

## SUCH A TIME AS THIS

**Today's Text: Esther, Chaps 3-10; Rom. 8: 28-39**

### **Extracts:**

- 1. And Mordecai told them to answer Esther: “Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king’s palace any more than all the Jews; for *if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish.* Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for *such a time as this?*” [Esth. 4: 13-14]**
- 2. And we know that *all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.* For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified [Rom. 8: 28-30]**

*During the Second World War, two contrasting personalities were thrown up by fate into leadership positions. In Nazi Germany, Adolph Hitler left prison to become the Fuhrer. His vision was to create a superior master (Aryan) race through the extermination of “inferior” races and complete military dominance of the world. In Great Britain, Winston Churchill was resurrected from political eclipse to become Prime Minister. With only a stubborn head and eloquence of speech, he was expected to save the world for human freedom and democracy. At the end of the War in 1945, Nazi Germany and its allies were defeated and Hitler committed suicide. Churchill wrote a biography out of his experience, “The History of the Second World War,” which helped him to win a Nobel Prize for literature.<sup>1</sup>*

*Churchill and Hitler stood at the threshold of history at the same time but what did each of them do with his own chance? Each of them made a choice, one for good and the other for evil. You are right now in such a time as theirs. You may be a child or parent, husband or wife, leader or follower, student, worker, self-employed or unemployed. You are somebody somewhere. But what do you plan to do with the chance that God has given you to make a difference? Are you using it to avenge the wrongs against you? Are you stealing or misusing the resources under your control? Are you whining and complaining and blaming God or others for your situation? Or have you rather chosen to make a difference for good in your life or the lives of those around you?*

*In today’s lesson, we shall use the story of Esther and Haman to study the subject.*

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<sup>1</sup> John Keegan, “Sir Winston Churchill,” <http://www.rjgeib.com/thoughts/britain/winston-churchill.html>

## 1. Where are you right now?

Examine the circumstances around you right now. Are you happy with yourself? Do you think that you have made the right choices and taken the right decisions? How do you now see the outcomes? Are you celebrating or regretting? Are you fulfilled or disappointed? Do you want to remain on course or change plans? Your answers are likely to be influenced by *how you got there*.

*In general, we may see ourselves in the right place at the right time or in the wrong place at the wrong time* for “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill; **but time and chance happen to them all**” [Eccl. 9: 11]. Some people call this chance thing luck or coincidence or God’s favour. For example, a very rich person may desire to have a baby and be prepared to pay any amount to any fertility clinic. Yet, she may not be lucky with a child. On the other hand, there is a poor person on the other side of town who has just dumped newborn triplets into a waste dump because she could not take care of them. So, what family we are born into, what colour of skin we wear, how tall or how brilliant we are: these are questions beyond our control.

However, if we believe that there is God and that He made everything for His own pleasure, we have to accept that *whatever or whoever* we are depends on our relationship with Him. If we love Him and work according to His purpose, He has assured us that all things will work together for good for us [Rom. 8: 28]. He will ensure that we are in the right place at the right time. Therefore, depending on your relationship with God, you could be in one of the following circumstances right now:

### a) *Wrong place, wrong time*

A person in this situation is living in *disobedience*. S(he) has chosen to walk by sight rather than by faith. S(he) is in flagrant violation of what God has commanded. It is a state of stress, regret and disappointment.

In the Garden of Eden, God specifically instructed Adam to avoid the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that the day that he ever ate out of it, that he would die [Gen. 2: 16-17]. There is evidence that he passed the word to his wife, Eve [Gen. 3: 2-3]. It is possible that they had come on previous occasions to view the tree of knowledge. However, on one unlucky day for them, the devil was there in the form of a serpent [v. 1]. Therefore, was it right on being caught for Adam to blame his wife or for his wife to blame the devil when they had disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit? They were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Human destiny changed dramatically for worse from that moment.

