

ESTHER

For Such A Time As This

by

Carl Armerding

Copyright @ 1955

CHAPTER EIGHT

A PASSION FOR SOULS

ONE OF THE VERY FIRST EVIDENCES of a genuine conversion is the desire that others may share with us in **“so great salvation.”** We often hear that referred to as a “passion for souls,” and it is just that. Some Christians seem to retain it only for a little while after their own conversion. In the case of a few, it seems to get stronger as they grow older in the faith. But most of us need to have this holy fire kindled afresh in us from time to time. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit who inspired the chapter now before us may use it to stir us all to greater zeal in the matter of seeking the salvation and eternal welfare of others.

In the previous chapter we heard Queen Esther pleading for her own life, as well as for the lives of her people. Thus we see that she was concerned with something more than her own personal safety. In that respect she was quite different from the Philippian jailer who thought only of himself when he realized what it meant to have to face the God who could shake the prison walls. With no thought, apparently, of his family he simply cried out, **“What must I do to be saved?”** The apostle not only answered that question, but gave him promise of more when he said, **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house”** (Acts 16:31). Such is the grace of Him who is **“able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think”** (Ephesians 3:20).

So far as Esther herself was concerned, we may be sure that her own deliverance was assured when the king ordered the execution of Haman. But nothing was said about her people. She might have thought that their safety was implied. But she was taking nothing for granted. Nor was she the less concerned about them even though she knew that she herself was safe. In that she could put a good many of us to shame. How many there are who never give a moment’s thought to the salvation of others! They seem to be quite content with the fact that they themselves have been saved. Like the Philippian jailer to whom we have referred they seem to be occupied only with their own interests. But in this regard Esther was like Rahab of other days who made the two spies who came to Jericho swear unto her by the Lord that they would also show kindness unto her father’s house, and that they would save alive her father, her mother, her brothers, and her sisters, and that they would deliver their lives from death (Josh. 2:12, 13). In like manner we now see Esther planning for the salvation, or deliverance, of her people.

“On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman the Jews’ enemy unto Esther the queen.” No doubt this is put at the beginning of this chapter to show us that if Esther had been thinking only of herself she had every reason to be satisfied. It was not so long before this that Haman had **“called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife. And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children”** (Esther 5:10, 11).

Now all of this was committed unto Esther to do with as she pleased. In effect, it meant that all the members of that household were really her servants from that day forward. As another illustration of this we may cite the case of Mephibosheth to whom King David gave **“all that pertained to Saul and to his house.”** That that included the servants is shown by the fact that Ziba and his sons were to till the land for Mephibosheth and to bring in the fruits thereof in order that Mephibosheth might lack nothing. And the Scripture is careful to note that **“Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants”** (II Samuel 9:9, 10). We know from Esther 9 that Haman had ten sons, all of which were slain not long after this. It was no small thing, therefore, when the king turned over the house of Haman to Queen Esther.

But even though all was now in her hands, we find that Esther decides to put everything into the hands of Mordecai. And so **“Mordecai came before the king; for Esther had told what he was unto her.”** Not only had the plot of Haman compelled Esther to reveal her identity, but now she also manifests her identification with the very one whom Haman had plotted to hang on the gallows. Such are some of the blessed fruits of persecution! When the people of God are at ease, they tend to drift apart quite easily. It is in times of persecution that they come to value each other, and that by which the enemy hopes to scatter them only serves, under God, to draw them closer together. That is why men like the apostle Paul could actually glory in tribulation. And thus that which we are apt to call a calamity becomes a blessing.

Without a moment’s hesitation **“the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai.”** It was a sad day for the Jews when Ahasuerus gave that same ring to Haman (Esther 3:10). The document which authorized the extermination of the Jews was sealed with that very ring. The surrender of it was probably the last thing which Haman did in the presence of the king. We have no record of that, of course, but it is implied in verse 2 of our present chapter. And the conferring of that ring upon Mordecai seems to have been the signal for Esther to **“set Mordecai over the house of Haman.”**

Just what Esther’s object was in giving this power to Mordecai is not indicated here. But it points to a very beautiful lesson all the same. Vengeance must be taken, but she committed that unto the hands of another. And that is exactly what the word of God exhorts us to do. It is written, **“Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord”** (Romans 12:19). Long before the Christian era, in referring to the enemies of His people, the Lord said, **“To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste. For the Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left”** (Deuteronomy 32:35, 36). It may be that Queen Esther had those very verses in mind when she turned over the house of Haman to Mordecai.

