

THE FUTURE OUTLOOK

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This Week's Sunday School Lesson

3. ESTHER SAVES HER PEOPLE

What Is Our Concern?

Someone once said that destiny is the scapegoat we make responsible for our crimes and our follies. It is a convenient excuse when we do not wish to oppose what is happening in the world or in our own lives. In other words, destiny is a concept we use to evade responsibility in the daily grind of life.

Obviously, if we view life as a movement of human deeds following an inescapable blueprint, it is foolish to speak of man's responsibility. Without freedom there can be no responsibility. The word **responsible** means **able to respond**.

When we turn to the Bible for guidance, it is a bit difficult to understand the point of view generally expressed there. The biblical writers emphasize the freedom and the responsibility of both man and God. Therefore we may assert the ultimate triumph of God's will in the universe; we also must assert man's genuine role in the shaping of the future.

How do you reconcile these two seemingly opposite assertions? How can we say that man plays a decisive role in history but that God eventually has the last word? How can man actually be responsible in the world? Where is man's responsibility exercised? This is our problem as we turn to the Book of Esther.

Before You Read the Scripture

Scholars differ concerning the date and purpose for Esther. Some think it was written about 150 B. C. to celebrate Jewish victories over the Greeks. Others see it as a fifth century B. C. defense of a Persian festival called Purim that the Jewish community had adopted. Regardless of the date of the book, we should see it as an attempt to win approval for this festival in Jewish life.

Most of the festivals in Israel were originally Canaanite agricultural festivals. As the early Christians took over the Roman holidays and gave them new meanings, so the Israelites adopted and gave new meaning to the Canaanite holidays. They wished to use the celebrations as occasions to praise God for what he had done for them.

Purim may have begun as a Persian festival. It is not mentioned in the Pentateuch. Therefore, to justify its observance by Jews, it needed to be connected

with some event in Israel's history.

The author of Esther has associated the feast with the deliverance of the Jews from a plot to destroy all of them. But nowhere in the book does God's name appear. This fact almost cost the book its place in the Bible. We probably should view the author as a man who thinks of man's work as the means by which God achieves his purposes. Thus Esther and Mordecai (Mor-duh-kye) are people whose courage and shrewdness are the means by which God delivers his people.

The names **Esther** and **Mordecai** strongly resemble those of two Babylonian deities, **Ishtar** and **Marduk**. This fact has led some scholars to suggest that an old myth was turned into a work of historical fiction. However, archaeologists have found a reference to a lesser official during the reign of Xerxes I whose name resembles Mordecai. Therefore, Esther may have some rootage in actual fact.

What the Scripture Says

The Scripture for today is Esther 1 through 8. Selected verses are printed below. See Home Bible Study suggestions in the back of the quarterly.

Esther 4:8, 13-16

8 Mor'decai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther and explain it to her and charge her to go to the king to make supplication to him and entreat him for her people.

13 Then Mor'decai told them to return answer to Esther, "Think not that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. 14 For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

15 Then Esther told them to reply to Mor'decai, 16 "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish."

Esther 7:1-7

1 So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. 2 And on the second day, as they were drinking

wine, the king again said to Esther, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled. 3 Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. 4 For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king." 5 Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, that would presume to do this?" 6 And Esther said, "A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!" Then Haman was in terror before the king and queen. 7 And the king rose from the feast in wrath and went into the palace garden; but Haman stayed to beg his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that evil was determined against him by the king. **Memory Selection:** Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this? —Esther 4:14

How We Understand the Scripture

Esther 1:1-9: The author has given us an elaborate picture of the pomp of the Persian court. The generosity of the Persian empire is reflected in the banquet given for all the people of the capital city. The Persians were regarded by Jews as the people God had raised up to free them.

Chapters 1:10 through 2:4: The story of Vashti's stubbornness contains a strain of humor. The officials feared that if word got out that the queen had ignored the word of the king, all the women of the kingdom would follow her example and revolt against their husbands.

We might as easily read too little into this story as too much. We must be careful of overdoing the author's intent. But we must also ask what the compilers of the Old Testament heard in the text. Probably they interpreted this book as showing how God used the stubbornness of the queen for the eventual good of Israel. Had Vashti not angered the king and lost her place, Esther would not have become queen. She would then not have been in a position to deliver Israel. Thus, through the free actions of human beings, God worked for his people.

