

Bible Study # 89
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The Writings Series—Esther

This evening we **are here at Esther, the fifth and final book of this five-book section called the Megillot.** The Megillot is that five-book section called the Festival Scrolls by the Jews. Of course, it was a portion of the Writings section. Traditionally, the Old Testament was divided as The Law, The Prophets, and The Psalms (Writings)—the three traditional divisions of the Old Testament as preserved by the Jews.

Jesus Himself referred to that in the book of Luke where He made reference to what constituted the Old Testament.

Luke 24:44-45, “Then He said to them, ‘These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me.’ And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scripture.”

Jesus clearly defined the Scriptures of the Old Testament as consisting of the Law, the Prophets and the Writings, or Psalms as it is sometimes termed. This means there isn’t any room for the apocryphal books. Jesus Christ defined the Scriptures for us here. We know they consist of the three traditional divisions preserved by the Jews since antiquity.

The first five books of the Bible are called the Book of the Law. The final of these three sections—the section of Psalms or the Writings—consisted of the book of Psalms, Proverbs, Job, then the five Festival Scrolls which we have been going through—Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and now this evening, Esther. The remaining portion of the Writings (the Psalms division), were the book of Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles.

We covered Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles in a little greater depth when we went through the historical books of the Old Testament. Since we are taking this section (the Writings) as the Jews preserved it, we will have one Bible study to include those so we can wrap it up. We will cover Esther this evening. Esther is the final of the five Festival Scrolls. Then we will cover the book of Daniel next couple of Bible studies.

The book of Esther is the fifth of the five Festival Scrolls. They are called Festival Scrolls because traditionally they were read at festival

periods. Song of Solomon was read on the Sabbath during the Days of Unleavened Bread; Ruth was read on Pentecost. Lamentations was read on a national day of fasting called the Fast of Ab on the ninth day of the fifth month of the Hebrew calendar. It commemorates the destruction of the temple. Ecclesiastes was read on the Sabbath during the Feast of Tabernacles. Esther was read on another national day called Purim. We will understand about Purim this evening because we will notice it as we read through this book.

The setting of the book of Esther is during the captivity of the Jews during the Persian period. If you remember, the kingdom was united. They had their first king with King Saul. He was replaced with David, a man after God’s own heart (I Samuel 13:14). Under David and his son Solomon, the kingdom of Israel and Judah was united. At Solomon’s death the kingdom split. The northern ten tribes elected their own king, Jeroboam the son of Nebat, while the southern kingdom of Judah (with its capital at Jerusalem) clung to its loyalty to the house of David in the person of Solomon’s son, Rehoboam. These two nations (the two kingdoms) continued down over the course of the next 200 years.

About 200 years later (around 721-718 B.C.), the Assyrians invaded and carried the northern kingdom captive. The southern kingdom continued on for over 100 years. It was later on, beginning in 604 B.C., almost 120 years later that Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (another king/ another kingdom) invaded the southern kingdom of Judah and began the process of captivity that culminated in 587 B.C. with the destruction of the temple. The Jews were forcibly removed from Jerusalem and Judea to Babylon, and the area of Judea laid waste.

Almost 50 years later, as we will read the story in Daniel, the Medes and the Persians entered into Babylon and overthrew the Babylonians; they possessed the kingdom. The Jews continued in captivity, first under the rule of the Babylonians and now under the rule of the Persians. Several years later, beginning about 535 B.C., the Persian king issued a decree that allowed the Jews to begin to return to Jerusalem under Zerrubabel.

We have the story of Ezra and Nehemiah and the return of some of the Jews back to Judea and Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple. A very sizable percentage of the Jews remained in the areas where the Babylonians transported them. They remained in the area of Babylon, but they were now under the rule of the Persians.

The book of Esther is set during this Persian period. It is set during the reign of the king that is known in classical history as Xerxes. He is called Ahasuerus in the book of Esther. That is the term by which he is called here.

This is in the latter part of the fifth century B.C. This would be approximately contemporary with the story of Ezra and Nehemiah. The story of Ezra and Nehemiah tells what was happening to the Jewish community in Judea. The book of Esther tells what was happening around the same time to the Jewish community in Babylon and in the areas of Persia where, actually, more Jews lived than in Judea. This provides the setting.

It tells the story of the attempted destruction of the nation of the Jews by their traditional enemies. We find that the one who was the instigator of this destruction was a man known as Haman the Agagite. If you will look it up, you will find that Agag was an ancient king of the Amalekites. In fact, there is sort of an interesting point about it that we will notice as we go through. Haman was responsible for stirring up an attempt to destroy the Jews.

This book is, as I mentioned, traditionally read on the Feast of Purim, which is a national holiday authorized in the book of Esther. It is similar to our Thanksgiving Day.

Esther is unique in the Bible in that it is the only book in the Bible that does not mention the name of God. God's name does not appear in this particular book. It is the only book that way. Now, certainly, in the story of the book, the intervention of God to deliver His people is very evident. The divine name is omitted for a very important reason. It is omitted so there is no confusion over the fact that Purim, which is established as a holiday in the conclusion of the book, is not a Holy Day proclaimed by God. It is a national holiday authorized by the Jewish community, but not in any way is it to be confused with a Holy Day given sanctity by God.

The king, as I mentioned, is identified as King Xerxes who reigned from 485-464 B.C. The story in the book, beginning with Esther 2:16, tells the story of what happened after the disastrous Greek campaign that Xerxes carried out from 480-479 B.C. Xerxes took an army of one million men, which was the largest army assembled in ancient times, and he set out to conquer Greece.

He was going to cross the area called the Hellespont, that area that divides Asia from Europe. If you look at a map, you'll see how Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) comes out and

is divided from the Greek peninsula. The Black Sea is up above; the Mediterranean is down below. The area called the Dardanelle (that strait of water that connects the Black Sea to the Mediterranean) divides the Turkish peninsula (the Asia Minor peninsula) from Greece and the European mainland. Xerxes took this gigantic army and came to the area called the Hellespont, which was the area that was the closest distance across. He was going to march this gigantic army across into Greece and was going to teach the Greeks a lesson. It turned out to be one of the greatest debacles that occurred.

