

Esther

CHAPTER TWO

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CONTENTS

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
1. The Gentile Power.....	9
2. The Jews.....	23
3. Mordecai and Esther.....	41
4. The Great Adversary.....	98
5. Some of the Circumstantial Evidences of the Hand of God	113

ESTHER

This book constitutes part of the divinely inspired Scriptures among which it occupies a well-distinguished place. It presents to us, relative to Israel, the people of God, a remarkable display of the ways of God, of which the Bible in its perfect unity presents the whole. From this point of view it is of great interest. There we find precious teaching and, as in all the books of the Old Testament, here we find shadows of that which answers to Christ and His earthly people in the future.

After the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-4) had permitted the Jews, captives at Babylon, to re-enter their land and to rebuild the temple, we view them as being in two distinct positions.

A small number of them profited by the decree and returned to their land. There they are not formally recognised by God because "Lo Ammi" (not my people) had been pronounced upon them, and the time of lifting the sentence had not yet come (see Hos. 1:9-11). But working with faith and under the action of the Spirit of God (Ezra 1:5; Hag. 1:14) they carried themselves as faithful Jews in the land. We see them as keeping the ordinances of the law of Moses, raising their altar and offering sacrifices, reconstructing the temple and raising the walls of Jerusalem.

It is true, the glory of Jehovah did not come to the temple of these sons of the dispersion, as it had filled the tabernacle in the wilderness and the temple of Solomon; no, the glory is departed (Ezra 11:22-25); the throne of Jehovah is no more at Jerusalem. No mention is made of the ark which also has never been in this new temple. "For," said Jehovah by Haggai to the returned captives; "*I am with you . . . according to the word that I covenanted . . . when ye came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not.*" Hag. 2:4,5. To faith God was there and that house was His temple. Consequently, the Jews keep themselves apart from the nations, read the Scriptures and hold to them, and follow the ways of the God of Israel, as far as the Gentile powers, under whose dominion they were, allowed them. Never since this time have they, as a nation, fallen again into idolatry. They call upon God, and God protects them in their dangers and sustains them in their difficulties. They have rulers, liberators and prophets.

This state of "the sons of the dispersion" is the subject of the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and part of Zechariah. Malachi, the last of the prophets, witnesses to the ruin that this state, alas, would turn into at a later time. But marvelous grace, it was then that God's faithful servant, the Lord Jesus Christ, came into this dark world!

This then is a new condition into which they are brought and put on trial. As we have said, the throne of God is no longer there, the glory of God

is no longer is the temple, and there is no more "priest with Urim and Thummim" to render the oracles of God (Neh. 7:65; Num. 27:21), but we repeat, for faith this is always the house of God; as such the Lord Jesus recognized it (though it was another temple then). (Hag. 2:3, comp. John 2:16.)

The Jews which returned to their land are always bondslaves, dependant on the nations (Neh. 9:36-38). They have been gathered again in expectation of the Liberator, the Messiah (Hag. 2:7). This will be the last trial of man. Will they receive Him when He makes them hear His appeals of grace after urging them to repentance? We know the result by the gospel record and Malachi already shows the decline and the beginnings of the condition as found by Jesus when He came among them.

But a great many of the Jews — that is to say of the Babylonian captivity — did not profit by the decree of Cyrus. They remained settled, not only at Babylon but dispersed throughout the povinces of the vast Persian empire (Esther 2:5,6; 3:6,8). One cannot but see in their conduct a lack of faith, of energy, of affection for the house of God. Nevertheless, they retain their customs which are different from those of the defiled nations. They stay separated even though in the midst of them. Here, of course, they have neither sacrifice, nor solemn feast days, nor the word of the Lord by means of prophets; nor can they keep the ordinances of the law of Moses in their entirety. They are, after a sort, in a position comparable to

the Jews of our day; without king or prince, or sacrifice, or statutes, or ephod, or teraphim (Hos. 3:4). God does not recognize them, but whatever their state — and this is what puts into relief His goodness and faithfulness — His regard is for them; *He acts in grace towards them*; He protects and spares them, but His actions move in a hidden manner, and for this reason His Name is never mentioned in this book.

It is this that we purpose tracing in this book, knowing the secret ways of the grace of God towards His people, dispersed throughout the nations till finally bringing them to the glory of the kingdom.

Let us examine some of the principal subjects which we find in this exceedingly interesting and instructive book.

Chapter 1

THE GENTILE POWER

First, in the opening scene we notice the power which God has now established on the earth, after His throne has been withdrawn from Jerusalem on account of Israel's iniquity and the headship has been transferred to the Gentile nations. It was given to King Nebuchadnezzar to represent it in its majestic appearance over a succession of times, in a dream which Daniel recalls and interprets (Dan. 2). These are "the times of the Gentiles" of which the Lord speaks (Luke 21:24). They began with the Babylonian Empire headed by its powerful head: Nebuchadnezzar, the golden head of his image. His lordship was universal and absolute. He had received it from God Himself (Dan. 2:37,38; Jer. 27:6-8) as it was told him by Daniel.

But in the book of Esther this Babylonian Empire is no longer present. It had terminated the night Babylon was taken by Darius the Mede, at which time also Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, was slain (Jer. 27:7; Dan. 5:28-31). The empire of the Medes and Persians succeeded him, represented by the chest and arms of silver of Nebuchadnezzar's image seen in his dream — less excellent now, for the royal authority was limited and no longer absolute (Dan. 6:7,8) but participating in the same privileges and displaying the same

spirit. Cyrus, successor to Darius, and the real head of the Persian empire, recognized that his power came to him from "the Lord God of heaven." Ezra 1:2. This is the empire which in the days of Esther reigned over the earth by its King Ahasuerus who "reigned from India even unto Ethiopia, over a hundred seven and twenty provinces." Esther 1:1.

The empires succeeding each other which constituted the statue are also individually presented in prophecy according to their moral character under the image of "beasts" and savage beasts (Dan. 7 & 8). This description tells us how they have appeared as to their character, their manner of actions, and their responsibility. The beast knows not God, lifts not its eyes up to the heavens, but keeps them turned down to the earth; it is altogether of the earth, follows its instincts and serves only to satisfy the more or less developed intelligence it possesses. These empires, in the person of their heads, instead of relating to God, the origin of their power, and living in dependence on Him, glorified themselves as though they owed everything unto themselves. Nebuchadnezzar heard these words from the mouth of Daniel: "Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory." Dan. 2:37.

Sometime later he forgot them and dared to say: "Is not this great Babylon, that *I have built* for the house of the kingdom *by the might of my power*, and for the honor of *my majesty*?" Dan. 4:30.

There is nothing for God in it; it is *man* exalting himself. When Nebuchadnezzar turns his eyes from God to look on himself, then lowers his eyes and turns them towards earth, he becomes a beast (see Ps. 49:20), without knowledge, given over to instincts and not guided by wisdom from on high. It is not till he lifts up his eyes towards God that he can say in his admirable confession: "*And* mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High." Dan. 4:34-36. In the end times this shall come to pass among the nations; they shall acknowledge and shall bless the Lord (see Ps. 138:4,5).

We shall not now stop to consider in detail the imagery by which the Babylonian might is figured; one sees there the majesty, the power, the energy and the rapidity of execution. The beast which represents the Persian empire is "like to a bear, and it raised up one dominion, [marg.] and it had three ribs in the mouth of it between the teeth of it: and they said thus unto it, Arise, devour much flesh." Dan. 7:5. The description expresses in a striking manner the character of the second kingdom. It is greediness and rapacity coupled with the voracity and cruelty of the beast of prey. In effect, the power of the Persian enriched itself by the spoiling of the conquered upon whom they imposed their intolerable yoke, and this for the satisfying of the tastes and unbridled desires of the luxury and enjoyments of the kings, the satraps and courtiers.

Daniel chapter 8 presents the power of the Persian under the figure of the ram "pushing westward, and northward, and southward; so that no beasts might stand before him, neither was there any that could deliver out of his hand; but he did according to his will, and became great." Dan. 8:3,4. The directions in which their conquests were effective, the irresistible force of their armies throughout their beginnings (2 Chron. 36:23; Isa. 45:1-3), the extent of the territory over which they reigned and which gave them the name of "grand king" is admirably described in a short account of the vision of Daniel.

But the Persian empire, as we have already remarked, was according to the word of the prophet, "inferior" to the head of gold. His position, even as the metal to which he was likened in the vision, indicated the great monarch of the Chaldeans. *Below* the head of gold were the chest and arms of silver. This was the Persian empire; it was not *inferior* in extent to the Babylonian empire, but the authority of their kings was limited in that they themselves were bound by the laws they had promulgated. There was a limit to the exercise of their will. Instead of being absolute, as was Nebuchadnezzar, who took no counsel but with himself, and whose will was the only law, with the Medes and the Persians the royal authority was regulated by a council of seven principal officers of the realm, and once a decree was rendered the king himself could not change it; it was irrevocable (Esther 1:19, 8:8; Dan. 6:7,8,12,15).

Other traits characterized the Gentile power which prevailed during the times of Esther. While on the one hand their authority was limited, on the other the Persian kings demanded to be treated as God Himself. Nebuchadnezzar, immediately after the vision which unrolled before him the course of the empires, and though he had recognized the God of Daniel as "the God of gods and the Lord of the kings," employs the God-given authority which he holds, to give to idolatry a splendor without equal and intended to make it the tie which would unite all the people who were subject to him. Death is the penalty pronounced against whoever would not obey the will of the mighty monarch and would refuse to prostrate himself before the statue of gold (Dan. 3). So also in the time to come, the beast and his image shall have to be worshiped, on pain of death, by them which dwell on the earth (Rev. 13).

With the kings of Persia a much higher pretension prevailed. They assumed the place of divinity. The first thing presented by Satan to man to seduce him had been: "Ye shall be as gods." Man has not forgotten it. This suggestion still works in him. He pursues this design with all his powers while his mind multiplies discoveries and sciences and he subjects to himself the forces of nature. And the moment will arrive when under Satan's workings "the man of sin [shall] be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."

2 Thess. 2:3,4. The saints of this present time will already be with the Lord, but what a terrible future awaits this world.

The pretension of which we have spoken was apparent with the kings of Persia in different ways. No one could present himself before them without being called, and when the law was infringed, it meant death for the transgressor, at least if the king did not show grace (Esther 4:11). No one might appear sad before him. Their presence was to be the source of joy (Neh. 2:1,2). Every decree having gone forth from their mouth was irrevocable. Besides we see Darius, on instigation of his counsellors, refusing to allow anyone to request anything from any god or man except himself on pain of being thrown into the den of lions (Dan. 6:7,8). Again we see how a word of these monarchs, pronounced against anyone, was a sentence of death (Esther 7:8-10).

The idolatry which Nebuchadnezzar intended to establish and impose upon all and the pretension to being considered as a god, which characterized the Persian kings, were both the effects of the influence of the enemy of God. The enemy was working against God's people, as it is seen in Daniel and we shall see it in the book of Esther.

Let us remember also that royal power is instituted of God and as such it represents the power of God upon the earth. Thus also, addressing the judges, God says: "I have said, Ye are gods." Psa. 82:1,6. The sovereign has

authority over life and death. Paul tells us in exhorting "every soul," to be subject to the authority which is of God, that the magistrate "beareth not the sword in vain." Rom. 13:1-5. The royal hand holds out a scepter of gold, a symbol of the power to reign, and a sign of authority and majesty. But that sceptre held out and touched by a person is for him a sign of grace and mercy, a token that he is accepted by royal favor and that instead of death his life is spared (Esther 4:11; 8:4). We would not be able to stand before the majesty of God, but His grace intervenes, places us into His favor, and we live! Then also the power of the sovereign abases and elevates whom He will, as we shall see in Mordecai and Haman. And this is, in its divine application, as is said of Jehovah: "He bringeth low, and lifteth up." 1 Sam. 2:7. Moreover, the power of the king of Persia gives the right to the tribute and the homage of all the nations which are subject to him; it possessed the glory and might. From all these viewpoints the great king fairly represents divine authority. But he, too, is only a man, and his history in this book shows it plainly.

Let us now enter more in detail into what the book of Esther is saying to us. The grandeur and the extent, the glory and the riches of the empire over which Ahasuerus reigned, are shown to us in the first verses: "This is Ahasuerus which reigned from India even unto Ethiopia, over a hundred and seven and twenty provinces," every one of which could count for a kingdom. Desiring to display the

power of Persia and of Media to his princes and servants, and to the nobles and princes of the provinces which he had invited, he showed them "the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honor of his excellent majesty." He made them a feast and celebration for one hundred and eighty days. After this the great king extended his invitation to the entire population of Shushan the capital for seven more days of celebrations.

Do we not see analogous things in our day? The course of this world does not change. Man is using the gifts God gives, the strength He bestows, for the amassing of treasure, displaying with pride his luxury and his riches and inviting others so as to freely indulge in the pleasures these riches afford and doing this in utter independence without constraint (chap. 1:8). Everyone drank as he pleased and abandoned himself to pleasure and joy. Is this not the course of this world today?

Everything in this feast of Ahasuerus was for pleasure, for the gratification of the lust^e of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). And I ask again: Has the world changed? We see the splendors of the World's Fairs where the nations of the earth agree together to display everything their riches have produced. Man boasts of all that which science, arts and the industry of man have invented to embellish his life, to charm his days and to add to his joys upon earth, but remains far from God. His feasts are perhaps less luxurious than that of Ahasuerus, but they are more frequent — a vain show of riches

and of the intelligence and genius of man. Does it not resemble the feasts of Ahasuerus, more than forty-three centuries ago "in the court of the garden of the king's palace"? There "were white, green, and blue hangings, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble: the beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, and blue, and white, and black marble." chap. 1:6. Such was that sumptuously decorated scene where the feast ran its course. There exquisite wines flowed in large volume "in the vessels of gold (the vessels being diverse one from the other)." Everyone did as they pleased without constraint, according to the king's instructions (vv. 7,8). What splendor, what riches, as the mirth — an earthly joy, that of intoxication and forgetting — filled the hearts. What satisfaction for the flesh! This is the boast of the world. But "the world passeth away," with its celebrations and mirth, with its vanities and coveting, "but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." 1 John 2:17.

There is more. In spite of all the splendors which it offers, the world is at enmity with God, and he who loves the world makes himself an enemy of God (Jas. 4:4). The world is judged since it has demonstrated its hatred to the highest degree in crucifying the Son of God. Soon the sentence shall be executed against the world, against Babylon whose riches, luxury, pride and downfall are described in the eighteenth chapter of Revelation. The voice of the angel shall be heard: "Babylon

the great is fallen, is fallen." She perishes with all them who glorified themselves with her. And what is the word addressed to the faithful? "Come out of her, my people." What part therefore can a Christian have in the celebrations of the world, the fairs, the amusements, etc.? For him all this is judged, since God has judged it. "They are not of the world," Jesus said, "even as I am not of the world." John 17:16. Are we going to associate ourselves with or attach ourselves to that which will perish under the judgment of God? Consider the words of the angel: "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins." Rev. 18:4.

