

# (Through the Bible) Nehemiah & Esther

by Zac Poonen

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a concern for God's name and being willing to fast and pray in order to build the church and honor God.*

**Duration:** 55:51

**Scripture:** Nehemiah 1:4, Nehemiah 6:15, Esther 4:14, Esther 6:1, Esther 9:1, Psalm 121:4, Proverbs 21:30, Isaiah 41:10, Romans 8:31, 1 Peter 5:7

**Topics:** "Sovereign Protection", "Selfless Sacrifice"

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## Description

This sermon delves into the stories of Nehemiah and Esther, highlighting the contrast between those who are willing to sacrifice for God's work and those who seek comfort and compromise. It emphasizes the importance of selflessness, sacrifice, and being concerned with the glory of God's name. The sermon underscores God's sovereign protection over His people, even in the face of opposition and schemes by the enemy.

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## Transcript

Let's turn today, this evening, to Nehemiah. In our last session we were considering Ezra, and I mentioned that there were these two movements of Israel described in great detail in the Old Testament. One was their movement from Egypt to Canaan which speaks of our personal walk with God coming out of sin, the devil's grip out of the world, through the Red Sea of Baptism into a life of victory over sin.

It relates to our personal life. The other I said was the movement of God's people from Babylon to Jerusalem. And Babylon speaks of a corrupt Christianity.

I just want to mention one thing here, that very often I have noticed that people think that certain denominations are Babylon, and certain other denominations are Jerusalem. I don't subscribe to that view. I believe that anyone, any Christian who lives after the flesh is really building Babylon.

Anyone who is seeking his own, even if he is sitting in the most spiritual denomination in the world, is actually building Babylon. And to build the body of Christ, that true Jerusalem that the Bible says the heavenly Jerusalem, requires a selflessness, a spirit of Christ where we are concerned with the glory of God, where we no longer live for ourselves. And that is the thing that characterizes these men.

Many people have made the mistake of thinking they leave some dead system and have left Babylon. I wish it were that easy. It's not that easy.

Babylon dwells deep within us, the spirit of Babylon. Babylon is a commercial system, and the principle of all commercial systems is the principle of profit, of gain for myself. And as long as a man lives by that principle of what can I gain out of Christianity, what can I gain out of doing this for the Lord, what can I gain out of joining this church, what can I gain out of joining this organization, what can I gain by working here, he's motivated by the principle of Babylon.

Whereas Jerusalem is a city of sacrifice, it's the opposite of business. It's what David said, I will not offer to the Lord that which costs me nothing. And wherever a man is motivated by that principle, he's motivated by the principle of Jerusalem.

And God may have somebody like that in what you think is a dead denomination, a man who lives selflessly for Christ. So I'm talking about when we seek to build the body of Christ, it's very important that we gather together people who have understood this principle of sacrifice. Otherwise, we shall just build another system like so many of the other so-called separated assemblies, which today are just as dead, sometimes more dead than the old denominations.

This is the state of affairs today in Christendom. And that is because people have thought, if I move from here to here, I've come out of Babylon. It's not true.

It's a spiritual system. We need to understand that. And here was this movement of God's people from Babylon to Jerusalem.

And we saw that very few people really came out of that system. And Nehemiah was also one of those people who were involved in this movement. The temple had already been built.

This is a time 70 years after Zerubbabel and Joshua had gone out to build the temple, the prophecy of Haggai and Zechariah, and about 13 years after Ezra. Ezra and Nehemiah lived around the same time, but Nehemiah came a little later. Nehemiah's burden.

See, the burden of Haggai, Zechariah, Joshua, and Zerubbabel was the building of the temple. The burden of Ezra was to teach the word of God. And the burden of Nehemiah was to build the city properly with walls, and organize the city, and reestablish the people in the covenant that they had gone back from, and bring a reformation among the people.

And here we read in Nehemiah chapter 1, in verses 1 to 3, he was living in Susa, the capital. And of this world power of those days, and that is King Artaxerxes was the king, and the Babylonian Empire was over. It was the Medo-Persian Empire now.

