

## AUGUST 19

### Esther 4-7

In thinking about the purpose of the book of Esther, there is not only the obvious message of God sovereignly saving His people, but there is the hidden message. The hidden message is represented in the fact that the words, "God" and "pray," and other indications of God's presence are not mentioned. Can God be present when He is not seen? Can a book telling of God's working exclude the mention of Him? Those who are seeking God will find Him. The book of Esther is a spiritual eye test.

Matthew 13:13-15 *This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.*<sup>14</sup>Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: `You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.<sup>15</sup>For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.'

### Esther 4

Vs. 1-3 The response of the Jews was immediate. Mordecai risked his life by coming as a mourner to the king's gate. Notice that there was fasting and weeping and sackcloth and ashes, but nowhere in Esther does it say that anyone prayed. Obviously they prayed.

Vs. 4-9 Apparently Esther and others didn't know what had happened. Mordecai refused to be comforted and suggested what Esther should do. It is interesting that Mordecai came with documentation to prove his claim.

Vs. 10-11 We imagine that a king and queen would be close. Xerxes had an enormous harem of attractive and exciting women. Now that he had a queen that any kingdom would be proud of, he could go back to business as usual. Of course, he would see Esther more often than the other wives because of official events. The fact that he hadn't seen Esther for a month signifies a very official and superficial relationship. If I didn't see my wife for a month, I'd be a wreck.

Esther's sense of security was shaken by Xerxes' character and behavior, and now there was an emergency. She was afraid, and it probably wasn't a common occurrence for a woman to approach the throne. I wonder if she thought he had found out she was a Jew?

Vs. 12-14 If you needed key verses for Esther, these might do. If you agree, why do you think these are good verses? What do you see in these verses that speak to you in your life and circumstances?

As disciples we are taught to live in the harvest, following and abiding in Christ. We never know where the Lord is leading us, or for what He might be preparing us. It is our perspective of living with Him daily and following Him that gives us the courage and presence of mind to understand how to respond to the situations He brings before us. Esther was shocked, but we'll see that she understood and recovered her calm.

Vs. 15-17 This shows that Esther and the other Jews were spiritually minded. By fasting they were appealing to God for help.

### Esther 5

Vs. 1-3 I have to admit that when I read this, I really think the entire description shows the king was immensely caught up in his own ego and was a man of low character.

Vs. 4-8 Esther might have known that the king couldn't resist being honored. That Esther didn't give her request at the first feast might have been to show that she was sincere. This might have

been a Persian custom we don't have insight into. It certainly was a "God thing" that things happened this way.

Vs. 9-14 In the whole scheme of God's working, this just looks like something we've seen a million times before. Pride comes before a fall, although in this case, possibly, before a *shish-kabob*. We've heard about the fall of the wicked in both Psalms and Proverbs. Now we get to see it.

V. 14 You'll see there is a note that "gallows" could also be "stake." It could be either. Once you begin reading Daniel, you'll see that this threat must have been a popular punishment in both the Babylonian and Persian Empires. *Also I make a decree that if anyone alters this edict, a beam shall be pulled out of his house, and he shall be impaled on it, and his house shall be made a dunghill.* (Ezra 6:11)

Just like Nebuchadnezzar heated up the oven seven times hotter than normal to make an example of anyone who defied him, Haman must have had a tree brought out of the forest to use as a gallows or impaling beam to make the point that no one dare oppose him. Just as a note: In Germany for their May fest, the industrious Germans bring a 70+ foot tree out of the forest, trimming off all the branches but the very top. I've seen a group of men raise it and put it in place without a crane, although they did have one standing by. Not that everyone can do what the Germans do, but the Germans could have had the tree cut and in place in a day if necessary.

#### Esther 6

Vs. 1-3 What I've learned from this verse is that if I can't sleep, the Lord must want me up to pray. What can you say? What a funny "coincidence" that this should happen on this very night.

One thing to note here is while we all love it when God does stuff like this, He is equally at work and present when He doesn't let stuff like this happen. Maturity in following in the harvest accepts God's presence both when the sun shines and when the storms rage.

Vs. 4-9 Now it's morning and what funny timing. God's judgment on the prideful and arrogant is not only just, but it shows that He has a sense of humor.

Vs. 10-11 Notice that the king knew that Mordecai was a Jew. Did the king not realize that the people he would be letting Haman exterminate were Jews? Re-read chapter 3. It looks like the king could have been oblivious to who the people were since he never proofread the final edict. Haman wrote it and sealed it for the king.

God has an ironic sense of judgment. Imagine what this must have felt like for Haman. Imagine the shock for Mordecai. Imagine the shock of all of those lower governmental workers who were expecting Haman to lower the boom on Mordecai.

Vs. 12-13 How comforting to have your wife and friends, who just suggested you punish Mordecai by hanging, tell you that he is about to be your downfall.

V. 14 And before Haman could collect his thoughts, he himself was collected.

#### Esther 7:1-10

Vs. 1-2 It must have been after all the food was served and the wine was being drunk, that the servants cleared out and there was time for conversation.

Vs. 3-4 It is interesting that Esther framed her request like this. Her urgent need came from the fact that total destruction was planned. I wonder if Haman was getting a bad feeling as Esther was explaining this.

Vs. 5-6 Dumb, da da dumb...in more ways than one. What a time for the king and Haman to discover that Esther was a Jew.