The world forgets the end towards which it is hastening. It is given up entirely to its distractions and its enjoyments, but, mixed with this intoxicating cup there is always something ready to trouble, a bitterness sometimes altogether unexpected. How true the word of the wise: "Even in laughter the heart is heavy and the end of that mirth is bitterness." But, unexpectedly, that which we thought would increase our pleasure often brings sorrow and spoils our enjoyment.

"Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house." Nothing seemed more appropriate than that the queen should be united in heart with what her husband was doing and, in her sphere, also give pleasure. Vashti, however, acted in independence. She wanted to enjoy personally the feast she had prepared for the women of the royal house and refused to be

associated with her husband's feast and to adorn it by her presence. Ahasuerus wanted to show the beauty and dignity of his spouse to the people and princes. He wanted them to see that she who is the nearest to him is worthy of him and of the station she occupies. But when she is requested to come, Vashti refuses to appear. "Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands" is an ancient command, for it was spoken to Eve: "Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." But as the man who is the head of the wife is lifted up against Christ his Lord, so it is often seen in the world that the woman is lifted up against her head. Today, in particular, the spirit of independence, of liberation as it is called, is gaining the ascendance over those whose glory shall be submission.

Thus it is that the royal feast and its joys are disturbed. The king and his princes must bring in order as to this spirit of insubordination which, coming from the queen, would spread to all classes. Vashti loses her crown which would be given to one better than herself. By irrevocable edict she is reduced to obscurity and this edict, published throughout, establishes the position of authority of the man.

Although the king and his counsellors were acting in ignorance and by human motives, the matter was of God. The commandment which He had given from the beginning must be maintained. To rise up against it is a sign of the last days. But in the secret counsels of God, the fall of Vashti would have serious consequences, although

unobserved by the world. Even though these were the times of the Gentiles, God gives evidence that He does not stop caring for His people. Everything turns, as regards God's plans with the earth, around this despised race, this "nation scattered and peeled . . . a people terrible from their beginning hitherto: a nation meted out and trodden underfoot." Isa. 18:2,7.

The fall of Vashti the Gentile queen, prepares the way of the Jewish queen for the deliverance of God's people. The circumstance which produces this result may seem rather miserable. It is the haughty character of an insubmissive woman which gives occasion for it, and the irritation of a king whose orders have been flouted. But God uses these sentiments to work the things He has in mind. He governs all things and makes the thoughts and actions even of him who is unaware to work for the accomplishment of His designs. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" Rom. 11:33. Do we not here in this event, see it again in the substituting of Esther for Vashti? Is it not an image of that which is in preparation and will soon take place? We know that during the time when the Jewish spouse is set aside because of her unfaithfulness, there is a Gentile bride, the Church, on earth.

We are not talking now of the Church as a vessel of divine testimony down here, the golden lampstand which should diffuse the light of Christ: The Church was called to show to the world the beauty and the glory with which her divine Head

had invested her: the royal crown which graced His head. Did she do it? No, and we know, according to the Word, that for this reason she will be rejected.

“Be not high-minded,” said the apostle to those who through grace have been made partakers of the root and fatness of the olive tree (Israel) “but fear . . . lest He also spare not thee. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but towards thee, goodness, if thou continue in His goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.” Rom. 11:17-22. The church has not continued; she has not showed His beauty to the world; she has shaken off the yoke of obedience towards her Lord; she is highminded and has wanted to enjoy herself; she glorifies herself as if nothing were wanting and she will be spewed out of the mouth of Christ (Rev. 3:16,17).

But according to the merciful ways of God towards Israel, His earthly people, the Jewish spouse which has been set aside for a time will be restored and will replace down here the Gentile spouse. The rejected branches shall be grafted in again (Rom. 11:23; Hos. 2:14-17). Then will be accomplished what Isaiah describes in glowing terms:

“Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on

the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited. Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine husband; The Lord of hosts is His name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall He be called. For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer." Isa. 54:2-8.

This will be the time of Israel's glory, although at present they are scattered and exposed to the railings of their enemies. We find this prefigured in the events which the book of Esther relates. We are thus led to consider a second subject which presents itself, and that is the Jews.

Chapter 2

THE JEWS

If we consider them as they are now, we see a people, formerly recognized of God as His people, in the land which Jehovah had given to them, now far from their land, dispersed and subjected to the power of the nations, apparently forsaken of God. I say apparently, for one always sees the hand of God behind the scenes directing all the circumstances and keeping even the simplest ones in view and it is just this which lends the book of Esther its great significance and keen interest.

The Jews* thus are viewed as a people dispersed throughout all the nations of the vast empire of Ahasuerus. Nevertheless, though in the midst of nations, they always remained Jews, a separate people by their manners, their customs, their religion and their observances. Their great enemy, Haman, adjudged them well by this report; however, he added a wicked and false trait to his description. "There is," said he to Ahasuerus, "a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy

*This is the name given to the descendants of Israel since the captivity, whether it be those who re-entered their land, or those of the dispersion. It originated, no doubt, from Judah, the children of the carrying-away, pertaining chiefly to that tribe.

kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; *neither keep they the king's laws*; therefore, it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed." chap. 3:8,9.

All of Haman's report about the Jews was true, except the accusation of insubmission to the king's laws. They obeyed them for conscience' sake (see Dan. 3:6-18; 6:4-16). The ordinances and prohibitions of their God were above every commandment and every injunction of man whoever he might be. "We ought to obey God rather than men." Acts 5:29. But the accusation of Haman was not truthful. On this point we would remark that generally the enemies of the faithful have made use of this weapon against them to bring down upon them the rigors of the authorities and hatred of the people.

The Jews accused Jesus before Pilate saying: "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar He stirreth up the people." Luke 23:2-5. Later the masters of the damsel possessed with a spirit of Python, frustrated in their hope of much gain, drew Paul and Silas before the magistrates. "These men," they said, "being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans." Acts 16:19-21. Likewise this accusation is aimed at Paul by Tertullus (Acts 24:5). There were also the martyrs of the first centuries, refusing to sacrifice to the emperors'

images. They were considered bad citizens. Do not we find it so, in some measure, in our day? Walking the path of separation as regards that which is of the world, and for conscience' sake, always excites enmity and draws the reproaches of the world upon the believer. A Christian does not vote, takes no part in the fairs, the patriotic festivals and public meetings, and he is openly or otherwise said to be a poor citizen. But if we are to be subject to the authorities, to pay taxes, to give honor to whom it is due (Rom. 13:1-7), we have to maintain our separation from the world, manifesting that we are not of the world and that our citizenship is in heaven (John 15:19; 17:16; Phil. 3:20).

Another trait characterizing the Jews in the book of Esther is that a moment arrives when after having become the chosen target, and because of this exposed to shame and contempt, tribulation raised by the Adversary overtook them: "If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed." It is a time of distress beyond compare, everything being against them. They are to be destroyed and it seems there is nothing which can deliver them from it. The decree which demands their death has been rendered in the name of the king, sealed with his ring and sent to all the provinces with orders to the governors to execute it. It could not be revoked according to the law of the Persians (Dan. 6:12-15). It affected all the Jews personally as well as touching their belongings. No one was to escape. "All Jews, both

young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar" (Esther 3:12,13) were to be destroyed.

This order recalls Pharaoh's edict of another day but surpasses it with singular cruelty. Do we not see here an image of the tribulation of the last days of which the Lord speaks in these terms: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." Matt. 24:21,22. Will there not also be a time of unimaginable distress coming throughout all the Roman Empire, restored by satanic power, when all they who refuse to render homage to the image of the beast will be killed (Rev. 13:15)?

Everywhere, in the days of Esther, enemies of the Jews were found in the domains of Ahasuerus ready to vent their hatred and to execute that cruel decree, fanned all the more by the prospect of plunder. The Adversary, the enemy of the people of God, finds, and will always find willing helpers. But at the same time, the effect the decree produced upon the people of the nations is striking. They felt the stroke which was to fall upon the Jews who had lived in their midst for a long time. "The decree was given in Shushan the palace but the city Shushan was perplexed." chap. 3:15. The evil which menaced the Jews aroused their compassion; this was a public calamity, for without

doubt the Jews contributed to everyone's welfare, and perhaps through them some of the Gentiles had received the knowledge of God. More than one example in the Word shows the influence the Jews of the dispersion had for good or for contempt. Some were led to inquire as to the motives for their separation, and thereby were led to read the Scriptures.

Oh, that *our* separation might be more real, so that, though misunderstood by the world, we would be as lights and that among those of the world there should be those who would want to know the secret of this life apart from the world and would also be led to Christ! We know also, in view of what will take place at the day of the judgment of the living (Matt. 25:31) that in the coming times when the brethren of the King, the messengers of the "kingdom gospel" will be persecuted, some from among the nations will receive them, and these will not lose their reward.

Is it not also striking to see, in the midst of the consternation of the city of Shushan that "the king and Haman sat down to drink"? The distress of an entire people which was about to perish, and the effect it had upon the population of the city, did not touch them. They sat down to drink and made merry. Haman, the adversary, envisions the disappearance of the objects of his hatred; that makes him happy. Is that not also what we see at other occasions in the Scriptures? This is especially so when the world has succeeded in getting rid of the light which so exposed them: Christ, the light

of the world. "Men loved darkness rather than light." John 3:19. The world rejoiced, while the saints sorrowed (John 16:20).

Furthermore, after we have been gathered around the Saviour, God will raise up, in the midst of an apostate people and a world at enmity, faithful witnesses who will prophesy. The beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit, puts them to death, "And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another." Rev. 11:3-10.

Such is the dreadful hatred of the heart of man against the truth and against all testimony to the truth. They let themselves be led by him who is the Father of lies, the Adversary of God, the enemy of Christ, who is out after only one thing; he seeks to hinder God's designs from coming to pass, preventing them every way he can. In fact, in all of Israel's history and even before this began, we see the effort of Satan to reach his goal of nullifying, if he could, God's plans. He always has his instruments in readiness for this purpose. He remembers the word pronounced against him in Eden, that the seed of the woman "shall bruise thy head," and he would like to render the sentence of no effect. At the time of the flood who was it that involved the human race altogether in corruption and violence? It is Satan hoping that if the entire race disappeared under the judgment of God, the seed of the woman could not appear to bruise his power. God baffled his cunning in sparing Noah "a

just man and perfect in his generations," and who found "grace in the eyes of the Lord." Gen. 6:7-9.

Later, when God had chosen a people in Abraham who is the father thereof and the depository of the promise, "in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18), this people having descended into Egypt, they were greatly multiplied there. How did Satan try to render the promise tied to Israel's existence of none effect? Pharaoh, frightened at the abundant increase of this people and the dangers which could result for Egypt, gave commandment to destroy all the male children of Israel. Had he succeeded, what would have been the consequence? The gradual extermination of the elect people. What then would have become of the promise? It would have been annulled. Pharaoh acted on political motives it appears; human wisdom motivated him, but who inspired him, who incited him to such cruel measures? It was Satan, the Adversary of God.

At the end of the crossing of the desert, Balak, through Balaam, wanted to destroy Israel. He was not permitted to do so, for Jehovah, seeing His people according to His counsels, has not seen iniquity in Jacob (Num. 23:21). Then through Balaam's counsel he made the Israelites fall into sin. Why? In order that, being deprived of God, and under the curse which Balaam was not able to pronounce, but which their unfaithfulness merited, they could not overcome their enemies and enter into Canaan, the land of promise. But behind Balak

and Balaam, we see the hand of Satan, of whom the miserable prophet is the responsible instrument.

The promises are assured unto David and to his posterity. Now what will the enemy do? Athaliah, the impious queen, daughter of Ahab, at the death of her son Ahaziah, took possession of the royal throne of Judah; so that nothing might stop her ambitions she planned to destroy the entire family of David (2 Kings 11:1-3). Only Joash escaped. Who drove Athaliah to this bloodthirsty resolution? Seen from a human viewpoint this was her ambition, but at the bottom of it was Satan who wanted to destroy the race from which Messiah was to come according to promise. In the history of Esther this is instigated by a sentiment of wounded pride and a desire for personal vengeance that made Haman seek to rid himself of Mordecai, but we are told that "he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had showed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai." (chap. 3:6). This is the wounded pride which demanded a vengeance equal to Haman's estimation of himself.

But Satan who motivated him aimed at the destruction of all the people from whom the Deliverer was to come. Notice that, in effect, the decree embraced as well all the Jews which on returning to their land had rebuilt the temple, and among them Zerubbabel their governor and ancestor of Christ. Again Satan reckoned on

spoiling God's designs, so he excited the passions of Haman's heart. How terrible! Man without God is the plaything of his covetousness and thereby the slave and instrument of Satan.

Later, "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman" (Gal. 4:4), and Satan made a new effort. Herod, fearing to lose his throne, ordered Bethlehem's infants to be destroyed thinking to include the "King of the Jews," whom the wise men had come to seek. Who moved Herod to attempt this because of his love for power? Satan — and we see it clearly in Revelation 12:1-6. The woman (Israel as seen in the counsels of God) gives birth to a son, Christ who should govern the nations with a rod of iron (see Psa. 2). But the dragon, the old serpent which is the devil and Satan, "stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born." The dragon wanted to make Christ perish at His birth by the hand of Herod; he did not succeed, for God watched over His Son. Next he raised up the priests and elders of the people, exciting their hatred against Christ, and they, by means of the Roman power, the fourth beast, whose characters the dragon carries — seven heads and ten horns (comp. Dan. 7; Rev. 13 & 17), nailed Christ to the cross. This resulted in breaking the power of Satan. This is his last unsuccessful effort to annul the promise. The seed of the woman is bruised at the heel but the head of the serpent is crushed by the same stroke. Christ is passed through death that "through death He

might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." Heb. 2:14.

Who can bring to nought the counsels of God? Satan may appear to triumph for a time, but his efforts are always shown to be in vain. At present, though overcome, he still seeks to attack the saints, to hinder their progress; he seeks to deceive and to entice them by means of his instruments, often unconsciously, into false doctrines, by human teachings; if he cannot now move directly against Christ, he tries to have His name dishonored by those who are His, leading them away by the covetousness of their own natural heart. The war has not ceased. After violent persecutions he employs deception to attract the Christian to join up with the world. However, the Christian ought to fight the good fight, put on the whole armor of God, being reminded of the precious Word by Paul: "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." Rom. 16:20. Soon the war will cease by God's intervention and we will enjoy rest.

