

*A Patristic Commentary*



# THE BOOK OF Esther

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

# **THE BOOK OF ESTHER**

**BY**

**FR. TADROS Y. MALATY**

## AN INTRODUCTION

Queen 'Vashti' was dethroned, and replaced by 'Esther', the fatherless girl, born in the land of captivity, whom God used for the salvation of His people from the evil plot of the tyrant 'Haman', which almost brought the whole Jewish people in the states of Media and Persia to perdition.

It was an actual episode lived by the whole people; beside being a personal experience that touches the life of every true believer; when he uproots from his heart queen 'Vashti', the one with authority, and lets the humble 'Esther', reign in her place; not because of her riches or family prestige, but according to the exalted grace of God, which takes away from us our inner orphanage, to make God, Himself our Father, and the heavenly church our mother; to be counted as kings in the Lord, and to enjoy victory over the true 'Haman', the devil.

As 'Vashti', in her haughtiness, probably refers to the literality of the law, I wish the letter dies in us, the spirit of the new covenant sets, and queen 'Esther' reigns; to say, together with the apostle: "*In that He says, 'A new covenant', He has made the first obsolete. Now, what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away*" (Hebrew 8: 13). ... The book of Esther is a proclamation that the letter has grown old, and of the spirit of the new covenant, that grants salvation and life.

**(Hegomen Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty)**

# ESTHER

## ESTHER:

It is claimed that the name 'Esther' is of an old Indian origin, meaning, (little lady), then moved to mean (a star) in Persian. She most probably was given this name after being chosen as a queen<sup>1</sup>. Her Hebrew name was 'Hadassah', the name of the myrtle tree.

'Esther', the daughter of 'Abihail', of the tribe of Benjamin, was born in the land of captivity, then brought by her cousin 'Mordecai' who adopted her, to Shushan, the capital of Persia (Iran).

## THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK:

It came in the 'Talmud' that this book was written by the great Synagogue (led by Ezra the scribe). According to St. Augustine, Ezra was the author of this book; whereas many other fathers, among whom was **St. Clement of Alexandria**, believe what was proclaimed by the Jewish Historian Josephus, that it was written by 'Mordecai' himself.

## THE DATE OF ITS WRITING:

As is clear from the book itself, it was written shortly after the era of king 'Ahasuerus' (Xerxes 486-465 B.C.); based on the fact that it talks about that king in the past tense, yet includes accurate details of the royal palace, which was later destroyed by fire forty years after the king was assassinated (425 B.C.); which indicates that the author, himself, was a Jew who lived in the land of Persia, has seen the palace, witnessed those detailed events; and was well acquainted with the names of the king's entourage and court; as well as with the Persian words and expressions.

## IT'S AUTHENTICITY:

Some scholars raised doubts about the authenticity of this book, based on the following points:

(1)The name of the pagan king was mentioned several times, while there was no mention of the name of God (with the exception of the annex to the book of Esther which we shall discuss), nor of any prayer, or of any application of the Jewish law. This view is rebutted, that the author of this book must have been a believer in God, and its reader would become more believing in Him. Although he did not mention the name of God, yet he presented a marvelous portrait of God's care for His people, even while they were in the land of captivity, refusing to return to Jerusalem.

Some see the absence of the name of God, as a sign of forsaking them (See Deuteronomy 31: 8), because of their refusal to return to Jerusalem, together with Zerubbabel, putting their own financial interests ahead of Jerusalem and the temple of God. **According to Edward Jang:** [The people of God are in His hands, even though they are away from the promised land<sup>2</sup>].

Some others refer not mentioning the name of God, to that the episode was taken from the documents of the Persian royal court (2: 3).

(2)Some scholars object to the historical authenticity of the episode, considering it a symbolic story; basing their view on the fact that king Xerxes was not known to marry a

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<sup>1</sup> J. Raven: *Introd. To O.T.P* 312.

<sup>2</sup> Edward J. Young: *An Introd. To the O.T. P349*.

queen other than 'Amestris', referred to by Herodot (479 B.C.)<sup>1</sup>, namely, in the seventh year of his reign. This objection could be answered by that, not mentioning another queen is not an evidence of her non-existence; particularly that queen 'Vashti' was dethroned in the third year of the king's reign (1: 3), shortly before going to war against the Greeks; and 'Esther' was made queen after his return in the seventh year (2: 16), and remained a queen until the twelfth year of his reign (3: 7; 5: 3). Therefore, if Xerxes reigned for a duration of 20 years, we do not know how the situation was during the last eight years of his reign; 'Esther' probably died, and 'Vashti' probably resumed her reign.

According to some, the word 'Vashti' was not the name of the queen, but rather a title by which she was called on account of her exalted beauty, and of the great love the king had for her; And she was the same 'Amestris' (referred to by 'Herodot'), who preceded queen 'Esther', and probably resumed her reign later on, after God realized the mission of Esther to save her people. As to mentioning her as a queen and wife of Xerxes in the seventh year of his reign, it was because, until the seventh year, Esther was not enthroned; hence 'Vashti' remains a queen in the sight of the historians, even though she was not seen by the king after her rejection of his invitation, in the third year of his reign, having not been expelled from the royal palace until the enthronement of Esther.

(3) Some scholars were skeptic, and had some reservations concerning certain exaggerations, like: the king's lack of knowledge of Esther's race; issuing the decree of the annihilation of the Jews, to take effect after 11 months; the huge sum of silver (11000 talents) paid by Haman into the hands of those who do the work; ... These reservations could be answered as follows:

As to the king's ignorance of Esther's race, the king was more interested in her beauty than in her race; probably on account of that, being born in captivity, she spoke the Persian language fluently without an accent; that her features probably did not tell about her Jewish race; and particularly that the king used to encounter her while drunk.

As to the execution of the decree of annihilation after 11 months of its issue; the kingdom was so large, and the ways of transportation were two primitive at the time; beside the fact that Haman intended to execute it all over the country at the same day, which was determined after consulting the diviners, to make sure that his evil plot would not fail (3: 7)

As to the huge sum of silver pledged by Haman, which constituted two thirds of the income of the Persian kingdom in one year; Haman hoped that, through confiscating the possessions and wealth of the Jews, he would be so rich to make up for his own expenditure, and even to help the king to make up for his losses in the war against the Greeks.

Beside these answers to the objections of the skeptics, there are the following evidences of the authenticity of the book and the episode:

a- The book refers to certain events, and elaborately confirms them by clear dates according to the Persian calendar (2: 23; 6: 1; 10: 2).

b- The book presents an accurate and live description of the Persian customs, and the circumstances prevailing at that time, particularly in Shushan the citadel, the capital of Persia (1: 5, 10, 14; 2: 9, 21, 23; 3: 7, 12, 13; 4: 6, 11; 5: 4; 8: 8).

c- The description of the personal character of 'Ahasuerus' conforms to what history tells of the fiery and loosely nature of king Xerxes, who reigned from the year 486

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<sup>1</sup> *History 9: 108-113.*

to 465 B.C<sup>1</sup>. His banquet in the third year of his reign historically conforms to his decision to wage war against the Greeks; on account of that the kings of Persia used to take such big decisions in the midst of banquets and loosely gatherings. Coming back from that war on the seventh year of his reign, according to the historical records of Herodot, the king held the banquet of Esther.

d- The book presents an acceptable interpretation of the origin of the feast of 'Purim', which was practiced in the time of Josephus, all over the known world at that time; and was also known in the days of the Maccabees in the year 160 B.C., as 'the feast of Mordeccai'.

e- In recently discovered Persian inscriptions, the name of 'Mordeccai' was mentioned as one of the court officers during the reign of 'Xerxes', confirming the historical authenticity of the book of Esther.

f- The narration of the events of the episode with such great accuracy, giving all the circumstances, and the names of the princes and officers of the Persian royal court (1: 10, 14), confirms that the episode has been a historical fact, and not a symbolic one.

g- The Jews acknowledge it as an authentic book.

### **THE PREVAILING CIRCUMSTANCES:**

The events of this episode took place during the period between the first return of the Jews from captivity, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, and the second return under the leadership Ezra. It confirms that God, in His salvation work, proclaims His care, even for those who refused to return to Jerusalem together with Zerubbabel.

King Ahasuerus, mentioned here, is Xerxes son of Darius, known, as we previously said, for his fiery and loosely nature, as is demonstrated by the two banquets he held, one to proclaim his intention to wage war against the Greeks, and the other after his return to forget about his failure and losses in that campaign.

The essence of the episode was that 'Haman' the prime minister of Persia and Media has issued a royal decree to annihilate all the Jews present all over the kingdom. But the watching eye of God worked to save His people on the hands of queen Esther and Mordeccai; And, it so happened that 'Haman' was hanged by the same gallows he has prepared for Mordeccai. God was glorified in His people, and the oracle of the psalmist is realized, saying: *"The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes at him with his teeth. The Lord laughs at him, for He sees that his day is coming"* (Psalm 37: 12, 13).

### **DIVISIONS OF THE BOOK:**

We can call this book 'The book of the three banquets': the banquet of 'Ahasuerus', representing the joy of the mortal world; the secret banquet of Esther, representing the banquet of the cross, destructive to the devil (Haman); and the banquet of 'Purim', representing the joyful collective resurrection.

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|---|---------------|
| <b>1- The banquet of King Ahasuerus</b>     | <b>1 – 2</b>  |
| <b>2- The banquet of queen Esther</b>       | <b>3 – 7</b>  |
| <b>3- The banquet of the feast of Purim</b> | <b>8 – 10</b> |

In the Septuagint version includes an annex to the book of Esther, that was not in the Hebrew text; constituting mostly prayers, messages, and dreams. **St. Jerome** included it in his Latin translation of the book. This annex embraced the following parts: A dream by Mordeccai(chapter11); the plot against the king(chapter12); the royal decree against

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* 3: 97, 98; 7: 9.

the Jews(chapter13); the prayer of Mordecai(chapter13: 8-17); the prayer of Esther(chapter14); the request of Mordecai from Esther(chapter15); the request of Esther from Ahasuerus(chapter15); The royal decree to save the Jews(chapter16) .

## **THE FIRST DIVISION**

# **THE BANQUET OF KING AHASURUS**

**(Chapters 1 and 2)**

- **Queen Vashti dethroned**      **Chapter 1**
- **Esther becomes a queen**      **Chapter 2**

## CHAPTER 1

# QUEEN VASHTI DETHRONED

It came to pass that king Ahasuerus held a banquet to show off the riches of his glorious kingdom and the splendor of his excellent majesty, in which he practiced his looseness, and drank too much wine to lose his reason (10), and his wife, on account of that he got furious, his anger burned within him (12), and received the counsel of the wicked (16);... But the amazing hand of God turned those evil practices into a tool to realize the salvation of His people, through dethroning queen Vashti, and enthroning Esther instead of her. In other words, while the devil was provoking Haman to annihilate the Jews, God prepared Esther for their salvation.

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|----|--|----------------|
| 1- | <b>The banquet of king Ahasuerus</b>                   | <b>1 - 9</b>   |
| 2- | <b>The king demands the attendance of queen Vashti</b> | <b>10 - 12</b> |
| 3- | <b>Queen Vashti dethroned</b>                          | <b>13 - 22</b> |

### 1- THE BANQUET OF KING AHASUERUS:

As the kingdom of Media and Persia became great and defeated the kingdom of Babylon, the Jews who were taken into captivity to Babylon, became under the authority of Media and Persia. The dominion of that kingdom extended from India to Ethiopia, covering over 127 provinces (1); including the land of Egypt, which was occupied by emperor Xerxes, after his father's failure to overcome it.

Ahasuerus, as we already said (1), refers to king Xerxes son of Darius; And as more than one king carried the name 'Ahasuerus', some scholars believe that it was not the name of a certain king, as much as it was a title given to the kings of Persia; the way the kings of Egypt carried the title 'Pharaoh'.

To show off the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the splendor of his majesty (4), the king held two great banquets: the first one lasted 180 days; probably one daily banquet for each of his provinces, or that period included the preparation for the two banquets. The second banquet was a collective feast lasting seven days for all the people who were present in Shushan the citadel, from great to small, held in the gardens of the king's palace (5).

He probably held those two banquets to declare his intention to wage against the Greeks; as, according to Herodot, the Persian kings used to make their decisions in such banquets.

