

them of the punishment that God had brought upon their fathers for just this kind of sin. He accused them of *profaning the sabbath*, which was done by using the sacred day for worldly purposes.

Verse 19. *Gates . . . began to be dark* means that darkness began to fall on the gates. As soon as Nehemiah saw that condition in the evening before the sabbath, he ordered the gates closed to remain so until after the sabbath. As a precaution against any attempt to override the rule and bring in the produce, some guards were placed.

Verses 20, 21. It was well that the watchmen were set at the gates. Some commercial men lingered near them a time or two, hoping doubtless to catch an opportunity for trading contrary to the regulations that had been established. Nehemiah warned them that they would be given rough treatment if they did not leave. They heeded the warning and came no more on the sabbath days.

Verse 22. The Levites were all eligible for the service about the holy city, but ceremonial fitness under the law required them to be entirely separated from any common objects or practices. Hence they were commanded to make the necessary adjustments in their condition, that they could serve as guards at the gates on the sabbath.

Verses 23, 24. A reformation of the marriage situation had been carried out before this (Ezr. 9 and 10), but here were some who either were overlooked at that time, or had relapsed into the unlawful relationship again. And, as usual, when the good associates with the bad, the latter has the greater influence. The children of these unlawful marriages took up the language of the heathen.

Verse 25. *Cursed them* means he described their sinful state to their face. He even used physical punishment on some of them. Since the Mosaic system of government was civil as well as religious, it was fitting that special offenders be so punished.

Verses 26, 27. Nehemiah strengthened his criticism of their conduct by citing the case of Solomon. Even as great a man as he was affected by evil surroundings through his unlawful marriages. *Outlandish* is from *нокра* and Strong's definition is, "strange, in a variety of degrees and applications (foreign, non-relative, adul-

terous, different)." In 1 Ki. 11: 1 Solomon is said to have loved many strange (*нокра*) women. As far as the information goes, all of Solomon's wives were from a land outside of his own proper country. The force of the word may be seen by writing it "out-landish."

Verse 28. There was one special case of unlawful marriages noted by Nehemiah. A grandson of the high priest had gone so far as to marry a daughter of Sanballat, the man who was the enemy of the work from the first. *Chased* is from *BARACH* which is defined as follows: "a primitive root; to bolt, i. e. figuratively to flee suddenly."—Strong. The expression, then, means that Nehemiah used some kind of force that caused this man to run away as in fear.

Verse 29. Nehemiah was especially grieved because the sacred office of the Levitical priesthood had been defiled.

Verse 30. The holy office was rectified by expelling all strangers, people of foreign blood, and placing the *wards* or charges with the proper persons.

Verse 31. Nehemiah completed the reformative work so that the service could again be pure. He asked to be remembered only in proportion to the good he had done.

## ESTHER 1

General remarks: The reader is requested to make the following notation in the sixth column of the chart: "Josephus places the history of Esther in this reign." It is true that most secular authors place the story in the preceding reign. I have accepted the word of Josephus in preference to the others because of the fact that he was an educated Jew, and certainly had better opportunity for understanding such a subject than the others. And especially is that consideration worth much in view of the fact that he lived many centuries ago, when the materials for historic writing were more plentiful than at a later date.

This book, like that of Ruth, contains a very interesting story of love and intrigue, that outshines any mere human composition. However, that was not the main purpose in giving us the book. Like the other book mentioned, it was composed to show the fulfillment of a very important prophecy, all of which will be revealed in course of the story. We should bear in mind that it is an inset historically

into the main history of the Persian Empire. But the motive in giving it to us is to show the fulfillment of a prediction that God made many centuries before. The circumstances of the times brought about the opportunity for that noted completion of God's decree.

Verse 1. We have already seen in many instances that more than one man in olden times had the same name. This Ahasuerus is not the one in Ezra 4: 6, but one who lived many years afterward. As shown in the chart, he was the man who was called Artaxerxes (Longimanus) in secular history. He was the one on the Persian throne at the time that Ezra and Nehemiah performed their wonderful works. This verse shows him to have been a powerful monarch, and held sway over a large territory.

Verse 2. *Shushan* is sometimes spelled Susa. It was the capital of the Persian Empire at the time covered by this book.

Verse 3. *Power* is from a word that means strength and influence. The phrase means that the *princes and his servants* represented the most powerful men in his kingdom, *Persia and Media*. The government that was in world power at the time of our story is known in history as the Medo-Persian Empire. A quotation from Smith's Bible Dictionary will explain how the empire with its hyphenated title originated: "Of all the ancient Oriental monarchies the Median was the shortest in duration. It was overthrown by the Persians under Cyrus, B. C. 558, who captured its king, Astyages. The treatment of the Medes by the victorious Persians was not that of an ordinary conquered nation. Medes were appointed to stations of high honor under Cyrus and his successors. The two nations seem blended into one, and we often find reference to this kingdom as that of the 'Medes and Persians.' Dan. 5: 28; 6: 8, 12, 15." From this account we will understand why the two parts are in the name of the empire. The supremacy of the Persians over the Medes also can be understood, and will account for the fact that the monarchy is generally referred to simply as the Persian Empire. When the two names are used together, it is because that in point of date, the Medes were first, and hence the order in which the two parts are used. But the superiority as to power and extent was ascribed to

the Persians. Not long after this powerful king came to the throne he made the banquet reported.

Verse 4. The festivities continued 180 days, during which the proud king exhibited his riches and other marks of glory. It was a season of pride and vanity, for the Persians generally were puffed up over the dignity of their authority.

Verse 5. The long feast recorded in the preceding verse was for the large gathering of notables out of the vast provinces of the king's domain. Afterward he made another feast for the members of his immediate household, or close attendants of the palace. In this feast no distinction was made between the classes of attaches of the court. The feast was held in the garden (fenced court) of the palace and lasted 7 days.

Verse 6. The whole scene was one of splendor, and the appointments suggested a week of the most abandoned dissipation. The king had pillars of marble erected, on which were suspended luxurious drapes of brilliant hues. These hangings were tied with linen cords that were passed through rings of silver. As this banquet was to last a week, provision was made for sleeping by furnishing beds made of gold and silver. These beds rested on a pavement of black marble, inlaid with materials of red, blue and white, forming a beautiful mosaic surface.

Verse 7. For many years it was thought proper style to have the pieces in sets for the table in similar patterns. Later people thought it was an advancement to have a variety, but the Persians thought of that long before us. The wine was served to the guests at the banquet in vessels, no two of which were alike. *Royal wine in abundance* means there was no shortage of the servings because they were taken from the king's own supply. His state of fortune was so great that the wine was unlimited.

Verse 8. *None did compel*. The law of the king was that each guest should be permitted to "take it or leave it" when the wine was offered. In that respect that heathen king manifested more decency than modern society leaders. At the present time it is regarded highly improper and offensive when a guest objects to drinking. It will be insisted that the guest "have a drink with me."

Verse 9. The dignity of the feast made by the queen differed from that

of the king in that no authority was represented. But Vashti had the use of the royal apartments belonging to her husband. As the guests of Ahasuerus were men of his household, so the queen appropriately served her banquet to the women of honored rank.

Verses 10, 11. After 7 days of drinking the king became *merry with wine*. The first is from an original word with a variety of meanings. The connection here shows it means the king was "feeling good" as the saying often goes when speaking of one who has been "imbibing freely." It is characteristic of intoxication that it will intensify the coarser sentiments of the one indulging. Under the influence of the wine the king stooped to make a most disgraceful attempt upon his wife. He ordered her to come into the presence of his royal male guests to show her beauty. She is described in the text as being *fair to look on*. The key to the phrase is the third word. It is from an original that Strong defines, "a view (the act of seeing); also an appearance (the thing seen), whether (real) a shape (especially if handsome comeliness; often plural the looks) or (mental) a vision." It is easy to see in this definition that Vashti had a figure that was attractive, and one that would especially make an appeal to the opposite sex. There is a footnote in Josephus, taken from the writings of a Chaldean. This note states that Ahasuerus intended to show his wife to his male guests unclothed. This note is evidently correct, for the inspired writer tells us that she was fair to look on. That means she had a body that would attract the eye of a man. And it is said in direct connection with the other statement, that Ahasuerus wanted to show her beauty, for she was fair to look on.

