews fought their enemies within the Persian Empire?
5. True or False. Government officials and Persia's armed forces were defeated by the Jews also when the Jews defended themselves against their enemies.
6. How deep-seated was the hatred by the enemies of the Jews toward the Jews?
7. True or False. A total of 800 enemies of the Jews were killed in the capital city of Shushan (Susa).
8. True or False. Though the Jews defended themselves throughout the Persian Empire on one day, Jews in the capital city fought their enemies for two days.
9. True or False. Though the Jews were authorized by royal edict to kill their attackers as well as the families of their attackers, the Bible text only confirms that the Jews killed the males who attacked them.
10. True or False. Though the Jews were authorized by royal edict to take for themselves the wealth and belongings of their enemies who they slew, the Jews only kept half of the spoils of war and gave the balance to the king.
11. Why do you think Esther had the bodies of the ten sons of Haman hanged or impaled?
12. How many enemies of the Jews were killed outside of the capital city of Shushan (Susa) throughout the Persian Empire?
13. True or False. The feasting in celebration of Jewish victory over enemies of the Jews was characterized by drinking.

14. Name the Jewish feast begun as a result of the events in the Book of Esther.
15. True or False. King Ahasuerus joined with Queen Esther and Prime Minister Mordecai in establishing the Jewish Feast of Purim.

Chapter Ten

10:1 “And the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea.”

“**Tribute upon the land, and upon the isles of the sea**” *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown* surmises that the particular and far flung extraction of tribute from throughout the Persian Empire was for the purpose of offsetting the disastrous and expensive attempt to conquer Greece. At the very least, the alternative plan to fund the empire offered by Haman at the expense of Jewish genocide did not materialize with the unfolding of the events contained in the Book of Esther. Another remedy had to be sought.

“**The isles of the sea**” Persian control of islands in the Mediterranean Sea nearest Greece were surrendered in Persia’s defeat in its attempt to conquer Greece. Hence, many of the islands under consideration may have been much closer, i.e., in the Persian Gulf (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*). “In his expedition into Greece, Xerxes lost the islands of the Aegean, but he still held Asia Minor and some of the islands of the Mediterranean and all its coastland except North Africa. In all these territories he imposed forced labor on his subjects, probably to recoup some of the losses he suffered in his debacle in Greece” (Butler 389).

10:2 “And all the acts of his power and of his might, and the declaration of the greatness of Mordecai, whereunto the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia?”

“**Written in the book of the chronicles of the kings**” The reference to secular, historical books respecting the Book of Esther was for the purpose of authenticating the Book of Esther beyond limitation to its own context. “This matter may be simply explained by the circumstance, that the author of this book was using as an authority the book of the chronicles alluded to in v. 2, and is quite analogous with the mode observed in the books of Kings and Chronicles by historians both of Babylonian and post-Babylonian days” (*Keil & Delitzsch*). However, Butler notes: “The full account of the greatness of Xerxes, and the emperor’s promotion of Mordecai, was recorded in the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia. But those chronicles have perished with the dust of ancient empires. The only records we have of Xerxes are those of the Greeks and the Book of Esther” (389).

Coffman adds a tidbit of information discernible about the nature of the nation of the Medes and Persians. “Incidentally, we have here the most conspicuous evidence that the Medo-Persian Empire was never two empires, but only one; the record of all their kings was in the same book!”

10:3 “For Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed.”

Keil & Delitzsch observes that the Book of Esther began with reference to King Ahasuerus and appropriately closes with reference to him. This dates the Book of Esther within the reign of King Ahasuerus (Xerxes). Butler expands on the closing references to Ahasuerus: “The postscript emphasizes the power of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) in order to reflect on the power and authority of Mordecai since the Jew stood next to the emperor himself in power and authority. If Xerxes could command the service of the continent of Asia and the coast of the Mediterranean, then Mordecai’s power and command was that all encompassing too” (388).

