



PT Butler

Bible Study Notebooks

Study of the book of Esther

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ESTHER INTRODUCTION

and 1:1-22

We do not know the human amanuensis (scribe) of the book of Esther. It could very well have been Mordecai. Whoever it was he/she used some of Mordecai's writings (9:20) and some of the official records of the kings of Media and Persia (2:23; 10:2), and probably the eyewitness accounts told and retold by Jewish scribes like Ezra. The book was written after the death of Ahasuerus (a.k.a. Xerxes) because 10:2 implies that the official state history of the reign of Ahasuerus (a.k.a. Xerxes) had already been written when the book of Esther was composed. Xerxes (Ahasuerus) died by assassination in 465 B. C. The intimate and exact knowledge of Persian culture of that time indicates the most likely date for the writing of the book is 460-450 B.C. The canonicity of Esther (approval as the word of God) is as certain as any other book of the Bible: (a) The Council of Jamnia (Jewish scholars and rabbis in A.D. 90) declares it to be canonical (which means it was accepted as the Bible before A. D. 90)—and since John the apostle was still alive and other Christians who had been given special gifts of "discernment" (1 Cor. 14), had Esther not been canonical these Christians would have said so; (b) Josephus (ca. A. D. 90) indicates it was accepted by the Jews as canonical in his time; (c) Melito of Sardis (a. D. 170) went to Palestine himself and confirmed the canon of the OT as we have it today; (d) Origen, Christian scholar of A.D. 250 confirms its canonicity; (e) the Jewish Talmud, in written form about A.D. 400 (in oral form in the time of Christ), confirms its canonicity; (f) the scholarship of 20 centuries (i.e., discoveries of manuscripts, archaeological artifacts) has amassed an accumulation of evidence to convince any honest person that Esther is truly a part of God's revelation to man; (g) without Esther being true there is no reasonable explanation for the historic fact of the feast of Purim being observed by generations of Jews beginning back when they were in exile in Persia! The total absence of the word "God" is the reason some people give for having doubts about the book of Esther. The Jewish Talmud gives Deut. 31:18 as a reason why God's name is not mentioned—because of the sin of idolatry, God had cast them into captivity and "veiled his face" from the Jews. Edward J. Young (OT prof. Westminster Theological Seminary) theorized, "These Jews in Persia...showed no desire to return to Palestine...Their theocratic spirit was weak...despite that fact, God had not rejected them...He would still watch over them...But, since these Jews were no longer in the theocratic line, so to speak, the Name of the covenant-God (Yahweh) is not associated with them...since they are in this distant, far country, and not in the land of promise, His name is not mentioned...By causing us to behold the workings of providence, the book does, after all, turn our eyes to God who determines the destinies of men and nations." Esther's book is primarily an extract from the official documents of the Persian Court—this would account for both its minute secular details and the omission of the name of God (e.g. 2:23; 3:14; 6:2; 8:9-14; 9:14,20; 9:29-32; 10:1-3). The providence of God preserving the Jews through Esther is no more astonishing than that predicted and recorded of the life of Daniel (Dan. 2:20-23). God's providence is unlimited. Nothing "just happens," even in a pagan empire. Esther is always read by the Jews (even today) at the Feast of Purim which was on March 20, A.D. 2000. Among the laity of modern Jews, Esther is the best known of all the books of the

Bible! The book of Esther has provided an impetus for Jewish nationalism and patriotism on a par at least with the books of the Maccabees. It provides an invaluable source for anyone wanting to know the historic background of the Jewish exile in Persia and what impact that exile had on the history recorded in the four Gospels and Acts. Its greatest value is the lesson that God is able to, and will, providentially preserve those who trust Him in the face of overwhelming opposition! Bob Russell, in the Lookout, 8/19/99 wrote about this: "...the story of Esther is a call to perseverance when God is silent. The book proves the truth of the old saying, 'God is in the shadows, keeping watch over his own.'" Russell went on to give 3 important lessons about this "(a) Even when God is silent, he is not indifferent; (b) Even when life seems futile, it is not insignificant; (c) Even when circumstances seem hopeless, they are not insurmountable."

The Persian empire is predicted by Daniel in the great "image" Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream (Dan. 2:39). Daniel interpreted the "image" as Babylon (the head of gold), followed by another, lesser, empire (Persia) followed by one of bronze (Greece) followed a fourth strong as iron (Rome). In Daniel's dream (7:1ff) Babylon is symbolized as the lion; Persia as the bear; Greece as the leopard; and Rome as the great beast with "iron teeth." Daniel also predicts a great struggle between Persia and Greece (Dan. 8)—see my commentary on Daniel, 3rd ed. pub. College Press (it can be accessed on College Press's web page and you really need the 3rd edition). All of these four great world empires were to play significant roles in preparing God's "chosen" people, the Jews, to bring forth from among the Jews, the Messianic kingdom—the church i.e., the "rock" which would break to pieces all the other "kingdoms" Dan. 2:44-45 and would conquer the fourth "beastly" empire which had "prolonged the lives" of its three predecessors. (Dan. 7:11-28). The book of Revelation "plugs right into" Daniel chapter 7, so that Revelation is a very dramatic, highly symbolic, finale of the Roman empire conquered by "saints of God"—the church—see my commentaries on Revelation, Vol. 1 & 2, College press or my latest book at College Press entitled, Approaching the New Millennium, A. D. 2000, An Amillennial Viewpoint. Persia's empire stretched from Asia Minor (now Turkey) on the Aegean Sea to the Indus River (India) and south to Ethiopia. Isaiah ch. 44-45 predicts that God would be with Cyrus the Great (Persian emperor) in his conquest of the world—Isaiah knew Cyrus' name 200 years before Cyrus was born! Persia's downfall was attacking Greece and burning her cities. Alexander the Great was provoked by that to invade the Persian empire and conquer it. Persia's role would be to preserve the Jews in exile, and allow as many as wished to return to Palestine and rebuild the Jewish commonwealth. Persia even supplied a large amount of money to the Jews to rebuild, and protected them against their enemies (later to be called "Samaritans"). You can also read about Persia's most significant role with the Jews in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Through the centuries since the Jewish exile into Assyria and Babylon (today Iraq) and Persia (today Iran), the Jews have had nothing but good things to say about the ancient Persians who freed them from captivity and helped them rebuild until Rome came along in A. D. 70 and tore down Jerusalem, its temple, and the rest of the country and exiled the Jews all over civilization. Many Jews married Persians. Some Jews came back when released by Persia, but many others stayed and died there. There were "Persian" Jews at the temple in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost when Peter preached the first Christian sermon (Acts 2:9 "Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of

Mesopotamia”). Some of them were probably baptized into Christ by Peter and the other apostles that day!

The “feast” or “banquet” (RSV) being given by Ahasuerus (1:3) is called in Biblical Hebrew, *mishetteh*, from a root word meaning “a feast whose main feature is drinking wine.” The number of guests would run into the hundreds. It lasted six months. Romans would later call people from this area of Persia, “Barbarians.” And if you have ever read anything from the “Chronicles of the Barbarians” you will know that this feast could have been quite an orgy of drunkenness and sexual activity. Some of these feasts had as many as 15,000 guests at one time, and cost nearly \$200,000 (2011 U.S. dollars) for each session. Xenophon (434-355 B.C.), a Greek historian, wrote of the Persians, “They drink so much that they cannot stand upright on their feet, and must be carried out.” The purpose of this feast was that Ahasuerus might show the riches of his kingdom and his own majesty for half a year. If Ahasuerus lived today psychiatrists would say he had “an identity problem”—a large one! The main reason for the feast was to create an image for himself. According to Herodotus, Ahasuerus announced at this feast, “As Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius have enlarged the empire, I wish to do the same. I propose to bridge the Hellespont, march through Europe, and fire Athens for burning Sardis and opposing Darius and Artaphernes. By reducing Attica and Greece, the sky will be the only boundary of Persia.” Ahasuerus (Xerxes) was quite a braggart! This was the setting and these were the circumstances surrounding critical decisions made by Ahasuerus. But God overruled this drunken braggart’s plans, and did not allow him to “conquer Europe” but sent him back home to Persia where he eventually gave the order to save the Jews from Haman’s intended genocide. No matter how depraved or stupid the behavior of men and women, all will ultimately be used by God for his purposes and redound to his glory.

On the last day of the “drinking-bout” when the heart of Ahasuerus was “merry with wine” (Heb. *detov*, “at good”) he ordered seven of his most trusted servants to bring the beautiful queen Vashti into the huge hall where all the drunken men (probably along with some women who were of such low class they had not been invited to Vashti’s feast) were carousing so she could “perform” (2:15). The Jewish Talmud thinks the words “with her royal crown” means she was brought in naked. This would fit the behavior of a childish, intemperate, ego-maniac as Ahasuerus is portrayed in the ancient records of Persia. Vashti refused! That was all there was to it. She presumptuously and deliberately disobeyed the emperor’s demand and sent the servants back empty-handed. We can only speculate why. Perhaps her moral standards were high. It is not unlikely that Vashti had adopted the higher moral standards of the Hebrew people around her. The same Hebrew word (*mishetteh*, “drinking bout”) is translated “banquet” for Esther’s affair. Most likely Vashti was highly motivated to retain her social and political status so she would take a chance and defy the drunken king’s demand. Had she allowed herself to be exploited and humiliated like a common prostitute she could never command respect from her peers or the citizens of Persia. Whatever Vashti’s motive, she defied the emperor of the “world” whose word was “law” that could not be changed! Later, when Esther was queen she put on a feast of her own and invited “the women” into the palace for it. There is no evidence that Persian custom demanded

women feast separately from men. Esther later invited Haman and the emperor to her feast (5:3ff).

The Hebrew text indicates Ahasuerus was “very, very angry,” i.e., enraged. Literally translated the Hebrew text would read that the king was “steaming, powerfully, excessively, fiery.” We can imagine the veins standing out on his neck and his face lividly red with rage, perhaps his arms flailing about, his voice shouting. Just moments before he was “feeling really good with wine.” As William Shakespeare said, “What fools we are to put into our mouths that which would take away our brains!” This drunken king lost all sense of propriety toward one who occupied the position of “queen of the realm!” When Vashti rejected the king’s order, the king panicked. The image he had built about himself by this grandiose week-long drunken feast was destroyed with one stroke! It was so unprecedented, the emperor did not know quite what to do—how to act. He knew the queen’s refusal would be known sooner or later throughout the empire. Along with that word flashing throughout Persia must also give an account of how the emperor handled the situation. He hastily convened a meeting with his “wise” men. These are VIPs of the empire (“men next to him—his seven “princes” who “saw the king’s face and sat next to him” 1:13—something like a “cabinet meeting” in the US White House. They were not astrologers or magi. They are men learned in the Persian law and government, familiar with all the precedents set in the past by other emperors. The usual Hebrew word for “law” is torah but the word in the Hebrew text translated “law” (1:13) is dath and is a Persian word (see 3:8) even used for the “laws of drinking” (1:8) and the “laws” or “regulations” for the emperor’s harem (2:12). Apparently there was no “law” to cover this situation so when the emperor asked his advisors they made dath up on the spur of the moment.

Memucan recognized that the politically expedient thing to do was suggest some punishment which would make it appear Vasti’s behavior was a serious matter of public policy, a breach of the royal law, and would concern the welfare of the whole empire. Memucan sounds like a “male chauvinist” who believes women must be kept “under control” or they might try to throw off the domination of the male-establishment! Then the king would have a whole empire full of men who would be “contemptuous and wrathful” against him for starting a “woman’s movement” in the empire. Memucan’s advice to reinforce male domination and exploitation by royal law would hardly remedy the situation created by Vashti’s refusal to obey her husband’s desire to “show her off” (probably naked or half-naked) and humiliate her before an auditorium of drunken warriors. Memucan feared Vashti’s defiance would cause more of a stir among the men of the empire than among the women. Abigail Adams, wife of John Adams (2nd U.S. President), took her President-husband to task through her letters for not writing into the U.S. Constitution that women were politically the equals of men and should have a vote or representation in what went into the Constitution. It is amazing, but true, that women in many societies (including some very sophisticated societies) are still treated almost like they are “property” of their husbands. Even in America some boys grow up to be chauvinistic bullies toward the women they marry. They have probably had fathers for grown-men-models who showed their sons when they were boys that the way to assert masculinity is to exploit and tyrannize women. The only

real and lasting way a man may command the respect and devotion of a woman is to love her only with all his heart and actions. Memucan may have had a maiden from his own family in mind when he suggested Vashti be “deposed” and a new queen chosen! Memucan advised Ahasuerus to put his decision into “a law of the Medes and Persians which could not be changed” (Est. 1:19; Dan. 6:8,12,15) to protect himself lest Vashti be deposed and reinstated and then have power to take off Memucan’s head!

Jewish rabbis in the Midrash (traditions in the form of rabbinical commentaries on the OT, earliest copies A. D. 100-200) say that Xerxes (Ahasuerus) was “utterly devoid of sense in so decreeing, nay, more, he made himself a laughing-stock.” With our hindsight today (2500 years after the event) we would probably agree with that evaluation! There was no need for such a “law” to be decreed. The consternation of Memucan was probably feigned. The women of Persia would not be able to violently overthrow the government or even to revolutionize the cultural status-quo because of Vashti’s disobedience. This royal law protected the myth of male superiority about as much as female equality could be attained in America by an “equal rights amendment” to the U.S. Constitution. All the thousands of laws we have in the U.S. about “civil rights” are not, and cannot be enforced everywhere. Actually it is apparent just from certain incidents in the book of Esther that wives were held in considerable esteem by their husbands (see 5:10; 5:13; 7:1-2). Xerxes could neither insure his own male superiority nor that of the men of his empire by passing a law. How could such a law be enforced in every single place in the vast empire where men and women came together? Vashti already proved that in spite of all Xerxes’ power and laws he could not force her to prostitute her womanhood if she did not want to do so! But Memucan’s advice pleased the inebriated emperor and his princes. Don’t think for a moment that ancient Persia is the only place and time in the world where “lawmakers” are inebriated when “laws” are decreed or executed! It happens in America all the way from the halls of Congress to the White House, to the Supreme Court, to the state, county, and local levels! Some glad day God, the judge of all the earth, will dispense his divine justice—and it may not wait until the end of the world!

The “precedent-setting” decree was sent out to the whole empire. Since there were people of different languages and dialects, the decree was written in as many different languages as were necessary. The practice of the Persians to address proclamations in different languages is illustrated by the bilingual and trilingual inscriptions on the Behistun Rock discovered in 1835 by Sir Henry Rawlinson, a British army officer, 200 miles n.e. of Babylon. The “rock” rises 1700 ft. out of the earth, and on the face of this rock, 400 ft. above the road, is an inscription engraved, 516 B.C. by order of Darius, king of Persia. It is a long account of the conquests of Darius in Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian languages. The Behistun Rock became the key that unlocked to the world the vast treasures of ancient Babylonian literature. Vashti may have refused the emperor’s order simply to show him “a thing or two” about the queen’s authority. Whatever her reason, we have no record of what eventually happened to Vashti. So far as we know she was never given an opportunity to speak on her own behalf or argue her reasons for disobeying the king’s order. Nor does the record show anyone else speaking on her

behalf. Her fate was decided according to the whim of an egotistical and drunken emperor. Jewish tradition believes she was executed—probably beheaded. The history of those times and those cultures would tend to substantiate that tradition. Ahasuerus “cut off his nose to spite his face.” His hand was forced and he executed or banished the one closest to him and now he is alone with himself. He is in desperate need of a wise and good consort.