Verse 12. Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment. Considering the purpose of the king, we can only honor her for her refusal to submit to the indignity. It was not an entirely unusual thing for a Persian ruler to call for his wife (Ch. 4: 10, 11), so Vashti had no reason to refuse to come at the mere fact that the king had called for her. Her refusal must therefore have been because she knew the purpose of the king in making the call. Every law of decency and self-respect would justify her action, and condemn the brutal and criminal attempt of the inhuman king. We would expect such a specimen of human flesh to become

angry at the action of Vashti. He had been "stung" by his wife, the person whom he doubtless considered his personal property. Besides, it had been done to the knowledge of his royal guests, who evidently had been led to expect being gratified in their fiendish desire for immoral entertainment at the expense of this beautiful woman's honor and modesty.

Verses 13-15. Something must be done, the king thought, to cover the shame that had been heaped upon him by the disobedience of his wife. It was his practice to consult his *men which knew the times*. That means men among the sages who were supposed to give good counsel on the affairs of state. They were to advise what the law would authorize to be done to a queen who refused to obey her king.

Verses 16-18. Memucan was spokesman for the 7 wise men. He told the king that the action of Vashti had wronged him. But it would not stop there, for the report would reach the ears of the women of Persia and Media, and all over the country. When they would hear of the action of Vashti, and if she were allowed to "get by" with it, they would be encouraged to *despise* (belittle) their own husbands. If a queen can act thus against the king, then surely no other woman need obey her husband.

Verse 19. The whole proposition may be considered as a "face-saving" gesture. There would really be no need for a royal commandment that the queen come no more before the king. Under the rules already in force (Ch. 4: 10, 11), all that would have been necessary would be not to call for her. The action therefore was to create an appearance of authority over the queen. *Give her royal estate unto another* meant to demote her so that she would feel the humiliation as a penalty. Moreover, the decree was to be incorporated into the regular laws of the Persians and Medes. The object of that was to be sure that neither the king nor anyone else could revoke it. There was a foolish notion among those people that man could make a law that was so completely right that it could not be improved. If this decree of the king became a part of the regular statutes, the fate of Vashti's honor would be fixed. That is the significance of the words *that it be not altered*.

Verse 20. The preceding verse revealed the motive of the proposed de-

cree as it would affect the king and queen directly. This one shows the other motive to have been concerned over the dignity of the men in general throughout the empire. When the decree became a part of the unchangeable law, it was then to be published to all the citizens. Such a serious action would certainly have a profound effect on all the wives with regard to their own husbands. Fearing a similar treatment for themselves, they would be induced to yield obedience to their lords.

Verses 21, 22. The king was pleased with the suggestion of Memucan. He doubtless was still smarting under the injury to his pride, and was in a mind to do anything that would seem to be in the nature of revenge. He later would have recalled the vicious edict had he the power to do so. But he sent letters into all the provinces of his mighty empire. They included so much territory that not all the people spoke the same language. The decree was therefore translated into the speech of each province. We have no information on the effect it had on the various people, when they received the hasty action of the haughty monarch. But the publishing of it was evidently a solace to the wounded pride of the king, and also must have given some satisfaction to the princes who had become uneasy over their own authority.

## ESTHER 2

Verse 1. *He remembered Vashti.* This could not refer merely to an act of the memory, for the king would not forget his wife in that sense. *And what she had done* should be connected in thought with the other italicized words. Moffatt's translation which helps to clarify this place is as follows: "He recalled what Vashti had done and the edict against her." I will also quote Josephus on this incident: "But the king having been fond of her, he did not well bear a separation, and yet by the law he could not admit of a reconciliation, so he was under trouble, as not having it in his power to do what he desired to do." The thing that distressed the king most was the thought that his fleshly desires had been cut off from gratification by his rash edict. This conclusion is supported by what follows in the text immediately after the statement about his remembering her. The servants made their suggestion about the virgins in direct connection with, and as

a solution for, the distress of the king. This proves the statement that his worry was over his disappointment at not being able to expect the gratification of his desires of the flesh.

Verse 2. We all would know that a purely sentimental love for his wife would not be satisfied by merely finding the virgins. But the servants knew the character of the king, and concluded that he would be appeased by the prospect of lustful indulgence. The virgins of the realm were to be sacrificed to his desires.

Verse 3. *All the fair young virgins* were to be gathered, not just some one to take the place of Vashti. The purpose of getting so many will appear soon. The word *fair* is from an original that means "a shapely and beautiful form of body." These girls were to be collected, as so many cattle, by officers appointed and authorized to take possession of them and take them from their homes. They were then to be turned over to *Hege*, spelled also *Hegai*. He is called a chamberlain in the text, but the word means a eunuch, supposed to be just the right kind of person to be entrusted with a group of young virgins being kept for the use of the king. They were to be taken to the capital city where the palace was located and placed in the *house of the women*, which was about the same as a harem. *Things for purification* will be noticed in V. 12.

Verse 4. *Pleaseth the king.* The first word is formed from two Hebrew originals, the first of which means "beautiful," and the second means "eye." So the phrase means that the girl having a body that looked beautiful to the eye of the king was to be put in the place of Vashti. The proposition was favorable to Artaxerxes (secular name for *Ahasuerus*), and he ordered it to be carried out. It will not be forgotten that God had a hand in this transaction as a whole, whose purpose will be seen near the close of this book. When the Lord has something special to be accomplished that requires the services of a not too virtuous man, he always finds the man already having the qualifications and therefore does not induce any man to become something he had not been before. But all these considerations do not justify the motives such a man discloses. I believe it will be well to make further reference to Josephus, and get his picture of this lustful king, and his shameful treatment of the



girls: "And when the eunuch thought the virgins had been sufficiently purified, in the forementioned manner, and were now fit to go to the king's bed, he sent one to be with the king every day. So when he had accompanied with her [had intimate relations], he sent her back to the eunuch." The quotations in this and the first paragraph of this chapter are from Josephus, *Antiquities*, Book II, Chapter 6, Section 2.

Verse 5. Tribal relations were regarded very highly in ancient times, hence the pains taken in this and many other instances to trace them out.

Verse 6. The reader has previously learned that the Babylonian captivity was accomplished in 3 divisions or sections. That was while studying 2 Ki. 24 and 25. The 2nd one was in the days of Jeconiah, otherwise spelled Jehoiachin. At that time Mordecai was taken to Babylon, together with "all the princes, and all the mighty men of valor" (2 Ki. 25: 14). Ezekiel was another one of these mighty men.

Verse 7. *Brought up* means he nourished or reared the girl who was his cousin, her parents having died when she was young. Of course she would be in the same situation with Mordecai as to the captivity, hence we find her in Persia with him. *Fair and beautiful*. The first is from two originals, the one meaning "beautiful" and the other meaning, "outline, i. e. figure or appearance."—Strong. The last of the italicized words is practically the same in meaning as the first, and was used by the writer evidently for emphasis. The phrase means to describe a girl with a beautiful form, one to please the eye of a man like the king. We are not to suppose that Esther had no other qualities than those of her body. The story will show her to have been a modest, sweet, truthful, respectful girl, and genuinely unselfish. But those were not the traits that caused her to be chosen by the officer, for he did not know about them, neither did the king upon his first relations with her.

Verse 8. To the "outside world" it would seem as a matter-of-course event that Esther would be included in this group, since she possessed all of the general characteristics of body that had been stipulated. God's purpose in all this story was to get her into the intimacy of the king, and it was done by the drag-net method employed. Had that plan not been used, then some

special one would have been necessary. But that would have roused the suspicions of the king and all the others concerned, and the intentions of the Lord would have been hindered if not prevented.

Verse 9. *Maiden pleased him* means she pleased Hegai (Hege). Of course it means she pleased him from the standpoint of the kind of girl that would likely please the king. *Gave her things for purification*. The officers sent out through the empire were to make a collection of all the eligible girls. That was a general and extensive work. Had they brought in some one who did not "pass inspection" under the eye of Hege, she would have been deferred at least for further examination. *Obtained kindness* means she was favored by him, by being given the necessary things for the season of purification (V. 12). *Such things as belonged to her* is merely a fuller statement than the one just before it. In other words, the eunuch was so well satisfied that Esther would rank high in the eyes of the king that he showed her great favor. He preferred her by giving her a special apartment in the house of the women. Maidens associated with women of distinction was a common practice in Biblical times. (Gen. 16: 1; 29: 24, 29; Ex. 2: 5; 2 Ki. 5: 2; Prov. 31: 15.)