Xerxes was the kind of fellow that you could never tell him anything. Maybe you've known one or two people like that in your lifetime. You can't tell them anything. Xerxes was sort of that way. He had the idea that what he was going to do was take boats and latch these boats together to make one giant pontoon bridge over which he was going to march his army. Well, that seemed like a good idea, except that when he put the things together, a storm came up. The boats crashed against each other and a number of them sunk. They had a big fiasco and couldn't get the troops across. It was not nearly as he had anticipated.

It gives you an idea as to what a perfectly "sane and balanced" individual he was. His response was that he was going to punish the sea by giving it 100 lashes. He lined up soldiers with whips to whip the sea. That would really inspire confidence. You see a "crackpot" like this and realize he is in charge. It really inspires confidence. Needless to say, he never successfully got very far into Greece.

He was the father of the King Artaxerxes who is mentioned in Ezra 7:1; he is the one who issued the decree that allowed for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the walls of Jerusalem. Xerxes is shown in secular history by the Greek historian Herodotus, as well as the Biblical account in the book of Esther. He is shown as a very vain and capricious monarch, and he was anything but an ideal husband.

In this book, we are going to take note that God sometimes allows His servants to find themselves in very disagreeable circumstances. If He chooses not to deliver them out of it, He will give them the help to endure it. Many times He uses those circumstances to accomplish His own purpose.

We pick up the story in Esther. According to tradition, Esther was written by Mordecai, the older cousin of Esther.

Esther 1:1, “Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus [referring to Xerxes] (this was the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Ethiopia, over one hundred twenty seven provinces).” He reigned over a tremendous empire.

Verses 2-3, “in those days when King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the citadel, that in the third year of his reign he made a feast for all his officials and servants—the powers of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the princes of the provinces being before him—” Everybody was there.

Verse 4, “when he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty for many days, one hundred and eighty days in all.”

They had this big “blowout.” It lasted 180 days. Now, if you think you’ve been to a party, Xerxes really knew how to throw a party.

Verse 5, “And when these days were completed, the king made a feast lasting seven days for all the people who were present in Shushan the citadel, from great to small, in the court of the garden of the king’s palace.” This was the finale.

Verse 6, “There were white and blue linen curtains fastened with cords of fine linen and purple on silver rods and marble pillars; and the couches were of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of alabaster, turquoise, and white and black marble.” It was really decked out.

Verse 7, “And they served drinks in golden vessels, each vessel being different from the other with royal wine in abundance, according to the generosity of the king.” To give you an idea, I would like to call your attention to one thing.

Verse 3 says, “...in the third year of his reign he made a feast to all his officials and servants...” The Jewish commentary brings out that the literal translation of the Hebrew word “feast” would be “a drinking.” The accent was more on the drinking than on the eating. I’m sure they had plenty of food, but what they really had was plenty of booze. So they had “a drinking.” He knew how to have a real party. It doesn’t say if he had any crawfish or not, but he very well might have. He had plenty of other stuff.

Verse 8, “In accordance with the law, the drinking was not compulsory; for so the king had ordered all the officers of his household, that they should do according to each man’s pleasure.” They weren’t drinking toasts. They were just quaffing it down as quickly as they could. It was sort of “name your poison.” You could have whatever you wanted, and they kept giving it to you.

Verses 10-11, “On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine...” You can believe it. Here, this is a seven-day drunk. His heart is merry with wine. He’s really loaded, and so are all his buddies. They have really been “tying one on” for a while.

Continuing, “...he commanded...seven eunuchs who served in the presence of King Ahasuerus, to bring Vashti the Queen before the king wearing her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials, for she was beautiful to behold.”

Verse 12, “But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king’s command...therefore the king was furious, and his anger burned within him.” Some commentators say that the sense of the words “to bring Vashti the Queen before the king wearing her crown royal” meant that was all she was going to have on. He was going to make a great display out of her. I don’t know whether that was the case or not. The point was that he wanted her to come and she didn’t want to come. Evidently, they both had enough to drink that the results were not good. She wouldn’t come and he was mad.

Verse 13, “Then the king said to the wise men...”

Verse 14, it lists all of them.

Verse 15, “What shall we do to Queen Vashti, according to law, because she did not obey the command of King Ahasuerus...?” He said, ‘She has not done what I told her to do.’

You have to get the picture. He and his buddies have been “boozing it up” for the last week. You can imagine the state they are in. He calls for the queen; she will not come because she is in the other court with all the women and they have been “boozing it up,” too (v. 9). She will not come. They have a real setto here. He wants her to come and she will not. So he gets his buddies around and he asks them, ‘What do you think we should do?’

Verse 16, they say, “...‘Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also all the princes, and all the people who are in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus.’” They say, ‘She’s done wrong, not only to you King, but to all the rest of us.’ You can just see them all nodding their heads, “Yes.” They are agreeing to that. They’ll drink to that.

Verse 17, “For the queen’s behavior will become known to all women, so that they will despise their husbands in their eyes, when they report, “King Ahasuerus commanded Queen Vashti to be brought in before him, but she did not come.”” They say that if word of this

becomes known, all women are going to start ignoring what their husbands tell them to do. They are going to say, 'The king commanded the queen to come and she wouldn't do it; so we don't have to do what you say either.'

They said, 'What you need to do is to put forth a royal commandment.'

Verses 19-21, "If it pleases the king, let a royal decree go out from him, and let it be recorded in the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it will not be altered, that Vashti shall come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal position to another who is better than she. When the king's decree which he shall make is proclaimed throughout all his empire (for it is great), all wives will honor their husbands, both great and small.' And the reply pleased the king..." He thought that sounded like a good idea; that would show her.

Verse 22, "Then he sent letters to all the king's provinces...that each man should be master in his own house..." They were really going to tell it like it is.

You have to sort of get the picture in your mind. This guy is all "booazed up." He's sitting in the bar complaining about the way his wife treated him. He asks his buddies (who have been drinking along with him) what he should do about it. That's sort of the picture of it. You can imagine the way this thing comes out. The only thing is that this is the king.

Now the Medes and the Persians had a particular law because they worshipped the king as god incarnate. Since one of the things about God is that God doesn't make mistakes, the law of the Medes and the Persians could never be reversed. You could never change the law. It was permanent. If you changed or repealed the law, you were admitting that the previous law had been a mistake. Now if the king doesn't make mistakes, how can you change, repeal or replace the law with something else. You couldn't do that because then you are saying that the king made a mistake. And since the king never makes a mistake, the law of the Medes and the Persians meant that something was never changed.