Chapter 2:5-18: The selection of a new queen was no light matter. The king's officials selected beautiful young virgins from all the provinces for the harem. There they underwent a year of beautification and social training. The possibility that there might have been prejudice against Jews is indicated by Mordecai's instructions for Esther not to reveal her background.

In celebration of his selection of Esther as his new queen, the king gave a banquet in her honor, released the people from certain tax debts, and gave many gifts.

Chapters 2:19 through 3:6. All
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What Does The Negro Want?

by
 MISS BEATRICE HERBIN

American politics, we must admit, is suffering from a cause of poor leadership, mismanagement, mistakes and confusion. This not only refers to Federal complications but to State and local complications as well. As I wrote in *The Greensboro Daily News*, Saturday, September 7, 1968, I said in the article, "It Must Be Either Humphrey or Nixon," there is no real choice on which to vote in the November election for President, yet they are the best we have. (And I do not appreciate the Wallace headquarters sending me their literature yesterday, as I am opposed to him and his stand on government.) I mentioned in the article that the only way to keep him out of office is for every Negro to vote along with all the sensible whites for a Republican or a Democrat. Humphrey and Nixon are all that's left since we lost Kennedy, Rockefeller and McCarthy.

Now, I read in the Wednesday's issue of *Daily News* that Marvin Fitch of Wilson, connected with the SCLC, Southern Christian Leadership Conference of which Abernathy is doing a poor job since the death of its founder, Dr. Martin Luther King, wants the Negro to vote for Gardner. Jim Gardner and Bob Scott are running for Governor of North Carolina. I say again, both are weak in experience and foresight of the qualities of Head-of-State, but they are all we have. However, this same Negro was originally opposed to Jim Gardner, the Republican Candidate and sought to organize a state-wide boycott of his Hardee's Hamburger Place; now, all of a sudden, he changes in favor of Gardner who has been criticized on his unconcern for the Negro's problems in this society. What does Fitch want? He is too confused to lead me anywhere, and I suggest that all Negroes and whites, too, who base their vote on hearsay of some so-called leaders begin reading and studying this business of politics for themselves, and vote accordingly. Has Fitch been bought by the Republicans? Of course, the Negro wants recognition in all aspects of American Government, and it is right that he should have it, but why dilly dally from party to party? We all would fare better if these leaders, themselves would study history and evaluate the progress already made under the Democrats. Governor Dan Moore has not been a bad Governor considering the progress Negroes have made during his time in office. Bob Scott comes from a political family, and though young and wavering between the white votes he desires and those of the Negro supporters, he may still prove to be our best of the two. I am happy that none of the Greensboro Citizens leaders attended the Raleigh meet in support of Gardner. Hawkins did not get the recognition at the Democratic Convention in Chicago which his group sought, but that is no reason to give up. Evaluate your program; study and improve it; then in the next four years come in strong. Rome wasn't built in a day. And while some Negroes holler, "Freedom Now," let us so work to qualify, understand and pursue in a manner of dignity, the status we want. Not because we are Negroes and the Constitution says this or that; not because we have so long been deprived of one thing or another, but work towards acceleration because we are well-prepared to help all of society. These are the kind of leaders this State and this Nation needs. And as soon as both whites and Negroes forget their personal and prejudiced feelings, then shall we move rapidly towards a "government of, for and by the people of the United States."

For decades I have been opposed to divided citizenship and arrogant attitudes of the people of both races that erupt into violence and senseless action: The Ku Klux Klan and the Non-Violent Coordination Organization, which became violent under Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown. It seems to me, and perhaps to much of the public readers that somebody doesn't know what non-violence means. Only Martin Luther King knew; the Honorable John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert, not to leave out Abe Lincoln, Chief Justice John Marshall of the Supreme Court (1819), and Chief Justice Warren, whose 1954

School Desegregation ruling brought down the rafters in American and Southern society.

Marshall wrote that "We are speaking of a constitution to endure to meet the needs of human cries through the ages, and not of a contract between states." His objective was justice for all, yet, in the words of Thomas Jefferson, let us be reminded that "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance." As long as man is made as he is, with the characteristics of love, hate, jealousy and fear, there will always be problems among men on this earth, and in my book the only panacea for eternal peace and that on this earth is Jesus Christ — a knowledge of Him, a practice of following Him, and like the martyrs after Him, to die for a right and just cause. When old self is straightened out, and this applies to seekers of public office too, then the people can live together in peace and justice. I do not endorse all the strategy of the Negro movements, for some are misguided and I only pray and hope that eventually he decides fully what he does want, and moves intelligently in that direction.