Verse 10. Esther did not know any reason for not telling her relatives about her situation. She was merely doing what her cousin, who was older than she and who was her guardian, had told her to do. Neither do we know what Mordecai had in mind, unless he was being influenced by a Higher Power. The whole plan needed to be carried out wisely or it might fail.

Verse 11. Mordecai had a parent-like interest in Esther, having cared for her from her young childhood. There could have been nothing but the most affectionate nearness between them. He knew of the edict of the king, followed by the proposition of the servants. He also was aware that his precious cousin, who was also his ward, had been taken into the house of women, as a possible though involuntary candidate for the king's bed. If she were sent out of this house on that mission, what might be her lot after he is through with her. No wonder, then, that *Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women*.

Verse 12. There was nothing supernatural in this purification process. It

was much in line with modern practices with perfumes and various kinds of "make-up" and application of cosmetics. The main difference was in the greater length of time used and the attention to formality observed. These girls were being prepared to spend a night with the king of Persia. It was possible for any given one of them to be chosen to succeed the deposed Vashti who had been exiled from the throne and bed of the king. Since the choice was to be made on the basis of bodily attraction, it was thought necessary to make every effort to please. By a liberal use of perfumes and other cosmetics the aroma of the body would gratify the olfactory sense of the king, the form of her body would please his eye, and both qualities would intensify the pleasure of another sense, that of touch or feeling. Every girl was required to spend one year in this preparation of her body before being called upon to go to the king.

Verse 13. The girls were to await their turns for going in to the king's private apartment. There is no definite information as to the things a girl desired to be given her to take into the bedroom of the king. Doubtless it referred to some of the little niceties that any girl might think would add to her personal charm.

Verse 14. Each girl spent a night with the king. In the morning she did not return to the *house of the women* from where she came, for her relation to the king had been changed. Having had intimate relations with him she was no longer a virgin and hence could not properly rejoin the other girls. But she was sent into the custody of a different eunuch, the one who kept the *concubines*. That word did not mean what it does today. The only practical difference between that and a wife was in regard to property rights. In those ancient times when plurality of wives was tolerated even among the Jews, there was no moral objection against a concubine. A significant thought here is that the girl was classed among the concubines after having intimate relations with the king. That was the only basis of marriage given by the Lord in the beginning. See Gen. 2: 24; Matt. 19: 5. After this one night's experience the girl was classed as a concubine only, and did not again come into the king's presence unless he called for her. That would mean that her night's

association with him would not entitle her to any of the legal rights of property or royal dignity.

Verse 15. Esther left it to the judgment of the eunuch as to what things to take with her to the king's apartment. She fared as well as the ones who may have made special requests along that line, in the eyes of the observers. In fact, a womanly spirit and modest behaviour are the best ornaments a woman can have. (1 Pe. 3: 4.)

Verse 16. Esther was in Persia, but the writer used the Jewish calendar. She was taken into the king's house in the 10th month, named Tebeth. Ahasuerus had been reigning 7 years, and hence the selection of a woman to take the place of the deposed Vashti was in the same year that Ezra began his work (Ezra 7: 17).

Verse 17. *Loved* is from AHAB and Strong defines it, "a primitive root; to have affection for (sexually or otherwise)." All of the connecting circumstances show that the king's love for Esther included both parts of the definition of the word. Her form of body and other physical qualities would respond to his sexual demands, and her sweetness of spirit would certainly arouse in him the deepest of affection. And so a girl of exquisite attractions in body and temperament was the agency used by the Lord to bring about the fulfillment of a great prediction. The following parts of the story will show that the king was completely charmed by his love for this maiden. He at once placed her in the honored position of queen of the realm and the sole object of his love. Such a situation was perfectly adapted to the great scheme in the mind of God, and proves the supreme wisdom in all of his performances.

Verse 18. The king was so happy over the finding of a companion for him in his life's relations that he made a great feast in her honor and named it for her. *Release* means rest, and the king granted a general holiday throughout the provinces in respect for this new wife. It was a custom to make gifts to friends on occasions of joy and gratitude. (Neh. 8: 10.) According to the state means the gifts were proportionate to the state ("means") of the king.

Verses 19, 20. The second time refers to another collection of girls. Josephus says the number of damsels brought together finally amounted to

400. Mordecai evidently did not know just what was going on "inside," and all the while, he was sitting at the gate. He had charged Esther not to tell any of her people what was going on. The record states that she respected his requests as she always had from her childhood. What a wonderful character she must have been. And these circumstances did not put her in the light of disobedience to her husband, for the thing that Mordecai asked her to do had nothing to do with the king's business.

Verses 21, 22. In the plot of a great story there will be items dropped in the course of the narrative that may seem not to have any bearing on the main subject. Then later, as the writer begins to take up these "loose ends" it can be seen that they were even some vital parts of the story. Such will be found to be so with regard to this paragraph, so note it well. The apparently casual presence at this gate gave Mordecai an opportunity to overhear a conversation between two of the gatekeepers. They were plotting to do violence to the king. He wished to have it made known to the royal husband of his cousin. No one would believe him but Esther, so he told her and she told the king. Acting on the information, the king ordered inquiry to be made. The conspiracy was discovered and the men were hanged. As this was an important event it was recorded in the official chronicles of the realm. The matter was given no attention further at the time, but it will come up again.

### ESTHER 3

Verse 1. *After these things* means after the events at the close of the preceding chapter. We have no information as to why Haman was given the promotion mentioned. However, since it was a part of the plan being used for the fulfillment of a great prediction, we may justly conclude that the Lord had a hand in it. The fact that is the most significant is that he was an *Agagite*. This is from *AGAG* which Strong defines, "an Agagite or descendant (subject) of Agag." Next, "Agag" is defined by Strong, "flame, a title of Amalekites kings." Now read 1 Sam. 15: 1-9, then Ex. 17: 8-16 and you will begin to see "daylight" in connection with one of the most interesting and important dramas in history. The hand of God will be seen throughout.

Verse 2. *Bowed and revered* are practically the same. The first refers specifically to the act of bending the knees, the second is a comment on the first, meaning that in bending the knees they meant to reverence him. The king had commanded the servants to show this attitude toward Haman in recognition of his recent promotion. Mordecai refused to pay the required homage. It was not from the motive of disobedience to the king, for he had already shown much regard for him. Neither could we think of it as being from jealousy, for all of his conduct before and after this event showed him to have been a very humble man. The explanation will appear in the following verses.

Verse 3, 4. The servants naturally observed the actions of Mordecai. The only point that impressed them was the fact that the king had been disobeyed. They asked him why he had disobeyed the commandment of the king, and his answer was what aroused their curiosity as to the outcome. The last phrase begins with *for* and ends with *Jew*. Now we know why he refused to bow to Haman; it was because he (Mordecai) was a Jew. In connection with that we must remember that Haman was a descendant of the Amalekites who were confirmed enemies of the Jews. There was even a standing declaration of war between the Jews and the Amalekites since Ex. 17: 14-16, and Mordecai evidently knew about it. To bow to Haman would be like a citizen of one country paying homage to one of another country that was in a state of hostility.

Verse 5. Disappointed pride is one of the most active motives for evil. It goaded Haman into plotting two terrible schemes for revenge.

Verse 6. When Haman's attention was called to the attitude of Mordecai, he inquired about him and learned of his nationality. He then recognized him as one of some people scattered all through the provinces of the empire. His feeling of importance was so great that he thought he should have an extraordinary revenge to satisfy his wounded dignity. But it would not amount to much if only this one lone man were put down. He therefore conceived the horrible plot to have all the Jews slain.