You get the idea? If you have ever met somebody that was never wrong and you never could tell him anything—meet Xerxes. We are introduced to him, and the first thing we see is that the guy clearly has some problems. He evidently has a drinking problem and that seems to have played a big role here. Another thing that we find is that he is an individual who wants what he wants. When he has been drinking for a

while, well, that is going to make that situation even worse.

Esther 2:1, "After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus subsided, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what had been decreed against her." Now he's feeling badly about it, as so often happens. A guy gets drunk; he really sounds off and does all this stuff. Afterwards he starts feeling remorse. Here, he is missing Vashti. He liked Vashti and he was missing her. Well, you can imagine; the guys that had advised him to get rid of her began to get a little nervous about this time. They are thinking that he is going to lie around here and mope around. He will start missing her. He is going to look for somebody to blame, and they are the guys who are going to be in trouble. He is going to say that they talked him into it. It's their fault—"Off with your heads!" They could see "the handwriting on the wall." So they said they had a good idea.

Verse 2, "Then the king's servants who attended him said: 'Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king.'" They said, 'Let's have a beauty contest. Let's pick out the prettiest girl in the whole empire and give her to you for a new queen.' Well, the king could see some merit to that idea. He thought maybe that wasn't too bad an idea.

Verses 3-4, "and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan the citadel, into the women's quarters...Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti.' This thing pleased the king, and he did so." He said, 'That's a good idea.' They were trying to come up with a good idea to keep the king's mind off of something else.

We are introduced to a little bit of background. As we go on, we are introduced to something else that is going on in Shushan, which was the capital of the Persian Empire.

Verses 5-7, "Now in Shushan the citadel there was a certain Jew whose name was Mordecai the son of Jair, the son of Shimel, the son of Kish, a Benjamite. Kish had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been captured with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. And Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is Esther, his uncle's daughter [his first cousin], for she had neither father nor mother [She was evidently considerably younger than he, so he had brought her up; she was an orphan and he had brought her up, taking care of her.]. The young woman was lovely and beautiful.

When her father and mother died, Mordecai took her as his own daughter.”

Verse 8, “So it was, when the king’s command and decree were heard, and when many young women were gathered at Shushan...Esther also was taken to the king’s palace....”

Now, let’s look at something here for a moment. Can you imagine what Esther must have felt like? The soldiers showed up, knocked at the door and said, ‘You are coming with us.’ Can you imagine what Mordecai must have felt like? Obviously, this was not the kind of marriage that Mordecai had ever had in mind for Esther when she was growing up. Certainly, it was not the kind of marriage that Esther had ever had in mind for herself. This must have seemed like a horrible, terrible calamity. How could God allow something like this to happen? That’s the question that goes through our minds when things happen that just don’t seem like it should be that way.

There are a couple lessons that are important that we learn from this book. Sometimes God allows things to happen to His people. He allows circumstances to occur that you and I would say, ‘Well, that’s not good. Why would this happen?’ God doesn’t guarantee that we go through life with no bumps, hurts, cuts and scrapes. There isn’t any guarantee that sometimes we won’t find ourselves in difficult and adverse circumstances. This certainly happened to Esther.

The other thing is that God can work in circumstances that look horrible and impossible, where it looks as though, ‘What good can come of this?’ God can work in circumstances and accomplish His own purpose in ways that you and I could never imagine. We can’t second-guess God.

God worked in the circumstance. God used circumstances.

Verse 8, continuing, “...Esther also was taken to the king’s palace, into the care of Hegai [the eunuch] the custodian of the women.”

Verse 9, “Now the young woman pleased him [He was very impressed with her.], and she obtained his favor; so he readily gave beauty preparations to her, besides her allowance. The seven choice maidservants were provided for her from the king’s palace....”

Verse 9, I’ll read the commentary, “He speedily gave her portions as a mark of favor. He lost no time in beginning the necessary preparations. ‘Portions’ were not cosmetics but rather special foods that were part of the preparation. The Hebrew word is the same as that for ‘portions’ of food in chapter 9:19-22. Each candidate had the

right to be given seven women attendants. Esther was given maidens suitable to her exceptional charm.”

Verse 9, continuing, “...and he moved her and her maidservants to the best place in the house of the women.”

Verse 10, “Esther had not revealed her people or kindred, for Mordecai had charged her not to reveal it.” He was concerned about her. He knew that there was a lot of animosity directed at the Jews and he had counseled her that she should not let it be known ahead of time as to whom she was.

Verse 11, “And every day Mordecai paced in front of the court of the women’s quarters, to learn of Esther’s welfare and what was happening to her.” He was worried. He was concerned. Every day he would come and try to get news.

Verses 12-13, “Each young woman’s turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after she had completed twelve months’ preparation, according to the regulations for the women, for thus were the days of their preparation apportioned: six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with perfumes and preparations for beautifying women. Thus prepared, each young woman went to the king, and she was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women’s quarters to the king’s palace.”

She could pick out whatever she wanted to wear.

Verse 14, “In the evening she went, and in the morning she returned to the second house of the women, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king’s eunuch who kept the concubines. She would not go in to the king again unless the king delighted in her and called for her by name.”

They were waiting their turn.

Verse 15, “Now when the turn of Esther the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai who had taken her as his daughter [Mordecai had raised her.] to go in to the king, she requested nothing but what Hegai the king’s eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised. And Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her.”

Instead of relying on her own judgment to pick out what to wear, she asked the king’s eunuch, who was in charge, what he thought would be the most appropriate. He picked out for her what was appropriate.

Verse 16, “So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.” This was right after the great debacle in Greece. After he had the original

fiasco with Vashti, he went on a great military campaign, and that was a fiasco. So it was decided the best thing to do was to keep the king out of the battlefield. They didn't need his strategy on the battlefield. What they needed to do was occupy him in the harem—keep him busy there and let the rest of them run the country. This was sort of the solution. He consoled himself with Esther. He was attracted to Esther.

Verses 17-18, “The king loved Esther more than all the other women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so he set the royal crown upon her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. Then the king made a great feast, the Feast of Esther, for all his officials and servants; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces and gave gifts according to the generosity of a king.”