And he was living in the capital of the city of Susa. And one of his brothers, one of the brothers means a fellow Israeli, came from Judah, verse 2. And Nehemiah, you see here, has a concern. Hanani, this man who came, did not offer Nehemiah some information.

Nehemiah had a concern to find out what is the state of Jerusalem. Is something being done? He had a concern to see whether God's house and God's city was being built. And this is what I want to say is the primary characteristic of any man whom God can use.

God does not use a man who has no concern. And he asked Hanani, how are things there? How are things going on there? And Hanani said, well, the walls are broken down, the gates are burned with fire. In the book of Isaiah, in chapter 60 and verse 18, the walls are called the walls of salvation and the gates of

praise.

The walls speak of separation from the world and of security. There is a security when you have a wall, there is a separation from the rest of the world. And God desires that the church be separate from the world.

That's the meaning of these walls around Jerusalem. And they have to be high walls so that a worldly minded person cannot easily be a part of your church. If a worldly minded person can easily be a part of your church, we'd say the walls are not very high.

In Jerusalem, it's difficult to be a part of it. You've got to be a disciple. You've got to be one who loves Jesus more than anything else on earth.

Throughout the centuries of Christendom, people have gradually lowered the standards. We can say gradually lowered the walls so that anybody can just jump over now and come in. The Bible says, Jesus said that anyone who climbs over a wall and comes in as a thief, there is a way to come in through the gate and that gate is very narrow.

But when preachers have lowered the standards so that the wall of separation has become so low, sometimes the wall is broken down completely. There's no difference between the church and the world. Sometimes worldly people behave much better than people in the church.

That is a picture of a church where the walls are broken down. This is the spiritual picture of what we see here in Nehemiah's time. And the gates, the gates are gates of praise.

And it's also the place where we read the elders of a city is just a place of authority. The church has lost its authority and the church has lost that spirit of praise. And Nehemiah was concerned about this.

And when he heard it, see how it affected him. It says in Nehemiah 1 verse 4, When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and he mourned for many days. Lord, look at the condition of your church.

That's how it applies to us. And I fasted and I prayed. I want to ask you, my dear brothers and sisters who seek to serve the Lord.

When was the last time that you mourned? Not for any sorrows of your own, but because the church of Jesus Christ is in such a pathetic condition in India today. When was the last time you fasted and prayed? Because you were concerned that the name of Jesus should be glorified in the church of Jesus Christ in India today. We can study a lot from the Bible.

And we can study all these things and understand all these things. But if we don't have a concern, nothing is going to happen. We're not going to be the men and women of God that God wants us to be.

This man was in the Old Testament. He did not have the Holy Spirit dwelling in him like we have. He did not have a full Bible like we have.

He did not have a fellowship in the church and he did not have books or tapes or conferences of any such things. He did not know Calvary. Yet he had such a tremendous concern and he was not what we call a full-time worker.

He was a man in a secular job who supported himself and served the Lord. That was Nehemiah, a tremendous example of a man who was absolutely selfless and was concerned for the glory of God's name. And if we can be challenged by that, I believe God can do something in us first and then through us.

Notice in this movement of God's people from Babylon to Jerusalem, it began with Daniel. And Daniel was a man who fasted and prayed there in Babylon. Then it continued with Zerubbabel and Joshua and Haggai and Zechariah.

All of them had a concern, a burden. There's a lot of fasting and prayer mentioned in the books of Zechariah. And Ezra fasted and prayed.

Nehemiah fasted and prayed. They're fasting and praying. See, a lot of it was because of a concern for God's name.

A lot of people fast and pray when they want something from God. When they want something from God, they say, we'll fast and pray and we'll get it. Well, that's good.

But these people were not fasting and praying to get something from God. They were fasting and praying that God's name should be honored in the city. I'm sure many of you have fasted and prayed.

I would ask you, what for? To get some answer to prayer? To get some healing in your family? To get a job perhaps? Fasting and praying to find a marriage partner? All that is good. I'm not against it. I'm asking, was there a time when you fasted and prayed because the name of Jesus, you needed to see the name of Jesus honored in a church.

See, unless we begin here, all our study is just going to tickle our brains and it's not really going to lead us into a godly life. So that's where we must begin. And we read, it concerned him so much that he was the man who offered the wine.