But to dispose of the house of Haman is one thing, and to provide for the deliverance of her people is another. And so she **“spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews.”** Haman was no more, but the evil he had done lived on after him. There is a sense in which Satan also has been judged and cast out. In anticipation of His glorious victory over Satan, our Lord could say, **“Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out”** (John 12:31). But it requires no argument to prove that the evil of which he is the author is still with us. Souls are in jeopardy every moment because of it. And it might well move us to tears as we think of all that is involved in this. We do not read that Esther shed any tears when she pled for her own life. Of course, it is entirely possible that she did not realize at that time all that she had been saved from. And is that not the case with us also?

How many of us realized at the time of our conversion all that the Lord has done for us? But as time goes on, and as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, we get better acquainted with Him and His Word. In the process we also learn something of the awful predicament that was ours when we were in our sins and under the wrath of God. And when we reflect on the fact that all of the unsaved are still there, we are moved to go forth to snatch them as brands from the burning. It is just as certain as anything could be that if the unsaved were conscious of their present peril, many of them would lose no time in coming to the Saviour. And if we as Christians realized this as we should, there would be more genuine weeping over lost souls, even as the Lord Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41).

It was such earnestness on the part of Queen Esther that caused the king to hold out the golden scepter toward her. **“So Esther arose, and stood before the king.”** Encouraged by this gesture of grace on his part, she rose from her knees to speak to him on behalf of her people. And it is quite remarkable that in her plea there is no reference whatever to the house of Haman. It is the safety of her people that is paramount here. The punishment of the house of Haman will be considered later. So she said, **“If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the king’s provinces.”** She did not ask him to do something which he did not care to do, or anything that it would not be right to do. She was very careful to consider both his pleasure and his honor. Would that we were always as careful as that when we come to the King of kings with our petitions!

Of course, she did not hide the fact that her own feelings entered into this also. She showed how deeply moved she was when she said, **“How can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?”** She imagines what it would be like if the mischief of Haman were not put away. She could not bear the thought of it, much less the sight of it. And as I write these words, I wonder how much we are affected by what we know of the future destiny of the lost! The secret of Esther’s feelings was bound up in her love for her people and her kindred. Oh, that we loved men enough to weep over them and to plead for them at the throne of Him who is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance!

In his reply to the eloquent plea of Esther, Ahasuerus reminded her and Mordecai that he had already given the house of Haman to Esther, and that Haman had been hanged on the gallows **“because he laid his hand upon the Jews.”** Strictly speaking, this last could hardly have been the immediate reason why Haman was hanged. It was the fact that Harbonah mentioned the gallows upon which Haman intended to hang Mordecai that suggested the verdict, **“hang him thereon.”** Apart from that it would seem that the immediate reason for the execution of Haman was the fact that the king found him **“fallen upon the bed whereon Esther was.”** Here, however, the king made it appear that it was because Haman had laid his hand upon the Jews.

At this point it is very interesting to compare what Ahasuerus said to Esther and Mordecai with what he said to Haman when he gave him permission to write the document of destruction. To Haman he said, **“The silver is given thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good unto thee.”** But to Esther and Mordecai he said, **“Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king’s name, and seal it with the king’s ring: for the writing which is written in the king’s name, and sealed with the king’s ring, may no man reverse.”**

We note an emphasis here that we do not find in his word to Haman. Can it be that this time he would make it very emphatic that his own heart was in this matter? He surely did not realize when he gave permission to Haman to write as he did, that before long he would be giving permission to others to write that which would annul all that Haman had written. In that sense the king did reverse himself. Nevertheless, this much seems to be clear; he does not expect ever to have to do anything to reverse what Esther and Mordecai are about to do. The previous order was supposedly irrevocable. But it was only the word of a man, after all.

We who trust in the living God have something far better than that. **“Men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast”** (Hebrews 6:16-19). Esther and Mordecai had two things—the king’s name and the king’s ring. But we have two better things—God’s Word and God’s oath.

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!
What more can He say, than to you He hath said,—
To you, who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

“Then were the king’s scribes called at that time in the third month, that is, the month Sivan, on the three and twentieth day thereof.” This third month was the third month of the Jewish sacred year, extending from the new moon of our month of May to the new moon of the month of June. This must not be confused with the third month of the Jewish civil year which corresponds roughly to the latter part of November and the first part of the month of December. The third month of the sacred year was the month in which the Jews celebrated the Feast of Weeks, otherwise known as Pentecost.

According to Deuteronomy 16:9-12, the Israelite was to number **“seven weeks from such time as thou beginnest to put the sickle to the corn. And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto the Lord thy God with a tribute of a freewill offering of thine hand, which thou shalt give unto the Lord thy God, according as the Lord thy God hath blessed thee: and thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God . . . and thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt.”**

In Leviticus 23:16 this same time is referred to as **“fifty days”** at the close of which they were to offer **“a new meat [or, meal] offering unto the Lord.”** In view of what happened at Pentecost after the Lord Jesus ascended to Heaven, it is not difficult to see something of prophetic significance in this. We recall that Mordecai had said that if Esther were to keep silent at that time **“then shall enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place.”**

We may be sure that in saying that he spoke better than he knew. And while it is true that Esther did not hold her peace, it is also true that deliverance did not come from her, it came from another place. It came from Heaven. It certainly did not come from any earthly source. And it came at the time set by Him who has put the times and the seasons in His own power (Acts 1:7).

