

Messengers For Christ

*Outreach Program
Handbook 6*

Philippians 2:13:

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure.

Often we wonder how involved God really is in our lives. We know He is involved directly working with us and within us with His Word and manifestations of holy spirit, but He is also involved indirectly yet intricately behind the scenes providing, protecting and preparing us for what lies before us. Although we are so often unaware of His providence, He has nevertheless been actively working in our lives.

Indeed, life may be a struggle, but we are never alone in it. The Book of Esther, like so much of the Bible, tells the story of God's involvement with His people. However, it shows God's work indirectly. God's name does not appear once in the entire 10 chapters. (This is also true of the Song of Solomon.) Yet God is not absent from the story of Esther; He is just disguised, working undercover, hidden in plain sight. In fact, the very fact that He is not named prompts us to look for him more intentionally, and when we do, we find Him. He is hidden in five acrostics which act like a handprint to indicate His influence in the narrative. (More on this on Day 4) Truly, His providence permeates the whole narrative. The Book of Esther demonstrates how God works in the lives of His people, both with and without their awareness. Esther is the classic illustration of God's providence as He, the unseen power, moves in the affairs of men to bring His purposes to pass.

Esther records events that happened during the Jews' Babylonian captivity. God told Moses about His people going into captivity long before they did.

Deuteronomy 31:16-18:

And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go *to be* among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them. ¹⁷ Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us? ¹⁸ And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods.

God had declared that if His people forsook Him, He would hide His face from them. In Esther God hides His face. Yet even though He hid Himself from them, He was still working for them and the Book of Esther reveals Him providing and protecting.

As we read Esther, we will see God's faithfulness to provide for His people even though they have turned away from Him and gone into captivity. Though the tragic events and the deliberate attacks upon God's people by the adversary are dire, God's involvement in the life of His people is what sustains them. We will look at the willingness and commitment of Mordecai and Esther to sacrifice themselves for the benefit and blessing of God's people.

Esther, along with the Old Testament books Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes, are the five scrolls that are read on various Jewish holidays. (See Companion Bible, Appendix 1.) Esther provides us with the history of the Jewish holiday Purim, or "lots," named because Haman, the Jews enemy, cast lots to determine the day of the Jews' annihilation. Esther is the Jewish heroine who, along with her adoptive father, Mordecai, reversed Haman's plan by influencing the King of the Persian Empire.

Esther and Mordecai have a specific and very important mission to fulfill. We see God's sovereign hand in preparing them for it and helping them execute it. When it comes to missions from God, I believe we all have some. God works with dreams, visions and the desires of our hearts so show us what they are. Often times we are tempted to settle for less than what God has asked us to do. Succumbing to this temptation denies God the opportunity to show us just how great He is and how willing He is to work with us in extraordinary ways.

The Book of Esther is a story of characters given a choice. As people choose, their destinies are formed and the world is changed. This is all because people allow God to work with them to will and do of His good pleasure. We see their attitude, commitment, determination, perseverance and hard work making significant contributions.

Affirmations: God watches over me. God works in my life in ways I am not even aware are happening.

Recommended Reading: Deuteronomy 31

Esther 8:1-2:

On that day did the **king Ahasuerus** give the house of **Haman** the Jews' enemy unto **Esther** the queen. And **Mordecai** came before the **king**; for **Esther** had told what he *was* unto her.² And the **king** took off his ring, which he had taken from **Haman**, and gave it unto **Mordecai**. And **Esther** set **Mordecai** over the house of **Haman**.

Ahasuerus is the first of the main characters we meet in chapter 1. The book opens in a time of peace and prosperity with the king throwing a great feast for hundreds and thousands of people, which lasts for more than six months. During this time, the king lavishly displays the glory and beauty of his kingdom taking great pride in its magnificence. This king was singled out and noted for the extent and grandeur of his kingdom. Chapter 10 also closes lauding the acts of his power and might. However, for most of the account he is presented as a weakling whose actions are always willed by his subordinates, Memucan (1:21), Haman (3:10-11), Harbona (7:9), and Esther and Mordecai (8:7-8). This seems to dramatize a sense of irony in that the great king ruling one of the greatest kingdom of the time can hardly make a decision for himself. He rarely says “no,” acquiesces to flattery and indulges people who feed his love of honor and recognition. He is very ostentatious and revels in the attention he solicits. [Besides the title “Ahasuerus” which occurs 29 times, “king” occurs 127 times in the Book of Esther. “Ahasuerus” means “I will be silent and poor” or “one who is humble.”]

We are introduced to **Mordecai** in Esther 2:5 where we learn of his lineage and relationship to Esther. He is a Benjamite who had been carried away from Jerusalem in the captivity, and he brought up Esther, his uncle's daughter: after her father and mother died. Mordecai is said to be “sitting at the king's gate” serving in some form of official capacity. He is distinguished by this absolute loyalty and constancy to Esther and to the king. Above all, he is loyal to the Jewish people. The summary of his life and service is recorded in 10:3 where it says, “he was constantly seeking the good of his people and promoting the welfare of all their descendants.” [“Mordecai” appears 52 times and means “little man.”]

Esther was a powerful woman who rose to the top of the kingdom. When introduced in chapter 2 it notes 3 times that she won favor with those with whom she interacted. Although her beauty was the reason she became part of the king's harem, her quality of life, God's hand upon her and the success of her night with the king secured her choice as queen. At the beginning of the account, she seems at first passive, and then in the last half of the story she becomes very active. The change occurs when Mordecai challenges her to intercede with the king for her people. After her 3 day fast, she emerges as a different person equipped with a plan and walking by the spirit. Following Mordecai's direction, she never disclosed her nationality and served as a secret agent working behind the scenes to avert the potential genocide of her people. She accomplished this without the advantage of aristocratic birth, well-placed friends, inherited wealth, or social prestige. [“Esther” appears 55 times. Her Hebrew name Hadassah occurs only once and means “myrtle.”]

Haman is introduced in chapter 3. He is the antagonist in the story and is the only one in the Bible called “the enemy of the Jews.” Haman is the quintessential villain who devises a plan to exterminate the Jews. The narrative reveals his thoughts more than any other character. Haman is presented as “the son of Hammedatha the Agagite.” Mentioning Mordecai, as being of the lineage of king Saul of Israel, and Haman, being of the lineage of king Agag of the Amalekites, sets an expectation of tension, conflict, and even violence between the two. Haman is promoted to second in the kingdom, and as soon as Haman comes to wield power in a place of prominence just below the king, he is immediately antagonistic toward Mordecai and vows to eliminate him. His fixation on Mordecai and his single-minded determination to end Mordecai's life was not sufficient to assuage his wrath. Instead, he devises a plan to completely exterminate the Jewish people from the entire kingdom. His efforts to consult the occult to aid in the extermination only backfire and in one ironic reversal after another, all Haman's plans are foiled. [“Haman” occurs 54 times (once translated “he”) and means “magnificent.”]

Affirmations: I have the courage of Esther and the resolve of Mordecai.

Recommended Reading: Esther 1 & 2

Deuteronomy 31:17-18: Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will **hide my face** from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God *is* not among us? ¹⁸ And I will surely **hide my face** in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods.

Esther is a story of palace intrigue set in the glory days of the Persian Empire, in which a Jewish maiden, elevated to the throne of Persia as queen risks her life to preserve her people from annihilation. The Book of Esther commemorates the historic deliverance that is still celebrated, to this day — the Feast of Purim.

In this lesson, I want to develop two of the points I made in Day 1's lesson. The first is that God's name is hidden, and the second is that Esther was one of the 5 Megillah read at the Jewish feasts. Esther was the obvious choice to be read at Purim because it records both the history of Purim and the command to observe it on a yearly basis.

I mentioned that the very fact that God's name does not appear prompts us to look for it more intentionally, and when we do, we find it hidden in five acrostics, which act like a handprint to indicate His influence in the narrative. We will look at those in our next lesson. Right now, it is the idea of "hiddenness" that I want to address.

There are four possible derivations of the name Esther. First, Esther is derived from *Ishtar*, the Akkadian goddess of love. Second, Esther is derived from *stara*, the Persian word for star. Third, Esther is derived from *astra*, the Median word meaning "myrtle." Since Hadassah, Esther's former Hebrew name, meant myrtle, Esther was chosen because it meant the same as her Hebrew name. Lastly, and most importantly, Esther is derived from *satar*, the Hebrew word meaning hidden. The most obvious connection the commentators make is that Esther hides her Jewish identity with a name that means "hidden." Esther did not reveal her nationality, because Mordecai had charged her not to (Esther 2:10). This plays into the author's penchant to hide information needed to fully understand the dynamics of the story.

However, I believe "hidden" is appropriate for a much greater reason. God is hiding Himself working anonymously, so to speak, behind the scenes using "natural" means. When God moves in extraordinary supernatural ways, (like parting the sea, dropping the walls of Jerusalem or moving the sun backward in the sky) we easily perceive His involvement, but when He works in ordinary, natural ways, we do not always recognize Him at work. Although we think He is not present or involved, He is. Although we often interpret His silence as absence, it is not. His hiddenness is not abandonment. He never leaves or forsakes us regardless of our ability to perceive what is actually going on. Talmudic scholars find Esther's name alluded to in the phrase, "I will hide My face" (Deuteronomy 31:17-18; 32:20; Ezekiel 39:29; Micah 3:4). Not only the name Esther but also the entire Book of Esther alludes to God being hidden.

It is not coincidental that the name Esther means *hidden* while the Hebrew name for Scroll, *Megila*, means *reveal*. Thus, the real name for the Book of Esther or The Scroll of Esther is "Revealing the Hidden" or "The Revelation of the Hidden." Something that is uniquely hidden in this scroll is the mention of God. His name and His presence are hidden from many readers, though easily discerned by those who have eyes to see.

Either the entire story is one of chance, happenstance, and coincidence or God is involved working behind the scene in a very stealth way (Proverbs 16:33; Ephesians 1:11). This explains the orthodox Jewish custom of wearing masks and costumes in the celebration of Purim, which is done to promote the idea of "hiddenness."

This masquerade fosters the essential message of the day — things are not as they seem. The elegant Persian Queen Esther is really the Jewish girl Hadassah; the man who saves Ahasuerus from a plot against his life is Hadassah's relative Mordecai; a day devised for the slaughter of God's people turns into a day of victory and celebration by them. God's hidden activity is made evident as His people are preserved through many twists, turns, and reversals of fortune which only prove that "the Most High God ruleth in the kingdom of men" (Daniel 4:25).

Affirmations: God reveals things to me when I need them. God is watching over my life.

Recommended Reading: Esther 3 & 4

Ecclesiastes 9:1a:

For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, *are* in the hand of God. . . .

I call these 5 acrostics the handprint of God because my hand provides an illustration of how they function. Just as my hand has five fingers and each one is different, so these 5 acrostics are each different and unique. My hand properly has 4 fingers and a thumb. Similarly, 4 of the acrostics spell out Jehovah and the 5th spells out the name “I am.” Of the 4 fingers representing Jehovah, 2 are spelt forward and 2 are spelt backward. Each of these pairs has one which uses the initial letters to form the acrostic, and one which uses the final letters in the words to form the acrostic. I may refer to each one individually as a fingerprint or thumbprint, but collectively they show us the hand of God at work in the Book of Esther.

The Bible speaks figuratively of the hand of God in several places. Let us look at a few of those occurrences to get an idea of how His hand shapes the Book of Esther.

Ecclesiastes is one of the greatest books on wisdom ever written, and it says in Ecclesiastes 2:24.

Ecclesiastes 2:24:

There is nothing better for a man, *than* that he should eat and drink, and *that* he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it *was* from the hand of God.

God’s mighty hands shape us, provide for us and deliver us. I Peter tells us how we are to react to God’s mighty hand.

I Peter 5:6:

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

The lives of Mordecai and Esther certainly bare testimony to the truth of this verse. The books of Daniel, Esther, Nehemiah and Ezra are all interwoven and pay tribute to the mighty hand of God at work on the behalf of His people. They are interwoven and deal with the time of the captivity and the return from it.

We see the hand of God working for His people in them. Sometimes the narrative of the Word talks about the hand of God being upon people. Ezra 7:6 informs us that the king granted Ezra “all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him.” Ezra 7:9 describes Ezra’s blessings as being “according to the good hand of his God upon him.” Sometimes the record in the narrative of the Word records the hand of God at work providing for His people. God recorded it plainly so we would not miss it. At other times the people realize it and speak of it themselves. (Ezra 7:27-28; 8:18,31; Nehemiah 2:8,18)

Indeed the psalmist declared what great comfort he had in musing on the work of God’s hand (Psalms 143:5). In Psalms 31:14-15 the psalmist trusts God for his deliverance declaring, “I trusted in thee, O LORD: I said, Thou *art* my God. My times *are* in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me.” Jesus just before he “gave up the ghost” committed his spirit into the hands of God. We, too, can find great comfort recognizing that our lives and times are in God’s hands.

In Daniel 4:35, even the great Nebuchadnezzar admits God “doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” Daniel also testifies that God “hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown (Daniel 9:15). His renown continues unto this day.

Sometimes His hand upon us goes unrecognized. However, James 1:17 tells us every good and perfect gift comes from God. Job, like us wonders about God’s hand at work. When pondering all he went through he comments in Job 12:9, “Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this?” We are certainly not always aware of all His ways and works,

In Isaiah 41 God speaks of many mighty things He does for His people and ends by saying, He did it so:

Isaiah 41:20:

That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it.

As we read, consider and understand the Book of Esther we will see the hand of God at work to deliver His people. These five acrostics will point to Him acting behind the scenes. We will see His mighty hand working a mighty deliverance which was to be recorded and memorialized yearly with joy, gladness and feasting.

Affirmations: I have a growing appreciation of the hand of my God upon me. I love how God is active in my life.
Recommended Reading: Esther 5 & 6

Esther 9:27,28b:

The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so as it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to their writing. . . every year. . . and *that* these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed.

The author of Esther is unknown, but it is clear, from the tone and details throughout the book, that the author is a devout Jew. Mordecai, Ezra, or Nehemiah are likely candidates. Jewish tradition ascribes the book to Ezra, as does Augustine. The Talmud ascribes it to the Great Synagogue, which completed the Jewish canon of scripture, of which Ezra was the founder and president.

Esther is a strange book, and it has been largely ignored and sometimes altogether disregarded. If you go to The Shrine of the Book in Jerusalem, Esther is the one book from the entire Old Testament that isn't found — not even a fragment — in the Dead Sea Scrolls in the Qumran community. John Calvin did not include Esther in his biblical commentaries, and he only referenced it once in the *Institutes*. (See 4.12.17) Though Martin Luther included it in his Bible, he was very ambivalent about it saying, "I am so great an enemy to Esther that I wish it had not come to us at all, for it has too many heathen unnaturalities." (*Table Talk* 24). In one exchange with Erasmus Luther said it "deserves. . . to be regarded as noncanonical."

The truth is many people are uncomfortable with this book. We are alright with that part where Mordecai tells her, "You have come to the kingdom for such a time as this, it's time for you to step up and do what is needed." But the rest of it is just strange. It simply lacks the moral clarity of the Book of Daniel even though it was written in roughly the same period, the period of the exile. The Book of Daniel is ethical and so uncompromising. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refuse to eat the king's food; they want to eat according to law. Not only do they admit they are Jews, they demand concessions because of it. When a law passes that forbids prayer, it does not affect Daniel at all. There is not even a description in the text of Daniel agonizing over whether or not to do it. He just goes home as usual, opens up his window and prays like always, and he is willing to face the consequences. There is great moral integrity in Daniel.

Esther lacks that kind of devotion to the truth. Her real name is Hadassah but she goes by Esther. She does not admit she is a Jew. In fact, one might infer from the text that Mordecai encourages her to enter into this beauty contest, which is no ordinary beauty contest. She is taken directly into the harem and prepared for her night with the king. She does not refuse the king's food enjoying the best of it for at least a year. She is put on a beauty regimen and goes through a purification process.

Esther is one of the few women in the Bible whose beauty is renowned. She is so enticing, so alluring, so appealing, so attractive that in that night she spends with the king that she wins his favor and he makes her queen. That was not just because she had a great smile. I think we want to read into the text that somehow it was her purity and her chastity that won the king over, but that is really not honest. This one night with the king was intended to be precisely what we think it was. No wonder those uptight people at Qumran did not include her book in the Dead Sea Scrolls. They were uncomfortable with it. We are comfortable with moral clarity. We like a Daniel. We scratch our heads when it comes to Esther.

One commentator remarks that the Book of Esther "neither praises nor recommends their [i.e. Esther & Mordecai's] actions or behaviors, but simply relates what took place without blame or approval." (Keil & Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament, Esther p. 197) Now, I will confess to you, I can relate to Esther's imperfections and moral compromises. I understand them. I am not ready to sit in judgment on Esther because I remember compromises that I have made. I am just so thankful that God works with us in spite of our mistakes and compromises. He can bring His good, acceptable and perfect will to pass working with people like us who are not always so good, acceptable or perfect.

Most sermons on Esther focus on that phrase, "For such a time as this." If you do any research on sermons on Esther, most of them are titled, "For Such a Time as This." But I think it is really the preceding phrase that catches my attention. It reads, "Who knows but that you've come to the kingdom for such a time as this." Whatever time it is in our lives God is big enough, He is sovereign enough that he can use even our tragic circumstances, even our bad decisions, even our sinful choices, even the dire circumstances of our life for His glory. He can accomplish His good, acceptable and perfect will even with imperfect people like us in the process.

Esther was written to provide a historical record of the events leading to the establishment of the Jewish observance of Purim, which records the great deliverance of God's people from extermination during the Babylonian captivity. Purim was yet another attempt by Satan to eliminate the Christ-line and prevent the coming of the Messiah. Satan was at work, using Haman to blot out Israel, as once before he had used Pharaoh for the same purpose. (See the Companion Bible Appendix 23 and 25). Jehovah's counsel must stand. His promise of the Messiah, the coming "Seed" of the woman (Genesis 3:15), must not fail. Therefore, He must overrule all for the preservation of His people and the line by which that "seed" was to come into the world (Companion Bible, Appendix 60). Esther is a vivid assurance of God's protection of His people.

Affirmations: The seed of the woman came and set me free. I know God is able and willing to take care of me.
Recommended Reading: Esther 7 & 8

Esther 5:4:

And Esther answered, If *it seem* good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him.

Banquet/feast: The Hebrew word for “banquet,” *mishteh*, occurs 20 times in Esther, and only 26 times in the rest of the OT. It occurs as early as Esther 1:3 and as late as Esther 9:22. The banquet is the setting at which most of the major events occur or are commemorated. Vashti is disposed at a banquet; Esther is made queen at a banquet, and, most important of all Esther identifies the wicked Haman as her enemy at a banquet. There are 10 banquets or feasts around which the Book of Esther is structured.

Esther 1:3-4	Given by Ahasuerus to display his riches and glory.
Esther 1:5-8	Given by Ahasuerus for all the people in Shushan.
Esther 1:9	Given by queen Vashti for the women.
Esther 2:18	Given by Ahasuerus for Esther, called “Esther’s banquet.”
Esther 3:15	Ahasuerus and Haman sat down to drink (had a private banquet).
Esther 5:4	First banquet by Esther for the Ahasuerus and Haman.
Esther 5:8, 12, 14; 7:1	Second banquet given by Esther for Ahasuerus and Haman.
Esther 8:17	Feasting in celebration of Mordecai’s promotion and counter-decree.
Esther 9:17, 19	First day of Purim feasting throughout empire.
Esther 9:18	Second day of Purim feasting in Shushan.

Decree: The Hebrew word for “decree,” *dath* is used 20 of its 22 times in Esther. *Dath* indicates an official decree issued by the government for its citizens. The first occurs in Esther 1:8 [law] and the last in Esther 9:14. So much of the story of Esther revolves around the two major decrees (Haman’s was intended to exterminate the Jews and Mordecai’s granted the Jews the right to defend themselves). Neither of these according to the laws of the Medes and Persians could be changed.

Esther 1:8 [law]	Everyone could drink as much as they wanted.
Esther 1:13 & 15 [law]	The king sought the advice of those who knew law and judgment about what to do to Vashti:
Esther 1:19 [law]	New decree to depose & replace Vashti.
Esther 2:8 [decree]	New decree to summon women to choose a queen.
Esther 2:12 [manner]	Candidates for queen purified according to the laws set up for women.
Esther 3:8 [law(s)]	Haman accuse Jews of having their own laws and not obeying the king’s.
Esther 3:14 & 15 4:3,8 [commandment/decree]	Haman’s decree to exterminate the Jews.
Esther 4:11 & 16 [law]	Law to kill those who came to king unsummoned.
Esther 8:13,14,17 [commandment/decree]	Mordecai’s decree allowing the Jews to defend themselves.
Esther 9:1 [decree]	The execution of both Haman’s and Mordecai’s decrees.
Esther 9:13 & 14 [decree]	Esther asks for another decree to extend the fighting for a second day and to impale Haman’s sons on the gallows.

