

Esther 5 and 6 The night the King could not sleep. Confessional reading LD10 q/a 28
Cong. Beloved of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In order to appreciate fully what the book of Esther is all about we need to understand something of its history.

The book of Esther was written after some of the Jews returned from their exile in Babylon, and the strange thing is that we do not seem to find any concern for Jerusalem or the temple in this book. It is written about the Jews who stayed behind in the pagan (信奉异教的) empire and they were very content to stay there.

King Ahasuerus ruled the Persian empire in 485-465 so at least 30 yrs after the temple was rebuilt. So these Jews were not anxious to go back to the Promised Land which God had given to His covenant (约) people to live with Him. They seem to have lost interest in living with their God in the place where they could call upon His Name.

In fact, the whole book of Esther is very unusual. Why? Because:-the name of God is not mentioned anywhere.

-there is no mention of sacrifice (献祭), or the Passover (逾越节), or keeping the laws of Moses.

- prayer is not mentioned anywhere, and no emphasis of any kind on religious devotion (虔诚).

Fasting (禁食) is mentioned, but pagan nations fasted as well.

- And no mention is made of Jerusalem, the temple or what happened to their fore fathers.

- There seems to be a total disconnect between Gods covenant people, the history of redemption (救赎) and the Jews who stayed in the pagan empire.

All this is very obvious when you read the book and for that reason some have asked why this book should even be in the Bible.

What kind of value is there here for us? What can we learn from a book that does not mention the name of God, or the Messiah, Christ, or faith or prayer and living a godly life?

Now it is true that it is interesting to read, especially if you like a love story with a good ending. The King of the world most powerful empire falls in love with this poor but beautiful orphaned (孤儿) slave girl. And she becomes the heroin (女英雄) who saves all her people. This makes a good story.

But is that what this book is all about? Well let's see what we can find out.

we want to look at the unusual structure of this book.

the two main characters in the book,

the plot, the central focus of the book and how it unfolds.

What the Lord is teaching us in this book.

1. The structure.

The book of Esther is very unusual in that the author has designed it just as an architect would design a house or some other building.

Every detail is very carefully planned out. The whole structure points to the fact that the writer sat down and wrote the book after all the events had taken place.

Then he constructed the book in such a way to bring into focus the purpose and theme of this book.

Let me explain. There are 10 chapters in this book.

But they are written in such a way so that the beginning and the end correspond perfectly from both ends to the middle.

Chpt 1 is the opening, the prologue (序曲).

Chpt 10 is the ending, the epilogue (尾声)

now we are coming from both ends towards the middle.

In chapters 2-3 the King makes his first decree (圣旨), and gives his signet (印章) ring to Haman to seal the edict (法令) to kill all Jews.

Coming back now in chapters 8-9 the King makes his second decree and gives his signet ring to Mordecia sealing the edict that all the Jews may defend them selves and kill those attacking them.

In Chapters 4-5 Haman and Mordecia clash with Haman apparently gaining the upper hand and victory over Mordecia.

Then in chapters 6-7 Haman and Mordecia clash (发生冲突) again, but now Mordecia emerges as the victor over Haman.

So all the chapters are laid out in perfect balance from both ends to the middle so that the focus is exactly on our text, the first vs. of chapter 6, which says what?

That night the King could not sleep.

This is the turning point of the book. We will come back to this later when we look at the plot. But secondly consider the 2 main characters of the book.

2. Main characters, Mordecia and Haman.

.Mordecia was a Jew, but not just anyone. He was of royal seed. His great grandfather was Kish the father of King Saul we read in Chapter 2:5. Son of Kish, a Benjamite.

So all though this is happening more than 500 yrs later, he is of royal decent.

Now God had said to King Saul, who was the son of Kish in 1Samuel 15:23 that he was going to punish the Amelekites for what they did to Israel when they came out of Egypt and in the wilderness were not able to protect themselves.

For that cruel attack on His people, God instructed King Saul in 1Samuel 15 to “Go and smite Amelek and utterly destroy all that they have.

Do not spare them; kill both man, women and infants, ox, sheep, camel and donkey”.