The purpose of the author in this very short chapter is that of stressing the greatness of Mordecai, the key word being that, in all the world, no one was any greater than Mor-

decai except the king. “Mordecai was next unto king Ahasuerus”! This required a preliminary note on how great was Ahasuerus. He was the ruler of most of the world as it was known then, from India to Ethiopia, with one hundred twenty-seven provinces, and here is added a note that he laid tribute upon the land and the isles of the sea. (Coffman)

“His seed” “In all probability Mordecai was a eunuch, and therefore we understand ‘his seed’ here to be a reference to God’s Israel” (Coffman).

Finally, though like much of the rest of the Bible’s narration on particular events and people (i.e., what did Jesus write in the dirt, John 8:6), we might like to know more than is revealed. Yet, we must content ourselves with what is revealed (Deut. 29:29). Lastly, Clarke notes that Latin and Greek texts add 10 verses to Chapter Ten plus six additional chapters, which are preserved in the Apocrypha or uninspired writings.

Questions

1. What is a plausible reason for the particular tribute mentioned in Esther 10?
2. How do references to “the isles of the sea” likely differ from the same reference that could have been made before the time of the Book of Esther?
3. True or False. We can turn today to the secular, history books kept by the Medes and Persians and read substantially the same thing we find in the Book of Esther.
4. How do we know that the Medes and Persians formed a nation together instead of cooperating separate nations or one nation dominating another nation.
5. True or False. It is doubtful that Mordecai fathered any children.
6. True or False. There are spurious or uninspired writings connected with the Book of Esther.

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God's Redemptive Plan

GOD'S PART

Love (John 3:16)

Grace (Eph. 2:8)

Mercy (Titus 3:5)

Gospel (Rom. 1:16)

CHRIST'S PART

The Blood of Christ (Rev. 1:5)

Our Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5)

HOLY SPIRIT'S PART

Revelation (2 Pet. 1:20-21)

MAN'S PART

Bible Faith (John 8:24)

Repentance (Acts 17:30)

Baptism (1 Pet. 3:21)

Obedience (Heb. 5:8, 9)

Purity (Rev. 22:14)

Faithfulness (Rev. 2:10)

Love (1 John 2:10)

Hope (Rom. 8:24)

Works (Jam. 2:24)

Endurance (Matt. 10:22)

Confessing Christ (Rom. 10:9-10)

Being Born Again (John 3:3-5)

Laying Aside Evil (Jam. 1:21)

Preaching (1 Cor. 1:18, 21)

Calling on the Name of the Lord (Rom. 10:14)

Knowledge of the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:15)



Meet the Rushmores

Bonnie and Louis Rushmore have been married for over 40 years, and they have three grown children. Brother Rushmore began preaching the same year that he and Bonnie wed, and so they have served congregations in various parts of the United States for 40 years, too. Louis Rushmore taught at the West Virginia School of Preaching for 10 years, and Bonnie and Louis have worked with World Evangelism for the past seven years.

These recent years they have traveled up to parts of 45 weeks annually between stateside and overseas venues. Bonnie and Louis spend one month in Guyana, South America and up to two months in the countries of Myanmar and India in Asia.

Brother and sister Rushmore participate with other World Evangelism team members to prepare and distribute Christian literature worldwide from the World Evangelism building in Winona, Mississippi. Bonnie does most of the layout for and Louis is an Associate Editor of *The Voice of Truth International* magazine; they both are also staff writers for the *Global Harvest* magazine. Louis is the Editor of *Gospel Gazette Online*, an Internet magazine.

In addition, sister Rushmore has authored *Living Principles: Gleanings from Unnamed and Named Bible Characters*. Her articles have appeared in several brotherhood magazines, too.

Brother Rushmore has written several books, tracts and articles. His books include these titles: *Beverage Alcohol*; *The Church Divine*; *No Hermeneutical Gymnastics, Please*; *The Parables of Our Lord* (2 vols.); *Digging Up the Past*; *Biblical Companions: Geography, Archaeology & Sacred History*; and *Bible Geography*.

Incidentally, Bonnie and Louis' daughter Rebecca has authored *What Makes Us Tick? A Look at Personality and the Bible*. All of these titles are available from World Evangelism, as well as hundreds of other titles of books and tracts.