Apparently, the wording of the new decree was left entirely to Mordecai for **“it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded unto the Jews, and to the lieutenants, and the deputies and rulers of the provinces which are from India unto Ethiopia, an hundred twenty and seven provinces, unto every province according to the writing thereof, and unto every people after their language, and to the Jews according to their writing, and according to their language.”** It was to be no secret that the Jews were to have the right to defend themselves.

While not exactly like the good news of the Gospel, it was good news in the sense that it offered hope where before there seemed to be no hope. And the fact that it was to be published just as extensively as the bad news had been published is also suggestive of the Gospel. **“The soul that sinneth, it shall die”** is universal in its scope because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. But the good news of the Gospel is also universal in its scope **“for God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16).

The decree sent out by Mordecai gave the Jews the right to defend themselves against their enemies. The Christian also has the right to defend himself in his conflict with the Devil and his hosts. Unlike the Jews of Esther’s day, **“we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness [or, wicked spirits] in high places.”**

These are the hosts of Satan who is the prince of the power of the air. Every Christian must be aware of this opposition at times even though he may not always be able to identify it. Of course, Satan may use human instruments to accomplish his ends. No doubt that was the case in Esther’s day. Behind Haman and his house was Satan whose desire it has been from the very beginning to destroy the children of God.

The murder of Abel marks the beginning of the bloody trail, the culmination of which is seen in the crucifixion of our blessed Lord. And every martyr who has sealed his testimony with his blood is in this noble succession.

But Satan is wise enough to know that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” Therefore, he prefers at times to wage a “cold war” and thus to wear out the saints of the Most High. It is for that reason that we are exhorted to take unto ourselves the whole armor of God so that we may be able to stand in the evil day; having our loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, our feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; and above all taking the shield of faith wherewith we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. For our peace of mind we are to have our head covered with the helmet of salvation. But for offensive warfare we are to take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit (see Ephesians 6:10-18).

Such protection is provided not only for a few of the children of God, but for all of them if they will avail themselves of it. Our chapter furnishes us with a good illustration of that. We read that Mordecai “**wrote in the king Ahasuerus’ name, and sealed it with the king’s ring, and sent letters by posts on horseback, and riders on mules, camels, and young dromedaries: wherein the king granted the Jews which were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take a spoil of them for a prey.**” If we look upon “the power of the people” as a type of Satan which is arrayed against us, we shall have no difficulty in making the application.

The Jews were to do two things; they were to gather together, and they were to stand. In other words, they were to present a united front against their common foe.

It does not take much imagination to see in this an exact parallel of what we do when we gather together as the Lord’s people in the place of prayer. It is then that we actually come into combat with the hosts of wickedness to which we have already referred. But it is to be feared that many of God’s children know little or nothing about such warfare. Such conflict requires spiritual energy which is derived from feeding on the Word of God. Then when we gather together in the place of prayer, we shall also be able to stand. And the glorious result will be victories of faith “**in the Lord and in the power of his might.**”

We note that this chapter makes mention of “**spoil.**” Paul tells us, by the Spirit, that our Lord Jesus “**spoiled principalities and powers**” when He “**made a show of them openly, triumphing over them**” (Colossians 2:15). We believe that this refers to our Lord’s victory over death, and over him who had the might of death, that is, the Devil. Our Lord was victorious over death when He rose from the dead. But His triumph is seen in His ascension to Heaven, for it was then that He went right through the domain of Satan who is the prince of the power of the air. And thus He opened the way for us to come boldly unto the throne of grace so that we also may triumph in His triumphs. Because He poured out His soul unto death it was promised Him that He shall divide the spoil with the strong (see Isaiah 53:12).

There is still another detail in our chapter which reminds us of Ephesians 6 and that is the reference to the day: **“Upon one day in all of the provinces of king Ahasuerus, namely, upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar. The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people, and that the Jews should be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.”**

In like manner Christians are told to take to themselves the whole armor of God that they may be **“able to withstand in the evil day.”** We have seen already that in the case of the Jews that day was determined by lot. In spite of all of his sagacity, the enemy is quite superstitious. But over all of this is the One who has put the times and the seasons in His own power. And He knows how to deliver the godly out of his trials and from the snare of the enemy. Therefore, no day which the enemy may set for our destruction need take us by surprise.