Verse 7. Having concluded on the fiendish plan for wholesale destruction of the Jews, he resorted to a superstition in settling on the day

to select for the mass murder. *Pur* means "lot," and he began in the first month to cast lots. This was done daily until the decision was indicated in some way by the sign that was connected with the superstitious practice. The lot fell on the 13th day of the twelfth month. That would give him plenty of time to prepare for the terrible event. Such preparation would include the edict of the king and its general proclamation throughout the provinces. Perhaps it would not have required all of that time for the plot of Haman, but the activities on the other side to counteract his wicked design would take some time also. This fact indicates that God took a hand in the lot when Haman resorted to it, and caused it to fall on that distant date in order to give his people opportunity for carrying out their role in this great drama. We know that God did use his enemies even to accomplish his will. He used Pharaoh (Ex. 9: 16), Balaam (Num. 24: 1) and the woman of Endor (1 Sam. 28). We are told also that he sometimes used the lot for disposing of questions. (Prov. 16: 33.)

Verse 8. *There is a certain people.* This was as definite as Haman would make his accusation. He might have known the nationality of the queen, and if so, he would not dare risk the results of indirect threat to her life. At any rate, he felt that he would secure the king's authority for his scheme were he kept in the dark about the whole truth. He contented himself with general but unfavorable reports about the conduct of this *certain people*. A part of his statement of their history was true, but did not show any disadvantage to the business of Ahasuerus. But one of his accusations was without foundation, for the history of the case shows the Jews to have been obedient to the laws of the realm.

Verse 9. Haman then asked for a decree from the king, authorizing the destruction of this *certain people*. Such a task would require the service of many men and they would need financial support for their time and labor. Haman agreed to furnish this out of his private funds. *To bring it into the king's treasures* meant he would at once place this amount in the royal treasury, to be used in paying the servants for their time and activities in executing the decree.

Verse 10. The ring was used as a symbol of authority. Smith's Bible

Dictionary says this about it: "The ring was regarded as an indispensable article of a Hebrew's attire, inasmuch as it contained his signet. It was hence a symbol of authority." The king expressed his approval of Haman's proposal by giving him his royal ring.

Verse 11. *The silver is given to thee* was the king's way of telling Haman to keep his money, but that he was authorized to carry out his patriotic purpose of destroying the enemies of the kingdom. Certainly, such a laudable service should be paid for out of the funds of the nation that would be benefited thereby.

Verse 12. Having consented to the request of Haman, preparations were made to publish the edict. The work was to be done in a formal manner, and for that purpose the king's scribes or secretaries were called to "take dictation." The work was done on the 13th day of the first month, and was to be executed or completed the same day of the twelfth month. *Lieutenants; governors; rulers.* These were the various men that represented the king's authority in the provinces throughout the vast empire. They differed slightly in rank according as the importance of their individual charges differed. *According to the writing thereof* means that the edict was written in the languages of the different people of the several provinces. The genuineness of the letters was made sure by being *sealed with the king's ring*. I will quote a little more about the ring from Smith's Bible Dictionary: "We may conclude from Ex. 28: 11 that the rings contained a stone engraven with a device or with the owner's name. The ring was used as a stamp to impress the name of Ahasuerus on the documents."

Verse 13. *A post* is defined in the lexicon as a runner; today he is called a postman. The terrible edict was so worded that the complete destruction of the Jewish race was to be accomplished, as far as it existed in the realm of Persia.

Verse 14. The official document was sent out 11 months before the time of execution. The reason for the general scattering of the edict was *that they should be ready* by the time the day came for the carrying out of the slaying and pillage.

Verse 15. The *posts* or runners were urged to publish the information as swiftly as possible. After they had been sent on their mission the king



and Haman sat down to drink. We may be sure these two men had different motives for engaging in a round of imbibing. The king thought he was celebrating a fortunate escape from some national disaster at the hands of a gang of evil men. Haman thought he was regaling himself over a fiendish revenge for his wounded pride. There must have been something unusual in the whole proceeding, for the people of the capital city were perplexed. They could not have been aware of any visible reason for the harsh decree. In all of the years that the Jews had been interspersed throughout the empire, there had been no indication of trouble from them. Now to know of such a sudden and drastic decree was very confusing. Of course, the reader will not forget that the king was wholly unaware of the identity of the people against whom he had signed the edict.

#### ESTHER 4

Verse 1. The decree was known to Mordecai since it was made so public. It caused him to go into a period of mourning. *Sackcloth and ashes* were put on and about the body on about the same principle on which people once wore dark crepe after the death of a near relative. Rending the garment was done also as a sign of grief and anxiety. Mordecai displayed his forms of mourning through the central portions of the city, accompanying the material demonstrations with bitter outcries.

Verse 2. There were restrictions against going inside the king's gate while wearing mourning. Mordecai went as far as he could; he came before the gate.

Verse 3. The mourning became general because the Jews were scattered throughout the empire. Some went to the extent of lying prostrate with their bodies covered with sackcloth and ashes scattered over them.

Verse 4. Esther had the service both of maids and eunuchs or chamberlains. They saw the condition of Mordecai and told her about it. She did not know the reason for his strange behaviour, and sought to have his mourning attire removed and replaced with raiment. He refused the raiment and we are aware of his reason for it.

Verses 5, 6. Upon the refusal of Mordecai to accept the raiment sent to him by Esther, she realized that something very extraordinary was go-

ing on. The king had placed at her service one of his own eunuchs. She commanded him to inquire as to the reason for Mordecai's actions.

Verse 7. The refusal of Mordecai to use the clothing that Esther offered him was not from a spirit of ingratitude or sullenness. When her special servant asked for an explanation, Mordecai gave the information without evasion. He had learned even of the detail about the money that Haman promised to furnish to be applied on the expenses of having the Jews destroyed.

Verses 8, 9. There seems not to have been any attempt to conceal the plan for the destruction of the Jews, for Mordecai was able to furnish the servant of Esther a copy of the royal decree. Upon the strength of the order, Mordecai sent a request to her to *go in unto the king to make supplication for her people*. This was the first information that Esther had of the terrible decree of the king. While she knew it was a royal document, she knew also that Haman was the instigator of it. However unjust it might be, she felt sure that the king was in the dark as to the undercurrent flowing from the wickedness of this man. She also knew of the law of the court, that no one of any rank dared come into the court uninvited by the king. She accordingly sent the information to Mordecai stated in the next paragraph.

Verses 10-12. The harsh rule was to the effect that the inner court of the king was to be avoided by all men and women. No one dared venture therein uninvited, and if one disregarded the rule he was liable to suffer death. The only chance for escape lay in the graciousness of the king. Should he be pleased to suspend the rule in any given instance, he indicated it by extending toward that person his golden scepter. That was a rod or baton held in the hand of a monarch that denoted his authority. Esther stated this law in her reply to Mordecai, then told him that she had not been invited to come to the king for 30 days. We do not have any information as to why the king had not called for his beloved wife for so long a time. However, the fact that such a long period had passed thus might have been an indication that some unusual condition existed in which perhaps the king would not wish to be disturbed. If that were the case then it would be especially dan-

gerous to intrude; this information was given to Mordecai by Esther.

Verse 13. Mordecai may have misjudged Esther. No one could know what she expected to experience through her relationship to the king. But Mordecai thought her refusal to grant his request was because of her confidence in that relationship, and the security she thought it would give her. He warned her not to depend on that feeling of security; that being in the king's house would not make her any safer than the other Jews when the edict of the king was ready to be put into effect.

Verse 14. *Enlargement* means literally room or space, which would mean that provision was made for escape from the destruction intended by the decree. Mordecai meant to express his faith in the providence of God, and the refusal of Esther to cooperate in the effort to avoid the destruction would not prevent the deliverance coming from some other source. *Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?* This means the same as if Mordecai had said: "Who knows but that thou wert brought to the kingdom at this time for the very purpose of bringing about the deliverance of thy people?" We are sure that his question was timely, and that God had indeed caused the procedure of selecting Esther as the queen.

Verses 15, 16. Fasting was not generally commanded by the law of Moses, but it was encouraged and blessed by the Lord. It was resorted to in times of great distress or anxiety. See 1 Sam. 31: 13; 2 Sam. 12: 21; Ezra 8: 21; Judg. 20: 26; 1 Chr. 10: 12. Esther had great confidence in the mercy of God. She also had much respect for Mordecai, and doubtless believed his plans were just. All of these considerations outweighed, in her mind, the law of her husband. *Not according to the law* was uttered to indicate that she had full realization of the seriousness of the thing she was about to perform. But it would be at the request of her beloved cousin, and after humble devotions to God. If, after such considerations, she took the risk of breaking the law, and "worst came to worst," all that could possibly come to her would be that she perish. In other words, if the request of Mordecai should have the effect he expected, the risk she would run would be more than justified. On the other hand, if the

plan of Mordecai did not work, it could not make matters any worse than they would have been anyway, for she could only perish. With this spirit of loving resignation to whatever might be in store for her, she sent word to Mordecai of her decision.