Fall: The Hebrew verb *naphal*, “to fall,” does not occur particularly often, but it is key to the intrigue in the story. It occurs 10 times. In Esther 3:7 Haman casts (“causes to fall”) the lot, or pur, to determine the date for the Jews destruction. In 6:10 when the king commands Haman to let nothing fall of all he declared to be done for the one whom the king chose to honor. The second and third occurrences are in 6:13, when Haman’s wife establishes that Haman has begun to fall before Mordecai, which would be without remedy. Then in 7:8, when Haman falls onto Esther’s couch begging for his life (an action which sealed his fate). In 8:3 Esther falls at the king’s feet to beg for the revocation of Haman’s decree. Both 8:17 and 9:3 declared the fear of the Jews that fell upon the people of the lands. The last is in 9:24, which repeats the evil devise of casting lots. Besides the actual occurrences of *naphal* we should also note Mordecai’s refusal to bow as everyone else in the kingdom did (3:2 & 5).

Pur/Purim: These Hebrew words (singular and plural) occur 8 times only in Esther. The date on which the Jews are to be exterminated was determined by the casting of lots which was what served as the name of the memorial by way of reversal.

Jews: This Hebrew word derived patronymically from Judah occurs 53 of its 76 times in Esther. The theme of the book is their deliverance from annihilation.

Affirmations: God has prepared a banquet for me. I decree a thing and it happens.

Recommended Reading: Esther 9 & 10

Esther 1:1:

Now it came to pass¹ in the days of Ahasuerus,² (this *is* Ahasuerus which reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, *over* an hundred and seven and twenty provinces:)

In Esther chapter one, we are introduced to the state of the empire and the pride and ego of the king. It paints quite of picture of the condition of the empire in which God's people found themselves. They had gone into captivity because they forsook their God, and the situation they find themselves in is far from ideal.

Ahasuerus was a title like Pharaoh. "This" (verse 1) implies that others were called the same thing and this one should be distinguished from the rest. This one was especially renowned.

Esther 1:2-3:

That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which *was* in Shushan³ the palace, ³ In the third year of his reign, he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, *being* before him:

The word "power" is a military word, and it indicates a military presence. It is most often translated "army" in the KJV, but it is also used of elite special forces translated "men of valor." They were there to protect and maintain order.

Esther 1:4:

When he shewed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, *even* an hundred and fourscore days.

That is quite a party—180 days, about 6 months. It was like a World's Fair where all the princes and nobles from the whole kingdom, came to see the vast wealth of the kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty.

Esther 1:5-9:

And when these days were expired, the king made a feast unto all the people that were present in Shushan the palace, both unto great and small, seven days, in the court of the garden of the king's palace; ⁶ *Where were* white, green, and blue, *hangings*, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble: the beds *were of* gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black, marble.

⁷ And they gave *them* drink in vessels of gold, (the vessels being diverse one from another,) and royal wine in abundance, according to the state of the king. ⁸ And the drinking *was* according to the law; none did compel: for so the king had appointed to all the officers of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure. ⁹ Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women *in* the royal house which *belonged to* king Ahasuerus.

How's that for a mission — to make the world see how grand and glorious you are. The reason for the parties was to show off the riches of the kingdom and promote great glory and honor upon Ahasuerus. He is very ostentatious and revels in the attention he solicits. The first nine verses record three banquets. The first was for his princes, servants and nobles and lasted 180 days — six months of serious partying. Then when it is over, in verse 5, he has another party for the whole capital. This is open to the common people so that they will be overwhelmed by his immense power and wealth. The text notes that the goblets were not only outrageously expensive (made of gold), but each one was unique. It is noted that the drinking was literally without restraint. While the men were drinking themselves into a stupor, Queen Vashti has a third banquet for the women. To dine separately was the custom at that time in the Eastern culture.

1. The phrase "it came to pass" is the figure of speech pleonasm. It is unnecessary. Simply stating what came to pass assures us that it happened. Preceding the declaration of what came to pass with the phrase "it came to pass" is emphatic. This phrase occurs 4 times in Esther, and it introduces a new scene in the drama. This first one introduces the state of the empire and the character of the king. The phrase "it came to pass in the days of" occurs 6 times in the KJV it uniformly marks a time of trouble ending in blessing. (See also Genesis 14:1; Ruth 1:1; II Samuel 21:1; Isaiah 7:1 & Jeremiah 1:3).

2. The traditional view is that Ahasuerus was Artaxerxes. Bullinger and Dake believe it was Astyages, the father of Cyrus. Jon Nessle says it was Darius I (https://www.academia.edu/25143969/Post-exilic_Bible_Chronology_and_Identifying_Esther's_Husband)

3. "Shushan" occurs 21 times and all but two are in Esther. The other two are in Nehemiah 1:1 and Daniel 8:2.

Affirmations: My mission is to make the world see how grand and glorious the kingdom of God really is.

Recommended Reading: Esther 1:1-9 and Ezra 1& 2

Esther 1:10-12:

On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king, ¹¹ To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she *was* fair to look on. ¹² But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by *his* chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him.

On the seventh day of the banquet, the drunken King decides to put his wife on display before all the common people of the capital. He sends his seven chamberlains to fetch Vashti and parade her before all his people. These chamberlains were eunuchs, emasculated persons, who had charge of the harems of oriental monarchs. They also functioned as confidential advisers and were frequently men of great influence with political position, power and prominence.

This was an unusual demand for an oriental king to make of his queen. To expose her to a company of drunken revelers was not only unbecoming to her as a woman, but also to her station as queen. According to Persian custom, the queen more than the wives of other men, was to be secluded from public gaze. Nevertheless, the king's pretentious attitude prompted him to break with custom so everyone would see the beauty of his wife. This was just one more thing to bring him glory and honor. Had the king not been so drunken he may not have tolerated this exposure, which was not only an insult to the queen, but to him also.

Queens and concubines were subject to the complete will of the monarchs just as were slaves. For her to refuse him before his subjects was humiliating and angered the king greatly. With everyone drinking without restraint and capital was in chaos. When we add to the party scene the queen's refusal to appear before the king as requested, the situation is really getting out of hand. To rein in the chaos and save face the king asks for help from his advisers to rein in the chaos and reestablish order.

Esther 1:13-22:

Then the king said to the wise men, which knew the times, (for so *was* the king's manner toward all that knew law and judgment: ¹⁴ And the next unto him *was* Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, *and* Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, which saw the king's face, *and* which sat the first in the kingdom;) [His top advisors, like the Supreme Court or Executive Cabinet] ¹⁵ What shall we do unto the queen Vashti according to law, because she hath not performed the commandment of the king Ahasuerus by the chamberlains? [That is the second time that phrase appears. It must be important to the proper understanding of the incident. The king sent those in charge of the harem to get the queen. That was very indecorous.] ¹⁶ And Memucan answered before the king and the princes, Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people that *are* in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus. [He made this a big deal.] ¹⁷ For *this* deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported, The king Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not. ¹⁸ *Likewise* shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king's princes, which have heard of the deed of the queen. Thus *shall there arise* too much contempt and wrath. [We do not want to let this go unaddressed or it will encourage other women to do the same.] ¹⁹ If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, That Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she. ²⁰ And when the king's decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all his empire, (for it is great,) **all the wives shall give** to their husbands honour, both to great and small. ²¹ And the saying pleased the king and the princes; and the king did according to the word of Memucan: ²² For he sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man should bear rule in his own house, and that *it* should be published according to the language of every people.

Now in the seventh day of his banquet, "when King was in high spirits from wine" (v. 10), he sent for Queen Vashti. He had been showing off all of his possessions. Now he wants to show off his ultimate possession. What do you think he wanted to show the people about her? Do you think it was her brains? Or her personality? I do not think so. He wanted her to come "in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at" (v. 11). We do not know the details of this, but apparently, it was going to be done in a very humiliating way. Then, in verse 12, this extraordinary thing happens: Vashti says, "No. I do not think so." Come and parade myself before a crazed mob after seven days of drunken partying? No way!"

So, how does the king respond? Does he say, "You know, you're right, that would have been really awkward, I am so sorry I mentioned it"? No. "Then the king became furious and burned with anger" (v. 12). He was the grand and glorious king, and this was affront to his position and ego. Vashti's response made him look weak. Her defiance attacked his sense of power, dominance and self-promotion. He has to do something.

In verse 13, he consults sages who know the law: "Since it was customary for the king to consult experts in matters of law and justice, he spoke with the wise men who understood the times and were closest to the king. . . ." The writer here is poking fun at the king in a moment of irony. This is the most powerful man in the world, but he cannot control his wife. So, he goes to the "Supreme Court" and makes this a matter of state. We might say, "He made a federal case out of it." He asks, "What am I going to do with my wife?" They advise him to issue a royal order. Verse 19-20: "Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed (remember Daniel 6:8), that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of the king." That is sort of what she had already decided. "Also, let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she. Then when the king's edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest." The writer is showing us how the flatterers that the king surrounds himself with just keep pumping him up. Therefore, the king deposes Vashti and makes it a federal crime for a woman to disobey her husband.

Our lives are aimless without a mission. We fill them up with ways to entertain or numb ourselves, which leads to damage in relationships, forfeiting our responsibilities, and missing out on doing anything really meaningful. Chapter two sets the stage for the entrance of two more of the main characters Mordecai and Esther.

Affirmations: I keep my body and desires under control. I seek wise counsel, not flattery.

Recommended Reading: Esther 1:10-22 and Ezra 3 & 4

Esther 1:20:

And when the king's decree which he shall make shall be published throughout all his empire, (for it is great,) **all the wives shall give** to their husbands honour, both to great and small.

We find the first of the hidden acrostics in Esther 1:20. It occurs in the English phrase, "all the wives shall give." God is pointing His finger to what Memucan said. Some of the texts have the letters that spell out Jehovah written in larger letters than the rest of the letters in the words forming the acrostic. (See chart below.)

This acrostic deals not just with one event or thought, but rather an entire course of action. It is also the only one formed by the initial letters and spelt backward. (Remember, Hebrew is written from right to left and English is written from left to right.) It appears in the *initial* letters, for the event intended to initiate a course of action to subjugate women and honor the men. However the name is spelt *backward* because Jehovah intends to *turn back* or reverse Memucan's counsel and bring a woman, Esther, into a position of honor and authority.

4	3	2	1
יְהוָה	הַנָּשִׁים	וְכָל-	הָאִשָּׁה
1	2	3	4
Hi'	V ^l kal	Hannashim	Yitt ^e nu.
1	2	3	4
it	and-all	the-wives	shall-give
"Due Respect Our Ladies shall give to their husbands, both to great and small."			

The Hebrew word for Lord, called the **tetragrammaton**, consists of the four letters *yod*, *he*, *vav* and *he*, transliterated consonantly usually as YHVH. Known more commonly as Jehovah, this name was used of God in covenant relationship with His people. The first line of the chart is in Hebrew written from right to left. The numbers above the Hebrew words, which show the order in which the words appear, indicates this. The second line of text shows the Hebrew words transliterated into English letters and written from left to right (note the numbers above it which indicate the word order. The third line is the English translation of the words. The last two lines in quotation marks is a free translation of the Hebrew with the intent of retaining the acrostic in English. You will notice that the first letters of the words in the phrase "Due Respect Our Ladies" spell out Lord in the reverse order.

When the king asks his wise men who knew the times what to do to Vashti because she refused to comply with the king's commandment, Memucan replied that Vashti's offense was not to the king alone, but to all the people of the kingdom. He said her refusal to comply with the king's request set a bad and dangerous precedent for all the women in the kingdom. He suggested that the king should deal with this harshly to end the contempt and wrath that women may direct to their husbands,

Memucan advised the king to depose Vashti and make a royal decree, a law that would be permanent and unchangeable, that women should respect and obey their husbands. This pleased the king and he made the decree and communicated it to his entire kingdom. The purpose was that every man "should be the ruler of his own home and should say whatever he pleases" (Esther 1:22 NLT).

Memucan's words intended to subjugate women and prevent them from acting in a manner contrary to their husband's wishes. However, God would reverse Memucan's counsel and bring a woman, Esther, into a position of honor and authority. Because Vashti was banished, a new queen would have to be chosen. Not only did God have the new queen in mind, He planned to keep her undercover like a secret agent until she was needed to fulfill His grand plan.

Affirmations: God reverses the adversary's unwise and evil intentions toward me. God has already been working in my life to prepare me for what lies before me.

Recommended Reading: The Book of Haggai

Esther 2:1:

After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus was appeased, he remembered Vashti, and what she had done, and what was decreed against her.

In chapter 2, Esther and her cousin/guardian/adoptive father Mordecai enter the scene. They are a great contrast to the characters we met in chapter one and Haman whom we will meet in chapter three. In chapter 2 of Esther, the king sobers up. His anger subsides, and he realizes he does not have a queen. He is advised by his personal attendants this time. These are not the sages we encountered in chapter one, headed by Memucan. Rather they are his bodyguards, youthful men, who give the king their idea of what to look for in a new queen. [Sounds like this may have been the inspiration behind the recent reality TV show, *The Bachelor*.]

What do you think their number one criterion is going to be? They suggest that he hold a Miss Mede and Persia beauty contest, where every province would contribute to the royal harem the best-looking woman in that province. There were 127 provinces under the king. That is a lot of women to choose from. In the end, the only criterion is pleasing the king, which most likely means she will turn heads. She will become the ultimate trophy wife.

The king had enough wealth and power to bring the most beautiful young women in the kingdom to him. What a way to find a beautiful wife. Beauty is still revered and idolized today. Both men and women aspire to it, are judged by it and are promoted because of it. But, there would be more involved than simply beauty in the choice of a queen as we shall see.

In verse 8 we find the second occurrence of the phrase, “it came to pass.” It introduces the beginning of the gathering of the maidens for the Miss Persia contest. One of the contestants was a young Jewish girl named Esther. She is an orphan who was raised by her cousin Mordecai. They had a very tender relationship. We learn that Mordecai was Jewish, adoptive father to an orphan, from the tribe of Benjamin, living in exile. We learn that Esther was also a Jew whose Hebrew name is Hadassah cousin of Mordecai who raised her as his own. She was an orphan, strikingly beautiful and able to win over people easily.

Esther is told to hide something very core to her identity — the fact that she was a Jew. In this chapter, Esther goes from being an orphan, a Jew in exile, and a part of the king’s harem, to becoming queen. What a wonderful quality of life and character she must have had. Immediately upon entering the king’s house in the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women she won favor Hegai and was given the best maiden and the best accommodations. This favor was due to her training and upbringing by Mordecai and God’s hand upon her. She was cordial and genial and received favor from everyone she met. This was mentioned three times in chapter two (verses 9, 15 and 17).

We read that Esther was fair and beautiful. She was a good-looking woman who could turn heads. When she had her night with the king, she followed Hegai’s advise from whom she had won favor. She took only what he had appointed although the women were allowed to take whatever they liked with them. She made it through the prelims and she is one of the finalists selected to go before the king. So, she began to prepare to go in before him. I think we want to read into the text that somehow it was her purity and her chastity that won the king over, but that is not what kings were like. This one night with the king was intended to be precisely what we think it was.

How many of you have ever spent more than an hour getting ready for a date? How many of you have ever spent more time getting ready for a date than you actually spent on the date itself? Would you take a whole year? That is how long it took Esther to prepare for her one night. It would be the only opportunity she had to make an impression.

Esther not only makes an impression, she wins. She outshines them all. She won the favor of all who saw her, we’re told. She was truly an amazing woman. The king, in typical fashion, throws another party.

Chapter two shows us how committed Mordecai and Esther were to each other. They worked together and made significant contributions to the kingdom. Although their contribution in foiling the assassination attempt went without recognition, it was another step in preparation for what God had in store for them both. In chapter three we will meet the last major player in the story, Haman, the Agagite

Affirmations: I have favor with God and man. God brings people into my life that help me grow and bring out the best in me.

Recommended Reading: Esther 2 and Ezra 5:1-6:14

Esther 3:1-2:

After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that *were* with him. ² And all the king's servants, that *were* in the king's gate, bowed, and revered Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did *him* reverence.

In chapter three we meet the last major player in the story, the antagonist, Haman, the Agagite. Calling Haman an Agagite was a way of associating the struggle in Esther with the one in I Samuel 15. Agag was the Amalekite whom king Saul spared in I Samuel 15 from which Haman descended, and Mordecai was a Benjamite, the tribe of Saul, Israel's first king. Saul began the war with the Amalekites (I Samuel 15:2-33), but he never finished it. He allowed Agag, the king, to live. Although Samuel did execute Agag at that time, Saul obviously lied to him about destroying all the Amalekites because here many years later Haman the Agagite is seeking retribution on God's people.

Exodus 17:16 warned that there would be war with Amalek from generation to generation. Haman being an Agagite was necessarily an Amalekite, and Josephus called him such in his book, *Antiquities*. Mordecai, a Benjamite ends the conflict assigned to Saul. He did not make the mistake that Saul did for he never took any spoil from the conflict. The account mentions that 3 times so we would be sure not to miss it (Esther 9:10, 15 16). Of course Haman's plan was to take spoil when they slaughtered the Jews (Esther 3:13).

It was five years after Esther became queen that Haman was promoted. He became the Grand Vizier, second only to Ahasuerus. Look at whom Satan brings to a position of prominence. He is the king's right hand man. The antagonism between Mordecai and Haman escalates and Mordecai's refusal to honor Haman places him in a very precarious situation. His fellow servants notice Mordecai's obstinacy, and they question him about it.

Esther 3: 3:

Then the king's servants, which *were* in the king's gate, said unto Mordecai, Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?

The king's servants question Mordecai because they could not imagine why he would do something like this. It is amazing they never turned him in to the king. He must have been well liked and respected. They will tell Haman though after they find out the real reason Mordecai would not bow, but it is going to take some persistent action on their part to pry it out of Mordecai.

Esther 3:4-6:

Now **it came to pass**, when they spake daily unto him, and he hearkened not unto them, that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's matters would stand: for he had told them that he *was* a Jew. ⁵ And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath. ⁶ And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; **for** they had shewed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that *were* throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, *even* the people of Mordecai.

"It came to pass" introduces the reason of the enmity between Mordecai and Haman. Now the plot really begins to thicken as the spiritual adversaries begin to square off. Of course, this happened only after being told Mordecai was a Jew. "For" begins the figure aetiology, cause shown; it emphasizes the cause or reason for the action Haman takes. God gives us the reason Haman sought to destroy all the Jews. The word for "thought" (verse 6) is translated "eye" or "sight" 7 out of 8 times. It used of mental and spiritual faculties. Haman pictured what he wanted to do to Mordecai. His mind picture fomented his scorn. However, he was not satisfied with only destroying Mordecai; he wanted to eliminate all the Jews. This was another attempt to destroy the Christ-line.

Esther 3:7:

In the first month, that *is*, the month Nisan, in the **twelfth year** of king Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that *is*, the lot, before Haman from day to day [from Nisan 1 to Adar 13], and from month to month, *to* the twelfth *month*, that *is*, the month Adar.

It was the custom to use monthly prognosticators to fix on unfortunate times. These individuals forecasted evil by consulting the occult. Isaiah speaks of them.

Isaiah 47:13:

Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from *these things* that shall come upon thee.

After Haman settles on a date, he goes to see Ahasuerus to negotiate his planned annihilation of the Jews.

Affirmations: I follow God's guidance without wavering. The evil enmity fomented against me never succeeds.

Recommended Reading: Esther 3;1-7 and Ezra 6:15-8:36

Esther 3:8:

And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws *are* diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it *is* not for the king's profit to suffer [allow] them.

Haman goes to the king to ask him for a written declaration to destroy all the Jews in the kingdom. He even offers to put money into the king's treasury to hire the mercenaries. Although Haman was willing to pay for it himself, verse 11 records that the king himself gives Haman the money to hire the mercenaries to do the dirty work.

Esther 3:9-10:

If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring *it* into the king's treasuries. ¹⁰ And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, **the Jews' enemy**.

Without any examination into the condition of the people or the reason for Haman's request, the king consented to their destruction. The king gave Haman his ring to confirm his supreme authority under the king, and that he might use it for sealing of the decree. The possession of the king's signet ring gave the holder full power to issue edicts in his name, since the sealing of them with his signet gave them validity.

This is the first of 4 times Haman is called, the Jews' enemy. No one else in the Bible is ever so described. His name is mentioned 50 times in Esther. During modern day celebrations of Purim, it is customary to boo, hiss, stamp feet and rattle noisemakers whenever the name of Haman is mentioned in the service. The purpose of this custom is to not only show their scorn and displeasure but to also symbolically "blot out the name of Haman."