Still there will be another outbreak of iniquity upon the earth. This will be during the time of Israel's distress, the times of sorrowful temptation which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth (Rev. 3:10). During these end times the beast, by Satanic power, will arise out of the abyss to rule over the nations; the false prophet with two horns like a sheep but speaking like a dragon will seduce the people; saints will suffer persecution; the great Adversary the dragon

will cast out of his mouth water like a flood after the woman to carry her away, that is, the faithful of Israel, but Christ will triumph. The final overthrow of Satan is certain. The divine One, the Lamb, accompanied by His followers, the called ones, elect and faithful, will overcome the kings of the earth, the beast and the false prophet which will have led them against Him. Thereafter, Satan will lie bound for a thousand years. After having yet once more seduced the nations and incited them against God and the saints, he will be cast forever into the lake of fire and brimstone (see Rev. 12, 13, 17, 19, 20). Such are the marvelous ways of God towards His own, such the final triumph of Christ over His enemies.

Let us return to the book of Esther. What about the Jews in their distress? They are absolutely powerless against the king's orders and the wrath of their enemies. Their trouble cannot be described; their anguish is extreme. "And in every province, whithersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, and weeping, and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes." Esther 4:3. But who came to their aid? The mightiest of the nation, the king and his favorite are they who have decided their plight, and they have sat down to drink, not caring about the blood that will be shed, the tears that will flow, the cruel agonies of those so unjustly condemned. What can equal the pitiless heart of man! The Scripture has well said, "with their tongues they have used

deceit." This certainly applies to Haman. "Their feet are swift to shed blood: destruction and misery are in their ways." Rom. 3:13-16.

But if the heart of man is hard and without compassion, "filled with all unrighteousness . . . unmerciful" (Rom. 1:29,31), it is not so with the heart of God. Someone saw the mourning and tears and heard the wailing. It is He of the bush which burned but was not consumed, saying to Moses: "*I have surely seen* the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and *have heard* their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for *I know* their sorrows; and I am come down to deliver them." Ex. 3:7,8. This same God, mighty and compassionate, was also ready to undertake for His poor Jewish people, scattered throughout Ahasuerus's empire, and at the point of being exterminated.

It will be so also in the time to come. The faithful and persecuted Jews will cry out: "We are become a reproach to our neighbors, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us. How long, Lord? wilt Thou be angry forever? . . . Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Thy name: and deliver us." Psalm 79:4-9. And again: "Thou hast showed Thy people hard things: Thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment . . . Save with Thy right hand, and hear me . . . Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man." Psa. 60:3,5,11. These could well have been the supplications of the poor Jews ready to perish. And God granted their prayers, as He will in the last days hear those of the oppressed remnant; as in

the time of Esther, so also in the future, those who have trusted in the Lord will say: "Through God we shall do valiantly: for He it is that shall tread down our enemies." Psa. 60:12.

Yes, after their distress, their anguish and imminent death, deliverance came for the Jews. They were not to perish. God intervened and though it came to pass by means of various circumstances and not as previously in Egypt, in a striking manner, with a strong hand and an outstretched arm. Although He remains hidden and even His name is not mentioned, one cannot fail to see His hand and His counsel directing all to save the dispersed from perishing. Their deliverance is simple and complete, accomplished by orders of the same power which first had condemned them to perish. They are ordered to defend themselves and take vengeance on their enemies. We shall see now the change wrought in Ahasuerus's disposition towards the Jews. For the moment let us simply notice the new edict by the king (for the previous one could not be revoked): which "granted the Jews which were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey . . . upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month." chap. 8:11.

In virtue of this edict, all the Jews everywhere put themselves on the defensive and on the set day, instead of their enemies having the mastery

over them and destroying them, they are the ones which smite their adversaries. "And no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people. And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews." chap. 9:2,3. The Jews, defending themselves, killed a great number of their enemies and among them the ten sons of Haman their cruel adversary, but they did not lay their hands on the loot. They fought for their lives, not to acquire goods.

Thus for the Jews the royal edict became "light and gladness and joy and honor," in place of mourning and sadness. In every province, in every city, whithersoever the royal decree had come there was joy and mirth for the Jews, a day of feasting and gladness. "And the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad And many of the people of the land became Jews" (chap. 8:15-17), no doubt concluding that they were the objects of divine favor and therefore desiring to have part in it.

All these events prefigured that which will take place, perhaps in a not too far distant time, sooner than we think, for "the time is at hand." Rev. 1:3. After the last great tribulation which will overtake Israel, there will be deliverance. Jeremiah gives us this word:

"And these are the words that the Lord spake concerning Israel and concerning Judah We have heard a voice of

trembling, of fear, and not of peace Wherefore do I see . . . all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even *the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.* For it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will break his yoke from off thy neck, and will burst thy bonds, and strangers shall no more serve themselves of him: but they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king [Christ], whom I will raise up unto them. Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the Lord; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid. For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee: *though I make a full end of all the nations whither I have scattered thee.*"
Jer. 30:4-11.

Daniel also tells us: "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book." Dan. 12:1. The Lord Himself will rise up against the enemies of His people and they will be destroyed. Israel will have

the advantage over her enemies: "But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines towards the west; they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them." Isa. 11:14. These are marvelous promises which will certainly be accomplished towards this now dispersed and oppressed people. The restoration of the Jews is a matter of certainty, "for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." Rom. 11:29. Their triumph under Ahasuerus is but a feeble image of this.

Another thing will apply in the days of Israel's deliverance and blessing, prefigured by the light, the joy, and the honor the Jews experienced in Persia. For saved Israel, the light of divine glory shall arise: "Arise," said the prophet at Jerusalem, representing all the nation, "Shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended." Isa. 60:1,19,20. Joy will abound in Israel in these happy times of her restoration: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord," they will say, "my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation." Isa. 61:10. And again: "Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated . . . I will make thee an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations." Isa. 60:15. "Everlasting

joy shall be unto them." Isa. 61:7. Notice also the touching words of Jeremiah: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel: thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry Shout among the chief of the nations." Jer. 31:3-7. Finally, instead of being an object of shame, Israel will be an honor, much greater than in the day of Ahasuerus, and at the head of the nations. "The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet The sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee I will make thee an eternal excellency." Isa. 60: 14,10,15. This is what is reserved for Israel in the days to come.

The blessing of Israel will be an occasion of happiness for the nations. As in the times of Esther: "the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad" (chap. 8:15) about the deliverance of the Jews, and as "many of the people of the land became Jews" (v. 17) so it will be again at the end. See again what the prophet says to Israel: "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." Isa. 60:3. Her restoration will be magnificent. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people

shall go and say, *Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths.*" Isa. 2:2,3. Also Zechariah in the name of the Lord of Hosts, announces: "In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you." Zech. 8:23.

Here, though in a still more marvelous manner, is that of which the book of Esther presents to us the shadow. Then we also will hear the voice: "Rejoice, O ye nations, with His people." Deut. 32:43. Then these words will be accomplished: "And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing." Zech. 8:13. Yes, the deliverance of Israel, caused by the judgements which destroyed the enemies of God and His people, became the joy and blessing of the nations. "Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" Rom. 11:12.

Chapter 3

MORDECAI AND ESTHER

From among the Jews, two characters stand out in the book of Esther which we are studying. Two persons of this nation here play a preeminent role. One is Mordecai, the other Esther. In certain respects they represent the Jewish remnant of the end time, but in different circumstances of his history we see Mordecai as a type of the Lord. Let us examine these two characters for a moment.

Mordecai came from the tribe of Benjamin, of those who were carried away with Jeconias* King of Judah, by Nebuchadnezzar. This was in the year 599 B.C. Mordecai, however, was born far away from Judea, in a strange land, for the happenings recorded in the book of Esther begin near the year 483 and must be placed among chapters 6 and 7 of the book of Ezra. Mordecai, like many others, Nehemiah in particular, and doubtless Daniel, whom we find in Persia the third year of Cyrus,*

*The same as Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:6, etc.). He is named Coniah in Jeremiah 22:24, Jechonias in Matthew 1:11. The Ahasuerus of the book of Esther must not be confounded with the Ahasuerus of Daniel 9:1, nor with the king of Ezra 4:6. These two last ones lived later.

*Daniel 10:1,4. Daniel at this time, was quite aged. It must be placed some years before his prayer in chapter 8.

had not profited by the decree promulgated the first year of this king which permitted the Jews to return to the country of their fathers. The reason for this has not been given to us, neither for Mordecai nor for the other two servants of the Lord, but all served for the accomplishment of the ways of God. And from this point of view the position of these three men in the midst of the nations is remarkable.

Mordecai "sat in the king's gate" which indicates that he occupied a position among the servants of the king of Persia (chap. 2:19). (Comp. chap. 3:2,3; Dan. 2:49.) Nehemiah was cup-bearer to the king and in favor with him (Neh. 2:1-8), and we know the great dignity accorded to Daniel at the court of the kings of Babylon and those of the kings of Persia which succeeded them (Dan. 2:48; 4:1-3). Thus, those poor Jewish captives, although often oppressed, had someone of their own at the court of the kings in power. God showed in this way that He did not forget His people which one day would be at the head of the nations. Many incidents show us that these exiles, having the knowledge of the only true and living God and possessing His oracles, exercised their influence about them, preparing to a great extent the happenings of the gospel. (See the history of the "wise men from the east," Matt. 2, that of the Ethiopian eunuch, Acts 8, and of Lydia, Acts 16, etc.)

Also in our own days, the influence of the Jews in the midst of the nations is great on account of their riches and often their remarkable talents. But

this influence is limited to the sphere of material and earthly interests. Far from being held in honor, they are more often exposed to criticism. Guilty of having rejected and crucified the Son of God, they continue to bear the burden of the crime. They are under the dreadful sentence called upon their heads by themselves: The blood of the Just One "be on us, and on our children." Matt. 27:25. This was different in the days of Mordecai.

Though he was one of the officers of the king, Mordecai was a true Jew, faithful to his God, true to his profession, having faith and confidence in the God of Israel. The first trait of his character recorded to us is his tender concern for his orphaned cousin Hadassah or Esther. The first of her names which signifies "myrtle," agrees well with her whose perfume of beauty and grace spread around her and won the hearts of others (chap. 2:7,9,15,17). Her second name, Esther, means "star," a name which goes with the high position for which she was destined. "Whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter" (chap. 2:7), and ever after his care for her did not diminish. He remembered the Lord's instructions relative to the orphans and His care for them (Ex. 22:22; Deut. 14:29; Hos. 14:3), and walked in this respect according to the thought of God. This thought remains the same, and the apostle instructs Christians to care for those of their own house (1 Tim 5:8).

When Esther, because of her beauty, is elevated to the palace of the king, Mordecai does not on this account cease to concern himself about her. "And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her." chap. 2:11. What solicitude! How good to see such faithful affection. Mordecai had much to bear when Esther, the object of his affection, his adopted daughter, was taken from him to be brought to the palace of the great king. It was a cruel separation for his heart, for we could not think for a moment, that he was one who put Esther forward with a desire for personal ambition. It was the striking beauty of the young maiden which attracted the attention of the royal commissioners (chap. 2:3; comp. v. 8). How could Mordecai, a faithful Jew, have been in agreement with an alliance of a daughter of Israel with a Gentile, be it even a king? He knew it was forbidden by the law (Deut. 7:3). But, Esther having been chosen, he could not oppose the royal decree. Were not the Jews subject to the nations on account of their sins, as Nehemiah acknowledged? "Behold, we are servants this day," he said. "The kings whom Thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion *over our bodies*, and over our cattle." Neh. 9:36,37.

Esther's being elevated and brought to the king's palace would make Mordecai sadly sensitive to the enslaved state of his people and of the cause for this state and again produce in him the humiliation which, for every faithful one, is the

sentiment which causes him to own the ruin in which he participates. He humbles himself under the mighty hand of God, who lifts up again when the time is come (1 Pet. 5:6). Mordecai could not have said like the proud Jews of the times of the Lord: "We . . . were never in bondage to any man" (John 8:33) nor like Laodicea: "I am rich . . . and have need of nothing." Rev. 3:17.

On the other hand, Mordecai could remind himself of Joseph who, sold as a slave by his brothers, was brought to Egypt, then led by God Himself to the court of Pharaoh and, raised to the highest dignity, became the saviour of his brethren (Gen. 45:5). The Scriptures told him about Moses, too, saved from the waters, elevated to the court of another Pharaoh and later a liberator of his people. Why could it not be the same with Esther, now having become the wife of Ahasuerus? God had permitted it; He had His designs and Mordecai could have the confidence that the fact that his adopted daughter was raised to the dignity of the queen of Persia would result in blessing for God's people. In this again he cheerfully made a sacrifice. He did not want to gain any personal advantage from Esther's position, for he had ordered Esther not to disclose her kindred nor her people (chap. 2:10,20). He waits for the moment which God has fixed to reveal the purpose for which a daughter of Israel, the enslaved people, had been raised up. He also remembers the word: "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them

among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory" (1 Sam. 2:8), and he waits upon God and confides in Him. The faithful remnant in the last days, oppressed by their enemies, also looks on to the moment when "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and *afterward receive me to glory.*" Psa. 73:24. We, too, having confidence, the hand of God's power will bring us also to the dwelling place of His glory, like Mordecai, not seeking our own interests, but those of the Lord and His own.

In the meantime, Mordecai showed himself faithful as a servant. Perhaps he first applied the exhortation, given to servants at a later date: "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward," and also "Honor the king." 1 Pet. 2:18,17. Two officers of Ahasuerus, from among the "guardians of the threshold," thus in personal touch with the king and his confidence, have plotted to lay hands on his life. Mordecai discovers it; what should he do? Can he keep silence? No, he is faithful to reveal what would be hurtful to constituted authority. It must be mentioned as an honor that is due to him. To conceal it would make him an accomplice to the crime. Mordecai used his relationship to Esther to make known to her that the life of her royal husband was threatened, and Esther reports it to Ahasuerus.

Now contemptuous people see the king get a wife and by this means save his life. But how marvelous a train of events, prepared by *God*

Himself so that King Ahasuerus should become indebted to the poor Jews and induced to do them good! Notice that now Mordecai did not make himself available to seek a recompense or promotion from the king. He has done his duty and retires into obscurity. This is the character of a true servant, devoted to his master. But we see another matter which pains the human heart; the deliverer is forgotten by him who received the good. As to the plot we are told: "And when inquisition was made of the matter, it was found out; therefore they were both hanged on a tree: *and it was written in the book of the chronicles before the king.*" chap. 2:23. But what did the king do for Mordecai who had saved him from death? Nothing. This often is the reaction of the "great ones" (see Gen. 40:23). But it was not only in the chronicles of the king that Mordecai's act was inscribed, it was before God, and God brings it to remembrance at a convenient time. Mordecai was faithful to his king, but he also was faithful to his God, and he placed the honor and obedience to be rendered to Him above the honor and obedience due to his king.