“So the posts that rode out upon mules and camels went out, being hastened and pressed on by the king’s commandment. And the decree was given at Shushan the palace.”

There was no time to be lost. No doubt many a soul is lost, not for lack of information, but because of procrastination. If the enemy can get us to put off prayer or anything else which might result in victory for us, he knows that he can defeat us. It was not only an exhortation that was sent out that day. It was something more than permission to defend themselves which was granted to the Jews; it was a commandment—yea, **“the king’s commandment.”** And what if some “post” or messenger, directed to go to some remote province, had chosen to delay until the day had passed! The consequences would have been serious indeed. We, too, have been sent forth with an urgent message. We also live in an evil day. Let us then be on our way and see to it that the place to which we have been sent with the King’s commandment shall hear the message of His grace before it be forever too late.

The very fact that this message was **“given at Shushan the palace”** gave it a royal dignity and importance which brought honor to those chosen to deliver it. Those “posts” were really the king’s ambassadors. They were in the king’s business. And the content of their message should have made them even more eager to deliver it.

Then, too, such a message was bound to find a ready reception on the part of those directly concerned, not only because of the opportunity which it afforded them to defend themselves, but also because royal authority guaranteed the reliability of every word of it. And the same applies to the Gospel as we preach it now. The messenger of the Good News may well consider himself a royal ambassador. And those to whom the message is addressed can rely upon it because it is backed up by all of the power and authority of the King of kings and Lord of lords. In the preamble of the Great Commission our Lord Jesus said, **“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore”** (Matthew 28:18, 19).

It is in perfect keeping with all of this that we now see Mordecai going out **“from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple.”**

“A dress of blue and white was held in great estimation among the Persians: so that Mordecai, whom the king delighted to honor, was in fact arrayed in the royal dress and insignia. The variety and the kind of insignia worn by a favorite at once makes known to the people the particular dignity to which he has been raised” (*Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*). But long before the Persian era the Lord had said, **“Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: and it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes”** (Numbers 15:38, 39). Thus we can see that blue would also have a spiritual significance for the intelligent Israelite.

It is interesting to observe that there are two different words used for crown in the language of the Book of Esther. The one here used differs from that used to describe the crown worn by Queen Vashti, and later by Queen Esther. The word here used in the Hebrew is the same as that of which we have the verb form in Psalm 8:5, in which we get a preview of our blessed Lord crowned with glory and honor. **“The garment of fine linen and purple”** seems to have been an outer garment worn over another. The fine linen, as we know from Revelation 19:8, is symbolic of righteousness, and purple is the well-known symbol of royalty. When we put all of these things together, we can see that it was no mean distinction which was conferred upon Mordecai at that time. It certainly excelled that with which Haman was compelled to array him as we have seen in our study of chapter 6.

It is quite evident that all of this met with the popular approval. **“The city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad.”** It was not so long before this that that same city **“was perplexed”** (Esther 3:15). And we may be sure also that those whose destiny was most directly involved in the honor bestowed upon their illustrious compatriot would rejoice in a special way. **“The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honor.”** Even before their actual deliverance they could rejoice in it. That is after the manner of faith. It enables one to look into the future with calm and certainty, knowing that what God promises He is able also to perform (Romans 4:21).

Verse 16 of our present chapter reminds us very much of Psalm 97:10-12 where we read that the Lord **“preserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked. Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous; and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.”**

The Jews of Esther’s day had every occasion to prove the truth of those words. In place of the darkness, the sorrow, the grief, and the dishonor which had been theirs, they could rejoice in the fourfold blessing of the Lord even though they did not make mention of His name.

This blessing was not limited to the city of Shushan. **“In every province, and in every city, whithersoever the king’s commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day.”** The word for **“feast”** in this verse occurs more often in the Book of Esther than in any other book of the Old Testament. It is also translated banquet in chapters 5, 6, and 7. It is first used in the Bible to describe the feast which Lot prepared for the angels who visited him (Genesis 19:3). It is also used to describe the great feast which Abraham made **“the same day that Isaac was weaned.”**

Since it is not used in Leviticus 23 we conclude that it was not exactly a religious feast. Nevertheless, we shall see later how it did become a national feast even though it was not numbered among the set times described in Leviticus 23.

The effect of all this upon the people of the land was remarkable. **“Many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them.”**

They became what we would now call proselytes. The motive which impelled them to do this was not exactly of the highest order. One could wish that we might have heard more about the fear of the Lord than about the fear of the Jews. That which is done for fear of man is apt to change from time to time. But that which is done in the fear of God will abide. He changes not. And it is the fear of the Lord, not the fear of man, which is the beginning of wisdom. It is to be hoped that both the Jews, as well as those who became Jews, learned something of the blessing of that before it was all over.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