Esther 3:11-15:

And the king said unto Haman, The silver *is* given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee. ¹² Then were the king's scribes called on the thirteenth day of the first month, and there was written according to all that Haman had commanded unto the king's lieutenants, and to the governors that *were* over every province, and to the rulers of every people of every province according to the writing thereof, and *to* every people after their language; in the name of king Ahasuerus was it written, and sealed with the king's ring. ¹³ And the letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, **to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish**, [This is the figure synonymia to emphasize the utter destruction contemplated.] all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, *even* upon the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and *to take* the spoil of them for a prey. ¹⁴ The copy of the writing for a commandment to be given in every province was published unto all people[s], that they should be ready against that day. ¹⁵ The posts went out, being hastened by the king's commandment, and the decree was given in Shushan the palace. And the king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city [put figuratively for the people of the city] Shushan was perplexed.

"Thirteenth day" occurs 3 times in this section. I wonder if it was a Friday. It was the day before the Jewish Passover, which was to start Nisan 14. "Thirteen" stands for rebellion, disintegration and revolution. The Jews were to be killed and their property taken by those who carried out the order. After the decree was written, which could not be changed, the king and Haman celebrated the decision drinking together.

"Perplexed" is a very rare word used only 3 times in the OT. It means perplexed, confused or entangled. This is the effect it had on the Persian townspeople. They did not understand it. Chapter 4 will tell us of the effect on the Jews.

Things are sure stacking up against the Jews. Mordecai and Esther definitely have obstacles to overcome. Esther was tempted to hide in the palace thinking that she as the queen would have been spared the coming destruction. She successfully became queen, and she could have stopped there and not gone any further, but Mordecai would not let her. He encourages and challenges her to rise to the occasion.

Affirmations: God helps me recognize and avoid evil associations. I do not wrestle against flesh and blood but rather against principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world and all spiritual wickedness.
Recommended Reading: Esther 3:8-17 and Nehemiah 1 & 2

Esther 4:1-2:

When Mordecai perceived all that was [being] done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and a bitter cry; ² And came even before [as far as] the king's gate: for none *might* enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.

Esther chapter three closes with the reaction of the people in Shusan to Haman's decree. They were perplexed and confused. They did not understand it, but Mordecai did. Mordecai was Esther's guardian. He sat at the king's gate, which meant he was one of the royal officials. He had once saved the king's life from an assassination attempt. But he would not bow down to Haman, and Haman becomes obsessed with the one man who will not bow before him. It grates on him. So he offers the king a plan for the destruction of the Jews, and in typical fashion the king agrees without even checking into the group of people about which Haman was talking. (Esther 3:10-11).

Haman's lineage was in opposition to Mordecai's lineage. Their families had been enemies for generations. This significant bit of information provides us insight into what we might otherwise view as Haman's overreaction to Mordecai's refusal to honor him, as well as into why Mordecai refused to do so. Mordecai may have felt somewhat responsible for Haman's declaration because he knew that Haman's spite was against him primarily, and that it was for his sake that the rest of the Jews were endangered. He may have felt that his persistent obstinacy to honor Haman resulted in Haman's attack on all Jews.

Mordecai's cry in verse 1 was not simply an expression of grief, but it was also a political act, an act of protest. It was similar to the actions of the young man who stood in front of the tank at Tiananmen Square in China. It is an act of extraordinary courage for he not only vented his grief, but also proclaimed it, that all might take notice of it. This is a remarkable man who not ashamed to show himself a friend to the Jews and a fellow-sufferer with them. However, it becomes quite clear to him that if anything productive is going to be done, if the people are to be saved, it is going to be up to Esther.

Esther 4:3-4:

And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, *there was* great mourning among the Jews, **and** fasting, **and** weeping, **and** wailing; **and** many lay in sackcloth and ashes. ⁴ So Esther's maids and her chamberlains came and told *it* her. Then was the queen exceedingly grieved; and she sent raiment to clothe Mordecai, and to take away his sackcloth from him: but he received *it* not.

Mordecai was not the only one mourning; the Jews throughout the entire kingdom responded with fasting, **and** weeping, **and** wailing; **and** many lay in sackcloth and ashes. The figure of speech polysyndeton is used to emphasize the greatness and universality of the mourning throughout the realm. When Esther's maids told her what Mordecai was doing she immediately sends him a change of raiment, because he may have been severely punished for approaching the palace in sackcloth and ashes. However, Mordecai refused.

Esther 4:5-9:

Then called Esther for Hatach, *one* of the king's chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her, and gave him a commandment to Mordecai, to know what *it was*, and why *it was*. ⁶ So Hatach went forth to Mordecai unto the street of the city, which *was* before the king's gate. ⁷ And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and of the sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them. [Money was apparently a key motive.] ⁸ Also he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, to shew *it* unto Esther, and to declare *it* unto her, and to charge her that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people. [Now Hatach knows Esther is a Jew, but he keeps her secret.] ⁹ And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai.

Esther wanted to know why he refused her offer of clothing and chose to remain was in sackcloth mourning. This started an exchange between them through Hatach. Mordecai was able to communicate to her Haman's evil plan and even sent her a copy of it so she could read it for herself.

Affirmations: I put on the whole armor of God and stand. I never allow myself to be bribed.

Recommended Reading: Esther 4:1-9 and Nehemiah 3 & 4

Esther 4:10-12:

Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai; ¹¹ All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, *there is* one law of his to put *him* to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days. ¹² And they told to Mordecai Esther's words.

We are right in the middle of Mordecai and Esther's discourse communicated through Hatach. In Esther 4:7-9 Mordecai told Esther of the gravity of their situation, and then in Esther 4:10-12 she responded. Things are sure stacking up against the Jews. Mordecai and Esther definitely have obstacles to overcome. Esther would be tempted to hide in the palace thinking that she, as the queen, would be spared the coming destruction. She successfully became queen, and she could have stopped there and not gone any further, but Mordecai would not let her. He encourages and challenges her to rise to the occasion.

Esther 4:13-14:

Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. ¹⁴ For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, *then* shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?

Esther said going to the king might get her killed and Mordecai responded that not going to the king could also get her killed. Mordecai was convinced that even if Esther refused to intervene with the king enlargement and deliverance would still come. The word for "enlargement" means respite or relief. It is only used twice, and it comes from a verb only used three times which means to be refreshed or have room to breathe. It was previously used of Saul being delivered from evil spirits when David played the harp for him. Mordecai closes with a rhetorical question asked to make Esther think and hope and trust in God's grace to deliver.

Esther 4:14 teaches us that the Lord promises us not only a deliverance from every dilemma, but also an enlargement in our particular calling and station in life. God provides deliverance or liberation from any trouble or captivity and enlargement or expansion of one's sphere of influence. Every time we faithfully trust the Lord for His deliverance, two things happen: He sets us free, and He enlarges our capacity. We will not stay in the same trying circumstances perpetually. We will come out of every difficulty delivered with an increase in our sphere of influence. The deliverance is worth pursuing in order to reap the reward of enlargement!

Esther 4:15-17:

Then Esther bade *them* return Mordecai *this answer*, ¹⁶ Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day [The Hebrew day began at sunset so night appears before day.]: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which *is* not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish. ¹⁷ So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.

The Jews in Shushan knew each other and worked together with unity of purpose as much possible. Once Esther decided what to do, she asked for the support of Mordecai and the rest of the Jews. Esther committed herself and her maidens to do the same. She felt it was better do her duty and die for her people than shrink from her duty and die with them. Mordecai respected her request and complied. Esther was not relying on her relationship with the king to bring success. Rather, she sought favor of the Lord through fasting and prayer. Who could grant her favor with the king.

I wonder if she reflected on the wisdom from Proverbs.

Proverbs 24:10-12:

If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength *is* small. ¹¹ If thou forbear to deliver *them that are* drawn unto death, and *those that are* ready to be slain; ¹² If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider *it?* and he that keepeth thy soul, doth *not* he know *it?* and shall *not* he render to *every* man according to his works?

She resolved not to be distracted or faint. Certainly, God's people were drawn nigh unto death and ready to be slain. She knew what was at stake and could not use the excuse of ignorance. She knew it could cost her life, but she resolved to go and if she perished, she perished.

Affirmations: I am thankful for those who like Mordecai help me discern God's will for my life. I do not faint in the day of adversity, for I am strong in the Lord and the power of his might.

Recommended Reading: Esther 4:10-17 and Nehemiah 5 & 6

Esther 4:14:

For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, *then* shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for *such* a time as this?

Esther realizes that the fate of a whole nation, the dream of the people of God, is in her hands. She understands that she was not brought to this point in her life for the sake of accumulating servants, an exquisite wardrobe, precious gems, and exotic fragrances. She is part of God's plan to redeem the world.

However, Esther does not want to do this. The king is careful about protocol and does not like it when somebody openly defies him. Esther knows what happened to Vashti. The king has but one law: a person can be put to death if he comes before him unsummoned. Remember the king had already foiled one attempt on his life (2:21-23).

Esther explains to Mordecai that she may not be as close to the king as he thinks she is. After all, it has been thirty days since she was called to go in to the king. He is her husband, and she has not seen him for 30 days. This is not an outwardly or overly devoted husband. She has very good reason to question how much influence she has.

Esther realized the fate of a whole nation, the dream of the people of God, was in her hands. She did not ask for it, but she got it. Esther knew she had not been brought to this point in her life for her personal benefit alone. She had been brought to this point in her life to be a part of what it is that God was doing on this planet, to work for justice, to spare God's people great suffering, and to oppose a man who is vile and evil and supremely powerful. She had been brought to this point in her life to be a part of God's plan to redeem the world. She did not let her success and status blind her to what she knew her life was really about.

Mordecai helps her to discern God's hand upon her life. He helps her see God's calling in her life clearly. He issues a very strong challenge: She dare not say no here, for if she misses this, as frightening as it may be, she misses the reason she was brought to this place in her life. Mordecai suggests that she had come to her position as queen for such a time as this? This was her moment, what was she going to do?

Since Esther was raised to regal honors by the overruling providence of God, she need not fear the miscarriage of the enterprise. For if God brought her to it, he would surely see her through it successfully. Mordecai spoke prophetically, when he modestly conjectured that Esther came to the kingdom that she might be the instrument of the Jews' deliverance. Mordecai thoroughly believed that it was a cause which one way or another would certainly be carried, and which, therefore, she might safely venture upon. Instruments might fail, but God's covenant cannot. There is a wise design in all the providences of God, which is unknown to us till it is accomplished, but it will prove in the issue that all is intended for and center in the good of those who trust in Him.

Esther gets it. She tells Mordecai she wants three days to withdraw with her closest friends to fast and pray.¹ She further asks him to gather all the Jewish people in Shushan to fast and pray three days for her, because she will not try to achieve this mission based on her own beauty, cleverness, and influence. Her only hope is God. What a woman! She is going to the king, even though it is against the law. She is willing to perish if need be. This king has no idea what he got into when he made Esther his queen. He does not have a clue.

I think it is very intriguing that there is no handprint of God recorded here. The handprint recorded in Esther 1:20 and is still being played out here. The handprint indicated that God would reverse the counsels of Memucan to subjugate women more profoundly. This opened the door for Esther to come to center stage. However, Esther was still a secret agent so to speak. Satan had Haman identify Mordecai as the real threat and he actively and purposefully opposed him. All the time God was moving Esther into place to bring Haman down.

1. Keil & Delitzsch note that "fasting was a penitential exercise and the only form of common worship practiced by Jews dwelling among Gentiles." This "penitential exercise was always accompanied by prayer." (See also I Kings 21:27-29 and Joel 1:14.)

Affirmations: I do not allow the world to draw me away from God's will for my life. I seek the help of the household of God when I need it.

Recommended Reading: Nehemiah 7 & 8

Proverbs 24:10-13;

If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small. ¹¹ *If thou forbear to deliver **them that are** drawn unto death, and **those that are** ready to be slain;* ¹² *If thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider **it?** and he that keepeth thy soul, doth **not** he know **it?** and shall **not** he render to **every** man according to his works?*

Esther 4:14 is a verse that has planted its hand firmly on the backs of God’s people, maybe each of us. It may even have pushed us into leadership we did not want, to blow the whistle on behavior in a company or community that had to stop, to stand up against unscrupulous people and practices at great personal risk, to come to the aid of the powerless when we want nothing more than to bury our head in the sand.

This story has been pushing God’s reluctant people into dangerous places ever since it was first written. It was to be reread every year at the festival of Purim. The phrase “for such a time as this” is a kind of biblical code for, “If not you, who? If not now, when?” We each come to these times when we cannot evade a daunting, even threatening, responsibility. Look again at Esther to see where such courage comes from, because few people understand the source of godly courage.

Courage starts when you realize, “I am uniquely positioned to help the helpless, to stop a terrible wrong, to stand in the way of a tyrant.” Courage grows when we see that we are positioned to be part of God’s “relief and deliverance” for others. Do you remember the siege of Samaria in Elisha’s day? After Elisha announced that by tomorrow there would be an abundance of food, it was four leprous men who said, “Why sit we here until we die.” They had the courage to go to the Syrian camp, and they found it empty. Then they returned to the city to proclaim victory to God’s people because the enemy had fled (II Kings 7).

Do you remember David who took supplies to his brothers when the children of Israel and the Philistines had the battle set in array? He was aghast at how God’s people were quaking in fear. David was ridiculed for his pompous, highfalutin attitude. Still he asked every one who demeaned him “Was this not a cause worth fighting for?” He went to face the giant at great personal risk, but he wrought a great victory that day. Jonathan, when he spoke up to his father Saul on David’s behalf when he sought to kill David, said in I Samuel 19:5 “For he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and the LORD wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest *it*, and didst rejoice: wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?”

Do you remember how Nehemiah responded when he was urged to hide out in the temple because of the threats upon his life? He said, “Should such a man as I flee? and who *is there*, that, *being* as I *am*, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in.” He refused to fear and reconstructed the wall and reinstructed God’s people (Nehemiah 6:11).

Even when Paul was wrong to go to Jerusalem, he responded courageously as he unequivocally declared, “What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13). Such is the story of so many of God’s people who realized that they were brought “to such a time as this.” I dare say, each one of us have been brought unto “such a time as this.”

Remember, Esther was not born to royalty. She had no training in leadership. She was an orphan raised in an exile community. She was young and sheltered. But she knew that God made a covenant with His people and would, as Mordecai reminded her, never forsake His people. But she also knew there was no divine assurance that she would come out of such a confrontation alive. Stephen in Acts 7 knew the same thing. There were martyrs then, as there are today.

Courage grows when we realize that our sovereign God has very likely quietly positioned us “for such a time as this.” The very reason we have our job, the very reason we have been given each friendship, the very reason we live in our neighborhood or attend our school, the very reason we attend this fellowship is so that God will have His operative, His agent, “for such a time as this.” Though we may have never thought of it before, God mapped our lives so that we stand at this crossroads by His plan, and we play an intricate part in that plan.

Courage demands that when it is our time to step up, we do so. When courage is called for, we may not fast and pray as Esther did, but we will do whatever it takes for us to accept the challenge before us. We must see the vision. We must let God paint the vision on the canvas of our hearts. Once He does, we can be sure He will fulfill that vision. Then we step into the moment that has been waiting for us, and “if we perish, we perish” (4:16).

After three days of prayer and fasting, Esther was ready. The time had come for action. God had given her a plan; now she must faithfully work it. That is how things continue to move, one step at a time until we reach our goal.

Affirmations: I am strong and have great courage. I am not a coward for I have God’s power and love active in my sound mind.

Recommended Reading: I Samuel 17 and Acts 4

Romans 8:28: And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.

Romans 11:33: O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable *are* his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

Haman was unaware of the threat Esther posed to him. He had no idea where the real battle was going to be. So do not ever give Satan too much credit. Yes, he has been around for a long time and he has honed his skills well, but he does not know the future, and he cannot read our minds. He did not see Esther coming. Haman was focused on Mordecai, and Esther, a woman, turns out to be the savior of God's people. She is a type of the Christ. Just as Esther kept her ethnicity hidden from Haman, God also kept a secret hidden from ages and from generation. He called it the great mystery or the sacred secret, and because Satan did not know it he crucified our Lord, and now we have Christ is us the hope of glory. Secrets can be good, and secrets can be kept.

How many times in our lives has the evidence of God's presence gone completely unnoticed? Many are the miracles we never knew to look for, the provided divine protection we did not know we needed, the seemingly meaningless encounters that led to significant, strategic relationships, the "fortuitous coincidences" that happened all the time, the everyday details of living that occurred under our radar — all shaped and implemented by the hand of God.

Whether we give God the glory or not, His fingerprints on us are undeniable. He fights for us. Who we are, where we are placed, what opportunities we have — all are intended to move and shape the Father's plans to further His kingdom — not only for us, but for the entire world around us.

When Mordecai, Esther's adopted father, spoke the words of 4:14 to her he was making at least two important points. First, she was completely prepared for this moment, but she got to decide if she would rise to the occasion. Second, Mordecai did not need to remind Esther that "enlargement and deliverance" would be arranged by God. The only hope for God's people has always been the loving and gracious favor of our Father. We do not limit Him when we say, "No." We limit ourselves. We lose; we are destroyed. His promises will remain true, even when we do not. He just reminded her that not going to the king would not eliminate the danger and threat of death.

Throughout scripture we see glimpses of great people's lives, like Esther. We read of their defining moments which are recorded. However, there was much that went on between them that we know nothing about. But those humdrum seemingly unimportant moments also mattered a lot to God, and He was involved in them preparing us for the defining moments that were on the way.

Have you ever felt that you were in the right place at the right time, and were being asked by God to do something dangerous? Have you ever decided to do something that you were initially scared to do? What gave you the courage to do so?

Is there a Mordecai in your life? Who is the spiritually wise person who knows you and helps you discern God's activity and calling in your life, and who loves you enough to challenge you when you are ready to settle for a second rate mission?

To whom are you a Mordecai? For who do you provide wise council and challenge to be their best? It is important that we are obedient to what God is calling us to do. He has prepared us for such a time as this; let us step up and meet the challenge. We may not know why, but we have been blessed with what we have been given, and we are where we are for a reason. Our mission may not be as dramatic as Esther's may have been, but we have a mission. We have a challenge. The bad news is, we can ignore it; we have freedom of will. However, the good news is, we can do all things through Christ; we can fulfill our mission and advance the kingdom of God.

Affirmations: God is always at work in my life whether I see it or not. I am on a mission from God.

Recommended Reading: Nehemiah 9 & 10

Esther 5:4:

And Esther answered, If *it seem* good unto the king, **let the king and Haman come this day** unto the banquet that I have prepared for him. [This is the second fingerprint which came from Esther's mouth.]

When we ended last session, Esther had committed herself to act. She and Mordecai addressed the problem, and she has the plan. Now she needs to proceed. She will need to be wise and humble in the way she fulfills her mission. This occurrence of "now it came to pass" introduces the drama of Esther's unwarranted approach to the king. Let us see how the pieces of this puzzle fit together.

Esther 5:1-3:

Now **it came to pass** on the third day, that Esther put on *her* royal *apparel*, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against [right opposite] the king's house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house. ² And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, *that* she obtained [won] favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that *was* in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre. ³ Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what *is* thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom.

The first hurdle has been cleared. The threat of death is past. The king understood that she came because she wanted something and that it must have been important because of the risk she took to come to him unsummoned. "To the half of the kingdom" was a common idiom (cf. Esther 5:6; 7:2; Mark 6:23). Some sources say it is an orientalism meaning a year's revenue, but all concur that it means a significant, lavish amount. This is the first time the king said it, and he will say it a couple more times, too.

Esther 5:4:

And Esther answered, If *it seem* good unto the king, **let the king and Haman come this day** unto the banquet that I have prepared for him.

"**Let the king and Haman come this day**" is the second acrostic spelling out Jehovah. It is formed, by the *initial* letters, for Jehovah is initiating this action, and it is spelt *forward* because He is *moving forward* not ending or reversing something. He is causing Esther to act; and take the first step, which was to lead up to such a wonderful outcome. This is the second pivot on which the account develops as we see the Lord initiating the plan with his secret agent Esther.

Esther 5:5-8:

Then the king said, Cause Haman to make haste, that he may do as Esther hath said. So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared. ⁶ And the king said unto Esther at the banquet of wine, What *is* thy petition [question]? and it shall be granted thee: and what *is* thy request [wish]? even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed. ⁷ Then answered Esther, and said, My petition and my request *is*; ⁸ If I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition, and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I shall prepare for them, and I will do to morrow as the king hath said.

No reason is given as to why she delayed another day. I do not think Esther lost her nerve or the king's mood was not yet perfect. Perhaps she just was not ready yet or she was not convinced about the timing. Whatever her instincts, the time was not yet right, the 24-hour interval will prove essential for God's purposes. Prudence works patiently; Haman was being "set up." Esther just requested they come to another banquet tomorrow at which time she would tell them. This banquet must have been quite delightful since they seemed pleased to come back.

Affirmations: I walk by the spirit the best I can. I do my best to stay on God's timetable and not act too quickly or too late.

Recommended Reading: Esther 5:1-8 and Nehemiah 11-13:3

4	3	2	1
יְבוֹא הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהָמָן הַיּוֹם			
1	2	3	4
Yabo'	Hammerek	V'Haman	Hayyom
1	2	3	4
let-come	the-king	and-Haman	this-day
"Let Our Royal Dinner this day be graced by the king and Haman."			
The name of Jehovah is read in the invitation, intimating that there would be a fourth at that banquet."			

