

Esther

(Scriptures from the English Standard Version throughout)

To those of you like Dr Burky, you'll not need to be reminded that you will see a full moon tonight. Unfortunately, I would say there are very few people like Dr Burky in the audience. Therefore, let me advise you: you will see a full moon tonight if the sky is clear. That full moon tells us one particular thing, amongst others, and that is that it is one month until the Passover. In fact, sunset this evening starts the 14th Adar, so there is just one month to the 14th Nisan when we gather for the Passover.

Most of us have already been making plans for the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. I know that because I have received telephoned calls from people making suggestions as to what we could do. That's great.

Yet so often as we approach the Passover, problems arise that seem to loom larger than normal. I see Mr de Gier holding his head in his hands at times, because of all the problems that come up, because of all of the things that people would like to have addressed before the Passover.

Problems loom larger than normal for a variety of reasons; part of that is the process of examining ourselves. Most of us don't like what we see. Does anyone LIKE what they see about themselves? Most of us, if we are really honest, say, *"I wish I could be something else. I wish the Kingdom would come and I would change, and I could be a different spiritual being."*

We see sins or shortcomings that have been part of our lives for a long time. We never seem to be able to overcome them and put them behind us. This, of itself, can lead to discouragement if we are not careful and remain focused on our hope.

The Passover truly should be a time of rejoicing at the power of God to save us, that this present evil world does not have to continue.

Tonight at sunset is not just the beginning of the month before Passover. It is also the start of a festival that is recorded in God's Word. It is not a festival that we are commanded to keep, but it is a festival that helps reinforces to us the power of God to save us from all difficulties.

I think it's very appropriate that this festival occurs in such close proximity to Passover. Because to my mind, the festival emphasises the importance of our own actions as we approach the Passover. "What am I doing about my life?"

The festival is the Festival of Purim (or Lots). The details of it are given in the book of Esther. Very little is made of the book of Esther. I have been in Pasadena for five years now and I don't remember anybody giving a sermon on the book of Esther. If I have, my memory is failing me. I don't hear too many references to the book of Esther in sermons.

The attitude of people to the book of Esther is shaped by a couple of reasons. In the past, it was noted that two principle problems exist with the book of Esther. Firstly, the name of God is never mentioned in the book, yet the name of the King of Persia, Ahasuerus, occurs some 127 times! What is this book doing in the Bible when *Elohim* or *Yahweh* are never mentioned? People worry that the absence of the name of God makes this book irrelevant.

Secondly, people look at the book and see that it is obviously not referenced in the New Testament. Hence, in the past, Protestant commentators have questioned its validity: should it really be part of the canon of Scripture?

Well it is! There's not much we can do about it. Should we pull it out of our Bible and discard it? I don't think that's the intention!

The attitude towards the book of Esther by many Protestant commentators was summed up so well by Martin Luther. He was noted as stating:

"I could wish that the book of Esther did not exist at all, for it Judaizes too greatly and has much pagan impropriety."

(He didn't say this in English. He said it in German.)

We now live in the 21st century. The late 20th century and the 21st century have brought their own problems to the book of Esther. Feminists take issue with the book of Esther over the treatment of women in it.

Let me quickly deal with one issue at this point in time, and we will deal with the other two issues as we proceed with the sermon.

With the first concern, it has been noted that the name of *Yahweh* does appear four times in the book - but as an acrostic - which is a Hebrew literary pattern where the first letters of successive words or sentences spell out either a name or the alphabet.

In Esther this occurs four times. On a couple of occasions, they are backward acrostics. Without a blackboard or PowerPoint to show you, it's not profitable to spend the time looking at this aspect of the book. What it says, more than anything else, is that the writer who the Eternal inspired to write the book, was a highly skilled person in understanding literary styles! Those who heard the book read, had a much greater appreciation of those styles than we may have today. So let us forget that "problem" for the moment.

Let's return to the proximity of Passover that I mentioned earlier on. Let's consider something. This festival occurs exactly one month prior to the Passover. There are NUMEROUS parallels to the Passover.

As you probably didn't all read the book of Esther, this morning, I will start by giving you an outline of the ten chapters.

The first chapter sets the scene. Ahasuerus, who we know today as Xerxes I, the King of Persia, provides a wonderful feast to show off his wealth and his greatness. He demands his Queen Vashti who has also been having a parallel feast for all the women of the land, to appear before all of these drunken sots, to show off her beauty.