Verse 20, “Now Esther had not yet revealed her kindred and her people, just as Mordecai had charged her, for Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him.” She listened to his advice.

Verse 21, “In those days, while Mordecai sat within the king's gate...” He was sitting there by the palace. Mordecai spent time every day at the gate of the king's palace waiting for word of Esther. He just very much desired to find out what was going on and what was happening to her.

Continuing, “...two of the king's eunuchs, Bigthan and Teresh, doorkeepers, became furious and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.” He overheard two of the king's chamberlains who were mad and were plotting to murder the king.

Verse 22, “So the matter became known to Mordecai, who told Queen Esther, and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name.” When he knew it, he got word to Esther, and Esther got word to the king in Mordecai's name.

Verse 23, “And when an inquiry [investigation] was made into the matter, it was confirmed, and both were hanged on a gallows; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.”

Esther 3:1-2, “After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above the princes who were with him. And all the king's servants, that were within the king's gate, bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow nor or pay homage.”

Agag was the king of the Amalekites. If you read the story back in I Samuel 15:3-9, Saul was supposed to destroy the Amalekites, and if you remember, he spared Agag and his family. You know, “Old sins cast long shadows.” If you don't do what God says, things can come back to haunt you. Saul didn't see what difference it made. He was going to do some of what God said and also some other things. There wouldn't have been any Agagites if Saul had done what God had told him to way back in the time of the prophet Samuel. But as so many times, people want to improve on God's instructions. God says something; since they don't see what difference it makes, they want to do it some other way.

Well, here was Haman the Agagite. He was parading by and everybody was bowing down, “licking the dust.” Mordecai didn't do that. He didn't bow down or prostrate himself. Evidently, Haman claimed divine honors for himself. He was a religious as well as a political leader. He was the great Pontifex Maximus of the Babylonian mystery religion, and everyone was doing him obeisance. Mordecai wouldn't bow down.

Verse 3, “Then the king's servants who were within the king's gate said to Mordecai, ‘Why do you transgress the king's command?’” ‘Why don't you do this?’

Verse 4, “Now it happened, when they spoke to him daily and he would not listen to them, that they told it to Haman, to see whether Mordecai's words would stand; for Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew.” They kept telling him, ‘You better bow down.’ He wouldn't listen. So one of them eventually decided to point out to Haman that Mordecai the Jew wasn't bowing down.

Verse 5, “When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath.” Oh, it just ruined his whole day—the fact that this guy wouldn't bow down in the dust. It made him so mad.

Verse 6, “But he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus—the people of Mordecai.” He figured Mordecai, by himself, wasn't worth the trouble it would take. So he decided what he was going to do—he would destroy all the Jews. He didn't like Jews anyway. It would be a good excuse. He would just destroy all the Jews.

Verse 7, “In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur (that is, the lot), before Haman to

determine the day and the month, until it fell on the twelfth month, which is the month Adar.”

In Hebrew, the “im” ending in Purim is plural. “Pur” is the singular. They didn’t shoot dice; they rolled a die—one. Basically, they rolled this lot before Haman from day to day, from month to month, to pick out the lucky day and the lucky month. They came up with a month (the twelfth month); then they came up with a day that was going to be the good time or the auspicious time. Verses 8-11, “Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, ‘There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people’s, and they do not keep the king’s laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain. If it pleases the king, let a decree be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring it into the king’s treasuries.’ So the king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, enemy of the Jews. And the king said to Haman, ‘The money and the people are given to you, to do with them as seems good to you.’”

The king said, ‘You keep your silver. You want to do this, just go ahead.’

The ring contained the signet seal. This was the mark of authenticity. Even today, if you get ready to promulgate an official document, it often has to be notarized. The notary seals it. He puts that stamp on there. The notary seal is that mark of genuineness or authenticity. The king had a special signet ring, and there was only one like it. It was the means by which authenticity of a decree was established. A decree was written, hot wax was put on it, and the king’s ring was pressed into it. This was the seal of genuineness. Here, the king took off the ring and gave it to Haman and said, ‘Write a decree and do it.’ You get the idea the king was a very capricious sort of fellow. If he liked you, he pretty well gave you carte blanche to do what you wanted. If he didn’t like you, he would cut off your head. We will see that a little later, too.

Verse 12, “Then the king’s scribes were called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and a decree was written according to all that Haman commanded...In the name of King Ahasuerus it was written [They wrote a letter.], and sealed with the king’s signet ring.”

Verse 13, “And the letters were sent by couriers into all the king’s provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women [that should pretty

well take in everything], in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to plunder their possessions.”

Verse 14, “The copy of the document was to be issued as law in every province, being published for all people, that they should be ready for that day.”

Verse 15, we are told, “...So the king and Haman sat down to drink [This was one of the king’s favorite pastimes; he figured this was something that deserved a good drink.], but the city of Shushan was perplexed.” It was a mystery to them how some crazy thing like this comes out.

Esther 4:1, “When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth....” He was ready to fast, pray and mourn.

Verses 2-5, “He went as far as the square in front of the king’s gate, for no one might enter the king’s gate clothed with sackcloth. And in every province where the king’s command and decree arrived, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes. So Esther’s maids and eunuchs came and told her, and the queen was deeply distressed. Then she sent garments to clothe Mordecai and take his sackcloth away from him, but he would not accept them. Then Esther called Hathach, one of the king’s eunuchs whom he had appointed to attend her, and she gave him a command concerning Mordecai, to learn what and why this was.”

She wanted to find out what was going on. She didn’t know.

Verses 6-8, “So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the city square that was in front of the king’s gate. And Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king’s treasuries to destroy the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, which was given at Shushan, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her, and that he might command her to go in to the king to make supplication to him and plead before him for her people.”

Word was brought back to Esther and she then sent a message to Mordecai.

Verses 10-11, “Then Esther spoke to Hathach, and gave him a command for Mordecai: ‘All the king’s servants and the people of the king’s provinces know that any man or woman who goes into the inner court to the king, who has not been called, he has but one law: put all to death,

except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter, that he may live. Yet I myself have not been called to go in to the king these thirty days.” It’s been a month since she had seen him.