Esther 5:13:

Yet all **this availeth me nothing**, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.
[This is the third fingerprint which came from Haman's mouth.]

Ordinarily the king and queen dined separately, each in their own apartment. To invite not only the king but another male guest, not a relation, was a remarkable act of ostensible favor. Haman felt so honored by the dinner and was so happy to be invited back for the second one until he headed home and ran into Mordecai.

Esther 5:9-12:

Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai. ¹⁰ Nevertheless Haman refrained himself: and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife.

¹¹ And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all *the things* wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. ¹² Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to morrow am I invited unto her also with the king.

When Haman returned home, he gathered his entourage and had a bragging session; it was very self-promoting. He really had no idea who Esther was and what she was up to because she had kept it a secret. When relating what happened earlier Haman said, Esther "did let no man in," except himself and the king, but Jehovah was also in attendance as a third guest. Remember His name was hidden in the invitation recorded in 5:4.

Esther 5:13:

Yet all **this availeth me nothing**, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.

Referring to his promotion and his being honored by Esther to come to this special dinner Haman said, "**This availeth me nothing.**" This is the third acrostic spelling out Jehovah. It is formed with the final letters of the words indicating an ending instead of a beginning. It also appears backward indicating that Jehovah was changing, reversing or overruling. It was Haman's gladness, boasting and self-promotion that was being overturned, and his authority and plan to kill Mordecai were being ended, and these words came out of his own mouth. He declared it himself. Now that is irony.

Perhaps this was the reason for the delay and the second banquet. God points out that Haman's plans were being brought to an end by the words of his own mouth. Back in verse four God's fingerprint points to the plan initiated by Esther moving forward and here in verse 13 it indicates that Haman's plans were being reversed and brought to an end.

Esther 5:14:

Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows [stake to which a criminal was fastened] be made of fifty cubits high, and to morrow [Not wasting any time] speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made.

He did this without ever consulting with the king and getting his permission to have Mordecai killed on it. It never entered his mind that the request would not be granted. After all, all the Jews would be facing extermination soon enough, and he was the Grand Vizer. What he did not realize was that God always makes a way for his people in a crisis. The very night before Haman was to ask the life of Mordecai, Jehovah was working invisibly behind the scenes to save Mordecai. We will see this in our next lesson.

Affirmations: I have such great joy to be involved in God's deliverance of His people. God makes a way for me to escape every time I need it.

Recommended Reading: Esther 5:9-14 and Ezra 9 & 10

4	3	2	1
זה אינר שנה לי			
1	2	3	4
zeH	'eynennV	shoveH	l'Y
1	3	2	4
this	availeth	nothing	to-me
The English may be freely rendered "Yet am I saD; foR, nO avaiL is all this to me."			

Esther 6:1:

On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king.

Chapter 6 verse 1 begins with “on that night.” That is the night before the second banquet, the night after Mordecai built the gallows, the night before he was going to the king to request the head of Mordecai. Talk about timing. This is not a coincidence. Now we see God going into action to reverse Haman’s gladness and end Haman’s authority. The word “read” in verse 1 in Hebrew is a participle that indicates a long continuance in the reading. It continued until they read what God wanted read and what the king needed to hear. This is a detail we learned about at the end of chapter 2.

Esther 6:2-3:

And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king’s chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus. ³ And the king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king’s servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him.

The king decides right then and there to do something about it. I cannot tell if what happens next was in the middle of the night or if the reading and discussion lasted until morning. The latter is probably the case.

Esther 6:4-9:

And the king said, Who *is* in the court? (Now Haman was come into the outward court of the king’s house, to speak unto the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him.) ⁵ And the king’s servants said unto him, **Behold** [figure asterismos], Haman standeth in the court. And the king said, Let him **come in**. ⁶ So Haman **came in**. [figure anadiplosis: ending one sentence with the same verb that begins the next sentence]. And the king said unto him, What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour? Now Haman thought in his heart, To whom would the king delight to do honour more than to myself? ⁷ And Haman answered the king, For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, ⁸ Let the royal apparel be brought which the king *useth* to wear, **and** the horse that the king rideth upon, **and** the crown royal which is set upon his [the horse’s] head: ⁹ **And** let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king’s most noble princes, that they may array the man *withal* whom the king delighteth to honour, **and** bring him on horseback through the street of the city, **and** proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour.

Haman suggested this thinking he was the one who was going to get the honor. However, his nemesis Mordecai was going to receive it. All the glory he intended to be lavished upon himself was instead lavished upon his enemy Mordecai. Not only did that happen, but Mordecai received from the hand of Haman, himself.

Now that is irony. I know I keep saying that. I use “irony” when referring to the combination of circumstances and their results when they are the opposite of what might be expected or considered appropriate. When I say something is ironic I mean the outcome was unexpected by those who took the action. In this case, what is happening is the opposite of what Haman wanted to happen.

Esther 6:10-14:

Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, *and* take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king’s gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken. ¹¹ Then took Haman the apparel and the horse, and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour. Mordecai had refused Esther’s change of raiment, but he graciously accepts this from the hand of the king by way of Haman. ¹² And Mordecai came again to the king’s gate. But Haman hasted to his house mourning, and having his head covered. [Having the head covered is a token of great confusion and mourning. See Jeremiah 14:4 and II Samuel 15:30.] ¹³ And Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends every *thing* that had befallen him. Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai *be* of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him. ¹⁴ And **while** they *were* yet talking with him, came the king’s chamberlains, and hasted to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared.

Haman went to the king to request the head of Mordecai, but he could hardly make his request now. Things were moving very quickly, and they had to rush off to the banquet. The king, by coming to Esther’s second banquet and acknowledging his favor of her, has already almost agreed to her request. Esther shows great skill in outmaneuvering everybody. Remember, the fingerprint points to God’s hand behind her plan.

Affirmations: I alert myself to godly coincidences. I love the ironic reversals God works in my life.

Recommended Reading: Esther 6:1-14 and Nehemiah 13:4-31

Proverbs 16:18:

Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.

Often pride is not as obvious as what we see in Haman. Esther 5:9–14 showed it clearly. Haman was not satisfied with all he had; he wanted more. More wealth, more power, more applause, more success — and when one lives to always get more there is never enough; one is never satisfied. Proverbs 16:18 says, “Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” That is about to happen to Haman, big time. We all need to see and identify the negative aspect of pride when it sticks up its ugly head. We may see it more easily in others, but we must get better at eliminating the destructive quality of pride when it shows up in our lives.

This Biblical proverb has been abbreviated and comes into modern vernacular as “pride comes before a fall.” Although this is understood as a universal truth in every culture, many people still succumb to its enticing and seductive nature, and end up paying the consequences. We are well aware of the good kind of pride displayed in proper self-respect. We all need a sense of dignity, integrity and self-worth. There is nothing wrong with delighting in one's own or another's achievements. This satisfaction is proper. Being proud of a child's report card, loving behavior or performance in sports or the school play is not wrong. Nor does it guarantee coming destruction. God wants us to have this good kind of pride for the blessings and opportunities He brings our way.

However, as with anything else that may start out good, there is always the danger of possible excess. What starts out as a simple and a humble type of pride can grow inappropriately into something much more deadly if not kept in check. Haman's pride had gotten out of bounds. He had an unduly high opinion of himself. His haughty behavior resulted from conceit and arrogance. His puffed up and inflated ego and high-mindedness bred a sense of superiority.

What starts out as a humble, justified, and reasonable self-respect may quickly deteriorate. This negative pride is often demonstrated by contempt, disdain or scorn for others. Proverbs 21:4 notes pride as sin and Proverbs 16:5 describes it as an abomination that will not go unpunished.

Proverbs 21:4:

An high [haughty] look, and a proud heart, *and* the plowing of the wicked, *is* sin.

Proverbs 16:5:

Every one *that is* proud in heart *is* an abomination to the LORD: *though* hand *join* in hand, he shall not be unpunished.

Probably the greatest fall that has ever occurred was when Lucifer fell from heaven. It is described in Ezekiel 28:17 which states, “Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness.” It was the sin by which serpent led Adam and Eve to fall saying in Genesis 3:5, “Ye shall be as gods.” God calls it an “easily besetting” sin of Christian leaders, especially those who have assumed such leadership prematurely. “Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil” (I Timothy 3:6). Isaiah also speaks of Lucifer's fall:

Isaiah 14:12-14:

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *how* art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! ¹³ For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: ¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.

Although we do not find the word “pride” in these verses we see Lucifer's proud heart identified with his statements of will. When God says that pride will come before a “fall,” He is giving us a major warning. These falls may be severe. God not only calls pride a sin, He also calls it an abomination. Whenever God uses the word “abomination” to describe something, He is using the most extreme and intense word that He possibly can to let us know that we should have no part in that activity. When God puts the qualities of pride and haughtiness in this abomination category, be sure He is giving a very serious warning about it.

Both James 4:6 and I Peter 5:5 says, “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” James 4:10 and I Peter 5:6 both command us to humble ourselves before the Lord, and He will exalt or lift us up. If we want God to work in our lives we must cultivate humility and avoid negative, destructive pride. When Jesus described himself he said, “I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matthew 11:29). Let us follow his example and avoid destruction.

Affirmations: I avoid negative, destructive pride like a plague. My genuine humility fosters God's grace in my life.

Recommended Reading: II Chronicles 26

Esther 7:1-2:

So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. ² 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.

As we begin chapter 7, Haman's wife, Zeresh, has already pronounced Haman's doom, and things are rushing to its fulfillment. As the king arrives (see verses above) he asks about Esther's request and promises to grant it. Now Esther is ready to make it known.

Esther 7:3-5:

Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour 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: [Save my life and the lives of my people.] ⁴ For we are [have been] sold [Remember the bribe?], I and my people, **to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish.** [That is the figure synonymia emphasizing the utter destruction that was contemplated.] But if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my tongue, [not bothered the king about this] although the enemy could not countervail [make good, compensate or reverse] the king's damage. ⁵ Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, **Who is he, and where is he,** that **durst presume** [This demonstrates that the king and Haman never knew she was a Jew.] in his heart to do so?

When the king asks "**Who is he, and where is he,** that durst presume in his heart to do so?" he unconsciously gives the name of the great "I am that I am." This is the fourth acrostic and the only one to form the name, "I am that I am." It is formed by the final letters meaning the "I am that I am" (or the "I will be what I will be") is ending Haman's life and preserving the Christ line. It is also spelled backward to indicate that Haman's authority and plan were being changed or reversed. This name is used to bring to mind the only other place it is used in scripture.

5	4	3	2	1
הָאֵל	הָאֵל	וְהָאֵל	הָאֵל	הָאֵל
1	2	3	4	5
hu'E	zeH	v'eY	zeH	hu'E
[who is] he this [man] and where [is] this [man]				
"Where dwelleth the enemy that darest presume in his heart to do this thing?"				

Exodus 3:13-15:

And Moses said unto God, Behold, *when* I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What *is* his name? what shall I say unto them? ¹⁴ And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. ¹⁵ And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this *is* my name for ever, and this *is* my memorial unto all generations.

Just as God came down to deliver His people out of the hand of Pharaoh, He now comes down again to deliver them out of the hand of Haman, "the Jews' enemy." Haman, like Pharaoh, sought to destroy the whole nation (compare Exodus 2:23-25 with 3:14-15). Haman's attempt to destroy Queen Esther and her people was just another attempt to eliminate the Christ-line and prevent the Messiah from coming.

Ahasuerus wanted to know the man who presumed to do such a thing. Haman was the human agent who dared to do so, but there is recurring Satanic agency behind it. The acrostic is in the final letters of his question "Who is he, and where is he?" Only the great "I am that I am" could know the real cause behind the attack, and could answer that question. Esther and Mordecai knew the human instrument, Haman, but it was bigger than just Haman. Had Saul done his job this threat may have never arisen.

Here was a "generation" in Persia who experienced the truth and the power of this Name, as a former "generation" had done in Egypt. Jehovah, Israel's covenant God had indeed come down to deliver them from Haman; as He had from Pharaoh, and from the great "enmity" (of Genesis 3:15) which instigated both to accomplish the Satanic design of exterminating the nation of Israel.

Affirmations: I am not afraid to confront evil face to face. I know God will be whatever He needs to be for me.

Recommended Reading: Esther 7:9-14 and Exodus 2 & 3

ESTHER 7:6-10: ESTHER IDENTIFIES THE WICKED HAMAN [THE 5TH FINGERPRINT] DAY 23

Esther 7:6:

And Esther said, The adversary and enemy *is* this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen.

When Esther answers the king she boldly identifies the culprit as “this wicked Haman.” Haman was the adversary and enemy of whom Esther spoke.

Esther 7:6-7:

And Esther said, The adversary and enemy *is* this wicked Haman. Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen. ⁷ And the king arising from the banquet of wine in his wrath *went* into the palace garden: and 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.

“**That evil was determined against him**” is the fifth and final acrostic spelling out Jehovah. It is formed by the final letters representing that Haman’s end had come. However, it is spelled forward indicating that Jehovah was initiating, causing or bringing it to pass, and it would be happening shortly.

It must have been a shock to the king to hear that his trusted Haman whom he had promoted was identified as the real enemy. He left the banquet in a rage and went to the garden to think over his response. He is struggling about what to do. He is properly very angry, but the king is uncertain about what to do. Haman is the prime minister and has deeply entrenched himself in the affairs of the kingdom. The king knows that doing something to Haman will affect the whole kingdom. It is a radical step to execute a prime minister and it would involve a great deal of distress throughout the kingdom and change the whole pattern of life in the empire. We have no idea what the king has in mind when he returns. However, as soon as he does he finds Haman getting himself in even more trouble requiring the king to take immediate action.

Esther 7:8:

Then the king returned out of the palace garden into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman was fallen upon the bed whereon Esther *was*. Then said the king, Will he force the queen also before me in the house? As the word went out of the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face.

Upon his return to the banquet hall, the king saw Haman’s untoward approach to the queen and could hardly believe this indignity. As the king voiced his astonishment Haman was apprehended, and his face was covered. The covering the face was a sign of condemnation and death. It indicated that the one whose face was covered was condemned to death and no longer worthy to be seen. It marked one as no longer existing in the eyes of society and that no appeals for mercy were possible. John Walton in *IVP Bible Background Commentary* notes that “In Assyrian elegy covering the face was seen as a treatment of the dead.” It meant Haman was seen as a dead man so he was immediately treated as one.

Esther 7:9-10:

And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, [How’s that for irony?] who had spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. Then the king said, Hang him thereon. ¹⁰ So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king’s wrath pacified.

The king in typical fashion immediately takes the suggestion of Harbonah and condemns Haman to die on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. After this ironic reversal of fortune, the king’s wrath was pacified.

In these five acrostics we have something far beyond a mere coincidence; we have divine design. When we read the denunciation in Deuteronomy 31:16-18, and see it carried out in Persia, we learn that though God was not **among** His people there, He was still working on their behalf. He was initiating and ending. He was moving some plans forward and reversing other plans. Hence, though His name, as well as His presence, is HIDDEN, yet, it is there, in the Word; and so wonderfully interwoven that no enemy will ever know how to extract it.

4	3	2	1
הַרְעָה	אֵלֶיךָ	כָּל־הָיָה	כִּי
1	2	3	4
kY	kal e thaH	elayV	hara'aH
1	2	3	4
that	was-determined	against-him	evil
“For he saw that there was eviL tO feaR determineD against him by the king.”			

Affirmations: I do not respond in anger. I am very decisive when I need to be.

Recommended Reading: Esther 7:6-10 and Daniel 1& 2

Psalms 37:23-24:

The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. ²⁴ Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth *him with* his hand.

We saw how the Book of Esther, like so much of the Bible, told the story of God's involvement with His people. However, it showed God's work indirectly. God's name was not mentioned once in the entire 10 chapters, yet God is not absent from the story of Esther. Rather He was disguised, working undercover, hidden in plain sight.

He hid His name in five unique acrostics, which acted like a handprint to indicate His influence in the narrative. The figure is only observable in the original language. Some of the Hebrew texts have the letters that spell out Jehovah written in larger letters than the rest of the letters in the words forming the acrostic. The design of this particular figure is to attract our attention to the special importance of certain passages. Each of the acrostics functions like fingerprint to identify God's action behind the scenes. Each of them designated pivotal points upon which the history developed. Truly, His providence permeated the whole narrative. The book demonstrates how God works in the lives of His people, both with and without their awareness.

We found the first of the hidden acrostics in Esther 1:20 spelling out Jehovah. It was contained in Memucan's words, **"all the wives shall give."** God pointed His finger to what Memucan, the wisest of Ahasuerus' sages said. By it God indicates His involvement in such an unlikely scenario. This acrostic is unique in that it is the only one not a complete sentence. It is also the only one formed by the initial letters and spelt backward. It appears in the *initial* letters, for the event intended to *initiate* a course of action to subjugate women and honor the men. However, the name is spelt *backward* because Jehovah intends to *turn back* or reverse the plan Memucan and the king were initiating and bring a woman, Esther, into a position of honor and authority.

"Let the king and Haman come this day" in Esther 5:4, is the second acrostic spelling out Jehovah. God pointed His finger to Esther's invitation to the king and Haman. It is formed by the *initial* letters, for Jehovah is *initiating* His plan for the deliverance of His people, and it is spelt *forward* because He is *moving forward* not ending or reversing something. He is causing Esther to act; and take the first step, which was to lead up to such a wonderful outcome. This is the second pivot on which the account develops as we see the Lord initiating the plan with his secret agent Esther.

"This availeth me nothing" in Esther 5:13 is the third acrostic spelling out Jehovah. God pointed His finger to Haman's own words showing that He was ending Haman's gladness, boasting and promotion. It is formed with the *final* letters of the words indicating an *ending* instead of a beginning. God was terminating Haman's authority and plan to kill Mordecai. It also appears *backward* indicating that Jehovah was changing, *reversing* or overruling. It was Haman's gladness, boasting and promotion that were being overturned, and his authority and plan to kill Mordecai were being ended, and these words came out of his own mouth. He declared it himself. Now that is irony.

When the king asks **"Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?"** in Esther 7:5, he unconsciously gives the name of the great "I am that I am." This is the fourth acrostic and the only one to form the name, "I am that I am." His thumbprint is formed by the *final* letters meaning the "I am that I am" (or the "I will be what I will be") is *ending* Haman's life and preserving the Christ line. It is also spelt *backward* to indicate that Haman's plan was being changed or *reversed*. This specific name of God is used to bring to mind the only other place it's used in scripture. It likens God deliverance from bondage in Egypt with His working here in the Book of Esther.

Here was a "generation" in Persia who experienced the truth and the power of this Name, as a former "generation" had done in Egypt. Jehovah, Israel's covenant God had indeed come down to deliver them from Haman; as He had from Pharaoh, and from the great "enmity" (of Genesis 3:15) which instigated both to accomplish the Satanic design of exterminating the Nation of Israel.

"That evil was determined against him" in Esther 7:7, is the fifth and final acrostic spelling out Jehovah. It is formed by the *final* letters representing that Haman's *end* had come. However, it is spelt *forward* indicating that Jehovah was *initiating*, causing or bringing it to pass, and since it is the second reference to it, it would be happening shortly.

In these five acrostics we have something far beyond a mere coincidence; we have divine design. We learn through them that though God was not *among* His people there, He was still working on their behalf. He was initiating and ending. He was moving some plans forward and reversing other plans. Hence, though His name, as well as His presence, is HIDDEN, yet, it is there, in the Word; and so wonderfully interwoven that no enemy will ever know how to extract it.

Affirmations: God orders my steps. I delight in His ways.

Recommended Reading: Daniel 3 & 4

Ruth 2:3:

And she [Ruth] went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field *belonging* unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.

I think God's most common miracle — if there is such a thing — is the coincidence. It seems to be all in the timing, and God has impeccable timing. I think God favors miracles of timing because He can stay incognito, visible only to those who believe in Him.

The Book of Ruth has an excellent example. Although Ruth 2:3 says, “her [Ruth's] hap was to light on a part of the field belonging to Boaz,” do not let the Old English fool you. Yes, it just so happened that she ended up in Boaz's field, but it was not by chance. Rather it was by divine design. God emphasizes this “chance” meeting with a couple of figures of speech.

The phrase “her hap, *miqreh*, was to light on, *qarah*...” is a paregmenon. *Miqreh* means an unforeseen meeting, event, accident, or happening. It comes from the root word *qarah*, which means, “to encounter or meet.” This use of words derived from the same root emphasizes the encounter. God further marks the arrival of Boaz in Ruth 2:4 with the figure of speech asterismos. “Behold” calls our attention to the arrival of Boaz. What amazing timing that he should arrive at the same time she does. This is not by chance. This is God at work behind the scene.

