

LIFE-STUDY OF ESTHER

MESSAGE ONE

AN INTRODUCTORY WORD AND THE SECRET CARE OF THE HIDING GOD FOR HIS OPPRESSED ELECT IN THEIR DISPERSION

Scripture Reading: Esth. 1—2

With this message we begin the life-study of the book of Esther. Esther is a sweet book, covering, as its central subject, the secret care and the open salvation of the hiding God in Israel's captivity. God is omnipresent and also omnipotent, yet He is hiding. Nobody knows where He is.

The people of Israel had been scattered, dispersed, in their captivity. They probably told the Gentiles among whom they were living that their God was Jehovah. Gentiles, especially the rulers, might have said to the Israelites, "Where is your Jehovah? Is your Jehovah real and living? If He is, why are you here in captivity as slaves?" During the years of the captivity, God was hiding, and He is still hiding. Even today, in the church age, God is hiding Himself. Both for the children of Israel and for us today, it seems that there is no God in this universe. We need to realize that God is living and real, but He is hiding. He is a God who hides Himself (Isa. 45:15).

Because God's people became degraded and rotten, God disciplined and punished them by handing them over as slaves to the Gentile nations. Yet in His severity there is mercy (Rom. 11:22). While the people of Israel were in dispersion and captivity, God was taking care of them in a hidden way, and at the right time He came in openly to save them. Even when the captives of Israel were in the lowest situation, at the bottom, Christ was among them, suffering with them (Zech. 1:7-17).

On the one hand, God used the Gentile nations as tools to discipline His people. On the other hand, the hiding God was with the people of Israel, caring for them. Eventually, God used the Medo-Persian Empire to overthrow the Babylonian Empire. Cyrus, the king of Persia, was even called God's shepherd, one who would fulfill His desire (Isa. 44:28), and His anointed, one who would serve God's purpose (45:1-4). From this we see that the hiding God did many things for Israel in a secret way.

I. AN INTRODUCTORY WORD

Let us now consider some introductory matters.

A. The Writer

The writer of the book of Esther was most probably Mordecai (Esth. 9:20, 23). As Esther's cousin, he was the one who raised her.

B. The Time

The contents of this book cover a period of at least ten years during the reign of Ahasuerus (486-465 B.C.).

C. The Contents

The book of Esther gives us a vivid record of how the hiding God of Israel took care secretly of His oppressed elect in their dispersion and saved openly His persecuted elect in their captivity.

D. The Crucial Point

The crucial point of Esther is that the very God who chose Israel, the descendants of Abraham, as His elect, after He gave them into captivity to the Gentile nations, became a hidden God to them to take care of them secretly and save them openly in secrecy (Isa. 45:15). This is the reason that this book does not mention the name of God even at occasions when the name of God should be mentioned (Esth. 4:3, 16). Because this book shows us a hidden God, it does not mention the name of God.

E. The Sections

The book of Esther has two sections: (1) the secret care of the hiding God for His oppressed elect in their dispersion (chs. 1—2) and (2) the open salvation of the hiding God in secrecy to His persecuted elect in their captivity (chs. 3—10).

II. THE SECRET CARE OF THE HIDING GOD FOR HIS OPPRESSED ELECT IN THEIR DISPERSION AS SEEN IN ESTHER

Chapters one and two unveil the secret care of the hiding God for His oppressed elect as seen in Esther.

A. Establishing a Top King in the Gentile World

First, the hiding God established a top king in the Gentile world in prosperity, power, and glory over a great empire extending from India to Ethiopia (Africa)—1:1-2.

B. Causing the Top King to Depose His Queen because of Her Disobedience to His Word

Next, the hiding God caused the top king to depose his queen because of her disobedience to his word at his great banquet with his high officials (vv. 3-22). The king commanded that the queen come before him wearing the royal crown in order that he might present her to those attending the banquet. However, the queen refused to come at the king's command. As a result of her disobedience the queen was deposed, and the position of queen became vacant.

C. Raising Up a Jewish Orphan Virgin to Be Crowned by the Top King as His Queen

Finally, in His secret care the hiding God raised up Esther, a Jewish orphan virgin, to be crowned by the top king as his queen (2:1-18). Esther saved the king from being assassinated, telling the king in Mordecai's name of those who planned to assassinate him (vv. 19-23).

Our God is omnipresent, omnipotent, merciful, and full of forgiveness. Although He is such a God, He is also the hiding God. Because our God is a hiding God, others may check with us and ask, "Where is your God? Where is His kingdom?"

When we are questioned in such a manner, we may want to answer in this way: "My God is hidden. I cannot see Him, and you cannot see Him either. But you need to realize that sooner or later my hidden God will come in to do something on my behalf and to deal with those who do not believe in Him."

I can testify concerning this from my experience. More than forty-five years ago, I, along with several other co-workers, was arrested and imprisoned by a small Chinese army that betrayed China and worked for the Japanese military police. The entire Christian community in that city was shocked, because they knew that we could very easily be executed like other Chinese who had fallen into the hands of the Japanese invading army. We did not know what to expect, but the hiding God intervened in a wonderful way using a particular person as an Esther.