Try these for the “five lessons” (a) Pride and arrogance feeds on the exploitation of others; (b) Drunkenness and intemperance causes people to disregard decency and sacrifice personal integrity; (c) No woman, not even a pagan one, likes to be treated as a mere object or “thing” to satisfy male gratification and ego; (d) the proper functioning of members of a household cannot be decreed or enforced through civil legislation—it must be established through morality and love; (e) Almighty God uses the consequences of men’s evil deeds to carry out His plan of redemption for the world—Esther became a queen “for such a time” as that—to save the Jewish nation from genocide.

Esther 2:1-23

Xerxes (Ahasureus) returned in late 480 B.C. from a disastrous military expedition to the Greek mainland. This was 3 long years after he had, in a drunken rage, humiliated and disposed of Vashti. His anger toward her “had abated” because it had been swallowed up in his anger against the Greeks. After humiliating Vashti, he took off for Greece, but was himself humiliated in disastrous defeat. He was slightly less arrogant now than he had been in that drunken party. He was back at the palace and the places so familiar which he associated with his erstwhile beautiful queen Vashti. Perhaps his conscience was bothering him (Rom. 2:12-16) about what he had done to her. Even though he had a harem of women, he had no “special” female “queen” in whom he could confide his most intimate thoughts. And every man needs the best woman he can find for that! In the Jewish haggadah portion of the Midrash, tradition says that before Esther was made queen, Xerxes would compare women who came before him with a statue of Vashti that stood near his bed. The Talmud says that after his marriage to Esther the statue was replaced by one of Esther.

The servants suggesting he select a new queen were probably women (of the harem or the royal court) because the Hebrew noun is feminine. These women could probably visualize what the atmosphere in the palace was going to be like now that the “spoiled-brat” of a king was back, without a “queen” and brooding over what he had done to Vashti. The servants suggested something that would be certain to get the king out of the “gloomies.” They encourage him to have a “beauty contest” to find a new queen. They suggest elaborate procedures to find the “fairest of the fair.” No possible candidate in his immense empire should be overlooked. Ancient kings and emperors had many “wives and concubines” (1 Kings 7:8). The emperor liked this idea. He could once again “show-off” to his subjects just how powerful he was and indulge himself in fantasizing all at the same time.

Enter Mordecai! The book of Esther might well have been called the Book of Mordecai. He is a star all the way through the book just as much as his young niece. And, in fact, the book ends extolling the fame of Mordecai. In 2 Maccabees 15:36, the feast of Purim is called, The Feast of Mordecai and his name is held in reverence in rabbinical literature. The name Mordecai seems to be derived from Marduk, chief deity of Babylon and Persia. Marduk means “be bold and audacious in acts of rebellion; run strenuously, attack.” Mordecai was probably born down in Persia rather than Palestine. Kish, a Benjaminite, was Mordecai’s great-grandfather (this “Kish” is not King Saul’s father since Saul reigned 1050-1010 B.C. and Mordecai lived 600 years after Saul ca. 485 B.C.) . Mordecai was compassionate toward all people (even the king who was keeping his people in captivity 2:21ff). When his uncle and aunt died, they left a beautiful young daughter completely orphaned. Mordecai went beyond the letter of the Mosaic law (Ex. 22:22) about not afflicting “orphans”—he kept the spirit of the law as proclaimed by Isaiah (1:17) defending the fatherless by taking Esther (his cousin) into his home as one of his children. Mordecai had no way of knowing when he first took Esther into his home

that someday his association with Esther would promote him to high office and fame. But God who rewards the righteous knew! Yes, even Mordecai had come to Persia “for such a time as this.” The orphaned girl had been named Hadassah by her parents which means myrtle in Hebrew. The myrtle is a large evergreen shrub with fragrant flowers and spicy-sweet scented leaves. The word hadassah came to mean beautiful sweetness. It has often been used as a symbol of beauty and sweetness (Isa. 41:19; 55:13; Zech. 1:7-10). It was one of the trees used in the Feast of Tabernacles (Succoth, or “Feast of Booths”) (Neh. 8:15). The Hebrew text, yephath to’ar vetovath mare eh translated means “beautiful in form, in personality and very desirable.”

There were undoubtedly 100's of young women from which the king could choose a queen. Some of them may have been thrilled at the opportunity. Esther was “taken.” Did she volunteer? Doubtful since she was a Jewess! Jewish tradition said Mordecai tried to hide her from the emperor’s “searchers.” Probably many of these young women would be retained in the emperor’s “harem” whether they became queen or not. Polygamy in the Bible can be traced to Lamech (Gen. 4:19,23)—before Noah. Polygamy was probably the result of conflicts (i.e., wars) between “families or tribes” from the earliest pre-Flood days. In such “conflicts” the male populations would be decreased and the females (wives and daughters—and small sons) would have to be either slaughtered on a massive scale (which sometimes happened) or the “left-overs” (women and children) of a war would have to be cared for by the victors! Thus “extended” families by polygamy came into existence. Some believe the agrarian (farming-sheepherding) life-style demanded large families, which polygamy would provide. However polygamy occurred, God never intended men or women to be polygamous or promiscuous (Matt. 19:3-9)! It evidently started all over with the earliest descendants of Noah and his wife. Remember Solomon’s “harem” of 1000! Because of the “hardness” of man’s heart, God permitted polygamy probably to protect females who would be slain, enslaved, or abandoned to die without some kind of protection and security. Polygamy, bigamy and sexual promiscuity have always brought jealousy, intrigue, ruination, financial disaster, slavery, abuse, homicide, and moral guilt. Esther had to be “taken” or probably slain on the spot! She had no other alternatives. When she was finally called in to emperor’s presence she did not offer to reveal her ethnic roots. And, of course, the people of the “Middle East” were all related through Abraham and his “sons” Isaac and Ishmael—they looked very much alike and Esther, having been born down in Persia, knew the language as well, or maybe better than, Hebrew. She “asked” of the emperor “nothing except what Hegai the king’s eunuch...advised.” The others, probably each, had a “shopping list” when it came their turn. There was clearly malicious prejudice against the Jews by some segments of Persian society (3:5-6; 5:13; 6:13; 8:11). The Jews had suffered this animosity when they were in Egypt and from the Canaanites, and the Babylonians (Dan. 6:1-5). They continued to suffer from racial prejudice from the Samaritans when some left Persia to rebuild Jerusalem. The Seleucids (Syrians 331-165 B.C.) attempted to exterminate the Jews with a holocaust in the days of the Maccabees. Jews suffered a Roman holocaust A.D. 66-70. Jews have suffered some form of severe persecution from segments of every nation where they have settled e.g., Nazi Germany, Communist USSR, and Islamic nationalities. There is no ethical fault in Esther not revealing, and Mordecai advising her not to reveal, that she was a

Jewess. It did not cause any suffering or loss for her or the rest of the Jews. When Rahab did not betray the Hebrew spies there was no condemnation from God's word (in fact Rahab is listed in "Faith's Hall of Fame" Heb. 11); Samuel withheld information from Saul at the direction of the Lord (1 Sam. 16:1ff); Elisha withheld information from Israel's enemies (2 Kings 6:19ff); The Lord himself was part to military deception in the assault against Ai by Joshua (Josh. 8:18); Jesus advised concealment of truth from those who have no right to know (Matt. 7:6). Jesus himself would not speak to Herod when questioned. Mordecai knew that the truth about Esther's ethnic origins would only bring suffering (perhaps even death) to her and the Jewish people if such information were divulged at this point in time.

After 12 month's "probationary period" Esther went into the king "in the evening" (2:14). The next morning, Esther came back "to the second harem." Those who "went in" and stayed the night with the king, came back to the "second" house because they were no longer virgins. They had to keep the "virgins" separated from the "non-virgins" until the king made his decision about which one would be "queen." It is difficult to assume anything else except that the "virgin" Esther who went in for one night to the king's chambers, was called in for sexual intercourse with the king. Once a maiden had been granted her night with the emperor, she was never permitted to be in his royal chambers or presence unless the emperor called for her by name. If a young maiden was not chosen as queen, she returned to the harem of concubines for the rest of her life. They were virtual prisoners. They would never be allowed to return to the world outside the palace and marry after consorting with the emperor for that would be degrading to the sovereignty and glory of the emperor. This was the way life was in the ancient days of Esther! It is still that way in some Middle-East, African and even Indian societies today! Again, Esther had only two choices—reject the king's summons for his purposes and die, or submit and make the best of it. That sounds like "situation ethics." But we must remember that "because of the hardness of men's hearts" God sometimes worked out his plan of redemption even in those "hardened" circumstances! Either God uses the evil of some to serve his purposes in redemption, or God destroys the whole of mankind again as he did in the days of Noah. God must maintain his omnipotent sovereignty That is one of the fundamental lessons of books like 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, Ezra, Esther, Nehemiah, Isaiah, Daniel, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Revelation, etc.

Esther may have refused the "cosmetic-make-over" offered in hopes that she might be rejected as "permanent" resident ("queen") of the palace! It may simply have been her modesty. It may have been some Jewish religious scruple. Whatever the reason, Esther's beauty was so radiant and her personality so pleasant, she was admired by anyone who simply looked at her as she was. Bob Russell in the Lookout of 8/22/1999 says God gave Esther "extraordinary" gifts of beauty and soul so he could use her for "such a time" as that! God uses lots of "ordinary" people who do not seem to have "extraordinary" gifts. But God also uses those who have exceptional talents or makeup. Remember David's courage and accuracy with a sling. God gave Solomon extraordinary wisdom. The apostle Paul had what would be called an impressive education (even in the Greek classics) and became the apostle to the Gentiles. Russell says, "Like wealth, brilliance, athletic,

or artistic talents, an attractive appearance can become a source of temptation and pride. But if a handsome or beautiful person is fully devoted to God, God can use his or her impressive appearance to open doors and influence others.” When one considers the circumstances under which Esther was “taken” into a cultural milieu which was contrary to everything she had been taught from the Torah, it is nothing short of amazing that she could be so self-sacrificing without exhibiting some animosity toward the king and her situation. No righteous Jewish girl could be blasé about what Esther had to do. She had no way of knowing whether she would become “Queen” of Persia or simply another of 100's of girls “incarcerated” into a life of concubinage. We do not know how old Esther was, but we can establish fairly accurately that Xerxes was about 40 years of age at this point. Xerxes was “smitten” with Esther’s unspoiled, unadorned, un-made-up beauty and her innocent, yet obvious charm and wholesomeness of character. It was love at first “evening.”

Xerxes set the royal crown upon Esther’s head and made her queen in the place of Vashti. He named the day she became queen “Esther’s feast” (i.e., “Star’s mishetteh”). This would be a Persian “holiday” so when the Persian empire vanished under Alexander the Great, it was probably forgotten and no longer observed by the Persians. However, the Jews later established the Fast of Hadassah (Esther) and observe it on the 13th of Adar (sometime in February or March according to the moon) and followed it with the Feast of Purim on the 14th and 15th of Adar. The emperor felt magnanimous—he was enjoying the great pleasure of having acquired the most beautiful and personable (and probably wisest) woman in the empire for his queen. He gave a great banquet for all his princes and servants and granted a remission of taxes to the provinces, and gave gifts with royal liberality (I doubt that the taxes were remitted for any long period of time!). Such actions gave Xerxes an opportunity to build up his own image and cement national and international political relations. It still goes on today. Potentates and politicians still curry the favor of constituents with “gifts.” International relations are still built, not on truth and honesty, but on “loans” and “foreign aid.” Reading about Xerxes’ life, one would almost have to assume his motive was more ulterior than magnanimous. He certainly could build up his image. And, after all, most anyone can be “generous” with other people’s (tax-payers) money.

When Esther became queen, Mordecai, the “Queen’s” uncle, probably sat at the “gate” leading into the immediate court of the palace to hear anything he could about his niece Esther, and hear of any other serious and useful information he might hear from those who went in and out of the gate—foreigners, citizens, etc. Bigthan and Teresh, who “guarded the king’s threshold” were plotting, for some reason or another (maybe angry that the king had made a Jewess “Queen”) to “lay hands on the king” probably to murder him. They may have been just two in a much wider conspiracy to throw off the throne this spoiled brat of a king who had let the Greeks defeat him. Conspiracies within the structure of Persian politics were common occurrences. Xerxes was eventually assassinated by Artabanus, the captain of the guard, and Aspamitras, a chamberlain. “Threshold” is hassaph in Hebrew. Whether Mordecai himself was near the “threshold” heard them plotting or whether someone else told him we do not know. (Josephus says that a Jewish

slave of the palace came to Mordecai with a report of the conspiracy), However he obtained the information he told it to his niece, Esther, the Queen; Esther told the King, Xerxes in the name of Mordecai (i.e., giving Mordecai the credit). When the king investigated the matter and found it to be true, both men were “hanged on the gallows.” Archaeological inscriptions have been found depicting people of the Mesopotamian civilizations impaling victims on sharpened posts about as high as a “cross” would be. These two probably died this way. Mordecai, we’ve already established was a humane and compassionate person—taking into his own home his niece and rearing her. He may have had some genuine compassion for this emperor who had shown favor to his niece. Unquestionably he would have Esther’s best interests at heart so he concluded if they were going to assassinate the king, they would probably kill Esther, too. Further, now that Esther was Queen, it would be a double tragedy to have his niece killed and also one who could be so helpful to the many thousands of Jews living in Persia.

So the king had this very serious event recorded in the official records giving credit to Mordecai the Jew for saving the Persian emperor’s life. Mordecai’s name would be officially remembered as long as the Persian empire existed (Persia fell to Alexander the Great about 150 years, more or less, afterward). Whenever a king or emperor wanted to be reminded of past events they would have these official chronicles read to them. How the emperor came upon information that he was about to be assassinated was very important information, so he would want to read over and over how he came to know so he might take measures to be protected by anyone especially loyal toward him. The king knew he could trust Mordecai and Esther. This loyalty would play a crucial part in the survival of Mordecai, Esther and the whole Jewish community (6:1ff).

We may learn these lessons from chapter two: (a) The male ego is insatiable and feeds on sexual promiscuity if unchecked by the love of God and his law; (b) God blesses those who care for orphans; (c) It is not unethical to withhold information, the revealing of which would do unjust harm to some benefit no one; (d) Some people (e.g., Esther & Mordecai) are willing to make almost unbelievable personal sacrifices for what they think may benefit others; (e) Plotting violence on another’s person usually returns in violence to the plotter.

ESTHER 3:1-15

The name Haman in Hebrew means “violent one,” or “riotous one.” Some think it means in Persian, “well disposed.” Haman was promoted by Ahaserus (Xerxes) the king above all hassarim (“princes”). Today he would be “Prime Minister.” He became second in “command” in all Persia. In ancient times a man thus promoted would receive the profoundest homage and reverence from all citizens. But there was one “citizen” (a Jewish exile) who would NOT show obeisance to Haman—he wouldn’t bow down when Haman passed by. All the other people (perhaps including some Jews) who sat at the “gate” to the king’s palace bowed when Haman walked by. Why didn’t Mordecai? Jewish tradition in the Midrash says that Haman wore an image of an idol on his clothing; others conjecture Haman may have become a “high priest” of Persia and felt entitled to call himself a “god” like other high ranking authorities of ancient Mesopotamian cultures (Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, Gaius Caesar {Caligula}, etal.). Clearly, a righteous and law-keeping Jew could not bow down before an “image” or any man who called himself a “god.” Mordecai’s contemporaries at the “gate” kept badgering him for some reason for his refusal to do obeisance to Haman. Mordecai’s answer was simply, “I am a Jew.” The other “gate-sitters” lost no time in telling Haman about Mordecai’s behavior and excuse. It is not wrong in our society to show “respect” for those in places of authority so long as they do not assume the prerogatives of a “god.” Even the NT teaches us that (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-14; Hebrews 13:7, 17). Paul and Peter wrote those instructions when Rome was ruled by some very corrupt rulers. But, of course, no Christian should ever make a human being or an image into a “god.” When Roman emperors insisted they be worshiped as “gods” many Christians refused and lost their lives to wild beasts in Roman arenas.