The author narrates accurate details of that banquet, saying that it was held in Shushan the citadel (or Susa), the capital of 'Elam', before 3000 years B.C. which was the seat of king 'Chedorlaomer' (Genesis 14: 1), then taken over by the kings of Persia and Media, who made it their winter capital, beside Babel and Wakbatanah. ... It seems that the first banquet was held for the rulers inside the palace; whereas the second banquet, held for all the people, who were present in the court (seemingly separate from the city itself 9: 12, 13), was held in the garden of the palace, where tabernacles to shade against the heat of the sun: of white, green, and crimson fabric (the Persian royal colors), hanged by white linen cords through rings of silver on marble pillars. The recliners for the guests, were adorned with gold and silver, on a ground of black marble, and the most prominent item for their entertainment, was the abundant flow of royal wine, according to the generosity of the king, served in golden vessels (7)

Queen Vashti also held a feast for the women in her quarters in the royal palace (9).

## **2- THE KING DEMANDS THE ATTENDANCE OF QUEEN VASHTI:**

*“On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of king Ahasuerus, to bring queen Vashti before the king, wearing her royal crown, in order to show her beauty to the people and the officials, for she was beautiful to behold”* (10, 11).

Here, the word ‘eunuch’ does not mean the literal sense of the word, but it was a title given to the court officials in Persia and Egypt; as for example the captain of the guard ‘Potiphar’ was called ‘the eunuch of Pharaoh’ (Genesis 39: 1); so were the cupbearer of the king and his baker (Genesis 40: 2). The seven eunuchs here, were therefore royal officials who had the honor to serve the king.

The king was so merry with wine, that he uttered perverse things, according to the oracle of the wise Solomon: *“Do not look on the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it swirls around smoothly. At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like a viper. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart will utter perverse things”* (Proverb 23: 31, 32).; and, *“It is not for kings,... to drink wine, nor for princes intoxicating drink, lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the justice of all the afflicted”* (Proverb 31: 4, 5).

If in Jesus Christ we have become kings (Revelations 1: 6; 5: 10), It would not be befitting of us to get drunk with the love and pleasures of the world, lest we would forget the law of heaven, and lose our royal stature. It would not be befitting of us to show off the beauty of our inner ‘Vashti’ to others; Namely, to parade our works of righteousness and virtues to get human glory, instead of keeping our (queen) within us, and not having her beauty shown, except to her Groom, the Lord Jesus.

If God has set man as a spiritual king; it would not be befitting of him to bring his queen forth to show off her beauty to strangers; but to keep her in her own quarters to hold a special banquet for women to make them happy, and to let them submit to her.... In other words, to let our bodies (the queen) live with the spirit of submission to our soul (the king), hidden within her royal behavior, to remain holy in the Lord, partaking of the royal glory and honor of the soul. That way, the apostle Paul loved his ‘Vashti’, namely his royal body in the Lord, and let her stay in the women’s quarters, saying: *“I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified”* (1 Corinthians 9: 27). *“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church”* (Ephesians 5: 29); namely, as a King toward His queen; For the soul to recognize her leading position by the Holy Spirit; and for the body to recognize its position as a helper to the soul, and a partner in conquest; lest man would be wholly deprived of the eternal royal glory.

The king intended to show off the beauty of the queen, *“for she was beautiful to behold”* (11); not perceiving that by so doing, she would lose her splendor and distort her image. Hence our Lord Jesus Christ, to confirm our commitment not to show off our inner (queen), says: *“When you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly”* (Matthew 6: 4). ... ‘Vashti’ would

remain in the women's quarters, when we present worship to God, not with the intention of showing off before men, but of closing off our inner doors, and entering into our secret place, where we encounter our unseen Groom; As according to **St. John Chrysostom**: [Being Himself unseen, God intends for your prayer to be unseen as well<sup>1</sup>]; And, [God intends for you to close off the doors of the mind, rather than to close off the seen doors<sup>2</sup>].

### 3- QUEEN VASHTI DETHRONED:

Having refused to come at the king's command, "*the king was furious*" (12). He moved from great love and admiration of his wife the queen, to have instead fire burning within him toward her.

The king sought the counsel of the wise men who understood the times, and know law and justice (he probably means the diviners and magicians) (13). It so seems that there was some animosity between the queen and Memucan, one of those counselors, who said before the king and the princes: "*Queen Vashti has not only wronged the king, but also all the princes and all the people who are in the provinces of king Ahasuerus. For the queen's behavior will become known to all women, so that they will despise their husbands in their eyes*" (16, 17). And he counseled the king to dethrone her and give her royal position to another who is better than she.

Memucan counted Vashti's behavior as a breaking up of the law of nature, and that of the family, which would make man lose his authority over his wife, and the wife despise her husband in her eyes; assuming that it is the law that support the dominion of man over his wife, and not perceiving that the wise leadership of man within his household, does not draw its strength from laws and commands, as much as from the spirit of the giving love; according to the words of the apostle Paul, saying: "*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it; ... Nevertheless, let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself*" (Ephesians 5: 25, 33).

Memucan says: "*Each man should be master in his own house, and speak in the language of his own people*" (22). Meaning that in case man marries a wife of another race, the household is committed to speak in the language of the man, and not in that of the woman. That was a portrait of the family life in the minds of the men of Persia at that time; who did not perceive that the language to prevail on the members of a household should be that of love, capable of captivating all of them. As there is no conflict of authority between husband and wife, it would be befitting to have between them a longing toward giving, working with inner love, and a perception of the unity of heart and mind.

Having loved Vashti only for the sake of her beauty, family position, and wealth; Ahasuerus, in his wrath sought the counsel of others concerning her refusal to come at his command.... We, on the other hand, receive our partner from the hand of God, to grant us the spirit of unity in Him, sanctifying the family bond, never to be loosed. As according to **the scholar Tertullian**: [How can I describe the happiness of matrimony, set by the church, held fast by the Holy Sacrament, crowned by blessing, proclaimed by the angels, and blessed by God<sup>3</sup>?!].

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<sup>1</sup> In Matt. Hom. 19: 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid 19: 3.

<sup>3</sup> To His Wife 2: 9.

## CHAPTER 2

### ESTHER BECOMES A QUEEN

Vashti was dethroned to be replaced by Esther. It is as though the former represents the literality of the law, which should be taken away to provide the free grace, the spirit of the gospel in us; to let Esther, the symbol of the church of the new covenant reign in her place.

1-	<b>The need for a new queen</b>	<b>1 - 4</b>
2-	<b>Esther the captive</b>	<b>5 - 11</b>
3-	<b>Esther the queen</b>	<b>12 – 20</b>
4-	<b>Mordecai saves king Ahasuerus</b>	<b>21 – 23</b>

#### 1- THE NEED FOR A NEW QUEEN:

*“After these things, when the wrath of king Ahasuerus subsided he remembered Vashti, what she had done, and what had been decreed against her. Then the king’s servants who attended him said: ‘Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king; and let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of the kingdom, that they gather all the beautiful young virgins to Shushan the citadel, into the women’s quarters, under the custody of ‘Hegai’ the king’s eunuch, custodian of the women. And let beauty preparations be given them. Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti’. The thing pleased the king, and he did so” (1 – 3).*

When the wrath of the king subsided, he remembered ‘Vashti’, and he probably intended to forgive her. But his counselors, fearing that she would probably make revenge against them, because of their counsel to the king, they hasten to provoke him to look for another beautiful girl. It is said that the king used to chose his wife from among the daughters of his officials; but, lest the he would probably think that they provoked him to send Vashti away for the sake of their own personal interest, they attempted to show their good intention by provoking the king to chose a beautiful virgin from any province, and of any race.

According to **St. Jerome**: [The philosophers of the world used to take away an old covetousness through instigating a new one; to take out an old nail through inserting a new one. According to that principle, the seven officers of the royal court acted with king Ahasuerus; they attempted to take away his longing for queen Vashti, through stirring up his lust for new virgin; namely, treating an ailment by another, a sin by another.... It is befitting of us, on the other hand, to overcome our faults through loving virtues, opposite to them; according to the words of the psalmist: *“Depart from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it”* (Psalm 34: 14). For unless we hate evil, we would not be able to love goodness; We should rather do good, if we intend to forsake evil; we should seek peace, if we wish to avoid war<sup>1</sup>].

The officials made use of the king’s weak personality<sup>2</sup>, and of his love for licentiousness, to put off his longing for Vashti, through providing him with beautiful girls from allover the country, to choose the one who pleases him

Following the symbolic or the spiritual interpretation, we consider those counselors who ministered to the king, and provoked him to chose a new queen instead of

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<sup>1</sup> Ep. 125: 4.

<sup>2</sup> Herod. His 9: 108-113.

Vashti; to be men of faith in the old covenant: patriarchs, prophets, kings, priests, and laymen, who lived under the shadow of the law (Vashti); and perceived that there was no salvation for men through the law, particularly in its literality; As, according to the apostle Paul: *“The commandment which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me”* (Romans 7: 10, 11)... On account of that the law exposed sin, and confirmed man’s death, instead of supporting, healing, or saving him, men of the old covenant anticipated with longing the coming of the Savior “Messiah”, (to set Esther a queen), through the free grace of the gospel; as said by the Lord Himself: *“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad”* (John 8: 56).

Seeking beautiful girls from all provinces for the king in Shushan the citadel, the court officials were as though, men of the old covenant, who have seen, by the eye of prophecy, the church of the new covenant gather together in her, members from all peoples and nations, and brought them forth into the virgin’s quarters in the palace of Christ, namely, the church, called *“the church of the firstborn”* (Hebrew 12: 23), to proclaim her spiritual virginity and her inner beauty, being *“a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish”* (Ephesians 5: 27). Believers have long desired to see this holy virgin reigning as a bride for the King; as according to the apostle: *“For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”* (2 Corinthians 11; 2).

## **2- ESTHER THE CAPTIVE:**

God turned the dethronement of Vashti to the salvation of His people, through setting Esther -- born in captivity, and raised by her cousin Mordecai – a queen instead of Vashti.

According to the book, Mordecai, who worked in Shushan the citadel, was a Jew, captivated from Jerusalem in the days of ‘Jeconiah’, king of Judah, by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. He was the hidden hero in the episode of Esther, on account of his faithfulness in raising his cousin Esther and his guidance to her; beside his faithfulness in his work for the king of a foreign race, and in saving him from an evil plot against him. He has been, as well, a man of deep spiritual behavior, full of faith and trusting in the work of God.

As we already said, Vashti referred to the literality of the law, that ought to be rooted out of the heart, to be replaced by the grace of the new covenant, for Esther (the church of the new covenant), to reign as a queen instead. ... The features and circumstances of Esther, came conforming to the church of the new covenant, on several aspects, of which are the following:

(1) Esther was born in the land of captivity, denied of the promised land and the temple, with all its beautiful

rites; as though representing the congregation of the Gentiles, fallen in the captivity of the devil, and denied of the spiritual blessings of God, and of the enjoyment of His temple ... But God saved them from that captivity, and made out of them spiritual kings, when the Lord Christ came down to liberate them; as according to Isaiah: *“God sent Me to heal the brokenhearted; to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound”* (Isaiah 61: 1).

According to **St. Augustine**: [You have taken our captivity away, not through liberating us from the hands of the barbarians; but from our evil works and our sins,

through which the devil prevailed on us. For whoever is liberated from his sins, the prince of sinners (the devil); will have no more authority on him]. And: [Confess that you are a captive, to be worthy of being liberated. As he, who does not know his enemy, how could he ever instigate his liberator<sup>1</sup>?].

(2) ***“She had neither father nor mother”*** (7). That is one of the features of the church, when she realized God’s call to Abraham: *“Go ... from your father’s house”* (Genesis 12: 1). Let us forsake our old father, the devil, and our early mother, the love of the world, that the Lord Himself, would become our heavenly Father; and the heavenly church would be our mother. The Lord, demanding from the Jews to get orphaned from their evil father, said to them: *“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do”* (John 8: 44).; And **St. Augustine**, talking about the Gentiles, forsaking their old father, says: [The Gentiles came to Faith after denying their sonhood of their old father, the devil<sup>2</sup>].