Ahasuerus, without our knowing his motive for doing so, had taken Haman the Agagite into favor and elevated him above all his princes. (Agag, likely the title of the kings of Amalek; see Num. 24:7; 1 Sam. 15:8.) The king had ordered that all should bow to and reverence him. Had it amounted to a simple act of respect, no doubt Mordecai would have obliged with the rest, but this went beyond respect. It would have been an act of

adoration, so he refused to comply with the king's order (chap. 3:1,2). This, however, was not vain haughtiness. Mordecai had much higher motives than personal feelings. Divine principles regulated his conduct as they should always regulate ours as well. In the first place he could not render to a man, a creature, an honor which is due only to God (Matt. 4:10). And secondly, Haman was of the race of Amalek, of which God had said: "The Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." Ex. 17:16. Haman was by birth at enmity with God and with His people. How could Mordecai prostrate himself before him? He ventures his life, but he firmly holds to the true principle and always follows it, that "it is better to obey God than man." It is like the three Hebrews, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego who refused to fall down before the golden image raised up by Nebuchadnezzar and like Daniel who prayed publicly to his God, in spite of the prohibition made by Darius, one of Ahasuerus's predecessors.

But are we not to obey the laws of the governing authorities? Has not Paul so ordered it? Yes, but it is a matter for the conscience. When human regulation is against God's revealed will, which should be followed? Of course, the answer is clear and it is always Satan's ruse to put these two things in opposition. How often, for human considerations or for the fear of man, even Christians have excused their disobedience to God under pretext of obedience to human laws. It was

not so with Mordecai. His heart was simple and upright; above all he was subject to God.

It was not as if there had been no struggle for him. "And all the king's servants, that were in the king's gate, bowed, and revered Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him." chap. 3:2. Example is contagious; why not do as the rest? But for Mordecai it meant to go against the current, and not "follow a multitude to do evil." Ex. 23:2. What a seasonable exhortation this is for Christians of today, in the religious sphere as well as in worldly matters! Listen to the reasonings: "Look, most everybody agrees with it; you think yourselves wiser and more enlightened than the rest." "Everybody does it; why shouldn't I?" These are reasonings of the mind and the deceit of the devil to pervert the right way which is and shall always be the straight road but it is a road for which the crowd has no use.

Much was against Mordecai: not only the example to carry him away, but also the solicitations, the advice, the reproofs of those around him. The king's servants said to him, "Why transgressest thou the commandment of the king?" They perhaps cared but little for Haman who was only the favored, but this is "the commandment of the king." To infringe upon this is to compromise one's position and perhaps life itself. They did not understand that there was One greater than the king, to whom above all others obedience was due. In this world it is the same. One must know how to resist their solicitations and

even the rebuffs of those who have nothing more than this world's interests at heart and who think it well and good to bow to the influential man of the day, the customs and the accepted opinions, stifle their convictions, going against their conscience rather than offending someone on who they are dependent. "But if you want to be so strictly religious," it will be said to one who desires to serve God faithfully, "you risk losing your position or your promotion." Should one give in to such insinuations? No, they are of the enemy, and the Christian ought to be on guard. He should be out and out for the Lord, cost what it may. In all things we are to be yielding, submitting, honoring the rights of God, imitating Mordecai who, rather than obliging "hearkened unto them." The enemy is wily; he knows that patience fails when we grow weary, if we are not close to the Lord. He renews his attacks and how often it happens that Christians become tired after having resisted day after day, give in, forsake their legitimate scruples and fall, to the great detriment of their peace and spiritual progress. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable." "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." 1 Cor. 15:58; Gal. 6:9.

The faith and steadfastness of Mordecai shows itself in yet another way. He did not hide the reason for his refusal. "He had told them that he was a Jew." chap. 3:4. It was for this reason that he could not prostrate himself before Haman. But how did he dare to confess it? He was not a grand

Mede or Persian personage who dared to resist an all-powerful favorite by royal orders, but he is a Jew, a miserable captive, and he does not fear to own to which humble nation he belongs! No, and this is a title of glory for Mordecai, though it be of shame before the world. For though dispersed and captive on account of their sins, they nevertheless are still the elect race, the posterity of Abraham, always "beloved for the fathers' sakes" "to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." Rom. 11:28; 9:4.

If a pious Israelite like Daniel (Dan. 9) mourned before God, seeing the miserable state of his people and confessing that righteously, they were thus reduced, the thought that he did not cease to be for God and the glory to come, enabled him to have no shame of his nationality, the only valid one according to God, for all others issue from the sin of Babel. And we Christians, heavenly people, a royal priesthood, children of God, belonging to Him who is the Prince of the kings of the earth, King of kings and Lord of lords should we fear to confess before the world and the adversary, who we are? Peter before the Sanhedrin, Paul before Agrippa and Festus and Nero, the martyrs of all times, in the face of hangmen and death, have confessed Christ. We do not need to fear loss of life or goods, as the Hebrews did (Heb. 10:34).

Perhaps we shall have to suffer the railings of the world and their disdain, and we may be timid

and hesitate to bear witness for the Lord of glory. Let us remember the apostles' exhortations: "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf." 1 Pet. 4:16. Let the reality of Christianity appear when we confess being a Christian, and God will be glorified thereby. Mordecai declared he was a Jew and showed it at the same time by his conduct, and this glorified God. Paul also exhorts his son Timothy: "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord," as he himself was not ashamed (2 Tim. 1:8,12), and as he was not ashamed of the gospel (Rom. 1:16). Let us follow these glorious examples and above all, that of the Lord Jesus, "who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession." 1 Tim. 6:13.

What will the king's servants do against this fearless confession of Mordecai? Do they approve? If they kept silence, could they not be accused of conniving with him? On the other hand if they denounced his conduct to the king's favorite, was there not a chance to be favorably considered by him? Would he not repay their zeal on behalf of his honor? Such are the thoughts of the man of the world. They are after gain; they curry the favor of the mighty. In like manner, Mordecai's contemporaries did not hesitate to inform Haman, using this last resort to break this audacious Jew.

Notice that they could do this under pretext of upholding the royal authority, yet at the bottom of their hearts there was quite another thought: dare they provoke the wrath of the king's favorite? And

they watched, after their denunciation, to see if Mordecai would remain firm, whether his matters would stand (chap. 3:4).

Christian, the world has its eye on you to see if you will maintain your Christianity in the face of temptations which the world presents to terrify or seduce you. Mordecai remained steadfast. Haman's eyes were focused on him and when he "saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath." chap. 3:5. Where did Mordecai's strength come from? He leaned upon an arm unknown to the world, an arm all-powerful which upholds the believers against their strongest enemies. He knows Him who has said: "Trust in the Lord, and do good For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be." Psa. 37:3,5,7,10. Trusting in his God, Mordecai, in the face of the terror of the wicked, could say: "The Lord is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" Psa. 27:1. This same God, who is also our Father, keeps the Christian protected against Satan and the world. "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." Psa. 27:14.

What can Haman do before the unbending courage, or perhaps, as the world would judge, before the obstinacy of this miserable Jew? For the world allows the compromises of the conscience. To bow down to Haman was, after all, only a form. Was it worth the pains to risk one's life for such trifles? Was it not just a foolish pride? This is the

world's viewpoint, but not God's, nor that of the faith which believes Him and follows Him. What then will the proud favorite do, wounded by the lack of deference to him? He could cause Mordecai to be taken and have him pay for his crime by death. That would not have suited his idea of showing off his greatness. He wanted a much more terrible example to avenge himself of the disdain of a Jew. "He thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had showed him the people of Mordecai" (chap. 3:6), and he resolved in his mind to "destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai." He held an entire nation responsible for the fault of one. Is this not what can often be observed during wars, even among civilized peoples? O, how cruel and unjust the natural heart is, which shows the Word to be true: "Their feet are swift to shed blood." Rom. 3:15. But we see still another thing in the heart of Haman which drove him to plan the destruction of the Jews. It is the ancient hatred of Amalek towards the Lord and His people.

The cruel edict has gone forth. How crushing a blow for the heart of Mordecai. His own life he would willingly give up for the sake of obedience to God. It is not he alone; it is not just his family's being involved, for often in those days, a whole family was engulfed in the condemnation of the culprit. It is the entire Jewish nation which is to perish. Haman, resembling the adversaries of the remnant in a coming day, could say as they did:

“Let us destroy them together” (Psa. 74:8); “Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation.” Psa. 83:4. How much Mordecai must have suffered at the thought. Should he have done otherwise? Was he not there as representative of the people who should bear testimony of God in this world? No, with a heart filled with anguish he could say, “I can do no different,” as was said many centuries later, in a time like ours, by Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms. Mordecai has a single eye; he seeks no arguments to excuse himself for being faithful to God. Would he perhaps give way at the shock of the death warrant? No; even when Haman left the palace where he alone had been invited, with the king, to a banquet given by Esther, the queen, Mordecai refused to pay to the favorite the required homage. Such is the energy of faith which the soul obtains; it rises above present circumstances.

However, this inflexibility does not arise from insensibility or hardness of heart. Seeing the ruin of his people determined, Mordecai’s heart is pierced with unspeakable grief. “When Mordecai perceived all that was done, Mordecai rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and bitter cry.” chap. 4:1. The true-hearted all suffer together in everything that befalls the children of God for they identify with them. Nothing could be farther from the Lord’s servants who are real, than a selfish heart. And Mordecai could not conceal his anguish of soul. As he had no

fear to confess publicly who he was and what he was to his God, so now he did not fear to show his sympathy and pity for the people of God. And he filled the city with his "loud and bitter cry," enough to move the hearts of the inhabitants of the city, Shushan, in favor of the Jews, and "came even before the king's gate." What a rebuke for the king himself if he could have heard him! But the powerful monarch was drinking with his favorite and not worrying about sacrificing an entire people at the hatred of a single person. Mordeai's cry did not penetrate to the ears of the king.

What will this faithful Jew do now to ward off the ruin of his people? He could do nothing by himself; he knew he could not reach Ahasuerus to appeal to his sense of justice and his compassion, neither, being clad with the tokens of his affliction, might he "enter into the king's gate clothed with sackcloth." chap. 4:2. But Mordecai counts on God and appeals to Him; he does not remain idle. He knows that it was of God Himself that Esther had been brought to the king and had gained his affections through the counsel of Him who inclines the hearts. He was aware that this matter had come to pass in view of "such a time as this," the time of distress in which the Jews found themselves (chap. 4:14). The believer, too, can always count upon this that "God . . . will with the temptation also make a way to escape." 1 Cor 10:13.

Mordecai makes use of the means God prepared for him through Esther. He sends the sad and terrible news to the queen who till now had been ignorant of it, and requests that she intervene, for she herself is also endangered by the royal decree (chap. 4:13). He commanded her, through Hatach "that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him, and to make request before him for her people." chap. 4:8. Demanding this of Esther, he knows that if she complies she might become a victim of her self-denial and his heart was wrenched at this thought, for he loved her tenderly. But the salvation of the Jewish people was uppermost on his heart. He rises above natural affection and is ready to give up that which he loves, in order to serve God and His people. What an example for us! We can understand Esther's hesitation, but amidst the anguish and pain Mordecai endures while urging the queen, although uncertain about the outcome of the means he seeks to use, his faith and his confidence remain unshaken. Should Esther not be willing to present herself before the king "then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place." v. 14. God cannot abandon His people to the mercy of the wicked.

How marvelous and strange the conflict of sentiments which shows itself in Mordecai. He weeps at the ruin of his people; clothed in sackcloth he cries "with a loud and bitter cry" of affliction, and, at the same time we see him assured of "enlargement and deliverance." Mean-

while these two sentiments emerge. We are aware of the outcome, and this is well, for without it what would this testing signify? We pray to know the outcome and this is well, but we are wholly cast upon God, knowing all the time that the Lord will not leave us, nor ever forsake us, as He has promised. He is faithful, and we belong to Him. "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." 2 Cor 4:8,9. May we be enabled, as Mordecai, while feeling the testing, and at the same time having a sense of the ruin which surrounds us, not to yield to discouragement, but count upon God and His faithfulness.

As we have seen, in this extremity, the sentence of death having been given, Mordecai did not yield to Haman. He does not seek to avert the stroke aimed at him by going against his conscience. He has again occupied his place at the king's gate, after the three days of fasting demanded by Esther had taken place in which all the Jews of Shushan as well as their children took part. This fast was doubtless accompanied by fervent supplications that Esther might be sustained in her attempt before the king, and that deliverance might be granted to the Jewish people (chap. 4:15-17).

Haman, at the pinnacle of his glory, the only other one invited to come with the king to the banquet Esther had made, departed from the palace "joyful and with a glad heart." But suddenly his joy and gaiety have disappeared.

When among the crowd of servants, which are at the king's gate and which hasten to render homage, he sees the Jew "Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai." chap. 5:9. In his wrath he could not wait for the set day when Mordecai would be included in the extermination of his entire people. He controlled himself for the moment, but when he was come to his house, having summoned his friends and his wife, he enumerated to them all his riches, his greatness and the favors of the king and the queen and said, "Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate." vv.10-13.

Such is the heart of the natural man. His pride is wounded at the smallest provocation and that which hurts it poisons all his life; all the good he could enjoy is as nothing. And who among the people of the world and the great ones of the present day does not have the same worm gnawing at him and destroying all his enjoyments? Mordecai, on the contrary, with imminent danger hanging over his head, maintained a heart at peace. God whom he served is with him. What a contrast! Meanwhile, perhaps without his suspicion, the danger has come closer. Moved by the advice of Zeresh his wife and that of his friends, Haman caused a gallows of "fifty cubits high" to be made, that on the morrow Mordecai might be hanged on it (v. 14). What did the life of a miserable Jew matter to these folk. Once dead he would no more

offend the eyes of the master; Haman would be able to give himself again to all his pleasures without being troubled by anything when he would see Mordecai's corpse suspended from the gallows. He who was a testimony for God would have been done away with from before the enemy of God and His people.

This is like the time to come when "the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit" will have killed the two witnesses "they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth." Rev. 11:7-10. The world always has hated the servants of God who testified against them. It has hated and killed that Great Witness, the faithful and true; if in our day our lives are spared, the hatred of the world is there nevertheless against Christ and His own, and when the time comes it will manifest itself just the same as before and be gratified in the blood of the martyrs (Rev. 17:6).

Even as Joseph before him, Mordecai, *in a figure, passes through death*. And as it was then so now it is at this supreme moment that his elevation begins. And can we not see in this an image of that which in a more perfect manner happened to One greater than Joseph and Mordecai? At the time Satan appeared to have the advantage, when Jesus "also descended first into the lower parts of the earth," and "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Eph. 4:9; Phil. 2:8. Then, "having spoiled principalities and powers," He

triumphed over them in it, and "God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow." Col. 2:15; Phil. 2:9,10.

We see this foreshadowed in Mordecai. In recompense for an eminent service rendered some time ago to Ahasuerus in saving his life and which is recalled to him at this very remarkable moment when, "on that night could not the king sleep" (chap. 6:1), Mordecai is brought to the notice of all the city of Shushan. Clad in royal apparel, an omen of his great future, the enemy himself, proud Haman, proclaims the honor the king bestows on Mordecai. Haman, believing that he himself was the very one intended, said:

"For the man whom the king delighteth to honor, let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: and let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honor, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor. Then the king said to Haman, Make haste . . . and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the

king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken." chap. 6:7-10.