### b) *Wrong place, right time or right place, wrong time*

Out of *shortsightedness or impatience*, some people get caught in the wrong place even when their timing is right. Conversely, they may be in the right place but their timing is wrong. Abraham was on the way to the place that God had promised him and his seed forever. However, out of impatience, he succumbed to his wife's carnal plan to have children by her maid, Hagar [**Gen. 16: 1-16**]. The product of that decision was the birth of Ishmael, the progenitor of the Arabs, who are today the traditional enemies of the Jews, Abraham's seed by Isaac!

c) *Right place at the right time*

Those who choose to obey God and follow His plans for their lives *will always* find themselves in the right place at the right time. They may pass through hardships or suffer lack but they are still on course! For example, why would the daughter of Pharaoh come to bathe in the Nile River exactly at the time that the ark of bulrushes that contained infant Moses was floating by? Why did she have compassion on the baby instead of asking him to be killed since she knew that Moses was thrown into the river by a Jewish mother [**Ex. 2: 5-9**]? That was divine providence!

By the time that Jesus died on the cross, His disciples had all scattered. If it had been left for the Roman soldiers to bury Him, we would never have known whether or where He was buried. After all, we do not know anything about the two thieves' graves. It took Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, who was a secret disciple of Jesus "for fear of the Jews," to *boldly* go to Herod and obtain the body of Jesus for burial in the tomb that he had prepared for himself. Who brought the spices to prepare the body? Nicodemus, the Jewish leader, who could only previously come to Jesus by night [**Jn 19: 38-42**]. Because these two men were in the right place at the right time, they were able to fulfill God's plan.

It is for *such a time as this* that believers should see their present stations in life. Are you prepared to go all the way? Let us now study the story of Esther and Haman to enable us to answer that question.

**2. It was "such a time as this" for both Esther and Haman!**

It is one thing to arrive at the place where God wants us to be. It is another thing to use the privilege *wisely*. In today's story, we find two contrasting cases. One used his privilege to seek vengeance and evil. The other used the opportunity to save herself and her people.

a) *The story of Haman*

It was not only the Jews who were brought into exile in Babylon [2 Kgs 18: 35; 2 Kgs 25: 28]. Haman was an Agagite, that is a descendant of Agag, the king of the Amalekites. You will recall that king Saul of Israel lost his throne on account of disobeying God's command to kill all the Amalekites whose ancestors had committed atrocities against the children of Israel on their way from Egypt [Num. 14: 39-45]. Saul had spared their king, Agag, who was later killed by Samuel in fulfillment of God's word [1 Sam. 15: 1-35]. Therefore, Haman's hatred for the Jews in exile had travelled a long journey from the distant past!

King Ahasuerus had promoted Haman above all the other princes with him to the extent that all the king's servants "bowed and paid homage" to him [Esth. 3: 1-2]. However, Mordecai, a Jew, refused to bow to him, presumably on account of his faith. Haman did not like it and he was determined to destroy not only Mordecai but also "all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus" [vv. 3-6]. He influenced the king to sign a decree to that effect under the guise that the Jews did not keep the king's laws. In granting Haman the authority to take action, the king told him, "The money and the people are given to you, *to do with them as seems good to you*" [vv. 7-11].

For Haman, that historic moment was the time to avenge, not to build. He saw himself as "the enemy of the Jews" [v. 10]. He used his new authority to send letters by the fastest courier to all the provinces, instructing his supporters to kill the Jews in their midst on a specific day [vv. 12-15]. Haman used the right place and time to do what seemed good to him, namely, to steal, kill and destroy those he considered to be his enemies. Why did he not build up the Agagites in exile?

b) *Here comes Esther!*

Esther was the new queen of king Ahasuerus. From childhood, Esther had been raised by Mordecai, her father's nephew. Last week, we treated the story of how she became queen ["A bride fit for a king," Vol. 5, No. 12: 2 May 2004]. Mordecai came to know about Haman's plan and he quickly alerted Esther to do something to counter it [Esth. 4: 1-9]. Esther reminded Mordecai (whom she now regarded as her father, having lost her parents when she was a child) that under Persian law, no one could go to the king if he had not sent for him/her. In her own case, the king had not called for her in the last thirty days. Mordecai asked her to risk her life because if she did nothing, the Jews would get help "from another place" [God, of course!]. Then, he made the remarkable statement, "Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for *such a time as this?*" [vv. 10-14].

