

Studies in Esther - Part 1

by Major Ian Thomas

Major Ian Thomas explores the Book of Esther, highlighting the spiritual symbolism of its characters and the conflict between the flesh and the Holy Spirit in the believer's life.

Duration: 31:40

Scripture: Genesis 25:29-34, Exodus 17:8-16, Malachi 1:2-3, John 16:13, Romans 8:7-8, 1 Corinthians 10:3-4, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 5:17, Ephesians 6:12, 1 John 5:4

Topics: "Conflict of the Flesh and Spirit", "Understanding Biblical Exegesis"

Description

Major Ian Thomas explores the Book of Esther, emphasizing the need for a solid foundation in biblical exegesis. He introduces key characters: King Ahasuerus representing human personality, Haman symbolizing the flesh, and Mordecai embodying the Holy Spirit. Thomas highlights the conflict between the flesh and the spirit, illustrating that true victory over sin is a divine gift rather than a human effort. He draws parallels between the story of Esther and the broader biblical narrative, particularly the enmity between God's people and the flesh, represented by Haman, an Amalekite. The sermon underscores the importance of understanding spiritual constants in scripture to accurately interpret and apply biblical truths.

Transcript

The Book of Esther. So as I warned you on Saturday evening, we may need for today and possibly tomorrow to depart from the book itself so that we may have solid foundations upon which to build. If you turn to the third chapter, the Book of Esther, if you're a little bit troubled about that, you work back through Psalms and Job and the first person you've bumped into, then it is, sometimes these little books are a little bit elusive to find.

Back through the Psalms, Job, and then into Esther. And we're only going to glance for a few moments this morning at the third chapter, and then we shall need to depart. And for this good reason, and this is by way of introduction, not only to the Book of Esther, but to all Bible exegesis or expositions.

When you turn to a book like Esther, where are you to begin? What are you to expect? What may one anticipate is to be found? Do you just read the book and try to find some little catchphrase that would make a good title for a sermon? Or some little incident that you could moralize about? Is that how to tackle the Word of God? Well, of course not. The Lord Jesus tells us plainly in the 16th of John that the Holy Spirit is the teacher. And He said the Lord Jesus will take the things that are mine and expound them unto you.

And He will glorify me. So you may be absolutely certain that no matter where you turn in the Bible, the theme, the central theme, will be the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who ultimately will matter.

And no matter where you turn in the Bible, no matter what passage it may be that you are studying, it will spiral around the person of the Lord Jesus in His atoning death, in His triumphant resurrection, in His ascension to the Father, and above all, especially in the Old Testament, above all His gracious indwelling person, present by the Holy Spirit within the human spirit of every forgiven spirit. Now, to that end, it's most important to establish what I would like to call expositional content. Now, I want to explain that for a moment.

You see, correct spiritualization gives you the key to accurate biblical illustration. And there is both to be found in the Bible. Spiritualization and illustration.

Now, illustration gives you a much wider margin, if you like, to play with. Spiritualization does not. For spiritualization is constant.

You see, the Holy Spirit will use certain themes, or facts, in a relentless way, all the way through the Bible, in absolute consistency. And where the Holy Spirit takes some such theme, and no matter where you turn in the Bible, it always means the same thing. You must not, you dare not, you cannot, violate that principle.

That's a constant. A very simple illustration. Almost any way you turn in the Bible, where the Word of God refers to oil, or anointing, it will refer to the Holy Spirit.

And if, therefore, you were to take a passage, and expound it in such a way that the oil represented something else. Supposing you took the parable of the ten virgins, and in your illustration oil represented sin. You would be violating a constant.

Your illustration couldn't be right. It must be wrong. Because you have violated a spiritual principle that is represented by true spiritualization.

There are certain things, of course, to which we are given a direct lead. It isn't everything that may be legitimately spiritualized. And only the Holy Spirit can make clear to your heart.

There are certain leads, of course, that leave us in no shadow of a doubt. For instance, in the first epistle to the Corinthians in the tenth chapter, that the apostle himself spiritualizes, and therefore we have an apostolic precedent in that particular instance, and therefore we may apally spiritualize. He's speaking of the children of Israel when they came out of Egypt.

It says, they did all eat the same spiritual meat, and they did all drink the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. Now there you have an apostolic precedent, referring to the rock that Moses struck, out of which the water flowed, to which we shall make reference in a few moments time. Paul says, that rock was Christ.

Alright, so on safe ground, therefore, when you spiritualize in that sense. And of course, again, throughout the Word of God, we discover that again and again, the rock, or the stone cut without hand, is a picture of the Lord Jesus. So the first thing to look for in any passage in the Bible, or any story in the Bible, is for the biblical constant, the expositional constant, that will be given to you by a correct understanding of what may be legitimately spiritualized.