(3) ***“The young woman was lovely and beautiful”*** (7). The heavenly Groom, seeing in his bride the beauty which He bestowed on her, said: *“Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, because it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you”* (Ezekiel 16: 14). Although our past was ugly through the blackness of sin, Yet, with cherishment, we say: *“I am dark, but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem”* (Songs 1: 5). And according to **St. Ambrose**: [Putting on those garments through the font of baptism, you would say, together with the bride of the song: *“I am dark, but lovely (perfect), O daughters of Jerusalem”*. I am dark, through my human weakness, but perfect, through the secret of faith<sup>3</sup>].

(4) ***“Hegai’ (the king’s eunuch, the custodian of the house of virgins) ... gave her and her maidservants the best place in the house of the women. Esther had not revealed her people or kindred”*** (9, 10). Hegai moved her to the best place, perceiving that she would find favor in the king’s eyes, and would most probably be chosen as the future queen. ... What is that best place, except *“the sonhood to God”*, which was bestowed on us as a gift from the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son. As in Him, we were exalted to the bosom of His Father, to be counted, together with Him, as His children.

***“Esther had not revealed her people or kindred, for Mordecai charged her not to reveal it”***. For the soul, enjoying sonhood of God, and becoming a queen, lives on a heavenly level, and comes to have an exalted race, inexpressible by language. She lives in silence, yet not the kind of silence set upon helplessness caused by shutting off the heart, but that of love open to heaven, to meditate in the works of God with unutterable joy.

(5) Her spirit of humility, obedience, and submission, to her guardian Mordecai, even after she was chosen a queen on the greatest throne at that time; ***“Esther obeyed the command of Mordecai as when she was brought up by him”*** (20).

### **3- ESTHER THE QUEEN:**

Coming back, defeated from his campaign against the Greeks, the king preoccupied himself with choosing the new queen. It so seems that all the preparations of the virgins, for a whole year for their encounter with the king, were done before, and not

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. 85.

<sup>2</sup> On Ps. 11.

<sup>3</sup> De Myst. 7.

after he came back from the battle. The book tells us about the preparations done with Esther, which were:

(1) She completed twelve months' preparation, according to the regulations for the women: "*six months with oil of myrrh, and six months of perfumes and preparations for beautifying women*" (12).

What is the meaning of six months of myrrh, but her acceptance of being buried together with her Groom, Christ, who was buried after being treated with myrrh ... The figure 6 refers to the six days of creation; namely, she stays bearing the sufferings, and buried together with her Groom all the days of her sojourn, until she consummates her spiritual perfection, and encounters with the Lord on the seventh day, face to face. Being buried together with the Lord, she will also be risen together with Him; For the fragrance of the oils and perfumes, refer to that of the joyful resurrection....

Let us, therefore, suffer together with Him, be buried together with Him, and be risen, as well, together with Him. That is the way to reach the heavenly crown. As, according to **St. John Chrysostom**: [It is befitting of you, not to be disturbed by those sufferings, but to be rather rejoicing ... It is befitting of us, to walk the way, to partake of His glory and honor... How glorious are the passions, by which we would liken His death<sup>1</sup>].

(2) "*She was given whatever she desired to take with her from the women's quarters to the king's palace*" (13). The virgin carries with her whatever she desired to take from the women's (Virgin's) quarters; For, setting forth to her heavenly Groom, she carries all what she gathered here of the holy things, like love, purity, and heavenly thoughts; she carries them as a sign of her love for her Groom, of what He, Himself, has bestowed on her, along the days of her sojourn on earth; namely, she gives to Him of what He has given her.

(3) "*Esther obtained favor in the sight of all who saw her*" (15). That was her true deposit: the free grace of God that make the soul exceedingly beautiful, and fit for royalty. (Ezekiel 16: 13)..Obtaining favor in the sight of all, is the grace of God that supports man in his strife, which, according to **St. John Chrysostom**: [No one is stronger than he who enjoys the heavenly help; and no one is weaker than he who is deprived of it<sup>2</sup>].

(4) "*Esther was taken to king Ahasuerus, into his royal palace, in the tenth month, which is the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign*" (16).

Esther could not be set a queen except in the tenth month of the seventh year. The tenth month refers to the consummation of the law (10 commandments), which is realized through our unity in Christ, who, alone, has never broken the law. The seventh year refers to the perfection of the gospel. It is as though our enjoyment of the kingdom is realized by receiving the law, spiritually in the Lord, through the grace of the gospel.

(5) "*The king made a great feast, the feast of Esther, for all his officials and servants, and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces, and gave gifts according to the generosity of the king*" (18). In his joy with Esther, he forgot all the troubles, and the great losses he had in his *battle* against the Greeks; and he gave the people a holiday, and tax relief for one year.

<sup>2</sup> In *Paralyt. PG 51: 51.*

“*With his own hands, the king set the royal crown upon her head*” (17). The soul cannot reign except by Jesus Christ, who crowns her with the crown of His glory, and holds a banquet in her name to bring joy to the heart of the heavenly creatures; there will be comfort, as the Lord counts her coronation a blessed Sabbath, and a joyful feast. As to “*His gifts, according to the generosity of the king*”, it is by presenting Himself a Groom whom we carry in us. He is the both the Giver and the gift, who generously gives Himself to us, and even rejoices when we readily receive Him, and say: “*My beloved is mine, and I am His; He feeds His flocks among the lilies*” (Song 2: 16). And Meditating in Him, **St. Augustine** says: [You keep watching on me, as though You have forgotten the whole creation! You give me Your gifts, as though I am alone the subject of Your love<sup>1</sup>].

#### **4- MORDECCAI SAVES KING AHASUERUS:**

Mordecai has been faithful in his own life, in bringing Esther up, in his service to the king, and in his love for his people.

When it came to his knowledge that two of the king’s eunuchs, the doorkeepers, sought to lay hands on the king, he told queen Esther, who informed the king. When an inquiry was made into the matter, it was confirmed, and both were hanged on a gallows. It was written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Persia.

In the annex to the book of Esther, we read that the king gave gifts to Mordecai; Yet it so happened that one night the king could not sleep, and reading what he has written in the chronicles concerning that incident, he realized that what he gave to Mordecai was nothing.(6: 1-11); and he intended to honor him as is befitting to what he has done....

We, as well, while striving here for the sake of the salvation of our brethren from eternal perdition, God, counting it as a debt, although it is He who works in and by us, He grants us grace and blessings; which, however, counting them as nothing, He crowns us with the crown of eternal life; and brings us forth into the fellowship of His glories, to live together with Him, face to face, in the bosom of God the Father.

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## **THE SECOND DIVISION**

# **THE BANQUET OF QUEEN ESTHER**

**(Chapters 3 to 7)**

- ❖ **Haman and his oppression against the Jewish people:** **Chapter 3**
- ❖
- ❖ **Mordecai instigates Esther:** **Chapter 4**
- ❖
- ❖ **Esther invites the king to her banquet:** **Chapter 5**
- ❖ **God glorifies Mordecai:** **Chapter 6**
- ❖ **The end of Haman:** **Chapter 7**

## CHAPTER 3

# HAMAN'S OPPRESSION AGAINST THE JEWISH PEOPLE

Having been promoted by king Ahasuerus, and his seat was set above all the princes who were with him (1), Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, bore the feature of the proud devil, and turned into a murderer who would never be satisfied except through shedding blood,

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|----|---|----------------|
| 1- | <b>Haman and Mordecai</b>                               | <b>1 - 6</b>   |
| 2- | <b>The royal decree to annihilate the Jewish people</b> | <b>7 - 14.</b> |
| 3- | <b>The king and Haman sat down to drink</b>             | <b>15</b>      |

### 1- HAMAN AND MORDECCAI:

“Haman” was named after one of the prominent gods in ‘Elam’, taken over by the kingdom of Persia and Media, who turned it into one of its provinces, and made its capital ‘Shushan the citadel’ or ‘Susa’, the winter capital of the kings of Persia.

Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite came a descendant of Amalek (1 Samuel 15: 3-9), whom Saul, disregarding the command of the prophet Samuel, spared them and did not destroy them with the edge of the sword. Consequently, out of them came the one who had almost annihilated the whole people in one day. ... Haman, therefore, represents the sin disregarded by man, and slothfully left un-rooted, to become, eventually, the cause of danger to his life.

*“After these things, king Ahasurus promoted Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and set his seat above the princes who were with him. And all the king’s servants who were within the king’s gate bowed and paid homage to Haman” (1 -2).*

Having been so promoted and honored by the king, Haman got so conceited that he expected everyone to submit to him and to pay homage to him. In that, he bore the spirit of his master – the devil – who intended to set himself a god, That is why when Haman saw that Mordecai, the Jew, refrained to bow and pay homage to him (2), *“he was filled with wrath; but he disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, the people of Mordecai” (5, 6).*

Yes, the Jews used to bow and prostrate to the ground before their kings, as a sign of giving them honor (2 Samuel 14: 4; 18: 26; 1 Kings 1: 16). But, as the Persians, on the other hand, did that as worship to their kings, the Jews refrained to follow suit<sup>1</sup>. And when Mordecai was asked why he did not bow down and pay homage to Haman, *“he told them that he was a Jew” (4).*

No wonder that Haman sought the destruction of the whole Jewish people, for he represented the devil, while Mordecai was a symbol of the Lord Christ. The devil would never endure the people of Christ, being the kingdom of God.

Let us now meditate in how Mordecai would be a symbol of the Lord Christ, for whose sake, Haman (the devil) intended to annihilate His whole race. In this concern,

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<sup>1</sup> Herodotus 7: 136.

**father Aphrahat**<sup>1</sup> says: [Like Mordeccai, who was persecuted by the wicked Haman, So the Lord Christ was persecuted by the wicked people; ... And like Mordeccai, who prayed for the sake of saving his people from Haman, So, by His blood, the Lord Christ interceded for His people to save them from the devil;. ... And like Mordeccai who laid in sackcloth and ashes, and saved his people, So the Word of God came down, bore our body as sackcloth and in humility, saved us; ...And like, by Mordeccai, Esther found favor with the king instead of queen Vashti, So by Jesus Christ, the church of the new covenant found favor with God the Father, instead of the Jewish Synagogue; ... And like Mordeccai who instigated Esther to fast, together with her maids; So Christ instigates His church to fast with her whole congregation. ... Ultimately, like Mordeccai who got the glory and honor of Haman, and before him it was proclaimed: *“Thus shall it be done to the man the king delights to honor”* (6: 11). Whereas Christ was glorified by the glory that was His from eternity, and to Him the Roman guards testified, saying: *“Truly, this was the Son of God”* (Matthew 27: 54)]...

Haman, discovering that what Mordeccai was doing is not out of personal animosity, but set upon a spiritual pious foundation, he arrived to the conviction that that problem would not be solved except by the annihilation of the whole Jewish race, to which Mordeccai belongs..

According to **St. Jerome**, [as the word ‘Haman’ means (Oppression), Haman was burnt by the fire of his wrath he himself kindled<sup>2</sup>].

Here, it is befitting of us to confirm that Mordaccai’s refrain to bow down before Haman was not out of insolence, animosity, or pride; but, as he said in his prayer that came in the annex to the book of Esther: *“You know all things, You know, O Lord, that it was not in insolence or pride or for any love of glory that I did this, and refused to bow down to this proud Haman; for I would have been willing to kiss the soles of his feet to save Israel. But I did this so that I might not set human glory above the glory of God, and I will not bow down to anyone but You, who are my Lord”* (13: 12-14).

Although Mordeccai, with a heart wide with love, and with humility, would have been willing to kiss the soles of Haman’s feet for the sake of the safety of his brethren, yet he would worship no one but God.

## **2- THE ROYAL DECREE TO ANNIHILATE THE JEWISH PEOPLE:**

Having counted the insult that came upon him through Mordeccai, would never be atoned by killing him alone, Haman sought the annihilation of the Jewish people throughout the kingdom of Ahasuerus, the people of Mordeccai. On April of the year 474 B.C., namely, about four years after the enthronement of queen Esther, Haman, in order to avoid any probable chance of failure of his evil plot, commanded the magicians and the diviners *“to cast Pur (lot) before him, to determine the day and the month, until it fell on the twelfth month which is the month of Adar (3: 7)*. By that he had time, long enough to realize his goal on a single day all over the kingdom.