Esther got the message. She sent to Mordecai to fast along with her and her maids for the next three days and nights. She promised to go to the king uninvited thereafter, “which is against the law, and if I perish, I perish!” [vv. 15-16]. The Jews were God’s people and Esther was prepared to die in order to save them from the hands of the enemy. The word of God says, “when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him” [Is. 59: 19]. God has promised that if our fast is meant to “loose the bonds of wickedness, (and) to let the oppressed go free,” then our “healing shall spring forth speedily” [Is. 58: 6-9].

Esther went to the king after her fast, and when he saw her, “she found favour in his sight.” The king said to her, “What do you wish, *Queen Esther*? What do you request? It shall be given to you- *even up to half the kingdom*” [Esth. 5:1-3]. Isn’t that remarkable? The developments from this point on could only have come from the throne of God Himself! Here are the highlights:

- She offered to host a banquet just for the king and Haman only. When the king informed Haman about it, he was all over himself. On his way home, he met Mordecai who as usual did not pay homage to him. Haman told his wife that the king’s honour “avails me nothing as long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.” Then, on his wife’s advice, he built gallows in his house where he hoped to hang Mordecai in due course [vv. 4-14].
- That night, the king had insomnia and could not sleep. He sent for the records where he read how Mordecai had saved the king’s life for which no honour or reward had been offered [Esth. 6: 1-3]. As Haman was coming in to ask for the king’s permission to hang Mordecai, the king asked him to suggest how to honour a person who had found favour with the king. Thinking that the reward was meant for him, Haman prescribed a highly publicized parade, full of pomp and pageantry. To his shock, the king asked him to do what he had recommended for Mordecai [vv. 4-11]!
- During the second banquet that followed the first one, Esther revealed Haman’s plan for her people. The king’s anger boiled up and he went outside briefly for air. Just as he was returning, he saw Haman in a compromising posture close to the queen: he was begging for mercy but it looked like something else! The king said, “Will he also assault the queen while I am in the room?” On learning from one of the servants that Haman had actually built gallows in his house for Mordecai, the king ordered Haman to be hanged there [Esth. 7: 1-10]! The king gave Haman’s estate to Esther, which she passed on to Mordecai.
- The king authorized the Jews to defend themselves against any attackers that Haman had instigated against them. Thousands of

their enemies lost their lives, including Haman's ten sons [**Esth. Chaps 8-9**].

- Modercai was promoted second only to the king. He “was great among the Jews and well received by the multitude of his brethren, *seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his countrymen*” [**Esth. 10: 3**]. The Jewish yearly Feast of Purim was instituted thereafter to commemorate the experience.

### 3. Conclusion: Lessons

Haman is a figure of Satan, the “accuser of our brethren” [**Rev. 12: 10**]. On the other hand, Esther is a figure of Jesus Christ who came to save humankind from the clutches of Satan. Haman sought to kill and destroy the Jews in exile. Esther risked her own life in order to save her people from certain death. Jesus gave His life on the cross so that we might have life and have it more abundantly!

Today, we face challenging circumstances. Christian families and values are on trial in the hands of satanic forces. God is raising believers for *such a time as this*. Are you ready to play your role? Will you be like Haman, a disciple of Satan, and squander the opportunity that God has granted you to make a positive difference, or will you be like Esther and serve God's purpose? Do you know that God has put you where you are right now for *such a time as this*?

The choice is yours!