He was the wine taster, who offered the wine to the king, because kings were afraid in those days that people would poison them. So they had a man to taste the wine first before giving it to him. And that was a man of tremendous trust and reliability.

So Nehemiah occupied a place of great influence. The king relied on him 100% because the king's life depended on him. And Nehemiah was a man of great influence in the palace of the world's greatest monarch at that time.

And it says here that he took the wine and gave it to the king, chapter 2, verse 1. And I had never been sad in his presence before. He was not a gloomy type of person naturally. He was a man who was always happy.

He had never in his life been sad before the king. The king had always seen him happy. And now he was sad.

And he was sad for nothing concerning himself or his family. He was sad and burdened because the name of God was not being honored. Or that there were more people like that.

And the king saw that. And the king said, you're not sick, are you? Your face is so sad. You're not sick.

This is nothing but sadness of heart. And Nehemiah was afraid. You know, it was a terrible thing to make, to ruffle the thoughts and opinions of a majesty, a king in those days.

And I love the honesty of this man, Nehemiah, who admits that he was afraid. See, fear is not something which we can eliminate completely from our lives. We will feel fear.

But we must never act on fear. Paul said he had fears in 2nd Corinthians 7. But he never acted on those fears. And if you are in a dangerous place, one day if you're going to serve the Lord in a place where your life can be threatened any day.

And there are many places like that in India today. Naturally, you will feel fear. And you don't have to feel ashamed of that.

We are human. But we must never act on the basis of that fear. We can be careful.

We can act with caution. But not with fear. Fear is the opposite of faith.

And when you act in fear, you're acting in unbelief. Please remember this. God cares for us.

He was afraid. But He still was bold. And He said to the king.

He says, My face has to be sad because the city where my father's tomb lies, the place of my father's tomb lies desolate. And the gates are being burned with fire. So he said, What do you want? And he made a quick short prayer to God.

And said, If it please the king, please send me to Judah to rebuild that city. And the king said, How long are you going to go? And he fixed a certain time. And he went.

And he went and he surveyed the walls. He came to Jerusalem. And he was there for three days to eleven.

And he arose at night. And he took a few men with him. I did not tell anyone what God was putting into my mind.

He was not a man who advertised and told people what he was going to do. He gathered a few who had a burden. See, he knew it's no use gathering a whole bunch of people who have no burden for God's work.

Let me gather those who have a burden. And with them he went around and inspected the work. And then we find as soon as this happened, there was opposition.

Just like in Ezra's time. As soon as somebody is concerned that the name of Jesus should be honored. And we need to build the city of Jerusalem.

Immediately there is opposition. The devil is alert to these things. And that's the reason why some people don't want to go out and live for and serve God like this.

Because they'll come face to face with the devil. But do you know that the way that you can know that you are in the will of God. Is that you confront the devil very frequently in your life.

If the devil leaves you alone. You can be pretty sure you're completely out of the will of God. To me, one of the indications that I'm in the right path is that the devil is angry.

And he stirs up people against me. And he stirs up all types of situations to try and hinder me and harass me. Then I know I'm on the right path.

And I hope you'll keep that before you. You see that throughout scripture. Wherever a man of God tries to restore a testimony for God's name.

He faces the opposition of the devil. And throughout church history, all godly men have faced this. So you find here how Sanbalat verse 19, 219 and Tobiah heard this.

They mocked us and despised us. And they said what is this you're doing? You're rebelling against the king. And I said to them that God of heaven will give us success.

And we are going to arise and build. But you people have no portion or right to memorial in Jerusalem. We do not work together with you.

He was not afraid of that. In chapter 3, we find very quickly Nehemiah was a great organizer. He was not only a man of prayer and fasting.

He was a wonderful organizer. He was a man who could motivate people to work because he worked himself. And I believe that's the type of leader that God wants in the church in India today.

People who can fast and pray, who have a concern for God's name, who are good at organizing people and motivating them to work for the Lord because they are willing to work themselves with their hands. And so without any delay, you find in chapter 3, Nehemiah has organized everything. I mean that's not mentioned there because he's a humble man.

