

THE GOSPEL PROJECT – CHRONOLOGICAL EXILE and RETURN GOD THE PROVIDER *Esther and the Great Reversal*

The day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor while most Japanese military celebrated their success, the man who planned the attack, Admiral Yamamoto, spent the day in a deep depression. He would write in his diary, *I fear all we have done is to awaken a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve*. Indeed rather than the U.S. Pacific Fleet being neutralized, it became fully engaged as the United States declared war on Japan. The attack on Pearl Harbor resulted in the exact reverse of what the Japanese hoped for.

Today, as we continue with ‘Esther’s story’ we will study a biblical reversal found in the story of a Jewish orphan, raised by her cousin and brought to the palace of the king to become queen for what was aptly described last week as *such a time as this*. The wicked Haman, a descendent of long-time haters of the Jews, had convinced the king to make an irrevocable law against the Jews. Apparently, it was unknown to King Ahasuerus that his own queen was a Jew. The root of this evil began due to Haman’s hatred of Esther’s cousin Mordecai who sat at the king’s gate and refused to bow to Haman. In Haman’s plotting, we find the exact reverse happening of what he had hoped.

Haman’s attack was designed to humiliate Mordecai and annihilate the Jews. But God had another plan. While Haman wants to exalt himself and humiliate Mordecai, he instead ends up humiliated and Mordecai ends up being the one exalted!

After Esther became queen, her cousin, Mordecai, was involved in an interesting ‘little’ providential event.

Read Esther 2:21-23 (ESV) ²¹ *In those days, as Mordecai was sitting at the king’s gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two of the king’s eunuchs, who guarded the threshold, became angry and sought to lay hands on King Ahasuerus.* ²² *And this came to the knowledge of Mordecai, and he told it to Queen Esther, and Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai.* ²³ *When the affair was investigated and found to be so, the men were both hanged on the gallows. And it was recorded in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king.*

At the time, Mordecai received no recognition or reward for saving the king’s life. Be reminded that God’s timing is always perfect. **Proverbs 13:21 (ESV)** ²¹ *Disaster pursues sinners, but the righteous are rewarded with good.* Interestingly, Mordecai’s display of faithfulness to the king had occurred before Haman rose to power and before Haman got the king to make the fateful decree of death against the Jews.

We studied last week how Esther made the decision to go to the king on behalf of her people who were now under a death sentence because of Haman. She knew that going to the king unbidden could bring about her

own death but she determined, *if I perish, I perish*. After a time of prayer and fasting, Esther came to the King. Unlike Esther, when we come to the throne of grace because of Jesus we do not have to fear whether or not our King receives us! **Hebrews 4:16 (ESV)** ¹⁶ *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

The king held out his scepter welcoming her into his presence. In **Esther 5** we read that Esther did not immediately speak of Haman's plot to the king. Why not ask immediately since the king had welcomed her? There are several reasons. (1) It wasn't the right time. The king was not prepared to hear shocking news about his 'trusted' Haman at that moment. (2) It was not the right place. Some things should be done in private. (3) Controlled by godly wisdom, Esther realized that Haman needed to be present for his own undoing. The queen invited both the king and Haman to a banquet. However, after the first banquet she still remained silent and extended a second invitation. The record does not reflect Esther's reasoning for delaying her request but it brings us to the final and most important reason for her delay unknown at the time even to Esther herself. (4) In accordance with the providence of God, one more event needed to occur, and it would take place between banquet 1 and banquet 2!

King Ahasuerus was about to have a sleepless night. Instead of taking part in any of the 'entertainments' available to the Persian king, he chose to have the records of the Persian chronicles read to him. Instead of putting him to sleep, the records brought a question to the King's mind regarding Mordecai of all people! In the reading of the records, he was reminded of the death plot against the king and how Mordecai intervened on his behalf. What had been done to honor Mordecai? The king found the answer! Nothing! And the king determined to change that.

Between banquets 1 and 2, Haman was once again infuriated against Mordecai for not bowing and he chose to have a gallows built to hang Mordecai upon. According to the Jeremiah Study Bible, the Persian gallows was not what we picture where a person is hanged with a rope around the neck. Instead they impaled their victims on a tree. Haman had constructed a huge seven and a half foot structure to complete his dastardly deed. His purpose was to put Mordecai's corpse on display for all the world to see the humiliation of the Jews. However, we are about to see the reversal of exaltation and humility.