After Haman had suffered such humiliation, and when Mordecai had been honored in the eyes of all, Mordecai again took up his obscure place as servant in the king's gate. There he remained hidden till the coming day of his elevation. Thus Jesus, resurrected and glorified, remains hidden in the heavens, and our life is hid with Him in God. But it is in expectation of the great day of His manifestation in glory, not for the present-day saints, for they shall be glorified with Him (Col. 3:3,4), but for the deliverance of the remnant of the Jews, and the establishment of the kingdom.

Soon the day of Mordecai's final triumph arrives. The adversary having been destroyed, nothing hinders the one representing the remnant of the Jews, from being raised gloriously, and "Mordecai came before the king; for Esther had told what he was unto her." Entrance into the king's presence would forever have been forbidden him had his connection with the Jewish spouse never been uncovered, but it now became a title of honor as we shall see. We read: "And the king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave it unto Mordecai," this being the sign of authority conferred on him, for it was with this ring that the royal decrees were sealed. The house of Haman is given unto Esther, who set Mordecai over it. Then honor and power are given to Mordecai by public decree. "And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and

white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a garment of fine linen and purple." chap. 8:1,2,15.

Mordecai then employed his power to deliver his people and make them master of their enemies. "And it was written according to all that Mordecai *commanded* unto the Jews, and to the lieutenants, and the deputies and rulers of the provinces which are from India unto Ethiopia, a hundred and twenty and seven provinces Wherein the king granted the Jews which were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them." chap. 8:9-11. The prominence of Mordecai, the glory which is conferred upon him, the might which he exercises, are the cause for great joy for his people and for the inhabitants of Shushan; all are eager to be subject to him, and the adversaries are destroyed (chap. 8:15-17; 9:1-19). Finally, we see Mordecai's peaceful reign under the authority of the great king. He is second after him, "great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed." chap. 10:3.

We see in all of this a picture of what will soon take place. Christ will receive the kingdom. He will appear in glory and power for the deliverance of the oppressed remnant; He will destroy His adversaries and those of His people; He will establish His reign of equity and peace; He will be great upon the throne of David His father and will

reign from sea to sea. Every knee shall bow before Him and His coming will signal the beginning of an era of glory for His people and of happiness and peace for all the earth. (See the numerous prophecies announcing this happy time, such as Psa. 45:1-7; Psa. 21; Isa. 11; Psa. 72.)

Mordecai's faith gave him the strength to remain separate from evil, to steadfastly resist the adversary, and to live unmoved, counting on the Lord. He has received his reward. He may be counted among the heroes of that faith whereby he overcame (Heb. 11:32-40). In various circumstances often no less difficult, may we, a heavenly people in the midst of a world of enemies, stand fast against the efforts and ruses of our enemy, having unshaken confidence in Him who makes us always more than conquerors. May we be strengthened in the Lord and in the power of His might having on the breastplate of faith; may we, like Mordecai, be decided in our separation to Christ and confession of His name!

Let us now consider the second character which we see presented in the person of Esther. From all viewpoints she is worthy to attract our attention as the vessel God prepared to accomplish His designs. She was seen as "the weaker vessel" (1 Pet. 3:7), but chosen of Him who is pleased to use the weak things to confound the mighty (1 Cor. 1:27). The woman was first seduced to sin and became herself an instrument of seduction. She drew Adam into her disobedience. Oftentimes, then as well as now, she plays the same role. But

on the other hand, as often as not, we see her filling a place blessed and used of God for good. And why should that surprise us? Does not grace always abound?

It is the *woman's* seed which crushes the head of the serpent. The Word tells us of the woman's position and the obligations incumbent thereupon and at the same time shows us more than one example of women who have been servants of God, as were Sarah, Miriam the prophetess, Deborah, Ruth, and Hannah the mother of Samuel, in the Old Testament; also in the New Testament we read of Mary Magdalene, Martha and Mary, Mary the mother of Jesus, Dorcas and others. Esther ranges among the virtuous women who "trusted in God." Each one presents a differing character, and exhibits a particular trait. Esther has a place all her own. She does not prophesy as Miriam or Deborah; she is not in the position of Sarah or Ruth; she is different in every respect, and her quality is that of charm and attraction in a special way.

She appears on the scene after proud Vashti has been set aside for having refused to obey the orders of the king. As we have seen, the Gentile queen — figure of the Church — is replaced by the Jewish spouse, figure of the future Israel. Esther is far from her country and an orphan, a type of Israel before their restoration (Lam. 5:3). But Mordecai adopts her, loves her and raises her. She responds to his care by her submission and affection. Mordecai has taken her for his daughter and, as a faithful child of Israel, instructed in the law, she

knows what is expected of her and displays her obedience to him (chap. 2:10). She belongs to people exiled, scorned, and a servant of nations, but she is remarkable on account of her beauty among all the daughters of her people and those of the nations. "And the maid was fair of form and of good countenance." chap. 2:7, marg.

Thus Israel, the elect, always retains her beauty in the eyes of God. Esther was, even as Joseph of old, "a goodly person, and well-favored" (Gen. 39:6), but like him, she was a captive and far from the country of her father, and even as he found grace in the eyes of the stranger whom he served, so also Esther found favor "in the sight of all them that looked upon her." chap. 2:15. She was especially pleasing to "Hegai, keeper of the women" (v. 8), when she was brought into his charge. "And he speedily gave her her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, which were meet to be given her, out of the king's house: and he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the house of the women." In this manner God inclines the hearts towards them who are His and whom He has chosen for the carrying out of His designs. So it happened to Joseph, be it at Potiphar's house or in the prison, also: "the people," departing out of Egypt found "favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required . . . jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment." Ex. 11:2; 12:36,35.

And what, in a coming day, will be the favor rendered by the hands of strangers to these children of Israel, at present despised, when these words will be accomplished:

“. . . the ships of Tarshish first, to bring thy sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, unto the name of the Lord thy God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because He hath glorified thee. And the sons of strangers shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee For the nation and the kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee.” Isa. 60:9-14.

Even so at all times and whatever the circumstances, God has and will have His eyes upon His elect, and will make it manifest. He preserves them in mysterious ways. It is He who gave to Esther that beauty and graciousness which captivates the hearts, but at the same time He has adorned it with a simplicity and humility which led her not to require anything more than what she held from God, nothing to move her ahead so as to prevail over her rivals. She was satisfied with Jehovah's gift to her, and she committed herself into His hands to do whatsoever seemed good to Him. “Whatsoever she desired was given to her [for she was now called before the king] Now when the turn of Esther . . . was come to go in unto the king, she required nothing but what Hegai . . . appointed.” chap. 2:13,15. It is precious to learn as

she did to be simply an instrument for the service of the Lord without adding anything whatsoever of man or of self. Such was Paul in his ministry. He would not adorn with human wisdom or eloquence, that which spoke for itself with power — the divine beauty of the grace of Christ crucified (1 Cor. 2:1-5).

“So Esther was taken unto King Ahasuerus And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favor in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti.” chap. 2:16,17. We cannot help but see again a striking picture of Israel and the sentiments of Jehovah’s heart for His people. Did He not say, “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee”? Jer. 31:3. Notice now her ascent over the nations, the crown royal put, so to speak, on her head. “And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face towards the earth.” Isa. 49:23. “And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah [my delight is in her] and thy land Beulah [married]: for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.” Isa. 62:2-4. This

will be Israel "in the last last days" when "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains" (Isa.2:2), and this word shall have become reality: "The Lord shall arise upon thee, and His glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." Isa. 60:2,3. This will come to pass when the Gentile bride (profession) will have been rejected and "all Israel shall be saved." (Rev. 3:16; Rom. 11:22-26.)

Esther has become the wife of Ahasuerus. But that brings us to a question we have already considered. How could a daughter of Israel mix with the daughters of the uncircumcised? How could she consent to be united to a Gentile, even if he were the king? How could Mordecai, himself so faithful to his Jewish position, consent to this? In order to answer these questions, we need to remember that these Jews of the dispersion were not in the same circumstances as those who had gone back to their land. These latter could maintain a strict separation from the idolatrous nations surrounding them and we see Ezra and Nehemiah, their leaders, insisting energetically upon their separation. "Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves." Neh. 13:25. Ezra, too, manifests his deep distress when he learned that some of the Jews were allied with strangers (Ezra 9 & 10). "Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives, to increase the trespass of Israel," he said. "Now therefore make

confession unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do His pleasure: and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives."

All this was good and was entirely in its place, but those who had not profited from Cyrus's edict were not in the same position. Subjected more directly to the power of the Gentile, they were obligated to submit to the law of the despot. But above all we must consider the designs of God who undertook for His people in a hidden manner and directed everything to hinder the enemy from accomplishing their ruin. He availed Himself of everything, even the feebleness of His saints who sometimes give in to the pressure of circumstances. He is Lord of the law and ordinances, which He has established. He dispenses His grace, and in a moment of distress even David could eat of the loaves of showbread, which he was not really permitted to eat, nor those with him (Matt. 12:4).

Do we not see this same grace which extends beyond the limits of ordinances in some of the alliances between some of God's people and those of the nations? Joseph espoused Asenath (Gen. 41:45); Solomon took to wife Rahab and Boaz was united to Ruth the Moabitess (Matt. 1:5). We need not be surprised, therefore, to see Esther become the wife of Ahasuerus. Mordecai, as we have said, was a man of faith; he desired the welfare of his people, and since God had permitted that Esther's beauty draw upon her the attention of the royal commissioners, without his having done anything to promote it, he trusted in the Lord, who, through

Esther, undertook in favor of the Jews. He counted upon His God, as in other times the parents of Moses, who, seeing the child "fair to God" (Acts 7:20, marg. and JND marg.) by faith hid the future liberator of Israel.

By her graciousness and beauty Esther captivates the heart of the king. She is crowned with the royal crown; she is queen, but no one knows her nationality. In spite of her high station, she remains subject to Mordecai. No position can set aside the sense of indebtedness towards a benefactor, nor the natural obligations of children to their parents. For "Esther had not showed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not show it For Esther did the commandment of Mordecai, like as when she was brought up with him." chap. 2:10,20. Such character of obedience is beautiful and we know Him who manifested it in all its perfection. We only have to follow His steps in submission and dependence.

The world did not know whence Esther was; it was a secret between Mordecai and her, a secret which was to be revealed at an opportune time, for the deliverance of their people, in a moment of extreme distress. The world has not known Jesus. His ascension in glory is a mystery to them, but faith knows, and the world shall see Him when He shall come for the remnant of Israel who await Him.

One would observe that Esther's rise to the position of queen becomes, an occasion of joy for many and of comfort for all. "Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast; and he made a release to the provinces, and gave gifts, according to the state of the king." chap. 2:18. It is to the daughter of a despised people that these benefits of the king are given; it is "Esther's feast." We are reminded of the spirit of the prophetic word: "In this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things; a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined." When will this universal blessing of the people of the earth take place? It is when the Lord Jehovah shall take away the rebuke of His people "from off all the earth." Isa. 25:6-8.

Esther, daughter of Israel, is at the height of glory. She let herself be placed in this position of a Sovereign without declaring her descent, in submitting to Mordecai's orders. She was not conscious of what the pattern of her service was to be or of what to expect; as an instrument under the hands of the God of Jacob she did not know what He would ordain for her. In the first place, if her elevation has been the occasion of the king's liberalities towards everyone, she is the means God uses to preserve the life of Ahasuerus.

She is the intermediate between him and Mordecai who, without her, could not have made contact with the king. This also served for Mordecai's advancement.

Another situation arises, and that is the moment of testing. Shut up as she was in the palace of the king, Esther was ignorant of the decree of extermination leveled against her nation. Through her maids and chamberlains she is made aware that Mordecai is before the king's gate, clothed with sackcloth, a sign of grief, and crying with a loud and bitter cry. Esther's heart is moved. The greatness of the position to which she had been raised did not make her forget what she owed Mordecai nor altered the affection she bore towards him. The queen was "exceedingly grieved" on hearing of the mourning of the one she venerated as a father. She wanted him to divest himself of the tokens of humiliation and grief; she desired to comfort him, to assure him of her sympathy, and she sent him raiment (chap. 4:1-4). But how could he accept any kind of consolation while his people stood in such peril? The feelings that filled his heart were much like those of Asaph: "O God, why hast Thou cast us off for ever? . . . Remember Thy congregation They said in their hearts, Let us destroy them together O God, how long shall the adversary reproach?" *Psa. 74:1-10*. And his soul "refused to be comforted." *Psa. 77:2*. His lament was not on his own account but for his nation.

Mordecai did not accept the raiment sent to him by the queen. Astonished, but doubting the validity of strong enough reasons for his acting as he did, and desiring to know so as to assuage or at least share his grief, "Then called Esther for

Hatach, one of the king's chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend upon her, and gave him a commandment to go to Mordecai, to know what it was, and why it was. So Hatach went forth to Mordecai unto the street of the city, which was before the king's gate. And Mordecai told him of all that had happened unto him, and of the sum of the money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasuries for the Jews, to destroy them. And he gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given at Shushan to destroy them, to show it unto Esther." chap. 4:5-8. Now Esther understands what threatens her people and Mordecai; now she understands his grief and makes it her own. But what could she do to avert such a terrible stroke?

She alone could intervene, but what a task for a feeble woman. Mordecai laid before her what she should do. It is simple; it is God's way; she is the only one who could approach the great king, who perhaps could have access to him and counter-balance the fatal influence of Haman. Mordecai does not just insinuate to her to do it, leaving it up to her to understand her duty. With all the authority of his position towards her and above all with the authority of faith which he possesses, and which governs his life as we shall see, he said to Hatach to *command* her "that she should go in unto the king, to make supplication unto him . . . for her people." chap. 4:8.

Now this was a charge which might well frighten a timid soul. We recall Deborah, who helped

Barak, when confronted by Sisera's innumerable army while only ten thousand were at his side. Jael, praised in Deborah's song, was the real heroine so to speak, but she was alone, a fugitive and neglected. Esther finds herself fully conscious of being in an even more difficult position. The law of the Persians was explicit; it forbade anyone, man or woman, to enter in unto the king in the inner court, except he be called. "There is one law of his to put him to death."

We can understand Esther's momentous hesitation, so much the more, since for the last thirty days she has not been invited to come into the king's presence, as though something had clouded the favor she had been enjoying. Should she then dare to face that formidable presence, come before the king and be found guilty of trespassing? Should she have the courage or even a chance, in these circumstances, to present a request? And could she have any hope of being received graciously as long as the great enemy, Haman, has deceived the mind of the king? And how could she tell him that she, Esther, till now the object of his favor, is of that race upon which the favorite's scorn had fallen, and which he has accused of not observing "the king's laws"? Would she not be a hindrance rather than a help to her people? It is true that by special favor of the king the guilty could be pardoned. If the king held out his golden scepter to her, she would escape death. But would Esther be the object of such favor? So we can see the difficulties which presented themselves before

Esther's soul and made her recoil. There is no doubt that she did love her people and Mordecai, but the obstacles seemed so insurmountable, and she told Mordecai what was holding her back. "And Hatach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai. Again Esther spake unto Hatach, and gave him commandment unto Mordecai; all the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law of his to put him to death, except such to whom the king shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days." chap. 4:9-11.