The wife of the captain of the Chinese army under the Japanese military police had been the wife of a schoolmate of mine who had died of tuberculosis. When he was dying, his wife asked me to visit him, and I did so and had an intimate conversation with him. He eventually died, and some time later she remarried. After I was arrested and imprisoned, a medical doctor who was meeting both with us and with other Christians heard about my situation. He then went to speak to the woman who had married the captain of that Chinese army. The two were close friends, and the doctor who was meeting with us told the woman that I and several others had been imprisoned and that she should ask her husband to release us. She spoke to her husband about us that very day. He loved her and was willing to fulfill her request.

That night he appeared to judge our case. We were taken from our cells and stood before him to be judged. I was the first one to be examined by him. He looked at me, asked me my name, and told me that everything was all right and that I was free to go home peacefully. He said the same thing to the others who had been arrested with me. At the time none of us knew what had taken place behind the scene. Later I realized that, in His secret wisdom, the hiding God had prepared an Esther for us. He had raised up a Chinese widow

to become the wife of the man who would judge our case. Just as the king of Persia listened to Esther and did what she said out of his love for her, so this man listened to his wife and released us from prison. This surely was due to the care of the hiding God.

Today we need to realize that the omnipotent God whom we are serving is still hiding Himself, especially when He is helping us. We cannot see Him, and apparently He is not doing anything for us. Actually, He is with us all the time and, in a hidden way, He is doing many things for us.

LIFE-STUDY OF ESTHER

MESSAGE TWO

THE OPEN SALVATION OF THE HIDING GOD IN SECRECY TO HIS PERSECUTED ELECT IN THEIR CAPTIVITY

Scripture Reading: Esth. 3—10

In this message we will cover chapters three through ten.

III. THE OPEN SALVATION OF THE HIDING GOD IN SECRECY TO HIS PERSECUTED ELECT IN THEIR CAPTIVITY AS SEEN IN MORDECAI

These chapters are concerned with the open salvation of the hiding God in secrecy to His persecuted elect in their captivity as seen in Mordecai.

A. Haman's Plot to Destroy All the Jews in Medo-Persia

In chapter three we see Haman's plot to destroy all the Jews in Medo-Persia.

1. An Agagite by the Name of Haman Being Promoted to the Highest Seat above All the Princes Who Were with the King

The Agagites were enemies of God. God charged Saul to slay all the Agagites, but he failed to do this and thereby offended God.

An Agagite by the name of Haman was promoted (no doubt at the instigation of Satan, the adversary of God) to the highest seat above all the princes who were with the king. The king commanded all his servants to bow down and pay homage to Haman, but Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage because of his Jewish belief in the unique God (vv. 1-4). He

believed in one God and refused to bow down to anyone other than God.

***2. Haman Being Filled with Rage
and Plotting Not Only to Kill Mordecai but Also
to Destroy All the Jews throughout the Empire***

Haman was filled with rage and plotted not only to kill Mordecai, the one who refused to pay him homage, but also to destroy all the Jews throughout the empire. He had the king send a decree to each province of his empire to destroy all the Jews, both young and old, children and women, in one day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, and to plunder their spoil (vv. 5-15). Haman's evil intention was to destroy all the Jews and to take away their wealth.

**B. Mordecai's Confrontation
of Haman's Plot through Esther's Close
and Intimate Contact with the King**

In 4:1 through 8:2 we have an account of Mordecai's confrontation of Haman's plot through Esther's close and intimate contact with the king.

1. All the Jews and Esther Fasting

When all the Jews and Esther heard of what Haman intended to do and learned that the king had even issued a decree to carry out Haman's intention, they fasted (4:3, 16). Although they fasted for their supplication to God, contrary to what we would expect, in verse 16 there is no mention of the name of God. While Esther and all the Jews were fasting, Haman, under the plot with his wife and friends, made a gallows on which to hang Mordecai (5:9-14).

***2. The King Being Unable to Sleep and Finding
the Report of How Mordecai Had Saved Him***

The king could not sleep, so he gave orders to have the book of the records of the chronicles brought, and they were read before him (6:1). The king found in the records the report of how Mordecai had saved him from being assassinated by two of his eunuchs, and he decided to bestow honor and dignity

on Mordecai. While the king was considering this, Haman came into the court to ask the king about hanging Mordecai (vv. 2-6). The king was thinking about honoring Mordecai, and Haman was thinking about hanging him. When the king asked Haman what should be done for the man whom the king desires to honor, Haman answered, "Let a royal robe be brought, one which the king has worn, and a horse on which the king has ridden and on whose head a royal crown has been set. And let the robe and the horse be delivered into the hand of one of the king's most noble princes; and let them array the man whom the king desires to honor and make him ride on horseback through the street of the city; and let them proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done for the man whom the king desires to honor" (vv. 8-9). At this juncture, the king commanded Haman to put on Mordecai a royal robe which the king had worn, make Mordecai ride through the street of the city on a horse on which the king had ridden, and proclaim before Mordecai, "Thus shall it be done for the man whom the king desires to honor" (vv. 10-11). After Haman did this, he hurried to his house, mourning and with his head covered (v. 12).