Read Esther 6:6-11 (ESV) ⁶ *So Haman came in, and the king said to him, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" And Haman said to himself, "Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?"* ⁷ *And Haman said to the king, "...* ⁸ *let royal robes be brought, which the king has worn, and the horse that the king has ridden, and on whose head a royal crown is set.* ⁹ *And let the robes and the horse be handed over to one of the king's most noble officials. Let them dress the man ..., and let them lead him on the horse through the square of the city, proclaiming before him: 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor.'* ¹⁰ *Then the king said to Haman, "Hurry; take the robes and the horse, as you have said, and do so to Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate..."* ¹¹ *... "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honor."*

Proverbs 18:12 (ESV) ¹² *Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor.* Proud Haman did not realize that before the day would end, his life would reverse from exalted to humiliated and the humble Mordecai would be exalted. Haman had been going to the palace to request the death of Mordecai when he mistakenly took the king's question to mean that the king planned to honor Haman. Haman had given into the sinful desire of believing life was 'all about him.' And it was not! Haman would be forced to honor Mordecai before all the people of the city.

Haman was 'smart enough' to do the king's bidding and honor Mordecai in the way that Haman had suggested thinking it would be for himself even though it must have 'galled' him immensely. Afterward, Mordecai went back to the king's gate. It was business as usual for him – being honored had not gone to his head. But, Haman – well now, he was distraught in exalting Mordecai as if in mourning. Although his wife and friends had encouraged him in the gallows building, they now gave him an unusual warning. **Esther 6:13 (ESV)** ¹³ ... *"If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, is of the Jewish people, you will not overcome him but will surely fall before him."* Through his wife and friends, God warned Haman of His promise to the descendents of Abraham, the Jews. **Genesis 12:3 (ESV)** ³ *I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* But the proud prime minister would not heed the warning. Had he sincerely repented and asked for mercy, it's likely that he could have saved his own life and the lives of his ten sons.

By the time Haman arrives at the banquet, the curiosity of the king regarding Esther's request seems to have reached its peak. The king is about to discover that Esther does not desire riches, resources, nor rank. She desires the reversal of judgment and salvation.

Read Esther 7:3-10 (ESV) ³ *Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, ... let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request."* ⁴ *For we have been sold, ... to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent..."* ⁵ *Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?"* ⁶ *And Esther said, "A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!"* *Then Haman was terrified ...* ⁷ *And the king arose in his wrath ...and went into the palace garden, but Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther...* ⁸ *And the king returned... as Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. And the king said, "Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?"* *As the word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face.* ⁹ *Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, "Moreover, the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing at Haman's house, fifty cubits high."* ¹⁰ *And the king said, "Hang him on that."* *So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the wrath of the king abated.*

There is a massive difference in being sorry for being caught and being sorrowful over sin. Haman was not sorrowful for what he had done; he was sorry he was caught. God's reversal had caught up with him! The Persians covered the face of the condemned to avoid looking at them.

Proverbs 16:33 (ESV) ³³ *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.* In his pride Haman had cast lots to determine the day of destruction of the Jewish people. But God intervened and delivered His people. J. Vernon McGee says, “Don't gamble with God. Don't take a chance with Him.”

Ironside reminds us, “It is easy to cherish a feeling of contempt and disgust for so low and vile a character as Haman. But it is well to remember, that in every man's heart is found the same evil thing.” **Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)** ⁹ *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?* It is the grace of God alone that makes one person different from another.

Ironside continues, “people often consider it a mark of superior virtue to be shocked and horrified by the crimes of others whom they imagine to be worse than themselves. It is well to realize that the worst acts of the worst men all spring from a nature identical with that of all other sons and daughters of Adam.” It is because of this humbling fact our Lord said to Nicodemus in **John 3:6-7 (ESV)** ⁶ *That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.* ⁷ *Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’*

There was still a battle to be faced for Esther and the Jews – that irreversible law of the Medes and the Persians was still in effect. Let's look at how the reversal of victory and defeat was handled in Persia.

Read Esther 9:1-2 (ESV) ¹ *Now in the twelfth month... on the thirteenth day... when the king's command and edict were about to be carried out, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, the reverse occurred: the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them.* ² *The Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could stand against them, for the fear of them had fallen on all peoples.*

To counteract the irreversible law of the Medes and the Persians that brought death to the Jews, another word from the king was given: the Jewish people would be allowed to fight back. They had the king's word behind them and they prevailed over their death sentence!

As I think of the salvation of the Jews in the kingdom of Persia through the efforts of Esther and Mordecai, I am reminded of the death sentence placed on Adam and Eve and in turn upon us. But our King chose to make a reversal of that death sentence. **Romans 6:23 (ESV)** ²³ *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Even though the penalty of death was upon us, we read in **Romans 5:8 (ESV)** ⁸ *but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* All we have to do is take the King of Glory at His Word and turn from our sins. **Romans 10:13 (ESV)** ¹³ *For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* That, my friends, is the greatest reversal of all!