Do you think this was a coincidence? I do not. I see God's hand in it. I agree with the anonymous quote I heard that handles these kinds of coincidences: “Coincidence is a miracle in which God wants to remain anonymous.” Remember the Bible is an Eastern book, and most sources I have checked conclude that the idea of fate or chance is foreign to the Hebrew mind. This was not a chance encounter; this is the hand of God guiding Ruth. She was believing to find grace in someone's eyes, and God directs her to the right place.

Like Proverbs 16:9 declares, Naomi and Ruth devised a plan, and God directed their steps. Ruth believed to find grace in the sight of the lord of the harvest, and she does. However, first she found grace in the eyes of the Lord who directed her to the right field.

Esther like Ruth and so many others accounts in God's Word, looks ordinary. No one does anything particularly remarkable — but if you see behind the scenes, you see astonishing things. God clearly manipulates these events, yet he does so without ever coercing anyone. Mordecai told Esther if you do not do this then deliverance and refreshing will come some other way. It was done by freedom of will, and much if not most of it was not by revelation. I think Esther's planning and execution of the two banquets was revelation. Her exchange with Mordecai and the prayer and fasting was just them doing the best they could with what they knew. If it was revelation, Mordecai would not have said, “Who knows?” he would have said, “You are here for such a time as this.” No one does anything out of character. No one acts inconsistently. Our sovereign God works that way. It is miraculous. The reversals in this account are amazing. The Book of Esther is full of reversals of fortune.

When Nebuchadnezzar demanded that the wise men of his kingdom make known to him his dream and its interpretation (Daniel 2:5), they responded incredulously that no man on earth could do as he requested only the gods could (Daniel 2:10-11). However, Daniel and his companions who were threatened to die with the rest of the wise men of the kingdom (Daniel 2:12-13) desired mercy from God to reveal the secret unto them. God did, and Daniel responded in praise and thanksgiving to God saying:

Daniel 2:20a-23:

...Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: ²¹ And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: ²² He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what *is* in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him. ²³ I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee: for thou hast *now* made known unto us the king's matter.

The Lord definitely set up Esther and Mordecai and brought down Haman in a most unusual way. God often works in unseen and creative ways beyond our comprehension that are unbeknownst to us until we see them blossom and bring forth their fullness in our lives. It is often fruitless to try to figure out how everything is supposed to happen. The way God works in the world to bring about His will and purposes is not always revealed to us. All we know from Scripture is that the things that God has planned and promised will absolutely come to pass.

However, we must not presumptuously think that we can decipher how and when and under what circumstances and for what reasons God chooses to act and intervene in our lives. All we need to know is that regardless of the way that God is present and moving, or seemingly absent and distant, He is always with us, and for us. We simply must wait patiently to see the power and glory of the Lord God revealed in this world and in our lives, even if it takes until the trumpet sounds.

Affirmations: I am sufficient in Christ's sufficiency in any circumstances. I do not presume to figure God out,

I just love His care and shepherding.

Recommended Reading: the Book of Ruth

Esther 8:1:

On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman **the Jews' enemy** unto Esther the queen. And Mordecai came before the king; for Esther had told what he *was* unto her.

We begin chapter eight with Esther & Mordecai replacing Haman and receiving Haman's estate. Although Haman has been dispatched, we still have to deal with the biggest problem, Haman's decree to exterminate the Jews, which could not be changed. Let us see how God provides the enlargement and deliverance Mordecai spoke of in chapter 4.

Both "on that night" in 6:1 and "on that day" here mark these two occasions as particularly significant. Esther finally tells the king who Mordecai was to her, and she gives Haman's house, which the king had given to her to Mordecai.

Esther 8:2-3:

And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman [He gave it to him in 3:10.], **and gave it unto Mordecai**. And Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman. [Mordecai now becomes the Grand Vizer.] ³ And Esther spake yet again before the king [like she did in 5:1-2], and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief [same as evil v6.] of Haman the Agagite, and his **device** [thought, plan, purpose, invention, etc.] that he had **devised** against the Jews.

I am glad they kept the figure paregmenon using words derived from the same root. "Device" also could have been translated thought, plan or purpose. Here both the noun "device" and the verb "devised" are related in Hebrew as the English translation indicates.

Haman ends up being hanged on the very gallows he had built for Mordecai. So, the king needs a new right-hand man, and who is better for the job than Mordecai, the man whom the king delighted to honor. I do not know about Memucan and the rest of the sages, but I am sure Mordecai would have been Esther's recommendation.

It is amazing to me how God honored godly Jews in foreign courts. Joseph, a man in whom the spirit of God worked, became second to Pharaoh. Moses was raised in Pharaoh's house and was heir to the throne until he left Egypt. Then God brought him back to the Egyptian Court to negotiate with Pharaoh for the release of His people. Daniel and his three friends were exalted in Babylon and Persia to high rank, Daniel becoming next in line to Darius. We just read of Mordecai who becomes number two next to Ahasuerus. Excellence gets rewarded.

Esther 8:4-8:

Then the king held out the golden sceptre toward Esther. [She makes it through a second time.] So Esther arose, and stood before the king, ⁵ And said, If it please the king, and if I have found favour in his sight, and the thing *seem* right before the king, and I *be* pleasing in his eyes [Esther is consistently gracious and respectful when she speaks.], let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy [some mss add "all."] the Jews which *are* in all the king's provinces: ⁶ For how can I endure to see the evil [Same as "mischief v3] that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred? ⁷ Then the king Ahasuerus said unto Esther the queen and to Mordecai the Jew, **Behold** [figure asterismos], I have given Esther the house of Haman, and him they have hanged upon the gallows, **because** he laid his hand upon the Jews. ⁸ Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh [pleaseth] you, for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse.

The king tried to make amends. He did the best he could. He allowed Esther and Mordecai to do whatever they wanted in his name, and seal *it* with his ring. The king was sorry he could not change the initial decree, but he told them to add whatever they wanted to it. Then they legislate the best possible outcome they could figure out.

Affirmations: God provides the enlargement and deliverance for me. God has granted me the authority to write my own ticket by decreeing His Word to come to pass in my life.

Recommended Reading: Esther 8:1-8 and Daniel 5 & 6

Esther 8:8:

Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh [pleaseth] you, for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse.

Once Mordecai and Esther decided on what to do, the dispatch went out with all haste.

Esther 8:9-10:

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; and 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.¹⁰ And he 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:

Haman's decree went out the thirteenth day of the first month, Nisan, and Mordecai's went out the 23rd day of the third month, Sivan. That is two months and ten days later. Haman's runners went on foot, but time was even more of an issue now, so Mordecai dispatched the posts on horseback. These guys had to cover a lot of territory, from Ethiopia to India. He wanted to be sure the Jews were notified in plenty of time.

Esther 8:11-15:

Wherein the king granted the Jews which *were* in every city to gather themselves together, and **to stand for their life** [Remember that phrase; it will come up later.], **to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish**, [Figure synonymia] all the power [force] of the people and province that would assault them, *both* little ones and women, [Remember this. It is going to come up again.] and *to take* the spoil of them for a prey, [The king also granted them the spoil which they refuse to take.]¹² Upon one day in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, *namely*, upon the thirteenth *day* of the twelfth month, which *is* the month Adar.¹³ The copy of the writing for a commandment [Imperial decree] to be given in every province *was* published unto all people(s), and that the Jews should be ready against that day to avenge themselves on their enemies.¹⁴ *So* the posts that rode 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.¹⁵ And Mordecai went 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: and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad.

Less than three months ago Mordecai was in sackcloth and ashes. Now he is in royal apparel, wearing a crown. The city also reacted differently this time, after Mordecai's decree, than it did in 3:15, after Haman's decree. In 3:15 it was perplexed and troubled, and now in 8:15 it is rejoicing and glad.

Esther 8:16-17:

The Jews had light, **and** gladness, **and** joy, **and** honour.¹⁷ And 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. [They faced the same threat, but now they had the right to fight and defend themselves.] And many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them. [They became proselytes because they wanted to join such an honored people.]

In Esther 8:8, Mordecai and Esther wrote legislation in the king's name that provided for the best possible outcome they could think of. The people of Israel are so blessed and favored, that many people of other nationalities committed themselves to the God of Israel. All this happen because Esther and Mordecai worked together to bring enlargement and deliverance to God's people.

Affirmations: I make haste, and delay not to keep God's commandments. I am so excited and blessed by what God has me doing that people want to join and help.

Recommended Reading: Esther 8:9-17 and Daniel 7 & 8

Esther 9:1:

Now in the twelfth month, that *is*, the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution, in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them, (though it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them;)

Well, the day of Purim finally arrives. It happens contrary to Haman's original intent because a second decree was issued that allowed the Jews the right to defend themselves. God uses the figure of speech parenthesis in verse 1 to point out another of the many reversals in this account. Indeed, Esther is distinguished by peripeteias, sudden turns of events and unexpected reversals.

Although much of the intrigue surrounds the impossibility of the reversal of Haman's decree (Esther 8:3,5). The many other reversals establish a pattern. One of the greatest reversals was the transformation of the Jewish community "from sorrow to joy, and from mourning to a good day" (Esther 9:22). There is much in Esther concerning the reversals of destiny, circumstances, and expectation.

Although the threat of the destruction of the Jews is no laughing matter, there is a frivolity in the book's style. Its hyperbole, mockery, and comic misunderstandings and reversals undercut the gravity of its theme. This demonstrates, as Romans 8:28 attests, that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose."

Queen Vashti, a Persian, was deposed so that Esther, a Jewess, could become queen and save her people. Haman, once exalted, was brought low, and Mordecai and the Jews, once hated, were exalted and honored. A decree that would have wiped out the Jews was overruled by one which led to the destruction of nearly 76,000 enemies of the Jews. No wonder Purim was celebrated yearly with such rejoicing. It was memorialized to help the Jews remember that God is in control and that people should faithfully worship and serve their great God.

Esther 9:2:

The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt: and no man could **withstand [stand before]** them; for the fear of them fell upon all people.

"To lay hand on" is used meaning "to kill" as in Esther 2:21 & 3:6. The solidarity and voracity of the Jews was such that no man could withstand or stand before them. Their fearlessness was like that which Joshua displayed when taking the Promised Land (Joshua 10:8 & 21:44). This allusion to taking the Promised Land shows the magnitude of the victory that was won. The reverence and respect of Mordecai and the Jews became formidable. It was repeated here in 9:2 and was previously mentioned in Esther 8:17.

Esther 9:3-4:

And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the fear [reverence or respect] of Mordecai fell upon them. ⁴ For Mordecai *was* great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for **this man Mordecai** waxed greater and greater.

Mordecai's fame spread as did Joshua's (Joshua 6:27). The intent of such notoriety was to instill fear in those opposing such a notable people (Jeremiah 6:24). Of course personal fame was desirable only in that it brought fame to the God whom these men served (Joshua 9:9).

Stating it this way, "this man Mordecai," is to emphasize the splendor of the person. Numbers 12:3 talks of Moses this way saying, "Now the man Moses *was* very meek, above all the men which *were* upon the face of the earth." I Kings 11:28 speaks of Jeroboam this way, and Daniel 9:21 speaks of Gabriel this way, too. The man Mordecai was revered and respected which only got greater and greater as time passed.

Esther 9:5-6:

Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, **and** slaughter, **and** destruction, **and** did what they would unto those that hated them. ⁶ And in Shushan the palace the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men.

Note the polysyndeton that showed the utter mastery the Jews had on their enemies. They had their way. They were successful. They retaliated against their enemies at their discretion. They did not slay the women or little ones, which they were granted the right to do. Why? Because they were defending themselves. Those that attacked were destroyed. Unless women and children attack, there is no need to defense against them. This is unlike the Middle East these days where women and children strap bombs to themselves.

Affirmations: Every morning I wake up I expect a good day. I remember and celebrate victories God has given me.

Recommended Reading: Esther 9:1-6 and Daniel 9 & 10

Esther 9:26:

Wherefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. Therefore for all the words of this letter, and *of that* which they had seen concerning this matter, and which had come unto them.

In Hebrew, each one of the names of Haman's sons listed in verses 7-9 had a suffix attached to it. It would have read "this Parshandatha himself," thus calling attention to each of them. Haman is called the enemy of the Jews for the third time in verse 10. Verse 10 also mentions that the Jews did not lay hands on the spoil (that is repeated in 9:15 & 16). Although they were granted the right to do so, they did not. That was the mistake Saul made, and they would not repeat it.

The king asks for a report of what happened in verse 12, and he also asks Esther if there was anything else she needed. She responded affirmatively and requests another day to finish off the adversaries and put the dead bodies of Haman's children on stakes. This was according to the law (Deuteronomy 21:22). When the fighting ceased they had a great celebration, a big-time party. This celebration was on the fourteenth, except in Shushan, where they had to wait until the 15th because they needed two days to get rid of their enemies.

In Esther 9:20-22 Mordecai established the Purim celebration with another royal decree. Haman is mentioned for the last time in Esther 9:24 where he is called for the fourth and final time, the enemy of all the Jews. Then verse 25 notes that his wicked **device**, which he **devised** [figure paregmenon] against the Jews returned upon his own head. This was just another of the many reversals in the Book of Esther. Verse 16 then notes that the celebration was called Purim after the name of Pur.

Why call the memorial Purim after Pur, the lots cast against them to divine the most opportune time to destroy them? Why remember the name of the devilish device used to bring evil upon them? It was done to remind them that there is no enchantment against Israel and that even the greatest devilish plot could not be allowed to stand. Numbers 23:23 says, "Surely *there is* no enchantment against Jacob, neither *is there* any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought!" We see that very sentiment in Esther — "What has God wrought!" in that so many people recognized the glory of the God of Israel and wanted to be a part of it.

All the Jews throughout the entire world learned that the Persian Queen was a Jewess and had been brought to the kingdom for the very purpose of saving the Jewish nation. This woman walking with God preserved the seed of the woman that was to come of which Genesis 3:15 spoke.

This last section of Esther serves a very important purpose; it is there to teach us the importance of remembering. Even today, the Jews celebrate this story of Esther in the Feast of Purim. They set aside two days for the holiday, which includes feasting, gladness and merrymaking. On the first evening they read through the story of Esther. The noise makers, little drums and horns that were brought to the service are used whenever the name of Haman is mentioned. Blowing the horns, beating the drums, booing and hissing at the mention of Haman's name makes for a most interesting service. The second day is set aside for feasting, merrymaking, and exchanging gifts. All of this is in remembrance of the deliverance accomplished by Esther and Mordecai in the days of the Persian Empire, some 500 years before Christ. Purim is still celebrated to this day because God wants the Jewish people never to forget this deliverance. It is to be forever a very important day in their history.

The Book of Esther shows us that God is with us in trouble. There are many promises in Psalms about God being with us in trouble. I wonder if Esther, Mordecai and the Jews sang any of these psalms after Haman's decree went out. Look at what God says in Psalms 91:15.

Psalms 91:15:

He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I *will be* with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.

We certainly saw how Mordecai and the Jews were honored in this record of deliverance. It is very important that we note how the deliverance came. Deliverance comes in many ways. In Psalms 91:15, God promises to be with His people in trouble and deliver and honor them. The word "deliver" in Psalm 91:15 means *to equip, to arm for war, to make strong, to brace up or invigorate*. To deliver here simply means to *equip for the fight*. God will equip His people for their battles.

His will is always to deliver us. We just need to ascertain by the spirit how He wants to do it. Sometimes, He removes us from the situation (like when Jesus passed through the crowd when they were going to throw him off the cliff [Luke 4:29-30] or when the 4 leprous men went into the camp of the Syrians to find them gone [II Kings 7:5]) and sometimes He intervenes with miraculous works of power (like parting the Red sea or the Jordan and dropping the walls of Jericho), but often He just gives us the equipment to slug it out right where we are and win.

Affirmations: God allows no enchantment against me. God is always with me in trouble.

Recommended Reading: Esther 9:7-32 and Daniel 11 & 12

Psalms 50:15:

And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.

Many times we get tired of the people we work with, or tired of the job, or tired of the house or neighborhood we live in. Then we make decisions to get out of the situation based on the frustration we feel. However, it may be that God wants us to stand right where we are. He wants to equip us to slug it out and win right there. However, He will not leave us to do it alone; remember He said, “I *will be* with him in trouble” (Psalms 91:15).

A good example of this kind of deliverance is found in Deuteronomy 28, which says, our enemies will come out against us one way and flee before us seven ways. Why do they flee? What are we doing? We are standing. We are not running; we are not being removed. We are standing. That is what the Jews did in 8:11; 9:2 & 16. We are equipped by God, and we can overcome any obstacle and defeat any circumstances or situations that we face. With God’s help, our enemies run off in every direction to get away from us.

Why are we to put on the whole armor of God? So that we can stand. Stand and what? Stand and fight, that is what armor is for. Sometimes the Lord says, “Stay and fight.” Other times he has other plans. He will let us know if we ask. We need to know what His direction is for us whenever we face a difficult situation. We can be confident in God that when He says to stay, that means He will equip us with all we need to win the battle and win every time.

Psalms 50:15 is much like Psalms 91:15 that we read in yesterday’s lesson. “And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” The Hebrew word for deliver is the same in both verses. God is there to equip us to win. Here it indicates the results of staying and fighting: We glorify Him. That is what Esther records? When we understand this, we can handle our attitudes better.

David understood this. It seems he was always fighting. He even stopped asking God to take him away from problems. Rather he asked God to give him the victory in them. His attitude was, “I do not want to go anywhere. I am staying right here where the heat is on, and I am going to win.” Read his song in Psalms 3. When he was encouraged to flee as a bird to the mountains in Psalms 11:1, he refused.

Let us be like David. Bring on the heat. Let us fight, win and bring glory to God. Let us expect God to show us what to do, what adjustments we need to make. Then we fight until we win. We serve a mighty God Who is able to deliver to the uttermost.

In Psalm 140:1, David says, “. . .deliver me, O Lord. . .” (That is the same Hebrew word again.) He is asking God to equip him for the fight. He is not saying, “Get me out of here!” He is saying, “Load me up and give me deliverance. . .” and he will surely give God glory because of his victory. David did not whine; he asked God to equip him for his fight.

God said that He would be with us in trouble. While He is with us, He has provided us the wherewithal to win. Let us put on the whole armor of God. It is the protection we need in battle. We need to use the manifestations and the wonderful Word of God we have been given so we can fight and win. Let us use the sword of the spirit, the Word of God. It is a double-edged sword, sharp enough to pierce and penetrate any enemy.

The fight is usually between our ears. The battlefield is our mind, and that is where we win or lose. We all face adversity in our lives. However, it is not the adversity, but how we react to it that will determine the joy and happiness in our lives. How did the Jews react in Esther upon finding out they got the right to fight and defend themselves? It said they had light, and gladness, and joy, and honor. In every province, and in every city, whithersoever the Mordecai’s commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day.

Like the Jews in the Book of Esther, if we want the Word and will of God to come to pass for us, it going to take a willingness and thankfulness to fight. Even when we are in the center of God’s will we will still have adversity; we will still need to put on the whole armor of God and stand ready to engage in battle.

Affirmations: God has equipped me to fight and win. I gladly use the whole armor of God

Recommended Reading: Psalms 50 & 91

Esther 10:3:

For Mordecai the Jew *was* next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed.

Do you remember what happened when Jesus told the disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee and meet him on the other side? What was God's will? Were they trying to do God's will? They sure were, but the winds were contrary. A storm came up, and many times that is just the cards that life deals us. Often times we can be right in the middle of God's will, doing everything we are supposed to be doing and it is going to be a tough fight. The wind may be contrary, but it is the set of our sails and not the gales that determine where we end up.

THE SET OF THE SAILS

One ship sails East,
And another West,
By the self-same winds that blow,
'Tis the set of the sails
And not the gales,
That tells the way we go.
Like the winds of the sea
Are the waves of time,
As we journey along through life,
'Tis the set of the soul,
That determines the goal,
And not the calm or the strife.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox 1916



When Jesus went unto them walking on the water, he made as though he would pass them by. He required them to ask for help. This is still a freewill fight we engage in. God promises to be with us in trouble, but we must invite Him into it. As long as we are in this world, we will be in a fight. The good thing is, God guarantees our success.

Life is not about waiting for the storms to pass. . . it is about learning how to sing and dance in the rain! During tough times, let us not spend too much time feeling sorry for ourselves; let us enjoy singing and dancing in the rain?

Esther 10:1-2:

And the king Ahasuerus laid a tribute upon the land, and *upon* the isles of the sea. ² And all the acts of his power and of his might, and the declaration of the greatness of Mordecai, whereunto the king advanced him, *are* they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia?

The records of the events were no doubt kept in the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia (Esther 1:1-2; 6:1ff). We find other similar examples in I Kings 15:7, 23, 32; and II Chronicles 12:15.

Esther 10:3:

For Mordecai the Jew *was* next [second, he was the grand vizier] unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed.