Correct spiritualization provides the expositional constant, to which all biblical illustration must be true, if it is to be accurate and safe. For these constants involve principles which may not be violated. Now you may find in any passage or any book, certain spiritual constants that have been established by the relentless consistency of the Holy Spirit in using that particular theme for that particular meaning, everywhere.

Alright, supposing you had three such constants in a book like Esther. They're fixed, you mustn't violate them. But you may use the rest of the story to illustrate a thousand and one different things, and every illustration may be legitimate, correct, safe, and accurate, so long as your illustration does not violate those constants.

So that one person may come along and take the book of Esther, and use it as an illustration for this, and somebody else may come along and use it as an illustration for that, and both may be legitimate, and a third, and a fourth, and a fifth, so long as in each case, the illustration does not violate the constants. In other words, it doesn't wrench something that must always mean something out of its context, and just to serve your illustration, make it mean something else. Do you see what I mean? I trust that I've made myself clear in this respect, and it is for this very reason that we're going to leave the book of Esther.

Because when you begin with the book of Esther, you must find some constant. You must find some spiritualization upon which you can hang, as it were, your further exposition of the whole story. Well, God gives us, in a very abundant measure, solid ground upon which we may begin to build.

And in order that we may strike right at it, we need to turn to the third chapter. And in the third chapter of the book of Esther, it says, After these things did King Ahasuerus promote Haman, the son of Amadeus, the Aegir guy. And he advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him.

And all the king's servants that were in the king's gate bowed in reverence to Haman, for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence. Nor did him reverence.

Now, by way of introduction, and incidentally, lunch hour meetings have tremendous value, but at the same time, they're not always particularly helpful from the preacher point of view. That is to say, I won't always be able to time it so exactly that I come to the psychological moment, you know, just as you have to go. I shan't be able to give my normal homiletical bow, as it were, and come just at the correct place to break the story.

I can suddenly look at my wife and say, my, it's ten to off you go quick, you see, and there won't be anything homiletical about that. It may be the psychological moment to you, but it may not necessarily be the psychological moment in the book, if you and me. So we just have to bash on as best we may, and stop when we must, and pick up the thread when we start again tomorrow.

So we'll have to move pretty fast too. But just to give you a brief sort of forecast of the general direction in which we're going to go, so that it isn't too tantalizing when we depart from the book right at the very outset of its study, I want you to note these three persons who are mentioned in these two verses. There is the king, Ahasuerus, and on the one hand there's a man called Haman, and on the other there's a man called Mordecai.

And to give you the brief skeleton, Ahasuerus, the king, will represent human personality. He will represent the human soul. The soul, the heart, the human personality, all those three words mean one and the same thing.

Your heart is your soul. And your soul is made up of your mind, your emotions, and your will. And that constitutes your personality.

So heart, soul, personality, they all mean one and the same thing. And king Ahasuerus will represent human personality, the human soul, in the wonderful illustration that God gives us in this amazing book. And Haman will represent the flesh.

He'll represent that sin principle of satanic origin which is from the start hostile to God, is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Haman will represent the flesh. On the other hand, Mordecai will represent the Holy Spirit.

So that you see the picture. You have human personality. On the one side, Haman, the flesh.

On the other side, Mordecai, the Holy Spirit. And I want you to notice that when we introduce ourselves to Haman in the third chapter, it is as one who has been advanced by king Ahasuerus, whose seat has been set above all the princes that are about him. We should discover then that the king has taken his ring from his finger and placed it upon Haman, which means that vested in Haman is all the authority of the king over the whole of his kingdom.

In other words, we are introduced to king Ahasuerus as one who at the outset of the story is not only under the complete influence of Haman, but as we should discover, completely identified with all his wicked ways. But I'm glad to say that at the end of the story, which we mustn't anticipate, but at the end of the story, we shall find the same king Ahasuerus, with his ring no longer now on the finger of Haman, but with his ring upon the finger of Mordecai. One who at the outset of the story was under the influence of and identified with all the wickedness of Haman, at the end of the story is under the influence of and totally identified with all the righteousness of Mordecai.

Now isn't that a wonderful thing? Now isn't that exactly and precisely the purpose of God and redemption? When you and I come into this world, Haman is already in the inner course of human personality. You and I are born by nature the children of God, alienated from the life of God, dominated by this sin principle of satanic origin, that makes us his captives, sold under sin for God's redemptive purpose. When it has been allowed to come to its glorious consummation, means that the redeemed sinner comes under entirely new ownership, an entirely new government.

