The Book of Esther

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The Book of Esther is one of those few portions here and there of the word of God which are remarkable for the absence of His name. This has often surprised many: the Jews themselves were not able to understand it, and there are many Christians who are not much better; so much so, that it has been the habit, especially in these latter times, for some to treat the book with a certain measure of distrust, as if the absence of the name of the Lord were a just suspicion — as if it could not be of God because God's name was not there. Now, I hope to show that it is a part of the excellence of the book that the name of God is not there; for there are occasions when God veils His glory. There is no occasion where He does not work, but He does not always permit His name to be heard, or His ways to be seen. I shall show that it is precisely what the character of the book requires — that the name of God should not be there; and this, therefore, instead of weakening the claim of Esther to its place in the holy volume, will rather show the perfectness of the ways of God, even in so exceptional a fact as the absence of His name in an entire book.

We must understand, then, what God has in view. And the answer is this: He is here speaking of His ancient people under circumstances where He could not name His name in connection with them as their position was wholly irregular. Properly speaking, in the Book of Esther they have no position at all. We could not say that exactly about those Jews who had gone up from Babylon according to the leave that Cyrus the Persian gave them

in fulfilment of the prophets. It is true that, even as to the remnant, God does not call them “my people.” In allowing Nebuchadnezzar to sweep the land of the house of David, and the tribes that still continued faithful to their allegiance, God took away from them their title for a short time, and that title is not yet given back to them. Nevertheless, it is in sate keeping. He means to restore them to the land of their inheritance; but the title-deed, for the time, has disappeared. It is not that it is lost, but reserved. It is kept secretly for them by God. When the day comes for Israel to be brought back God will gradually bring them into their proper place, and into their due relationship, and then will come the days of heaven upon earth. But it was far from being so yet, even with the remnant that went up from Jerusalem. There, as we know, the Book of Ezra shows them centring round the altar of God, and building His house; and the Book of Nehemiah presents them marking their distinction. Even though they had lost their title, still they had not lost their God. If God would not call them His people, they, at least, would call Him their God. Faith clung to what God was to them when God could not call them His own. Therefore did they build the walls of Jerusalem that His people might have, even in their feebleness, the sense of their separation to Himself. This has characterised all their life. It was not merely their religious life, but their whole life. Ezra looks at the religious life: Nehemiah looks at all their life consecrated to Jehovah. But the Book of Esther brings out quite a different view. What became of the Jews that did not go up to Jerusalem? What became of those who were deaf to the leave, or valued not the liberty to go up to the land where God’s eyes rested, and where yet He means to exalt His name, — His Son the Messiah — as

well as the people of His choice, then indeed to be manifestly owned by Him?

The Book of Esther is the answer to that question, and shows us that when God could not own them in any way whatever, — and where, too, they were not owning Him publicly, — when there was no sign on God's part, nor on the people's part — where the name of God, therefore, is now entirely in the secret — is not named once throughout the book — yet where there is all this, there is seen the hand and working of God secretly in favour of His people, even in the most irregular condition in which they can be found. This is the nature of the book, and this, I believe, is the solution of the difficulty as to the name of God not being once named in it. We shall see abundant confirmation of what I have referred to when we look into the book. I just give, so far, a little intimation of its character in order that we may take heed to it the more, as the various incidents come before us.

Esther 1. We at once plunge into a remarkable feast made by the king Ahasuerus, who, I presume, is the one who is known in profane history as Xerxes. That is a matter of no great consequence — whether it was Xerxes or Artaxerxes, or even another who has been put forward as the true answer to it. We must remember that the title of Ahasuerus was a general one, just as Pharaoh was the general one in Egypt, and Abimelech among the Philistines; that is, there were many Pharaohs and many Abimelechs. So also among the Persians there were several that bore the name of Ahasuerus. Which Ahasuerus is meant is a question, but it is a matter of no importance; if it were, God would have told us. I presume, however, that it was really

Xerxes, partly because of the character of the man — a man of prodigious resources, unbounded wealth, immense luxury and vanity — a man, too, of the most arbitrary and capricious character. We shall see this in his conduct towards his wife; we shall see it, too, in his conduct towards the Jew. We shall see, accordingly, the history of a remarkable part of this capricious monarch's reign; for if there was a single Persian king with whom it might have been supposed to go hard with the Jew it was this one. Darius was a great admirer of Cyrus, and, consequently, a great friend of the Jews. Xerxes was a friend of nobody but himself. He was just simply a man who lived to please himself — to gratify his tastes and passions according to the ample means which the providence of God had placed in his hands, but which he wasted on his own luxury, as, alas I most men do.