She refuses and she is removed from her queenship. As the French would say, *"Off with her head!"* We don't know that her head was removed from her body, but she was removed from her queenship. The reason that she was removed from her queenship was that: *"If all the women of the land hear what Vashti has done, they will rebel against their husbands. So, to preserve the nation, she must be removed."*

Chapter two deals with the selection of the new queen. We are introduced to Esther. We are also introduced to Mordecai, her uncle, and the circumstances of their lives.

At the end of this chapter, Mordecai becomes aware of a plot to depose Xerxes and he reports it to the appropriate authorities. The plot is overthrown and Mordecai's contribution is entered into the annals of the kings of Persia.

In chapter three we are introduced to the villain of the book - Haman. In the synagogue, every time that Haman's name is mentioned in the reading of Esther, everyone stamps on the floor and shouts, trying to drown out the person reading the book of Esther. Haman is introduced, and not only Haman, but his order of the destruction of the Jews because of Mordecai's refusal to bow down to him.

Chapter four deals with the initial plans of salvation. How were the Jews going to be saved from this edict that Haman has been able to bring about with the king's agreement?

In chapter five we have Esther preparing the first of two banquets for the king.

In chapter six Mordecai is honoured because of his role in disclosing the attempted *coup d'état* and Haman is called upon to lead Mordecai, his nemesis, through the streets of Shushan, riding on the king's horse, arrayed in the king's apparel.

Chapter seven describes the second banquet at which Haman, as the villain, is exposed.

Chapter eight deals with the ultimate salvation of the Jews.

Chapter nine deals with the establishment of the Feast of Purim.

Chapter ten concludes with a note about the king.

So you now know all the characters: Ahasuerus (or Xerxes), Vashti, Esther, Mordecai, Haman and a few other people along the line.

As I said, if you read the book (and I hope I have stirred some brain cells and some remembrances of the book for you), you will realise that there is great commonality between Esther and the situation in the book of Exodus. Because in both cases, they are in captivity. Secondly, in both cases, the future of the people is threatened with annihilation. If you kill off all the male children, you don't have a nation left. The nation is lost.

In both cases, an Israelite ends up as part of the royal household! In Exodus, it is Moses who is adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. In the book of Esther, it is Hadassah (Esther) herself who ends up as being the queen of the reign.

You might say a fourth similarity is that deliverance is given at the expense of those who sought to destroy. There are a number of similarities. If we had time, we could probably explore and see other similarities that relate to what we remember in terms of the Passover.

You might also say that the majority of these points that we have mentioned have an application to us today. Because we live in a world that is in bondage, a world that is held captive. The future of humanity is threatened. It's not just annihilation for us. It's annihilation for ALL humanity. As Jesus Christ told the disciples, "*Unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved alive.*"

We don't have an Israelite ending up as part of the royal house of any nation. We don't quite have a match there. But certainly Jesus Christ intervenes at the end and deliverance is given at the expense of those who sought to destroy.

Yet there is one major difference between the Passover of the book of Exodus, and the book of Esther. In Exodus, the Eternal orchestrates everything. He is up front. He is managing the stage. He is visible to anybody reading the account of the Exodus. Moses is a big player, yes, but Moses isn't doing it himself. He receives a message from the Eternal to deliver to Pharaoh. He has another message from the Eternal to deliver to the Children of Israel. Moses is an actuator, in many ways, of what the Eternal has commanded and done. Moses simply does what the Eternal tells him, and the Eternal provides the miraculous events that follow.

We have to admit that in the book of Exodus, the Eternal is very front stage. Yet, as we have already heard, in the book of Esther, the Eternal is absent. He doesn't seem to be on the stage. If He is, He must be "behind the curtains" somewhere, hidden from view.

Esther, Mordecai and the rest of the Jews appear to be on their own. This is the major lesson that I would like to focus on today. Because as we approach Passover, we would love to see God intervene in our lives to take all our problems away. Is there anyone here who would NOT like the Eternal to intervene in their life to straighten out something, to help you overcome something, to remove some obstacle or some discouragement that you have in your life?

I think each and every one of us could take a piece of paper and start to make a list of the things we would like the Eternal to change in our lives.