Verse 17. Mordecai was cooperative also, and did as Esther bade him do in preparation for the great venture into the king's presence.

## ESTHER 5

Verse 1. *Third day* means the last day of the period of fasting that Esther had ordered. Laying aside whatever clothing she might have been wearing appropriate for the fast, she put on her royal garments. That was in due respect for the king into whose presence she was about to venture uninvited. The king was seated on his throne in the *royal house*. This is distinguished from the *king's house*. That is because the palaces in ancient times were not always referred to in the same sense. Sometimes a king would maintain a house as his personal residence separate from the building he occupied as a king. Ahasuerus did this, and had his throne in the royal house which was near his personal residence.

Verse 2. The king saw Esther standing in the court. She had not been invited on that day, nor had she been called for 30 days. Her presence was a clear case of intrusion into the exclusive vicinity of the monarch of the great Persian Empire. By that act she exposed herself to the possibility of a sentence of death. Even though she was the queen, there was no provision made in the law for any personal exceptions. The only thing that could save her was the mercy of the king. Esther could justly have been thinking of the close attachment that existed between the king and herself, for a man with the emotional sentiments of Ahasuerus would doubtless have made them known to her in their previous intimate relations as husband and wife. But would even all that save her as she stood in the august presence of the great king whose established law she had violated? What a momentous crisis that was, both for Esther personally and for the Jewish people! It is significant to read that *when the king saw Esther the queen . . . she obtained favor in his sight*. As a cold, logical fact, we would know that it would be only after seeing her that he would have any occasion to act upon

the situation. But the writer made the statement as emphasis on the power of her very appearance in his sight. The established signal of favor was displayed by extending toward Esther the golden scepter. With our mind's eye we can see her as she modestly and respectfully approached toward the throne, coming just near enough to touch the top of the scepter, a gesture in recognition of his supreme authority.

Verse 3. The king was completely charmed by the influence of Esther's presence. She had been his choice among the group of maidens of the realm who had been placed at his command. She was accepted because of his love for her, and that attachment was so strong that it overcame the fact that she had violated a fixed rule of the court. It went so far as to induce the king to commit himself to her wishes before he had the slightest idea of her purposes. He not only recognized her as the queen, but added the affectionate expression of her personal name, *Queen Esther*. When he told her she could have anything she wished, even to the half of the kingdom, he gave evidence of her complete influence over him. And this gives us further proof that God understood just what kind of person to bring into the plan predicted and set on foot at the battle of Rephidim. (Ex. 17: 8-16.)

Verse 4. The king offered half of his kingdom to Esther if she desired it. Instead of that, she merely wished that he and Haman accept an invitation to a banquet that she had prepared. It is true that it would be a great honor to have a king of the Persian Empire, accompanied by his recently-promoted prince, attend a banquet in the home of the queen. However, that was apparently such a small favor compared with the one she could have received, that we are bound to be filled with surprise. That is, we would be entirely perplexed over it were we not already aware that a great drama was "now showing," in which the fate of God's people and the fulfillment of a divine prediction were at stake. We may be assured that God was taking a hand in the affair and directing Esther, the wisdom of which will become evident later on.

Verse 5. The request of Esther needed to be authorized by the king regarding Haman. He was therefore called to prepare to attend the banquet, which he did with readiness, it being

an unusual honor thus bestowed upon him. A banquet was a feast in which wine was used in large quantities. The word is used in connection with this feast in the next verse. An ordinary meal where the wine was not drunk might not have brought about the condition of mind on the part of her special guests that was desired. Hence Esther provided a feast where "im-bibing" would be indulged in, and the king and Haman attended it.

Verse 6. When Esther appeared, uninvited, within the inner court, it was evident that she had some request to make. So there was a logical reason for the statement of the king at that time. There was nothing, though, in the mere fact of a gathering at a banquet that suggested any such motive on her part. But the king was under so great a "spell" in his devotion to this charming woman that he almost unconsciously invited her to make a further request.

Verses 7, 8. The request that Esther made the second time was exactly like the one made in the first instance except as to date. The next banquet was to be on the morrow. It would have been natural not to repeat such an extensive occasion as a royal banquet the same day, for physical reasons at least. But there was a far more important reason than that for letting a night come and go between this feast and the next one. Certain things must take place, both on the part of the king and others, that would require some time, and especially the nighttime, for bringing them about. Esther therefore asked her royal guests to attend her banquet on the morrow. *Will do tomorrow as the king hath said.* This means the same as if she had said: "Tomorrow, at the banquet, I will do whatever the king asks me to do." She expected the proceeding to come to some form of climax at the second feast, and that the king would give some kind of directions to persons in his charge. The statement in italics means she would be ready for whatever came. We note that nothing is recorded as to the king's accepting the invitation this time as was done at the first. That fact was to be taken for granted since the king had already fulfilled his promises.

Verse 9. "Every joy hath its sorrow," is an old saying, and it was certainly true with Haman. He departed from the feast full of pride over the distinguished honors placed upon him by

the invitations from the queen. But that pride received a wound as he passed out at the gate. He probably had momentarily forgotten his feeling against Mordecai in the excitement of the banquet and its joyful social atmosphere. Now that the hated Jew was thrust upon his vision again, and that in an attitude of contempt, his rage almost knew no bounds.

Verses 10-12. Nevertheless, he restrained himself and rested on the hope of obtaining some consolation later in the midst of his home and friends. He went thither to report on his experiences of the day. *Called for his friends, and Zeresh*. We need not suppose that Haman's wife lived apart from him, that he would need to call for her to come. The statement means that after he called for his friends to come, he spoke to them in the hearing of his wife. Much of the speech was for the information of friends since it pertained to his family circumstances, of which his wife would be aware already. But aside from those items, the conversation had to do with the honors just bestowed on him, all of which was news to the friends and his wife.

Verse 13. The very sight of the Jew at the king's gate so irritated Haman that his enjoyment of the honors bestowed on him was lost. Mordecai was only one Jew, and the edict had already been started out to destroy the whole number of them throughout the realm. But that was not to take place until the 12th month, and this personal humiliation at the contemptuous attitude of Mordecai was constantly with him. Immediate relief from the distress against his pride was what he desired.

Verse 14. The suggestion to build a gallows for the hanging of Mordecai may have been from a personal impulse of Zeresh as far as her motive was concerned. But we should keep in mind the fact that God was in all this transaction, and was turning even the selfish motives of the enemies into usefulness for effecting the divine plans. This gallows will be needed in God's service, and it was well that the personal motives of Haman and his wife be made use of.

### ESTHER 6

Verse 1. Any person is likely to have wakeful nights occasionally. Darius passed such a night (Dan. 6: 18). But we can understand the cause in his case, for he had just signed a decree

that he felt was unjust. In the case of Ahasuerus it was different. It is true he also had authorized a decree that was unjust, but he had not learned of that as yet. There was no apparent reason for his sleeplessness, yet we are sure it was just another item in the wonderful drama being carried on by the Lord. When a person is unable to sleep, and no reason for it is known, he naturally seeks something to "pass the time." In the case of a king the most natural subject of interest would be the records of his kingdom, so this king called upon his servants to read them to him.

Verse 2. The servant "happened" to read the account of an attempt upon the life of the king. Now I will request my readers to turn to Ch. 2: 21-23 and note the comments on those verses. In the present paragraph we see the "loose ends" of the story being gathered up. The account showed the plot of the conspirators and their exposure. It told also of the patriotic service of Mordecai in getting the information to the king that saved his life. But no further action was taken as far as the record went. It has always been the custom at least to give a "reward of merit" of some kind to one who has performed an unusual service to another, and especially to as important a person as a king. But the one doing the reading said nothing along that line while pronouncing this chronicle from the official document.