So in a sense, you see, king Ahasuerus representing human personality is neutral. What Ahasuerus does and how he behaves depends upon under whose influence he is acting. Now this is proof of human character.

And the whole purpose of God in Christ is that there shall be wrought in the infinite mercy of God in your heart and mine a radical change of orientation, so that our whole human personality comes under completely new government. And that's what in the Bible is called being a new creation. For if any man be in Christ, he's a new creature.

All things have passed away and everything has become new and you wouldn't recognize it as the same man. Well now, that's the brief forecast, if you like, of the general direction in which our studies are going to go. But the first question is this, on what authority? How dare you? What is your constant? What's your point of reference? Why pick on Haman? Why say that he's the flesh? For very good reason.

Very good reason. And that's where now we have to turn, way back, to the book of Exodus. And we'll turn to the book of Exodus and chapter 17.

We shall begin to make a most interesting exploration. Now don't get worried if you don't see what I'm aiming at, because I know exactly what I'm aiming at. So I don't mind how confused you are.

I'm a little bit confused. At first it'll be just a little bit tantalizing. But that's what makes the Bible so fascinating.

And that, among the many others, is one of the most potent evidences of its divine foray. You will remember that we have already referred, in the tenth chapter of the first epistle of the Corinthians, to the rock that Moses struck, from which the water flowed, which rock was crying. The story is recorded in the first few verses of the seventeenth chapter of Exodus.

They have hardly come out of Egypt. In other words, they are a newly redeemed people. For that is the significance of God's people being brought out of Egypt.

That is redemption. That is reconciliation to God by His death. Not salvation.

Simply forgiveness. Simply redemption. Salvation is in Canaan.

They missed their salvation. They were converted. They would have been on their way to heaven in the language of the New Testament.

Their names would have been written in the Lamb's Book of Life. They would have registered their decision for Christ. But for forty years they never tasted salvation.

All they knew was that they were out of Egypt. That they never got in to the land of Canaan. Canaan, as you recognize, of course, is never, never, never under any circumstances in the Bible heaven.

It's only heaven in your hymn books. But never take a theology from your hymn books. Because they're nearly always wrong.

More sentimental nonsense is recorded in our hymn books and more damage is done to Christians by the songs they sing, I think, than almost any other factor combined. But this is the beginning of their new walk and their new life. They've been redeemed.

And Moses strikes the rock and the water flows. And they are poised as a redeemed people upon the threshold of a new walk that was to lead them on and in to the land. Flowing with milk and honey.

Which represents Christ in the power of his resurrection monopolizing the redeemed humanity of the forgiven sin. But verse 8 says this. Then came Amalek and fought with Israel in Rephidim.

No sooner had the rock been smitten, no sooner had the water flowed, no sooner were they poised for the onward march to go on and go in. Then came Amalek and fought with Israel in Rephidim. Amalek represents, no matter where you find Amalek in the Bible, the flesh.

For no sooner has the sinner been redeemed and the Holy Spirit on the grounds of redemption has returned to the human spirit than he seeks immediately to gain access into the human soul. Mind, emotion and will. Which has already been dominated for years by the flesh.

And when the Holy Spirit seeks to re-establish the Christ rule in the area of human personality of course the flesh acts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. There is conflict at once. When the Holy Spirit wants to re-enter your human personality and establish the government of Christ the flesh stands arms akimbo and says Oh no, this mind has been mine to pollute for years and it's going to be mine for the rest of this man's life.

And the Holy Spirit says no. There's a change of ownership and there's going to be a change of government and there's conflict at once. And the flesh says the affections of this girl have been mine to pollute for years.

I've turned love into lust and I intend so to do. And the Holy Spirit says oh no there's a change of ownership and there's going to be a change of government and there's conflict straight away. Then came Amalek.

Amalek at this stage could not now prevent the redemption of God's people for they were already out of Egypt. They had already been baptized into Moses. They'd gone through the place of death.

And God miraculously had already raised them from the place of death and poised them upon the threshold of their new life. But now Amalek has tried the path of God's people and said not father, no father. Never.

Not a step. That's the flesh. Can't prevent your redemption if once you claim Christ as your redeemer but having forfeited that privilege at least the flesh can rob Christ of your life in time and make you useless until you get to heaven.

And that is the obvious of the flesh. Knowing that you've become fit for heaven though you never deserve it the flesh will do all in its power to make you totally unfit for earth on the way to heaven. Then came Amalek.

But Moses said to Joshua verse 9 Choose out men and go out tight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him and fought with Amalek.

And Moses and her went up to the top of the hill and it came to pass when Moses held up his hand that Israel prevailed. And when he let down his hand Amalek prevailed. So a battle was to be fought out in the plain between Joshua and Amalek.