Haman encountered the king, and stirred him up against the Jews, claiming that they are breakers of the king’s laws, and are, therefore worthy of destruction; and presented ten thousand talents of silver into the king’s treasuries. And as we said before,

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<sup>1</sup> *Demonstration 21, On Persecution 20.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ep 22: 21.*

he hoped that, through plundering all the possessions of the Jews, he would become immensely rich, and recollect that huge sum of money he gave to the king, to help him make up for his losses in the war against the Greeks, beside his loss of the taxes he used to collect from the Jews<sup>1</sup>.

*“The king took his signet ring from his hand and gave it to Haman, the son of Hamadatha the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews, and said to him: ‘The money and the people are given to you, to do with them as seems good to you’”* (11). And, *“Letters were sent by couriers into all the king’s provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions”* (13).

It is a light portrait of the decree that was issued against us, for the sake of the envy of the true ‘Haman’ (the devil), by which all men, with no exception, became under the verdict of death; by which everyone looking on himself would mourn, fast, weep, and wail, day and night, and would even lay in sackcloth and ashes (4: 3); for, according to the apostle: *“just as through one man, sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned”* (Romans 5: 12).

That bitter verdict will eventually turn against Haman and his followers, through Mordecai and Esther; and there will be salvation and a joyful feast for the whole people.... Likewise for us, if by the devil, we have fallen under the verdict of death ... By the Lord Jesus Christ (the true Mordecai), Esther and her people (the church), have enjoyed salvation, joy, and a heavenly feast; while the devil and all his hosts have collapsed under the cross. As according to the apostle: *“Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it”* (Colossians 2: 14, 15).

### **3- THE KING AND HAMAN SAT DOWN TO DRINK:**

Inclining his ear only to Haman, the king did not attempt to investigate or enquire about the other aspect of the matter, but left everything in the hands of Haman, who, for fear that the king might probably perceive the truth and retreat from his decision, he provoked him to drink wine and forget everything, on the expense of the people.

The annex to the book of Esther, which came in the Septuagint version, presents to us a copy of the royal decree, sent in the name of Ahasuerus to all the 127 provinces of the kingdom; the following are its most important points:

(1) It accused the Jews of betraying the trust of the king, who did them good, through breaking up his laws; and considered that their destruction would bring peace to the whole kingdom; saying: *“When these wicked people go down to Hades in one day, peace which they have disturbed, will be restored to our kingdom”* (13: 7).

(2) It called Haman, the second person after the king, who honors him as a father figure. Therefore, all are committed to consent to his counsel, concerning the destruction of that adversary people, together with their women and children.... Here, meditating a little in calling Haman ‘a father figure’; he actually represents the devil who provides his followers with an evil fatherhood.; As, according to the Lord Christ, addressing the

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<sup>1</sup> D. J. Wiseman: *Illustra???* From *Biblical Archaeology*, P 76.

wicked Jews: “*You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father, you want to do*” (john 8: 44). As God, presents to us His fatherhood, to make us carry, as children, the features of our father, and to enjoy the fellowship of His eternal glory; So does the devil, who presents his evil fatherhood to his followers, to make them carry his features, and partake of his eternal perdition.

## CHAPTER 4

### MORDECCAI INSTIGATES ESTHER

When Mordecai heard what Haman did, He committed himself to the wise spiritual behavior: *“He tore his clothes, and put on sackcloth and ashes”*, humiliated himself before God, and prayed. He also asked Esther to fast and prostrate herself before God, and to encounter the king to expose Haman’s evil plot to him. ... This way, praying with a contrite heart would support the work with the edifying spirit of wisdom.

<b>1-The humiliation of Mordecai</b>	<b>1 - 3</b>
<b>2-Deeply distressed, Esther sent Hathach to learn what happened to Mordecai</b>	<b>4 - 9</b>
<b>3-Messages between Esther and Mordecai</b>	<b>10 – 17</b>

#### 1- THE HUMILIATION OF MORDECCAI:

*“When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry. He went as far as the square in front of the king’s gate, for no one might enter the king’s gate clothed with sackcloth. And in every province where the king’s command and decree arrived, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing, and many lay in sackcloth and ashes”* (4: 1-3).

When Mordecai heard what Haman did, he tore his clothes, a sign of great distress, like what Reuben the son of Jacob did when he returned to the pit and saw that his brother Joseph was no more there (Genesis 37: 29). ... Mordecai put on sackcloth, a sign of his broken down heart, and of his humiliation; he cried out with a loud and bitter cry, perceiving that what would dwell upon his people will be because of him.... Mordecai’s behavior was like that of Nehemiah, who, hearing the painful news about Jerusalem, he said: *“I sat down, wept, and mourned for many days, I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven”* (Nehemiah 1: 4); And like the apostle Paul who, bearing the same heart, said: *“I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh”* (Romans 9: 1-3).

If Mordecai was a symbol of the Lord Christ, the way to salvation started by tearing his clothes, putting on sackcloth and ashes, and going out into the midst of the city, to cry out with a loud and bitter cry, which has shaken the gates of heaven, to save Esther and her people from destruction. The Lord Christ, likewise, took off His glory, emptied Himself for our sake (tearing the clothes), put on our body (the sackcloth), came down to our earth (going out into the midst of the city); cried out on the cross, and delivered His Spirit for the sake of our salvation. ... According to **father ‘Aphrahat’**: [Having sat, clothed in sackcloth, Mordecai saved Esther and her people from the sword; And, having been clothed with a human body, the Lord Christ saved the church and her children from death<sup>1</sup>].

*“And in every province where the king’s command and decree arrived, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, weeping, and wailing, and many lay in sackcloth and ashes”* (3)... It is a living portrait of the believers who, meditating in

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<sup>1</sup> Dem. 21. On Persecution 20

the great day of the Lord, and perceiving the work of sin in them, they wail presenting a true repentance, to draw the mercy of God.

Ultimately, Mordecai came before the king's gate, but did not enter because of being clothed in sackcloth.... The kings, living in their palaces, cared only for their own comfort, and did not intend to encounter the suffering and the oppressed. ... They have closed their gates before those clothed in sackcloth, until the King of kings, Himself, came down, incarnate (clothed in sackcloth), to partake of their sufferings, and to bring them forth by His Holy Spirit, not to the king's gate, nor into his palace, but to the bosom of God the Father; ... When the great closed the gates of their palaces before the needy, the Greatest of all came down to carry them up to His heavens.

## **2- DEEPLY DISTRESSED, ESTHER SENT HATHACH TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO MORDECAI:**

Esther called Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs whom he had appointed to attend her, to go to Mordecai and learn what and why this was; and gave him garments to clothe Mordecai, and take his sackcloth from him, but he would not accept them. ... (It so seems that Hathach was a Jew, as, about him in the second 'Tergom' it came that his real name was 'Daniel'). That was why Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the sum of money that Haman promised to pay into the king's treasuries to destroy the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the written decree for their destruction, to show to Esther, and to tell her to go in to the king to make supplication, and to plead before him for her people.

## **3- MESSAGES BETWEEN ESTHER AND MORDECAI:**

Returning to Esther and telling her the words of Mordecai, she sent Hathach back to Mordecai to say to him that she has not been called to go in to the king these thirty days; and if she does, according to the law, she will be put to death, unless the king holds out the golden scepter to her, that she may live. In response, Mordecai sent to Esther, saying: *"Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace any more than all the other 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"* (4: 13, 14).

If Mordecai tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and cried out with a loud and bitter cry in the midst of the city, that was not out of despair, nor of a loss of hope, but of humiliation before God, in complete faith that He is capable of intervention; and to instigate the Jewish people to supplicate to God with contrite hearts. ... His words to Esther revealed how he truly believed that deliverance would definitely arise, through Esther or any others; saying to her: *"For if you remain completely silent at that time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place"* It is as though he is telling her that God would find another way to deliver His people, but you would lose the crown He meant for you to have.

I wish, in the time of temptation, we would, like Mordecai, believe in God's might, that deliverance will definitely arise, that God will certainly act; that we will come out of the temptation, conquerors and victorious, and not losers and defeated, and that we would be crowned, and acquire for ourselves a profit on a heavenly level.

Mordecai confirmed to Esther, that the events of her life are not just mere chances, nor the fruit of human strife; but constitute a divine plan for the sake of the glory of God, for the edification of the church, and for the growth of her spiritual life.... That was how 'Joseph' the son of 'Jacob' believed, when he said to his brothers: "*Do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life*" (Genesis 45: 5); ... So, if Esther became a queen, or Joseph was sold as a slave, God, the Lord of history, meant to bring them forth to where they would glorify Him to the account of the whole congregation.

Instigating Esther to come out of the circle of her narrow thinking; not to think just of her life and death; for what would happen to her people would reflect on her life and that of her father's house; Mordecai said to her: "*Do not think in your heart that you will escape in the king's palace*". He also revealed to her that, even though she might stretch her hand to work; she should have no fear, for it is God Himself, as a Father, who will work through her.

I wish we, likewise, would set forth out of the circle of the 'ego', and perceive that God's spiritual work would never fail, and that He is capable of salvation, if we deliver our life in His hands.

If Mordecai has confronted Esther with such utter courage and frankness, to take fear out of her heart, She, in her turn, humbly received his message, and her response to it revealed a heart, wide with exalted love; saying: "***Go gather all the Jews who are present in Shushan, and fast for me, neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day; My maids and I will fast likewise. So I will go to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish***" (16).

Loving her people, Esther delivered her life to death for their sake. Although she was a great queen, beautiful, young, and beloved by her man; yet she was also aware that, in his ferocity, he knows no mercy. She knows how, when his closest friend Lysias begged him to relieve his older son from going to war, and presented to him his other five sons in his place, he did not hesitate to cut the boy into two pieces by the sword, and to command his guards to tread with their feet over his corpse, to let everyone know how firm he is.

She did not blame Mordecai nor accused him of insolence, for not paying homage to Haman, but with faith, she delivered her life to death, perceiving that her own sins, and those of her people, were the real cause of their tribulation. In her prayer we read in the annex to the book of Esther, we hear her say: "*Now we have sinned before You, and You have handed us over to our enemies because we glorified their gods. You are righteous, O Lord*" (14: 6). ... By faith, she knew that the key to salvation is the confession of sins, and the return to the Savior God.

She did seek a human temporal solution; ... She did not adorn and perfume herself to draw the heart of the king; Nor asked Mordecai to think of a contrary way against Haman; But, perceiving that salvation is only from God, she resorted to prayer and fasting, and asked Mordecai to join her and her maids, together with all the Jews who were present in Shushan the citadel (Susa); ... Here, let us meditate in how her maids partook of her praying and fasting, neither ate nor drank for three days. For this would reveal the way she used to treat them, not as a haughty mistress, but as a mother figure who cared for their salvation; that they got the spirit of piety, and readily partook of her anguish with a befitting spiritual mind! ... I wish we, as well, would care for those

who serve us, for we are responsible for their salvation as brethren, who partake of our fellowship in the one body of Christ.

Esther intended to go into the king's heart by God, for: "*The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord*" (Proverb 21: 1). She resorted to prayer and fasting, to let God change the stony nature of the king's heart, and to open it up for her, to enter into it together with the Lord, to deliver her and her people. About this, **St. Ambrose** says: [By her fasting, Esther moved the proud heart of the king<sup>1</sup>].; And **St. Clement the Roman** says: [Having been perfect in faith, Esther faced danger, not less than that faced by Judith, to save the twelve tribes of Israel from sure perdition. By fasting and humility, she beseeched the eternal God who sees everything<sup>2</sup>]. In the book of the laws of the apostles it came as: [By fasting, Esther, Mordeccai, and Judith, were delivered from the evil plots of 'Holofernes' and 'Haman'<sup>3</sup>].

By a perfect love and trust in God, who works in the life of the humble, Esther fasted, and set forth with courage to work, saying: "*If I perish, I perish*"; not out of disbelief in the salvation of God, but in love and readiness to die for the sake of the salvation of her people and brethren. And according to **St. Ambrose**: [Why did Esther deliver her own life to death, and did not fear the wrath of the vicious king, but to save her people from perdition, a sign of utter virtue<sup>4</sup>!].