Now imagine living with a man given to such fits of temper and rage. You never know what mood you are going to find him in. If you walk in unbidden, he’ll chop your head off. Sometimes we make the statement of someone, ‘Boy, he really bit my head off.’ Well, we don’t mean it literally; we mean it figuratively. Esther meant it literally. She said, ‘He has a guard posted, and if I walk in there, the guard’s job is to cut off the head of anybody that walks in unless the king specifically says not to. I don’t know what kind of mood this guy’s in. I haven’t seen him for a month.’

You kind of get the idea that we don’t have the ideal marriage described here. That’s a little bit of an understatement. Esther was not in a really enviable situation. Yes, she was the queen and yes, she had great comfort, money and luxury available to her. But what she never experienced in this life was a close, happy marriage with a husband that she could completely trust and with whom she could really share her life—though he, evidently, had a regard for Esther. That was remarkable, but he was not the kind of individual who was ever going to make a very outstanding husband.

She was concerned. She didn’t want to go to the king. She sent word back to Mordecai and said she couldn’t do that. Mordecai then sent an answer back to her.

Verse 13, “Then Mordecai told them to answer Esther: ‘Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the other Jews.’” He said, ‘You don’t think that you are going to escape, do you? Do you think you are going to be the only Jew that’s going to escape this thing? Even though he doesn’t know that you are a Jew, don’t think that you can stand idly by in a time of crisis like this and escape it.’

Verse 14, “‘For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place [God will work out something else], but you and your father’s house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?’”

Mordecai said to her, ‘You and I have wondered many times why God allowed you to be taken and brought to the king’s harem. Maybe this is why you are there. You are in the right place at the right time. Maybe that’s why God allowed that. You have a responsibility. You can’t just

think of yourself. If you don’t take advantage of the opportunity God has given you, God will do something. He will work out something else, but you will not escape.’

Verse 15, Esther then sent an answer back to Mordecai. She said, ‘Okay.’

Verse 16, “‘Go, gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me; neither eat nor drink three days, night or day. My maid and I will fast likewise. And so I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.’”

She had to fast for three days and get all her friends to fast with her—three days of fasting and prayer—to get up the courage to walk into the room where he was. You have to realize that’s sort of an extreme situation—this terrorized kind of outbursts.

Esther 5:1-3, “Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace, across from the king’s house, while the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house. So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand [Of course, God worked that out; God put him in a good mood.]. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter. And the king said to her, ‘What do you wish Queen Esther? What is your request? It shall be given to you—up to half of the kingdom!’”

Now get the idea. Here’s this fellow. I mean he may chop off your head; he may give you half his kingdom! It just sort of depends on the mood he’s in. Now, how’s that for a mood swing? If he’s happy, he’s very happy; if he’s mad, he is very mad. How would you like to live with a character like that? It’s not a good situation.

What we have to realize is that many of God’s people—I guess most of God’s people—have certainly lived in far less than ideal circumstances. We all have less than ideal circumstances in some facets of our lives. Certainly, many of God’s servants through the centuries have had blessings in certain areas and others have had blessings in other areas.

Well, Esther obtained favor and the king said, ‘What do you want? I will give you anything you want.’ Esther said, ‘I do have a request.’

Verse 4-6, “So Esther answered, ‘If it pleases the king, let the king and Haman come today to the banquet that I have prepared for him.’ Then the king said, ‘Bring Haman quickly, that he may do as Esther has said.’ So the king and Haman went

to the banquet that Esther had prepared. At the banquet of wine [she knew what he liked and what to give him to get him in a good mood] the king said to Esther, 'What is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request, up to half my kingdom? It shall be done!'"

He knew that she didn't just walk in there and risk her life to invite him to dinner, but that was the only request she made. 'I've prepared a special meal and I wish you and Haman would come and enjoy this meal with me.' He wasn't just loaded with brains, but he was able to figure out that she didn't walk in there just to invite him to eat. So she, again, said this to him.

Verses 7-8, she said, "...My petition and request is this: If I have found favor in the sight of the king to grant my petition, and to fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said."

She said, 'You know what I would really like is for you and Haman to come back to dinner again tomorrow.' So, again, he knew there had to be a little more to it than this, but he agreed.

Verses 9-13, "So Haman went out that day joyful and with a glad heart; but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, and that he did not stand or tremble before him, he was filled with indignation against Mordecai. Nevertheless Haman restrained himself and went home and he sent and called for his friends and his wife Zeresh. Then Haman told them of his great riches, and the multitude of his children, all the ways in which the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the officials and servants of the king. Moreover Haman said, 'Besides, Queen Esther invited no one but me to come in with the king to the banquet that she prepared; and tomorrow I am again invited by her, along with the king. Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.'"

Haman said, 'The Queen didn't let anybody come into the banquet except the king and me. And I'm invited back again tomorrow. None of this makes any difference as long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting there in the king's gate. Boy, it makes me mad. It just ruins my whole day. It "rains on my parade" when I see this guy sitting there.'

Verse 14, "Then his wife Zeresh and all his friends said to him, 'Let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high....'" That's about 75 feet tall. We are not talking about a little gallows; we're talking about a seven-story office building. Build a gallows that is really a gallows. When he gets

hung on this thing, he's going to know he's been hung.

Continuing, "...and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordecai be hanged on it; then go merrily with the king to the banquet.' And the thing pleased Haman; so he had the gallows made." He thought that was a wonderful idea. That just made his whole day to go out and hang someone.

God does have a sense of humor. Notice the timing on this.

Esther 6:1, "That night the king could not sleep. So one was commanded to bring the book of the record of the chronicles; and they were read before the king." It just so happened that night the king couldn't sleep. He tossed and he turned. He figured anything that dry and dull was bound to put him to sleep. He ordered them to bring in the book of the Chronicles and read it to him. So they open it up and start reading.

Verse 2, "And it was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, the doorkeepers who had sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus." The part they read just happened to be the story of Mordecai telling him of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, and how they were going to assassinate the king. That just happened to be the spot where the Chronicles fell open.

Verse 3, they were reading that story to him, and the king pipes up and says, 'By the way, what did we ever do for Mordecai? He saved my life. What did I ever do for him?' They said, 'Nothing. You never got around to doing anything, king. Nothing has been done.'

