

Article of the Month – August 2010

Power Encounters as Missionary Method – V – Esther & Mordechai

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We now continue the series about power encounters in spiritual frontline battles. Earlier we considered such encounters with Pharaoh, Amalek and Balaam, and studied some in the books of Samuel, Kings and Daniel. Today we look at the book of Esther. This story differs from the others, in that no direct missionary outreach was taking place; what was at stake here was the survival of that part of God's people¹ that had failed to return after the Exile had come to an end.² It shows how even a secularized

'nominal' part of God's people still enjoys His great faithfulness and protection in the face of an all-destroying enemy.

This book in which God does not speak explicitly – His name is not even mentioned – has often been debated for its genuineness. It is quoted nowhere in the NT. Some argued that for this reason it could not possibly be canonical. Others see that we have a gem of a book here, showing the old theme of God's people being threatened and salvation being provided by His invisible presence. Why was He so invisible at that time? In the Torah we read: 'And I will certainly hide My face on that day because of all their wickedness in turning to other gods'.³

The Jews who had remained in Persia after the first group returned with Zerubbabel, might be considered the more secular. They were comfortable in their country of exile and it may have been the crisis, induced by Haman, that compelled them to reconsider their religious identity and their God. He, behind the scenes, had put His instruments of salvation in place at the right time. As such the book is thoroughly Evangelical in nature. Esther is an example of a missionary who has a hard time accepting she really was one. Without her interference, the second half of her book, the second half of Ezra and the whole of Nehemiah might not have been written, if the Jews had been eliminated by Haman's planned genocide.

The people who had faced the threat of extinction at this villain's hands, were saved by God's miraculous dealings with two people who, although simple, were of great character: Esther and her uncle Mordechai. Esther, during her royal career, learned not to love her life, but to be prepared to lay it down for her people. Her words became classics: 'If I perish, I perish'.⁴ Not that it had been easy for her. She had to be admonished by Mordechai that she might have come to royal position 'for such a time as this'.⁵ She had to accept that a divine plan for her

¹ Between 479 and 471 BC

² After the decree of Cyrus in 539 BC

³ Deut. 31:17,18

⁴ Esther 4:16

⁵ Esther 4:13,14

life existed, just like there is one for each of us: ‘For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus *to do good works*, which *God prepared in advance for us to do*’.⁶

This book will have more spiritual significance for us when we understand the typological meaning of its characters. These represent the real characters: ‘...a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things...’.⁷ Types cannot always be precise in detail. Only that aspect of the type, specifically given in God’s Word, is reliable as a spiritual lesson.⁸

King Ahasueros is the type of God the Father, very rich and ruler over the greatest kingdom of the world, graciously extending his scepter towards the one whom he loved and had elevated to royal dignity.

Queen Esther, his wife, type of the true missionary Church who understood her role to save the people with which she had been doomed to die, earnestly interceding, fasting and pleading with the king.

Esther had taken the place of former *Queen Vashti*, who had refused to obey the king’s rightful demand to display her beauty in front of the representatives of the nations. She typifies the false church that lost its missionary zeal to be an example for the nations. In this sense she may also be seen as a type of Israel being banned into exile for her disobedience.

The *Seven Counsellors* to the king⁹ are a type of the Holy Spirit, also called the Seven Spirits of the Lord.¹⁰

It is not hard to discern in *Haman* the type of Satan who once occupied an important position in the heavenly Kingdom but turned against his Master’s top creation – mankind – for sheer jealousy.

The victim of Haman’s jealousy was *Mordechai* – type of Jesus Christ – who beat his adversary in the end and inherited his position as second man at the Royal Court. It was he who inspired Esther to save the Jews. Mordechai became Esther’s sender reminding us of Jesus’ words: ‘As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you’¹¹: ‘for such a time as this’.¹²

As said, this was a clear power-encounter, but the context differed from the preceding ones in that Haman, representing the invisible enemy, was stopped in his genocidal attempts by Esther and Mordechai, who represented the invisible, silent God, Who nevertheless turned out to be the Winner of the contest. As always, the devil took the initiative to challenge God – and lost. Can it be that this crisis among the Jews triggered the return to Jerusalem of the next group under Ezra, about 15 years later?

⁶ Eph. 2:10 (italics mine)

⁷ Heb. 10:1

⁸ Dr. Brian J. Bailey, *Esther*, Hebron Press, Benoni, South Africa, 1996a:6

⁹ Esther 1:13,14

¹⁰ Is. 11:2; Rev. 1:4

¹¹ John 20:21

¹² Esther 4:14