Verse 3. The king evidently thought the full account had not been read. His question, then, as to what had been done in appreciation of Mordecai's action, was in the nature of request for the complete story. But he was told that he had heard all of the story, that nothing had been done for Mordecai.

Verses 4, 5. The king was determined on supplying what had been neglected in the case, and prepared to show his appreciation by bestowing some honor on Mordecai. Naturally he wanted to use the proper method and would employ some trusted servant for the purpose. So the king asked to learn who was available and who was in the outer court. Anyone would be permitted to come that far uninvited. Haman "happened" to be there at the very time the king made his inquiry. He had come, however, to seek the lawful entrance to the inner court, to ask for the slaying of Mordecai. When informed that Haman was there, the



king gave order to have him brought in. Doubtless this invitation came before Haman had asked for it, and it must have been a joyful surprise. Under such an impression he came into the immediate presence of the king with great expectations.

Verse 6. We should keep in mind that up to the present point, the king knows nothing of the connection Mordecai has with the decree that Haman had caused to be sent out. He knows only that it was against "a certain people," but does not know that Mordecai and Esther would be involved. Therefore, when he makes his proposal to Haman, the king will be perfectly "innocent" of its relation to the divine plan. As far as the king was concerned, this affair which he was about to carry out would be only an incident to complete the routine of honorable reward of merit, so that the royal chronicles would show a regular form. And since Haman was one of his more important servants, he would be an appropriate person to suggest the procedure and also to put it into effect. In the light of all this he asked Haman for his suggestions. We would expect Haman to take just such a view of the case as he did. Had the king not recently promoted him? Had not the royal decree been signed at his request? Had he not been the only guest invited to the queen's banquet with the king? And now, had he not just been invited to come into the inner court even before he had asked for it? No wonder, then, that he said to himself, *To whom would the king delight to do honor more than to myself?* Everything indicated that he was the very one to receive the honor.

Verses 7-9. With the impression just described as his motive, Haman would naturally make the scene as dignified as possible. The procedure he suggested would place a man about second to the king in the point of show and pomp. There are no less than six items in the formula that he prescribed for the man to be honored. I shall briefly note the items from the text: *Royal apparel, crown royal, arrayed by the most noble prince, on horseback through the city, proclaim before him, horse the king rideth, etc.* What a display of glory that Haman thought he was arranging for himself!

Verse 10. With our knowledge of the whole background in mind, it would appear that Ahasuerus had the idea of punishing Haman by the order

he gave him. That it was done as if he was saying to himself: "I will teach Haman a lesson that will humble him." Such was not the case, for he was still wholly ignorant of the true state of affairs. He did not know the connection that Haman and Esther and Mordecai had with the edict sent out. Instead of being a rebuke to Haman (which we can see that it was), the king would rather consider it something of an honor to him, to be entrusted with this important service for the king of such a great realm as Persia. But this very motive of Ahasuerus would make the order given to Haman all the more a sharp rebuke.

Verse 11. Of course Haman could not do otherwise than obey the order of the king. Even to have protested would have forced an issue into the limelight that he was not ready to meet. So he faithfully carried out the procedure suggested by himself and directed to be applied to the very man he hated most. It gives us an instance of the lesson taught by Jesus in Luke 18: 14.

Verse 12. When the march through the city was over, the procession ended where it began which was at the king's gate, since that was where Mordecai had been keeping himself most of the time. What feelings of mingled hate and shame Haman must have been having as he deposited the despised Jew in his accustomed place after this triumphant march through the city; a march of triumph for the Jew who had consistently spurned the haughty Haman. But it was a triumph of honor that he had not sought. And it was no wonder that Haman hastened to his home, with his head covered with sackcloth or some other article that indicated his utter dejection.

Verse 13. Haman received no comfort from his wife, as he did the first time he appealed to her. She evidently knew about the general history of the Jews, and that in all of their troubles they were successful in the end. But she must have been unaware of the full relationship between Mordecai and them, even though he was called a Jew. She finally suspected the truth about it and concluded that Haman was doomed to be the loser in any conflict with Mordecai. She stated this thought to him, and the same was agreed to by the wise men attending on him.

Verse 14. The affair of giving Mordecai an honorable conduct through

the streets of the city took place between the two banquets given by Esther. Haman likely forgot about the second invitation because of his terrible shock at the exaltation of Mordecai. So he had to be reminded of his "social engagement," and urged to fulfill it.

### ESTHER 7

Verse 1. *To banquet.* The second word is a verb and is defined in the lexicon, "to imbibe." That is the main item of the occasion, although it would imply also a feasting as an additional indulgence.

Verse 2. The king was still under the "spell" of his love for Esther. Ordinarily a man tries to express his love for a woman by making her a present of some valuable article. He may spare no expense within his possibilities, sometimes even bringing himself almost into bankruptcy. Ahasuerus could think of no gift that was good enough for this woman who had him overwhelmed by his devotion to her. So he told her to name the gift most desirable, the limit being nothing less than half of his kingdom.

Verse 3. Esther made her request general at first, merely asking that she and her people be spared their lives. This must have been one of the greatest surprises the king ever received. Being entirely uninformed of the identity of the people against whom he had signed the decree of destruction, he had no inkling of any danger to the Jews. He was also unaware of the nationality or race of his wife, and consequently had no idea of the peril overhanging her.

Verse 4. In continuing her answer to the king, Esther was actually recounting the terms of the decree that he had unconsciously signed against her and her people. However, she did not as yet reveal their race, nor the connection between them and the decree that had authorized Haman to start a movement of destruction. She explained that she would not have made any complaint had the edict required only that they be sold into slavery. It would have been a loss to the kingdom had the Jews been sold into bondage, for the price of their sale would not have been as great as the loss from the services of so good a people as hers. And neither would Haman have been able to make up for the loss, although he had pretended to have great wealth when asking for

the decree. These last remarks are based on the concluding words of the verse, which may appear a little vague to the readers. I shall offer a few words of explanation. The *enemy* is Haman. *Countervail* means "make up for," and *damage* means loss. With these definitions in mind I will reword the last sentence thus: "I had held my tongue, although Haman could not make up for the king's loss." In other words, the sale of the Jews would have been a loss to the king, which Haman with all his boasted wealth could not have made up for the king. While Esther might have regretted seeing such loss to the king, yet she would have suffered it to go through, rather than cause any appearance of opposition to the royal decree.

Verse 5. The reply and questions of the king showed that he was entirely in the dark about what was going on. His words *where is he* especially indicated that he was wholly unsuspecting as to the guilty party.

Verse 6. This verse is brief but very weighty. It is the climax to all of the things that Esther and Mordecai had been doing, beginning with the 4th chapter. She wanted to be sure of her ground before springing the surprise upon the king. In order to that end she drew him on with her social program, and in the progress of that she could observe the complete willingness manifested to grant her any request she might make. Thus, after he had thrice offered her anything up to half of the kingdom, she concluded "the iron was hot" and ready to be struck. So there, at that second banquet, with the king still lost in his rapturous admiration for his lovely queen, and in the immediate presence of Haman, she told the king the answer. She used three words to describe Haman; *adversary*, *enemy* and *wicked*. *Haman was afraid* which means he trembled in the presence of the king and queen. The memory of the march through the streets of the city would come surging into his mind. Now that the queen had dared to accuse him at the inquiry of the king, and with an accusation that he knew to be true, the full extent of possibilities threw him into a panic of fear.

Verse 7. Esther displayed much wisdom by not stating the full details of her case in Vs. 3, 4. She told enough to give the king a shock, and start his mind working toward the desired conclusion. With that much of the situa-

tion arrayed before him, his nerves would be in a tension of concern for the welfare of his beloved wife. To think that anyone would dare wish to harm the idol of his heart was almost more than he could stand. The person who could be so unreasonably rash must undoubtedly be skulking somewhere like a cowardly spy. Imagine, then, his state of mind when the awful truth was stated to add its weight to his already outraged temper. No wonder that he arose unceremoniously from the banquet and left the room, as if shrinking from the vile presence of the man on whom so much honor had been heaped, but undeservedly. Haman was able to see the grave danger confronting him. The king had gone out, so his only means of contact to make a plea for mercy was through the queen.