It can be seen that Esther does not positively refuse. She explains her fears and her doubts to the one she habitually consults and follows. She needs to be strengthened and sustained. Where is her faith one may ask. Perhaps she is feeble. But who among us has not found, in any of our circumstances, a time when it seems impossible to go ahead, nothing but obstacles block our way, or everything fails? It is needful to count on God, no doubt, but it is well also to own, as Esther did to Mordecai, the difficulties wherein we find ourselves, our own weakness and the need we have for help.

Is it not remarkable that deliverance for her people depended on such a feeble instrument? God must always show His power in vessels of weakness so that man may not glory in himself. He chooses things which are not, to bring to nought the

things that are. It is through that which is most despised, the cross of Christ, Christ crucified in weakness, unto the Jews a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness, that God saves mankind (1 Cor. 1:17-31).

Esther has now made known to Mordecai what troubles her and holds her back from carrying out his orders. "And they told to Mordecai Esther's words." How was he to respond? We have already noted how that Mordecai placed the glory of the Lord and the welfare of His people above everything. He knew well the danger to which Esther was exposed in presenting herself before the king in order to plead the Jews' cause, but he passed in silence over the feelings of his heart. He did not seek to consult with either flesh or blood. If it becomes necessary, he is ready to sacrifice his "Isaac."

This always the character of true faith. The Lord said to those who followed Him: "If any man come to Me, and hate not His father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple." Luke 14:26. Natural affections must be kept in their place and not come between God and ourselves. It must be God first and above all, or else there will be hesitating and a fall. Such was the sentiment which dictated Mordecai's response to Esther. It might seem hard; it has been said that he accuses her of selfishness and indifference towards her nation, but Esther's energy needed to be renewed, and Mordecai must let his speech be "seasoned

with salt." Col. 4:6. "Then Mordecai commanded to answer Esther, Think not thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether hold thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" chap. 4:13,14. These are the words of the faithful Jew by which he sought to stimulate Esther to take the route he had traced out before her. It is the mind of God for it is that of devotion which does not hesitate to give all for Him and His own. It involves taking the cross, not counting even life itself dear, just so the service which God has entrusted is accomplished. Such was Paul (Acts 20:24) being an imitator of his divine Master. And this also becomes us according to our measure. "For none of us liveth to himself," and "ye are not your own." Rom. 14:7,8; 2 Cor. 5:15; 1 Cor. 6:19.

Notice the manner in which Mordecai seems to forstall the temptation which could have crept into Esther's soul. I am not saying that it was there. "If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time." Because she had not made known "her kindred nor her people" she could have regarded herself as sheltered in the royal palace. The silence, when it became a question of confessing to the truth, could be regarded as a denial.

It is necessary for us in this present time to decidedly take sides with God. Joseph of

Arimathea was able for a long time to hide his discipleship with Jesus, but the time came when he confessed openly what he was. But could Esther have looked on with an indifferent eye and through fear at the massacre of her people and keep silence "at this time"? It would be painful to think so, but just the same, do we not see the disciples forsaking their Lord, and Peter, rather than keeping silence, opens his mouth to declare three times that he does not know Jesus? May we mistrust this deceitful heart, this spirit so prompt to say: "I will never forsake Thee," because the flesh is weak and carries us away.

Mordecai, however, anticipates the thought that could have gone on in Esther's soul. "Think not with thyself," he says. It is as if he said, "Take care that you do not give yourself over to the illusion of a false sense of security, for the stroke and the ruin will overtake you even in your elevated position. If you are not for God and His people, God will be against you." How this recalls the words of the Lord: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it." Luke 9:24. Esther's security is tied to that of the Jews. But above all she holds to her devotedness to her God. The words of the Lord Jesus show us that the same is true today. If in the midst of great troubles we are true to Him, what do we have to fear?

We have already mentioned Mordecai's marvelous faith and confidence. To him the Jew's deliverance is a certainty. God could not let His

people perish and annul His promises. (See Jer. 23:3-8; 31:1-14.) Mordecai knows them and sees their accomplishment in the future. The return of some Jews to their land with Zerubbabel and Ezra is for him not the glorious return of Judah and Israel into their land, delivered from under the yoke of the nations. His faith based on the Scriptures anticipates like Paul, the day when "all Israel shall be saved." Rom. 11:26. This is why he says to Esther: "Then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place." Would she not rather, instead of perishing, be herself the instrument of that deliverance, however great the difficulties might be, however feeble she might feel herself to be? Would she fail the Lord in His design He had for her in having brought her to the throne? Could she believe it to have been a coincidence, as we say, or was it the guidance of the hand of the Lord who lifts up whom He will? And in what greater way could she glorify Him than in the salvation of His people? "And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" What more opportune time was there? Could Esther be thinking that it was for *herself* that she had been made the queen of Persia, the favored of Ahasuerus? Surely not, but the stern words of Mordecai recalled it to her. God certainly does not need *us* to accomplish His designs, but how great the privilege if He condescends to use even our weakness for Himself, even if it be at the price of great sacrifice.

Esther understood Mordecai. She enters into his thoughts. Her decision is made; she will give herself for the salvation of her people. But she feels keenly for herself the need of help from on high for such an undertaking, the need for courage to dare to enter the presence of the king at the risk of her life; the need of wisdom as to how to present her request and to do it at the right moment. Therefore she requests supplication to the Lord for herself and she also looks to the Lord on her own behalf. "Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat or drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king." chap. 4:15,16.

The fast was an expression of humiliation and grief; it indicated abstaining from material things so that the spirit might be at liberty to be occupied with God, accompanied, however, by prayer. According to the spirit of the book of Esther this is not expressly mentioned, but we cannot doubt that in such great peril supplications were not lacking, but accompanied the fast which alone could not have sustained the soul of Esther. We have in Scripture more than one example where prayer and supplication went together with fasting. Before beginning his journey, Ezra said in a simple and touching manner: "So we fasted and besought our God for this: and He was intreated of us." Ezra 8:23. Daniel, while thinking of the desolations of Jerusalem and the end of the captivity announced

by Jeremiah, made confession for himself and his people and said: "And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes." Dan. 9:3.

But the most remarkable passage in which the situation strikingly resembles that of the Jews in the times of Esther, is one found in the book of Joel. The children of Israel there are threatened with a terrible calamity and the prophet says:

"Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly. Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not Thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God?" Joel 2:15-17.

These words could certainly be applied to the trying circumstances in which the Jews were found here!

After Esther had shown her dependence which proved she had a deep sense of her own feebleness, she was resolved "and so will I go in unto the king." Strengthened from on high, she braved it all, even to violating that dreadful law.

She did "what is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish." She has offered her life as a sacrifice; she tastes, so to speak, ahead of time, the bitterness of death. She gives herself for her people. "So will I go in"; what an admirable word of decision. It reminds us of Rebecca's words, responding to the servant's appeal: "I will go," and the still more touching decision of Ruth: "Whither thou goest, I will go . . . thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." The Lord loves this decision from the heart for Him. He did not hesitate to give His life for us. When the time had come for Him to die, "He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." May we in some measure appropriate this spirit which neither hesitates nor questions in serving Him or His people. Esther did not know what would happen to her, but she is going to enter and if it is death she will meet with, she will suffer it.

We do not wish to make forced comparisons, but cannot the Christian's heart, in these things, which are recounted by the divine Spirit, perceive the likenesses and shadows of that which was perfect in Christ? May we then be permitted, while recalling the various traits of Esther's conduct, to remind ourselves of what is presented to us about Christ. Is not the Lord Jesus the source and the divine expression of every true self-denial, every pure love and devotion to God and His people? He offered Himself without spot to God. With entire decision, when entering the world, He said, "I come to do Thy will, O God." This will continued

all the way unto death, "to bring many sons to glory," and He did not draw back from this work.

But when that awful moment arrived, He "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death." Heb. 5:7. Then the Lord took the cup from His Father's hand; He passed through the judgment and in perfect devotion for His own, entered into death. But He was heard for His piety; He was saved out of death being raised again, and has become the author of eternal salvation for those who obey Him.

We have a shadow of these glorious things in Esther. She said: "So will I go" and after the days of the fast and supplications, she indeed enters and presents herself before the king seated in royal splendor on the throne of his kingdom as sovereign ruler: "Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house; and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house." chap. 5:1. It is a solemn moment. The life of an entire nation depends on what is about to take place. Will Esther be accepted? Will the royal favor rise above the law and override the death sentence the law assigns to the transgressor? Will the queen and the Jews be saved? Yes, for the Lord has heard the supplications; the fast of the people has been agreeable; Esther's devotedness meets with His response, and He will give her His recompense. It is God Himself who inspires the

plan, who gives the strength to carry it out, the wisdom to bring it to a good ending, and if we have worked with that which He has provided, when all has come from Him, He will reward us as if it had all come from ourselves. "He works in us both the willing and the doing after His own good pleasure," and then He tells us "your labor is not in vain in the Lord." What a God is ours!

It is He who inclines the heart of man, and more particularly that of kings, to perform His pleasure. Thus when Ahasuerus "saw Esther the queen standing in the court" arrayed in her royal apparel and adorned with the beauty and graciousness which heretofore had won his heart, "she obtained favor in his sight." The king held out his golden scepter which was in his hand. Esther came near and touched it and this was the sign she was accepted. Death is behind her; she lives. But there is more. With her, her people also escape; though still hidden, their rescue is no less certain and will be brought in evidence when the right moment has come. Here again Christ and His work come before us in a striking manner. He has gone through death, but He lives, and His resurrection is for us the pledge of His acceptance before God. It was not possible that the well-beloved Son of God, who by obedience and for His glory had submitted to death, should be held by it. If He died for our sins, He was raised for our justification, and we are saved by His life. He, being without blemish, offered Himself to God and presented Himself before Him in the glory and in all the beauty and

excellency of His person and work. He was well-pleasing to God.

But there is even more. We are agreeable to Him: "Accepted in the Beloved." His life before God is the measure of our salvation; because He lives, we live. His divine favor is ours as well. Faith lays hold of this now and rejoices, hidden from the world, but in a coming day the world will know that we have been loved by the Father, even as He is loved.

Not only is Esther's life spared, but the king also is ready to grant her request, whatever it should be, to the half of his kingdom, as Jehovah said to His anointed: "Ask of Me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Psa. 2:8. But it is not a splendor of glory, possession of half a kingdom, that Esther desires. What matters to her is of no personal concern. It is the rescuing of the Jews and the retribution to the adversary which she has in view. The exercise of power will come in the future. Is it not so with Christ? Now His glory is hidden; His kingdom is not of this world. He saves His own and brings to nought the power of Satan. "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Rom. 16:20), and after that Christ will reign in glory.

Esther now presents her request which, on first thought, seems far removed from her anticipated purpose. She says: "If it seem good unto the king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the

banquet that I have prepared for him." chap. 5:4. Why does not Esther immediately uncover to the king that which occupies her heart? It might seem that her first cry should be, "Spare me as well as my people." Here we see something worthy of remark. A new trait appears in Esther's character. She, the obedient daughter, the timid and fearful young queen is now decided and dedicated, and appears to us to be invested with wisdom and prudence. The Lord who has strengthened her, now gives her the necessary qualities to bring about a good ending to the work in hand. This will always be so for every servant who has heard and who follows the call of his Master, who will abundantly supply the wisdom and discernment to go into action at the opportune moment and in the necessary manner. Esther did not rush into it; she observed the favorable moment "to seize the occasion." She is, as one sees, directed by the Lord so as not to compromise her people's cause but to further their good. She knows Haman's great influence over Ahasuerus. She does not invite an open contest with the "favored" but expects him to unmask himself.

In God's designs it had to come about, on the one hand, that Mordecai's peril would become extreme (chap. 5:14) and on the other, that the king would become favorably disposed towards Mordecai (chap. 6). Also Haman must still reach the pinnacle of honor which his pride ambitiously covets, before he will be cast down headlong by it. Such are then the lessons of God. Esther concurs to

these things by her patient waiting. She puts into practice these golden precepts: "Trust in the Lord, and do good Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass. And He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him." Psa. 37:3-7.

No doubt the king had the thought that, in presenting herself before him, the queen had a more important request than she would present at a banquet, and he reiterated to her his promise to grant her all her desire whatever it might be. He seemed to have become earnestly concerned, and Esther could not help but be encouraged. But the propitious time, the occasion to strike has not yet arrived; she senses this and does not yet open her heart. She begs the king to come again on the morrow with Haman to another banquet which she will prepare, and she exclaims: "I will do to-morrow as the king hath said." chap. 5:6-8.

Haman's pride is exalted to the highest degree seeing he alone is again invited for the second time with the king to the banquets given by the queen. "Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but *myself*; and to-morrow am I invited unto her also with the king." What a tomorrow for him!

The solemn day has arrived where all is to be unveiled. The king's chamberlains came and "hasted to bring Haman unto the banquet that

Esther had prepared." Here the king solemnly renews his promise to grant to Esther whatever she should ask of him, and now Esther proceeded to do as she had said and revealed her request. That which had come to pass regarding Mordecai, before whom Haman had had to humble his pride, and honor him before all, indicated to Esther that the moment of God's will had come. She found herself emboldened to speak. It is well to know how to wait on the Lord in dependence for the moment to act! Then we find that all things are prepared for a happy outcome. Esther reveals to the king how her own life and that of her people are threatened. She does not at all distinguish between her own destiny and that of her people but names herself first, for Ahasuerus knows her and loves her while he does not yet know her people. Otherwise, perhaps this people would not have been of much concern to him, but because of his love to her he moved to preserve both her and her people.

Just so we, too, only subsist through the love of God for His Son, and as to the future it is through Jesus' love that God will show grace to Israel. Esther adds another motive to her request. It is for death and destruction that they have been sold by the adversary. If it had been "for bondmen and bondwomen," she said, "I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage." In effect, the presence of the Jews was for bounty and blessing in the kingdom of Ahasuerus. Esther knew this. The exercises of

her faith deeply penetrated it; she recalled the blessing made to Abraham: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," and many other such scriptures of the prophets.

We may easily overlook them, but we know well that it is so and that nothing would have been able to compensate for the loss caused by the disappearance from the earth of this despised people, from whom comes salvation (John 4:22). For this reason Satan has bent all his efforts to exterminate them. And since salvation has come to the nations in the person of Christ, we know that nothing could have made up for the loss which would have resulted for the world, had the Jews vanished from it, for in God's plans marvelous blessings are in store for the peoples of the earth after the Church is with the Lord and when the Jews, converted to Christ for His kingdom, will be the administrators of it (Rom. 11:12, 15; Isa. 66:18,19).

