## At times, we must stand in the gap for others

## Lesson Scripture: Esther 3:2-3,5-6a; 4:7-16

Lesson aims: to recognize God's hand in human affairs, to understand that at times we must stand in the gap for others and to always honor God in what we do

Background: Esther is the last of the historical books in the Old Testament. Dated the Old Testament. Back around the 5th century B.C, it records events during the budget on Captivity. The records events during the Babylonian Captivity. The Persians have been in control for some time. Actually, "the first wave of Jewish exiles returned home about 50 years before this book begins" (NIV Standard Lesson Commen-Standard Lesson Commentary).

There are 10<sup>°</sup> chapters in the book with no direct men-tion of God. The author is unknown but generally people accept Mordecai as the writer. The theme is "God's providen-tial care." Ahasuerus - the Ahasuerus - the Greeks call him Xerxes - is king of the large empire that stretches from India to Cush.

No records to date have validated Esther's story; how ever, the detailed description of Persian culture is accurate for that period.

To appreciate the idea of providence, keep in mind the following three points. "First,



nothing happens merely by chance or fate. Secondly, God works in our lives without taking away our freedom of choice, and finally, God works within the framework of histo-ry" (Richards' Complete Bible, Handbook). To make this live, think for a few moments about the Civil Rights Movement. God moved within history, allowing everyone to choose his or her side. When He moved nothing and no one could stop the changes. would like to approach this lesson from that perspective.

Lesson: Esther (Hadassah), an orphaned Jewish girl living with her uncle, Mordecai, is in Susa (Shashan). The Persian King Ahasuerus is having a series of banquets

that are designed to display his wealth and power. The New Jerome Biblical Commentary suggests that the banquets are strategic planning sessions for an attack on Greece. The first one lasts for 180 days. The second one comes on the heels of the first and lasts for seven days. It is during this one that the drama heightens. summons

Ahasuerus Oueen Vashti to show her off to his guests. She is also giving a banquet and refuses the audience. A decree is issued that she is never to appear before the king again. Later he persuaded to choose a replacement. Several years later, the king chooses Esther as his queen. She is told by her uncle not to disclose her identity.

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Mordecai, a minor official in the king's court, overhears a plot to assassinate the king. Immediately, he informs Queen Esther. Of course she tells her husband. The matter is investigated and the culprits are executed. A third character is introduced, Haman. Honored by the king, everyone is expected to bow. Mordecai refuses and Haman hears about it. Considered a sign of disrespect, the official plots to kill him. Haman comes up with a date to not only kill Mordecai but all Jews as well.

The king sanctions the decree. Mordecai and many other Jews go in mourning (sackcloth and ashes). Esther sends a eunuch to find out what's going on. Her uncle explains through the eunuch and appeals for her interven-tion. She knows the customs and is fearful for her life.

Mordecai sends a message to her that states silence is not the answer but if she will not someone else will. He tells her that her position could very well be for a time such as this. Upon hearing his reply, she requests that all Jews in Susa fast along with her for three days. After that, she will approach the king.

Ezekiel Application: 22:30 asks, "Who will stand in

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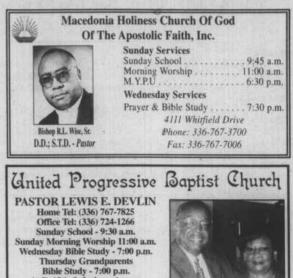
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the gap...?" Today that ques-tion resonates throughout society. Who will stand in the gap for the many faceless and nameless people who are cheated, mistreated, plotted against and ignored? Many of us are in positions to change things or at least bring them to the forefront. It's uncomfortable and may jeopardize that job, but God will get the glory. You didn't get that position solely on your own anyway. Could you be there for such a time as this?

Yes we are like Esther but there is a voice that shakes us to the core. Are we honoring God in whatever we do? There are a number of us that put on blinders once we arrived. We turned our backs on our people. God acting in our history, once again sends someone to remind us. Now what?



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