Verse 8. Having brought the situation to this dramatic climax, Esther was overcome with emotion and lay down upon her bed. Haman was then desperate with fear and threw aside all discretion. In casting himself upon the bed by the side of the queen, we are sure he had no intention but to beg earnestly for his life. Nevertheless, the position was interpreted by the enraged king in the light that such a compromise would logically be taken. With an accusing question he spoke in the hearing of the ones present, calling attention to the threefold offense namely, *force the queen, before me, in the house*. The witnesses took the view of the case that was expressed by the king and resolved not to let the wicked Haman add one word more in his plea. They shut him off by covering his face, thereby smothering him as with a gag.

Verse 9. When Harbonah called attention to the gallows that Haman had erected he may not have thought especially of the use the king would make of it. The purpose was to cite another item of evidence, proving how wicked a man Haman was; that he had constructed an instrument for the destruction of the very man who had saved the king's life. But the suggestion was enough for Ahasuerus. He promptly gave orders that Haman should be hanged thereon.

Verse 10. The orders were carried out. The inspired writer added emphasis to the occasion by stating that the hanging of Haman took place on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. This pacified the king's

wrath because it struck out the man who was the author of the terrible conspiracy just discovered.

### ESTHER 8

Verse 1. The word *house* is from an original with a various meaning. Its leading idea is household or family members. The verse means that Esther was given authority over the members of Haman's family, both immediate and distant relatives. In the meantime she had acquainted the king with her relation to Mordecai. This brought him into the royal favor so that he was escorted into the king's presence.

Verse 2. The king had taken the ring from Haman, previously given him as a badge of honor, and now gave it unto Mordecai. That action was a signal of authority, and Esther availed herself of it by placing Mordecai in charge of the house of Haman.

Verse 3. Esther had been favored so much by the king that she was encouraged to press for more. The immediate disposal of Haman and his family had been arranged for through the authority vested in Mordecai. But there remained the edict that had been signed by the king at Haman's request. It was still in force and only waiting for the date on which it was to be executed. Something must be done to counteract that, else the people of Esther will be destroyed. That was what she meant by the request to *put away the mischief of Haman*. Falling down at the feet of the king, she tearfully begged him for further consideration.

Verse 4. By holding out the golden scepter toward Esther, she was made to understand that she might make her wishes known and that they would be granted. There is every indication that no request of hers, within the possibilities of the king, would be denied her, so completely was he enthralled by his love for her.

Verse 5. Esther knew the rule of the Persian law, that no edict could be directly repealed; yet it might be possible to do something that could have the effect of an alteration or repeal. That was what she requested, but she made it on condition that the king felt entirely favorable towards it.

Verse 6. Esther was a Jewess and knew that the edict of destruction would include her by its terms unless some exception could be made due to her relation to the king. But regard-

less of any assurance she may have felt for her personal safety, her great spirit of humanity was moved for her people. She felt that she could never stand it to see them come to such harm. On account of this concern she made the request stated in the preceding verse.

Verse 7. We notice the king addressed both Esther and Mordecai because of their common relation to the issues at stake. The execution of Haman was placed in charge of Esther, and the reason for it was stated; that it was his attack upon the Jews.

Verse 8. The execution of Haman and his household was not enough. Some action must be taken to counteract his wicked designs against the people of Esther and Mordecai. This had to be done through some other edict, not by directly repealing the first decree. The king therefore gave authority to have the other edict drawn up and made binding in the established manner. Such a result was accomplished by putting the king's name on the document. But that might be done without his knowledge or consent, so an additional evidence must be used to close up the gap of uncertainty. This was done by using the seal that was on the king's ring, a sort of "notary" signal. The outstanding point of that act was the established rule that "no man may reverse it."

Verse 9. The official secretaries were called in again to "take dictation" on the important work of the new edict. It was done near the end of the 3rd month, and was to take effect on the 13th day of the 12th month. That would give a period of about 9 months in which it could be given full publicity. The document was to give authority to, and call upon, all the various subordinates in the realm of Persia to see that the edict on behalf of the Jews was carried out. It also authorized the Jews to take full advantage of the decree and be prepared to carry out its provisions.

Verse 10. *He wrote* means Mordecai wrote; not by his own hand for that was what the scribes or secretaries were called in for. But he dictated it and had it put down in writing and then attested in the forementioned manner. Copies of it were then sent by postmen on various beasts of burden, to all the sections of the realm where the Jews were scattered.

Verse 11. The terms of the edict

were very sweeping. They gave the Jews the unrestricted authority for assemblage and for self-defense. This might be done to the extent even of killing their enemies who would attack them. They could also take possession of the property that had belonged to their foes.

Verse 12. The decree was to take effect on the very day that had been set for the enforcement of the former decree. The reason for such a date is obvious. It would not do to have it dated even one day earlier, for the Jews were to act in self-defense only, and no attack upon them would come before the prescribed date. And of course it would not do any good to date it later, for that would be after they would have been the victims of the other edict.

Verse 13. The decree was officially copied and sent to all the sections of the realm. It urged the Jews to be ready to avenge themselves when the day came on which the decree of destruction was to be put into force.

Verse 14. The *posts* were the same as postmen. They were urged on in their mission by the commandment of the king. It is evident that Ahasuerus was as eager as was Esther or Mordecai to have the vicious instrument of Haman intercepted.

Verse 15. Mordecai had manifested a spirit of humility from the beginning. There is no indication that he ever sought any honor. So the exaltation of which we read was placed upon him by the king unsolicited. It is significant that the city of Shushan (the Persian capital) rejoiced. Most of the citizens of the city were Persians, and the edict just sent out was on behalf of the Jews. But the injustice of Haman's activities was doubtless understood by the people. They were happy, therefore, to know that a harmless group of their subjects was to be spared the awful destruction intended by the wicked Haman.

Verse 16. *Light* is from *owrah* and Strong defines it, "luminousness, i. e. (figuratively) prosperity." Of course the idea is that the Jews were glad because of the prosperous situation they had the right to expect.

Verse 17. In the various sections of the realm of Persia, the Jews celebrated their joy by holding a feast. *Many of the people became Jews*. This means they became proselytes to the Jewish system. There were certain



privileges that were allowed by the law that entitled a foreigner to be classed with the Jews. That had several restrictions, yet left the relationship in such a state that it gave to the proselyte much advantage. The circumstance shows one of the common traits of mankind. When special favor seems to be in store for certain classes, then others wish to "get in" on the favor. It is always well to see persons show an interest in things that are right. It would be more highly appreciated, though, were they to do so under circumstances that betrayed less selfishness.

### ESTHER 9

Verses 1, 2. Since the preceding chapter came to a close, 9 months have passed. The date for the two famous edicts has arrived and the Jews have girded themselves for the conflict. They assembled in the cities, and were so successful in their own defense that the public mind was stirred up in their favor.

Verse 3. *The fear of Mordecai* means they respected him for his righteousness of life. Because of this the officers of the city helped the Jews in their defense.

Verse 4. Mordecai was in high standing in the household of the king as well as in the estimation of the people in general. He had not done anything that would be called great in the estimation of the world, but God was with him and was causing the tables to be turned in his favor.

Verse 5. The mention of *sword*, and *slaughter*, and *destruction*, is for emphasis. The general idea is that complete victory over the enemy was achieved by them.

Verse 6. If there would be any place where the citizens of a realm would have advantage it ought to be in their own capital city. But even that did not avail them anything in their aggression against the people of God.

Verses 7-10. This paragraph merely states the names of Haman's 10 sons as being among the slain. The importance of that fact will appear later. The additional news item is the fact that the Jews did not take possession of the spoil. The edict of the king would have permitted them to do so, but they spurned it with contempt.

Verse 11. All events of importance were made a part of the royal record.

Because of that, the king was given an account of the number of casualties of the day. There would be a special reason for his interest in the subject, for he had given his official consent to the decree on the occasion, and had commanded its prompt execution when the time of maturity came.