Well, he is here shown to us in that epoch of the Persian empire when it consisted, not of 120 provinces only, which was the case when Darius the Mede, and Cyrus the Persian, reigned. We find in the Book of Daniel that there were seven provinces added afterwards through conquest. Xerxes reigned at a time, therefore, when the Persian empire was in the height of its glory and its resources, and he has all the pomp and circumstance of the empire around him — all the grandees and satraps of his vast empire. Under these circumstances it is that he calls for Vashti, who refuses to come. This provoked the capricious and arbitrary monarch. Vashti disobeyed the king. She refused according to the peculiar love of retirement which characterised Persian women. She refused to meet his wishes. He would display her beauty to all the world, and she declined. The consequence was that the king seeks counsel with his nobles, and one of

them ventures upon very bold advice, namely the dismissal of Vashti. This, accordingly, is the first great step in the providence of God brought before us in the book, and all the remarkable issues follow.

Now, this of itself even, is of the greatest interest; but then there is more than this. The book not only is a book of providence — God's secret providence — when He could not name His name in behalf of His people — in behalf of the Jews in their poor and dispersed condition among the Gentiles; but, further, it is typical of the great dealings of God that are yet to be, because what, mainly, does the book open with ? This — the great Gentile wife of the great king is discarded, and the singular fact comes that a Jewess takes her place. I cannot doubt, myself, that it is what will follow when the Gentile has proved himself disobedient, and has failed in displaying the beauty that should be in the testimony of God before the world. In short, it is what is going on now; that is, at this present time, the Gentile is the one that holds a certain position before God in the earth. The Jew, as you are aware, is not the present witness of God, but the Gentile. The Gentile has utterly failed. According to the language of the 11th of Romans, the branches of the wild olive — the Gentile — will be broken off, and the Jew will be grafted in again. Well, Vashti is the Gentile wife that is discarded for her disobedience and failure in displaying her beauty before the world. That is what Christendom ought to do. The Gentile, I say, will be broken off and dismissed, and the Jew will be brought in. This is what is represented by the call of Esther. She becomes the object of the great king's affections, and displaces Vashti, who is never restored. But I merely give this remark by the way to show the typical

connection of the book with the great course of God's counsels in scripture.

Now I return to expound a little the facts that are traced in it as the grand development of secret providence when God's name cannot be named. God can work where He cannot proclaim Himself, and this is remarkably illustrated in the fact that when the command went forth for the young maidens to be sought for the king for him to take his choice, amongst others "in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite; who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had carried away. And he brought up Hadassah; that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful, whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter. So it came to pass when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was brought also unto the king's house to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women. And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him" (Esther 2:5-9).

And, in short, when the turn of the different maidens came and, amongst others, Esther's turn, she not only found favour in the eyes of the chamberlain but, still more, in the eyes of the king. "Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus into his royal house in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign" (ver. 16). I may observe, by the way, that it is a

remarkable confirmation of these transactions of Ahasuerus belonging to the time of Xerxes, that it was in the third year of Xerxes's reign, as history tells us, that he held a grand council of all the grandees of his empire. The political object was his attempt to conquer Greece, and he returned again in the seventh year of his reign — the very same dates that are mentioned in this book of Esther. During that time he was away from his country and was occupied with that vain effort which ended in the most complete destruction of the Persian fleet, and the overthrow of their armies by the comparatively little power of the Greeks. But, however that may be, I merely make the remark by the way as showing the wonderful manner in which God's providence preserves even the dates, and the way in which the facts fit in. That, however, is a small point, but the great matter is this - that the Jewess was preferred to all others. The Jewess is the one who alone will be the bride on earth of the great King. We know who the great King means. I suppose you are all aware that 'the great king' was a special title of the Persian monarch. Now Scripture uses "the great King" in reference to the Lord. I cannot doubt, therefore, that there is an intention in this typical manner, even, of speaking of Him.