Mordecai had done nothing to indicate he was planning to overthrow the government. He had done nothing to indicate he would do any personal harm to Haman. Probably if Haman had told him to do something reasonable and that would not violate his Jewish scruples against idolatry, Mordecai would have obeyed Haman. He clearly had demonstrated his affinity for Xerxes by informing him of a plot to kill him. His fellow “gate-sitters” should not have informed Haman of Mordecai’s harmless resistance to pagan protocol. It was none of their business. Mordecai was not harming them or their country. Yes! I am a firm believer that Christians should report on neighbors or any other citizens or non-citizens who are breaking laws that might endanger someone else’s life, property or liberty (those are our unalienable rights). No government or society has the authorization to deny those three things to its citizens. However, we have no right or reason to go to authorities accusing as a criminal someone who says or writes that he/she disagrees with our ideas, opinions, reasoning, feelings, etc. Only when others overtly, physically, disobey law and order that would violate our “unalienable rights” should they be reported.

Apparently Haman was not aware of Mordecai’s impertinence until told by

the other gate-sitters. When Haman saw it for himself, he was enraged (the Hebrew word *chemah* means, “infuriated, on fire, inflamed, burning with anger.”). It is the same word used to describe Nebuchadnezzar’s anger (Dan. 3:13,19) when the Hebrews would not bow down and worship his giant image on the Plain of Dura. Haman would not be satisfied, however, by taking out his anger on just one Jew. He wanted every Jew in the empire of Persia to die because Mordecai refused to bow down before him. Haman figured if Mordecai’s “excuse” for his irreverence was that he “was a Jew,” then all the other Jews in the Persian empire (probably millions) would “puncture” his ego and pride by refusing to bow also. Jewish commentators see anti-Semitism as Haman’s basic motive rather than wounded pride. But I doubt that it was purely racial. Had it been purely racial Haman would have found ways to persecute the Jews before this. Of course, there is racism in America! But “racism” is not disagreeing with or disliking the opinions and illicit behavior of any American regardless of his/her race. Racism is despising someone exclusively because of their racial origins. Racism is found in every country of the world. There are some places (and some of them are in America!) where Caucasians (“white-skinned-people”) are discriminated against simply because they are Caucasian. No Christian should ever be guilty of “racism.” After all, we are all ultimately related to Adam and Eve—or Noah and his 3 sons and their wives. In the kingdom of God, the church, there must be no discriminations against people regardless of their race, economic status, educational status, social status, or gender, so long as they believe in Jesus Christ and follow his commandments.

Haman chose the month of Nisan (Jewish month of April—Passover month—the “first” month in the Jewish calendar) in which to make his plans to commit genocide. The word *Pur* is borrowed into the Hebrew language from one of the Mesopotamian languages and probably means “ivory or stone dice” by which these ancient people “cast lots” to determine seasons, behaviors, victory or defeat in duels and in war, etc. When he cast lots they told him he should do the act in the month of Adar (the 12th month) which would be February/March. That would mean his “lots” told him to take a whole year for the entire empire to get ready to carry out his plans. He then went to the emperor Xerxes with a bold-faced lie that the Jews throughout Persia were disobeying the laws of the empire. It sounded like a revolt. The Persian empire was vast, as we have already pointed out. Haman is trying to convince the king to slay about 3,000,000 or more Jews dispersed throughout the Persian empire. The magnitude of Haman’s proposed atrocity is almost incredible when it is realized that Haman is planning to eradicate a whole race of people—all because his pride has been wounded by one man! Haman’s words, “they are all over the place,” is an attempt to frighten the king into thinking of a world-wide conspiracy to revolt against the Persian empire. Next, Haman emphasizes how “different” the Jews were from other people. Of course they were different—but only different in how they practiced their religion. Other than that there was no difference between the Jews and the Persians. Jews put their trousers on one leg at a time just like the Persians. They were born, got married, worked, and died just like Persians. The Jews were, in fact, much better “citizens” of Persia than some of the Persians! It was Persians who planned to assassinate the king—it was a Jew who warned the king about it. The Jews had the divine revelation of Almighty God in human language. They had laws and commandments that made their morals much higher than those of heathen peoples. Their dietary laws sometimes seemed

odd or repulsive to the heathen, but that difference posed no threat to the Persians. Jews did not worship idols and that was no threat to anything but the religious fellowship between Jews and heathen—otherwise Jews had to associate with the heathen in everyday life.

Jews were “law-abiding” exiles in the lands where they found themselves. Many Jews made great contributions in politics, the sciences, the arts and finance in every country where they dwelt (e.g., Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah). They were told to do this by their prophets before they were taken into exile (Jeremiah 29:5-7). The ancient rabbis interpreted Jeremiah’s prophecy to mean, “The law of the country in which you live is binding” (with the exception of idolatry and anything that might be connected to idolatry). Nehemiah was so faithful to his Persian overlords they made him “cupbearer” which means he tasted all the wine and food before the king drank and ate to make sure it was not poisoned. He was so well trusted he was allowed to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild its walls at Persian government expense, to return to Persia, and then to return to Judea again to become governor of that province in the name of the king of Persia. It is not profitable to any one to disobey their country’s laws (unless those laws disobey the laws of God). Crime of all kinds (even shoplifting and so-called innocent vandalism) costs the taxpayers billions of dollars each year in America alone and untold tears of grief. In a book titled, *Red On Black*, an American black man tells of his “captivity” in the USSR from 1930s to 1970s. He was lured there by promises of a high-paying job in the automobile industry because he was one of Henry Ford’s most experienced assembly-line workers. When he got there the job he expected was never offered. He was spied on constantly by neighbors and the KGB, and not allowed to leave the country until finally, 40 years later he accomplished his release. All his time there he was strictly obedient to Russian law and order. What else could he do? Disobey and be imprisoned in Siberia or executed!

Haman’s rage was so all-consuming he is willing to pay a tremendous bribe to the emperor. His offer is 10,000 talents of silver. This is equivalent to approximately \$10,000,000 in U.S. currency. Herodotus estimated the sum equal to the annual revenue in silver of the whole Persian empire. Haman’s offer had to be tempting. Xerxes’ recent military fiasco in Greece had drained the Persian royal treasury. The immediate response of Xerxes to the request of Haman, without any royal questions or investigations into the ethics or practicality of such genocide, was to give Haman his signet ring which allowed Haman to do what he asked with full sanction and authority of the imperial crown. Xerxes response certainly reinforces the characterization of history that he was an immature, quick-tempered, vacillating, greedy ruler. “Money talks!” is the shibboleth (“catch-word”) of politics. In the bastions of modern politics, money almost always takes precedence over truth. Bribery is one of the fundamental rules of political strategy and tactics. Our U.S. government (both “parties”) has almost come to the place where it is “run” by lobbyists and their “soft-money” (bribery). And most politicians think it is alright—just don’t get caught! It was not that way with America’s founding fathers. George Washington took no salary for his public service (only necessary military expenses) either as Commanding General or President. Many founding fathers forfeited their “fortunes, their reputations and their lives” to make this a free republic. There may

still be a few “honest politicians” but the American public as a whole has become extremely pessimistic about politicians. Xerxes’ statement to Haman, “The silver is given to you, and the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you” is one of those famous political “spins” we’ve heard in America so many times through the years. Xerxes is leaving himself some “wiggle-room” as we’ve heard about current political underhandedness in America. “Not to worry” though, Haman, because he can anticipate the plunder he will take from the 3 million Jews he will kill will recoup his bribe to the king and more (like the Nazis with the Jews in the 1930s & 40s).

The king’s edict was sent out to the ends of the empire by a mail system which was very efficient (maybe even more efficient than most in Europe today and even sometimes in America!). The extreme limits of the empire could be reached in one week! Persian mail-carriers were mounted on fast horses and had relay stations every 14 miles, much like the “pony express” in America in the 1800s. Such a decree would create consternation and in some places utter chaos. There is an ancient decree by Mithridates, king of Pontus in Asia Minor (ca. 60 B.C.) sometimes cited as a parallel to this shocking decree of Xerxes: Mithridates “sent a secret order to all the satraps (princes) and the mayors of cities that they should within the space of thirty days fall upon the resident Romans and Italians, upon their wives and children and upon all the freemen of Italian origin, kill them and take their goods as possessions. When the appointed day came, there was wailing and lamentation in the whole of Asia (Minor).” The Persian empire (including Jews in all the provinces) had from nine to eleven months of warning of the massacre that was to come. Haman had decided action was to begin on the 13th day of the 12th month (Adar—Feb/Mar). Modern Jews keep 15 days of Adar in connection with the Feast of Purim; they make the 13th a fast to commemorate the fast of Esther (4:16) and they keep the feast itself on the 14th and 15th. King Xerxes (Ahasuerus), as we’ve said before, is “wagging-the-dog” here! His conquest of Greece turned into a farce ending with a humiliating defeat (in spite of his huge naval fleet and army). He has to prove to his subjects that he is “macho-man”—he has power. He is getting seriously flawed counsel from Haman his “Commander of the Joint Chiefs” here! He does not know yet, that his beautiful and intelligent “Queen” is a Jew! He has put a “spin” on who is going to do the dastardly deed by telling Haman, “...do with them as seems good to you.” If Haman’s plan seems successful with the Persian people, Xerxes will take the credit—if it fails, Haman will get the blame. That’s life in the high atmosphere of ruling politicians! Neither Haman nor Xerxes could know the cleverness and courage of Esther.

Please read Romans 1:18-32 out loud in class! If you ever have an opportunity, read *Chronicles of the Barbarians*, edited by David Willis McCullough, firsthand accounts of pillage and conquest from the ancient world to the fall of Constantinople, pub. History Book Club, NY, NY. The Roman civilization of the time of the apostles was “child’s play” compared to the Goths, Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Vikings, Huns, Genghis Khan, Mongols, Tartars, and Tamerlane. Another book to read which is a current “best seller” is *The Rape of Nanking* concerning the Japanese invasion of China in the early 1930’s. Of course, most older people today know about the Jewish “holocaust” perpetrated by the Nazis under Adolph Hitler and his gang of thugs. There was the Mau Mau uprising

followed by Idi Amin's slaughter in Africa. Then even more modern are the "Killing Fields" of Cambodia under the direction of Pol Pot. Cortez and other Spanish conquistadors in Mexico is one story of rape and pillage after another. It is possible, and it has been done in almost every generation and nation. Treatment of the American Indians by some of the early European settlers was atrocious and American Indians were not merciful in their tribal wars and resistance to settlers. Man's inhumanity to man goes on all the time, on small scales and large ones. Without the rebirth of the image of God in the human mind and heart, human beings are capable of, and do, behave worse than animals (2 Pet. 2:12). That is why it is imperative to "preach, teach, and print the Gospel to every nation." The Gospel is the ONLY antidote to inhumanity! Sin cannot be fixed by money, entertainment, or force.

We may learn from this chapter: (a) Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely; (b) Racial or cultural distinction is often used as rationalizations for the real motives behind hatred and persecution which are pride and greed; (c) Some people will compromise even the most fundamental standards of humaneness for a bribe; (d) When people refuse to have the One True God in their knowledge they will eventually worship themselves as "gods" and they inevitably harden their own consciences so that they can order millions to be murdered and sit down and celebrate it.

ESTHER 4:1-17

The tearing or rending of clothing, putting on sackcloth and throwing of ashes on the head were all actual, though symbolic, rites practiced by Jews and other Semitic peoples (still practiced in some Mid-East countries) expressing grief and contrition. The English word “sack” is probably derived from the Hebrew word saq, to the Greek word sakkos, to the Latin word saccus. All the words, saq, sakkos, saccus, and sack mean approximately the same thing —“a bag made of rough thread.” The Hebrew “sack cloth” or saq was a coarse dark cloth, usually made of goat’s hair. It was worn by mourners (2 Sam. 3:31; 2 Kings 19:1-2), often by prophets to symbolize the actions they sought from their audiences—sorrow and repentance for sins (e.g., Isa. 20:2; Rev. 11:3). Some think the saq was much like a loin cloth; others think it was like a burlap sack with openings for the arms and neck. Sometimes the garment was worn next to the skin (John 3:6; 1 Kings 21:27; 2 Kings 6:30; Job 16:15; Isa. 31:11), but it was usually worn over another garment. Ashes were sprinkled over the person sitting among the ashes and wearing “sack cloth” as a sign of mourning (2 Sam. 13:19; Job. 2:8; Jer. 6:26). Mordecai, having donned the symbolic dress of deep grief, went out into the middle of the capital of the empire and began venting his feelings in loud, doleful, wailing which was customary in those cultures. The Hebrew word marah is translated “bitter” and is the same word used by Naomi when she said, “Do not call me Naomi, call me Mara (Ruth 1:20-21). The rule that nothing mournful or of evil portent was to pass through the palace gates and into the presence of the king was another of the customs of the ancient Middle-East. Another interesting side-light of this event is the Hebrew word here translated “fasting.” The word tzum is used here in Esther 4:3, and means “to abstain.” The word tzum is not used in the OT before the book of Judges. Another Hebrew word is used for “fast” in the first 6 books of the OT—it is ‘innah, and means, “to afflict the soul.” The original commandment in Lev. 16:29 was for the Israelite to “afflict the soul” which did not necessarily mean to abstain from anything. Jesus made drastic revisions to traditional practices of fasting (Matt. 6:16-18). “Afflicting the soul” (i.e., “fasting”) always has to do with the human need for meditation and intercession before God in times of stress, sorrow and repentance. Jesus said, “When you fast....” (Matt. 6:16ff). He did not say we had to fast as Christians—although it might be a good practice if we don’t let it become a “show of religiosity” like the Pharisees made it! Even the part of “abstaining” from food, etc., might be helpful while Christians meditate on their spiritual condition and commune with God about it! Really communicating with God (rather than pretending to) requires almost total solitude, away from all distractions, or it doesn’t get done! Maybe 21st century Christians need to “fast” from T.V.!

The Hebrew grammar represents Esther as writhing, twisting and trembling in pain. She was more than curious about Mordecai’s behavior. Like any loving daughter, Esther hurt when her “foster” father was hurting. She had the power to help him and wanted to know what it was all about. She sent him clean and non “sack-cloth” clothing. He sent the Queen’s servants back with the clothing which probably came from the royal clothes-closet, kept the sack-cloth on, and

continued wailing. Esther sent Hathach, a royal servant of high standing and he was to report back to Esther the “why and wherefore” of Mordecai’s public display of grief. Haman and Xerxes would not have confided their planned atrocity to a woman, even if she was the queen and even if they didn’t know about her Jewishness. Mordecai wanted to be sure to get Esther’s UNDIVIDED attention before he “spilled the beans” about Haman’s plot to massacre the Jewish race in Persia. He wanted to make sure she did not think he was exaggerating the seriousness of his mourning. He wanted to be certain she would believe his story. After all, a naive young woman, even as smart as she was, would not believe Haman had the king’s sanction on such a thing as genocide! Once he had her persuaded he was very serious about the matter, he got the whole story to her.