But it doesn't happen that way! I know that sometimes it does. At first, God may appear very active in our lives. I've heard of people who came into the Church and had great miracles performed in their lives at first: miracles of healing, miracles relating to their jobs, miracles relating to multitudinous aspects of their lives. You could probably add to the list of those that I've heard, many times over.

But years down the line, we need God to intervene in our lives for healing or for other problems, and the way in which He miraculously intervened there at the beginning just doesn't seem to happen in the same way. It's easy for people to wonder, *"Where is God in these circumstances?"*

We want God to be present to handle our trials, but He doesn't appear. That doesn't mean that He is not in control of the situation. We would love to see God zapping our trials, removing difficulties, providing physical intervention in our lives and those of His people.

This, to my mind, is what the book of Esther really addresses, the fact of God's intervention. How DOES God intervene in the difficulties we face? How does He expect us to understand His intervention?

We have to start with an appreciation that WE don't see things in a perfect manner. So often we look at circumstances in life, and we are like Elisha's servant, who gets up in the morning, and sees the Arameans around the city and says, *"Woe is me, I'm going to be strung up before this day is out. This is the last day of my life and it is going to be a very sad one."* You probably know the story:

2 Kings 6:15 When the servant of the man of God rose early in the morning and went out, behold, an army with horses and chariots was all around the city. And the servant said, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"

It's a wonderful way of expressing the guy's absolute frustration and fear of what was going to happen. Elisha was an incredible man, stoic to the end.

16 He (Elisha) said, "Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

The servant probably gave him a strange look, saying, *"What in the world are you talking about?"*

17 Then Elisha prayed and said, "O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see." So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

"The Aramean, the biggest military force is camped outside the city, but there is something out there arrayed for battle against them that is much more impressive looking than what I saw in the first instance."

How often does that occur? We look at the physical circumstances in life, and we don't appreciate what is REALLY out there!

Nebuchadnezzar had to learn that as well. In Daniel 3, he threw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the fiery furnace because they wouldn't fall down and worship the image that he had made. In his fury, he ordered that it be heated seven times hotter than it had been heated before. How do you burn a body seven times faster? It's already capable of burning people, but now let's get it seven times hotter.

He got it so hot that it would consume the people who were throwing Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the fiery furnace. It was a VERY hot place!

Daniel 3:22 Because the king's order was urgent and the furnace overheated, the flame of

the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell bound into the burning fiery furnace.

... and everyone thought that was the end of them: a lesson learned.

24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king."

25 He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

We all have our fiery trials that seem to be able to consume us. Here was an insight into a fiery trial, but One who is referred to as the Son of God is there, walking in the midst of the fire with the other three men.

I want to ask them, "Did you see this fourth Person? Or were Nebuchadnezzar and his cohorts the only ones who saw this fourth individual?" It will be interesting to know, one of these days. Did they really see the fourth Person or was that something that the Eternal only allowed Nebuchadnezzar to see?

The events of Esther follow the same line. Despite the manoeuvrings of human beings, Someone else is really in charge. The book of Esther, like many other books in the Bible, has some very despicable human actions. It starts off early. Cain kills his brother. Is that nice? No, of course it's not.

Ahasuerus "does his wife in," to keep women in their place. Then Esther has to go through this process to be chosen as the new queen.

The king obviously has a great harem of women. That offends the sensitivities of people in the 20th and 21st centuries in the Western world. It certainly didn't offend anyone's sensitivities then. Does it offend God's sensitivities? I would say that it does, because Ahasuerus had no idea what marriage was all about, in any way at all!

Yet it was recorded to show the actions of human beings who DON'T see God in the picture of their lives.

Here we have two ways being played out for us. On the one hand we have the likes of Ahasuerus and his counsellors, and Haman and his counsellors, conducting their lives in a particular way. On the other hand, we have Esther, Mordecai and those associated with them leading their lives in a totally different manner.

Notice the outcome of Esther. From a situation that looked bleak in Esther 4:12 and the following verses, where Esther realised she was putting her life on the line, to go before the king to ask for his involvement in the situation, to ...

Esther 9:1 Now in the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's command and edict were about to be carried out, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, the reverse occurred: the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them.