Esther then becomes the bride — the queen of the great king, after the Gentile has been dismissed because of her disobedience, and the king makes a great feast thereon. He sends a release to the provinces, as we know will be the case. When the Jew is taken into favour it will be as life from the dead, whatever may be the mercy of God now, and it is most rich; but, as far as the earth is concerned, it is altogether spoiled by worldliness, by selfishness, by vanity. All these things

have destroyed the character of God's kingdom as far as its witness upon the earth. No doubt God accomplishes His heavenly purpose, but that has nothing to do with this book. The type of heavenly things is not found here. It is only the earth and the earthly aspect of Christendom set aside by the calling in of the Jew by and by. She becomes the permanent bride of the King.

We are here told, in the end of the second chapter, that not only does Mordecai sit in the king's gate, but he becomes the means of making known to the great king an attempt to take his life. Two of the king's chamberlains, which kept the door, sought to lay their hands upon the king, but the thing became known. Inquisition was made, and they were both hanged upon a tree. We well know that every offender in that day that is coming will be found out and dealt with immediately. It will no longer be the uncertainty of law. In that day "a King shall reign in righteousness." There will be a great discovery and punishment of those that lift up their hands against the Lord.

In the third chapter we have a very different scene. "After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him."

It is only a type — only a shadow, and not the very image. In the millennial day there will be no Haman. Till that day come, whatever may be the vivid picture of coming blessing, there is always a dark shadow. There is an enemy; there is one that tries to frustrate all the plans of God: and, of all the races of the earth, there was one that was particularly hostile to God's people of old -

the Amalekites, — so much so that Jehovah swore and called upon His people to carry on perpetual war against that race. He would blot them out from under heaven. The Amalekites were the peculiar object of God's most righteous judgment, because of their hatred of His people. Now this Haman belonged not only to Amalek, but even to the royal family of Amalek. He was a descendant of Hammedatha the Agagite, as it is said, and Ahasuerus advances this noble to the very highest place. But in the midst of all his thick honours there was one thorn! Mordecai bowed not. The consequence was that Mordecai became an object of reproach. The king's servants asked him, "Why transgressest thou the king's commandment?" And after this went on for a time Haman hears of it. "He told them that he was a Jew."

There was the secret. God does not appear. There is no intimation in the history that God had spoken about Haman! Yet here was the secret reason; but the only public reason that appears is that Mordecai was a Jew. "And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath. And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had showed him the people of Mordecai; wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai" (Esther 3:5, 6); and Haman accomplishes it in this manner. He reports to the king, as being the principal noble in favour, that there was "a certain people scattered abroad among the peoples in all the provinces... their laws are diverse from all people, neither keep they the king's laws; therefore, it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed; and I will pay

ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasures" (vers. 8, 9).

The king, according to the character I have already described, made very small difficulty of this tremendous request of Haman. He took his ring from his hand, he gave it to Haman, and told him to keep his silver. He sent out the scribes to carry out this request, so that the posts went throughout all the king's provinces. The Persians, you know, were the first originators of the postal system that we have continued to this day. "Letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even upon the thirteenth day of the twelfth month." The king and his minister sat down to drink, but the city of Shushan was perplexed.

Well might there be a great cry going forth from the Jew. Their doom was sealed. So it appeared. The more so as it was always one of the maxims of the Persian empire that a law once passed was never revoked — "according to the law of the Medes and Persians that altereth not." Nothing then, it might appear, could possibly have saved the people. The master of 127 provinces had given his royal word, signed with his seal, and sent it out by posts throughout the whole length and breadth of the empire. The day was fixed; the people named. Destruction seemed to be certain; but Mordecai rends his clothes and puts on sackcloth, and goes into the midst of the city, and cries with a loud and bitter cry (Esther 4:1), and if God's name is not written and does not appear, God's ears, none the less, heard. Mordecai came unto the king's gate, for none might enter into the gate

clothed with sackcloth. He came before it, not within it, and Esther heard. They told her, and the queen was exceeding grieved, little knowing the cause of the grief. And Esther sends, through one of the chamberlains, and Mordecai tells him of all that had happened unto him, and of what Haman had promised to pay, and the destruction that was impending over the Jew.