And yet the outcome of that battle had absolutely nothing to do with Joshua. Now this is a very important lesson. For the moment you are redeemed there is a conflict within the soul.

The spirit lusted against the flesh and the flesh lusted against the spirit. There is a battle to be fought but I want you to know this. It is a battle with which you have absolutely nothing to do whatever.

When the rod was held high Joshua prevailed. When the rod was lowered Amalek prevailed. So how much did it have to do with Joshua whether he won or lost? Absolutely nothing.

And God is seeking to tell us again and again from the beginning of the Bible to the end that victory over the flesh has absolutely nothing to do with you or me. Victory over the flesh is God given. It is a victory already won to be taken and enjoyed to be appropriated by me.

If you do not grasp that fact then for the rest of your Christian life you will be fighting against the flesh a battle already lost. You take your pick. You make your choice.

Either you receive by faith a victory already won or you insist pig-headedly to go on the rest of your Christian life fighting a battle already lost. Just make your pick. Choose the way you would like to go.

The rod of course represents a God given victory. We are introduced to the rod in the fourth chapter of the same book of Exodus. You remember that when God commissioned Moses to take his people out and to bring them in Moses answered chapter 4 verse 1 and said behold they will not believe me nor hearken unto my voice for they will say the Lord has not appeared unto thee.

And the Lord said unto him what is that in thine hand? He said a rod. And God said cast it on the ground and he cast it on the ground and it became a serpent. And Moses fled from the forest.

He ran away. And the Lord said unto Moses put forth thine hand and take it by the tail. I say if you really had to pick up a serpent which end would you get hold of? You might get thirsty but I'd get hold of the tail.

Oh no you wouldn't. I wouldn't. If I had to get hold of a serpent I wouldn't leave the business end waving around.

If I had to get hold of the thing I'd get it just behind the neck as near to those fangs as I could without being bitten. But I certainly wouldn't get it by the tail. Oh no.

But God said to Moses you get it by the tail I'll take care of the business end. That's what God said to Moses. Getting at the most dangerous point.

You see God has told us right from the very beginning Genesis 3.15 that the serpent will bruise his heel the seat of the woman. Christ crucified. That he, the seat of the woman would bruise his head.

God has already taken care of the business end of the devil. Now he says you get hold of him by the tail. David puts it another way.

He says God has split his enemies in the hind part. I like that. Give him a kick in the pants.

And God says all you've got to do is that on tape. All you've got to do is appropriate. Take a victory over anyone but for God's sake don't embark upon a battle already lost.

That was the significance of the rod. And you remember what Moses did. He put forth his hand and he caught it.

And it became utterly harmless in his hand. And that was to be the symbol to Moses from then on that the battle wasn't his. It was God's.

And the whole Christian life is the responsibility of the one whose life it is. Jesus Christ. You cannot live the Christian life.

There is only one person confident so to do. The Lord Jesus. You can never get victory over sin.

Never. For Jesus Christ has already accomplished that. You can only take from him the victory he has already won.

Well that in brief is the significance of course of Exodus 17. And it goes on to say this. Verse 13 of Exodus 17.

And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of a sword. And the Lord said unto Moses write this for a memorial in a book. And rehearse it in the ears of Joshua.

For I will utterly put up the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. And Moses built an altar and called the name of it Jehovah Misses. The Lord's my banner.

For he said because the Lord hath sworn that the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation. God said I'll never be at peace with Amalek. I'll never compromise with Amalek.

There'll never be an armistice with Amalek. I hate Amalek. And from generation to generation I am at war with Amalek.

And God says that in your flesh dwells no good thing. God says no flesh will ever gloire in his presence. God says there'll never come a day where anything of what you are apart from what Christ is will ever be acceptable to God.

There is absolutely no salvageable content in you whatever. You're fit for nothing but death. God says I hate Amalek.

And I'm at war with Amalek from generation to generation. Now you may wonder what Amalek has to do with Esther. I'll let you into the secret though it'll be tomorrow before we actually trace the connection.

Haman the son of Amadeus the Agagite was an Amalekite. He was an Amalekite. And God hated him.

He was one of the generations of the Amalekites with whom God says I will never be at peace. God hated the Amalekites for the Amalekites were always the enemies of his redeemed people. If you'd like to turn back quickly to Esther we'll notice just one thing about his reputation.

Esther and chapter 3 to begin with. And this is what it says. Verse 10 The king took his ring from his hand and he gave it unto Haman the son of Amadeus the Agagite the Jew's enemy.