The wheels of God’s judgment grind slow but sure.

All Amelekites were to be destroyed, including their animals.

But King Saul refused. He did not obey God. We read in vs.9 of 1Sam 15“Saul and his people spared Agag the Amelekite king, and the best of the sheep”. This was the beginning of the end of Saul’s reign as King.

Now Samuel did later kill Agag, but evidently Saul must have spared his family.

How do we know this? Because the second main character in the book of Esther is Haman, who was a son of Hamedatha the Agagite we read in 3:1 and so a decendent of King Agag.

So now you can begin to see the bigger focus of this book.

What is going on is not just between these two men who dislike one another.

No, what is happening is that the very thing God told Saul to do to the descendents of Agag, Haman is now planning to do to the descendents of Saul and all of Israel.

He wants not only Mordecia killed in his decree, but every man, woman and infant of Israel

So the table has now been reversed.

Haman is now in a very powerful position to carry out the grudge (抱怨) his people had against the Israelites for almost 500 years.

And it certainly looks as if he is going to succeed except for this one little thing that Haman had not counted on. The simple fact that this one night, the King could not sleep.

Now congregation you can begin to feel the tension of what is really going on here in this book.

It is not just a romantic story, nor is it about two angry men who have an intense dislike for each other.

The crucial issue here is whether or not God’s chosen covenant people from whom the Messiah is to come will survive.

The real question is, will Satan be victorious in preventing the Messiah from coming?

Yes this book deals with what is happening amongst those who refused to go back to the promised land.

There is no mention of their faith or trust in God, we don’t know if there was any.

Certainly it was forbidden for one of Gods covenant children to marry a heathen (异教徒) but their disobedience is not the focus of this book.

Haman’s decree not only affects Mordecia or the Jews in Sushan.

It is a viciously (恶意地) planned holocaust (大屠杀) for all of God’s covenant people everywhere on the face of the earth to be annihilated (被消灭).

In other books of the O.T. usually the spotlight (聚焦点) of God's revelation is centered on Jerusalem and the promised land, and the faithful wherever they are.

But this time it shifts over to put light on that is happening in the palace of Sushan and a pagan emperor and the Jews who have chosen to stay there. You can understand now that this is a very serious threat.

So having seen now what is actually happening here, let's take a closer look to see how the Lord protected his people.

3. Lets have a look at how the plot unfolds.

Mordecia the Jew has some sort of position in the palace of the King . Several times it is mentioned that he was in the Kings gate. In all probability this means that he may have

belonged to the palace guard and therefore he was in the position to uncover the assassination (刺杀) plot against the King by two of the officials in the king's court.

This took place a number of years before the night the King could not sleep.

What Mordecia did to protect the King ,was recorded and kept in the vast library of the King along with all matters of importance that happened in the life of the King's palace.

In chapter 1 tells us that Vasti the queen rebelled against her husband, and was therefore dethroned as queen..

She refused to perform for her drunken husband and the officials, so the King's servants counseled him to get rid of her and look for a new queen.

Well Mordecia, being one of the King's servants suggests his beautiful niece be considered as the next queen. She was an orphan and he had taken her into his home to care for.

And , as you know, Esther was the one chosen by the King to become the new queen of the empire.

But that process altogether took about 2 yrs, so she became queen about 4 yrs before the night the King could not sleep.

In the mean time, Haman has become very upset with Mordecia for not bowing down to him as he leaves the palace everyday, so he devises a plan to get rid of him and at the same time settle this old grudge of the Agagites against the hated Jews.

But Haman is superstitious (迷信的) .

He has to consult the wise men and astrologers (占星术士) of the pagan god he worships to find out when he should do this.

Well the astrologers are not dumb, this is a good time to make, not a little extra income .

After all Haman is a rich man, so they keep throwing the dice (骰子) for a whole year before they come up with a date to murder the Jews.

But, the date they come up with is still another 11 months away!.

So Haman , because he is superstitious ,has to wait for almost 2 years before he can get rid of Mordecia.

But this gives Mordecia the opportunity to put the pressure on his niece, Esther to do something.

She has to plead for mercy for her people.