Esther upon this, we are told, gives Hatach commandment to Mordecai telling him the hopelessness of the case. The object was that she might go and make supplication to the king. But how? It was one of the laws of the Persian empire that nobody could go into the king's presence. The king must send, and the king had not sent for the queen for thirty days. It was against the law to venture there. Accordingly Mordecai sends her a most distinct but severe message. "Think not with thyself," said he, "that thou shalt escape in the king's house more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place." Not a word about God. He is hidden. He means God, but so perfectly is there a preserving of the secrecy of God that he only vaguely alludes to it in this remarkable manner — "Then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place;" — for God would look down from heaven; but Mordecai only speaks of the place and not of the person — "but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Esther, accordingly, is brought to a due sense of the situation. She enters perfectly into Mordecai's feeling for the people and his confidence of the enlargement

that would come from another place. So she bids Mordecai ‘‘Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day.” She also, as she says, will do this. “I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king.” Not a word about the perfumes now. Not a word about the sweet odours to prepare herself for the presence of the king. To that she had submitted; it was the king’s order; but now, although she does not mention God, it is evident where her heart is. She goes with this most singular preparation, but an admirable one at such a time — fasting — a great sign of humiliation before God; yet, even here, God is not named. You cannot doubt that God is above, and that God is behind, the scenes; but all that appears is merely the fasting of man, and not the God before whom the fasting was. “And if I perish, I perish.” Her mind was made up.

Accordingly, on the third day (Esther 5), Esther put on her royal apparel, “and stood in the inner court of the king’s house, over against the king’s house, and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the gate of the house. And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight; and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand,” for faith was great in the goodness of God. All that appears is merely man, yet the unseen hand was there. This she looked for, and this she found. “So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre. Then said the king unto her, what wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom.” So Esther answers, “If it seem good unto the

king, let the king and Haman come this day unto the banquet that I have prepared for him.” God gave her wisdom. She does not at once bring out what was so heavy a burden on her heart. “He that believeth shall not make haste.” The unseen God who was the object of her trust enabled her soul to wait. She asks not only the king to the banquet, but the king and Haman. How constantly this is the case. So with the Lord when He gives Judas the sop even before that terrible betrayal which led to the cross. Little did Haman know what the God who did not appear was preparing for him. And at the banquet the king again returns to the question, for he right well knew that there was something more than the banquet in the mind of queen Esther. ‘‘What is thy petition and it shall be granted thee. What is thy request? Even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed.”

Again the queen asks that she may have their company at another banquet. “And I will do tomorrow as the king hath said.” So Haman goes forth that day ‘‘joyful and with a glad heart,” but when he sees Mordecai the Jew and that he did not stand up or move for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai. Nevertheless, Haman refrained himself. When he goes home to his wife and his friends, and tells them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king, he names as the crown of all the special honour paid, in queen Esther’s inviting him to a banquet where none came but the king himself. “And tomorrow” says he, “Am I invited unto her, with the king also. Yet all this availeth me nothing” — such was the bitterness of his heart and

hatred — “so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.” So the wife with the weakness that belongs to her nature suggested that a gallows should be made for this wicked Mordecai. “Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and tomorrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon; then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet.” The thing pleased Haman well, and it was done.

But the unseen God was at work that night. The king could not sleep (Esther 6), else there had been a bitter feast for Esther before the feast with the king. “On that night the king could not sleep.” He asked for the record of the kingdom. The providence of God was at work. It was found written that Mordecai had told of the treacherous chamberlains, and the king asks, “What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai?” “Nothing,” said the servants. At that very moment Haman comes to the court. He wanted to see the king, to ask for Mordecai’s life. Little did he know what was in the king’s heart. He is ushered into the presence of the king, at his request, and the king, full of what was in his own heart, was providentially led to ask, what he was to do for one that he wished to honour. “What shall be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour?”

Haman had no thought of any one but himself. Thus he was caught in his own snare. He asked with no stint. He suggested to the king the highest honours — honours higher than ever had been given to a subject before. “For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head; and let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the

king’s most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour” (vers. 7-9). So the king at once says to Haman, “Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king’s gate; let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken.”

