

ESTHER

For Such A Time As This

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE SECOND BANQUET

IN OUR STUDY of chapter 5 we suggest that Queen Esther manifested much self-restraint in that she did not present her real request at the first banquet which she had prepared for the king and Haman. But it may also be that she had good scriptural precedent for what she did. There are a number of references in the Old Testament which show that the Lord Himself waited until “the second time” to make known His real reason for speaking to His own.

For example, we read that **“the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time”** after he had offered up Isaac as the Lord commanded him. It was then that He said, **“In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice”** (Genesis 22:17, 18).

It is very interesting to note that when the Lord spoke to Abraham the first time, **“the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed”** (Galatians 3:8). But when He spoke to him the second time, He made mention of the Seed **“which is Christ”** (v. 16). And it was in direct connection with that that He also said, **“And thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.”** It may be that Queen Esther had that promise in mind when she approached her heathen husband with the request which was to bring about a preview of that, as we shall see when we come to study the next chapter of our book. However, we must not presume too much.

But before we leave the subject of **“the second time,”** we might notice also the fact that it was **“when Solomon had finished the building of the house of the Lord . . . that the Lord appeared to Solomon the second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. And the Lord said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me; I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put my name there forever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually.”** It was at that same time that He referred to the promise made to David, saying, **“There shall not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel”** (I Kings 9:1-5).

If Solomon had walked as David his father walked, **“in integrity of heart, and in uprightness,”** he would have inherited that promise and that **“Man”** whom we now know as **“the Son of David,”** might have been known as the Son of Solomon.

In the day when that promise to David is fulfilled **“there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek; and his rest shall be glorious. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea”** (Isaiah 11:10, 11).

The fact that Elam is specially mentioned in this prophecy in connection with the second time is of more than passing interest when we take into account the fact that the events which we are considering at present, in the Book of Esther, took place in Elam. Just how much Esther may have known about all of this we may not be able to say. But we like to think that she had some acquaintance with it. And if so, then the words, the second time, would have more than ordinary significance for her. For those who would like to pursue this interesting subject still further, we suggest a careful consideration of both Acts 7:13 and Hebrews 9:28.

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

Once again it is the king who takes the initiative here. And we note also that he is more personal than he was when he made a similar offer at the first banquet. Here he actually addresses her as **“Queen Esther.”** Now we have no desire to magnify insignificant details, but we believe that there is something here which is very precious. It recalls the fact that when our blessed Lord called Mary by name that she recognized Him as her Lord and Master (John 20:16). Previous to that she merely supposed Him to be the gardener. But the Good Shepherd **“callesh his own sheep by name”** (John 10:3). And we all know something of the thrill it gives us when we are thus recognized by others.

In addressing her as **“Queen Esther,”** the king was giving emphasis to her royal position. In other words, he was not treating her as he might treat some ordinary subject, or one of his servants. In thus addressing her he was tacitly inviting her to make her petition large. And since she was about to make the most important request anyone can make this side of eternity, this must have been very encouraging. She was not only coming to a king, she was coming to him as a queen. And best of all, it was he who called attention to that fact.

“Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favor in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request.”

She took the king at his word, and that quite literally. That is why she repeated the very words which he used when he made the gracious offer to give her her heart's desire.

Now it may be of interest to the reader to know something of the distinctive meaning of these words. The one is not a mere repetition, or synonym, of the other. The word “**petition**” comes from a root which means “*to inquire*” as if to ascertain the will and pleasure of the one to whom the petition is addressed. It also has in it the idea of *demanding*. The word request comes from a root which means “*to search out, or strive after.*” And that reminds us of the man who was granted his request “because of his importunity” (Luke 11:8). It also reminds us of the apostle Paul who wrote to the Romans, saying, “**I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me; that I may be delivered from them that do not believe**” (Romans 15:30).

Such comparisons show that basically prayer is a matter of ascertaining the will of the Lord, and then earnestly beseeching Him to grant that which is according to His will.