As I said, two ways of living are being set out before us throughout the book. A human way, based on human understanding, based on power and control, is shown in chapter one. It is also based on chance because in chapter three we see Haman, "rolling the dice, the lot," to work out a propitious time upon which to kill the Jews - hence its name, *Purim*. It was based on the roll of the dice or some other way.

Despite the lack of a name or instruction of God, there is a clear commitment on the part of Mordecai and Esther to God and His ways. The Jews themselves collectively also knew how to respond to God when facing a trial, and call upon Him for intervention.

Let's start by looking at some of the material that is given to us in the book. Let's start with Mordecai and Esther. In chapter two, Mordecai puts Esther forward as a candidate for the role of queen. The reason is not known. But we know that he sees a greater purpose in their lives. Their lives are not ruled by "fate," so to speak, or by chance.

You might say the situation of Mordecai putting Esther forward, parallels that of Moses being set afloat in the Nile river in a bulrush basket:

Exodus 2:2 ... when she saw him that he was a goodly child ...

What do they mean by that? What else had they been told that is not recorded in Exodus 1? We have the same enigmatic situation in the book of Esther. Mordecai puts Esther forward as a candidate for the queen. Their lives are not ruled by chance as is Haman's. Mordecai told Esther that she had come to the situation she was in as queen for a time such as this.

Esther 4:13 Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews.

14 For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Clearly the concern of Mordecai was for his people, rather than his own self-aggrandisement. It wasn't for Esther to become queen to become important and to elevate Mordecai by himself. Esther was put forward as queen because Mordecai understood that the destruction of the people was at hand! We don't know how well he understood it. We are not told.

Did Mordecai put Esther forward as a candidate allowing her selection as queen to be in God's hands? Reading the book of Esther very closely, I would say that that would be a fair assumption to make. He realised that this was a means whereby God was going to deliver His people and provide for their well being.

The second aspect is of Mordecai and Haman in chapter 3. Haman is given great office by King Ahasuerus:

Esther 3:1 After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the Agagite, the son of Hammedatha, and advanced him and set his throne above all the officials who were with him.

To use the current expression, this man became the "prime minister," under a president. In France they have a president who is the head of state. He then appoints a prime minister to head the government, to run the cabinet. We have a similar situation here. They didn't call them "prime ministers" in those days. They were more inclined to call them "grand viziers": those who had responsibility for the nation.

Esther 3:2 And all the king's servants who were at the king's gate bowed down and paid homage to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai (who also sat in the king's gate) did not bow down or pay homage.

3 Then the king's servants who were at the king's gate said to Mordecai, "Why do you transgress the king's command?"

4 And when they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's words would stand, for he had told them that he was a Jew.

5 And when Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or pay homage to him, Haman was filled with fury.

6 But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, as they had made known to him the people of Mordecai, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

Power had gone to this man's head. He was overcome by it. Mordecai won't "pay homage" to Haman. We read through that and it doesn't really mean much to us today. I have been in the presence of a king, an African tribal king who lived in considerable splendour, and I have seen people coming before him and laying on the floor in front of his throne until they were asked to rise. You might say that was a unique experience in the 21st century but there are parts of the world where that does happen.

In this part of the world, the king was "part-god." When people prostrated themselves before the king, they were breaking the second command, "*Thou shalt not bow down to them.*"

In reality, Mordecai is saying, "*I am not going to sacrifice my principles and my relationship with my God for the benefit of this man and his ego.*" He would not prostrate himself. He would not pay homage to Haman.

The verb that is used is used in relation to the second command. In this particular instance, it is intensified. Haman wanted people to worship him, and Mordecai refused to worship this man. Despite the pressures on Mordecai from all those around him, he refused to compromise the way of life that he had been called to live.

A third lesson for us is, how do we respond to trials in our lives? Each and every one of us has them. I doubt any of us could claim that we don't have trials.

To the participants at this time, when trials arose, the response was that of sackcloth and ashes with fasting. If we look at the use of sackcloth and ashes throughout Scripture, we find it is used to indicate repentance and the seeking of God's will and intervention in a person's life. You don't just put on sackcloth and ashes because you "feel like it," or, "because it's Lent." No. People put on sackcloth and ashes because they realise something is wrong with their relationship with someone and they wanted to see that relationship put right. They wanted to humble themselves so that they could have the right relationship with that individual.