Esther carried the spirit of the three young men, who said: "*God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fire furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king! But if not, let it be known to you, O King, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up*" (Daniel 3: 17, 18).

She requested fasting, neither eat or drink for three days; as though she intended to enter together with the Lord into His tomb, to rise together with Him on the third day, believing in Him, who is able to raise her and her people from the dead; And as though she intended to go together with Jonah, the symbol of Christ, into the belly of the great whale, to partake of the burying and death of the Lord Christ for His people, to come out to preach the good tidings of life.

In the annex of the book of Esther (Chapter 14), it came that "she took off her splendid apparel, and put on the garment of distress and mourning; and instead of costly perfumes she covered her head with ashes and dung, utterly humbled her body with fasting, plucked the hair from her head, stood supplicating to God, confessing her sins and those of her people, reminding Him of His promises to her fathers, and beseeching Him to look down on the humiliation and affliction of His people by the hands of the idol-worshippers.

Believing that it is God who speaks on her tongue, to pierce the heart of that vicious king, she said: "*Put eloquent speech in my mouth before the lion, and turn his heart to hate the man who is fighting against us, so that there may be an end of him and those who agree with him*" (14: 13). She did not attempt to seize the heart of that vicious king by her beauty, nor by her self-wisdom, but by God who speaks on her tongue. According to **St. John Chrysostom**: [Esther saved the entire Jewish people from utter

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<sup>1</sup> Ep. 63: 26.

<sup>2</sup> Ep. 1: 55.

<sup>3</sup> Constitution of the Holy Apostles 5: 20.

<sup>4</sup> Duties of the Clergy 3: 2.

perdition by her prayer! She beseeched the merciful God to go with her to the king, and to put eloquent speech in her mouth<sup>1</sup> ...].

In her prayer, Esther revealed her inner feelings; ... Although she lived her life as a great queen, with glory and honor, yet her heart remained perfectly simple, and free from any deceitful pleasures of this world; saying: “*O Lord, You have knowledge of all things, and You know my necessity, and that I hate the splendor of the wicked, and abhor the sign of my proud position which is upon my head on days when I appear in public; I abhor it like a filthy rag, and I do not wear it on the days when I am at leisure. And that Your servant has not eaten at Haman’s table, and I have not honored the king’s feast, or drink the wine of libations. Your servant has had no joy since the day I was brought here until now, except in You, O Lord God of Abraham*” (14: 16-18).

That was how she lived in the palace as a queen, yet she perceived that she was actually a captive, her crown, in her eyes was like a filthy rag which she abhors. That explains to us that, when it was her turn to go in to the king, before she was chosen, “*she requested nothing but what Hagai the king’s eunuch, the custodian of the women, advised*” (2: 15). Her heart longed for nothing, even the royal crown.

According to **St. Augustine**, Esther was a role model for those who occupy exalted positions of public service, but their hearts remain open to heaven; saying: [Esther, although she was the queen, wife of the king, yet that did not keep her from risking her own life to intercede for the sake of her people; and when she prayed to God, she said that her crown to her was no more than a filthy rag<sup>2</sup>].

Commending a woman, newly dedicated to the Lord, **St. Jerome** said: [She came to hate every splendid attire, and, like Esther, she cried out to the Lord, saying: “*You know my necessity, and that I hate the splendor and sign of my proud and glorious position, namely, the crown she had to wear as a queen, I hate it like a filthy rag*”<sup>3</sup>].

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<sup>1</sup> *Conc. Statues* 3: 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Pn Ps.* 53.

<sup>3</sup> *Ep.* 130: 4.

## CHAPTER 5

# ESTHER INVITES THE KING AND HAMAN TO HER BANQUET

Having fasted, together with her maids, with Mordeccai, and all the Jews in Shushan the citadel, in humility, and with tears before God, Esther set forth to the king, leaning upon the chest of her God, to invite the king and Haman to her banquet; which was truly the banquet of the cross, through which the people of God were saved, and Haman (the devil) perished.

<b>1-Esther goes in to the king</b>	<b>1 - 2</b>
<b>2-Esther invites the king and Haman to her banquet</b>	<b>3 - 8</b>
<b>3-Haman had the gallows made for Mordeccai</b>	<b>9 – 14</b>

### 1- ESTHER GOES IN TO THE KING:

*“Now, it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king’s palace, across from the king’s house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house”* (1).

Esther prepared herself for that audience by fasting and praying with humiliation, and came to encounter the king on the third day, to invite him together with Haman to her banquet. According to several scholars, the figure 3, here refers to the resurrection<sup>1</sup>. If Esther’s banquet refers to the banquet of the cross, prepared by the Lord to save His people, and to crucify the devil with all his wicked deeds, Esther set forth to that banquet with the spirit of resurrection. In other words, if that banquet referred to the cross, what came upon Haman of perdition, has been by the cross of the Lord, risen from the dead. On the cross, the true Haman, namely, the devil, perished; For the one nailed on the cross was, Himself “the resurrection”(John 11: 25).

Esther set forth to the king, as though to the cross through the power of the Lord’s resurrection; That is why, believing in God who lifts the poor up from the heap of ashes, she took off the sackcloth, and put on the royal apparel.

The annex to the book of Esther presents to us a magnificent detailed portrait of Esther’s encounter with the king.(chapter 15); It mentions that, after she took off the sackcloth in which she had worshipped, and arrayed herself in splendid attire, she invoked the aid of the all-seeing God and Savior (5). It is as though she proclaims that, for His sake, she took off the sackcloth, and for his sake she put on the attire of glory, and that, without Him she would never set forth to act. She invoked Him, not only to accompany her, but to be in her heart, and to speak on her tongue; and even to let her hide in Him when He aims His arrows toward the king’s heart, to turn it from cruelty to love. She invoked God, the Savior of all, having known that *“The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes”* (Proverb 21: 1).

Esther set forth together with two maids, on one she leaned gently for support, while the other followed carrying her train. She was radiant with perfect beauty, and looked happy, and very amiable, but her heart was frozen with fear. When she had gone through all the doors, she stood before the king who was seated on his royal throne, clothed in the full array of his majesty, all covered with gold and precious stones, looking

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.3 :5      3 :3      1

most terrifying. Lifting his face, flushed with splendor, he looked at her with fierce anger. The queen faltered, turned pale and faint, and leaned her head on the maid who accompanied her. Here, God changed the spirit of the king to gentleness, and in alarm he sprang from his throne and took her in his arms until she came to herself. He comforted her with soothing words, and said to her: ‘What is it Esther? I am your husband. Take courage! You shall not die, for our law applies only to our subjects. Come near’. Then he raised the golden scepter and touched her neck with it; he embraced her and said: ‘Speak to me’. She said to him: ‘I saw you, my Lord, like an angel of God, and my heart was shaken with fear at your glory. For you are wonderful, my Lord, and your countenance is full of grace. And while she was speaking, she almost fainted and fell. Then the king was agitated, and all his servants tried to comfort her” (15).

What a scene that reveals the encounter of the living church, hidden in Christ Jesus, risen from the dead, with God the Father, to enjoy His love and his eternal embrace!

We are in need to set forth together with Esther on the third day, bearing inside us the strength of the resurrection of the Lord, which takes away our mourning, and grants us inner glories, and royal attire that befit our encounter with the heavenly Father. Let us set forth together with her, also accompanied by two maids, one to support us, and the other to carry our trains; the way the Lamb of God carried the manhood, like a maid, appearing in weakness, when He is the King of kings; while the manhood kept following Him, submitted to His divine work in harmony.... Let us, likewise, lean on the body, as a maid, submitted to our souls in the Lord; and let the body walk behind us, follow the steps of the spirit, minister to it, but has no authority to move it with its temporal desires and pleasures.

Let us walk together with Esther, who seemed frail, falling underneath the weight of the cross, together with her Christ, partaking of the cup of His passion, and His death, to carry the power of His resurrection.

Let us, like Esther, hide in God our Savior, go through all doors, until we reach the audience of the King. For, the Word of God will bring us forth from strength to strength (Psalm 84: 7), and from glory to glory (2 Corinthians 3: 18); and the everlasting gates would open before us for His sake (Psalm 24: 7).

Ultimately, Esther came to the king who comforted her with soothing words, and said to her: ‘What is it Esther? I am your husband, take courage, you shall not die; for our law applies only to our subjects, not to you’ ... Are we not hearing the same words, when we enter into the bosom of the Father, to find the Son, our firstborn brother, interceding for us, to enjoy the fellowship of His glories; and assuring us not to fear the judgment, for we shall not die? For the apostle boldly says: “*Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercessions for us*” (Romans 8: 32-34).

As the king embraced Esther in his arms, and raised the golden scepter and touched her neck with it, So will God the Father embrace us, and set us a queen by the cross (the golden scepter) which we have received, and carried, with the Lord, on our neck.

As to saying that she saw him like an angel of God, and her heart was shaken with fear at his glory, it bears a symbol of the church who, beholding the secrets of God and

His face, would enter into an eternal unceasing love; and would remain, her whole eternity, meditating in Him with love mixed with awe.

Let us now say with **St. Augustine**: [Has God not realize her request for her (14: 13), to turn the king's heart with an active hidden power, even before listening to her supplications<sup>1</sup>?].

## **2- ESTHER INVITES THE KING AND HAMAN TO HER BANQUET:**

According to the historian 'Herodot'<sup>2</sup>, the kings of Media used to forbid anyone to enter the room of their royal throne unless he is invited, to show off their awe and majesty, and at the same time to protect themselves against any attempt of assassination.... As for Esther, she not only entered into the room of the throne, but she entered, as well, into the king's heart, who embraced and comforted her, asking her: "*What do you wish Esther? What is your request? It shall be given you, even to half of my kingdom*" (3). Yet he did not expect to hear her answer: "*My petition and my request is; if I have found favor in the sight of the king, let the king and Haman come to the dinner that I shall prepare them, and tomorrow I will do as I have today*" (7, 8).

We do not know why did Esther postpone her request, when the king has already promised to give it to her, even to half his kingdom. Did she feel some kind of fear, intend to restore her courage by more prayers to God; or wisely chose not to hasten her request, lest the king may feel that she abused his love for her to apply pressure on him?! ... But we are sure of one thing, that she had to postpone it until the next day, to let the cup of Haman's evil be filled to the rim, by preparing the cross for Mordecai (14), on which he, himself would be hanged. It was God's hand that made her postpone her request, until God's salvation plan be realized in its most magnificent fullness, to glorify Mordecai through the humiliation of Haman, proclaiming before him: "*Thus shall it be done to the man the king delights to honor*" (6: 11); while Haman would prepare the cross for himself.

The postponement of Esther's request was therefore through a divine intervention, in response to her supplication to God to work in her heart, and to grant her words of wisdom; and through that postponement, God hastened to honor Mordecai, by taking sleep away from the king (Chapter 6), to enquire: "*what honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for exposing the plot against the king?*"

As to why Esther invited Haman together with the king to her banquet; and it was the first time to do that, as is obvious from Haman's joyful reaction to that invitation, saying to his family and friend: "*Besides, queen Esther invited no one but me to come in with the king to the banquet that she prepared, and tomorrow I am again invited by her, along with the king*" (12); It was probably, as she intended to complain against him to the king, she chose not do it behind his back, but in his presence. To strike two birds with one stone, she intended to please the king through inviting Haman, his beloved and favorite companion, with him; and at the same time, to complain against Haman, in his presence, to the king.

Anyway, if that was the banquet of the cross, set by the church at 'Calvary', to invite the king to rejoice in the fruit of His suffering church, risen from the dead, in the

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<sup>1</sup> *Against 2 letters of the Pelagians, ch 38 (20).*

<sup>2</sup> *Herodotus 1: 99; 3:118.*

presence of Haman (the devil), to let him be condemned to be crucified, and to lose all his dominion. As according to **St. Jerome**: [On the cross, although Christ was hanged according to the flesh, yet, on it, the devil was actually crucified, and his dominion was destroyed].

### **3- HAMAN HAD THE GALLOWS MADE FOR MORDECCAI:**

*“So Haman went out that day joyful and with a glad heart”* (9). For, in his pride, thinking only of himself, Haman counted that the queen, by inviting him together with the king to her banquet, tended to honor him; and could not imagine that she did it for his judgment. In that, the words of God on the tongue of the prophet ‘Obadiah’ apply to him, saying: *“Behold, you shall be greatly despised, The pride of your heart has deceived you”* (Obadiah 2, 3).