Esther had to trust Hathach! She could not go out of the palace herself and speak with Mordecai because anywhere Mordecai could go would be too public for them to discuss matters. She had to send Hathach, who had probably been assigned to be the “Queen’s” most trusted servant. He had a “high position.” He would not want to lose his “standing” with Esther, and if he was well-acquainted with Esther’s goodness and integrity he knew she would not betray him to anyone for bringing a message from her “uncle-father” Mordecai. He could go into her “private chambers” as her “right-hand-man” and read her the message in seclusion. The book of Proverbs says a lot about “keeping-one’s-mouth-shut” at the proper time. Esther probably knew about the “wise-sayings of Solomon.”

Esther’s first reaction was to remind Mordecai of the widely known law of the Persian monarchs about approaching his presence without being given the emperor’s personal permission to do so. It was not only widely known, but also widely respected! The law was that “whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king...who is not called...he (shall) be put to death, except those to whom the king shall hold out the golden scepter.” This was to protect the king from assassination; and to protect him from every “Tom, Dick, and Harry” of his empire who might have some trivial or inane “axe to grind.” Whatever the reason for the law, it certainly inspired fear of approaching the monarch unless bidden by the monarch himself to do so. Esther’s immediate concern was fear for her life. It is not until Mordecai’s sharp rebuke that Esther begins to consider the consequences of opting for her personal safety. Esther is human, Mordecai is human. They are ordinary people caught up in the struggle between good and evil, courage and cowardice, on a catastrophic scale (planned genocide). Esther’s first reaction was self-preservation. Perhaps she thought the problem would go away in time; maybe she thought, even after Mordecai’s unrelenting wailing that he was simply wrong about the whole thing; perhaps she rationalized that she could be of more help to her Jewish people by staying alive as the Queen rather than by being a martyr. Few human beings, your author included, given plenty of time to think about an extremely dangerous and almost inevitably death-reaping endeavor, will have the daring to immediately “jump right into it.” Having been in the U.S. Navy under fire in the Korean War, I know that the less time you have to think about what is going on and is going to take place, the more apt you are to react automatically (as you have been trained to do). It is good to think about what one would do under the same circumstances Esther faced! We should never be so arrogant as to say, “It couldn’t

happen here!” How would you react?

Mordecai immediately sent back a message to Esther that would bring her “face to face” with reality! He reminded her that since she was a Jew too, and that her ethnic origin was now known (4:8), she need not think she will escape the massacre just because she lives in the palace. In fact, once it is known by the emperor and Haman that she is a Jewess and that she concealed this fact while being chosen as Vashti’s successor, Esther might be one of the first to be slain! There was nothing “base” about Mordecai’s warning. It was reality! He was looking out for her safety as well as the safety of all the other Jews. Mordecai, having heard the secret planning of Haman and Xerxes, could have kept quiet, taken what family he had left, and tried to escape, leaving Esther to fend for herself. But Mordecai is no coward! He was not afraid to disobey Haman’s orders! Fear is probably more motivating than patriotism when “the chips are down.” C. S. Lewis wrote in his book, *The Problem of Pain*, p. 97, “It is hardly complimentary to God that we should choose Him as an alternative to Hell: yet even this He accepts. The creature’s illusion of self-sufficiency must, for the creature’s sake, be shattered: and by trouble or fear of trouble on earth, by crude fear of the eternal flames, God shatters it ‘unmindful of His glory’s diminution.’” Both David, in the Psalms, and Solomon, in the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, (along with many prophets and even Jesus in the Gospels) write that The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. On the other hand, Paul writes that “the love of Christ constrains us...” 2 Cor. 5:14

Mordecai believes it is divine providence that has placed his adopted daughter in the position of Queen of Persia for just such a time of great need by God’s people. He also told her he believed if she didn’t do her duty, God’s providence would lead SOMEONE to do it and she would, of course, have failed her God. Where did Mordecai get this idea of divine, providential intervention into the affairs of mankind and history? From God’s word! The Jews in the captivities had some of the scrolls of the OT (see Dan. 9:2). Mordecai would have read the story of how God put Joseph down in Egypt to deliver his people from famine; Moses in the palace of Pharaoh to deliver his people from bondage; David, Daniel, and a host of other Jewish heroes, who by the providence of God had been put in circumstances and times of great danger. Mordecai also knew that God did, in fact, providentially raise up people who would serve him when others who had promised to do so failed! Mordecai knew that at great personal sacrifice these heroes of God had to willingly choose to be used by him for delivering his people. Mordecai’s challenge to Esther was based on the historical certainties of God’s past dealings and his promises to fulfill the covenant made with Abraham through the prophets. Christians have not only the historical certainties Mordecai had but also the historical certainties of the New Covenant “enacted upon surer promises”—specifically the victory over sin, in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Yes! There are always people who “come to the kingdom of God,” just at the right time God needs them! Read the OT prophets! Daniel was down in Babylon, as a “captive” of Babylon, just at the right time to become “third” in power and also high up in power in the Persian empire. John the Baptist came just at the right moment to introduce the Messiah to the Jews. Saul, the Pharisee, was just the

right person, at the right time, to become God's "apostle to the Gentiles." We could go on and on and on and on, naming great heroes of the faith from the end of the apostolic age until this very day who came "just at the right time" to take the word of God where it had never been taken before. But that does not mean we can stop praying. There is a time element for all of God's dealing with men. Sometimes God reveals the length of that time; sometimes he doesn't. He gave Hezekiah an additional 15 years of life (Isa. 38:1-8); he gave the false prophet Hananiah two months to live and repent (Jer. 28:1-17); he gave the Jewish nation 490 years from their going forth from captivity to get themselves ready for the coming of the Messiah (Dan. 9:24-27).

Generally speaking, God has numbered man's life-span upon the earth to be about 70-80 years (Psa. 90:9-12)—soon they are gone and we fly away. So let us use every day we have, each day at a time, to do what our hands find to do glorifying God and his Son, Jesus Christ. Esther's reply, "...if I perish, I perish" was FAITH not fatalism. She, along with Mordecai, believed God would keep his promise to preserve the messianic destiny of the Jews. But she also believed that since others had given their lives up as martyrs in cooperation with God to keep the destiny alive, she would do likewise if it were to be required. There is a difference. Bertrand Russell, the famous agnostic who wrote a book entitled, *Why I Am Not a Christian*, was a fatalist. He knew he was going to die along with everyone else. But his conclusions about God and eternal life were much different than Esther's and Mordecai's.

We may learn from this chapter: (a) There are times of rejoicing for those who believe in God (such as at the coronation of Esther); but there may also be times of mourning and supplication (such as at the decree for the slaughter of the Jews). (b) When such times of mourning and intercession are called for, godly people (like Mordecai) will not indulge in selfish release from the need for contrition, even when, in all innocence, suggested by others; (c) Great biblical heroes and heroines are made, not born! (d) Great biblical heroes and heroines were as human as we are; (e) Decisions to choose or refuse great responsibilities in relation to the will of God should not be made without intercession and supplication; (f) If we do not carry out our responsibilities toward the kingdom of God, God can and will raise up others who will; (g) resignation to the will of God is not fatalism.

Esther 5:1-14

Esther dressed herself in “her royal finery” and “stood in the inner court of the king’s palace.” The author of the account has described perfectly the arrangement of the Persian palace. The king’s throne is opposite an open doorway leading into the inner court of the palace. Esther was using all her womanly intuition in standing so she might be seen by the emperor instead of sending word that she wished an audience with him. She was well aware of the Persian law about not “asking” but “being invited” into the king’s presence. Esther knew also that the king had been “smitten” with her beauty and vivacity and it had been over 30 days since he had feasted his eyes upon her beauty. Knowing male vulnerability as all women do, Esther “prettied herself up” and played the coquet! Esther may have prayed for a “miracle” but God didn’t give one! God worked “miracles” exclusively during Biblical history (and probably for the next century after the Bible had been completed) to prove the authenticity and authority of those who wrote the word of God—which in turn proves the authenticity and authority of the Bible itself. “Miracles” were not done to extricate people (not even Jesus) from what they had to do to conform to God’s will. Jesus himself never worked a “miracle” to extricate himself from any physical situation necessary to fulfill God’s will. God intends that believers carry his regenerating word to those who need it by ordinary physical capacities and resources he makes available by his daily administration of creation. If God wants to intervene and provide something or take away something which seems to disagree with what we have called “the laws of nature,” he can and will. But that is not a “miracle” in the sense of a Biblical “miracle”—it is “providence.” If God worked “miracles” every time we needed something to eat, or every time we faced a difficulty, then “miracles” would not be miracles, they would not be “exceptions”—they would lose their power to authenticate his written word. And it is his word, not his force, that regenerates our hearts. (See *Miracles*, a book by the renowned Christian author, C. S. Lewis).

Esther’s beauty coupled with the fact that the emperor had not enjoyed her conjugal presence for more than a month, put him in a magnanimous mood. What Esther did should not be labeled “manipulative.” The end she sought was not an attempt to misappropriate his power and office for selfish purposes or evil purposes. It is interesting to note that the king offered to grant Esther’s request before she made it. It was a customary thing with rulers of middle-east empires to take pride in their generosity. They competed with one another in giving fabulous gifts to those who pleased them. It was a status symbol. To refuse the generosity of a potentate was a serious insult not usually forgotten or forgiven. If a Christian is seeking the purpose of God, as clearly as he can understand it from the Bible, then it is not wrong to use every bit of logic, truth, and expertise to bring someone else to see the truth and accept it. But that is not manipulation. No adult has a right to trick, force, deceive, or otherwise manipulate another adult into any position or action. Neither the word of God nor any other “truth” may be handled in an “underhanded” way (2 Cor. 4:2). God Almighty will not trick, deceive, or force any human being to do his will.

It would be a temptation to almost anyone to accept the king's offer of "half his kingdom." It is not being tempted that is wrong—Jesus was "tempted" (Matt. 4; Luke 4). To choose the "temptation" if it is an ungodly one is wrong! As long as we are in this world, we will be tempted! Not even Christians will be able to escape temptation. Jesus said, "For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the man by whom the temptation comes!" (Matt. 18:7). Paul wrote that no one will ever be tempted beyond the strength available to resist (1 Cor. 10:13). Evidently, just the word of God believed in one's mind and heart provides a sufficient strength to resist—this is precisely what Jesus used to resist temptation (Matt. 4, "...it is written..."). Undoubtedly Esther was tempted, or at least flattered by the offer, but Esther did not waver for a moment! She almost seems as if she had not heard the king's offer. She immediately invited the king and Haman for dinner in her royal quarters intending to explain the full consequences of Haman's plan to kill all the Jews—she will reveal to the king that she, his beloved Queen, is a Jew! Her primary concern is her Jewish people, but she may also have been thinking to protect the king from allowing something to be done in his empire for which he will be sorry all the rest of his life because the truth of Haman's motive would sooner or later "come out." Truth always "comes out." It may take a while, but it always does!

Esther wanted to reveal the information about her Hebrew lineage to the king at a time when he would be most relaxed and enjoying himself. Also, by inviting Haman to dine with the King and Queen, in the Queen's quarters, would disarm him. The environment of a royal dinner would keep the shocking news from a military, political setting and would be in the best interests of Esther's obtaining the end she sought. She certainly aroused the king's curiosity. He knew Esther had not risked her life by approaching him when he was on his throne without permission just to invite him to a banquet! The king ordered someone to go tell Haman to "hurry up" and get there. Xerxes renews his promise to Esther of half his kingdom if she wants it. But Esther is "stringing the king along" and changes the date of the "party" to the day following the first invitation. She made the king think she was about to divulge her "secret" request, and then cleverly holds the king in suspense for another day! She knows that one postponement of her real request will only intensify the desire of the king to grant what would be a very spectacular request from her. It would also keep Haman on "tenter-hooks" (in suspension) to wonder what his clever queen had in mind to invite him to a "royal" dinner. He probably thought she was going to recommend to the King that Haman be given even more power than he already had!

Haman depended for his self-esteem on being patronized by the "high and mighty." He was exhilarated that he had been singled out by the queen for special favor and invited to sit with the king and queen at a "dinner." When Haman came out of the queen's chambers he evidently went directly past Mordecai at the "king's gate." Mordecai ignored the presence of the "second most important man in the entire kingdom of Persia." In fact, Haman may have thought he was the most important man in the empire, since this king had been such a miserable failure in conquering Greece, and was not much more than a spoiled "brat." So, when Mordecai ignored him Haman became livid with anger! Why didn't Haman, with all his power and position, seize Mordecai on the spot and have him executed? We

don't know, but we speculate he wanted to be sure he had the full sanction of the royal edict before he executed such an important man—after all Mordecai is “foster father” to the king’s precious queen, Esther, and probably a man of leadership and stature among the many Jews and others “sitting at the king’s gate.” So Haman cunningly held his anger in check until he thought he would have everything set up for a “legal” murder. Rage, wounded pride, and desire for revenge is psychological dynamite. It must explode—either internally or externally. All that is needed is a spark of self-justification and that is often supplied by sympathetic friends or “Yes” men. That is where Haman went. He called in his “friends” and his wife for supportive rationalizations to justify what he had already made up his mind to do. There’s a plethora of “self-esteem” books, seminars, retreats, and sessions being “hyped” these days. They are even spending more time teaching that in lots of public schools and neglecting math, science, English, history and other fundamental necessities of an education. And even some churches pay more attention to these “self-esteem” books than they do the Bible!!! Haman depended on his title, his spot in the “political pecking order” for his self-esteem. He had an “identity problem.” Jesus teaches us that who we are depends on what we believe about Jesus! (Matt. 16:13-20). Self-respect, and respect from others does not accrue from titles but from character! (1 Thess. 4:9-12; Rom. 13:13-14; Col. 4:5, etc.). The greatest is the servant of all! Quite contrary to teaching “self” esteem, Jesus taught that sinful human beings should have none....they should be like the servant who, after having done all that is commanded, say, “we are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.”(Luke 17:7-10) or like the Prodigal Son, who determined to say to his father, “I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.” (Luke 15:18-19).

Haman did “have it all.” Many modern day “name-droppers, and hangers-on” in the Washington, D.C. “political pecking order” would be elated to have Haman’s place. They maneuver, back-bite, slander and criticize one another in Washington just to have any access to the President. But Haman was bitter. He could not enjoy any of this. All the fame and fortune of Haman was not sufficient to satisfy his soul so long as there was one Jewish gate-keeper who ignored his importance! No matter how much he bragged about his own importance, he really didn’t feel important so long as there was one person who did not agree with his own estimate of himself. Haman couldn’t handle rejection. It destroyed him. Contentment has to be learned (Phil. 4:10-14). And learned the hard way (2 Cor. 12:7-10). True contentment comes from trusting Jesus that our importance is all because of the grace of God in sending his only Son to save us from our sins. Our importance is in how God sees us, not because of how we see ourselves or how other people see us! For any person who will believe it and enter into covenant with God, that person is worth the vicarious death of God’s sinless Son! Believing that and trusting completely in it will bring contentment! C. S. Lewis has said that what is most important is not how we see God, but how God sees us!