Throughout Scripture, the use of sackcloth and ashes and fasting is used to indicate repentance, and the seeking of God's will and intervention. Fasting was well understood by the people of that day. Daniel, a century earlier, had talked about it at length and had practised it (Daniel 9).

Zechariah, writing, some 50 years prior, had talked about fasting in chapters 7 and 8.

Ezra and Nehemiah who came on the scene over this period of time knew of the right approach to fasting (Ezra 8 and Nehemiah 1). They knew how to respond when problems arose. When trials came on the horizon and created difficulties for people, they knew what to do.

A fourth aspect we can learn is Esther's approach to the king at the banquet. On both occasions, the king offered her half the kingdom.

Esther 7:2 And on the second day, as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king again said to Esther, "What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled."

That's a very big offer! When you look at it, that could have been a solution. "*Give me half the kingdom and all the Jews can remove across into there and we can get away from Haman.*"

But what would that have said about Esther? Would it say that she was an opportunist, who was interested in getting something for herself?

***3 Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request.
4 For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king."***

She said, *"We are to be destroyed."* She could have walked out with half the kingdom, and possible freedom for the Jews.

But consider, for a moment, Esther's request with another request that is recorded in Scripture. Consider this in light of Solomon's request to the Eternal:

1 Kings 3:5 At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I shall give you."

Do we dive into our wallets and pull out our "lust lists"? *"Please give me this, this, this, this and this."*

6 And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day.

7 And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of David my father, although I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in.

8 And your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude.

9 Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?"

10 It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this.

11 And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right,

"Because you have asked for the ability to rule these people in the right way, I am going to give you all the things you didn't ask for, as well as what you have asked for."

12 behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you.

I think there's a great parallel between Esther's response to Ahasuerus and Solomon's response to the Eternal. Because their concern was for others and not themselves. The way of life that Mordecai and Esther lived was driven by concern for OTHER people - not for what they could get out of it for themselves. That characterised Haman. That characterised Ahasuerus. That characterised their courtiers. It did NOT characterise Esther and Mordecai.

Esther was offered half the Kingdom. But she said, *"No, that is not what I want. It is the life of my people because YOU are going to suffer loss as a result of this."*

Let's look at another aspect of the book. Consider the reaction after deliverance is provided. Mordecai sent out a message, a proclamation ...

Esther 9:21 obliging them to keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same, year by year,

22 as the days on which the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday ...

It sounds a very appropriate approach. *"Have a blast, folks."* But it doesn't end there, because Mordecai's instruction to the people was ...

22 ... that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

That is a very remarkable thing. He was an enlightened man - but he wasn't just an enlightened man, he was a servant of God. He realised, *"This isn't just a time for those who have the means to rejoice to rejoice, this is a means for everybody to rejoice. Make sure no one is left out of it."*

He focuses outgoing concern upon others rather than for the self, loving the neighbour as oneself, looking out for them, being concerned for them.

We might conclude that the people were instructed to be in harmony with the great commandment of loving your neighbour as yourself.

Even though the name of God is not mentioned, what I have tried to convey to you is that consistently, Esther and Mordecai lived in accordance with God's standard! Those were the standards by which they lived.

The rest of the people had an appreciation for the God of Israel through the lives of Esther and Mordecai. God was being reflected through the decisions and choices that people made throughout this short book.

Like us, they were to be lights in a dark world. They were to be different. Like the elect, flesh was "saved alive."

Matthew 24:22 (Moffatt) Had not those days been cut short, not a soul would be saved alive; however, for the sake of the elect, those days will be cut short.

What carnage might this have produced in the Persian Empire? We have no idea.

Clearly, God was present in the way in which people were saved. He is concerned about us being aware of the experiences of others so that we can be encouraged and receive help and direction in our life.

The Eternal is a God of people, of history and events - not a god of philosophy! He is a God of action. Let's compare what Paul said to the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

God is there. God IS watching over His people. You and I have to learn that we don't have to be able to see God, to realise that He is there, taking care of the situation. He has made promises, that He won't allow trials that are greater than we can bear. He will not let us be tempted beyond our ability and He will also provide a way of escape. That's a promise!

The interesting thing about the whole account of Esther and Mordecai is that when God doesn't seem to be intervening - what do you do? You do what you would be doing if He WAS there, and if you could see Him! Your conduct doesn't change because you can't see God!