Oh, what a downfall! What horror of horrors must have filled the heart of this wicked man, that he whom he most hated of all men living, was the very one whom he himself as the chief noble of the empire was compelled to pay this honour to, according to his own suggesting! However it was impossible to alter the king’s word. “Then took Haman the apparel, and the horse and arrayed Mordecai, and brought him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour.” Very differently did Haman return to his wife and friends that day. “Haman hasted to his house mourning, and having his head covered. And Haman told Zeresh his wife and all his friends every thing that had befallen him. Then said his wise men and Zeresh his wife unto him, If Mordecai be of the seed of the Jews, before whom thou hast begun to fall, thou shalt not prevail against him, but shalt surely fall before him.” Such is the secret feeling of the Gentile as to the Jew. It may be all very well for the Gentile, as long as the Jew is driven out of the presence of God, but when the day comes for exalting the Jew, Gentile greatness must then disappear from the face of the earth. The Jew is the

intended lord here below. The Jew will be the head, — the Gentile, the tail.

So the banquet proceeds (Esther 7), and the king and Haman are found, for there was no time to lose. The chamberlain had come and summoned Haman to the banquet, and now the king, for the third time, demands from the queen her petition. “What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee; and what is thy request? and it shall be performed even to the half of the kingdom. Then Esther the queen answered and said, If I have found favour in thy sight O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition.” What! was it come to this? the queen to be a beggar for her life! “Let my life be given me at my petition and my people at my request; for we are sold, I and my people to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish: but if we had been sold for bond-men and bond-women, I had held my tongue, although the enemy could not countervail the king’s damage.” She had struck the right chord. Not only all the affections of the king burst out at this insult that was done to the one that he loved above all in the kingdom; but more: there was the audacious presumption that should attempt the destruction of the queen and all the queen’s people — of all her people without even the king’s knowledge. Who could be the traitor?

“Then the king Ahasuerus answered and said unto Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he that durst presume in his heart to do so? And Esther said, The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman.” “Then Haman was afraid” — as well he might be — “before the king and the queen. And the king arising from his banquet of wine in his wrath went into the palace

garden." Well did Haman know that it was sentence of death that was pronounced upon him. "And Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen, for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king." And when the king returns he finds Haman in his agony fallen upon the bed where Esther was, and the king willingly puts the worst construction upon it. The word goes forth from his mouth and they cover Haman's face for immediate execution. And Harbonah one of the chamberlains suggested to the king the gallows that was already made in Haman's own premises, and this also meets the king's wishes. "Then the king said, Hang him thereon. So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified."

But this was not all. It is not only that God thus completely caught in his own toils the cruel adversary of His people, but God would care for the Jews throughout the whole dominions of the king, where they were still under sentence of death. The deliverance was not yet complete. The prime enemy was destroyed, but they were still in danger; and so Mordecai, it is said, came before the king (Esther 8.) "For Esther had told what he was unto her." The king takes off his ring and gives it to Mordecai. The Jew accordingly comes now into the place of government in the earth. Their enemies are destroyed, but still they have to be vindicated and to be delivered completely throughout the empire. And Esther falls down at the feet of the king and beseeches him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman, and the king again holds out the golden sceptre, and Esther explains that the posts that had gone forth with the king's letters were carrying destruction to the Jew throughout his

provinces. The king answers, “Behold I have given Esther the house of Haman, and him they have hanged upon the gallows, because he laid his hand upon the Jews. Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king’s name, and seal it with the king’s ring; for the writing which is written in the king’s name and sealed with the king’s ring, may no man reverse” (vers. 7, 8)

How then was the thing to be met? In this way — that throughout the whole empire by a fresh post are sent out letters “wherein the king granted the Jews which were in every city to gather themselves together and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them, both little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey.” So it was done. “And Mordecai went out from the presence of the king,” now with every sign of real honour. And “the Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honour. And in every province, and in every city whithersoever the king’s commandment and his decree came, the Jews had joy and gladness, a feast and a good day.”

So accordingly it was done (Esther 9). The Jews did gather themselves together and laid their hand upon all that sought their life. No man could withstand them. It is the evident type of the day when the Jew will be again restored to his due and proper place throughout the earth. And “Mordecai was great in the king’s house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces; for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater. Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them.” And so we have the account given. But there is more. “The king said unto

Esther the queen, The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in Shushan the palace, and the ten sons of Haman; what have they done in the rest of the king's provinces? Now, what is thy petition? and it shall be granted thee; or what is thy request further? and it shall be done. Then said Esther, If it please the king, let it be granted to the Jews which are in Shushan to do tomorrow also according unto this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows."