He doesn't say that he organized the whole thing. But when you read chapter 3, you see everybody's got their job. The leaders, the great, the high priest, verse 1, even the high priest, he didn't sit on a chair and supervise the work.

He began working with his hands. He arose with his brothers and began to build. He took bricks and mortar, the high priest, the biggest man in that city.

He began to work. And it's a wonderful thing when Nehemiah could get the leaders not to sit on their chairs and supervise. But to begin to dirty their hands and work.

There we see something of the greatness of this man Nehemiah. He got everybody to work. He said, we're all brothers.

There's nobody big or small here. The walls of Jerusalem have to be built and all of us have got to work, otherwise it won't be done. And you see this expression in verse 2, next to him.

Verse 4, next to them. Verse 7, next to them. Verse 8, next to him.

Right through you find that expression coming. Next to him, next to him. In other words, without a gap, they all work together.

So that right around that city, without a gap, they built that wall. Different types of people. There were even women there.

We read in chapter 3, verse 12. The daughters of Shalom. He was a senior official there.

And his daughters were working with their hands, dirtying their hands and building brick and mortar. It's amazing what Nehemiah could accomplish to get all these people to work together from one end of Jerusalem right up to the other. And we read in chapter 4, this Sanballat who we saw earlier.

When he heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became furious. Now, rebuilding the wall didn't trouble Sanballat in any way. He was instigated by Satan.

See, very often when we are doing a work for the Lord somewhere, some of the people who oppose us, we're not harming them in any way. We're doing good to the area, to society in general. But the only way we can explain the opposition and the anger of these people whom we have never harmed is the fury of Satan.

Throughout India we see, wherever there's persecution, why are people so angry against Christians who are seeking to improve the lot of the poor people? It's the anger of Satan. We're not harming all those people. We're not speaking against their religions.

But they are angry because Satan hates anyone who is concerned to build the Church of Jesus Christ. And so we find throughout Scripture this principle, and here they became furious, they mocked, they got angry, they threatened, they tried to bring governmental pressure. It's all these things.

This is not just happening in the 20th century in India. It happened even there. And he spoke in the presence of the brothers and the wealthy men of Samaria and said, what are these feeble Jews doing? Are they going to restore it? He tries to influence rich people to oppose the work.

And Tobiah makes fun of the work. And in verse 7 it says, they were very angry and they conspired together in verse 8 to come and fight against Jerusalem to cause a disturbance in it. And what did Nehemiah do? He did not get into an argument or discussion with them.

He prayed. He said, Oh God, verse 4, we are despised. These people are against us.

We are only building the wall and these people are against us. But they continued to build the wall and it had reached half its height. We read in verse 6, and the people had a mind to work.

And we read in the remaining verses how they continued to pray to God. Verse 9, they prayed to God and they set up a guard against these people day and night. They watched and they prayed.

Jesus used that expression often, watch and pray. And that's what we see here. They prayed and they watched.

What did they watch for? They watched for the enemy. To be alert against the enemy and they prayed. This is how they worked.

And then in Judah also, you see, one of the problems in Christian work is that it's not just the enemies who oppose us from outside. It's also the murmuring that comes from within. We read even in the Acts of the Apostles that when the disciples multiplied, there was a murmuring among the Greek widows saying, we're not getting as much food as the Hebrew widows.

There's some partiality here. Murmuring coming up within. And that's another thing Nehemiah had to deal with.

People began to murmur saying there's a lot of rubbish and we can't handle all this. Verse 10. And he had to handle all that.

All that murmuring and the discouragement when the Jews who lived near them came and told them 10 times, verse 12, they will come against you from every side. Be careful. Put fear and discouragement.

It's dangerous to go there. They will attack you. All these words.

There are many people who, when they go out to serve the Lord, all these people are going to come and say, it's dangerous to go there. 10 times they will come and tell you they'll attack you here, there and the other place. But Nehemiah was a man who was not frightened.

We see further in verse 14. When I saw their fear, that is of the Jews, I rose and spoke to the nobles and said, don't be afraid. Remember the Lord who is great and awesome and fight for your brothers and your sons and your daughters.