What a great epitaph to Mordecai. He was great among his people, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and maintaining peace for all his seed (those in Persia not Israel). What a picture of peace and tranquility. The Jews of the kingdom live in harmony and mutual goodwill with the Gentile majority. Mordecai and Esther are respected, admired, and unashamed to advance the interests of the Jewish community and to speak out in its defense.

Affirmations: I am like a ship fully equipped for my journey. I set my sails to get where I want to go.

Recommended Reading: Ezekiel 1-3

Proverbs 25:2:

It is the glory of God to conceal a thing; but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.

An acrostic is the repetition of letters in a text that can have a significance of its own. This significance is generally independent of the words in which they occur. As we saw from a previous lesson, the scroll of Esther that was to be read yearly at the feast of Purim was a revelation of the hidden. In it, God records His working behind the scenes to insure His people's deliverance and the eventual birth of His only begotten son.

Each of the five acrostics is unique which demonstrates how God handles each and every situation that arises for His people. He handles each one personally and individually. Five is the number that represents God's grace, and we see God graciously working, step by step to bring His will to pass without violating anyone's freewill or coercing and manipulating anyone to do what He wants. Mordecai is the only one of the four main characters who does not utter words that contain one of the acrostics. Instead, he speaks the guiding principle underlying how God's handles the situations and circumstances of our lives. Enlargement and deliverance always arise to God's people from one place or another, and He has people waiting in the wings to swing into action when it is required (Esther 4:14).

The four fingerprints are the four acrostics, revealing YHWH. Each is uttered by a different speaker:

#	Speaker	Initial letters	Final letters	Direction	Race
1.	Memucan	1:20		Backward	Gentile
2.	Esther	5:4		Forward	Jew
3.	Haman		5:13	Backward	Gentile
4.	The writer		7:7	Forward	Jew

The first two acrostics are a pair, having the name formed by the initial letters of the four words, and the last two are a pair, having the name formed by the final letters of the four words. It is remarkable also that in the two cases where the name is formed by the initial letters, the facts recorded are initial also initiating a course of action. In the last two cases where the name is formed by the final letters, the events are terminal, leading quickly to the end toward which God was working.

In the two cases where the name is spelled backwards, God is seen overruling or reversing the counsels of the Gentiles for the accomplishment of His own purposes. Where the name is spelled forward, God is ruling directly in the interests of His own people, although it was unknown to them at the time.

These four form an introverted structure:

- A. Words spoken *concerning* a queen.
- B. Words spoken *by* a queen.
- B. Words spoken *by* Haman.
- A. Words spoken *concerning* Haman.

The fifth acrostic, the thumbprint, appears in the dramatic moment when the king seeks the identity of the one seeking the destruction of Queen Esther and her people by asking, "Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" Hidden in this phrase is the very name that God announced from the burning bush: the "I AM." This is the very name God announced when He delivered His people out of the land of Pharaoh in the past, and who has now come to deliver them again out of the hand of Haman. The main characters in the story identify the human villain, but God of course saw the spiritual agency acting behind him in yet another attempt to exterminate God's people, destroying the Christ-line and preventing the coming of Messiah.

These five acrostics in Esther are documented within the Talmudic literature with some texts using bigger letters in the formation of the acrostics. They may remain hidden to many, but by God's mercy and grace, they are no longer hidden from us. Praise God for His wonderful matchless Word.

Affirmations: I recognize the fingerprints of God on my life. I thank God that he has made Himself known in His Word.

Recommended Reading: Ezekiel 4-6

I Chronicles 29:12:

Both riches and honour *come* of thee [the LORD], and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand *is* power and might; and in thine hand *it is* to make great, and to give strength unto all.

David was a man after God's own heart. He knew what it was like to be in and out of fellowship with God. He also knew what it was like to have God's hand upon him. He expressed his heart so wonderfully in a prayer in I Chronicles 29.

I Chronicles 29:10-13:

Wherefore David blessed the LORD before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed *be* thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. ¹¹ Thine, O LORD, *is* the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all *that is* in the heaven and in the earth *is thine*; thine *is* the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. ¹² Both riches and honour *come* of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand *is* power and might; and in thine hand *it is* to make great, and to give strength unto all. ¹³ Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name.

David's belief in the greatness of God and His ability to influence the affairs of men provided him the wherewithal to stand and fight for the will of God. He expected victory and was committed to fight for it. Let us be like David and fight, win and bring glory to God. Let us expect God to show us what to do, what adjustments we need to make. Then we will have the courage to fight until we win. We serve a mighty God who is able to deliver to the uttermost.

As long as we are in this world, we will be in a fight. We must simply remember God promises to be with us in trouble and He guarantees our success (Psalms 91:15). To enjoy that success requires us to fight. In the last epistle Paul wrote, he said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (II Timothy 4:7-8). Fought is past tense, it was coming to an end for him. We all have the right to decide that for ourselves. As long as we are willing to fight, we are guaranteed success.

In Esther God's people lived in an alien society under despotic rulers. They often felt social and political pressure to betray their faith. The challenge was formidable, but they fought. Both Mordecai and Esther broke laws of the empire for which the penalty was death. Mordecai had refused to bow down to Haman, and Esther dared to enter the king's throne room without being summoned.

God's plan to deliver his people depended on the choices Mordecai and Esther would make. We know from the story that God's plan to deliver the Jews from annihilation succeeded. God is still calling men and women to stand and fight for what is right. He might seem hidden, but He is active. In ways often invisible, He continues to deliver and honor His people and bring glory to Himself.

In Esther we saw God's hand working behind the scenes to bring deliverance to His people. God's hand is not so feeble today that it can no longer save. His reach extends all the way to our lives. Whether we see Him or not, He is at work in our lives right now. Even on the most uneventful days, He works in some of the most unusual and amazing ways. He specializes in transformation. The mundane can become meaningful. Recognizing God's hand in our lives will bring comfort and courage. Psalm 31 has some poignant words.

Psalms 31:14-17:

But I trusted in thee, O LORD: I said, Thou *art* my God. ¹⁵ My times *are* in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me. ¹⁶ Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy mercies' sake. ¹⁷ Let me not be ashamed, O LORD; for I have called upon thee. . .

May we ever call upon the name of the Lord and rejoice in his salvation.

Affirmations: I will fight the good fight. I lovingly anticipate my Lord's appearing.

Recommended Reading: Ezekiel 7-9

Joshua 4:23a,24:

For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you. . . ²⁴ That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it *is* mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever.

Esther reveals the awesome providence of God, and how He works behind the scenes to accomplish His will, many times without anyone's awareness of what is going on. It is an amazing revelation of how God works through natural means, and how He can bring about His will through the free-will choices of men without any coercion or manipulation. Indeed, the theme of God working behind the scenes pervades the entire Bible, and certain passages proclaim this truth in a particularly helpful way.

In Judges 7:9-15 Gideon, about to face the troops of Midian with a much smaller and less-equipped force, is very concerned about the success of the engagement. However, on the night before the battle God leads him to spy on the enemy camp, giving him a unique window into God's hidden activity. Gideon overhears one soldier telling another of a dream he has had of Gideon's army defeating the Midianites. Gideon is delighted to discover that God was already actively engaged in waging the battle — giving the enemy a faint heart so they will be an easy conquest for Israel.

Gideon's experience is an important reminder for us that God is remarkably capable of changing hearts and rearranging circumstances as He sets us up to succeed. Instead of running disaster scenarios through our heads, we would do better to invest our energies in praying for God's help and staying positive and hopeful. It is far better to look for the opportunity in every difficulty instead of being paralyzed at the thought of the difficulty in every opportunity.

Do you remember the experience of the **Shunammite widow in II Kings**? Elisha counsels the woman, whose son was miraculously provided (II Kings 4:12-17) and restored to life (II Kings 4:32-37), to leave Shunem for seven years in order to avoid a famine. She obeys, then returns after this period to petition the king for her land. At the very moment she arrives to make her request of the king, Elisha's servant Gehazi is talking with the king, telling him about the great things that Elisha had done. Seeing the woman and her son, Gehazi presents them to the king as a testimony to Elisha's ministry. Then the king, obviously impressed, "appointed an official for her, saying 'Restore all that was hers, together with all the produce of the fields from the day that she left the land until now'" (II Kings 8:1-6). This is just one of many amazing miracles of timing that God pulls off unbeknownst to anyone until it is actually happening.

During the **siege of Samaria in II Kings 6 & 7** things had gotten desperate for God's people. As prophesied in Deuteronomy 28:47-57, the people had gotten so rash, frantic, distraught and hopeless that they were eating their own children. However, while they were forlorn and in such great despair, God was actively working on their behalf. He had run the Syrians off with a noise of a great host. However, the people were still shut up in the barricaded city with no awareness of how God had moved on their behalf.

God had Elisha announce the deliverance, but it fell on unbelieving deaf ears. God had to work with four leprous men who realized that the only hope they had was to go into the enemy's camp. This was another example of opportune timing to bring Elisha's prophecy of liberation and abundance to pass within the 24 hour time frame. Even when the lepers reported back the reality of the miraculous removal of the enemy host, the king still refused to believe. Finally, at the pleading of one of the king's servants the report was investigated and the mighty deliverance was realized.

In II Kings 8:6-23, after it was reported to the king of Syria that his secret plans made behind closed doors were being reported to the king of Israel by Elisha the prophet. The king sent a great host to capture Elisha, and they surrounded the city assured that his escape was not possible. Elisha's servant despaired when he realized the situation in which he and his master were. However, Elisha was not troubled because he was aware of the mighty hand of God that protected him.

Then Elisha prayed for God to open his servant's eyes so he too could see what Elisha saw. God had already provided a vast angelic army including chariots of fire to defend them. What a great illustration of how God uses supernatural as well as natural means to secure the safety and security of His people. We may never know how many times God has rescued us from enemy attacks in similar fashion. However, we should rest in the knowledge that God's spiritual forces are working behind the scenes to accomplish His purposes in our lives. We simply trust that God will use whatever means needed to work out His best in the world and in our own lives. How the mighty hand of God works, vastly exceeds our comprehension or ability to imagine. Remember God has promised the church that He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think and secure glory for Himself by Christ Jesus throughout all ages. That includes right now!

Affirmations: God sets me up to succeed. There is an unseen host battling on my behalf.

Recommended Reading: Ezekiel 10-12

Genesis 50:20:

But as for you, ye thought evil against me; *but* God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive.

In the story of Joseph in the Book of Genesis 37-50, we see God's intervention on behalf of His people. Although the story of Joseph is fraught with injustice as bad things repeatedly happen to an undeserving person, we must remember both the beginning and the end to see how the hand of God moved omnisciently to deliver His people. The injustices were many: Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, falsely accused by his master's wife of trying to rape her and unjustly thrown into prison, where he was forgotten. Without the declaration of the will of God at the beginning and end of the account we might lose sight of God's active intervention which did indeed bring His will to pass.

God established His plan for Joseph's life with dreams that were doubled (Genesis 37:2-11). Joseph longed to see them realized; they became his desire, and he pursued them diligently. These dreams painted a clear picture that Joseph remembered and used to guide him until he saw them fulfilled. The life of Joseph demonstrates the importance of holding fast to the vision God shows us and keeping our heart and motivation pure. That way, one does not retaliate or get bitter towards those who oppose him and his mission.

Joseph had every reason to become bitter by his mistreatment, but he never did. He kept his motivation pure and never retaliated against those who had treated him unjustly. He stayed humble and faithful to his dream. Joseph never lost sight of his vision. Despite the evil injustices that befell him, he did not let the circumstances deter him. He stayed faithful to the vision, walked by the spirit and never gave up. He believed his righteous God would work all things out as he continued to move ahead unwaveringly.

The Lord was with Joseph when his brothers, instead of killing him, sold him into slavery. The Lord was with Joseph prospering him in Potiphar's house (Genesis 39:2). Even when Joseph was unjustly thrown into prison, the Lord was with Joseph, giving Joseph a position of privilege and respect while in prison (Genesis 39:21-23). The Lord was with Joseph by delivering him from prison and elevating him to second-in-command in Pharaoh's court.

Even more telling than the sustaining hand of God during Joseph's travails, is what Joseph himself says to his brothers at the end of the account. After their father Jacob died, Joseph's brothers, afraid that Joseph had carried a grudge against them for selling him into slavery, tried to appease Joseph by telling him that their father desired Joseph to forgive them, and they fell down at his feet as Joseph's dream had foretold.

Joseph's response demonstrates his understanding of God's hand working out the various details of the account. He said, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; *but* God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive (not only the children of Israel, but all the people from the surrounding countries that came to Egypt to get food). Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them. (Genesis 50:20-21).

Joseph desired no vengeance; he harbored no hatred; he had no animosity. Joseph treated his brothers with mercy, loving kindness and undeserved favor. Joseph was able to maintain an attitude of complete forgiveness, compassion and affection, because he had a clear understanding that although what his brothers did to him was evil, God's hand provided for him at every bump in the road. God saw him through every difficulty. Joseph understood that God was at work and God was in control, and he was able to trust God for the godly outcome God had promised him.

Although Satan tried heartily to thwart God's plan with one injustice after another, Joseph remained faithful to the vision and saw it through to completion. It did not matter what evil people intended to do to Joseph, God worked out His will despite those things that were wrong. God was able to bring to pass the vision He gave to Joseph. Nothing was able to stop God from delivering His people and saving them from their destruction.

Affirmations: God works all things together for good because I love him. I do not retaliate or get bitter when wronged.

Recommended Reading: Genesis 48-50

Exodus 31:17-18:

It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.¹⁸ And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.

Biblically “finger” connotes the notion of power and influence and often represents the source of deliberate action. The activities identified as being done by the fingers often reflect the character of their owner. The phrase “the finger of God” is often used in Scripture to indicate God’s authority (Exodus 31:18; Deuteronomy 9:10), His signature, trademark or power (Exodus 8:19) or His work (Psalms 8:3). Both the arm and hand are more common biblical images of power, but because of its relative size, the image of a single finger can represent the smallest increment of power or influence. Jesus condemns the Pharisees for burdening people with their interpretations of the law, and then refusing to lift a finger toward helping them with that burden (Matthew 23:4).

We know from II Timothy 3:16 that “All scripture is given by inspiration of God.” This usually happened as God revealed it to His prophets who wrote it as “*they were* moved by the Holy Ghost” (II Peter 1:21), which is indeed how Moses wrote Exodus. However, the *Ten Commandments*, according to Exodus 31:17-18, were given by direct inscription of God! Exodus 31:17-18 is also corroborated in Deuteronomy 9:10 where Moses testified: “The LORD delivered unto me two tables of stone written with the finger of God; and on them was written according to all the words, which the LORD spake with you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly.” Then a third time this truth is locked in regarding the second set of tablets in Exodus 34:28, which says, “He wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.” (See also Exodus 34:1.) It amazes me that out of all the holy scriptures, God chose to write the *Ten Commandments*, not through one of His prophets, but with His own anthropomorphic finger! He left no possibility for transcription errors. How seriously and literally should they be taken.

How significant that these scriptures in Exodus about the writing of the *Ten Commandments* were written in the context of the observance of the weekly Sabbath (Exodus 31:12-16, 34:21-22). Part of what God wrote with His finger was the commandment to remember the sabbath day and keep it holy (Exodus 20:8-11). This was commanded in remembrance of the creation account (Genesis 1:31–2:3). Ever since the creation, people have observed a weekly calendar. The seven-day week (unlike the day, month, and year) has no astronomical basis. People keep time in weeks simply because God did! Even those who deny the six-day week of creation must observe it, for their biological rhythms are constructed that way by God. “The sabbath was made for man,” said Jesus (Mark 2:27). Since God considered the truth of the literal creation week so important that He inscribed it Himself, we should believe this portion of His Word is truly significant.

There is an unusual and intriguing parallel in the Gospels regarding the finger of God:

Matthew 12:27-28:

And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast *them* out? therefore they shall be your judges.²⁸
But if I cast out devils **by the Spirit of God**, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

Luke 11:19-20:

And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast *them* out? therefore shall they be your judges.²⁰
But if I **with the finger of God** cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you.

I am not sure I understand the ramifications of that comparison, but it sure seems to equate doing things with the finger of God with doing things by the spirit of God. Could it be that God now writes upon our spirits with His finger in a similar fashion that He did in Exodus 31:18?

God Works In Mysterious Ways His Wonders to Perform

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plans His footsteps in the sea,
and rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
of never failing skill,
He treasures up His bright designs
and works His sovereign will.

You fearful saints, fresh courage take;
the clouds you so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
in blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
but sweet will be the flow’r.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
and scan His work in vain;
God is His own interpreter,
and He will make it plain.

by William Cowper

Affirmations: I operate manifestations of the spirit. God has written upon my heart with His finger.

Recommended Reading: Ezekiel 11-15

Isaiah 14:24:

The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, *so* shall it stand:

Isaiah 14:24 provides great comfort as it clearly states that God's will happens exactly as He purposes. When He promises something, He also has the power to make it happen. God is sovereign over His creation. What He says is going to happen, happens. Isaiah 46 also corroborates this.

Isaiah 46:9-10:

Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me,¹⁰

Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:

How does man's free will fit with this? If man is free to make choices outside of God's control, how can God really be in control? The answer lies in a proper understanding of God's foreknowledge. God knows before we choose, what we are going to choose. However, this in no ways effects what we choose to do. God functions outside of the dimension of time. He sees the end and the beginning and everything in between at the same time. God is not bound by the dimension of time.

He declared the coming of the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15, and although Satan tired untiringly to break the Christ line and prevent the promised seed of the woman from coming he was not able to do so. God consistently made a way for the birth of His only begotten son even prophesying where he would be born and from whom he would be descended.

Jesus Christ fulfilled every Old Testament prophecy about him. God could say something was going to happen because he was capable of making it happen. He knew what would happen, which is how He could promise it. Yes, God is sovereign over His creation, but He has also allowed each man to be sovereign over his own life and decisions. He has provided eternal life to whosoever may come, but He has left the decision as to who actually comes, to each and every individual. He has given man the right to decide the outcome of their individual lives, but He retains control over the future of mankind.

Mordecai was aware of this truth. He was convinced that God would preserve His people and that Esther was strategically positioned to help Him do so. However, Mordecai was aware of Esther's individual freedom of will and knew that if she did not respond God would just bring it about in some other way (Esther 4:14).

God allows mankind the freedom to choose, but it is limited and confined within the boundaries of His sovereignty. Even the great king Nebuchadnezzar realized the boundaries in which man was to function.

Daniel 4:34-35:

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom *is* from generation to generation:³⁵ And all the inhabitants of the earth *are* reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and *among* the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?

Once we understand that God is in control, we must look to His goodness and benevolence. Simply knowing that God is all-powerful and able to do whatever He chooses is not enough to provide the strengthen and comfort we need to endure the trials and tribulations of life. We learn to trust God as we receive good from His hand on a daily basis (Psalms 68:19), then when difficult or inexplicable things occur we continue to trust Him believing all things will work out for the best (Romans 8:28). We are anchored by the goodness of our God committing our lives and times into His hands (Psalms 31:15; Luke 23:46). He is good and even the most unpleasant things have purpose, even if that purpose remains hidden to us. The key lies in trusting Him to be the God He declares Himself to be — a God of love, mercy, compassion and faithfulness.

We come to trust God's character the same way we come to trust a person's character: by repeated exposure. Paul exhorted the Romans to not be conformed to this world: but to be transformed by the renewing of their mind. That is the only way to prove that *is* that the will of God is good, and acceptable, and perfect (Romans 12:2). When we renew our minds to the Scripture instead of conforming them to the world, we become sure of God. The spirit will guide us into all truth (John 16:13) which is what the Word of God is (John 17:17). The more we are transformed by the renewing of our minds according to the Word of God, the more we will trust Him at all times.

Affirmations: I trust in the guiding hand of God. I serve God by my free will choice.

Recommended Reading: Ezekiel 16-18

Psalms 103:19:

The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.

The word “providence” occurs once in the KJV. It is a translation of the Greek *pronoia*, and means essentially forethought or making provision beforehand. The two places *pronoia* is found in the Bible are in Acts 24:2 where Tertullus praised Felix for his providence and in Romans 13:14 where Paul admonishes the believers to “make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.” Both verses convey the idea of looking ahead in an attempt to make provision for something.

Although Providence is often used as an appellation for God, it is generally understood as the foreseeing care and guidance of God omnisciently directing the universe and the affairs of humankind with wise benevolence. As Esther portrays, much of this providence happens behind the scenes without any perception of God at work in the affairs of men. In all things God works according to the counsel of his own will (Ephesians 1:11).

However, in no sense, does He author sin or violate freewill.

Man is a free moral agent and responsible for his actions. Yet despite what man does, God is still able to bring His good acceptable and perfect will to pass. Saul of Tarsus willfully persecuted the church. His actions are described as kicking against the pricks of God’s providence (Acts 9:5). Although he persecuted the church and profited in the Jew’s religion, God’s purpose in his life would not be denied.