He went out joyful and with glad heart; gathered his household and friends, and said to them: *“Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordeccai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate”* (13) ... That is how the devil feels toward the children of God, not enduring to see any of them sitting at the gate of the King of kings, counting it as his great loss!

Let us meditate in how Mordeccai, after tearing his clothes, putting on sackcloth and ashes, and going out into the midst of the city, crying out with a loud and bitter cry, we find him, after such a humiliation, go back to the palace, yet he still does not bow before Haman, nor pay him homage; For he would never seek favor with anyone at the expense of the truth, nor give any man what befits to God alone.

Seeing Haman losing his peace, his wife and friends counseled him *“to let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high, and in the morning suggest to the king that Mordeccai be hanged on it; then go merrily with the king to the banquet”* (6: 14).

And like Haman, who was hanged on the gallows he made for Mordeccai, the devil, counting that he would get rid of the Lord Christ by crucifying Him on the cross he prepared through his followers; he, himself, was secretly crucified on it, and lost his dominion on the believers in the Lord (Colossians 2: 14, 15).

He let a gallows be made, fifty cubits high, to be able to enjoy watching Mordeccai hanged on it, while sitting in his palace from afar. ... The figure 50 bears a symbolic meaning, it refers to freedom, as in the Jubilee (the fiftieth year) the Jews were commanded by the law of God to give freedom to their slaves; and to restore the land to its owners<sup>1</sup>.... By the cross, the believing humanity was liberated from the true Haman; ..., on it, she saw her Christ stretching His arms to embrace the whole world: Jews and Gentiles, to liberate them from the captivity of the devil, and to bring them forth into the bosom of His Father.

## CHAPTER 6

### GOD HONORS MORDECCAI

In faithfulness and true love, Mordecai humiliated himself before God; and instigated Esther to act in a spiritual way. Going back to his work in the king's palace, he did not retreat from his spiritual pious behavior, and kept on not bowing before Haman...While spending the whole night preparing the gallows to hang Mordecai, God took away sleep from the king's eyes, to end up glorifying Mordecai, and putting Haman's work to no avail.

1. **The king remembers what Mordecai has done** 1 - 3
2. **The king seeks Haman's counsel** 4 - 9
3. **Haman falls down before Mordecai** 10 - 11
4. **The collapse of Haman** 12 - 14

#### 1- THE KING REMEMBERS WHAT MORDECCAI HAS DONE:

*“That night the king could not sleep; So one was commanded to bring the book of the records of the chronicles, and they were read before the king. And it was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, the doorkeepers who had sought to lay hand on king Ahasuerus. Then the king said, ‘What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?’. And the king's servants who attended him said, ‘Nothing has been done for him’”* (1 - 3).

How amazing was the timing: While Esther was preoccupied in preparing her banquet; and thinking about a way to complain against Haman, beloved by the king; ... And while Haman was spending the whole night preoccupied in preparing the huge gallows; ... God was using all the events together to realize His salvation plan in its most magnificent way. What Mordecai and Esther were not able to achieve, the Lord Himself did, through taking sleep away from the king's eyes, to instigate him to reward Mordecai for the sake of his faithfulness in saving his life.

Here, it is befitting of us to meditate a little in how Mordecai's prayers were heard in the proper time. And when I say 'his prayers', I do not mean just the words coming out of his mouth, but his whole life. Every spiritual work, faithfulness, and sanctification, would turn our life into a prayer received by God. What Mordecai did few years ago, when he served the king with faithfulness, and saved his life from an evil plot, has been a prayer to God Himself, He who receives every spiritual and faithful work as a sweet fragrant incense. By that we may understand the oracle of the psalmist, saying: *“I give myself to prayer”* (Psalm 109: 4); and perceive that every member in our body, every emotion and feeling, through its sanctification and strife in the Lord, would be more like a key that opens up the gates of heaven, to let us enter into the presence of God. *“The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much”* (James 5: 16), because the supplications he utters with his tongue come out in harmony with what his whole life proclaims. On the contrary, the prayer of the wicked is an abomination before God, because he utters what is different from what his life proclaims; coming out of tune that brings no pleasure to the Lord.

The Lord responded to the prayers of Mordecai, which he raised by his practical life, as well as by his tongue. While Haman was fine-tuning his evil plot to bring Mordecai down to the dust, *“God raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the beggar*

*from the ash heap, to set them among princes, and make them inherit the throne of glory”* (1 Samuel 2: 8).

“*That night the king could not sleep*”; he remembered what Mordeccai did saving his life, and asking what he has got as a reward, he was told “*nothing has been done to him*”. His heart could not be at peace until he pays his love back with love, and reward him with what befits his great deed.... If indeed, that was the feeling of a king, known for being vicious, what would be befitting of us to pay God back for having saved us from our destructive sins. As according to **St. John Chrysostom**: [If when the king remembered the good work of Mordeccai, he bestowed on him such great glory, how would it rather be befitting of us to give thanks to God in great abundance, when we remember His forgiveness of our sins, which we committed against Him, and the goodness He presented to us<sup>1</sup>].

## **2- THE KING SEEKS HAMAN’S COUNSEL:**

Haman came early in the morning, probably after a night he spent with the carpenters working on the cross, on which he intended for Mordeccai. He had just entered the outer court of the king’s palace to suggest to the king to hang Mordeccai, so that he would have inner peace before he goes to enjoy the banquet of queen Esther; when he heard the king asking him: “*What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor? Now Haman thought in his heart, ‘Whom would the king delight to honor more than me?’*” (6). In the pride of his heart, thinking that there is no man worthy to be honored more than him, he exaggerated in his suggestion, and did not perceive that: “*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall*” (Proverb 16: 18); and, “*When pride comes, then comes shame, but with the humble is wisdom*” (Proverb 11: 2); And according to **father (Mar) Ephraim the Syrian**: [The temporal glory is like a rock hidden in the sea, not known to the sailor before his ship crashes into it, its bottom torn off. And water gushes in to sink it<sup>2</sup>].

He exaggerated in his suggestion to the king, and said: “*For the man whom the king delights to honor, let a royal robe be brought which the king has worn, and a horse on which the king has ridden, which has a royal crest placed on its head; ... then parade him on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him: ‘Thus shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honor’*” (7 – 9).

Haman bore the spirit of Satan whom God honored, and included among the highest heavenly cherubs. Then in the pride of his heart, he intended to take what is God’s, to his own account. That was how Haman intended to take for himself<sup>3</sup> the king’s robe, horse, and honor!

## **3- HAMAN FALLS DOWN BEFORE MORDECCAI:**

The king’s words fell down on Haman like the strike of a lightning, when he said to him: “*Hasten, take the robe and the horse, as you have suggested, and do so for Mordeccai the Jew who sits within the king’s gate. Leave nothing undone of all that you have spoken*” (10). If Haman could not endure Mordeccai on account of his race, and his referance to God; Here the king glorifies and honors him, calling him “the Jew”, a fact the king probably knew through his investigation concerning his reward.

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<sup>1</sup> In Acts hom 38.

<sup>2</sup> A. J. Wensinck: *Mystical Treatises. St. Isaac Syrian, P 219.*

How amazing! ... Abasing himself, Mordecai was lifted up by the king to an exalted honor; while, having his heart haughty with pride, Haman fell underneath Mordecai's feet... For the sake of his brethren, to save their life, and to turn the dark day of their perdition into the joyful feast of 'Purim', Mordecai abased himself, to be exalted. While Haman, on the other hand, through the evil counsel of his wife and friends, got proud, to fall down and perish, together with all his household.

What we see in the glorious Mordecai, but the glorious work of the Lord Christ, He, who raised us, together with Him, up to His glory, after He humbled Himself for our sake, and cried out because of us, a loud and a bitter cry on the cross; ... While Mordecai put on the royal robe the Lord Christ gave us Himself to put on (Galatians 3: 27), and be hidden in Him; ... While Mordecai rode on a royal horse; the Lord Christ granted us His divine grace to carry us from glory to glory, to bring us forth into His Father's bosom; ... While Mordecai got the royal crown, the Lord Christ granted us in Him, a fellowship in the divine nature, and made us heirs of God, together with Christ, in whom we came to be the subject of the Father's pleasure; and before us, it was proclaimed: "*Thus shall it be done to the man whom the King delights to honor*".

As much as Mordecai was glorified, Haman fell down underneath his feet; As according to **father Aphrahat**: [Mordecai treaded upon the neck of Haman, his persecutor; And the Lord Christ treaded with His feet upon his enemies<sup>1</sup>].

#### **4- THE COLLAPSE OF HAMAN:**

*"Afterward, Mordecai went back to the king's gate. But Haman hastened to his house, mourning, and with his head covered"* (12).

While Mordecai was honored through the city square, and has got the glory which no one expected, he went back to the king's house with his head raised up; Haman, on the other hand, to whom everyone paid homage, hastened to his house, mourning, and with his head covered. Covering the head for men has been a sign of great sorrow and shame. When David escaped from Jerusalem before his son Absalom, "*he wept, and had his head covered and went barefoot. And all the people who were with him covered their heads*" (2 Samuel 15: 30). And "*when the nobles of Judah went to the cisterns, found no water, and returned with their vessels empty, they were ashamed and confounded, and covered their heads*" (Jeremiah 14: 3).

Mordecai went back to the king's house, as though to his own house, for he was proclaimed as the one favored by the king; whereas Haman hastened to his house, mourning, and with his head covered. ... Mordecai refers to the soul, glorified in the Lord, victorious by the Holy Spirit, setting forth to heaven (the King's house), as though her own house; whereas the wicked soul, fallen down like Haman, would not go back to the paradisiacal life, but would hasten to her own house, namely, to the 'ego', to live her life self-centered, filled with sorrow and shame, with her head covered, and with a veil on her mind, that keep it from beholding the divinities, seeing the heavenlies, and soaring in the eternities..

*"When Haman told his wife 'Zeresh' and all his friends and his wise men, everything that had happened to him, they said to him, 'If Mordecai before whom you have begun to fall, is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him, but will surely fall before him'"* (13); by which they prophesied what will dwell on him, or probably

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<sup>1</sup> Dem. 21, On Persecution 20.

perceived that what happened was not a matter of coincidence, but was realized by a hidden hand; hence they could not offer him any word of encouragement or hope.

It so seems that their words destroyed his will, and made him reluctant to go to the banquet of Esther; for it is written: “*While they were still talking with him, the king’s eunuchs came, and hastened to bring Haman to the banquet which Esther has prepared*” (14).

Haman went to the banquet with a spirit far different from that when he received the invitation the day before; he went to it like a lamb taken to the slaughter. Yes indeed, “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the living God*” (Hebrew 10: 31); And as the psalmist says: “*The nations have sunk down in the pit which they made; in the net which they hid, their own foot is caught. The Lord is known for the judgment He executes. The wicked is snared in the work of his own hands*” (Psalm 9: 15, 16).

## CHAPTER 7

### THE END OF HAMAN

In the banquet of Esther, we see a living portrait of the banquet of the cross, in which the true Esther (the church) enjoys salvation from perdition, destruction, and annihilation (4). In it, as well, the true Haman (the devil) falls under her feet in humiliation; and with his face covered, he is taken to the cross, where he loses his dominion, as well as his life.

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|---|--------|
| 1. The king and Haman drink wine together | 1      |
| 2. Esther finds favor in the king's sight | 2 - 4  |
| 3. The wicked Haman exposed               | 5 - 6  |
| 4. Haman's humiliation before Esther      | 7 - 8  |
| 5. Haman crucified                        | 9 - 10 |

#### 1- THE KING AND HAMAN DRINK WINE:

*“So the king and Haman went to dine with queen Esther”* (1)

What is this banquet prepared by Esther for the king and Haman to drink in, but the banquet of the cross, presented by the church to the King; namely to God, who finds pleasure, and smells sweet fragrance in the sacrifice of the Savior. Hence the priest prays saying: [He who raised Himself a well-received sacrifice on the cross for the salvation of our race, as a sweet fragrance smelled by His good Father, at evening time on Calvary (Golgotha) <sup>1</sup>

If the divine King rejoiced to drink in the banquet of the cross, and smelt the fragrance of love of His beloved Son; In the same banquet, Haman (the devil) drank the cup of God's wrath on him and on his evil deeds; ... The banquet that brought pleasure to God for His church, destroyed the devil, exposed his deceptions, and took away his dominion.