Verse 4, "And the king said: 'Who is in the court?' Now Haman had just entered the outer court of the king's palace to suggest that the king hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him." It just so happened that Haman had come to request the king's permission to hang Mordecai on the gallows. This was not a good time to bring up the subject of hanging Mordecai. Can you just see why the king couldn't sleep that night? God could have worked it out in other ways, but God has a sense of humor and He allowed this. It just so happened that very night they were reading about Mordecai and the king got stirred up to do something. Haman was there and was coming in to request to hang Mordecai.

Verse 5, "The king's servants said unto him, 'Haman is there, standing in the court.' And the king said, 'Let him come in.'" 'That's just the fellow I want to see. Bring him in here.'

Verse 6, “So Haman came in, and the king asked him, ‘What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor [‘Got any good ideas?’]?’ Now Haman thought in his heart, ‘Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?’” Haman thought, ‘It must be me that he has in mind.’ Haman said, ‘I have some good ideas if you want to honor somebody.’

Verses 7-9, “And Haman answered the king, ‘For the man whom the king delights to honor, let a royal robe be brought which the king has worn, and a horse on which the king has ridden, which has a royal crest placed on its head. Then let this robe and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king’s most noble princes, that he may array the man whom the king delights to honor. Then parade him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him: “Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.””

Haman was really laying it on thick. Boy, he was thinking of all the things he would enjoy doing. He was a really vain sort of a fellow, pretty arrogant and impressed with his own importance. He said everything he could think of.

Verse 10, “Then the king said to Haman, ‘Hasten, take the robe and the horse, as you have suggested, and do so for Mordecai the Jew who sits within the king’s gate. Leave nothing undone of all that you have spoken.’” The king said to Haman, “Those are good ideas. I want you to take the apparel and the horse and everything you’ve said. I want you to do it for Mordecai the Jew. You know the guy. He’s the one that sits in my gate every day. And make sure you follow these instructions to the “T.”

Can you imagine Haman’s face? This was not a good time to bring up the subject of hanging Mordecai. Haman was not the brightest guy in the world, but he did figure out that “discretion was the better part of valor.” It was not going to be to his advantage to mention to the king why he had come.

Verse 11, “So Haman took the robe and the horse, arrayed Mordecai and led him on horseback through the city square, and proclaimed before him [Haman was the guy that had to go before him.], ‘Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.’”

Verse 12, “Afterward Mordecai went back to the king’s gate. But Haman hastened to his house, mourning and with his head covered.” Oh, it just ruined his whole day.

Verse 13, he told his wife and all his friends the things that had happened. Some of his buddies said, “...‘If Mordecai, before whom you have

begun to fall, is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him, but will surely fall before him.’”

Verse 14, “While they were still talking with him, the king’s eunuchs came, and hastened to bring Haman to the banquet that Esther had prepared.”

Esther 7:1-2, “So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther. And on the second day, at the banquet of wine, the king again said to Esther, ‘What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request, up to half my kingdom? It shall be done!’” By this time he was sort of mellowed out. Let’s put it that way.

Verse 3, “Then Esther the queen answered and said, ‘If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request.’” She said, ‘Please don’t kill me.’

Verse 4, “For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king’s loss.”

Boy, this really stirred up the king. What she did was sort of fall down before him and say, ‘Please spare my life. Please spare my life and that of my family.’ Well, he didn’t realize she was a Jew. None of this had ever dawned on him. By this time he was really feeling warm and sort of “glowy.” He had a little “buzz” on and was feeling really happy with Esther and visions of sugarplums dancing in his head. He was ready to do anything but kill her. So when she falls down, and says, ‘Please don’t kill me,’ he gets pretty stirred up.

Verse 5, “Then King Ahasuerus answered and said to Queen Esther, ‘Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing?’” He said, ‘Where is he that dares presume in his heart to kill my wife?’

Verse 6, “And Esther said, ‘The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!’ So Haman was terrified before the king and queen.” You can imagine; all of a sudden he went from having a big smirk on his face, to his knees knocking. Well, the king jumped up.

Verse 7, “Then the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine and went into the palace garden; but Haman stood before Queen Esther, pleading for his life, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king.” He was being a little bit perceptive. He began to pick up

on the fact that, ‘You know, I think my days are numbered.’

Verse 8, “When the king returned from the palace garden to the place of the banquet of wine [The king had stormed out of the room, out into the garden—this had really taken him by shock and surprise and he was trying to collect his wits. He walked around for a few minutes and came back in.], Haman had fallen across the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, ‘Will he also assault the queen while I am in the house?’” Esther was reclining on a couch and Haman had fallen down there on the couch, where he was begging. When the king came in, he asked if he was going to force the queen right before him in the house. Boy, he was really stirred up. ‘What are you trying to do?’

Continuing, it says, “...As the word left the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face.” You can just see these old guards standing by there. They didn’t need any further instructions. They knew Haman’s “goose was cooked.” About that time, they just pulled the sack down on his head and started taking him away. They didn’t need detailed instructions.

Verse 9, then one of the eunuchs (these guys were always trying to ingratiate themselves) “piped up,” “Now Harbonah, one of the eunuchs, said to the king, ‘Look! The gallows, fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai, who spoke good on the king’s behalf, is standing at the house of Haman.’ Then the king said, ‘Hang him on it!’” The eunuch said, ‘That new gallows was built out there—that big 75-foot gallows—you can see it from the palace. Did you know that Haman built that to hang Mordecai? You remember Mordecai. He’s the fellow who saved your life.’

This shows you a little something about politics. And it hasn’t changed. When somebody is on the way up, everybody is his friend. When somebody is on the way down, they all gang up to kick him under another rung further down the ladder. When Haman was riding high, none of these eunuchs went to the king and asked if he thought it was right that Haman was building the gallows out there to hang Mordecai. ‘Mordecai hasn’t done anything.’ You think anybody spoke up for Mordecai? No, they didn’t care what happened to Mordecai. They were “battering up” to Haman because they figured Haman was the “number one” man. They wanted to be on Haman’s good side. Now they saw (they could put two and two together) these guys dragging Haman out and knew what was going to happen to him. They wanted to make themselves look

good. Immediately, they jumped in and said, ‘Let me tell you something else about him. He built that gallows out there to hang Mordecai. Mordecai’s the guy that saved your life from that assassination coup.’ The king said to hang Haman on it.