Galatians 1:13-16:

For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews’ religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: ¹⁴ And profited in the Jews’ religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called *me* by his grace, ¹⁶ To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

There are plenty of examples of divine providence at work in Paul’s life. The blazing light that fell on Saul on the road to Damascus, his conversation with Jesus (Acts 9:3-6) and the frustrating of Paul’s plans to go to Bythnia which were redirection to Macedonia (Acts 16:7-10) are examples of divine providence at work. The first two led to Paul’s conversion and the later to taking the Word of God to European soil for the first time.

Another clear case of divine providence overriding sin and being victorious over man’s freewill is seen in the life of Judas Iscariot. Judas lied, deceived, stole and finally betrayed the Lord Jesus into the hands of his enemies. Although God was displeased with this great wickedness, all of Judas’s plotting and scheming led to the salvation of mankind. God providentially allowed Judas the freedom to perform a series of wicked acts to get Christ to the cross (Act 3:18; 4:27-28).

Luke 22:22:

And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!

This demonstrates both the sovereignty of God (“the Son of Man goes *as it was determined*”) and the responsibility of man for his actions whether good or evil (“*woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!*”).

There are some general statements that can be made regarding providence. Three of these fundamental principles at work are: First, God is sovereign in this universe and in complete control of all things (I Chronicles 29:11-12; Psalms 24:1; 115:3; 135:6). Although He allows freedom of will, nothing is able to stand up to him, defy him, or do that which will defeat Him in the end. Second, God created the world and all that is in it. Hence, it is His and subject to Him (Deuteronomy 10:14; Jeremiah 27:5-6; Psalm 89:11; I Corinthians 10:26). It is impossible that anything or anyone, whether in heaven or on earth, whether supernatural being, king, or simple peasant, should imagine that they are self-sufficient or answerable only to themselves (Isaiah 45:11-12; Daniel 4:35; Revelation 20:11-13). Third, God has an eternal plan of redemption for the world and all that is in it. This plan is realized in and through Jesus Christ and will be accomplished regardless of any effort to thwart it (Psalms 33:11; Proverbs 19:21; Ecclesiastes 3:14; Isaiah 14:24-27; 46:8-11; Ephesians 1:9-11; 3:11; II Timothy 1:9).

Affirmations: I see God’s providence throughout history. I trust that God is in control.

Recommended Reading: Ezekiel 19-21

Isaiah 64:8:

But now, O LORD, thou *art* our father; we *are* the clay, and thou our potter; and we all *are* the work of thy hand.

The “hand of God” is often used to express God’s strength and power. We find it used when speaking of the creation of the universe and man’s place within it. God himself declares “I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, *even* my hands, have stretched out the heavens, and all their host have I commanded” (Isaiah 45:12). The psalmist uses the same figure saying, “Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens *are* the work of thy hands” (Psalms 102:25) and “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Psalms 19:1).

God repeatedly refers to His “mighty hand and outstretched arm” regarding the deliverance of His people from Egyptian tyranny. God promised Moses that He would stretch out His hand and smite Egypt with all His wonders (Exodus 3:20). God assured Moses that His strong hand and outstretched arm (Exodus 6:1,6) would deliver His people from Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

This story of deliverance would be taught to generation after generation (Exodus 13:14; Deuteronomy 4:34; 5:15; 7:8,19; 11:2; 26:8; Psalms 136:11-12; Jeremiah 32:21; Acts 13:17). Moses memorialized that great event in a song he sang with the children of Israel. His great victory song is recorded in Exodus 15. In it, they praised the Lord singing, “Who *is* like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who *is* like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful *in* praises, doing wonders? Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them” (Exodus 15:11-12). So great was the deed that God had done, that those nations and peoples that lay ahead on Israel’s journey into the Promised Land would hear of it and be afraid (Exodus 15:14-16).

The figure of the outstretched hand/arm of God is used of the affairs of history, including the rise and fall of nations (Isaiah 14:26-27; 25:10-12). By that same mighty hand and outstretched arm with which He brought His people out of Egypt He would one day judge and scatter them among other nations. Yet in a future time He would regather a purified people to their Promised Land (Ezekiel 20:33-36).

God’s providential care could be expressed as His “gracious hand” upon them. It was God’s “gracious hand” that gave Ezra protection and guidance all the way from Babylon to Jerusalem, and about a decade later Nehemiah similarly experienced God’s “gracious hand” when he approached the Persian king for permission to return to Jerusalem in order to rebuild its fallen walls (Nehemiah 2:8). Both men experienced God’s gracious sustaining hand for the work that He called them to do.

God’s hand also “fell upon” or “came to” selected ones whom He called out for special service. Jeremiah was one so-called: “Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:9-10). God’s prophets often felt the hand of God as they ministered. Thus the hand of God was upon Elijah as he “ran ahead of Ahab” from Mount Carmel to Jezreel (I Kings 18:46). The hand of the Lord came upon Elisha so as to give the Lord’s instructions to King Jehoram of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah during the Edomite campaign (II Kings 3:14ff). Several other prophets also report the Lord speaking to them with a strong hand (Isaiah 8:11, Ezekiel 3:22; Daniel 10:10-12).

Although the “hand of God” is often understood as a metaphor to express God’s strength and power, it is also used anthropomorphically being felt or seen as a man’s hand. Daniel feels a hand touch him (Daniel 10:10). Belshazzar saw one writing on a wall (Daniel 5:5). Ezekiel is grabbed by a hand and lifted (Ezekiel 8:1, 3). Amos sees a hand holding a plumb line (Amos 7:7).

Yes, we are the work of God’s hands. He has not only, as a potter, formed our bodies and breathed into us the breath of life, but He has created us with spirit in His image. Now as three-fold beings of body, soul and spirit we are His masterpiece, a consummate demonstration of His handiwork. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). Let us enjoy being about our Father’s business and walking in the good works unto which we have been ordained.

Affirmations: I sing and shout of God’s victory. I feel God’s hand upon my heart and life.

Recommended Reading: Ezekiel 22-24

Ezra 7:9:

For upon the first *day* of the first month began he to go up from Babylon, and on the first *day* of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him.

Ezra was a priest (Ezra 7:1-5), a descendent of Aaron through Seraiah, the high priest who was slain when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians (II Kings 25:18-21). He was also a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses (Ezra 7:6), and as a scribe he had a duty to: 1) Study the will of God as revealed in His word, that he might hide it in his own heart (Ezra 7:10; Psalms 119:11). 2) Teach his fellow exiles what he had learned by giving the “sense” of the word (Ezra 7:10; Nehemiah 8:2-8). 3) Copy and preserve intact the very words of God (Ezra 7:11).

Ezra was successful in his endeavors because the Lord’s good hand was blessing him. 5 times in Ezra 7 & 8 either Ezra or the narrative of the Word acknowledges how and why the hand of the Lord God was upon his life. The narrative of the Word tells us the hand of the Lord was upon Ezra as “the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the LORD his God upon him (Ezra 7:6). He made the treacherous journey to Jerusalem safely “according to the good hand of his God upon him” (Ezra 7:9).

Ezra himself recognized God at work and praised Him for His involvement. Saying in Ezra 7:27-28.

Ezra 7:27-28:

Blessed *be* the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put *such a thing* as this in the king’s heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which *is* in Jerusalem: ²⁸ And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king’s mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God *was* upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.

In Ezra 8:18 Ezra continues to recognize God at work by providing ministers for the house of God (Ezra 8:1-22). 38 Levites and 220 Nethinims came to assist him because as he noted “the good hand of our God” was upon them. Ezra proclaimed a fast to seek from God the right way to travel (8:21-23). Because he had told the king that God’s hand would be with them, he was ashamed to ask for a military escort (Ezra 8:22), but they arrived safely anyhow because, as Ezra explained and in Ezra 8:31, “the hand of our God was upon us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy.”

We saw Ezra was successful in his endeavors because the Lord’s good hand was blessing him. God wants us to know why, and He makes note of them in Ezra 7:10.

Ezra 7:9b-10:

. . .on the first *day* of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. ¹⁰ **For** Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do *it*, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.

“For” marks the figure aetiology; God emphasizes the reason by stating it so obviously. Ezra enjoyed the blessing of God’s hand upon his life because he prepared himself for it by seeking the law of the Lord, doing it himself and then teaching statutes and judgments in Israel. Ezra had first made himself “meet for the Master’s use, prepared for every good work” (II Timothy 2:21). Ezra was useful for the Master because he made God’s will his will. He did the law of the LORD; he actually obeyed what the law of the LORD said to do.

He believed and taught the people he lead back to Jerusalem that God would be with those who seek Him (Ezra 8:22). The word “seek” implies a willingness to invest time and effort in obtaining something. He entreated God’s protection through fasting and prayer (Ezra 8:21-23). Ezra believed that God rewarded those who diligently sought Him, and we know such faith undoubtedly pleased God (Hebrews 11:6). Ezra was willing to step out in faith trusting the Lord would protect them. Because he had informed the king of the hand of God upon them he refused an armed escort even though the journey was perilous and there was potential for ambush along the way (Ezra 8:31). His love for God, God’s people and the mission God had called him to energized his believing faith (Galatians 5:6).

Affirmations: I thrive with the good hand of God upon me. I prepare my heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do *it*, and to teach His statutes and judgments.

Recommended Reading: Ezra 7 & 8

Isaiah 49:14-16:

But Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. ¹⁵ Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. ¹⁶ Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of *my* hands; thy walls *are* continually before me.

The people of Zion established their despair crying, “The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.” However, God’s reply directly addressed and corrected their hopelessness. He confirmed His love and compassion saying, “Can a woman forget her sucking child? . . . yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.” To demonstrate His unchanging, unfathomable love He had them “engraved” upon His hands, even though, as the last part of the verse declares, their walls were continually before Him.

Remember, however, that in the days of the prophet the walls of Zion were in ruins. Although the heart of the faithful, like Nehemiah and his brethren (Nehemiah 1) failed because of the dire condition of Jerusalem, the Lord had a plan for the restitution of the city both the walls and the Temple. He put a vision and a mission before Nehemiah, Haggai, Daniel, Ezekiel and others. These great words of Isaiah 49 bring strength and peace to the forlorn assuring a divine remembrance, tender as — yea, more tender than-a mother’s.

The walls of Zion no longer existed. They were broken down, nothing but rubbish and debris were there. Yet in God’s eyes the walls still exist. You see, God sees “things that are not, as though they were.” God sees the ideal, the perfect vision of the perfect future, and “all the wonder that shall be.” Yes, Zion was desolate when they cried in despair, but “before Him” stands what will one day stand on the earth before all men, “the new Jerusalem, coming down from heaven.” Its walls will be great and high, and its foundations garnished with all manner of precious stones. These are the walls that are before Him, though the ruins were before men.

A nursing mother has deep and tender feelings of attachment for her newborn child. It would be most unlikely for her to forget her baby. However, God says that He will never forget one of His own. God states that His remembrance is beyond that of a mother for her nursing infant. God’s memory is deeper than the memory of even the most intimate human relationship. His love and compassion does not allow Him to forget.

When Israel came out of Egypt, the Passover was to be “observed of all the children of Israel in their generations” (Exodus 12:42). This same idea was expressed with the words “it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand” (Exodus 13:9). This Word of God was to be taken to heart and kept before their eyes by being placed on the hands (Deuteronomy 6:8; 11:18). Here in Isaiah 49 God represents Himself as doing for Israel what He had bid Israel do for Him. They were, as it were, to write the supreme act of deliverance in the Exodus upon their hands, that it might never be forgotten. God writes Zion on His hands for the same purpose.

Isaiah 49:14-16 does not primarily refer to individuals, but to the entire community which in verse 14, decried their hopelessness. Yes, God remembers the community, not as an abstraction or a generalized expression, but as the aggregate of all the individuals composing it. Therefore, this assurance of our text is to be taken by every single soul that loves God, and trusts Him through Jesus Christ. We, too, on occasion fall into circumstances in which we are tempted to think God has, somehow or other left or forgotten us. Let us never give in to the temptation. Never! Ever! Whatever our difficulties let us be sure that no circumstances of our lives are so dark as to shake our confidence in God’s promise. His remembrance of us is certain.

Hebrews 13:5:

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

“Engraven” is the Hebrew word *chaqqaq*, translated inscribed, engraved, graven or carved, depending on your translation. Most Jewish commentators agree that the meaning of the ancient word is best translated inscribed or written with an emphasis on permanence. It appears 19 times in the Scriptures, 8 of which are translated lawgiver or governor for those who did the writing. The remaining times it represents writing down a message. Whether written on stone, paper or whatever in every instance it means more than just recording something for posterity. It refers to the unchangeableness and binding nature of the inscription. If God wrote it, it is so. It is fixed, and it will be done.

Affirmations: I am continually in God’s remembrance. God has graven me upon His hands.

Recommended Reading: Ezekiel 25-27

Hebrews 13:5b: . . .for He has said, “I WILL NEVER [under any circumstances] DESERT YOU [nor give you up nor leave you without support, nor will I in any degree leave you helpless], NOR WILL I FORSAKE *or* LET YOU DOWN *or* RELAX MY HOLD ON YOU [assuredly not]!” So we take comfort *and* are encouraged *and* confidently say, “THE LORD IS MY HELPER [in time of need], I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?”

God’s continuous remembrance of His children is true because He has indelibly engraved them upon the palms of His hands. He remembers and cares for us constantly. Note that the original Hebrew (like the KJV) does not say He has graven our names on the palms of our hands. It says, “I have graven thee.” It is not simply our names or faces He has inscribed on His palms. It is so much bigger than that. He has recorded “us” — His intimate knowledge of who we are, our essence, all that makes us the unique men and women we are. He knows every detail of our lives and He keeps it all before Him on the palms of His hands.

We are secure in the all powerful hands of our Almighty God, cupped, protected and supported in His palms. Nothing can pluck us out of His hands (John 10 29). God has us and all that pertains to us, well in hand. There is no moment when we are out of His sight. His attention is never distracted from us. His care never falters; His provision never fails.

When He looks on us He sees the perfection He has made us to be in Christ. Christ includes us in his high priestly prayer in John 17, noting that God loves us every bit as much as He loved his only begotten son (John 17:20-23). Part of God’s provision is forgiving and forgetting our sin and shortcomings.

Isaiah 1:18:

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Isaiah 43:25:

I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.

Psalms 103:12:

As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

In Revelation 3:20 Jesus said, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup [eat] with him, and he with me.” This is significant because in the Orient the host does not eat with his guests unless they are intimate friends. In this passage of Scripture Jesus is saying, “I am your most intimate friend.” Jesus enters into our hearts upon our invitation. He never forces himself on us. He is not just entering in, but he is supping with us. Jesus said, “I want to be very intimate with my people; I will sup with them; I will eat with them if they will but invite me in.”

The Lord is with us always. Matthew 28:20 says, “. . .lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” The invitation recorded in Matthew 11:28 says, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Christ died for all and thus He could say, “Whosoever will may come.” Once Christ has offered the invitation, it is a matter of our accepting it. If you want to come to Christ you may. Man need not die in his sin because Christ died for sin and carried our sicknesses and our pains. We need not carry them. God has willingly and gladly engraved us upon the palms of His hands.

There is no question about the call of Jesus Christ to man being clear. The only question is whether man is going to respond to that call. When Jesus died upon Calvary’s cross, he died for everybody in the whole world; but only those who accept him as their savior receive the benefits of his death.

Those of us who have accepted Jesus as Lord in our lives — God has engraved upon the palms of His hands. He continuously remembers and watches over us. He has come to abide within us forever, that we may have eternal life now and forevermore.

This is God’s continuous remembrance of us. There is not a day, hour, minute or second when we as sons who believe in Him should ever perish. Rather we are continually remembered before the throne of God. We sons of God have truly been engraved on the palms of God.

Affirmations: God will never leave me or forsake me. I sup with my Lord for we are the closest of friends.
Recommended Reading: Ezekiel 28-30

Nehemiah 2:18:

Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for *this* good work.

Nehemiah was passionate about his homeland and concerned about Jerusalem. The longing for the welfare of Jerusalem that is expressed in Psalms 137:1-6 can be seen in the heart of Nehemiah. Although he was taken in the captivity and was busy serving the king, doing an outstanding job as his wine steward, he was still passionate about his homeland. He had risen to the top and served the king in the palace, but his concern about Jerusalem and the things of God is what really stirred his heart.

As the wine steward to the king he had never had a bad day (Nehemiah 2:1-8). He had never been sad or disgruntled. Only after hearing news about the dismal state of Jerusalem did his countenance change. It was his excellent service to the king which opened the door for the request he needed to make of the king. When the time was right the opportunity became available.

When Nehemiah heard about the condition of Jerusalem from his brother, he was overwhelmed with sadness. He expressed his concern by sitting down and weeping. His mission began when he perceived a need and proceeded with preparation to meet that need. Before doing anything else, Nehemiah prayed and fasted about his concern. Nehemiah started his prayer with praise to God. Dwelling on how awesome God is helped Nehemiah believe and trust that God would guarantee the success of the mission God had laid upon his heart. He recognized how God had redeemed His people by His great power and by His strong hand (Nehemiah 1:10). Finally, he presented his request to God, asking for favor when he went to the king.

Whatever the reason, after his time of prayer and fasting Nehemiah waited nearly four months — from autumn to spring — until the time was right to make his request to the king. Nehemiah needed time to think it through before speaking to the king about it. Timing was important to the successful accomplishment of his mission, and even when the door opened for him to make his request of the king, he first paused to go to God about it (Nehemiah 2:4-5). Nehemiah wanted to make sure his words were God-pleasing and his actions God-directed. When the king asked about his need, Nehemiah knew his plan well enough to be able to give a clear answer. Nehemiah knew what he planned to do, how long he estimated it would take, and what resources he would need. Then the king granted him all he requested and Nehemiah knew it was because of “the good hand of my God upon me” (Nehemiah 2:8).

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem he spent three nights assessing the situation in detail (Nehemiah 2:11-16). He took the time to examine the situation in person, and he took some key individuals with him to survey the wall and make a plan of action. Then in Nehemiah 2:17-18 Nehemiah presented his plan to the people.

Nehemiah 2:17-18:

Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we *are* in, how Jerusalem *lieth* waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come, and let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach. ¹⁸ Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me.

And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for *this* good work.

When Nehemiah told the people that the hand of God was good upon him and that he had the king's support because of it. The people responded enthusiastically with, “Let us rise up and build.” They strengthened their hands and started rebuilding. Once they were convinced the good hand of God was in it, they strengthen their hands for the good work that laid before them. Because Nehemiah knew their efforts would be successful with God's power, he assured the people that they would accomplish the mission. Then, when opposition came in verse 19, Nehemiah answered saying, “The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build” (Nehemiah 2:20). When God's good hand is upon us we can always be sure of the success of our mission. Accomplishing the rebuilding of the wall was not easy, but the difficulties were overcome and the work was amazingly finished in only 52 days.

Nehemiah recognized the good hand of God working things out and making his path clear. He was walking in God's will, accomplishing His plan. Like Nehemiah, God has a plan for each of us. As long as we diligently pursue His will, nothing can prevent that plan from being accomplished. A great key to experiencing the good hand of God upon us is discovering God's will and walking in it.

Affirmations: I am passionate about the Christian heritage of my country. God opens doors for me to serve.
Recommended Reading: Nehemiah 1 & 2

Jeremiah 29:11 NIV

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

The Book of Esther is a dramatic account which can provide great insight into the special and purposeful plan God has for our lives. There are great truths to be gleaned about courage, unity of purpose, comradery, divine timing and God's providence. God has a plan for our lives that is rich and exciting. I still remember the opening line of the person who witnessed to me. The young man asked me, “Did you know God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life?” I had heard the “God loves you.” stuff before. I believed that God loved me, but I had never considered that God had a plan for my life. Immediately he had my attention.

Not only did God have a plan for me, but He wanted to work with me to bring His plan to pass. When I considered that God wanted to be involved in my life, and that He was interested in communicating to me what was best for me; I was stunned. The thought that God wanted to work with me was thrilling. My adventure had begun, and it has not stopped yet. Two years after that initial exposure I found out that God had His plan written out in detail in His Word. Yes, the Bible was the Word and will of God.

The truths of His Word became clearer and more specific. As I believed what He declared, I realized promise after promise. My relationship with Him continued to grow as He led me to scripture after scripture, which I claimed for myself and proclaimed to the world. A year later, I found out that revelation manifestations were available, and that God wanted to fill in specific aspects of His plan for me with word of knowledge, word of wisdom, and discerning of spirits.

Now, some 50 years later, God is still faithful to unveil His plan, as I am faithful to keep walking ahead with Him. His plan has been an adventure. It has worked out for good. I have prospered in every category of life. I have a hope that does not fade away. My future is thrilling because the present is extraordinary. The truth has provided both security and hope amidst all the challenges of life. Each of our lives can be a personal adventure with God.

In addition to an adventure, His plan has been a process. We tend to like end results more than the process that gets us there. However, the learning process is as much fun as arriving at the destination. There is opportunity all along the way. We can profit from every experience. Philippians 2:13 says God works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure; He will do so all the days of our lives. What He has started, He will continue. I am as convinced as Paul was.