#### 2- ESTHER FINDS FAVOR IN THE KING'S SIGHT:

Having entered to the banquet, and drank from Esther's love for him, he said to her: *“What is your petition, queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request, up to half my kingdom, it shall be done”* (2). He calls her by her name, and asks her to seek, up to half his kingdom; counting her a partner in his glory. At the same time he calls her “queen”, to remind her of her royal stature, which gives her the right to seek with boldness, to gain the king's heart, and his glory.

These are the same feelings of God toward every soul, He calls her by name, as His own bride, and calls her a queen, *“to come boldly to the throne of grace”* (Hebrew 4: 16); He requests from her to make him happy by asking from Him, up to half His kingdom. That is why the Lord instigated His disciple, saying: *“Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full”* (John 16: 24).

God longs to hear every soul ask Him, to receive; For He intend to grant her even Himself, to make her a heir who enjoys the fellowship of His glories. Before such exalted divine love, what would the church or the human soul, as a member in the church, ask for? She, like Esther, will not ask for wealth, honor, nor earthly blessings, but will ask for the sake of her salvation, and that of her brethren; saying: *“If I have found favor in Your*

*sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king's loss"* (3 -5).

Here, Esther is shown as a true mother, who embraces in love all her brethren, works and seeks for their sake. She did stand passively before their calamity, but abased herself, prayed, and strove to the end for the sake of their salvation. For the life in faith would bring man forth outside the 'ego', to live with a heart, open wide for all (2 Corinthians 6:11). That was what the apostle proclaimed by saying: "*O Corinthians, we have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open.... Now in return for the same (I speak as to my children), you also be open*" (2 Corinthians 6: 11, 13). With the same spirit, **St. John Chrysostom** says: [Nothing could make man like Christ, like his care for his brethren<sup>1</sup>]; and: [I cannot believe that there is salvation for him who does not work for the sake of his brethren<sup>2</sup>]; and: [Nothing is as worthless as a Christian who does not care for the salvation of others ... Everyone is able to help his neighbor, even with just his good will, if he has nothing to offer.... If you claim to be a Christian, and do nothing to help others, your words would be contradictory, like saying that the sun cannot give light<sup>3</sup>].

### **3- THE WICKED HAMAN EXPOSED:**

Asking Esther: "*Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such thing?*" *Esther said: 'The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman'. So Haman was terrified before the king and queen"* (6).

If the first goal of the banquet of the cross, is the salvation of Esther (the church) and her people, it would not be realized except by the exposure of the wicked Haman (the devil), and his loss of all his dominion, to stand terrified before God and the holy church. As according to the apostle Paul: "*Having disarmed principalities and powers. He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it (in the cross)*" (Colossians 2: 15). Speaking about the cross, **St. John Chrysostom** says: [By it, demons are terrifying no more, but worthless and despised; Death is no more death but going to sleep; as he who fights against us is now underneath our feet<sup>4</sup>].

### **4- HAMAN'S HUMILIATION BEFORE ESTHER:**

If the cross has exposed the devil, broken down his sting, corrupted the death which he brought over man, and cast him down under the Savior's feet, he, now, is humiliated before man who reigns without him. This concept became clear in the fall of Haman at the feet of Esther, who was reclining on a bed, as it was the custom in the banquets in the old days.

*"The king arose in his wrath and went into the palace garden, probably to think what to do next. He returned to the place of the banquet of wine to find Haman fallen across the couch where Esther was. Then the king said: 'Will he also assault the queen while I am in the house?'"* (8). The king's words came to express his inner wrath; and

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<sup>1</sup> In: Cor. Hom 25. PG 61: 208.

<sup>2</sup> De Sacer. 3: 10 PG 48: 686.

<sup>3</sup> In Acts hom 20: 4 PG 60: 162.

<sup>4</sup> In Matt. Hom 45: 7.

was a sign to those attending to him to act ... As they left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face to put an end to his life.

What the king said: "*Will he also assault the queen while I am in the house?*", proclaims how God sees in the true Haman, namely, the devil, who enters into the heart of the believer to confiscate the soul from God's hand and bosom;... like Haman who seemed intending to draw Esther from the king's bosom, and rape her! ... God is a jealous God, who would not endure to see the enemy enter into His house, and take away by force His bride from His hands!

## **5- HAMAN CRUCIFIED:**

*"As the word left the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face. Now Harbonah, one of the eunuchs, said to the king, 'Look, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman made for Mordecai, who spoke good on the king's behalf, is standing at the house of Haman'. Then the king said, 'Hang him on it'" (8 – 10).*

So, Haman was justly crucified on the same cross which he has prepared for Mordecai; As it is said: "*The righteous is delivered from trouble, and it comes to the wicked instead*" (Proverb 11: 8); "*The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous, and the unfaithful for the upright*" (Psalm 21: 18); "*The nations have sunk in the pit that they have made; in the net that they hid, has their own foot been caught*" (Psalm 9: 15, 16); "*As you have done, it shall be done to you; your reprisal shall return upon your own head*" (Obadiah 15).; and, "*With the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you*" (Matthew 7: 2).

The devil exulted in the cross, and provoked his followers to realize it, not perceiving that what he does will return upon his head. As according to **St. Jerome**: [On the cross, the devil was put to shame, he and all his hosts. Yes, Christ was crucified in flesh, yet, on His cross, He crucified the devil<sup>1</sup>].

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<sup>1</sup> On Ps. Hom 21.

***THE THIRD DIVISION***

**THE BANQUET OF PURIM**

**(Chapters 8 to 10)**

- **An introduction to the feast of Purim**
- **Preparation for the feast of Purim Chapter 8**
- **Celebration of the feast of Purim Chapter 9**
- **The greatness of Mordecai Chapter 10**

## AN INTRODUCTION TO THE FEAST OF PURIM

The word 'Purim' is plural of 'Pur', meaning (a lot). This day was set to celebrate God's exalted work with His people, having saved them from the collective slaughter, prepared by Haman against the Jews, all over the Persian empire, after the magicians and the diviners cast 'pur' (that is a lot) before Haman to determine the day and the month, until it fell on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar (February – March).

Having saved His people on the hands of Mordecai and Esther, the day set for their slaughter turned into a day of destruction for their enemies, and instead of disgrace, the Jews enjoyed glory. The Jews used to celebrate that feast on the fourteenth and the fifteenth of that month. In the days of the Maccabees in the second century B.C., it was celebrated as the 'the day of Mordecai'; And the historian Josephus wrote that in his days the Jews celebrated that feast all over the world<sup>1</sup>.

The rites of celebrating that feast are as follows<sup>2</sup>:

(1) The Jews fast on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar. And if it is a Sabbath, they would start on the eleventh of the month.

(2) In the evening, when the new day begins, according to the Jewish rite, the Jews gather together in their synagogues all over the world; and after the evening prayer, they read the book of Esther.

Once the name 'Haman' is said during the reading of the book, all those present used to cry out, saying: 'Let his name be blot out'; or 'let the name of the wicked be blot out' And the names of Haman's ten sons are read quickly in one breath, as a reference to their crucifixion together.

(3) The people return to the synagogue the next day to consummate the religious statutes of the day, then spend the rest of it with joy and gladness before the Lord. And the rich give gifts to the poor.

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<sup>1</sup> *Antiq. 11: 6,3.*

<sup>2</sup> *New Westminster Dict. Of the Bible. P 782.*

## CHAPTER 8

### PREPARATION FOR THE FEAST OF PURIM

The collective slaughter set for the Jews turned into a joyful feast in their life along the generations. For that feast God prepared through the events that followed Esther's banquet, all of which reveal the true concept of the feast of Purim.

1. **The king gives Haman's house to Esther** 1
2. **The king gives his signet ring to Mordecai** 2
3. **Esther stands before the presence of the king** 3 - 4
4. **A new royal decree is issued** 5 - 14
5. **The glorified Mordecai** 15 - 17

#### 1- THE KING GIVES HAMAN'S HOUSE TO ESTHER:

*"On that day king Ahasuerus gave queen Esther the house of Haman" (1).*

Haman sought from his followers to cast a 'pur' (a lot) to fix a day for him to annihilate the Jews and inherit all the possessions; And Lo, Haman, himself, is delivered to death, and the king gives his house to Esther, the Jew.

If the true Haman 'the devil', has put in his heart to take the heart of man by force, and to inherit it after destroying and putting him to perdition; through the banquet of the cross, man took over the position of the devil before his fall; and as though, he came to join the heavenly hosts, as one of hem. According to certain fathers, the heavenly ranks are seven, beside the cherubim and the Seraphim, and man came to be the tenth rank, instead of the devil, who has once been the morning star who used to stand before God. The enemy has fallen into the pit, to leave his place to man to be raised up to heaven, and to reign instead of him.

If the devil has set himself the ruler of this world through the seductions of sin (John 12: 31), took the house of man, given to him by God, to dwell in with authority; Through the banquet of the cross, man, not only took back his house, but was raised up by the Lord to paradise. About this point, **St. Gtrgory of Nyssa**, addressing the catechumen, says: [You were outside of paradise, O Catechumen; partaking of the exile of your early father Adam; But now, the gate of paradise is opened before you to go back to where you have been<sup>1</sup>].

If the feast of 'Purim' is the feast of nullifying the 'pur' or the (lot) of Haman to annihilate the believers, for God to proclaim that they are His portion, the heirs of the house of the fallen enemy, who enjoy the entrance into heaven itself.

#### 2- THE KING GIVES HIS SIGNET RING TO MORDECCAI:

*"So the king took off his signet ring, which he has taken from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai" (2)*

*"When the prodigal son returned to his father, the father said to his servants: 'Put a ring on his hand'" (Luke 15: 22), a sign and a confirmation of his sonhood authority. So, the believer -- Mordecai -- has the king's signet ring, according the Evangelist: "As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1: 13). This is the royal signet ring,*

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<sup>1</sup> Pg 46: 416 C.

(the authority of sonhood) which we get by the Holy Spirit in the water of baptism, called ‘the signet ring of the soul’ by several fathers, like **St. Clement the Roman**<sup>1</sup>; **Hermas**<sup>2</sup>; **the scholar Tertullian**<sup>3</sup>, and **St. John Chrysostom**<sup>4</sup>. About it **St. Augustine** says: [Hold fast to it, it will never change, for it is a royal seal<sup>5</sup>]. And according to **father Theodor of Massisa**: [By this seal, you enter into the possession of God; It is the sign of your Father, for you have become the flock of Christ<sup>6</sup>]. And according to **St. Cyril of Jerusalem**: [By this seal, you join the spiritual military. Each one of you would come forward, and introduce himself before God, in the presence of an uncountable army of angels; the Holy Spirit puts a sign on your souls, to be included in the army of the great King<sup>7</sup>].

By this seal, as we enjoy the authority of sonhood, to live in the possession of God, as His children, and spiritually strive as His hosts. we enjoy the eternal feast, as we inherit the immortal glory. For according to the apostle: *“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together”* (Romans 8: 16, 17).

### **3- ESTHER STANDS BEFORE THE PRESENCE OF THE KING:**

If Mordecai has got the king’s signet ring, as a sign of his enjoyment of the eternal feast; Esther, on the other hand, enjoyed standing before the presence king, which is the true feast, in which the church enjoys the company of the Lord, His dwelling inside her, and her entrance into His bosoms.

The book says: *“Now, Esther spoke again to the king, fell down at his feet, and implored him with tears to counteract the evil plot of Haman the Agagite, and the scheme which he had devised against the Jews. And the king held out the golden scepter toward Esther. So Esther arose and stood before the king”* (3, 4).

The true feast is to encounter the Lord, or to stand before Him; ... It is standing after falling down, as said about Esther: *“Esther fell down at his feet; ... the king held out the golden scepter toward her, So she arose ...”*. In other words, the feast is an entrance into an experience of the resurrection through the cross (the golden scepter).