***3. Esther Pointing Out to the King
That Haman Was the Wicked Adversary
and Enemy Who Conspired to Kill All the Jews***

At her feast with the king and Haman, Esther the queen pointed out that Haman was the wicked adversary and enemy who conspired to kill all the Jews. The king immediately sentenced Haman to death and commanded his men to hang Haman on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai. On that day the king gave the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews, to Esther the queen and took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai, making him the second man to the king in the whole empire (7:1—8:2).

**C. The Open, Triumphant Victory
of the Jews over Their Enemies**

In 8:3 through 10:3 we see the open, triumphant victory

of the Jews over their enemies—the open salvation of their hiding God to rescue them from their persecutors.

1. The King Issuing a Decree through Mordecai

The king issued through Mordecai a decree to authorize the Jews to destroy all their enemies throughout his empire from India to Ethiopia, one hundred twenty-seven provinces (8:3-14).

2. The Jews Having Light, Gladness, Joy, and Honor

Mordecai went forth from the presence of the king in royal robes of blue and white and with a large crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple. The city of Susa the capital shouted and rejoiced, and the Jews had light, gladness, joy, and honor. Throughout every province and every city, wherever the king's decree came, the Jews had gladness, joy, a feast, and a good day. Many from among the peoples of the land (the heathen) became Jews, for the fear of the Jews had fallen on them (vv. 15-17).

3. The Jews Destroying All Their Enemies throughout the Empire

The Jews destroyed all their enemies throughout the empire under the reign of King Ahasuerus in the influence of Esther the queen with Mordecai as the second to the king (9:1-16). All the princes of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and those who did the king's business helped the Jews because of the fear of Mordecai, who was great in the king's house and whose fame went forth throughout all the provinces and who became greater and greater (vv. 1-4). In Susa the capital in two days the Jews destroyed eight hundred of their enemies and they hanged Haman's ten sons upon the gallows (vv. 5-15). In the provinces the Jews assembled and destroyed seventy-five thousand of those who hated them, thus having rest from their enemies (v. 16).

4. The Triumphant Jews Appointing and Establishing the Days of Purim

The triumphant Jews appointed and established the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month Adar as the Purim to celebrate their triumphant victory over their enemies (vv. 17-32). In this way the feast of Purim was established among the Jews for the remembrance and celebration of the two days during which they destroyed their enemies throughout the great empire of Persia. These days were to be days of feasting and rejoicing and of sending portions to one another and gifts to the poor (vv. 17-19, 22). These days were to be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city, and the remembrance of them was not to fade from their seed (vv. 26-28). The appointment and the establishment of the Purim was confirmed by Queen Esther and Mordecai the Jew in writing with all authority (vv. 29-32).

5. Mordecai Becoming Second to King Ahasuerus and Great among the Jews

Mordecai became second to King Ahasuerus and great among the Jews and well-regarded by the multitude of his brothers, one who sought the good of his people and who spoke for the welfare of all his seed, that is, all the children of Israel (10:1-3).

IV. A CONCLUDING WORD

A. A Crucial Hidden Point

The story of the book of Esther is a crucial hidden point for the fulfillment of God's calling to Abraham for a land, a seed (a people), and the blessing to all the nations (Gen. 12:1-3; 22:17-18).

B. For the Fulfillment of the Promise through Moses

The story of this book is also for the fulfillment of the promise through Moses that after God gave Israel into captivity, He would still take care of them (Deut. 4:27-31).

C. For the Fulfillment of the Prayer of Solomon

In addition, the story of the book of Esther is for the fulfillment of the prayer of Solomon on the day of the dedication of the temple that God would take care of His elect in their captivity (1 Kings 8:46-53).

D. For the Keeping of the Lineage of the Genealogy of Christ

Moreover, the story recorded in the book of Esther is also for the keeping of the lineage of the genealogy of Christ through the survival of Israel in their captivity that Christ might be brought into the human race. If all the Jews had been destroyed, there would have been no lineage of Christ's genealogy for Christ to be brought into humanity.

E. To Keep a People for the Possessing of the Holy Land for the Coming Kingdom of Christ

Finally, the story of the book of Esther is to keep a people for the possessing of the holy land for the coming kingdom of Christ. The people of God's elect who returned from captivity were small in number, yet they occupied and possessed at least a small portion of the earth, the holy land. This was significant because the earth had been usurped by Satan, and there seemed to be nothing left for the God of heaven and earth. However, God brought back a small number of His people to possess the holy land as a base for Christ to come back to establish His kingdom on earth.