If we fear God, we need not fear anybody else. If we believe that almighty God is always on our side supporting the work that we do, we need never be afraid of anybody else. This is the spirit with which Nehemiah built that wall.

And I don't have time to go all over. I just want to move on to chapter 6 and verse 1. Just one thing I want to mention that is in chapter 5 you see Nehemiah's tremendous example. See, even though he was working so hard, it says in the last part of verse 18, I did not demand the governor's food allowance.

He did not take any money or any allowance for himself for all the work that he did. He served God at his own expense. And he was a very hospitable man.

It says 150 people, verse 17, sat at his table and he took care of them. He did not use because money which was contributed, he used all the money that was contributed to the building of the work. He was a man who lived with great sacrifice and did not use money which was given for God's work in any way for himself.

You know when God sees a man who is like that, who is faithful with money, faithful with his money, there is no limit to what God can use. Many people fail because they take advantage of their service for the Lord in this financial area. In chapter 6 it says again about these people how they came and saw that there was no breach left in the wall.

The whole wall had been completed without any gap. Then Sambalax tried another tactic. He said come let us have a discussion together in the plain of Ono.

But they were planning to harm me. And look at the answer of Nehemiah which is a very interesting answer, the answer that we should give as well. He said I'm doing a great work and I cannot come down for all these useless discussions.

When God has given us a task to do, we stick to that and we don't waste our time in useless discussions. And thus we read in verse 15 of chapter 6, the wall was completed in 52 days. For the previous 90 years from the time the first exiles had come into Jerusalem, this wall had not been built.

For 90 years it was lying like that, broken down. Nobody concerned about it till God found one man. And when that one man was concerned, in less than two months he did the job.

You know there is so much of the Lord's work and different aspects of the Lord's work that we see there is a need of in many parts of our own country. 90 years, 100 years, 200 years it's been like that. What is God waiting for? He's waiting for one man who has a verdict, who is not going to be discouraged by the opposition and who is going to motivate people, stir them and build the wall, the body of Jesus Christ.

Now we move on to, we read about Ezra in chapter 8. We read about Nehemiah and the people confessing their sin in chapter 9. And I just want to move on to the end of that. He organizes the people and I want to show you something in chapter 13. Just let me mention this that Nehemiah organized people who could look after the gates and who could sing and praise.

Just like David, you find in this movement of God's people there are always people who are worshiping God and singing and praising. When he comes to chapter 13, we find here that Nehemiah sets a lot of things in order. He goes into the temple and you see something like what Jesus did when he cleansed the temple in Jerusalem when Jesus was on earth.

You see something similar to that in Nehemiah chapter 13 where he goes inside and he finds that inside the temple people have put their unconverted relatives there and he chased them all out. Eliashib the priest was related to Tobiah chapter 13 verse 4 and he had prepared a large room for him and Nehemiah came and chased them all out and he says in verse 8 he threw out all of Tobiah's household goods and told them to clean the rooms. This is the house of God.

We don't want all these people staying here. He was a fearless man. He was a man who was concerned for the purity of God's house and he was not concerned about his reputation.

And he cleansed that temple somewhat similar to the way Jesus cleansed the temple when he was on earth. And the other thing he saw was he saw a lot of people verse 15 onwards who were trying to make money on the Sabbath by selling things on the Sabbath and he rebuked these nobles and he says what is this evil thing verse 17 that you are doing and when he saw certain people trying to sell things on the Sabbath in verse 21 he warned them. He says why do you verse 21 why do you spend the night here if you do so again I will use force against you and from that time on they did not come.

See I have seen this there are some leaders who are very weak and not firm and authoritative when it comes to the purity of the church and when God cannot find a man who is strong and authoritative for the purity of the church God's work suffers. But Nehemiah wasn't like that. He wasn't concerned about his reputation.

He said I don't care whether you think I am a gentle man or not. I don't seek a reputation for being gentle and meek and all that. If you fellows dishonor God I am going to be strict and I am going to push you out with my hands.

Don't you ever come here again. They needed something like that. And we also see how he treated people who had married non-Jewish women.

In those days, verse 23 I saw the Jews had married women from other countries and their children spoke half this language and half the other language and see how he treats them. Verse 25 I contented with them I cursed them I slapped them and I pulled out their hair their beards and made them swear don't you ever give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. See Nehemiah wasn't concerned about his reputation.