I wish we set forth together with Esther to the king; and with contrition we fall down at His feet. ... I wish we implore Him with tears to counteract the evil plots of the devil against us; So that the Lord would stretch His hand through His heavenly cross, the Giver of life, to make us stand and be eternally with Him.

### **4- A NEW ROYAL DECREE IS ISSUED:**

By Haman, the first decree was issued, with the verdict of death; Now by Mordecai and Esther, through the banquet of the cross, that first decree was *“wiped out”* (Colossians 2: 15); and to our account, a new decree was issued, proclaiming our sonhood to God, and the perdition of our enemies (the devil and his hosts).

How beautiful were the words of Esther (the church) to the king, interceding for her people: *“For how can I endure to see the evil that will come to my people? Or how*

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<sup>1</sup> Ep. 7: 6.

<sup>2</sup> Sheph. Sim 9: 6: 3.

<sup>3</sup> De Pudic 9: 9.

<sup>4</sup> In 2 Cor. Hom 3: 7.

<sup>5</sup> In Ioan, Tr 16.

<sup>6</sup> Cat. Hom 13: 17.

<sup>7</sup> PG 33: 333 A, 428 A.

*can endure to see the destruction of my kindred?”* (6). those are the feelings of the church toward every soul, and the feelings of the shepherds, and the flock as well; For all are kindled with the love of the salvation of others.... These feeling are embodied in the words of **St. John Chrysostom**, who did not cease to pray and to work for the sake of the salvation of every member of his congregation. Saying: [Nothing I love more than you; not even the sunlight! I would, tens of thousands of times, if possible, present my eyes for the sake of the repentance of your souls. Your salvation is so dear to me, more than the light itself! ... For how would the sunlight be of benefit to me, if sorrow blinds my eyes because of you?!... What hope would be mine, if you do not progress?!... And on the contrary, what despair could enter into me, if you grow?!... Hearing joyful news about you would provide me with wings ... So consummate my joy! ... I long for your growth ... I love you! ... To me, you are my father, mother, brothers, and children!].

Through the love presented by Mordecai and Esther, the new royal decree was issued, with the following text as it came in the annex to the book of Esther (Chapter 16):

(1) A judgment of Haman for his pride: *“Many people, the more they are honored with the most general kindness of their benefactors, the more proud do they become”* (16: 2). In the first decree, Ahasuerus counted Haman like a father-figure; Now he judges him as being proud. So it is with us: When we fall into sin, we count the enemy (the devil) as a father; but the banquet of the cross, exposed his truth as a proud creation that abused God’s gift to it.

(2) The king counted what was to dwell on the Jewish people, as though on him personally (3 – 12); and that Haman intended to deceive the rulers and princes appointed by the king. So it is with the Lord, who, by the cross, counts every oppression and deception by the devil against us, as directed against His kingdom, and touches God Himself as we are His own.

(3).He called the Jewish people: *“The children of the living God, most high, most mighty, who has directed the kingdom both for us and for our ancestors in the most excellent order”* (16: 16). Therefore, through those events, the heathen king could touch God’s hand; and the temptation turned into a secret of blessing, that many have forsaken idol-worship, and came to believe in the living God. If the Jews have been saved from annihilation in the flesh; many of the heathens have been saved from the death of idol-worship.

## **5- THE GLORIFIED MORDECAI:**

*“Now Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, with a great crown of gold and a garment of fine linen and purple; and the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad”* (8: 15)

It was not possible for the city of Shushan to take off the garments of mourning, and to enter into the life of exultation and gladness, unless Mordecai is first glorified before the king, and put on the royal apparel, the crown of gold, and the garment of fine linen and purple. So it was with the church; it was not possible for her to enjoy the heavenly exultation and the spiritual joy, unless her Groom, the Lord Jesus Christ is glorified, and ascend to His Father. ... As, for our sake, He emptied Himself, For our sake, as well, He was glorified, to glorify us together with Him, and to let us put on, together with him, the royal apparel of blue and white, namely, the heavenly (the blue),

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<sup>1</sup> In Acts hom 3.

and the pure (white) garment. By Jesus Christ we were made kings (Revelation 1: 6), put on the heavenly nature, full of purity; And by Him, we enjoy the heavenly golden crown, and put on the royal garment of righteousness (the fine linen) and purple (the royal color).

As Mordecai was glorified, ***“the Jews had light and gladness, joy, honor; and gladness; ...Then many of the people of the land became Jews, because fear of the Jews fell upon them”*** (8: 16, 17). ... So it is with the church; As Christ was glorified by the glory which was His from eternity, the church enjoys the light, namely, the enlightenment, the gladness of the spirit, and the inner honor.

Here, as the church is glorified by the glorified Christ, we remember the dream seen by Mordecai, mentioned in the annex to the book of Esther, and its interpretation (the consummation of chapter 10, and chapter 11). Mordecai saw, as though noises, thunders, and earthquakes; And two great dragons were ready to fight against one another; the nations were stirred up, and the righteous cried out to God; A little spring became a great river with abundant water; and was then transformed into light and a sun.... What are those noises but the noises of the law, and the symbols of the Old Testament, who preceded the coming of the Word, to proclaim the spiritual war, not that between Mordecai and Haman (the two great dragons), but between the devil and the Lord Christ. And that little spring, namely, Esther, which become a great river, then light and a sun, shining on the people, refers to the church, set forth through the Lord Christ, by whose incarnation He humbled Himself to become a little spring, to flow on us with His Holy Spirit, and to shine on us with His splendor, being the Light of the world, and the Sun of righteousness.

That dream carried an interpretation of the events of salvation in the days of Esther; and carried, as well a symbolic interpretation of the events of the true salvation, realized by the Lord Christ Himself.

## CHAPTER 9

# THE CELEBRATION OF THE FEAST OF PURIM

The thirteenth day designated for the annihilation of the Jews, turned from sorrow to joy; when in that same day the Jews could kill their enemies. And the two days: the fourteenth and the fifteenth became a joyful feast celebrated by the Jews every year.

1. **The conquest and dominion of the Jews** 1 - 10
2. **Esther doubles the strike** 11 - 19
3. **Mordeccai institutes the feast of Purim** 20 – 32

### 1- THE CONQUEST AND DOMINION OF THE JEWS:

All the provinces of the kingdom have got two royal decrees: the first, sent by Haman from Shushan the citadel, dated the thirteenth of the first month, commanding the killing and annihilation of the Jews; And the second, sent by Mordeccai from the same city, dated the twenty third of the third month, authorizing the Jews to hold the sword, to defend themselves against their enemies. On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, when the enemies of the Jews intended to attack them, according to the first decree, *“The Jews gathered together in their cities throughout all the provinces of king Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could withstand them because fear of them fell upon all people. And all the officials of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and all those doing the king’s work, helped the Jews, because the fear of Mordeccai fell upon them”* (2, 3).

If the enemy (the devil) stirred up against the church, assuming that he can overcome her. Yet he was cast defeated under her feet; as according to the Lord Himself: *“The gates of Hades shall not prevail against her”* (Matthew 16: 18); And as He says to the church of Philadelphia: *“I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie – Indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you”* (Revelation 2: 9)

On the gallows prepared by Haman to crucify Mordeccai, he was crucified, as were his ten sons (14). Having plotted a complete annihilation of the people of God, he and all his followers perished.

Despite their knowledge that a second contradictory decree has been issued, the enemies of the Jews hoped to overpower them” (1); they all joined forces to attack them, to end up with shame. ... According to the Jewish tradition, no one could stand before the people of God, except the ‘Amalekites’, whose hearts were as hard as that of Pharaoh. As we already said, Haman was a descendent of Amalek (1 Samuel 15: 3, 9). Haman’s ten sons intended with persistence to avenge their father’s blood, whatever the cost might be.

*“The Jews gathered together in their cities throughout all the provinces of king Ahasuerus to lay hand on those who sought their harm. And no one could withstand them, because fear of them fell upon all people”* (2)

That collective movement bears a spiritual concept which touches our life in the Lord. The gathering together of the Jews in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king, refers to the dedication of all man’s senses, motives, energies; and every talent submitted to the kingdom of God, to work together with one spirit and one mind, to oppose the devil with all his thoughts and seductions, which constitute an animosity intended to harm us. By so gathering together in the Lord, no one can withstand us, nor

any plot can overpower us; And we become, in the sight of the devil, awesome and fearful.

*“And all the officials of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and all those doing the king’s work, helped the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them”* (4). The gathering together of the Jews in their cities, refers, as I already said, to that all man’s senses, motives, and the inner energies, would stand-by for spiritual strife, through his holy life. As to the help of *“the officials, the satraps, the governors, and all those doing the king’s work”*, It refers to the outside support for man, living in the Lord, like that from the heavenly hosts, the congregation of saints departed in the Lord, and the prayers of those still living..... Hence the apostle says: *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us”* (Hebrews 12: 1).

Bearing such a strength of the Spirit, its unity within, and an outer divine support, the people could overcome their enemies.... The number of those killed by the Jews reached 500 men in Shushan, beside Haman’s ten sons.... Yet the people did not stretch their hands to plunder their possessions, nor to kill women and children, despite the permission of the king to do that (8: 11); to confirm their intention, not to use the king’s decree to realize any goals for themselves, other than to seek their own safety.

## **2- ESTHER DOUBLES THE STRIKE:**

*“The king said to queen Esther, ‘the Jews have killed and destroyed 500 men in Shushan the citadel, and the ten sons of Haman; ... and asked her ‘What is your further request? It shall be done’. Then Esther said, if it pleases the king, let it be granted to the Jews who are in Shushan to do again tomorrow according to today’s decree, and let (the corpses of) Haman’s ten sons be hanged on the gallows”* (12, 13).

Esther requested that, not for the sake of blood shedding, but probably, perceiving that the enemies of the Jews were still persisting on their plots to realize Haman’s plans, she intended to put an end to the whole matter. As to hanging the corpses of Haman’s ten sons, she intended to make that a lesson to anyone who might think of doing the Jews any further harm.

What Esther has done refers to the commitment of the believer to strike the works of the devil up to the end; to leave no trace of him inside the palace (the heart), to keep him from any further attempt to get up and fight the soul anew; and to uproot from the soil of his inner life, every root of sin, to make the palace holy for the Lord to dwell in.

That was concerning Shushan the citadel; As to the rest of the king’s provinces, they were committed to confine their revenge to the thirteenth day of the month, and not any further.

## **3- MORDECAI INSTITUTES THE FEAST OF PURIM:**

*“Mordecai wrote all these things and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of king Ahasuerus, both near and far, to establish among them that they should celebrate yearly the fourteenth and the fifteenth days of the month of Adar”*, as a memorial of God’s work with them, to send presents to one another, and gifts to the poor. The way God cared for them and saved their life, everyone, likewise is committed to care for his neighbor, and not disregard the poor and the needy. This day is called *“the feast of Purim”*. We already talked about its rites.

*“To confirm these days of Purim at their appointed time as Mordeccai the Jew and queen Esther had prescribed for them, and as they had decreed for themselves and their descendants concerning matters of their fasting and lamenting”, (9: 30); as a praise of thanksgiving to God, who works to the account of His children. ... According to **St. Jerome**: [Esther is a symbol of the church, whose congregation were saved from danger; Having slain Haman, whose name means (oppression), she delivered to the generations to come a great memorial day and feast<sup>1</sup>].*

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<sup>1</sup> *Ep.* 53: 8.

## CHAPTER 10

### THE GREATNESS OF MORDECCAI

This chapter presents to us a portrait of the greatness of king Ahasuerus, who “*imposed tribute on the land and on the islands of the sea*” (1); and of “*Mordeccai the Jew, who was second to king Ahasuerus, 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 kindred*” (3). He became the secret of blessing to his generation, and to all the generations to come, through his exalted love.

If the whole people were glorified by their salvation from the enemy, Mordeccai, who did not seek what is his, but what is the others’, has been more and more glorified.

In the annex to the book of Esther, this chapter is consummated by the dream seen by Mordeccai, (which we have already dealt with), in which God confirmed that He works by him and by Esther, for the sake of the salvation of their brethren.

May our good God, who granted Esther and Mordeccai the grace of a wide-open heart, spacious with love for their brethren, open our hearts up for the edification of every soul for the glory of God.

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