God gave Esther the needed word and made it touch Ahasuerus's heart. We need not stop to evaluate the strange conduct of this despotic king, who, without gathering any information, and in his blind confidence in a favorite, for a sum of money delivers an entire people — men, women and children — unto death. From a historic and moral point of view, one cannot help but be taken aback at seeing just where man will go when invested with power which he exercises at the inclination of his whims, without the fear of God and to whom

the life of others, life so precious to the eyes of God, counts for nothing.

How much of this is apparent through the past ages, and in our days as well; how many there are who through ambition or other motives, have delivered, or are delivering unto death thousands and thousands of their fellowmen, often sparing neither women nor children! Ahasuerus did it from levity and irresponsible carelessness; whatever the motives, the blood of man shed by man is the work of Satan. No matter what we have seen this man Ahasuerus to be, we have been able to glean other valuable lessons from this book of Esther. It deals with a part of God's people, unknown, it is true, but everything happening here was relevant to *all* of them — that is, all Israel. Had Haman prevailed, they all would have perished. Ahasuerus, Haman, Mordecai, and Esther, are only instruments upon the scene, vessels of wrath or vessels of mercy. The great God there conducts all with a wise and powerful hand; all works for His glory, and the accomplishment of His designs. He uses all: Ahasuerus with his despotism and his character without discernment and without firmness, Haman with his vain glory and malicious hatred, Mordecai with his unimpeachable faithfulness to his God, Esther devoted to her people. It is marvelous to see God Himself working as well above it all.

How reassuring to the believer who sees Him ruling this agitated world and working all things together for good to them that love Him. Truly the

saints can say, "All [things] are yours" and we are Christ's and Christ is God's, Lord over all. The believers therefore see everything in this world as under them, with God and Christ above them (1 Cor. 3:22).

What Esther has said has gone straight to the heart of the king, at this moment not so much perhaps on account of her people but on account of her who had found favor in his eyes and whom he loved and whose life was being threatened. He trembled thereat and said to Esther; "Who is he, and where is he, that durst presume in his heart to do so?" chap. 7:5. This is a powerful and true pronouncement for it is from the heart that thoughts of hate and murder arise. The heart is the seat of the sentiments and affections, of hatred as well as of love. The one, arising from wounded pride, had dictated to Haman the destruction of the people of Mordecai; the other coming from God who had inclined the heart of the king towards Esther, secured the deliverance of these same people.

Satan, and those who represented the people of God, were there confronting each other, the same as in that marvelous scene described in Zechariah 3:1-5. Who would prevail? The contest is quickly resolved; there is only one answer. Haman the adversary is unmasked and presented in his true character by Esther. "The adversary and enemy," she said, "is this wicked Haman." chap. 7:6. Adversary of God, enemy of His people, ruler of the darkness of this world, the exceeding wicked

one (Eph. 6:12) — these are the marks which in the Scriptures define those of which Haman became the instrument. But here the wicked course of Haman ends. He is judged and condemned. His attempt to implore Esther's intercession was in vain. It was of no avail to him. We shall see later what becomes of him. For the moment Esther will again occupy our attention.

By revealing her kindred she has saved herself and her people. By the same token she pays her debt of gratitude to Mordecai by presenting him to the king and appointing him over the house of Haman which the king had given her (chap. 8:1,2). But one thing remained to be done without which neither the good will of the king nor his favor which Esther enjoyed, would have any effect. The decree, instigated by Haman, and which was to exterminate the Jews, had not been revoked nor could it be. Esther, knowing this, went again to intercede before the king, in whose hands alone was the life or death of the Jews.

“And Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews. Then the king held out the golden sceptre towards Esther. So Esther arose, and stood before the king, and said, If it please the king, and if I have found favor in his sight, and the thing seem right before the king, and I be pleasing in his

eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews which are in all the king's provinces: for how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred? Then the King Ahasuerus said unto Esther and to Mordecai the Jew Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring: for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may no man reverse." chap. 8:3-8.

Several interesting things are to be remarked in this passage. Foremost we see the touching and urgent intercession of Esther for her people and the witness of her love for them. How could she live seeing her kindred are condemned to perish. Her portion was to live and to die with them. Then we see her humble submission, recognizing that all depended on the king's good pleasure. And finally she reckoned on the favor the king had accorded her, and on his love for her. Since the death sentence had been written and had been sealed with the king's ring, it could not be revoked. What could be done? Let another decree be written, itself being irrevocable as well, but showing grace towards the Jews, so that the plots of the enemy might be foiled.

We have already seen, while more specially speaking on the subject of the Jews, how matters went. But do not these details also engage our thoughts more directly concerning matters of an infinitely higher order? There was also a decree of death (and rightly so) against us, and Satan our formidable enemy held the controlling advantage, for he had the power of death (Heb. 2:14). That decree could not be revoked, for in our case, we being sinners, the justice of God required it. What could be done? We could not have done anything to escape this terrible situation, but Jesus, the well-beloved of the Father, has obtained for us the decree of grace which perfectly met our need and has delivered us from the power of Satan and the claims of the law.

Again, Esther did not rest till she had obtained a full and entire deliverance, an absolute security for her people. She never departed from her place as a woman subject, devoted, offering her life, from the moment she had said, with saintly resolution, "So will I go in unto the king," persevering energetically to the finish of her task. May we imitate this!

A last thing is to be mentioned. Esther, in conjunction with Mordecai, desired the deliverance of the Jews to be commemorated. It was the thirteenth day of the twelfth month (the month Adar) that the lot (Pur) was cast before Haman, that was designated for the holocaust of the Jews. This same day and the day following, by the king's second decree, the Jews smote their enemies and

were delivered. The fifteenth day was a day of rest for them, a day of feasting and rejoicing.

“And Mordecai . . . sent letters to all the Jews . . . to establish this among them, that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar, and the fifteenth day of the same, yearly, as the days wherein the Jews rested from their enemies, and the month which was turned unto them from sorrow to joy, and from mourning into a good day Because Haman . . . had cast Pur, that is, the lot . . . to destroy them Wherefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed . . . that . . . it should not fail, that they would keep these two days Then Esther the queen . . . and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority, to confirm this second letter of Purim. And the decree of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book.” chap. 9:20-32.

This is the last act which is reported to us, touching the reign of Queen Esther, the devoted daughter of Israel.

Now the Jews, dispersed among the nations, continue to celebrate this feast of deliverance, waiting until the great day of their true feast and their perfect deliverance arrives (Zech. 12:8-14) when they will have rest from their enemies, when

they will repent and receive Christ. This is the happy time of which, by the Holy Spirit, Zacharias, the father of the "forerunner" spoke in those magnificent terms:

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people, and hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David; as He spake by the mouth of His holy prophets, which have been since the world began: *that we should be saved* from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant; the oath which He sware to our father Abraham, that He would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life." Luke 1:68-75.

The "dayspring from on high," the angel of the covenant, Jesus, has visited them, but they did not receive Him and under the sentence of judgment they mourn and are dispersed. But the time of their return to their own land approaches, the time of their blessing (at least for the faithful remnant) and for those that fear His name. He whom their fathers have rejected will arise. "The sun of righteousness [shall] arise with healing in His wings." Mal. 3:1; 4:2,3.

Chapter 4

THE GREAT ADVERSARY

Let us now look at a third personage which plays so great a role in this most important episode of the history of the Jews. It is very striking to observe, in the court of the Persian, Ahasuerus, a man arising belonging to a race which from ancient times has been an enemy of the Jews. Haman, the Agagite, from the word Agag, title of the kings of Amalek, belonged to the nation which attacked Israel in the wilderness, shortly after their departure out of Egypt. Subdued by Joshua, type of the Lord, Jehovah declared war with Amalek forever (Ex. 17:8-16). Balaam, who prophesied in spite of who he was, announced the end of this people; he said: "Amalek was the first of the nations; (that is the oldest) but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever." Num. 24:20. Moses (Deut. 25: 17-19) reminded Israel of Amalek's treacherous attack and commanded them to erase their memory from under the heavens when they would be at rest in their land.

But Israel was unfaithful, and it was Amalek who came to attack and spoil them (Judg. 6:3). Saul, Israel's first king, is charged with executing sentence against Amalek. But he, too, is unfaithful and carries it out only partially. By his neglect there were some of them that escaped. Amalek

continues (1 Sam. 27:8), and we again find them a last time in the person of Haman, showing himself still as the enemy of the Jews. "Full of wrath" when he saw Mordecai refusing to show him the reverence he thought was due to him, he wanted not only to punish Mordecai but also to punish the entire race after finding out who he was (chap. 3:5,6).

Haman's entire history bears out that great truth announced in the Scriptures and so often verified by facts: "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Prov. 16:18. But in Haman's history there is more than receiving promotion and then falling through pride. Queen Esther characterized Haman as "adversary, enemy and wicked" and we have remarked that these terms are precisely those whereby the Scripture identifies Satan, the Adversary of God, the enemy of His people, and that wicked one. And Satan always has those upon the earth who can be called his representatives; they are individuals who are his instruments and who bear his same traits. Haman is one of them, as was Pharaoh in Egypt, or Herod during the Lord's time. So in the time to come there will be the Iniquity, the man of sin, which the Lord will destroy by the breath of His mouth, and also his powerful ally, the Beast (2 Thess. 2:8; Rev. 13).

Let us notice a few of these striking traits in Haman's history. He, a stranger of a race ignored for many years, arose suddenly and found himself elevated above all the princes and servants to the

Persian nation (chap. 3:1). Nothing about him is told us which explains such a rise to honor. He appeared suddenly displaying a proud and wicked character; all are required to render homage to him; woe to him who refused to bow before him. This resurrection of the Amalekite, pursuing the Jew with his hatred, brings before us the beast suddenly rising out of the bottomless pit, receiving his power from Satan and using him "to make war with the saints." (Rev. 13:1,2,7; 17:8.)

The analogy is all the more striking since the beast is none other than the re-appearing of the Roman persecutor's power which has disappeared, but must be reborn: "The beast that thou sawest was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit . . . and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder . . . when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is." Rev. 17:8. When Amalek appeared for the first time (Ex. 17:8-16) and made war with God's people, Moses said: "Because the Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." A first victory has been obtained; Mordecai the Jew prevailed, but the struggle has continued and will continue, until we see the entire destruction of the power which is represented by Amalek, at the appearing of the great conqueror for a last and final triumph (Rev. 19:11-21).

We have already noticed that what distinguished Haman are the predominant marks of Satan: pride and wickedness. The prophet has characterized the Great Adversary thus: "How art thou fallen from

heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning Thou hast said in thine heart, *I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God.*" Isa. 14:12,13. Nebuchadnezzar, in his time (Dan. 4:28-30) and also the king of Tyre (Ezek. 28:2) have shown to a great degree this same disposition of the heart of the natural man who, instigated by the enemy, will, like him, exalt himself above everything. This exaltation of self will have its full manifestation in the son of perdition, "who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." 2 Thess. 2:4. Such we see Haman to be, in his character and acts. He would allow no rival about him, and demanded veneration and worship of all his contemporaries. To have all bow and prostrate themselves before him was his will. By this he gaged who was for him and it was, so to speak, his mark on their foreheads, to bow themselves into the dust. Mordecai refused this mark, therefore he must perish with his people. How great a contrast there is between the man in Satan's following who exalts himself and seeks to usurp the place and throne of God, and Him, who in the form of God, humbled Himself and has taken the form of a bondman so as to be obedient unto death. Would that we might follow Him in this path of self-denial, of humbling and obeying! Since pride comes before a fall, it is no less true that he who humbles himself shall be exalted. The Lord Jesus is the example of it; God has gloriously exalted Him.

Haman's downfall is another very striking fact whether one visualizes the moment of its happening, or that which brings it on and the circumstances leading up to it, or finally the results thereof.

It is when at the summit of greatness and honor, that he falls, and his downfall is tremendous. He had been raised above all the most noble and the greatest the Persian empire possessed. The king had complete confidence in him; he could do what he pleased. To crown the favor, twice the queen invited him by himself to the feast which she had prepared for the king, and he gloried in it. From the second banquet, however, he departed as a vile criminal to be hanged on a gallows which he had erected for another. From glory he is expelled into the abyss of dishonor and shame and into death. We find this repeatedly in the ways of God. He allows man in his pride and spirit of independence to lift himself higher and higher, excluding God, glorying in his own works of ingenuity and of his hands. Then God sends the breath of His mouth, and all the great designs of man are reversed in a moment. Such were the impious builders of the tower of Babel: "Go to, let us build us a city, and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven," they said, "and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." Gen. 11:4. They have commenced their work; the tower arises; it seems nothing can stop them from realizing their purpose. But the Lord descends and with a word confounds and disperses

them. Many centuries later Nebuchadnezzar has finished that great and magnificent city of which he said: "Is not this great Babylon, that *I have built* for the house of the kingdom *by the might of my power and for the honor of my majesty?*" But while the word was still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven to usher him from the height of his pride to the condition of a beast of the field (Dan. 4:28-33). Babylon itself, that great and superb city, after having been taken by Belshazzar, is reduced to a heap of ruins and perpetual desolations (Jer. 50 & 51; Isa. 47).

And what will happen to the other Babylon of this world which will soon rise and exalt itself in the advance of science and civilization, in industry and art, hiding under a brilliant exterior the most profound corruption of this world, whose prince is Satan? When at the apex of its glory, the voice of the angel will be heard: "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen . . . for in one hour is thy judgment come." Rev. 18:2,10. How solemnly true the words of the Psalmist: "I have seen the wicked in great power and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found . . . The end of the wicked shall be cut off." Psa. 37:35-38. Haman's fate was like that and so is the fate of all the proud. "The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment. Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; yet he shall

perish for ever . . . they which have seen him shall say, Where is he?" Job 20:5-7.

It is possible that on seeing the wicked prosper and the just, on the contrary being oppressed with evil, that the heart of the believer may momentarily be overtaken with trouble, and that doubt regarding God's coming in, may threaten to overtake his soul. God, in His goodness towards us cares for us and, by His Word tells us how to dissipate these clouds with which the enemy tries to bring us down (Psa. 37). Let us notice the exhortation to confidence — confidence entirely in Him who rules all things — and to a walk peaceful and right with God, making Him our delight and listening to the assurance He gives of His care and of meeting our requests. He has patience towards this evil world, but "yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more." The reign of peace and righteousness of the Lord shall be established; in the meantime we Christians enjoy anticipating the kingdom which is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Rom. 14:17.

That magnificent Psalm 73 develops the same theme. Seeing the wicked prosper, he says, "But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped." He envies them; in his bitterness he continues, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency," and at that his soul is in turmoil. Have we, perhaps in some measure, had such a painful experience? But listen to the Psalmist. He suffers and says: "Until I went into the sanctuary of God."