The reason for Queen Esther’s earnestness is clearly seen in what follows. She and her people had been sold “**to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish.**” In saying that she was using the very words of the document which had been written by the king’s scribes, sealed with the king’s seal, and carried to the remotest corners of the Persian Empire by posts who were “**hastened by the king’s commandment**” (Esther 3:13, 15). In saying “**we are sold,**” she was referring, of course, to Haman’s offer of ten thousand talents of silver “**to bring it into the king’s treasuries.**”

“**But,**” she continued, “**if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail [or, compensate for] the king’s damage.**”

Evidently the Jews, even though they were a captive people at that time, were not looked upon as slaves. Presumably they had all of the privileges of free men and women. Esther indicates that they might have accepted a change of social status without protest. But such a change, she intimates, would not be for the king’s advantage, but rather to the contrary. All of the money which Haman had promised to pay into the king’s treasuries would not compensate for the loss that this would mean to the king.

There is much food for thought in that statement. The service of a slave can never be the same in value as that of a free man. And in saying that, we are not unmindful of the fact that again and again the apostle Paul referred to himself as a servant, or bondsman, of the Lord Jesus Christ. But that was voluntary slavery, like that of the Hebrew who had the opportunity to go out free, but who preferred to accept the mark of perpetual servitude because of his love for his master, his wife, and his children (Exodus 21:2-6). The slavery to which Queen Esther referred was not after that order, nor was that all that Haman desired. His purpose was not only to enslave the Jews but ultimately to exterminate them.

“**Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?**” Had she followed the course that Nathan did when he came to charge David with the crime of having murdered Uriah the Hittite, she would have said, “**Thou art the man**” (II Samuel 12:7). But she did not use that method even though we can see that it would have been justifiable.

The king must have known that the document from which she had actually quoted in part was sealed with the royal seal. And that certainly involved him. But it was not necessary to go into that at this point.

“And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman.”

Before ever she mentioned his name, she used three strong words to describe him. To begin with, he is **“the adversary,”** a type of him who is our **“adversary the devil,”** and who, **“as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”** (I Peter 5:8). He is also the **“enemy,”** or one who hates the people of God. And as the **“wicked one”** he is the very antithesis of goodness. This last epithet is used in the New Testament to describe both Satan and the Antichrist (I John 2:13 and II Thessalonians 2:8). And in view of all that Haman had done and was attempting to do, we do not believe that this description of him was an overstatement.

“Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.” And well he might be! In one fell stroke Esther had exposed the character of him who lay at table that day with the royal couple. She had also answered the king’s double question, **“Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?”** He was right there in the palace which made it quite unnecessary to send anyone after him to discover him and to apprehend him. He had walked right into the trap from which there was now no escape.

The king was infuriated! Rising from the banquet of wine in his wrath he went into the palace garden. What his motive may have been for such a move at that time we are not told. It will be remembered that the court of that garden was the scene of the seven days’ feast which the king made for **“all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small”** (Esther 1:5). But whatever his motive, it would give him time to think about the turn which events had taken within the last few hours. He could not help but see that he was implicated in it all even though he may have been led into it quite innocently.

On the one hand, for a man in his position to be caught off his guard in this way must have been humiliating indeed. It does seem strange that he did not know until then that Esther was a Jewess. The discovery of that fact would certainly put him in a dilemma, there can be no doubt about that. On the other hand, he must have been thoroughly convinced that all that Esther had charged was true. He did not ask her to prove her statement. In her heart-moving plea for her life, she had used the very terminology of the document dictated by the despicable Haman.

In the meantime, **“Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king.”**

He made no attempt to explain. Neither did he express any sorrow for what he had done. It was his own life, and only that, that he was concerned about. We do not read of one word of repentance. He did not even go as far as Judas did when he said, **“I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood”** (Matthew 27:4). It is quite likely that he had seen Ahasuerus in a fit of anger before. But this must have been different. And there was no mistaking the fact that this would not pass off after a brief interlude in the garden.