Look in chapter 8 in verse 1 On that day did the king Ahasuerus give the house of Haman the Jew's enemy unto Esther the queen. Chapter 9 in verse 10 The ten sons of Haman the son of Amadeus are the enemy of the Jews. Look in the 24th verse in the same chapter.

Because Haman the son of Amadeus the Agagite the enemy of all the Jews. What was the reputation of Haman? The Amalekite. He was the enemy of the Jews.

He was the enemy of God's people. He was the enemy of the seed of Jacob. And which took them and had them murdered sadistically which he murdered in his heart against them.

He was an Amalekite. Why pick on the Amalekites? Turn back to Genesis chapter 25. We just have a moment or two to glance at this.

Genesis 25 and verse 29 And it says Jacob saw the pottage and Esau came from the field and he was faint. And Esau said to Jacob Feed me I pray thee with that same red pottage for I am faint. Therefore was his name called Edom.

Edom means red like the porridge with which he filled his stomach. He took his name from his porridge. So Esau Edom were always identified.

And Esau said Behold I am at the point to die. And what profit shall this birthright do to me? For Jacob had said Tell me this day thy birthright. And Jacob said Swear to me this day.

And he swore unto him and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage and lense and he ate and drank and rose up and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

Esau was the man who despised his birthright. What was the birthright? The birthright was God's promise to Abraham that in his seed singular the Lord Jesus to which of course Paul refers in the third chapter of the Epistles to the Galatians. The birthright was that one day through the promised seed the Lord Jesus God would do all that was necessary for the reintroduction of divine government in human experience.

That there would be a Savior through whom the divine rule could replace the satanic rule in the area of human personality. You see when Adam fell into sin he succumbed to the satanic temptation. You have all it takes.

Lose God, lose nothing. You're completely self-sufficient. Cut all the traces.

Be independent. Carve your own destiny. And this was the life that Adam believed.

And he repudiated his dependence upon God and as we shall discover increasingly in our evening session sin basically is an attitude of independence of God. And this was the attitude that was adopted by Adam. I am, I have, I can without God.

And this was the attitude that was perpetuated in Ethel. He despised his birthright. Who wants a birthright? Who wants the divine government to be restored to his own life? I'm perfectly satisfied with what I am.

I've got all that it takes. That was Ethel. And Ethel was a great big brawny fellow.

He was what one might describe today in colloquial language a man's man. He had great big hairs in his chest. You remember the description that's given on it.

Just like barbed wire all down his front. And Jacob was the complete antithesis. Jacob was a sissy.

Jacob was mommy's darling. Jacob stayed at home and helped her with the cooking. And the washing up.

And Ethel despised Jacob. Ethel said if ever there was a man that needed a crush it's Jacob. If ever there was a man that needed religion if ever there was a man that needed God it was Jacob.

But I'm determined. And he despised his birthright. And God hated Ethel.

But he loved Jacob. Would you turn to it it'll have to be our last record. It's the last book in the Old Testament.

Malachi. Malachi chapter one. The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi.

I have loved you says the Lord. Yet he say wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord. Yet I love Jacob.

And I take Esau. And I lay his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness. Whereas Egon saith we are impoverished.

That's true. But we will return and build the desert of Satan. We got all that it takes.

Thus saith the Lord of hosts. They shall build but I will throw down. They shall call them the border of wickedness.

And the people against whom the Lord hath indignation forever. I hated Esau. God said I can't begin in the life of a man who has all that it takes.

And yet I love Jacob. Love Jacob. Yes because you see however much you and I may despise Jacob we've never despised him more than Jacob despised himself.

And there were times when Jacob would slip off into the darkness and his eyes red with tears would cry out oh God he didn't know. God he said. God whoever you may be if there's any kind of blessing that you can give to a man like myself it would make me different from what I am and that's what I need.

I hate myself. God said I love Jacob. I can do something for Jacob.

I can begin with the man who hates himself. I can do nothing for him who loves himself. Last reference.

We must turn to this then we'll dismiss. It'll only take two moments. It's in the 36th of Genesis.

Verse 8. Thus dwelt Esau in Mount Seir. Esau is Edom. These are the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in Mount Seir.

Verse 12. Timnah was concubine to Eliphaz Esau's son. And she bear to Eliphaz Amalek.

Amalek was Esau's grandson. Esau against whom God said I have indignation forever. He despises the birthright.

He repudiates God. He has all that it takes. He's utterly self-sufficient.

He's pig-headedly stubborn. And from generation to generation I am against him. Amalek was Esau's grandson.

And Haman was an Amalekite. And that's why we have an unshakable expositional concept upon which we can now begin safely to live. He was the enemy of the Jews.

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