Haman’s “Yes” men and his wife goad him into giving instructions that the “gallows” (a large pole, sharpened to a point) upon which they plan to impale Mordecai be made “50 cubits high” (approximately 75 ft.)! Would impaling Mordecai have satisfied the deep depression in the psyche of Haman about his own self-

worth? Never! It most likely would have only exacerbated it! He would never escape his conscience, try as he might! Soon afterward people would figure out the real motive behind Haman's execution of Mordecai. "You can fool some of the people some of the time....." you know that saying! Would it have solved Haman's problem to be made "first" in the kingdom—in other words, be made KING? No. What dictator or tyrant or even President of the US has ever been content with being President—unless one of our Presidents truly, honestly, wanted the job in order to really serve the nation! The best way for Christians to circumvent the harsh realities of being ignored, spurned, unloved, etc., is to understand that we probably deserve it! Remember? "When we have done all that our Lord has commanded we are still unworthy servants." Remember? Just the grace of God is sufficient for us? Those who commend themselves by comparing themselves with other human beings are "without understanding" (2 Cor. 10:12). Comparing ourselves to Jesus, we are not worthy to untie his sandal straps! (John 1:27).

Happiness, contentment, satisfaction, fulfillment, and worth are all controlled not by circumstances, but by perspective! That's because every human being has been created by the same Creator, endowed with the same "image" of that Creator. All human beings are "brothers" according to creation. But perhaps the most incisive discussion of this important principle is in 2 Cor. 5:14-21 "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all, therefore all have died....From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view...." Once we become a disciple of Jesus, we must allow his word to control us so that we see everyone and everything henceforth from Jesus' point of view. And where does one find Jesus' point of view? In the New Testament Scriptures, of course!

We may learn from this chapter: (a) God's providential assistance does not preclude the best use of human capabilities;

(b) nothing ventured, nothing gained; (c) although the urgency of some situations might seem to call for haste, if time permits one's first reaction should be postponed; (d) there is nothing like piqued curiosity as a tool for getting one's needs noticed; (e) we should not be impressed when others do us some honor lest we are tempted to believe everyone should do us the same honor; (f) respect from one's peers is a result of character, not title or position; (g) human glory is a hunger that can never be satisfied; (h) a real friend would not suggest actions that are unjust or immoral.

ESTHER 6:1-14

One of the great lessons of the book of Esther is to learn how the smallest circumstances of life, those most generally regarded as left to chance, work together for good to those who love the Lord, and for evil for those who hate him. The Lord did “not create our world a chaos” (Isa. 45:18) and he does not allow human beings to make it into a complete chaos because “he puts kings on thrones and takes them off” according to his divine program (Dan. 2:20-23). Our text (6:1) says, “On that night the king could not sleep....” The Septuagint (an ancient Greek translation of the OT, often symbolized as LXX for the 70 Jewish scholars who did the translating in Alexandria around 300-200 B.C.), says “But the Lord removed sleep from the king that night...” The Hebrew language text reads literally, “...the king’s sleep fled away.” That night Xerxes gave orders for someone to “read” to him “the book of memorable deeds—the chronicles” (i.e., the official record of important things done by people during the history of his reign). He probably expected the monotonous intonation of the reader’s voice to lull him to sleep. But his insomnia was providential. Had he gone easily to sleep that night (regardless of what kept him awake), he would not have heard that Mordecai, a leader of the Jewish people, had been the informer of a plot to assassinate him—the king! That startled the king and for the moment he forgot his insomnia. According to Herodotus those who had done great deeds of honor and benefit to the king of Persia had their names written in a special roll of honor and were esteemed as a special class of people. It would be a serious violation of Persian protocol and law and a great dishonor to the emperor should he not honor someone who had saved his life. The “chronicles” showed nothing had been done to honor Mordecai. The king gave orders to bring whoever was standing outside his throne room in the court to be brought in. Who else? Haman—waiting to get audience with the king to get his permission to impale Mordecai on his 75ft high pointed pole!

Yes! It is the government’s business to reward those who do good, just as much as it government’s business to punish those who do evil! (Rom. 13:1-7; 2 Pet. 2:13-17). At least that is what the Bible teaches to be one of the responsibilities of government (see *What The Bible Says About Civil Government*, (chapter 2, pp. 43-107, “The Purpose of Civil Government,” by Paul T. Butler, pub. College Press, Joplin, MO, 1990.). If our government would only do more rewarding of those who actually do good, instead of rewarding so many of those who are criminal, lazy, immoral, and influential or popular, we would probably have less of the “bad” and more of the “good.” It appears to me, in my short life-time, that our government(s) national, state, and local, have missed giving “rewards” to a lot of people who have done “good.” How many awards do you think Seth Wilson ever got from the city of Joplin for bringing Ozark Bible (now “Christian”) College to Joplin? So far as I know—only one. Our local Sons of The American Revolution chapter awarded him its “Silver Good Citizenship Medal” and certificate—I made sure of that one year when I was president of the chapter. Our chapter has also given medals and certificates to the late Missouri Senator, Richard Webster, Sr., Circuit Judge Herbert Casteel, numerous policemen and highway patrolmen and other people in Joplin who have

made significant contributions to good citizenship. But most of the people we gave awards to had never gotten any from the local city council, etc. Bad news “sells” and the criminals are the ones who get all the publicity.

Haman’s pride and arrogance made him totally unaware of the possibility that anyone else might deserve to be honored by the emperor. He was confident the king was about to confer upon him another honor, perhaps for thinking up the scheme to slay all the Jews. You can imagine what would have happened to Haman had he spoken up to the king first about impaling Mordecai right after the king had read how Mordecai had saved his “hide.” The king would probably have done to Haman what he did later after the dinner with Esther—i.e., shiskaboded Haman on his own pointed pole! Well, Haman got a few more hours of life to live on earth because he let the king speak first! The king, of course, found out later what Haman was wanting to do to his “foster-father-in-law” and executed him, but the book of Proverbs and James in the NT have very much to say about controlling the “tongue” (hastily-speaking without thinking). Proverbs 29:20 says, “Do you see a man who is hasty in words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.” Control of the tongue is good virtue for a Christian to cultivate, eh?!

Haman’s reply to the king IS all too human! Christians are not to think this way! The apostle Paul wrote, “give preference to one another in honor...” (Rom. 12:10) and, “...in humility, count others better than yourselves.” (Phil. 2:3). “We see no any longer from a human point of view...” (2 Cor. 5:16). But Haman, quicker than Wild Bill Hickok could draw and shoot, said to himself, he’s talking about me and began “laying it on” about what the king should do to “the man the king delights to honor.” Haman suggests the highest honors he can imagine—those befitting a parade to honor the emperor—even to riding on the king’s favorite horse. His final suggestion was that one of the king’s ranking noblemen should be made valet for the one about to be honored. A similar kind of honor was bestowed upon Joseph by the Pharaoh of Egypt when Joseph saved the whole Egyptian nation from starving (Gen. 41:41-43). Our Heavenly Father expects Christians to think exactly opposite to what Haman was thinking because his Son “counted equality with God a thing not to be grasped, but humbled himself, taking the form of a human servant...even to death on a cross.” (Phil. 2:5-11; 1 Pet. 2:18-25). Even after Jesus had accomplished his task on earth, “he did not exalt himself to be made a high priest but waited to be appointed by God.” (Heb. 5:4-5).

There is nothing wrong with honoring truly deserving people—but Haman, thinking he was the one to be honored, “spread it on a little thick.” Paul mentions that those who do honorable things ought to be “honored” (1 Cor. 16:18; Phil. 2:29; 1 Thess. 5:12-13). I like, very much, the idea started a few years ago by the North American Christian Convention of making a special honor they call, “God’s honored servant” and giving it to those who have made great sacrifices for the work of the Lord. It would have been right and proper to have honored Haman, perhaps even as he described it, had he earned it! But knowing his character (arrogant, proud, malicious) he doubtless did not earn such honor! And it is sad, but true, those who really deserve being “honored” for doing good, if they get any honors at all get them after they have passed from earth’s scene. Paul wrote the Corinthian church to

“give recognition to such men” THEN—not after they were dead.

What an utter shock it must have been for Haman to hear the emperor’s order that the highest honors imaginable were to be given to Mordecai—the man Haman most hated! And Haman was ordered not only to see that such honor was bestowed on Mordecai, Haman must do the honors himself! I think most people can identify with Haman “feelings”—whether they are willing to admit it or not. I remember being humiliated by my mother (God bless her) making me apologize to my sister for treating her badly (on the few occasions when I did so—tongue in cheek) when we were children. Especially when we had to “kiss and make up.” Peter, who boasted he would fight to the end to keep Jesus from being crucified, was humiliated when Christ looked at him as he was being led off to be crucified. Haman was ordered to “make all haste” to see that Mordecai was honored. Haman must go through the streets of the great capital city proclaiming the honor of the Jew who rides upon the emperor’s own “best” horse, dressed in the emperor’s own robes! Mordecai had never sought any such honors. Most men would have been so intoxicated with the excitement they would have sought a “promotion” up the chain of command. But after the royal parade Mordecai immediately put off the royal robes and returned to his lowly place of service at the “king’s gate.” We really don’t know what Haman’s attitude was when he was forced to honor Mordecai. But we can imagine! It is a wonder Haman didn’t have a stroke or heart-attack from all the stress on his ego—apoplexy they used to call it! Haman, mortified and ashamed, fled to his own home after the parade expecting to find some solace or security there. He was so devastated he put a covering over his face so he would not be recognized as he fled to his house!

He had no sooner reported the sordid details of his humiliating experience than his counselors and his wife advised him that Mordecai, the Jew, would ultimately cause his complete fall from power. Why would they say this when they must have known Haman had already secured a royal edict to kill all the Jews? Well, they could see (without Haman’s blinding rage) that Mordecai had been so highly honored by Xerxes himself, it wouldn’t be at all smart for Haman to go ahead with his planned genocide upon the Jewish people. But they also knew Haman’s seething malice—and fully expected him to go ahead with the plan to massacre all the Jews! In other words, they were trying to “cool” Haman down before he “broke a blood vessel” as my mother used to say to me. Now they are advising Haman to “drop it—leave it be—don’t get in deeper than you are already.” Haman’s advisers may very well have concluded that the providential way Mordecai had been able to get Esther installed as Queen, warn the king about assassination, etc., that the Jews must be under some special divine protection. The Septuagint translated the last phrase of 6:13, “...and thou wilt not be able to withstand him, for the living God is with him.” That scenario is not altogether impossible. Remember Nebuchadnezzar’s royal announcement (his conversion) after his “madness” (Daniel 4:34-37). Remember Pharaoh’s magicians who explained: “This is the finger of God...” and the Egyptians cried: “let us flee before Israel, for the Lord fights for them” (Ex. 8:19; 19:25). Jewish history and scriptures were well known by the “wise men” of the cultures of Mesopotamia and Persia.

These predictions of Haman's "fall" before Mordecai must have pierced Haman's heart with great trepidation. Insecurity breeds paranoia. Insecure people persistently fantasize that others are determinedly "out to get them." Haman was probably near hysteria from his paranoia. His "friends" certainly did not give him any relief. But he went to Esther's "party" for him and the king! What else could he do. The king sent his "eunuchs" and they "brought Haman in haste to the banquet that Esther had prepared." If you've been invited to the queen's "party" and the king is to be there also, you go whether you want to or not! **AND, YOU DON'T KEEP THE KING AND QUEEN WAITING!!** Any excuse Haman would make now would only make the king more suspicious of Haman. Remember the parable Jesus told about the "king" who gave a marriage feast for his son (Matt. 22:1-14) and the invited guests decided they had better things to do than attend? Some day, that will be the scene in heaven! Those whom Jesus, his apostles and his church have invited to his "feast" on the Bread of Life and the Living Water, and who have shown contempt for the invitation will regret it for all eternity.

We may learn these lessons from this chapter: (a) The good that we do, though unrewarded now, will always have its rewards in heaven, so do not be weary in well-doing; (b) evil has a way of obsessing the whole person; (c) flattery is dangerous; it usually blinds the one being flattered; (d) inordinate pride shrinks the soul and heart of a human being and eventually destroys.

ESTHER 7:1-10

The king was very anxious to hear Esther's request. She had piqued his curiosity by postponing what was her heart's desire. The king repeats for the third time (5:3; 5:8; 7:2) his magnanimous promise. In spite of the urgency of the crisis and in spite of every good reason for Esther to be livid with anger at Haman, she controlled her emotions and produced the proper protocol in addressing the king. Esther's petition is verbalized in only four Hebrew words, literally translated they would read, "My life at my petition, and my people at my request." These words are very poignant to modern Jews. They have been preserved in Jewish traditional liturgy called the Selichoth. The Selichoth are penitential prayers in the form of liturgical poems recited on all fast days and days of special intercessions and during the "penitential season" which begins before Rosh Ha-Shannah (Jewish New Year in September) and concludes with Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement in October). Esther showed great diplomatic skill in pleading for her own life first. The revelation that the life of the king's "favorite" was in danger would arouse any protective instinct the king might possess. Then she added the "lives of her people." This shocked the king. Who would dare make such threats? Esther has the king (and Haman) in her "web." They are being feasted (probably entertained), and she has kept both of them on the "edge of their seats" waiting to hear what was on her mind. It must be very important for her to have been so bold as to approach the king in the first place.

Esther doesn't hesitate; she doesn't mince words. She tells the king plainly that she and her people are in danger of being massacred. She, and her people, are the "people" who had been "sold" to be slaughtered. Her inference as to her people being "sold" probably took a moment to register with the king—but he would quickly remember that Haman had just two days before given him lots of money to be able to kill all the Jews! So the king wouldn't have to take long to "put two and two together" and realize that Esther is saying she is a Jewess! The Jews, even though technically a people in exile and "prisoners of war," were given privileges of freedom practically equal to Persian citizenship so long as they did not seek to disobey the laws of Persia. Esther indicates that she and her people might have accepted a change of social status from quasi-citizens to that of bondage or slavery rather than what had been planned for them by "someone." But, No! They have been sold to be slaughtered like dumb animals! The holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis was exactly what Haman intended—only he was not going to put them in concentration camps and work them to death or let them slowly starve to death and then kill them. He was evidently going to send Persian troops to every city and village of the vast empire to kill all Jews on the spot.

Esther shrewdly points out that Haman's 10 million dollars (10,000 talents) would not be able to put into the Persian treasury enough money to pay for the economic, intellectual, political, and ethical loss to the Persian empire should the status of the Jews be changed to dead. She let the king figure out what the Persian empire would lose if Haman was allowed to kill all the Jews! Can you visualize the

loss to the United States, just in cultural possibilities alone (scientists, doctors, musicians, writers, farmers, factory workers, political leaders, etc., etc., etc.), that is taking place every single year when there are one million (or more) potential citizens ABORTED every YEAR! (some of these babies, potential adults, with so much to offer our great country, are aborted in the birthing process itself!!!). Now figure up the future economic potential that will be lost. What are the future retirees going to do if there are less and less young people in the work force paying into Social Security? What is the nation going to do for a standing army, navy, marine corps, and air force to defend the country when we are depleting our next generations at the rate of one million per year while most of the other nations of the earth are growing in population? How did Europe survive the Nazi holocaust? With foreign aid and primarily from America! Had not America sent billions, even trillions in foreign aid to western Europe (and to Japan, Taiwan, Israel, and dozens of other countries) millions of people would have died right after WWII! What will it take to make future political leaders of all the nations to realize the staggering deprivation brought on by those who want to kill certain races of people?