There all becomes light; he understands the ways of God; he sees the end of the wicked; he knows that his portion in this world of iniquity is to have the Lord with and for him until the time of his receiving to glory. Wonderful position, glorious hope, which will never disappoint us. "I am continually with Thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever!" If the remnant can use such language when at the end iniquity seems to prevail, have we not all the more every good reason, while dwelling in the sanctuary of His presence, in the light of God, to rejoice before Him, filled with confidence, peace and hope in the midst of a crooked and perverse world?

Considering Haman's rise and fall has led us to these thoughts. Perhaps these Psalms we have quoted from are those which gave Mordecai courage and confidence. His expectation was not disappointed. Here we may remark that Haman falls into the very trap he had prepared which is another characteristic of the wicked that the Word presents to us. Haman had no doubt that, when Ahasuerus asked him how he should treat the man the king delighted to honor, it could be none else but himself of whom the king spoke. He believed, while designating honor upon honor for such a one that he would be traveling in his proper dignity, and adding to his own prestige — and behold the

honors are for Mordecai. Haman himself was to be a mere servant parading the triumph of the Jew.

Then, while he had raised the gallows for him whom he hates and believing everything was in readiness to have his enemy perish ignominiously, it is he himself who suffers the same fate. "Behold," says the Psalmist, "he travaileth with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood." What a picture, true of Haman and of him who in the last days persecutes Israel! (Rev. 12:13-17!) "He made a pit," David continues, "and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate." Psa. 7:14-16. This indeed was Haman's terrible experience.

We have other examples of this divine government. The accusers of Daniel perished by the teeth of the lions which should have devoured him, and those who cast the three Hebrews into the fiery furnace are consumed by the flames which spared the faithful witnesses to God (Dan. 6 & 3). And do we not see the same fate presented to us in the history of the great Adversary? He leads his subjects to crucify the Lord Jesus, and it is the death of Him of whom he wanted most to rid himself, who then destroys his power. The seed of the woman whose heel was bruised will crush the serpent's head. Satan is taken in his own fall-trap, "that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." Heb. 2:14. Believers, delivered by what the enemy

prepared against them and seeing him fall into the ditch he had dug, may well in triumph sing: "I will praise the Lord according to His righteousness: and will sing praise to the name of the Lord most High." Psa. 7:17.

Observe also the suddenness of Haman's fall. Nothing announces it to the ordinary observer. The mere fact that it serves to exalt Mordecai does not indicate an alteration of the favor of the king. As to himself, it may seem as if he resented a great humiliation, but the greatest favorite of Ahasuerus's princes had only to obey, and their prompt compliance, whatever the object for it might be, only consolidated their position. Haman could console himself as he was led to the gallows raised for Mordecai, by saying to himself: "He triumphs today, but this is only for a moment. Tomorrow it will be his turn to be hung."

How often it happens that the unbelieving world reasons in this manner about the subjects of truth and its witnesses! It is believed and expressed many times that the Bible and Christianity have come to their last moments, but instead, the truth remains unchangeable, founded on the divine rock, while the world will pass away in a moment, together with its vanity. Haman deceived himself, and, like the world today, had the sword of vengeance hanging over his head on the fragile thread of just one man's favor; aside from this man, it was God who used this occasion to execute judgment. However, it is worth remarking that there were more clear-sighted eyes foreseeing the

fall of the favored and telling him: "Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him." chap. 6:13.

These were prophetic words, although they came from the mouth of one ignorant of God and of His dealings. The Amalekite could not prevail against the Jew. The Adversary must fall before Christ and His people. But should not these words of Zeresh have driven him into humbling himself? They certainly did trouble him, but it was too late for him to avoid the gallows by confessing his crimes.

Haman's downfall was sudden as we have said. In fact, how much time transpired between the moment when "the chamberlains [came], and hastened to bring Haman unto the banquet that Esther had prepared" (chap. 6:14) and the time when they covered his face and by order of the king, suspended him on the scaffold he had prepared for Mordecai? At most some hours. And thus it transpires in the great judgments which have been executed upon the earth and which remain as monuments of God's holy justice. Noah's contemporaries heard his voice which warned them; they became insensitive to his appeals and suddenly the deluge came which took them all away. The sun arose over the smiling plain where Sodom and her sister-cities, equally answerable with her, were situated. Lot entered Zoar, his refuge, and suddenly "the Lord rained upon

Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven," and entirely destroyed those cities and their inhabitants. Just as suddenly will judgment be executed when the Son of man shall appear. "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be And then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn." Matt. 24:27-30.

Is it not when the world says: "Peace and safety" that sudden destruction shall come upon them? And as Haman was warned, so is the world; its end has been announced by the prophetic word. But alas, it is intoxicated with its so-called progress, with pleasures and pomp, having its ear closed to divine warnings. It would rather be listening to false teachers who abuse them, or mockers which say: "Where is the promise of His coming?" 2 Pet. 3:3,4. How terrible to Haman was the voice which condemned him without appeal. "Hang him," said the king, and that was the end. How much more terrible when this word will be executed: "Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him" (Rev. 1:7), and - when Christ, descending from heaven, will destroy the wicked with the breath of His mouth, and the beast and the false prophet with all them that are aligned against Him. Sudden judgment, inexorable, without appeal.

Finally as a last trait of the history of Haman, the adversary of the Jews, we may observe that his

downfall is complete; he is abandoned by all. Zeresh his wife and his wise men with her can tell him his ruin but have no word of counsel, consolation or encouragement to offer. Terrified on seeing the wrath of the king, he "stood up to make request for his life unto Esther the queen" but he has not time to implore her grace. His very act serves to ruin him. The king abandons him forthwith, pronouncing his death sentence. It was necessary that God's decree against the Amalekite should be carried out. Whatever instruments He may use, whether worthy and of personal integrity or otherwise, as we have seen in the person of Ahasuerus the king himself, God is sovereign as to accomplishing His own ends.

At the moment of Haman's apprehension, such a figure appears in the person of "Harbonah, one of the chamberlains," who once bowed to the Amalekite when Mordecai did not, a true "courtier," who may have been one of those who accused Mordecai of non-compliance to Haman. Now he sees his opportunity to curry favor with the king and the up-coming favorite and advertises: "Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman." chap. 7:9. Harbonah in true courtier fashion, thoroughly a man of the world, who, when it suits him, finds fault and accuses Mordecai, now flatters him while dealing the deathblow to Haman. One of Satan's tools works against another; there is no mercy; he is a hard, heartless master, and the

Scripture rightfully calls him a liar from the beginning and the father of lies. God is above all the events. The Psalmist says, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain." He uses the acts, the words and the sentiments of man to accomplish His design.

The king's wrath delivered the adversary to his just due, satisfying God's justice. "Wrath restrained," it may be mentioned in this context, is a solemn reminder that eventually God will bring all things into judgment. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Eccl. 8:11.

After his death not only he himself but all Haman's posterity disappears. His ten sons (mentioned by name) having been his pride are killed and hanged (chap. 9:7-10,13). All his riches pass on to Esther and Mordecai. Thus he disappears entirely from the scene and the name of Amalek is wiped out from under heaven. This is typical here according to the word of the Lord to Israel, as quoted earlier: "For I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven" Ex. 17:14, reminding us of the final scene in the end when Satan's citadel, great Babylon, is doomed. "For in one hour is she made desolate . . . and shall be found no more at all." Rev. 18:19,21.

Now the world is ripening for judgment. She is going to disappear with all her adversaries, to give place to a new world over which Christ will reign in peace and righteousness; thereafter will be the eternal state from which evil will be banished forever.

Chapter 5

SOME OF THE CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCES OF THE HAND OF GOD

In conclusion, let us retrace once more some of the circumstances which manifest in a most evident manner the hidden God whose name is not once mentioned in this book, but whose workings in the course of all the events are most striking.

The royal festival is disturbed by the haughty refusal of Vashti to comply with the king's command. It is an incomprehensible refusal, because she ignored the disgrace to which she exposed herself. This incident brought on a change of immense importance — the *Gentile* queen is disgraced and superceded by a *Jewish* queen. It becomes the means of salvation for the Jews. It also is the origin of the eminent place the Jew is going to occupy before the king. The *beauty* of Esther and the graciousness God bestowed upon her, gained her the hearts and made her find favor in the eyes of the king.

Mordecai is introduced, we know not by what human means as one of the subordinate officers at the king's gate. God has placed him there in view of accomplishing His counsels. An obscure servant, unnoticed, but faithful, he is within reach to discover the plot framed against the life of

Ahasuerus, who came to know it by Esther's intervention. Her elevation and the place Mordecai occupies, work together for the saving of the king.

Another remarkable circumstance is that *Haman casts lots* to know which month and day the Jew's massacre was to take place. But, "the lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." Prov. 16:33. He cast his lot on the first month and it falls on the twelfth month. For Haman, the act is a superstitious one, but God, unknown to Haman, directs things in such a manner that eleven months intervene for the events which bring on the Jews' deliverance.

Finally the fact that Haman is not content with taking the life of Mordecai alone, but would do away with all the Jewish people, only served to display in a most brilliant manner the marvelous ways of the wisdom of God, who so intervened also in delivering Daniel from the lion's den, and his three friends from the fiery furnace. He delivers an entire people without showing Himself, so to speak, but all the more admirably because of this.

Who gives or withholds sleep? It is God; for "on that night could not the king sleep." chap. 6:1. One might have thought to look for natural causes for this insomnia, but the real reason was much higher than this. God wanted hidden things to come to light *this certain night*, to bring to pass things which must come. He would have the good which had been forgotten to be manifested so that the evil which was being forged would also be

brought into daylight, so He took away the sleep from the king's eyes. The memoirs which characterized a reign were written with the Persians as with Israel (2 Sam. 8:16, marg.), as chronicles. The plot directed against Ahasuerus and discovered by Mordecai was inscribed in the "book of records of the chronicles" of the reign of Ahasuerus.

That *very night* when sleep fled from the eyes of the king, they read to him a portion of this book, and it was precisely that which told of the plot. Who led the king to choose that book of annals in preference to any other and who led the reader to read that exact portion? Moreover, it is the night between the two days of Esther's banquet prepared for him and his favorite. Who led all these circumstances which prepared the way for Haman's fall and the elevation of Mordecai? Do we not see in it all the hand of God?

This very morning Haman had made himself available in the court of the palace. It certainly was not to honor the king. His purpose in being there at an early hour was the desire to satisfy the full extent of his hatred against Mordecai himself, while awaiting the massacre of all his people. The gallows of torment had been erected and Haman did not doubt that the king would grant him his request. He came "to speak unto the king to hang Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him." chap. 6:4. It would be well, he no doubt thought, to give to the king some plausible reason, and he assumed that the king would care little for

the life of one miserable Jew, for he would be embarrassed to admit that which was the real obstacle to his joy.

But *that very night*, that preceded the morning when Haman would come to solicit permission to put Mordecai to death, *that night* sleep had fled from the king's eyes. Ahasuerus had realized that nothing had been done to reward Mordecai, his saviour. And now it is Haman, come *this morning*, he, raised above all the princes, who must proclaim the honor which the king bestows on the man so detested by Haman. Do not all these circumstances show us the wise and sure hand of God who without haste, by apparently insignificant happenings, leads everything to His own ends?

One more word. What made the king leave the banquet for only a moment, but just long enough for a terrified Haman to fall upon Esther's couch, appearing as if he would yet add to his other crimes by doing violence to her? This definitely was the seal to his death sentence.

Yes, rather than being hidden, we see throughout this book, God working in a providential way with regard to His people whom He guards carefully though all and in spite of all that which conspires against them. We see God in the feelings and conduct of His afflicted ones whom He delivers. We see Him also in figure, in a marvelous way undertaking for the sufferings and deliverance of the remnant. Here we have also seen what are like the shadows of that glorious Person upon

whom the Holy Spirit delights to dwell. This short little volume has furnished us with lessons of exhortation and encouragement.

Wherefore, may we not neglect any portion of the Holy Scripture which is all divinely inspired, and which is "able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus And is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." 2 Tim. 3:15-17. Let us study them in their entirety, or we shall not be able to lay hold on God's plan throughout, all details fitting together into one unique design, to the end "that in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together *in one all things in Christ*, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him." Eph. 1:10. Lastly, but not least, let us always study with prayer, for God alone can give us spiritual intelligence and true discernment.

Translated from the French as it appeared in "Messenger Evangelic" 1896. Author unknown.

ADDENDUM

A few remarks by the translator may be permissible, while reflecting that the foregoing ministry on this delightful little volume of Esther was given nearly one hundred years ago.

Many world events have taken place since that time in which that remarkable remnant of the Jews have played a most prominent part. The great Adversary is still at work raising havoc with them as though he might still frustrate God's plans. One is reminded of the pogroms, the exterminations in Europe, the constant harassment of those returned to Israel's land. It may be difficult to reconcile the severe judgments God allows to come upon the "sons of the dispersion" while at the same time His eye is ever upon them for good.

Most surely His government, as it was in Egypt upon the Hebrews, takes its course because of their voices raised before Pilate: "His blood be on us, and on *our children*." Matt. 27:25. But then again, "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" and He always preserves to Himself a remnant. "There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." Rom. 11:26.

Marvel of marvels, before long a number of them will step forward and continue the "message

of the kingdom," interrupted when the sign was fastened to the cross above His head: "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews." This message will be resumed and will go out to all the world which is left after God's judgment on those nations who have heard the gospel and rejected Him has taken place.

Alignments for the last great conflicts have become more apparent since two great world wars left mighty geographical changes in their wake. Also "increased knowledge" has allowed the gospel message to go out far and wide by heretofore unknown means. The Christian's lethargy and unfaithfulness have not prevented a merciful God from allowing unusual means for the propagation of His glad tidings.

A most remarkable spectacle meanwhile runs its course in the so-called "Holy Land." For nearly forty years a returned company of Judah's sons from every part of the earth has struggled incessantly to possess, to hang onto and to hold the little piece of earth they have sought to appropriate as their own, but has had no peace, only wars and troubles. Why? Because they sought it not by faith and so it must all come to nought, until the Lord their God brings them back. "For, lo, the days come, saith the Lord, that *I* will bring again the captivity of My people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord: and *I* will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the Lord; neither be dismayed, O

Israel: for, lo, *I* will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid." Jer. 30:3,10. Again: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee. Again *I* will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel." Jer. 31:3,4.

Our story began with Vashti, the Gentile queen, set aside, who answers well to the Gentile bride of Christ in her Laodicean state. On earth she has failed as a testimony for Him and is dismissed as nauseous to Him. But as to the true Church, redeemed and bought by His precious blood, she shall never come into condemnation, but also is no longer seen as a witness on earth. She is now a heavenly company, His bride — a mystery which was never before revealed, said to be "the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but *now* is made manifest to His saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Col. 1:26,27. A blessed hope indeed! God "gave Him to be the head over all things *to the Church*, which is His body, *the fulness of Him* that filleth all in all." Eph. 1:22,23. Hallelujah. "The Lord shall count, when He writeth up the people, that this man was born there." Ps. 87:

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