He was concerned more for the purity of God's house for obedience to God's laws and to that to fulfill that he was even willing to slap people and pull out their hairs from their face. Now, I'm not saying that we should do things like that but the emphasis there which I'm trying to say is that God needs people who are not only concerned but who are so concerned that they are strict about God's standards in the church and who are firm and the people must know that this leader of ours is a firm man. He will tolerate no nonsense when it comes to the standards of God's word and there must be a little fear in their hearts.

I've often told people in the church, listen, if you fellas don't fear God, then you better fear me because I'm not going to allow any of this nonsense in the church. The best thing is you fear God, then you don't have to fear man at all. But if you don't fear God, you come to the church and start playing the fool and you're going to have problems with me because we're not going to allow that in the church and I've observed through the years as I've seen different churches built that if in a church if God cannot find a firm leader like that nothing solid is ever built and I've discovered also that the reason why many times a leader is not like that is because he is concerned about his own reputation.

What will people think about me? I want to have a reputation as a very humble, gracious, gentle person. Well if you're concerned about your reputation you might as well forget about building the church. So that's what we learned from Nehemiah, a man who was not concerned about his own reputation and whom God could use.

Now let's turn over to the book of Esther. The book of Esther is one book in which the name of God never appears. The word God or Lord never comes in this book.

In fact it's the only book in the Bible where the name of God never appears. The Song of Solomon in the original Hebrew has got one place where the name of the Lord, which is not always translated with God's name in English translations, it does appear. Jehovah or Yah comes in one place.

But Esther is the only book in the whole Bible where the name of God never appears. And yet God is working behind the scenes invisibly supporting and helping his people. Now I think there is a reason why God's name is not mentioned here.

And this may be my own opinion but I will share it with you for what it is worth. See, Ezra and Nehemiah referred to people who left the comfort of Babylon and Medo-Persia and went to a difficult work to settle down in Jerusalem because they knew that there must be a testimony for God in Jerusalem. And so you find God openly manifesting himself, supporting those people who were concerned about that.

Esther, in the book of Esther, we read about the Jews who did not want to pay the price to come out and be a testimony for the Lord. You see, we see that today among Christians. There are believers of all types.

There are believers who like to be believers but who are always seeking their own and want to make money in the world, want to get on in the world and want to get a good position and honor and titles and big jobs and live very comfortably and also want to be believers and go regularly for meetings and have meetings in their home perhaps. But they don't want to pay the price of being an out and out disciple when God may send them to some other place where it's inconvenient to serve Him. They don't want that.

They will never hear God call them to a difficult place to serve Him. But they are believers. Those are the type of people like the people who stayed back in Babylon or stayed back in Medo Persia and the people mentioned in Ezra and Nehemiah are the people who were willing to be inconvenienced, willing to suffer

poverty and difficulty in order to establish a testimony for God's name in some difficult place.

And we know there are these two types of believers and some of these believers who are seeking comfort externally they are very good. They are good people. They don't harm anyone and they know the Bible and they come regularly for their meetings and they praise the Lord and they sing well and they preach well.

But deep down they have never said Lord I am willing to go anywhere for you. I am willing to go to any place to serve you. Because they are afraid.

God may send them to North India. They don't want to go to North India because they want to live comfortably here and settle down and they want to go regularly to the meetings and be good believers here and say God has never called me to go there. But God will never call such people because He sees them deep down in their heart they don't want to go.

So even though God helps such people, He does not publicly identify Himself with them like He would with somebody else who has gone out sacrificially to live for Him. And that is why God does not publicly identify Himself with the people in the book of Esch. His name is not there at all.

I believe that's the reason. But He cares for them like He cares for all these believers around here who seek their own and their own comfort and live for money etc. So He cares for them.

So there's a lesson there. And you see certain compromises here in the book of Esther. For example, we see that Mordecai, when you know the story how this king Ahasuerus did not he got so drunk one day and he told his queen, beautiful queen Vashti to come and appear before all the other men and she was a very modest queen and she said I won't come and the king rejected her and said we got to look for another queen and when Esther Esther was a pretty Jewish girl there and Mordecai encouraged Esther to get married to this heathen king.