God can see us. He may not seem to be intervening in a trial in our lives, at a particular point in time. But that doesn't mean to say that we then compromise our situation to accommodate ourselves, "because God is not intervening." No, you should carry on living the life to which you have been called. I have to carry on living the life to which I have been called. I can't allow myself to compromise myself.

We have the destruction of the enemies. People in this day and age are always very upset about God killing people. Let's look at it this way. These people were opponents of God's plan. They were opponents of God's way of life just as Pharaoh and his army, the leadership of Egypt, were hostile to God's position and to God's way of life.

Humanity, at the return of Jesus Christ, will be hostile to God's way of life. They are taken out of the way temporarily. They will be resurrected again.

In the book, the enemies were destroyed. They were opponents of God's way of life just as Haman had been.

If one puts the book of Esther in a geopolitical situation, we have a situation in Jerusalem with the Samaritans who hold up the rebuilding of the Temple, holding up the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Is this part of the situation that is being played out between Haman and Mordecai? What is happening in the Persian Empire at that point in time? God intervened at this point in time to enable the Temple to carry on being rebuilt, and the opposition to be removed.

There is another lesson for us: nothing is to stop the building of the Temple of God of which we are a part! God is not going to allow that! The situations we face from time to time may seem impossible, but the Eternal has the means whereby He can intervene, and He can help us overcome those difficulties, so that the building process can carry on in our lives, that we can be built up as part of God's Temple.

We live in a world of bondage, a world of abuse. Most people living in the world today have no concept that slavery is a bigger issue now than it was two centuries ago! It's hard for us to envisage that in our "enlightened" world.

But this world is in bondage to abuse, to slavery, to all sorts of things, just as the Persian Empire was in bondage to the same god of this world.

You and I have the opportunity to serve Somebody else, just as Mordecai and Esther had the opportunity to serve Somebody else. The apostle Peter speaks to this very aspect:

1 Peter 1:8 Though you have not seen him, you love him ...

We have not seen Jesus Christ. We are going to gather together for the Passover and remember His death. In taking of the bread and the wine, we are going to renew that covenant relationship with Him, to live by HIS standards. But we have never seen Him!

8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,

I guess there was a certain amount of inexpressible joy in terms of Esther and Mordecai, when they found the way in which God worked to end their problems!

You and I have the same situation. Each and every one of us faces problems in this life. But there is Someone who we don't see, who can help us. He may be "behind the curtains" on the stage, but He is there to help us! We don't see Him. We simply see the end results. And like Mordecai and Esther, while we don't see Him, we still live the way that He would have us live.

John records for us some of the closing words that Jesus had with His disciples in Jerusalem. Thomas had come in and had seen Jesus. Thomas had said, "*Unless I can put my fingers into the nail holes on His hands, and put my fist into His side, I am not going to believe.*"

Jesus, allowing Thomas to see those holes, said to him, "*Now you have seen, do you believe?*" Thomas was very repentant about it. In responding to Thomas ...

John 20:29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

We started off at the beginning with three comments:

1. The name of God is never mentioned in the book.

Does God have to be seen? I think the character of God shines through very clearly in terms of Mordecai's and Esther's lives. They are a reflection of the character of the God they served. The question I have to ask myself is, "*Am I like that too?*"

2. The book is not obviously referenced in the New Testament.

But does the New Testament talk about the same problems as people faced then? Of course it does.

3. The sensitivities of the feminist and women's movements today about the treatment of women.

The question I would ask myself is, "*Has anybody ever been treated in a godly way by an ungodly kingdom?*" What are you expecting? Are you expecting godly treatment in an ungodly world? Please wake up! The only time that godly treatment of people will really occur is in the Kingdom of God! It can happen in our lives too, as we seek to live according to that way of life.

So occurring a month before Passover, the Feast of Purim helps us appreciate what we are about. Yes, this is a battle. This is a battle as much as it was for the Children of Israel in Egypt.

We are called with a calling to live a way of life that is going to bring deliverance from that world. We can appreciate that.

The Feast of Purim removes Passover from its distant past and brings it up to a sense of reality for you and me in terms of the lives we live today. It makes it real for us. It gets our minds focused on the ultimate meaning of Passover!

... *Peter Nathan*
03 Mar 07