There are many that cannot understand this. And no wonder! They take Esther as the type of the Lord's dealings with the church. One sees at once what profound confusion is made by that. Not so. It is the Gentile discarded, and it is the Jew called in; but righteousness will be the character of the reign of the kingdom by and by. Grace is what suits the church now. It would be perfectly unintelligible therefore to have Esther representing the church now. The execution of righteous vengeance would be altogether incompatible with the calling of the Christian — with the church's place. But with the Jew called in to share the kingdom by and by — called into the honours of the kingdom — it is exactly in season. Then — when Messiah shall reign, and Jerusalem shall be His queen — will be found that word verified, "The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish."

So it was in this day. Thus you see, whenever we get the truth, the word of God falls into its due place. We understand it, and we distinguish between things that differ; we rightly divide the word of truth. When, on the contrary, we in our anxiety apply things to that which concerns ourselves, we fall into great mistake, and destroy the proper place of the church of God, and our

share of God's heavenly affections. Our proper place now is to act suitably to Him who is at the right hand of God. But when the Lord Jesus leaves heaven for the earth — when He comes to reign, then righteousness will be the character of His kingdom, and terrible things will be done in righteousness, according to the 45th Psalm. Thus the execution of the ten sons of Haman is not the smallest difficulty when this is understood, for the Lord will not only smite at the beginning, but there will be a repetition of the blow: there will be a thorough clearance of the adversary, and of all that render but feigned obedience. The Lord will deal with them in that day that is coming.

And so the king commanded, and the Jews gathered themselves for another day. Not only those in Shushan "but the other Jews that were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, and stood for their lives, and slew of their foes seventy and five thousand, but they laid not their hands on the prey.'' So that joy and gladness then fill the heart of the Jew. And Mordecai writes and sends letters to all the provinces, and thus the joy is spread throughout the whole earth. Not only so, but the Jews, as we are told, founded a feast upon this remarkable intervention of the providence of God.

The book closes, in the next chapter (Esther 10) with an account of the greatness of the realm of the king, and also of Mordecai his minister. "For Mordecai the Jew. was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed." Thus worthily closes this most remarkable book. The Jew, delivered from all his distresses, is brought into the nearest place to the great king, and

instead of being himself the victim of the hatred of the Gentile he has authority over all to execute vengeance upon all that would slay the seed of Abraham.

May the Lord give us to delight in the ways of God! May we read His word and profit by His word in all wisdom and spiritual understanding! We shall not find the less profit from the book because we understand it. To apply it to ourselves is only to deceive ourselves. We see the place of the ancient people of God when the proud Gentile will be put down because of his disobedience, and when the Jew will be brought in all the loveliness that God can put upon him, into his own proper place before the earth. These are the prospects that this book gives us. Yet not this only, but the beautiful feature, I think, you will see completely preserved from first to last — that all this was given during the day of the cloud — of the darkness - of the dispersion — of the non-recognition of the Jew. The name of God is entirely absent from it. It is the secret power of God working through circumstances that might seem awkward. But what a comfort to us! We, too, have to do with the same providence of God — not indeed working to the same end; for God's object is not to give us vengeance upon the foe, is not to exalt us into earthly greatness, but we have got to do with the same God; only — thank God! He does not disown us. He has brought us into a relationship which never can be lost, — a relationship which depends upon Christ and which is sealed by the Holy Ghost. Consequently, He never refuses that we should call upon Him, "Our God and Father"; nor does He ever refuse to own us as the children of His love.

Thus you see the book does not in the smallest degree apply to us in what is meant by Esther; but we are,

surely, justified in taking all the comfort of God's mighty hand. Where men see but circumstances passing around us, we know that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose." We may not see the way, but we know the God, we see the God, we can draw near to the God that controls all things in our favour. In short, therefore, the providence of God is a universal truth, till the day come when the dealings of God will be public and manifest, and His name will be named upon His people. Meanwhile we can count upon this for Israel. We know that now they are dispersed — that now they are in a wholly anomalous condition, but the day will come when God will set aside the Gentile, and bring in Israel once more, and our hearts can rejoice. It will be no loss to us even if that were the motive. But, in point of fact, it will be no loss to us. We shall be with the Lord Jesus on high, and it will be only after that that God will judge the Gentile and call back the Jew.

W.K.