Verse 12. All through the story we are studying, the king's regard for Esther has been much in evidence. He favored her with a piece of information connected with her previous requests. In this report he made separate items of the destruction of the citizens of Shushan in general, and of the 10 sons of Haman in particular. The second item was in reference to her chief concern, which was the fate of Haman's family. What have they done *in the rest of the king's provinces?* Moffatt renders this as follows: "What, then, must they have done in the other provinces of the king?" The thought is, if that much destruction of the enemies has taken place in just one city, there is no telling how much has been done in other parts of the vast empire. But even with that much accomplished in her favor, she was given the privilege of making further requests. She was assured that any request would be granted to her.

Verse 13. The next request of Esther was to the effect that the day's accomplishments be repeated on the morrow; that is, as far as possible. There could actually be more of the citizens slain, but the sons of Haman could not be slain again. But they could be subjected to the shame of the gallows. Their father had sought to have her cousin hanged but was slain thereon instead. Now she wished to render the merited disgrace more complete by having their dead bodies held up to public scorn.

Verse 14. True to his promise and also true to form of his previous favorable attitude toward Esther, he caused the 10 sons of Haman to be hanged.

Verse 15. Matters were going "their way" for the Jews, so that the slaughter of the enemy was continued even into the 14th day of the month. And again they did not deign to take advantage of the right to property. This movement was done in the capital city as Esther had requested.

Verse 16. While the attack was being repeated in the city, the Jews out through the provinces were also con-

tinuing their destruction of the enemy, to the number of 75,000. They again refrained from taking any of the prey of the enemy.

Verse 17. The 13th and 14th day had been periods of success against the enemy. The Jews observed the fact on the 14th day by having a feasting and period of gladness.

Verse 18. The Jews that were in the capital city extended the season of gladness; they included the 15th day in their festivities.

Verse 19. The same spirit of gladness that prevailed in Shushan and other large cities was manifested in the small towns. One item in the observances was the sending of portions (gifts) one to another. That was a custom that prevailed in ancient times. It indicates the righteousness and propriety of making gifts as expressive of joy and appreciation. In Neh. 8: 10 is an instance of this subject. In that case the Lord had been good to the people. They were then advised to observe a day in honor of the Lord, and a part of the exercises was that of making gifts.

Verses 20, 21. It has long been the practice of human beings to keep, in memory of great occurrences, some kind of formality. The Jews had a feast in memory of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage (Ex. 12: 14). Now they were directed by Mordecai to keep a feast in commemoration of the triumph over the conspirators acting with Haman. This observance was to be in honor of the 14th and 15th days of the 12th month.

Verse 22. The noteworthy feature of the great season was the idea of sorrow being replaced with joy. The time was celebrated by feasting among themselves, and by sending gifts to the poor. When there comes a time of general good feeling among the people of the land, it is wholly proper to celebrate it by making presents. They may do this first among themselves, then by sending gifts to those less fortunate.

Verse 23. *Do as they had begun* means the Jews determined to keep up the memorial feasts from year to year, in the same manner that was observed at the start.

Verse 24. The inspired writer goes back toward the early parts of the history and takes up the plot of Haman to destroy the Jews. *Had cast Pur* refers to the casting of lots that

is described in Ch. 3: 7. Haman was an Agagite, and 1 Sam. 15: 8 shows that he was descended from the Amalekites. These were the people who opposed the children of Israel in Ex. 17. At that time God declared that he would put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. It was gradually being fulfilled in this book.

Verse 25. This verse also is a brief recounting of the earlier transactions of the great drama now being shown through the inspired channel.

Verses 26, 27. *Pur* and *Purim* are forms of the same word which means "lot." It was used as a name of the annual feast that the Jews kept at the time now being considered. It was adopted in view of the method that Haman had used in determining the day for the destruction of the Jews. They wished to keep alive their appreciation of the escape from Haman's plot, and for this purpose they named the days, feast of Purim.

Verse 28. *Throughout every generation.* As a secular evidence of the truth of this account, I shall offer to my readers an extract from a metropolitan newspaper. The item is from the Chicago Herald and Examiner in the issue of Feb. 22, 1939, and is as follows: "*At Masque Purim Ball*—Celebrating the 2,500th anniversary of Purim, these pretty young ladies [pictured] appeared in costume yesterday at a rehearsal for the masque ball to be held at Temple Shalom." It is interesting to know that a statement in our Bible is verified by this authentic news item in a standard secular publication, many hundreds of years later.

Verse 29. *Wrote with all authority* means they had full consent of the king to write this letter. It was called the *second letter* in reference to the one in Ch. 8: 10. It was called *Purim* because of its being occasioned by the casting of lots (meaning of Purim), by which Haman had decided on the date for his destruction of the Jews.

Verse 30. The *provinces* were divisions of the realm of Persia. The word is from *MEDITUAH* and Strong defines it, "properly a judgeship, i. e. jurisdiction; by implication a district (as ruled by a judge); generally a region." The Persian Empire was so vast that its territory had to be subdivided into these 127 districts, with secondary rulers over them. This letter was sent to the Jews in all these regions, and it contained words of *peace*

and truth. That is, the peace offered to the Jews was backed up by words that had been attested and found to be true.

Verses 31, 32. The purpose of the letter was to confirm or establish the annual feast of Purim. After the decree had been published throughout the 127 provinces of the empire, the fact was *written in the book*. That means it became a part of the official records, such as were kept by all great empires.

### ESTHER 10

Verse 1. *The land* means the main body of the empire. The authority of Ahasuerus was so extensive that he put the islands under this tribute or tax also.

Verse 2. For comments on *chronicles* see 1 Ki. 14: 19. Such important transactions as those about the Jews would certainly be made a part of the royal records. The reason for making this statement by the inspired writer, is the fact that we are interested in the history of Mordecai and his connection with the people of Persia.

Verse 3. *Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus*. The book of Esther furnishes us with at least two important facts and lessons. It shows the complete destruction of the descendants of the Amalekites (Ch. 3: 1; 7: 10; 9: 12), which fulfilled the prediction made in Ex. 17: 14. It gives also a clear example of the truth spoken by Jesus, that, "whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." (Luke 14: 11.)

### JOB 1

General remarks: I shall not attempt to discuss all the questions raised as to the exact date when Job lived. The "authorities" do not agree on the subject, but that is not of so much importance to us. The main thing to remember is that he was an actual person and not an imaginary one. In Ezk. 14: 14, 20 he is named in connection with Noah and Daniel, and in the same sense. No one who accepts the Bible at all ever denies the actual personality of two of the men mentioned, and hence that of Job should be regarded in the same light. Strong's lexicon gives us the direct and simple definition, "the patriarch famous for his patience." James refers to him (Ch. 5: 11) as a real man,

and we have no reason to consider him otherwise.

As to his race or nationality I shall quote from Smith's Bible Dictionary as follows: "Job, the patriarch, from whom one of the books of the Old Testament is named. His residence in the land of Uz marks him as belonging to a branch of the Aramean race, which had settled in the lower part of Mesopotamia (probably to the south or southeast of Palestine, in Idumean [Edomite] Arabia), adjacent to the Sabaeans and Chaldeans." According to this, Job's blood was a mixture of that from Abraham and the other branches of people under the Patriarchal Dispensation. Other points of interest as to Job's place in the great Book of God, and the central line of thought running through the book, will be noted as we pursue our study.

Verse 1. The character of Job is the outstanding fact of this verse. *Perfect* means he was completely righteous before God, and feared or revered him. To *eschew* evil means not only to refrain from doing it but to shun or avoid it.

Verse 2. The story will come back to this verse in the outcome. Let the reader take note of the number and sex of Job's children at this place.

Verse 3. The narrative will come back also to this verse, so it will be well to mark it. *Substance* is from a word that Strong says means "live stock." *Household* is from ABUDDAH and Strong defines it, "something wrought, i. e. (concretely) service." It is the word for "store of servants" in Gen. 26: 14. So Job was blessed with a family of sons and daughters, a possession much prized in Biblical times; an abundance of various animals, and many servants to wait upon him in the enjoyment of his property.

Verse 4. The sons would hold feasts in their houses, each taking his turn to act as host to the others. To these feasts the sisters were invited. All of this indicates a united and thus a happy family. That was a condition to be considered as a great blessing, for not all families are thus congenial. While a parent would regret to lose a child, however unworthy or unpleasant in disposition, yet the loss of so agreeable a group of children would be felt the more keenly.

Verse 5. It would be no surprise if the sons should commit some trespass in the course of the festivities, for-