Xerxes immediately asks, “Who is he....” (The Hebrew phrase is, “Who filled this man’s heart to do so?”). Xerxes knows very well that Haman secured the imperial decree to exterminate the Jews. There may have been a subtle attempt by the king by his question to make himself appear free of any involvement in the matter. Esther could have justifiably said, “Thou art the man!” He was involved whether he thought so or not. He took the money in exchange for a royal decree—that is accepting a bribe and accessory to genocide! Esther was more interested for the moment in saving her people than placing blame. It was urgent that she get another royal decree to keep Haman from carrying out his plans. She put the blame where the matter started—with Haman. Of course, Esther’s finger pointing at Haman was judging! What else could it be? Every human being has to learn to discriminate good from evil and where blame lies for both! We couldn’t have a justice system without “blaming” and “judging” people for their crimes. “Judging” is done constantly—hour by hour, minute by minute, all over this earth! The Bible is not against “judging”—it is against unrighteous judging (and don’t we have some of that going in the U.S.A. when pedophiles are given a few years in prison and sometimes released altogether). Jesus told the Pharisees, “Do not judge by appearance (by guessing), but judge with right (with all the facts and evidence one can obtain) judgment.!” (John 7:24). Every Christian has to be able to judge who are “hogs and dogs” lest they cast their pearls before them and give them bread. The truth must not be given to “hogs and dogs” lest they turn and rend you. Americans “judge” when they go to the grocery store (which store, what to buy); the news media judges every time it puts a news program on (which stories, which one’s most important, why put it on at all, etc.). You’d better not try to live in this world without doing some judging!

Esther had not one good word to say about Haman. She called him an adversary (persecutor), an enemy, and an evil-doer. There were no mitigating circumstances whatsoever to soften the enormity of his evil intention. His motives were completely wicked. Haman was afraid. And well he might be! Now he was the condemned, and the Jews were his condemners. Now it was his life in the

balance. Now he knows how terrified Mordecai and Esther felt when they learned of his planned genocide! The justice of the One whose very Nature is “Absolute Justice” will someday manifest infinite justice to all the persecutors and slayers of all the faithful believers of God and his Son. The king “jumped up” with anger. He strode angrily into the palace garden (paradise is the Persian word for “garden”). He had been duped by this Haman who lied to him about the Jews being disobedient to the laws of Persia (3:8). He had been tricked into taking a bribe to make a law. He had “egg on his face” before his queen and Mordecai and probably lots of other people around the palace. He knew the laws of the Persians could not be changed. He couldn’t reword his edict or revoke it! Meanwhile Haman began discretely at first to request that the queen spare his life. His pleading did not move Esther. Haman proceeds to “fall” upon Esther’s couch and implore her to spare his life. Haman committed a serious faux pas (error, blunder) in doing that! Apparently his intention was to be very urgent and sincere in his plea for his life. He may have been trying to beat on her or kill her. At that moment the king walked back into the banquet room. What he saw, the Hebrew text says, indicated to him that Haman was about to kill her! There was no entrapment by Esther! Haman trapped himself! Esther did not misrepresent her reason for inviting them for dinner—in fact, she didn’t tell them at all why they were invited. Haman did not have to come—he could have stayed away and explained his absence to the king later, but of course, he would be in trouble there, too. Esther did not say to the king, “Let Haman tell you why you are both here”—she flat out told the king herself and pointed out the culprit.

JUSTICE is one of the main topics of the O.T. Prophets. The Hebrew word tsedek is interchangeable for “justice” and “righteousness” in the O.T. It usually depends on the context as to which way the word is translated. In other words, “justice is righteousness,” and “righteousness is justice!” God is both “just and the justifier of Christians (merciful)” by the vicarious death of Christ. If God had not required Christ to die for all the sin in the world, God would not have been just! God is not only the Great Creator, he is the Great Lawgiver-Lawmaker. Without law there is no liberty or society possible—not even the church! If there is a law there has to be a penalty for violating that law. Without a penalty for breaking a law there is no law. If the penalty is not paid then there is no law, either! So, every Christian should feel a sense of justice accomplished when it is recorded that Haman “got his.” Now, in many circles of “do-gooders” a statement like that would utterly shock them out of their socks! Many so-called “liberal-minded” “progressives” think that criminality is not the criminal’s fault—it’s the fault of his background, his environment, his poverty, his abuse as a child, his genetic make-up, and scores of other reasons. They actually think the person who committed the criminal act is the victim! My goodness! Think of all the great, good, contributions made to mankind by so many millions who’ve had bad backgrounds, poverty, abuse, genetic problems. Think of George Washington Carver—son of a slave whose mother was kidnaped and separated from her baby. Dr. Carver grew up in poverty, near Diamond, MO, reared by foster parents, and he didn’t become a criminal! Because he was reared in a God-fearing, Bible-loving home. But the very fact that any society at all, beginning with the family, to the school, to the city, to the nation (including the church 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2) has laws or rules or sanctions, or “don’t do that,” or “you must do this” indicates personal responsibility for behavior. If there is personal responsibility, there must be penalties for “misbehavior” commensurate

with the crime! If it is a capital crime, then there has to be a capital punishment. What if there were no sanctions at all against anyone, at any time, for any reason, or no reason at all, for slaying another person? Who would want to live in that kind of society?! Not even the “progressives.” So, be “righteous” and strike a blow for “justice” any way you can—write letters to the editor of the local newspaper; write your congressmen and senators; write your local authorities; COMMEND them when they are “just” and CONDEMN them when they are not!

Harbona was one of the 7 chamberlains that served in the presence of the king (1:10). He apparently was well informed of Haman’s plot to have Mordecai executed because he knew all about the “tree” 50 cubits high. This is the first time we are told that Haman put the “tree” (a sharp-pointed pole) in the courtyard of his house. Haman was a sadistic barbarian. He wanted to be able to see the gruesome death of Mordecai impaled on a pointed pole. The Hebrew word *tolah* translated “hanged” is generic for “suspended.” Archaeological artifacts depict the Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks and Persians (and the Romans) “hanging” people by impaling them on sharp-pointed poles (see Zondervan’s Pictorial Bible Dictionary, 1963, p 189 in art. “Cross”). Harbona also knew that Mordecai had “spoken good” toward the king in the past. He knew Mordecai had saved the king’s “bacon.” He knew Haman’s persecution of Mordecai was unjust. So, Harbona “reminded the king of Haman’s gallows.” There are “righteous” people whose consciences (trained by someone with some semblance of truth to give them) demand “justice.” Harbona was not going to stand by and let this egregious injustice be done to someone who had saved the life of the king!

Xerxes cried out immediately, “Hang him thereon!” Haman did not get a trial by a jury of his peers. There were at least two witness, you might say, Mordecai and Harbona! Harbona told the king that Haman had such unmitigated hatred and malice for Mordecai that he planned to “enjoy” executing Mordecai before the date set by the decree to exterminate all the Jews. But Esther had described that wicked man for what he was and the king knew it was true because the king himself had been deceived by Haman. So, Haman’s guilt was a well established fact. There were witnesses who could have been called if the king had any doubts about his guilt—his “counselors and his wife.” Solomon, a very “wise” man, wrote “Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the sons of men is fully set to do evil.” (Eccl. 8:11). Isaiah wrote, “My soul yearns for thee (God) in the night, my spirit with me earnestly seeks thee. For when thy (God’s) judgments (through civil authorities) are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness. If favor is shown to the wicked, he does not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he deals perversely and does not see the majesty of the Lord.” (Isa. 26:9-10). I never cease to be shocked, every day, as I read my newspaper, my various magazines, watch my TV, and read history books, of the “bleeding-heart” liberal judges and lawyers (and news media) and the people who sob and wring their hands about the “cruel and unusual punishment” meted out in prison sentences to the perpetrators. The liberals cry, “unconstitutional!” Don’t those ignorant liberals know that most of the very people who gave birth to our U. S. Constitution had just recently shot and killed Englishmen who were invading their homes, closing down their businesses, and shooting their American countrymen?

Don't these ignoramuses know that George Washington and other militia-men had executed spies, shot deserters, imprisoned captured enemy soldiers, and destroyed property of those in opposition to liberty in order to win that liberty? What is so "cruel and unusual" about executing a serial-killer-rapist of children by lethal injection, by the electric chair, by hanging, by gassing, or any other method? The criminal, by his very act of crime against a society's laws, manifests violently that he doesn't want to live in the kind of society in which law abiding citizens live. So, if the crime is not capital, put the criminal in a place where everyone else is who doesn't want to live in a law-abiding society—prison! What's so "cruel and unusual" about that? Did you know there is no provision in the law of Moses for "incarceration" for criminal actions? There was provision for "cities of refuge" but those were places where someone might run for sanctuary who was being hunted by an "avenger" so they could have time to gather any evidence they might have that they weren't guilty. The law of Moses provided only three basic penalties for crime: (a) capital punishment (i.e., execution); (b) corporal punishment (i.e., physical punishment short of execution—"an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth"); (c) restitution (i.e., theft, negligent harm to another's property, etc., was punished by making the guilty repay the victim—sometimes double or triple, sometimes by indentured servitude). Wouldn't "restitution" go a long way TODAY in reducing crimes of theft, negligence, vandalism, etc.? It did when I was a kid, especially when my Dad was the "investigator," the "judge" and "the executioner!"

We learn from this lesson: (a) The virtue of courage is not confined to men—the heroine Esther saved a whole race of people at the risk of her life; (b) America is not the first "melting-pot" culture—ancient civilizations like Persia became "great" by absorbing other races and cultures (e.g., the Jews); (c) Pride and inordinate ambition usually results in humiliation and self-destruction; (d) The mania for power (e.g., Haman) breeds hatred for anyone opposing the madness; (e) Those who would do criminal harm must be restrained by "pointing" them out to civil authorities; (f) Civil authorities must fulfill their mandate from God and deter criminal actions with commensurate punishment.

ESTHER, 8:1-17

Haman's fortune probably exceeded 10 million dollars. The king gave Haman's fortune to Esther! This was an extraordinary thing to happen to a Jewish-woman-exile. Some of the male exiles among the Jews became rich (e.g. Daniel), but for a woman (especially a Jewish woman) to reach such heights of power and property was unheard of. Haman is called "the Jew's enemy." He has continued to be the prototype for all Jewish enemies throughout the ages. A late 19th century Jewish work of art from Poland pictures Haman leading Mordecai through the streets of Susa. In the picture Haman's wife, Zeresh, mistaking him for Mordecai, dumps slop on her husband from the window of her house. But from this day forward Mordecai became a high official ("came before the king") and attended the king's court. The king retrieved the very important royal signet ring he had given to Haman (3:10) and gave it to Mordecai. "Justice" is what it's called! (See Matt. 25:29). Mordecai could now act in the king's name with the same powers formerly granted to Haman. Esther appointed Mordecai to be administrator of Haman's estate. Mordecai moved into the palatial dwellings formerly occupied by Haman and was thus provided a residence befitting his new position. No doubt Mordecai removed the gruesome execution pole and the body of Haman before he moved in! In my book, *What The Bible Says About Civil Government* (already referred to), I have a list of at least 40 "believers" who were in one way or another involved in civil government—all the way from Melchizedek ("king of Salem") to Archippus (probably a military man) Philemon 2. Many of these believers served in pagan nations and governments (e.g. Lot—a judge in Sodom, Joseph who married the daughter of an Egyptian priest and sired two of the "tribes of Israel" by her, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Esther, Mordecai, Nehemiah, the centurion of Capernaum, Joanna, wife of Chuza who was Herod's steward, Cornelius, Sergius Paulus, the Philippian jailer, Erastus, some of the Pratorian guard, some of Caesar's own household, Zenas a lawyer and co-worker of Paul, and Archippus (mentioned earlier). Christians who reject participation in civil government, or service in some way through the civic or political processes available to them, are shunning an opportunity that cannot be had through the church. And civil service is unequivocally called a "ministry to God" in the Bible (e.g., Rom. 13:1-7). It is possible to be in politics or civic service and be a believer and maintain your faith—at least in America! (Daniel, Nehemiah, Esther, Mordecai, et al.). In the brief history of the United States of America there are hundreds, yea, thousands of examples of a "civic ministry" by believers. Americans should thank God every day of their lives, especially for those early "ministers of God"—believers who had such a crucial and imperative role to play in winning America's independence, giving birth to her Constitution and form of government. Get the book, *Christianity and The Constitution*, by John Eidsmoe, pub. Baker Book House, some day and read about all these great heroes of the Christian faith and servants of America—or the book, *America's God and Country Encyclopedia of Quotations*, by William J. Federer, pub. by Fame Pub. Inc., Coppell, TX. Both these books would "knock the socks off" lots of history (not just students) teachers in our public schools unless they're so biased they would not accept the messages in them (which are all documented). Or, you

could get, *The Light and The Glory*, by Peter Marshall and David Manuel, pub. Revell. Give your children the REAL FACTS about Christianity and America's founding!

Haman is destroyed. He is no longer a threat, personally, to the Jews. But the Persian "law" which says once a "law" or royal edict has been made, it cannot be revoked or changed, is still "on the books." Can it be revoked—taken back—erased? NO! Esther begged the king on her knees with tears. The king promises to give her all the royal power at his disposal to help her—BUT the laws of the Medes and Persians cannot be changed. Not even the king can change what has been decreed and sealed with the royal signet ring (3:7-15 & Daniel 6:14-15). At first glance, some might say, "Those Persian emperors made a stupid law when they decreed that once a decree has been made it cannot be revoked or changed." But with a little reflection and comparisons with other ancient, and modern, systems of government, it might not appear so "stupid" after all. In the first place, the emperor ("king") in Persia could always issue another edict which could "supercede" the earlier one made. This is precisely what Xerxes did when he gave Esther permission to write "what she pleased in regard to the Jews, in the name of the king, and seal it with the king's ring" and what she wrote could, in turn, not be revoked! Xerxes is suggesting that Esther and Mordecai compose another decree that will provide some way for the Jews to counteract the decree authorizing the Persians to attack and kill them. We will see later (8:11) how Esther and Mordecai overcame the king's edict without having to change or revoke it! In the second place, a sanction against revoking laws once they are made stands as a "check and balance" against an emperor who vacillated, couldn't make up his mind, would make a law in one minute and in the next minute change or revoke it. Equivocation and indecision, making, remaking, remaking the remake, altering the words, saying "yes" and "no" within minutes, would create nothing but chaos in the whole structure of governing and government. Basically, that's somewhat the kind of system America's founding fathers instituted with our Constitution and the three faceted system of governing—legislative, judicial, and executive. By the way, that's the proper order. Many foolish Americans would rather have the order either executive, judicial and legislative—or judicial, executive and legislative. But since we are a "republic" not a pure "democracy" the legislative branch (which consists of the representatives of the people) should have seniority if any one should! History proves the "executive" shouldn't have seniority! And with some of the "illegal" and irresponsible decisions made by America's "Supreme Court" and other federal courts in the last 60-some years, we must not let these courts "change" our Constitution and laws made by the Congress! Certainly, America has some bad laws—many, many, many—too many laws period! Above all, we must not let our government "officials" from any "branch" REWRITE our Constitution. It is NOT out of date—in fact it is the most excellent and dearest document instituting a human, civil government EVER written since the beginning of human government (except the Bible). Of course it may need an amendment, here and there, as we've already done, but not even all our amendments are "good" ones.

