

## THE BOOK OF ESTHER – NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY

### PART TWO – CHAPTERS FOUR TO SEVEN

#### CHAPTER FOUR

When Mordecai hears the news of what is to be the consequence of his refusal to worship Haman, he is heartbroken. He responds in the way which was usual among his people when they heard about death, whether it has already happened, or was anticipated.(II Sam1:11) His outward demonstration of grief would have barred him from going to the king himself presumably because the king only wanted to meet cheerful people. When Esther hears what is planned, she too is devastated. She tries to provide Mordecai with suitable clothes to make him acceptable again in the king's presence but he refuses to cover up his sorrow for his people. Before taking any other action Esther seeks the whole story from Mordecai. He fills her in on the execution order, the price Haman has paid to obtain it and asks her to go to the king begging him to stop the planned massacre. She responds by explaining the danger she would face, even as the queen, in trying to approach the king without being invited. It could cost her life if the king did not hold out his golden sceptre to give her permission to speak. For the last month the king had not asked for her to come to him which might mean she is out of favour already. Mordecai responds with the terrible truth that if no-one intervened she would presumably die also once her identity as a Jew is known when Haman's cruel plan is implemented. Maybe, he says, this is why you became queen. Esther asks Mordecai to request that he and the other Jews fast with her and her ladies in support of her decision, "If I perish, I perish." If she is going to die anyway as a Jew, she has nothing to lose in risking her life at the king's hand. This is the same discovery we also make when we realise that our only hope is to count ourselves dead with Christ so that we might live in His strength.(Gal.2:20)

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION ON CHAPTER FOUR

1. What would it feel like to be in Mordecai's position as the cause of genocide among his people?
2. Have you ever faced Esther's situation in being asked to put your own life at risk to save others? How did you handle it? How did your faith in Christ make a difference?
3. Where does the New Testament explain the idea of 'If I perish, I perish.'?(Rom.6:8-11; Phil.1:20-23)

#### CHAPTER FIVE

After three days of preparing herself, Esther dresses up to face the king? How will he respond? His offer is encouraging – up to half his kingdom! Very wisely the queen begins with a simple invitation to dinner for the king and Haman. After a good dinner and yet more wine, the king again asks what favour Esther wants with the same generous limit of half his kingdom. Esther could have been like Salome after dancing before Herod and asked for the head of Haman on a platter.(Matt.14:6-11) Again she is careful and only asks her two guests to return for another dinner. After enjoying such excellent hospitality they willingly agree. Haman heads for home but on the way he sees Mordecai and his hatred is stirred further. Back with his friends and family he gloats about his success as the king's favoured deputy and reminds them of all the benefits his privileged position has brought him and them. 'I am even in favour with the queen who has twice invited me to a special dinner. I just cannot stand that man Mordecai!' His wife has a great idea to ease his anger. She urges him to build a gallows for Mordecai and to ask the king to hang him on it, and then his happiness will be complete. All Haman has to do is to find the right moment to ask the king's approval. Now Haman and Esther

are waiting for the opportunity to request a favour. Haman wants to murder Mordecai. Esther wants to redeem her people. Who will win?

#### QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER FIVE

1. How is this story similar to when Jesus hung on the cross? At that moment who had won, God or Satan?(Jn.16:30) Who thought he had won?
2. How does that night in Susa in Persia illustrate the choice before us when we consider our own lives and the cross?

#### CHAPTER SIX

The king has a bad night and cannot sleep. While God is not mentioned, we can assume it was the convicting work of the Holy Spirit letting the king know that justice for which he was responsible had been neglected. The king responds by asking to review government records in the middle of the night. Again it must have been the Spirit of God who leads him back to the story of Mordecai's report of the assassination plot. He knows at once that such loyalty should have been rewarded. Had this been done? No? I want it to be done now! Whom could I send to arrange the public honouring of Mordecai? God's timing is always perfect. Haman is just entering the palace to ask for the hanging of Mordecai. When Haman hears that someone is to be honoured for service to the king he can only assume it is him. Asked for advice he proposes that the hero should be paraded through the city on the king's horse. He can just picture himself being cheered by the people. The king agrees to his proposal and asks him to carry it out – for Mordecai! He is devastated but has no alternative but to obey instructions. When he returns home after the parade to tell his wife and friends they warn him that disaster is about to strike him. There comes a point even for unbelievers when the evidence of God's hand being at work, despite our best efforts to do otherwise, is overwhelming. In the middle of this conversation the king's servants arrive to take him to the second planned banquet with the king and queen. We can assume he was not in party mood!

#### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION ON CHAPTER SIX

1. How has God troubled you about issues you need to deal with but have not? What means does He use in the Bible to gain our attention?
2. On what occasions has God's timing been brilliant in your life in reversing seeming disaster into something exciting? What does this story tell us about the futility of worrying about possible disaster if we truly belong to God?(Phil.4:6,7; Matt.6:34)

#### CHAPTER SEVEN

Esther, Haman and Ahasuerus sit down for their second planned dinner. The climax of the story has now arrived. The king again invites Esther to make her special request and repeats once more his promise of anything up to half his kingdom. It is an electric moment. What will she ask for? A third banquet? Certain now that this is the right time, she asks that her life be spared and that of her people. In making this request she is revealing who she actually is, one of the Jews already condemned to death. The king is horrified that someone is seeking the life of his lovely wife. Who could it be? Haman! In fury the king withdraws to the palace garden. Haman takes the opportunity to beg Esther for his life as she has just begged the king to spare hers. He makes his final disastrous mistake by

throwing himself on her couch as he pleads. The king returns at that moment and assumes that Haman is sexually assaulting Esther. He is immediately arrested and awaits his fate. One of the king's servants provides a convenient solution. In Haman's garden is a gallows which he has set up for Mordecai, 75 feet high! The king sentences him to die on his own gallows, the ultimate example of justice being self-inflicted.

#### QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER SEVEN

1. In what way did the threat to the wife he loved need to be revealed to the king? Once it was known, what did the king realise was the only solution?
2. How in the same way is there only one real cause for human suffering today? What is it and how has it been dealt with?(Rom.5:12-21)