Philippians 1:6:

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in **you** will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ:

”Perform” means “to bring to completion.” We are confident that God will finish what He starts. God ignites in our minds and imaginations cherished hopes, ambitions and aspirations. God plants His ideas, plans, and desires within our hearts. He has a beautiful servant's course laid out before each of us. We just await its discovery.

Today, we have in our hearts interests, hopes, and dreams, of which, many are truly God-given. He is the One Who deposited them in us. Now He expects us to nurture them like a seed. We feed, cultivate and weed them. We must choose to believe and receive them. He wants His plans to become our plans and His ways to become our ways. That is what Ananias did in Acts 9. God showed him a vision and sent him on a mission. Ananias made God's way his way and did like he was instructed even though he had questions and hesitations (Acts 9:17)

God will never quit on His people. This will happen on the day of Jesus Christ, at the time of the gathering together. God is not done with me yet. I am still a work in progress, and I am enjoying every minute of it. God created believers unto good works according to Ephesians 2:10, and Philippians 2:13 says that God works in His people to will and to do of *His* good pleasure. Not only do I love it when a plan comes together. I love it when God lets me in on it. You will, too.

Affirmations: I love God's plan for my life. I am on the adventure of a lifetime.

Recommended Reading: Ezekiel 31-33

Ephesians 2:10:

For we are his workmanship (*poiēma*, masterpiece), created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

We are God's masterpiece, able to do the good works that Jesus Christ did. We were formed, made and created to be able to walk like Jesus Christ. Jesus' good works made us able to receive the gift of holy spirit. It brought us to the point where we could have salvation and forgiveness of our sins. We have been set apart from the world. We are masterpieces because of all that Christ accomplished for us by his life and his death and his resurrection and his ascension.

God formed, made and created us in such a way that we can also walk in the steps of Jesus Christ. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. God Almighty, the creator of the heavens and the earth, fashioned us. He knows our names. He counted the hairs on our heads. He knows every detail about us. He has seen every freckle, every birthmark, every mole. He knows every aspect that we might consider a flaw, and He has pronounced us His masterpiece. When we look in the mirror we have to shift our thinking. We have to refurbish our minds to accommodate the thoughts of God. God sees us as a masterpiece. We may say; "I am too fat, I am too thin, I am too old, I am too young." That is just reflexive behavior. We let the culture tell us what we are. We want to learn to have God tell us what we are; God's Word has more authority than anything we can learn by our senses.

We are all, essentially, the progeny or the descendants of Adam and Eve. Remember in Acts 17:26 God says that He has "made of one blood all nations of men." Of course, all of our bodies are different. They are all just strands of DNA and peptides and proteins and fats and carbohydrates and salt and calcium and all this stuff, all the dust that it takes, with the breath of life in it, to make us walk around and be able to wear hats. We have skin color and eye color and hair color; we have all manner of differentiation. The majority of us all have hands and feet and eyes and nose and mouth and brain and nervous system and we are all very similar to Jesus Christ in these ways. We have a physical body that is part of God's design; so that, we could do His work and worship Him and make Him known. That is why He made us the way we are.

If we think about it; there are forty-six chromosomes (that is twenty-two pairs of somatic chromosomes and two sex chromosomes), which are each double stranded. Just this little helix of DNA, yet what vast combinations of it are possible. Just look around a crowded room sometime and you will see wonderful diversity. What a wonderful design there is to God's handiwork. We are all so unique and yet all so similar at the same time. It took a God that loved us to make us this way.

If we really want to look at science in its most pure forms; true science is observing. True science is observation. A true scientist looks at something and says; "Hey, look at that," and then he looks at it again the next day and he says; "Hey, look at that, it changed, or it is still the same." True science is observation. What scientists do is they observe repetitious phenomenon and they examine the components necessary for that phenomenon, that activity, to take place. Scientists say to themselves; "How did that happen?" and then in the process of learning how something happened, they try to answer the question of why it happened.

They always, if they are true scientists, have to come to the conclusion that the reason why things happen is because God decided to make them happen in such a way. God invented life and chemistry and physics and the answer to "why" is always found in God's Word.

All this wonderful awesome creation of our bodies and our souls and our spirits God has purposed all along. When He brooded over the face of the waters He thought everything through very well. So here we are, today, fully equipped to do the works that God called us to do. Let us declare boldly like David did, "The LORD will perfect *that which* concerneth me: thy mercy, O LORD, *endureth* for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands." God will never forsake His masterpiece. He made it to show it off, to put it on display for all to see. Let us remember we are his masterpiece created in Christ Jesus.

Affirmations: I am God's masterpiece. I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Recommended Reading: Ezekiel 34-36

Ezekiel 1:1-3: Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth *month*, in the fifth *day* of the month, as I *was* among the captives by the river of Chebar, *that* the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. ² In the fifth *day* of the month, which *was* the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity, ³ The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was there upon him.

From early youth Ezekiel had been trained to be a priest, but Nebuchadnezzar's invasion resulted in him being taken captive to Babylon. When he was 30 years old, Ezekiel began to experience amazing visions from the Lord. He recorded the exact date on which the first vision came. He described this amazing experience as having the hand of the LORD upon him.

When we read of God's hand in Ezra and Nehemiah, we saw God guiding them through difficult situations providing for them and protecting them along the way. However, when we read of the hand of the Lord in Ezekiel the impression seems to be a bit different.

There are over 30 references to the hand of the Lord in the Book of Ezekiel. It occurs in several phrases that are repeated throughout the book. "The hand of the LORD was. . . upon him" occurs 7 times in Ezekiel 1:3; 3:14,22; 8:1; 33:22; 37:1; and 40:1. "I will stretch out my hand upon" occurs 8 times in Ezekiel 6:14; 14:9,13; 16:27; 25:7,13,16; 35:3. "I lifted up mine hand" occurs 10 times in Ezekiel 20:5²,6,15,23,28,42; 36:7; 44:12; and 47:14. "With a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm" occurs twice in Ezekiel 20:33 and 20:34. "Smite mine hands together" occurs twice in Ezekiel 21:17 and 22:13. It also occurs uniquely in Ezekiel 13:9; 20:22 and 39:21.

When Ezekiel writes, "the hand of the Lord came upon me," he seems to be describing a hand that nudges, even pushes him into uncomfortable places that he might not have otherwise gone. When the hand of the LORD is upon us in this way, we will "feel" it. It is an undeniable encounter where we feel the presence of the Lord. We may sense His anthropomorphic hand on our shoulder or back or head leading us to do something.

The first occurrence of the phrase is in Ezekiel 1:3 where the hand of the LORD is associated with the word of the LORD coming unto Ezekiel in the form of visions. It occurs next in Ezekiel 3:14 & 22 where it is again associated with the charge to speak God's Word regardless of how it is received. Ezekiel 8:1 is immediately followed by a vision and specific guidance. In Ezekiel 33:22 God opened Ezekiel's mouth and then verse 23 says, "Then the word of the LORD came unto me." Ezekiel 37:1 the hand of the LORD carried Ezekiel into the valley of dry bones in the spirit of the LORD. In the last occurrence, Ezekiel 40:1, the hand of the LORD took Ezekiel into the land of Israel by way of visions of God.

The hand of the Lord is an expression used in prophecy to denote the power or constraining influence of the Lord to direct men who have yielded themselves to God's will. Ezekiel describes the tangible presence of God upon him guarding, guiding and encouraging him to pursue a course of action he would not have done without the comforting assurance of God's involvement with him. The hand steadied him and brought him wherever God wanted him. It was associated with visions, revelations and communicating the Word of the Lord.

The phrase "I [the Lord] will stretch out my hand upon," used 8 times, is associated with desolation and destruction resulting from God's judgment upon Israel and her neighbors. "I [the Lord] lifted up mine hand unto," used 10 times (7 of them in chapter 20), is associated with God's blessing and deliverance despite His judgment. The two occurrences of "with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm" occur at the end of chapter 20. It is an allusion to God's deliverance and the exodus from Egypt. That particular phrase is consistently repeated in the Pentateuch for the series of mighty acts by which the Lord brought about that deliverance (Exodus 6:1, 6; Deuteronomy 4:34; 5:15; 7:19, &c). Although in the Pentateuch it is connected with "great judgments" with which the Almighty's power was manifested for deliverance in Ezekiel 20:33 & 34 the same power is manifested for discipline. Now He "will rule over" and purify them with the same might and authority which He formerly put forth to save them from their enemies.

The hand of Lord on Ezekiel enabled him to see the way that God sees, supernaturally. It will do the same for us. The hand of Lord will allow us to see things from His perspective. His hand not only provides direction and protection, it also challenges us and brings us along assuring us that together we can do some amazing things.

Affirmations: God gives me visions. I can see supernaturally

Recommended Reading: Ezekiel 37-39

Psalm 126:1,2:

When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.² **Then** was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing; then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them.

How strange that God's people would be surprised when God delivers with his mighty hand. God can turn any situation "right side up." There is nothing beyond His power and providence. We expect Him to work in a mighty way in the lives of His people. **When** God worked in such a mighty way to turn the captivity of His people, they could hardly believe it. It was almost too good to be true. They had lived so long under the oppression that they had almost given up hope. Now it was as if they wondered, "Could it indeed be real?"

God turned their sorrow into rejoicing. The time in captivity is not as important as the deliverance from the captivity. "When" deals with time. Proverbs 13:12 says, "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but *when* the desire cometh, *it is* a tree of life." We should never give up hope; so what if it takes longer than we would like. We should not dwell on the length or misery of the captivity, but rather rejoice when the deliverance comes.

Christians who dwell more upon what they have gone through than upon what God has done for them, rob themselves of the joy of living. Enduring difficult situations is seldom fun, but the end of the captivity is always a cause for rejoicing. What is our impression of life? Is it continual conflicts, deep afflictions, and sad adversities? Or, is it a continual feast upon the great things God has done for us?

Then is another word that deals with time. It refers back to verse one. Look at what happened when God turned the captivity of His people. First, let us note the response of God's believing people: "our [plural] mouth [singular]" and "our [plural] tongue [singular]." The people responded unanimously with laughter and singing. It was as if they had one mouth and one tongue. They were united in their rejoicing. The pain of the captivity was replaced by the elation of God's mighty power working on their behalf.

Next, let us note the response of the unbelieving heathen: "**The Lord hath done great things for them.**" They recognized it was not by chance. God worked deliberately and completely. They recognized that it was not just common or ordinary things that God did. They recognized that God moved on their behalf.

Then verse three begins like verse two ends. This time it is God's people declaring, "**The Lord hath done great things for us.**" (That is the figure anadiplosis.) God's people are the "apple of His eye" (Deuteronomy 32:10; Psalms 17:8; Zechariah 2:8). What was the end result? God's people were glad. They spoke of it, and it changed their attitude or disposition. Psalm 40 echoes similar sentiments.

Psalm 40:1-5:

I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.² He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, *and* established my goings.³ And he hath put a new song in my mouth, *even* praise unto our God: many shall see *it*, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.⁴ Blessed *is* that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.⁵ Many, O LORD my God, *are* thy wonderful works *which* thou hast done, and thy thoughts *which are* to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: *if* I would declare and speak *of them*, they are more than can be numbered.

We should speak of God's wonderful works. Yes, we may endure trials, but we are delivered out of them (II Timothy 3:11; 4:17,18). Yes, we have our weaknesses and shortcomings, but we also have an all-sufficient Savior, who works on our behalf and helps us overcome our frailties. God can turn any captivity. Remember how God turned the captivity of Job.

If we remember and recount the difficulties we have been through, let us not forget that we have been through them safely and profitably. We have not remained in captivity. He has turned our sorrow to rejoicing. The deeper our troubles have been, the louder our thanks to God should be. He has led us through all, and preserved us until now. As Charles Spurgeon once said, "Our griefs cannot mar the melody of our praise, we reckon them to be the bass part of our life's song."

REMEMBER & DECLARE: "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad."

Affirmations: The Lord hath done great things for me, and I am glad. The Lord hears my cry.

Recommended Reading: Psalms 126 and 40

Daniel 2:47:

The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth *it is*, that your God *is* a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret.

One night the king had a dream and wanted it interpreted. However, he did not want his astrologers to simply make up an interpretation. Therefore, he refused to tell them the dream and insisted that they tell him both the dream and the interpretation of it. Because he is so concerned about it, he demands that they tell him or they will be killed.

Daniel 2:19-23a:

Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven.²⁰

Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his:

²¹ And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: ²² He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what *is* in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him. ²³ I thank thee, and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might, and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee for thou hast *now* made known unto us the king's matter.

Under the threat of death, Daniel asks God to let him know the dream and its interpretation. God has promised to supply all our need. He does so according to His timetable, not ours. We may never really understand when, why, or how it will come before it actually does, but when it does come we can be absolutely sure of it. We do not have to rely on vague feelings or hunches. If God wants us to know, we can know that we know.

I am sure if we were in a situation like this, we too, would receive what we need to know also. Then Daniel explained to the king what had happened, and God got the glory.

Daniel 2:28-30:

But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these; ²⁹ As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came *into thy mind* upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he [God] that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass. ³⁰ But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for *any* wisdom that I have more than any living, but for *their* sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart.

God wanted the king to know so He had Daniel tell him. Daniel is just making God's intent and message clear to the king. The king's dream was from God, and this entire scenario was instigated by Him. Daniel did not initiate any of this, God did. Daniel is in reality carrying out God's will. God is not carrying out Daniel's. First, Daniel tells the king the dream.

Daniel 2:31:

Thou, O king, sawest, and beheld a great image. This great image, whose brightness *was* excellent, stood before thee; and the form thereof *was* terrible.

How would you like to guess about this? Would a vague feeling communicate this kind of information? Yet, people are willing to put up with that uncertainty. It does not work that way in the Word. Revelation is precise and detailed. Verses 32-45 contain the specifics of the revelation.

That is some pretty specific and detailed information. Revelation can be like that. Some people think of revelation as a vague feeling or indiscernible impression that they get, of which, they are never really sure whether or not it comes from God. That may be part of our growth in operating the spirit, but there is much more available. Some people may limit God to working with them like that, but that is not what He wants. He wants to communicate with detail, exactness, and precision. If He did talk to us like that, would we remember what He said? Revelation is certain and sure. It allows us to be certain and sure.

God got the glory, and that is the way it should be. If we can live our lives and bring glory to God, I think we would be happy. We can, and as we walk by the spirit, we will.

Affirmations: God loves me and tells me what I need to know to help His people. I know the God of heaven.
Recommended Reading: Ezekiel 40-42

Ephesians 1:19-21: And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*, ²¹ Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:

God's right hand is a phrase used throughout Scripture associated with the exercising of God's power and authority (First occurrence is in Exodus 15:6). The "right hand" is a place of honor (I Kings 2:19; Matthew 20:21-23). Being seated at God's right hand, is having a place of highest favor with God and indicates the right and responsibility to exercise the power and authority delegated to the one so seated.

Before stating the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus said to His disciples, "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). In the Gospel of Mark, the same idea is stated figuratively saying Jesus "was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God" (Mark 16:19). The description of being at the right hand of God does not refer to being in a certain location, but rather to the right and responsibility to exercise the power and authority delegated to him by God. God exalted Jesus above all others by seating him at His right hand. As our Lord, Christ has absolute authority. Jesus functions under God with His authority like Joseph did under Pharaoh and Mordecai did under Ahasurus.

The term "God's right hand" in prophecy refers to the Messiah to whom is given the power and authority to subdue His enemies (Psalms 110:1; 118:16). The position of the Messiah is at God's right hand. The fact that Christ is "sitting" refers to the fact that his work of redemption is completed. Even during the gospel period when Jesus walked the earth and trained the twelve, he realized that God had "given all things into his hands" (John 13:3). God sent Jesus, and Jesus spoke the words of his Father. It was because God loved His Son that He placed everything in his hands" (John 3:35). So intimate were they two that John 5:20 declares, "...the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that Himself doeth." Jesus is the long-expected deliverer of Israel (Luke 1:71, 74). Because the mother of James and John recognized his authority to rule, she requested that Jesus, grant that her two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom (Matthew 20:21).

New Testament has many uses of "the right hand of God" to express what Jesus is doing now. In Peter's sermon on Pentecost he says of Jesus, "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. (Acts 2:33). Acts 7:55-56 describes Stephen looking into heaven and seeing Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Paul also repeated the same truth in Colossians 3:1 noting that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God.

Hebrews 1:3 depicts Jesus functioning at the right hand of the majesty on high as being the brightness of God's glory, the express image of God's person, and upholding all things by the word of his power. Hebrews 10:12-13 also describes this right hand of God as a place of honor and exaltation for Jesus. (See also Acts 5:31.) I Peter 3:22 indicates that angels, authorities, and powers have been subjected to him.

How comforting and assuring it is for the believer to know that as the heir of salvation he or she is safely in the hands of both our Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father. They work with unity of purpose to keep us safe, secure and supplied with all we need within the family of God.

John 10:28-30:

And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and *my* Father are one.

Indeed Christ makes intercession for us (Romans 8:34). We are superconquerers, and like Paul can be fully persuaded "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

Affirmations: I am seated together with Christ at the right hand of God. Nothing can pluck me out of God's hand.

Recommended Reading: Ezekiel 43-45

Esther 4:16-17: Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which *is* not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish. ¹⁷ So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.

We have spent time investigating the acrostics in Esther which reveal the names of God. We can also find the Messiah there. He is the centerpiece of history and the subject of the Bible from Genesis 3:15 to Revelation 22:21. Jesus Christ is the major focus of all the Scriptures, both New and Old Testaments (Luke 24:27, 44-48, John 5:39 45-47). Apart from him, the Word of God cannot be properly understood.

Jesus' life and ministry is typified by the life of many people in the Bible — men like Adam, David, Jonah, Joseph, and Melchizedek are all types of Christ. Inanimate objects also symbolize our Redeemer. We find him portrayed as the rock smitten for us (Numbers 20:8-11), the serpent on the pole (Numbers 21:8-9), the scarlet thread (Joshua 2:18), and manna (John 6:31-33). Jesus' life and ministry were also illustrated by animals such as the Passover lamb (I Corinthians 5:7) and the scapegoat (Leviticus 16:26).

However, in the Book of Esther we see Christ as the savior of God's people. Both Esther and her adoptive father, Mordecai typify Christ's life and ministry. Esther portrays Christ in her willingness to give her life for God's people (Esther 4:16; Matthew 26:42) and in identifying and defeating her adversary (Esther 7:6; Colossians 2:15; I John 3:8). Mordecai exemplifies Christ through his loyal service to his master which earned him his position at the right hand of the king (Esther 10:3; Ephesians 1:20).

The deliverance God provided through Esther and Mordecai was necessary and preparatory for God's ultimate deliverance through Christ. Esther and Mordecai are significant characters in the great drama of redemption specifically because God through them continued moving toward the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. God saved Esther, Mordecai, and the rest of the Jews from death at the hands of Haman preserving the Christ-line so that Jesus might eventually be born. God protected the Jews not just for their sakes, but also for ours, and ultimately for His glory through the triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God kept moving His story of redemption forward. Other post-exilic leaders like Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah delighted to see the fulfillment of prophecies of the return from exile (Deuteronomy 30:1-5; Isaiah 44:21-45:25; Jeremiah 29:1-14). They restored the walls of Jerusalem and its temple. They restored Temple worship, including the sacrifices, enabling Christ to fulfill all the law and to die as the perfect Passover Lamb. They made significant contributions to what Galatians 4:4 calls "the fullness of time."

God preserved His people through their captivity and exile so that He might fulfill His promise of redemption through Christ. Esther and Mordecai were instrumental in thwarting the annihilation of the Jews and preserving the Christ-line so that God's Messianic promises could come to pass. Does the Book of Esther mention Christ explicitly? No. But it does not speak of God explicitly, either.

It is unfair to argue that seeing God in a book in which He is conspicuously absent in print is eisegetic. It was written under the auspices of God Who expected His readers to interpret the book in light of and as part of the rest of the Old Testament. The purpose of the book is arguably to show God's sovereign activity and providence even when He is not explicitly named. We can just as surely see Christ archetypically portrayed in this grand drama as the savior of God's people.

God is as active in the lives of His people today as He was in Esther. He sees the entire picture. He knows what is happening to us, what has happened to us and what will happen to us. Furthermore, He is not just hanging there in the background, working undercover hidden from His people any more. He is there for His people actively and mightily moving openly and miraculously on our behalf. He has created us in His own image, and He has not abandoned us to whims of the world.

He provides a solid foundation in the storms of life. He has given His only son who has saved us from anything and everything that can come against us. No matter what is going on around us, God and His son our lord and savior Jesus Christ will always be there for us. We have a rock, a solid foundation upon which to base our lives. In the inevitable times of weakness and suffering, which come from living in a fallen world, we must remember and take comfort in the truth that God and His son are there for us and will never leave us.

Affirmations: I see my Lord Jesus in every book of the Bible. Jesus is the solid foundation of my life.

Recommended Reading: Ezekiel 46-48