Apparently, Esther remained silent through all of this. Her case was now in the hands of the king. We read of no display of emotion on her part. If Haman thought that he could play on the sympathies and emotions of a woman, he was mistaken that time. All too soon, so far as he was concerned, **“the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine.”** For him it was no longer a banquet, it was just the place of the banquet. And what he saw when he returned only made matters worse. **“Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther was.”** Beside himself in his desperation when he realized that his own life was in jeopardy, the one who had so boldly planned the extermination of a race of people became a coward in the face of death.

The **“bed whereon Esther was,”** was probably one of those beds, or couches, **“of gold and silver,”** mentioned in Esther 1:6.

It must be remembered that the Orientals did not sit at table as we do now. They reclined as did our blessed Lord and His disciples at the Last Supper. That will explain the presence of a “bed” in the banqueting house. Nevertheless, the king seems to have put the worst possible construction upon this act of Haman, for he said, **“Will he force the queen also before me in the house?”**

Under other circumstances that might have been the case. The horrible sin of Absalom comes to mind here when, upon the advice of Ahithophel, he **“went in unto his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel”** (II Samuel 16:21). But such was not the case here.

However unjust this remark of Ahasuerus was, it had its due effect upon the servants standing by. **“As the word went out of the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face.”** Apparently, Haman had not one friend in that court. At least, not one rose up to plead his case or even to suggest to the enraged monarch that his judgment was too harsh. The covering of Haman’s face was the sign that he was doomed to die even though the king had not as yet pronounced the death sentence upon him.

It is at this point in the story that we learn of the presence of others in the banqueting house. Among these was Harbonah, one of **“the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king”** (Esther 1:10). He was one of the group which was sent to bring in Queen Vashti to show the people and the princes her beauty. But this time he was about a different kind of business. And he showed that he had knowledge of what was going on in the house of Haman that night. He knew all about **“the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king.”** It is true that he did not do more than call attention to it. But that was all that was needed. And the fact that he mentioned Mordecai as the one for whom the gallows were being erected was also significant. Harbonah was here supplying information which Queen Esther might have used, had that been necessary, when she was pleading for her own life and for the lives of her people.

Haman did not get a trial by a jury of his peers. Neither were any other witnesses called. Esther had described him for what he was. And that was quite sufficient for the king. It was Harbonah who revealed the fact that Haman had actually planned to kill Mordecai before the date set by the decree to exterminate the Jews.

But what he had planned for another, and that an innocent man, turned out to be the means of his own doom. When the king heard of the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, he thundered out, **“Hang him thereon!”** Thus Haman fell into the very pit which he had digged for another. How true is the proverb, **“Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him”** (Proverbs 26:27)! **“For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy”** (James 2:13). In other words, **“Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”** (Galatians 6:7).

It is interesting to find that the word here used for gallows in the Greek translation of the passage is the same word which is used for the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Greek New Testament in such passages as Acts 5:30; 10:39; and 13:29. It is also found in Galatians 3:13 and I Peter 2:24.

The word tree in all of these passages refers to the cross on which our Lord Jesus was crucified. But the same word is also used in Revelation 2:7 and 22:2, 14 in connection with **“the tree of life.”** Like Haman, we deserved to die that death of shame and loss. But the Lord Jesus died there in our stead as our Substitute. And thus the cross, or the tree, which was a curse for Him becomes for us **“the tree of life.”**

“Then was the king’s wrath pacified.” It subsided like the waters of a flood subside. But the death of Christ did something more for us than to cause the wrath of God to subside. By means of that cross He **“delivered us from the wrath to come”** (I Thessalonians 1:10). And because of that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. That, of course, is something about which Haman knew nothing at all. His plea for his life was silenced when they covered his face and took him to his own home to die. And that brings to mind the words of the Psalmist who said, **“I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace”** (Psalm 37:35-37).

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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