Verse 10, “So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai....” There are some lessons here in human nature. It hasn’t changed. Politics is still the same. People will seek to ingratiate themselves to the individual who is in power. And, so often, as soon as somebody falls out of favor and somebody else comes into favor, they immediately switch positions. We have a lot of politicians who have to read the opinion polls in the morning to find out what they are for and against. They don’t know. They have to find out which way everybody is going—I’m their leader. I need to run around and get in front of them, but I have to find out which way they are going.’ There isn’t any leadership there and very little courage. It’s the same thing—human nature!

Esther 8:1, “On that day King Ahasuerus gave Queen Esther the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came before the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her.” Esther told the king that Mordecai was her cousin who had raised her.

Verse 2, “So the king took off his signet ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai; and Esther appointed Mordecai over the house of Haman.” Boy, can things ever turn around! There’s a lesson of faith here. Don’t look at things and judge them by physical circumstances. Just a matter of a few days earlier, you would have looked at the situation and said, ‘There isn’t any way. Haman is firmly entrenched. He is an avowed enemy of the Jews, and there isn’t any way. How in the world can things turn around?’ In a day’s time, the situation had totally reversed.

One point we need to understand: As we look at adversities and difficulties, we sometimes see things heading the wrong direction. We look at it and ask, ‘How can this be? Why would God allow that? It’s going this way and I don’t see how anything can change it.’ Well, when we say there isn’t anything that can change it, we are leaving God out of the picture. *God can change it*. When God gets ready, He can act, oh, so swiftly and work out a scenario that you and I would never in 1,000 years dream up. God has ways of doing it. He can work in circumstances. It’s a very important lesson of faith. Just because

I don't see how God's going to do it, how does that limit God? The fact that I can't figure it out—what does that prove? That just proves that I can't figure it out. It doesn't prove God can't figure it out. God has already figured it out. The fact that I can't figure it out just proves, '...as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways' (Isaiah 55:9).

Verses 3-8, "Now Esther spoke again to the king, and fell down at his feet, and implored him with tears to counteract the evil plot of Haman the Agagite, and the scheme which he had devised against the Jews. And the king held out the golden scepter toward Esther. So Esther arose, and stood before the king, and said, 'If it pleases the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and the thing seem right to the king and I am pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman... which he wrote to annihilate the Jews who are in all the king's provinces. For how can I endure to see the evil that will come to my people? Or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?' Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, 'Indeed, I have given Esther the house of Haman, and they have hanged him on the gallows because he tried to lay his hand on the Jews. You yourselves write a decree for the Jews, as you please, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring; for a letter which is written in the king's name and sealed with the king's signet ring, no one can revoke.'"

Verse 9, "So the king's scribes were called at that time, in the third month, which is the month of Sivan, on the twenty-third day...." They had to get together to figure this out. They had to reverse the decree without reversing the decree. They couldn't just ride out and say, 'This was a crackpot idea from start to finish. The king must have really been "bombed" out of his mind when he allowed something like that to go through, so we reverse it.' Well, they couldn't say something like that. That would make the king look bad. It would make him look like he was wrong, and if there was one thing the king could never be, that was wrong. So they had to get together and figure out how to reverse the decree without reversing the decree.

Verse 9, continuing, what they did, "...and it was written, according to all that Mordecai commanded, to the Jews, the satraps, the governors, and the princes of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces in all, to every province in its own script, to every people in their own language, and

to the Jews in their own script and language."

They wrote out commands concerning the Jews, and this was sent out to the governors and the princes of the provinces, which stretched from India to Ethiopia. You realize the Persian Empire was a vast empire that stretched all the way from India to Ethiopia, 127 provinces. Everyone got the decree in his own language. This was written in the king's name (v. 10).

Verses 11-14, "By these letters the king permitted the Jews who were in every city to gather together and protect their lives—to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the forces of any people or province that would assault them, both little children and women, and to plunder their possessions, on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar. A copy of the document was to be issued as a decree in every province and published to all people, so that the Jews would be ready on that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. Then the couriers who rode on royal horses went out, hastened and pressed on by the king's command. And the decree was issued...."

They couldn't reverse the decree that said, 'On this day, the 13th day of the 12th month the Jews are fair game.' But they issued another decree and said, 'On the 13th day of the 12th month the Jews can get together and defend themselves. We told you earlier that you could kill a Jew on that day. Well, that's fine, but the Jews have permission to band together and defend themselves against the attackers on that day.'

Verses 16-17, we are told, "The Jews had light and gladness, joy and honor. And in every province, and city, wherever the king's command and decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a holiday. Then many of the peoples of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them."

Again, what happened? They realized the Jews could defend themselves, and the king's soldiers were going to be standing there to make sure that they were well defended. You didn't want to be perceived as being against the Jews. The Jews were in good favor now because it was realized that the queen and the prime minister were Jews. So, all of a sudden, these people that the day before were ready to go out and steal the Jews' property, now they were trying to "buddy up" to them and say that they have always liked Jews. 'Yeah, I really like you people. I wish you would kind of tell me a little bit about things. I'd like to find out a little bit about your religion. I've really been giving a little thought to that.'

It's human nature. People look to see which way the wind's blowing. They want to find out and get on the winning side. This was the case. Well, the Jews realized when this second decree was issued that things were looking very positive.

Esther 9:1-3, "Now in the twelfth month, that is the month Adar, on the thirteenth day, the time came for the king's command and his decree to be executed. On the day that the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, the opposite occurred, in that the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them. The Jews gathered together in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could withstand them, because fear of them fell upon all people. And all the officials of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and all those doing the king's work, helped the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them."

They knew which side their "bread was buttered" on. All of a sudden, the same politicians who were ready to kill all the Jews and confiscate their property, now that Mordecai was the Prime Minister, they said, 'We really like Jews. I tell you what—we surely are going to help these Jews. We are not going to let anything happen to them.'

Verses 4-6, "For Mordecai was great in the king's palace, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces; for this man Mordecai became increasingly prominent. Thus the Jews defeated all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, with slaughter and destruction, and did what they pleased with those who hated them. And in Shushan the citadel the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men."