At first she refuses, but under pressure, she finally gives in, but says :

OK I'll go, and If I perish , I perish". It does not sound like a statement of faith but more like a fatalism (宿命论) .

And yes, there was reason for her to be afraid, because if the King did not extend his scepter (权杖) to her when coming to him, she would have died instantly.

But when she went the next day, he did receive her, when she invited the King and Haman to the banquet she has prepared.

So, the King comes with Haman, but Esther did not tell him why, but asked him to come again the next day. What went on in her mind for waiting a day we do not know, but we know what the Lord had planned.

Now of course, because she delayed it one day, the tension heightens, the King is now very curious; what

this is all about? What does the Queen want to say that is so important that she would risk her life for?.

So Haman becomes even more puffed up (膨胀, 得意) with pride.

After all to be the only other person invited as guest to dine with the King and queen of the greatest empire on earth is no small honor, and he is invited also for the second time.

So Haman leaves the banquet hall full of his own importance, but on his way out Mordecia again refuses to bow down to him and that really makes him furious!.

He is fuming (愤怒) and goes home, and, with the advice of his wife and friends, decides not to wait for the date that was set to kill and get rid of him.

He cant stand it any longer, he wants Moredcia dead, and so decides to go in first thing in the morning to ask the King' permission to hang him.

He is so sure and confident that the King will not refuse him, so he orders gallows (绞刑架) to be built to hang Mordecia on.

So he gets up early the next morning and goes and stands in the King's court full of pride and hatred, thinking Mordecia is going to be a dead man within short.

But there is this one little thing that stands in the way. That was the night the King could not sleep.

No matter how hard he tried, the King could not sleep that night.

So what do Kings do when they cannot sleep? Call in the musicians to play for him? No, not this night! Instead, he asked that they would read something interesting to him from the library.

Now his library was not small. Archeologists (考古学家) have found some of these libraries.

There were thousands of tablets with all the numerous events recorded that took place over the years.

Out of that vast selection , the servant reads what Mordecia had done 4-5years earlier in saving the King's life.

When that was read to the King, he wanted to reward that man.

You see now why the King could not sleep. Of course he could not sleep.

Under the circumstances it was impossible for him to sleep because God was watching out over his people.

It was the Lord who directed all these events over all these years to the very last detail. The servant chose one tablet from among all the 1000's of others where it was written what Mordecia did to save the King.

Why the King could not sleep is what we also confess in Ld 10 Q/A 28 about the Lord caring for his people now.

There we confess that "the providence (护理) of God is seen in His mighty and everywhere present power, and that no creature can separate us from His love.

Why? because all creatures are in his hand and without his will they cannot so much as move or be moved."

Well we have a good example of that here in the book of Esther don't we?

Haman can plan his evil, but can only move as far as the Lord will allow him.

Our Lord in heaven neither slumbers (困倦) nor sleeps but is ever watching over his sheep as a faithful shepherd.

"God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble, therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved." We need to remember that with all that is happening in the world today , don't we?

The Lord used a simple thing like the King not sleeping that night to prove that He is the Lord of all of history.

Well you know the rest of the story. In his pride,

Haman thinks he is being rewarded and honored by the King so he suggests to be dressed in the Kings robe and ride the King's horse with a crown on his head .

He is so bold he wants everyone to think he is the King. But God had other plans for him.

It was not Haman that rode the kings horse ,it was Mordecia. And it was not Mordecia that hung on the gallows, but Haman. It was not Haman who was honored, but Mordecia.

Let there be no doubt in anyone's mind that the Lord is not in control even to the minutest (最微笑的) details to accomplish His purposes.

That is also true today, brothers and sisters, even when we are unfaithful, God is faithful.

The Lord protects His church and every believer who trusts in the Savior.

There was never any doubt that the Messiah would be prevented from coming. Satan is allowed to move so far and no further.

Jesus Christ came as promised, and now rules over all nations and kingdoms on earth and all principalities (公国, 诸侯) and powers as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

But now think on what this same Lord of history, who so minutely planned to deliver His people then in such a miraculous way has done to save us from being slaves to sin and death and hell.