Esther 8:9 is one of the longest verses in the O.T. Mordecai waited two months to issue his decree for the purposes of political "protocol" and subtlety, and

to allow time for better preparations and decrease the margin for political errors to be made. Mordecai's decree would give the Jews eight months or more to organize themselves, collect arms, and make all necessary preparations to resist the decreed massacre. The Jews had not received copies of Haman's edict ordering their slaughter, but Mordecai took care that the Jews would not have to learn of their right to fight against their enemies second-handedly from their neighbors. The power given by Xerxes to Esther and Mordecai is awesome. He simply said, "write as you please with regard to the Jews." No restrictions, no suggestions, no threatened revocations or retaliations to either if what they wrote displeased the king. Now how could a king grant such power? BECAUSE HE KNEW, OF ALL THE PEOPLE IN HIS KINGDOM, ESTHER AND MORDECAI WOULD DO WHAT WAS JUST AND RIGHT, WITHOUT MALICE AFORETHOUGHT! And that's exactly what they decreed. The Jews were granted the right, only, to defend themselves—not to overtly begin attacking Persian armed forces or civilians! Could you handle such power? It's frightening, isn't it, the power our top governmental leaders have at their disposal? This concept goes to the very heart of what our founding fathers contemplated and tried, with God's divine help, to set right. Two history professors in 1984 researched 15,000 written items and 2200 books written by America's founding fathers. They published their findings in the American Political Science Review, #189. The Bible was the NUMBER ONE source of quotations and references in all their writings—and—of all the human writers they quoted, Christians led by an overwhelming majority!! So, we now understand how Xerxes could have such faith and trust in Esther and Mordecai not to abuse the political power he granted them! The ONE, OVERRIDING, ALL-ENCOMPASSING principle America's political leaders MUST have pounded into their human, sinful, brains is that GOD'S WORD must rule in their hearts in ALL DECISIONS they make, politically, personally, and otherwise (if there is an otherwise)! If this is not the case, our political leaders are un-American no matter how much they profess to be "Americans!" If this is not the case, they are not prepared to handle the kind of power they have! They must "use the law, lawfully" as Paul stated to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:8ff) and that means all civil law must be legislated and enforced by a HIGHER LAW than the laws they make in Congress. There is a higher Law-Maker and a higher Law than those in Washington D.C. or Beijing, China! Abraham Lincoln once said something like, "Most men can handle adversity, but few can properly handle power!"

We would imagine that lots of Persian citizens and "provincials" whom the Persians had conquered (i.e., tax-payers) all across that vast expanse known as Persia (ca. 500-300 B.C.) detested and complained about being taxed to support the "king's horse stables." Remember, the OT Law dictated that kings of Israel were not to "multiply" for themselves horses and chariots (along with lots of other things). Some may have been bitterly exasperated that all those horses were frivolous, "good for nothing" things that could have been used by the taxpayers for themselves. Well, folks, that's one of the fundamentals of human government. Human government is a predatory animal. Government produces NOTHING to the economy except government! It doesn't manufacture goods, it doesn't raise crops, it doesn't have any industry but bureaucracy! It is not supposed to "retail" anything. It's revenue comes from taxes and tariffs. It's main function is to "take" taxes, and, hopefully, "give" back protection to its law-abiding citizens from their enemies, both

foreign and domestic, and on a small scale, promote public works (i.e., roads, communication systems, etc., which individuals could not do on their own). Biblically speaking, not even education is within the purview of civil government and our founding fathers knew that and ALL of America's earliest educational system was controlled and paid for by the citizens in their local communities!. That is the reason the Bible in both OT and NT advocates the payment of rightful (just, fair, impartial) taxes to civil government—even Jesus said so and so did Paul (Matt. 22:15-22; Rom. 13:1-7). The law-abiding citizens of Persia and the Jews needed to be thankful that the kings of Persia had enough money in the government's treasury to take care of the "stables and horses" so that their "pony express" could make communication about the holocaust Haman had planned and the right of the Jews to take up arms to defend themselves against it! What Haman would have wrought would have hurt Persia, in the long run, as much as it would have hurt the Jews! Clearly there are LOADS AND LOADS of frivolous, non-necessities, for which our U.S. government spends taxpayer's contributions. Personally, I am not only disgusted, but angry, about the immense amount of taxpayers contributions spent for what our government "provides" as "entitlements" to illegal aliens. Some government "entitlements" are justly earned, like military veteran's benefits, whose low pay and "overtime" on their jobs earns them their benefits; like retirement payments to federal employees, etc.. I am also angry about the trillions of dollars we've given away in foreign aid, only to have those receiving it make war on our citizens! But I'm also grateful for a postal service, and a military establishment strong enough to defend us, policemen, highway workers, national parks and other national, state, and local (some) environmental agencies, conserving our national resources, etc. I have such a long list of "frivolous and irrelevant and irresponsible" actions of our government it would take a book to document what I think about government (that's why of all the books I wrote, I am most pleased with What The Bible Says About Civil Government).

YES! Indeed! Self-defense is an UNALIENABLE human right! It was instituted by God in Genesis 9:1-7, and has been sustained, upheld, proclaimed, insisted upon, in almost every book in the Bible to the end of Revelation! Unalienable means, as the composers of our Declaration of Independence wrote, there are human rights that human governments have no mandate to violate. You know Jefferson didn't compose that by himself?—in fact he plagiarized, to a large extent, the Virginia Constitution and the Virginia Bill of Rights, written by George Mason. Mason lived 1725-1792 and is called the "Father of the Bill of Rights," who had said before 1776, "The laws of nature are the laws of God, whose authority can be superseded by no power on earth." The first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution, limiting the power of the government, are practically Mason's and may be found expressed in his two Virginia documents! The Bible is not against capital punishment for capital crimes—THE BIBLE IS FOR CAPITAL PUNISHMENT FOR CAPITAL CRIMES! The apostle Paul, before the tribunal of Festus (Acts 25:7-12) said, "If then I am a wrongdoer (which, of course, he plainly was not!) and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death; but if there is nothing in their charges against me, NO ONE, can give me up to them (the Jews)." Every Christian (and non-Christian) has the unalienable right to defend himself/herself against the taking of their lives. AND IF THE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES WILL NOT DO IT, THEN IT BECOMES A MATTER OF INDIVIDUAL

SELF-DEFENSE! I didn't say anyone has the right to become a vigilante, taking the law into their own hands and hunting criminals down like "bounty-hunters." But if someone kicks in your door in the middle of the night and enters with intent to do bodily harm, it is your Biblical, unalienable right to defend yourself against them (See Exodus 22:2, for example). Just as our Declaration of Independence says, man has three unalienable rights (which neither individuals nor governments can take from him—and which government was ordained by God to protect)—LIFE, LIBERTY, AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS ("happiness" means, ownership of private property and was so stated in the original draft of the "Declaration of Independence"). Look it up on the Law of Moses! The Jews of Esther's day would have had every right to obtain necessary weapons (just like Christians and non-Christians would have today) and use them against the "soldiers" (henchmen) to be sent by Haman in an unbiblical, unwarranted, unsubstantiated, deceptive (deceiving the king) genocide—and THEY DID SO! They should have done it in Germany against Hitler, but Hitler controlled all the guns! Is gun ownership by responsible citizens is relevant for today in America? You betcha! The fact that practically every loyal colonial American had a gun or two or three in their homes when King George sent thousands of English troops to this continent to revoke their rights as English citizens, is what made it possible for you to have your liberty today! I know. I have at least 10 ancestors (which I can document) who fought in the American "Revolution." That "Revolution" was in no way a "revolution" but a defense against an invasion and the tyrannical suspension of legal systems and unalienable rights every Englishman enjoyed in England. It was a war for American Independence. Let us pray to God that the coming generations of Americans will inform themselves of what God has to say about civil government and insist that in America God's principles will be instituted into the government and followed as closely as is humanly possible.

Mordecai's message to the whole empire (not just Jews) was that, in the name of the king, the Jews were permitted to organize, unite and prepare to "stand" for their life. They were given permission to resist any aggression by any people. Their resistance could go so far as to "destroy, slay, and cause to perish," all the power of any people or province that would assault them. The edict of Mordecai specifically allowed only defensive action. The Jews were not permitted to attack unless attacked. Once the Jews were attacked they were allowed to do their best to survive. One my heroes, General of the Army, Douglass MacArthur (under whom I fought in the Korean War), said, "In war, there is no substitute for victory." When attacked and unalienable rights are being revoked, VICTORY OVER THE ENEMY is the only solution. Those who would take away unalienable rights will not cease until FORCE, AND OVERWHELMING FORCE, brings them to "heel." Needless to say, the situation in Persia after Haman lied to the king and got permission to commit genocide, is an unusual situation. Few kings would ever issue conflicting edicts such as these which would allow actual civil war to take place within his kingdom. BUT AMERICA HAD A "CIVIL WAR" or "WAR OF REBELLION" and I have lots of ancestors who fought on the side of preserving the Union in that one! It was necessary to preserve the Union only because thousands and thousands of human beings (slaves) were being denied their fundamental "unalienable" human rights and those who were suspending the rights of the slaves would not come to "heel" by persuasion or legislation. FORCE HAD TO BE USED! Abraham Lincoln

was a very astute and God-fearing president! One of our greatest Americans! Now the Lord could have worked a miracle and delivered all the slaves in the U.S. in 1861, but God didn't! It had to be done with the blood, sweat and tears of human beings (nearly 700,000 "soldiers" including both sides, were killed in that war). The Lord could have delivered the Jews from Haman with a miracle—but he didn't. Why not? Because he created human beings with minds to think, consciences to judge, and wills to choose. God created man free from being a robot or an animal controlled by buttons or instinct. Man is in God's image—with the awesome power to choose and decide and act. God made man with the awesome power to choose and act so that he might cooperate with God, enjoy his nature and presence. When man fell into sin, God extended him divine grace by inviting him to join in redeeming man. If man decides to join God in redemption he must choose what the Creator says is "good"—if man doesn't, God uses the consequences of bad choices to try to direct man back into cooperation with redemption. God will not miraculously force man to choose redemption—faith is what redeems—and miracles validate God's promises of redemption through faith. However, freedom carries awesome responsibilities! One is choosing and acting for the right and just and good instead of the wrong and evil. There are rewards and penalties for good and bad choices. And the consequences of choices will be given to man to live with eternally! Jesus met many sick people but did not cure them all miraculously. He didn't even heal his sick apostles by miracles. Jesus met many hungry people but he didn't feed them all miraculously. If human beings like being made in the image of their Creator, then they must choose what their Creator says is "good" if they wish to go on enjoying the presence of God forever! If not, they may go to hell! Let's work and pray that they do not opt for the latter destiny!

Many Persians "became" Jews for fear of being slaughtered by Haman's "hordes" who just might get on a rampage of killing and indiscriminately slaughter every one they could get their hands on. Plus, the Jews now had government authority on their side (cf. 9:3). There was about to be a great struggle with much bloodshed. The Gentiles reasoned that the Jews would probably be victorious and they expected Jews to take revenge upon all who had not been sympathetic to them, just like a heathen would do. Of course, Mordecai had already decreed that it not be so. But who knows whether the Jews in a particular community were going to heed what Mordecai decreed? The Hebrew text uses the word rabbim from the root rabab to express "many." It means "multitudes, myriads, vast." So great throngs of Persians, in every province, "from the peoples of the land" (meaning uncircumcised Persians—"Gentiles") became Jews. Jewish commentators on this incident are reluctant to admit that MANY uncircumcised Persians from all over the empire actually became Jewish proselytes! Do you realize what this means? It means that MANY WHO WERE PROSELYTED TO Judaism in Esther's day may have been the ancestors of many who today call themselves "Jews." Ezra (Ezra 1:59-63) found of the approximately 50,000 Jews who returned to Palestine after the exile at least 652 who could not prove they were Jews. According to the book, *The Thirteenth Tribe*, by the late Arthur Koestler, pub. Rand House, (the author himself a "Jew")—most European "Jews" today are descended from the Khazars. The Khazars were Caucasians (not Semites) of southern Russia who were proselyted to Judaism about A. D. 900. According to Jacob Gertenhaus (*Christianity Today*, 3-13-70), no Jew today can trace his ancestry beyond 200-300

years backward. Exclusive genetic purity of the Jewish race began to disappear as a result of the Assyrian and Babylonian exile. The many Gentiles who became Jewish proselytes in the days of Esther is a case in point! Most “Jews” today are no more genetically pure Israelite than Caucasian Americans are genetically pure Englishmen—not even those whose ancestors came on the Mayflower or to Jamestown, VA.

We may learn the following lessons from this chapter: (a) Civil power may be used for good; (b) The Jews would not have been delivered if Esther and Mordecai had not used some ingenuity of their own in composing a counteracting edict; (c) Sometimes those expensive (royal stables) trappings of government, which seem so impractical, may be of very crucial usefulness; (d) The Lord does not always work miracles to protect the oppressed, sometimes he uses letters, languages, couriers, kings and queens and commoners to do his work of justice and goodness on earth; (e) Even pagan emperors and peoples recognize the need for the sanctity of human life against unwarranted and illegal homicide; (f) Not all Jews today were born Jews—many may be descendants of Persia (Iraqis and Iranians, etc.)! Isn’t that a huge irony in light of modern Israel’s unmitigated claim to Palestine as the land belonging to the “Jews”? And all the billions U.S. taxpayers have sent in “foreign aid” to Israel (No. 1 in U.S. foreign aid) to help her sustain her “invasion and occupation” of Palestine in 1948!

We also learn from this lesson: (a) I have counted at least 40 believers in the Bible from Abraham, Joseph and Daniel to Cornelius, Sergius Paulus and Zenas who served God by serving as significant civil authorities (read my book, *What The Bible Says About Civil Government*, the chapter on “Participation of Believers”); (b) It is a blessing to any nation to have laws that cannot be changed at the whim of individual rulers (e.g., amending the U.S. Constitution has to be done by a vote of the majority)—we have many celebrities (sports, entertainment) who believe the laws are not for them but for everyone else; (c) Absolute power corrupts absolutely—civil authorities should be restrained by enforcing on them the same penalties enforced on those they rule—I’m for “term limits” for all our government officials; (d) If “life” is an unalienable right (U.S. Declaration of Independence) then so is the right to self-defense—Missouri legislature recently passed a law that a resident has the right to use force against any aggressive intruder into his home; (e) God doesn’t work miracles to provide justice in the earth, he expects civil governments to do so (from Gen. 9:5-6 to Rom. 13:1-7); (f) Persians were descendants of Noah’s son Japheth (Gentiles)—some in Esther’s day “became” Jews to save their necks—thus some “Jews” today are not genetically Jews at all!