Vs. 7-8 The king went out to cool off and to think through all that Haman had suggested and planned. Esther was not in danger. There were some servants and guards present. One of them just happened to have a "head bag" in his pocket.

V. 9 Again, this is ironic justice. What we don't know is if Haman was hung like a "hanging," or hung like "on a spit." It is interesting in The Psalms to see David ask the Lord to punish his foes with the kind of destruction they were trying to bring on David. Here, we see it.

### **1 Corinthians 12:1-26**

There is great teaching in chapters 12 and 13. Keep in mind that Paul is teaching this to correct a problem in the church, and he will begin to apply all of this teaching in chapter 14. These chapters are leading up to, and laying a foundation for, correcting the Corinthians' misuse of the gifts in their public services.

Vs. 1-3 So what do you have here? How can you curse Jesus without knowing it, thinking you were led by the Spirit? This is my take on what Paul seems to be saying.

When the Corinthians were unbelieving, regardless of the sincerity or piety of their emotions, regardless of their Jewishness, they were led by those emotions to worship idols (Rom. 2:22). They lived in a very pagan place and even on their best days, their "god feelings" still led them to mix with the ungodly culture. Emotion does not equal accurate worship. Apparently then, some of these believers under the influence of emotion were speaking in tongues; and others who knew the language were hearing them curse Jesus. In the same way, it is only by the Spirit that a person can speak in tongues and praise God. Emotion does not equal worship, even in the church. Apparently the gift of tongues was going to seed in this church, and Paul will correct this overemphasis on tongues. This will become very, very clear in chapter 14.

Vs. 4-6 What point do you think Paul is making in this section? Notice the progression in these verses and what is attributed to each member of the Trinity. Think about these because they are different. Gifts are under the authority of the Spirit. Service is under the authority of the Lord. And working, as in making things happen, is under the authority of the Father. For an interesting look at this, read John 5. The Son served as He saw the Father working. There is diversity, but it is all unified in the Trinity and under the Father.

Vs. 7-11 The gifts are all unified under the same Spirit and they are given, not as we desire, but as He wills.

Vs. 12-13 The *for* in v. 12 is the application of what Paul has just said. You can imagine that as divided as the Corinthians were around their "heroes" like Paul, and Apollos, and Peter, the gifts must have given them fits. Especially since they didn't have any choice which gifts God gave to them.

Vs. 14-20 Notice in this first example of division over gifts, pride is not the primary issue, but self pity. What do you do if you're a successful CEO, but you didn't get a gift of teaching or spiritual administration and you thought you should have? What do you do if you're good looking and think you should be a hand, but you're a toe? What if you have great opinions, but God didn't choose you to be a prophet? Since Paul addresses this first, it might have been the primary problem.

V. 18 So it wasn't evolution after all. God put all the organs where He chose. Actually I think it's pretty cool that we don't sit on our brains.

Vs. 21-26 Now we have the example of pride. Without the heart, the mouth stops and the hand falls. Actually, the heart is pretty useless without veins. And mess up a couple of those DNA couplings and you've got major vein problems. Who is to say what gifts are unnecessary? It's interesting that in God's blessing to Nehemiah, everyone was "working properly."

Vs. 24-26 This is true of the body and of the church. We noticed in Nehemiah how important it was to have a leader, but it was just as important for everyone to work together and do their part. Both were miracles and both were provided by the Lord.

Up to now we all agree with this analogy that the Spirit and Paul have given us. But here's the question. Why are the gifts given and what is the body supposed to do? People do stuff and that makes the working of the body parts important. If the body just sits there, watching TV, who cares? What is important for us is that the body of Christ is meant to be working in the harvest. Without His purpose and passion working in us as disciples in the harvest, this teaching on gifts is all theoretical and academic, and it totally eludes us.

### **Psalm 36**

So, vs. 1-4 seem to stand together, and vs. 5-10 stand together, with vs. 11 and 12 being a plea for deliverance and justice. How would you title 1-4, and how do you think they relate or move into 5-10? What is the difference between these two men, if you want to see it like that?

Vs. 1-4 Notice that the wicked are encouraged in their evil because God appears invisible and silent. Their mindset is irrational, but by God not acting immediately and being unseen, the wicked show their hearts and validate the judgment that will come against them.

Vs. 5-6 Notice how David equated God's love, faithfulness and righteousness with the visible creation. God is never truly invisible and David also knew the character of the Lord.

Vs. 7-9 Again David mentions God's *steadfast love*. God's loyal love is what gave David *refuge*, fed him in the wilderness and revived his soul in all those long years of doubt and running.

Vs. 10-12 So David appealed to God to *continue* showing His *steadfast love* to those who knew God. Although there are other requests here, the simple prayer and confidence we have is simply the steadfast love of the Lord.

In a way it sort of reminds me of the flow of Psalm 119: I'm surrounded by troubles and enemies and rats, but I set my mind to meditate upon Your word and find my joy in You.

### **Proverbs 21:21-22**

When I saw these two proverbs together, it made me think that wisdom and righteousness are true strength. So what about *the city of the mighty* and *the stronghold*? How do the wise in Christ do this?

Notice in v. 21 that *righteousness* is internal character and that *kindness* is external, an action. Oh, and did I mention that the word translated *kindness* here is the same word translated in Psalm 36 as *steadfast love*.

*But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,<sup>45</sup> so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.* (Matthew 5:44-45)

*Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."<sup>20</sup> To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* (Romans 12:19-21)

I guess you would call that, "The Art of War," in the harvest.