He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who rules over multitudes that no man can number.

He is adored by the saints and angels who bow at his feet in love and adoration (敬仰) and never cease to praise Him.

Yet he shed his Royal blood for unworthy sinners like you and me.

He is the highly exalted prince of peace, but he was despised (被藐视) and rejected by man.

He wore a crown of thorns and His royal blood dripped down his face. He was laughed at by the soldiers who beat him.

He was hung on the gallows, for our sin.

All this he willingly suffered so that your and my sins could be washed away.

Nor did he do this so that we might sit on a white stallion dressed in fancy clothes and a golden crown on our head receiving the praise and adulation of men.

No, he wore a crown of thorns that we might receive the highest honor, the crown of eternal life, and the crown of His perfect righteousness.

He did it so that we might be clothed in the garments of translucent light of His purity and holiness.

He did it so that we might be prepared as a beautiful bride for Him and admired at by all the heavenly angels.

He did it so that we might live with Him in the heavenly palace he has prepared for us.

All this Jesus had done for you and me and all of God's covenant people who trust in Him today.

So you see that this book does have a very distinct message for us.

Jesus Christ has come to save us as promised long ago to Adam y Eve. He is always faithful to complete what he has promised in a most carefully planned way.

Every detail of redemptive history fits perfectly as pieces in a jig saw puzzle (拼图) .

So now having heard His word in this overview of the book of Esther, what can we learn here?

1. There is a very strong warning here for all of us lest we forget that Jesus is coming again. This book shows us how Israel had forgotten their Messiah was coming. They were not even thinking about him anymore.

They had become very comfortable living among the unbelievers and lived like them.

How about you? Are you eager to see Christ coming on the clouds of glory and see this earth dissolve in fire with all your possessions in it?

Is it evident to your neighbors that you really love Christ so much and are eager to obey him and see him?

2. Besides the warning from the Lord in this book, there is also a great comfort.

Jesus is saying to us, Have you understood from my word to you who I am?

I have not changed, I am the same God and Savior who controls every little detail in all of history.

So I continue to care for my church today in the same way. Every minute and every detail of your life is in my hands.

And, if you understand who I am, do you understand who you are and do you believe what I have done for you?

Having heard who I am, do you have faith in me? Do you trust me to care for you?

If you have not yet trusted in me to be pardoned for your sin, come to me, and confess your sins and I will save you. I will set you free from the burden and quilt of your sins.

I want you to know that I have never , ever turned anyone away who has come to me with a repentant heart that is broken and contrite (痛悔的) . Never.

Those of you who have confessed me and who love me and trust me, listen, I want to remind you that you are not servants of an earthly king. I have given you a place in my heavenly kingdom, not as any servant ,but as my beloved bride.

As a believer who has confessed me before men, I have given you the most honored position on earth. Ahasurus chose Esther, but I have chosen you as my bride to rule with me in my Kingdom , but not because you were the most beautiful person on earth.

I have washed you as my bride in my own royal blood to make you spotless and absolutely beautiful for myself., to honor and serve and love me, and no other .

I have made you pure and holy for myself, never forget it.

I will provide for your every need. I am the Lord God , maker of heaven and earth, and I have chosen you. Whatever happens to you, happens to me , we are one.

So, you don't have to fear any Hamans, or any other ruler or angel or circumstance which may want to do you harm or destroy you.

You don't even have to fear cancer, nor some other sickness, nor accident.

No one, nor anything can possibly touch you or hurt you or take your life without my permission.

I want you to trust me so you can live in peace

I am in absolute control of every minute and second of your life as I was of Esthers and Mordecia's and all of Israel.

I will leave you on the face of this earth only as long as I want you there.

I have everything prepared for the wedding, but first I want you to finish your work on earth.

But I may surprise you and suddenly call you home this week, and you need to be prepared for that. I determine the moment your life on earth begins and ends.

So dear Brothers and Sisters the next time you can't sleep, think about the night the King could not sleep and then remember who Jesus is, and who you are, and what he is doing for you right now. What is that?

Jesus is preparing the wedding feast for all who love and worship him. Amen