ESTHER 9:1—10:3

The Jews prepared at the same time their enemies were preparing, so each would be aware of the other's preparations. It was not the intention of the Jews to provoke hostility by going where they did not belong. They were not the aggressors. They simply knew that for purposes of defense, there would be strength in numbers, so they grouped together in any city or town where enough Jews lived to organize their resistance. The Jews were so well organized and highly motivated "no man could withstand them." The Jews fought with such ferocity, all the people of the Persian empire stood in awe and fear of them. They would go through another holocaust or attempted genocide some 300 years later (ca. 175-168 B.C.) during the days of Antiochus IV, the Syrian, versus the Maccabees. In both holocausts, the Jews were faced with total extinction. Both the attempted genocides were precipitated by personal prejudice and a personal vendetta using citizens of their own heathen lands against the Jews. There were no great issues in either of the two pogroms of territorial infringements, rebellions, or national sovereignty involved. The assault against the Jews in both pogroms were irrational, unjust and genocidal. The Jews had done nothing whatsoever to deserve such murderous genocide. Right was on their side. They fought with abandon to preserve their race and to uphold the justness of their cause. It is tragic, but intriguing, that the attempted genocide of the Jews in A. D. 1930-45 was initiated by one man's (Adolph Hitler) implacable hatred of them because of his prejudice. It was Hitler's personal vendetta, helped along by a cadre of lesser lights who were waiting to hear anti-Semitism spouted at the highest decibels! In Persia, in addition to their own fervor, the Jews had on their side the Queen (Esther) of the empire and Mordecai, prime-minister to the King. Many ruling and administrative officials of the Persian empire helped the Jews—probably because of their fear or respect for Mordecai. Mordecai had been promoted to the position formerly held by the dreaded Haman! But Mordecai was respected for being quite a different kind of person than Haman. The Hebrew resistance was not unbridled willfulness, but they were able to defend themselves against their enemies to whatever extent they deemed necessary. It was OT justice—"eye for eye, tooth for tooth." Their enemies were defeated on every hand, but the Jews did not plunder their enemy's property—although the Jews had official sanction to do so! This is exceptional behavior! Even Americans on both sides, in their own War for Independence (1776-1783), and in their Civil War (1861-1865) occasionally either plundered the properties of enemies (fellow Americans) or destroyed and burned them. So did the Russians in their "Communist Revolution" and so did the French in the "French Revolution." This explodes the old, false, unscientific, unhistorical cliché that man has "evolved" in his alleged 1 million years on planet earth! In most civil wars today (in the Middle-East, in the Far-East, in India, in China, in the Balkans) plundering and unnecessary destruction continues just as it did 2400 years ago (and even earlier in Biblical history). Try looking in a world almanac some day and find the statistics of deaths, wounded, and missing of all the modern wars—and also the monetary costs just for fighting those wars—then add to that the cost for rebuilding war-ravaged territories! Sad, sad, sad—terribly SAD!

This "body count" of the number of dead should be considered fairly

accurate. On the Behistun Inscription (made later by Darius the king of Persia) numbers of those slain in battle are given with precise exactness. The area of the hill where the Palace complex stood in Susa was more than 100 acres. Archaeologists have found the ruins of many houses in this area. It is not improbable that 500 men would be slain in their attempt to attack the Jews within the palace complex itself. The fact that the Jews did not seize the property of those they killed in their resistance is mentioned a number of times (9:10,15,16) in order to emphasize that they were concerned only with defending themselves. They were not motivated by greed in the grizzly, lethal work of defending their lives. The Jewish enslavement in Egypt was much different. In Egypt they slaved and were killed months and years without pay. When they left, God allowed them to be remunerated for their labor. Kinda like VA benefits are “payments” for all the “overtime” a military man serves in war and peace without remuneration. This does not mean, however, that Jews never plundered and raped and destroyed in other wars in which they were involved! Read Josephus’ description of the 4 year siege and eventual attack upon Jerusalem in A. D. 70 by the Roman legions. The Jews inside Jerusalem killed, plundered, and destroyed one another’s person and properties in a holocaust perpetrated upon one another!

The Hebrew Massoretic text of the OT (A. D. 500-900), which had every letter, line, paragraph, and page numbered for accuracy, requires that the ten sons of Haman be written in a perpendicular column on the right-hand side of the page, with the vav (“and”) on the left-hand side of the page. The origin of this may be from the tradition that the ten sons were impaled on a very tall pointed pole, one above the other. It is also traditional that when the book of Esther is read at Purim celebrations, the names of the ten sons plus the word “ten” are all to be read in one breath, because as the Talmud states, “they all died together.” The request of Esther to slay Haman’s ten sons was not “cold-blooded.” After all, they undoubtedly were involved in “hatching up” the plan to kill all the Jews along with their father, and probably involved in actually taking up weapons to carry out what their dead father couldn’t do (we remember the two sons of Saddam Hussein!). Capital punishment of those convicted of capital crimes is both biblical, rational and practical. Capital punishment serves not only as a deterrent but also produces a proper execution of justice (see *What The Bible Says About Civil Government*, already cited). Killing in wars of defense is actually “capital punishment” upon murderers (aggressors) on a large scale! The request for making the sons of Haman public spectacles was to provide a strong deterrent to any non-Jews who had not participated in the violence but might be contemplating it! Deterrence for crime by publicly punishing with a penalty appropriate to the crime, is thoroughly scriptural and reasonable. The Jews were taught in the Torah (OT Law) to punish crime (a) without pity—i.e., without mercy (Deut. 19:11-21; 25:12); (b) without delay (Eccl. 8:14; Isa. 26:10; Deut. 17:10; 19:11-21; 21:18-21; 22:13-21; 22:22,23,24; 25:1-3, etc.); (c) without partiality (Deut. 10:17; Isa. 61:8; Jer. 22:3; Psa. 37:28; 89:14; Micah 6:8); (d) without presumption of guilt (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; Num 35:30; Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1; Deut. 19:16-20; Ex. 23:1,3,7,8); (e) by making the penalty commensurate with the crime (Ex. 21:23; Lev. 24:17-20; Deut. 19:21); (f) with proper judicial rules for evidence (John 18:19-21; 18:22-23; Acts 23:1-5; Deut. 13:12-14; 17:2-7; 19:15-21; Lev. 19:16; Ex. 22:10,11); (g) to prohibit personal vengeance (Matt. 5:38-42; Rom. 12:14-21; 13:1-7; Ex. 21:13; Num. 35:10-34; Deut. 19:1-13; Josh. 20:9). The Bible also gives reasons

civil governments must punish crime, (a) to carry out civil government's God-ordained mission (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17; (b) to vindicate the sovereignty and character of God (Rom. 1:18ff; Gen. 9:6-9; Gen. 1:29,30; 9:1,4,5,6; Heb. 13:17); (c) as a deterrence (1 Tim. 1:8-10; Deut. 13:11; 17:13; 21:21; Isa. 16:9-10; Heb. 12:3-11; Prov. 13:24; 19:18-19; 21:11; 23:13-14, etc.); (d) restraint of criminals and crime, although the Mosaic Law made no provision for incarceration (Deut. 13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21; 24:7; Num. 15:30,32; Lev. 18:29; 20:3; 24:12; Num. 15:34; 25:28; 35:25; Gen. 39:20) (e) to prevent private vengeance; (f) to rehabilitate the criminal, if possible and bring about true repentance (Ex. 22:1,4; Lev. 6:4,5; 24:21; Prov. 13:24; 22:25; 23:13, etc.). ISN'T IT INTERESTING THAT A WOMAN WAS NOT SQUEAMISH ABOUT SENTENCING 10 MEN TO BE EXECUTED? Do we have women in America who could become President and commit men and women to war! LET'S HOPE SO!

The circumstances of the struggle within the city of Susa (2 days duration) resulted in a difference regarding the date of the day of rejoicing between the Jews of the capital city Susa, and the Jews of the provinces. The Jews of Susa could not "rest" until the third day which was the 15th of Adar. When Mordecai attempted to set up a national celebration for this great deliverance some difficulty arose as to which day would be set aside for all Jews to commemorate it. It was diplomatically decided that both days would be kept (9:21). There's nothing wrong about "gladness" when a war is over—and nothing wrong with "celebrating" it—else we would have to do away with July 4th in America, and VE Day and VJ Day, etc. Just like in a game of cards or any other game (athletic and otherwise) the winners laugh and the losers grouch. Congregations of Christians celebrate victories over Satan when a sinner repents and is immersed into Christ; congregations celebrate lots of things (some that are not even scripturally sanctioned). Heaven rejoices over one sinner who has repented. Why would it be wrong to declare a feasting of gladness by Esther and the Jews when they had won a victory over evil in the person of Haman? Jews in OT times considered "wine" (Heb. yayin) a blessing from God and gave thanks to God for it. Harold Fowler in his commentary on Matthew, Vol. 2, pages 526-533, published by College Press, has the most thorough discussion of wine and the believer I've ever read—it's in a Special Study entitled "Would Jesus Drink Wine?" in connection with the Pharisees accusation that Jesus was a "wine-bibber and a glutton" in Matthew, ch. 11—every Christian should read this!! It is not the "wine" per se that is wrong—it is the intemperance, lack of self-control, that is wrong—check out 1 Timothy 4:1-5—the Bible nowhere teaches "total abstinence" except perhaps for the attitude that a Christian would "drink no wine and eat no meat" so long as it would cause a "brother" to stumble." But then, we have opened another "can of worms"—Paul did lots of things that were not kosher (clean) to Jews simply to show them that he would not be made a slave to anyone's scruples when they made their scruples necessities for salvation.

The word Pur in Hebrew is singular, and is probably a word borrowed from the Assyrian word puru which means "stone." Pur is found in the Hebrew text only in Esther 3:7 and 9:24,26. It came to mean a lot for casting to determine an issue. The casting of lots was a familiar practice of ancient Eastern civilizations, even of the Hebrews (e.g., Prov. 16:33; Num. 26:55; Ezek. 48:29; Prov. 18:18; Jonah 1:7;

Acts 1:26, etc.). Lots were drawn or thrown in various ways; sometimes by means of stone or ivory dice; sometimes by sets of intricately carved wooden sticks; by strips of parchment and other means. Haman's "lots" were probably some type of numbered or figured stones. So, the Jews named their "festival" of victory over Haman's edict and the soldiers sent to carry it out, Purim (the —im ending on any Hebrew word indicates it is plural in this case it means, "stones" or "dice"). Of course, the "lots" themselves were not being celebrated—they were symbolic of their victory over what Haman's "lots" had decreed against!

We just do not know whether Jesus observed Purim or not. We do know he observed the Passover (in fact it is almost certain that he observed the Passover 4 times in the gospel accounts) and the Feast of Tabernacles, also called "Feast of Booths" or "Succoth." (John chs. 7,8,9,10:1-21). But we also know he went to Jerusalem during the Jewish Feast of Dedication (John 10:22ff). Hanukkah is the Hebrew word for "Dedication" and it is observed at the same time as the Christians observe "Christmas" on Kislev (December) 25th. It commemorates the "re-dedication" of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem by the Maccabees when they had driven the "abomination of desolation" or "the contemptible one" (Antiochus IV "Ephiphanes") from their land in 164 B.C. Hanukkah is not a feast instituted by God in the OT (or NT). Whether Jesus "observed" Hanukkah or not, we may only speculate. It does appear Jesus kept a few of the rabbinical "traditions" when the rabbis did not insist that he do so! One thing is certain, Jesus was born of a Jewish mother and the Holy Spirit, so he was in his human, genetic constitution, a Jew. He grew up in a Jewish home and culture. He practiced Judaism as it was intended to be practiced even in the OT. But he also showed at some significant times that he was not bound to the "Law" as human beings were bound to it (e.g., Matt. 17:24-27), and, while not being "bound" by it he willingly observed it in cases where some other Jew might be offended or made to stumble had he not done so! Personally, I doubt that Jesus observed either Dedication or Purim. We know he observed Passover. Whether he observed every year of his 30 upon earth First Fruits (Bikkurim, April), Pentecost (Shevuoth, "Feast of Weeks," June), Trumpets (Rosh-Hashana, September), (Tabernacles or Succoth, "Booths", September), The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur, October) or not, we may only speculate. He went to Jerusalem at the special days allotted for "Tabernacles" (John 7:1-13). According to Michael Asheri, in his book, *Living Jewish*, pub. Everest House, 1978, pp. 177-178, Purim is "a minor holiday, in the sense that work is permitted on it, but in practice, many Jews do not work on Purim because it is considered a Yom Tov (a "blessed day")...it is customary among all Jews to send gifts of food to their friends and neighbors on Purim...almost always pastries...Purim is the one day in the year on which drunkenness is not only permitted but actually encouraged at least in theory...There is a Jewish saying to the effect that only when one is so drunk that one cannot distinguish in the Megilla between 'baruch Mordechai' (Blessed by Mordecai) and 'arur Haman' (Cursed be Haman) has one fulfilled the observance of Purim...the festivity features all sorts of clowning and merriment including the Purim Shpiel...or Purim play, in which Mordechai, Esther, Haman and the other figures of the drama described in the Book of Esther have parts and it is customary for Jewish men to dress in Jewish women's clothing for the Purim Shpiel...in Orthodox communities, the children still dress up in masquerade costumes and go from house to house begging for gifts and even money (Purim has no connection to

Halloween at all)...there is a Jewish proverb that says when Messiah comes all holidays will be abolished—with the exception of Purim....a special section is added to the grace after meals on Purim....a triangular cookie filled either with Lekvar (a sort of prune jam), or mohn (poppyseed) is eaten...In Yiddish, these pastries are called Homentashen, or Haman’s pockets and in Israel they are called Oznei Haman (Haman’s ears).”

This “P.S.” to the book of Esther emphasizes the power of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) in order to reflect on the power and authority of Mordecai since the Jew stood next to the emperor himself in power and authority. If Xerxes could command the service of the continent of Asia and the coast of the Mediterranean, then Mordecai’s power and command was also that encompassing. The author of “Esther” cannot bring himself to lay down his pen until he has recorded for all posterity the greatness of Mordecai. And well he should record it! The Persian chronicles have returned to dust, but the account of Esther and Mordecai lives on in God’s word which cannot pass away! It is certainly not unusual for a Jew to be promoted to a very high position in a Gentile government (Gen. 41:37-45; Dan. 5;7; 6:3; Neh. 2:1, etc.) This Jew, Mordecai, has won for himself the name of a great and good statesman. So the real measure of Mordecai’s greatness after all is not power but the beneficent use of that power for the good of others. That is the measure of every man. “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant...” (Matt. 20:26).

We learn from this lesson: (a) The word “justice” means, “equity, evenness” (i.e., “an eye for an eye...”)—due to the planned Persian genocide the Jews had no reason to extend mercy until the Persians changed their minds about killing all the Jews—“justice” (punishment commensurate with the crime) needs a revival in the world today; (b) Wars of self-defense against an aggressor are not intended to confiscate territory or property—only self preservation of life and domain and property—such defensive wars are sanctioned throughout the Bible; (c) If Haman’s 10 sons were conspirators in planning the genocide of the Jews, and we assume they were (like Saddam Hussein’s sons), then they deserved capital punishment along with their father (I refer you again to my book *What The Bible Says About Civil Government*; see the chapter on *Crime And Punishment*); (d) Americans celebrate their “independence” which was obtained with much bloodshed and property damage—Americans celebrated VE Day (Victory in Europe) and VJ Day (Victory over Japan) with enormous amounts of reveling and joy; (e) We do know Jesus attended Hanukkah of “Feast of Dedication” which was not legislated in the Law of Moses—we do not know whether he celebrated Purim or not—Jesus did a number of things not specifically legislated for or against in the Law of Moses, and the epistles tell Christians they we are not to judge one another in the matter of observation of days (Rom. 14:1-9, etal); (f) Mordecai was a humble servant of the Lord and his name has been preserved for all time in God’s word because he used his circumstances and position to serve God’s people—“Whoever would be great among you must be your servant” (Mt. 20:26).

Mazzeltov and Shalom (“Peace, well-being, and may you prosper.”)

Introduction to Paul T. Butler Th.D

Paul was born in Springfield Missouri and graduated from Conway High School prior to enlistment in the US Navy. He began serious bible study with correspondence courses from San Jose Bible College. He later enrolled in Ozark Bible College and acquired his Bachelor of Theology degree June of 1961. He received a Master of Biblical Literature degree from Ozark in May of 1973. He received a Doctorate of Theology from The Theological University of America in October of 1990.

Paul taught at Ozark Christian College from 1960 to 1997. He also served many years as registrar for the college.

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