Verses 7-10, it goes through and mentions the various ones.

Verse 10, "...but they did not lay a hand on the plunder."

Verse 11, "On that day the number of those who were killed in Shushan the citadel was brought to the king." Word was brought to the king.

Verse 12, "And the king said to Queen Esther, 'The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the citadel, and the ten sons of Haman. What have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now what is your petition? It shall be granted to you. Or what is your further request? It shall be done.'"

Verse 13, they said, 'Let us have tomorrow to finish this up.' The sons of Haman who had been in collaboration on the whole thing were hanged on the gallows.

Verses 14-32, "So the king commanded this to be done; the decree was issued...And the Jews who were in Shushan gathered together again on the fourteenth day of the month Adar and killed three hundred men at Shushan; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder. The remainder of the Jews in the king's provinces gathered together and protected their lives, had rest from their enemies, and killed seventy-five thousand of their enemies; but they did not lay a hand on the plunder. This was on the thirteenth day of the month Adar. And on the fourteenth day of the month they rested and made it a day of feasting and gladness. But the Jews who were at Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth day, as well as on the fourteenth; and on the fifteenth day of the month they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. Therefore the Jews of the villages who dwelt in the unwalled towns, celebrated the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a day of gladness and feasting, as a holiday, and for sending presents to one another. And Mordecai wrote these things and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, to establish among them that they should celebrate yearly the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar, as the days on which the Jews had rest from their enemies, as the month which was turned from sorrow to joy for them, and from mourning to a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and joy, of sending presents to one another and gifts to the poor. So the Jews accepted the custom which they had begun, as Mordecai had written to them, because Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to annihilate them, and had cast Pur (that is, the lot), to consume them, and destroy them; but when Esther came before the king, he commanded by letters that this wicked plot which Haman had devised against the Jews should return on his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. So they called these days Purim, after the name Pur. Therefore, because of all the words of this letter, and what they had seen concerning this matter, and what had happened to them, the Jews established and imposed it upon themselves and their descendants and all who should join them, that without fail they should celebrate these two days every year, according to the written instructions and according to the prescribed time, that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city, that these days of

Purim should not fail to be observed among the Jews, and that the memory of them should not perish among their descendants. Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter about Purim. And Mordecai sent letters to all the Jews, to the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth, to confirm these days of Purim in their appointed time, as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had prescribed for them, and as they had decreed for themselves and their descendants concerning matters of their fasting and lamenting. So the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim, and it was written in the book.”

An official proclamation was made proclaiming a day of festivity and rejoicing, a national day of thanksgiving to God.

Very carefully, the name of God is omitted in this section because, while the decree was issued, it was something that applied to the Jews. It was a national day of festivity. It was a national day of deliverance. It was not something that was to be confused with a Holy Day ordained by God. So, very carefully, there isn't any mention that God decreed or commanded it. But, rather, it originated with Esther and Mordecai.

Esther 10:2-3, we are told, “Now all the acts of his power and his might, and the account of the greatness of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? For Mordecai the Jew was second to King Ahasuerus, and was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his kindred.” We have a conclusion here.

As we go through, there are several things that are brought out that we might look at. Haman had cast lots to pick out the lucky day—what he thought was going to be his lucky day and the Jews unlucky day—the 13th of the 12th month. You know, in various pagan superstitions, the number 13 always equated with being unlucky. Haman thought that 13 was going to be unlucky for the Jews. Friday the 13th didn't turn out as unlucky for God's people as it turned out unlucky for Haman. Of course, there is a lesson there. When you are up to “no good,” things have a way of coming back on you. Haman chose the day by casting of lots.

God is our deliverer. He chooses to effect deliverance in a way that we would never anticipate. He sometimes allows His people to

go through difficult situations in order to accomplish His purpose.

The book of Esther is, in many ways, a book of faith and deliverance. It anticipates the time when all people everywhere are ultimately going to want to join themselves to God's people. It anticipates and celebrates God's deliverance of His people. And it is a story that certainly ends up with great festivity and rejoicing.

The book of Ecclesiastes was read at the Feast of Tabernacles. What comes afterwards? –The Last Great Day. Then we have the part of God's plan that represents the new heavens and the new earth. A time when the wicked are destroyed in the Lake of Fire and all of God's people are delivered into the glories of the Kingdom of God.

The final Psalm is a song of praise to God. The book of Esther ends that way. It ends with the destruction of the wicked and the deliverance and final salvation of the people of God. It ends with rejoicing and festivities, a celebration of their deliverance.

We commented earlier that the five books of the Psalms correlate and parallel the five books of the Megillot and these five festival occasions.

Psalm 150:1-6, the final Psalm, “Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty firmament! Praise Him for His mighty acts; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness! Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; Praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with high-sounding cymbals! Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!”

It ends on a very festive note of celebration and deliverance.

The book of Esther ends on a festive note of celebration and deliverance. It concludes with the destruction of the wicked and the celebration that God's people have on their deliverance. That is ultimately the way God's whole plan ends, isn't it? So there is a parallel, even of the two national days. Lamentations is prophetic of the Great Tribulation, and Esther celebrates God's deliverance of His people. It focuses in on what will be the ultimate destruction of the wicked and the deliverance of His people. That's the message of the book of Esther. The message that God will ultimately intervene, destroy the wicked and save and deliver His people. That is the ultimate conclusion of the matter. God is going to see that occurs. The book of Esther is a reminder of that and celebrates that. The

celebration of Purim normally occurs about a month prior to the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread.

I think with that we are pretty well to the conclusion of the book of Esther.

As I mentioned, we will go into the book of Daniel next time. This is the next book in this section of the Writings. We will spend two Bible studies on Daniel. Then, when we get into the book of Revelation, we will come back to certain of the prophetic portions of Daniel. We will take a couple of Bible studies on the book of Daniel and then we will have a concluding Bible study on Ezra, Nehemiah and Chronicles to wrap up this section. So three more Bible studies and we will have concluded this portion. The book of Revelation will be all that's left.

We will have spent time going through, step by step, every book of the Bible. There's plenty in the Bible to go back to, so we are not at the end of everything there is to study. But, hopefully, you will have a little bit of an overview and will have had the opportunity to have gone through and heard commented upon every section in God's Word.