Now there are many many good qualities about Mordecai that I really appreciate and I don't want to say anything to bring him down because he was a man who stood for God. He did not bow down to him and there are many good things we see in Mordecai. But you notice that this man if he knew the scriptures, he knew very well that according to the word of God a Jewish girl should not marry a heathen man, a non-Jewish man.

That is exactly what we saw in the previous page, in the last chapter of Nehemiah. These Jewish men had married into heathen families and those are the people who Nehemiah slapped and pulled the beards and said don't you ever allow your daughters to go and marry these. You shall not give your daughters, Nehemiah 13 25 to all these heathen people and you turn over the page and you come to Esther and you find this Mordecai doing exactly that.

Now Esther lived at a time before Nehemiah but I'm just trying to point out to you that when people do not go all out for the Lord and say Lord I'm willing to go anywhere, I'm willing to do anything, I'm willing to sacrifice and live for you because I've got only one life on earth and I don't want to live in comfort and ease. I want to go wherever you want me to go. If we don't give ourselves to the Lord like that we'll find compromise comes in in different areas without even our knowing it.

Do you think Mordecai felt that he was doing something wrong in encouraging Esther to marry a heathen king? No. See when we compromise in one area we get so used to it that we compromise in other areas

also without our conscience troubling us and God will not publicly identify himself with us. If you want God to publicly identify himself with you you have to be out and out for him.

You have to say Lord I'm not gonna live for comfort, I'm not gonna live for money, I'm not gonna live for honor, I'm not gonna live for pleasure, I'm gonna live for you, I'm willing to go where you want me to go and if you want me to go away from a comfortable place to a difficult place, I'm ready to go. Those are the people you read in Ezra and Nehemiah and there's a detailed list of their names. We saw that.

But when it comes to Esther, there's no list of names or any such thing. God doesn't identify himself with these people but he cares for them just like God cares for a lot of people in the world. He makes the sun to rise upon whom? Upon the good and the evil.

He gives a lot of material blessings and material protection to people. What he did for God's people for the Jews in the book of Esther was that he protected them from death which is a good thing. But we don't see people concerned about the glory of God's name or any such thing.

The only thing Mordecai was concerned about was the Jews should not be killed. You know? If the danger of our being killed, let's somehow pray to God and ask him to protect us from being killed. That's all he was interested in.

So different from Ezra and Nehemiah who were concerned about the glory of God's name. So I'm just trying to say that there are two types of believers and you see both of them here. There were those who stayed back in Babylon and there were those who moved out of Babylon into Jerusalem.

And there are believers sitting in Babylonian systems and living by Babylonian principles. I'm not saying God forsakes them. He provides for them.

He cares for them. That's the message of the book of Esther. And if all that you are interested in is protection from death and material protection, brother, you can stay in Babylon all your life.

But if you want to fulfill God's purposes, you better move on and say, Lord, show me what is your will for my life. You know, the human heart is so deceptive. The heart is deceitful above all things.

We can think we are such dedicated people because we sing so movingly on Sunday morning and we feel we love the Lord so much. But look at the way we live. We're seeking our own.

Settle down comfortably. Not concerned about the work of God in difficult places. How much concern do many believers living in comfortable surroundings in this state have for God's work in very, very difficult places? I ask, do they even get a missionary magazine in their home to read about God's work being done in North India? They don't even get that.

They're not interested. They're interested in their comfortable life and Sunday morning, praising the Lord, and come together. These are the people that we read of in Esther.

When they have trouble, they go to God. If they get some healing, they're very happy. And if their financial needs are met, they're quite happy.

These are the people who drift along in life, useless to God, useless to men, just satisfying their conscience. I've lived a good life. I haven't harmed anybody.

I believe in victory over sin. I believe in overcoming my dirty thoughts. I believe in overcoming my anger.

That's not all there is in the Christian life. Jesus didn't just overcome dirty thoughts and keep himself from anger. He accomplished the Father's will.

And I believe that should come as a challenge to us. Anyway, let me say how God cared for these people. We can learn something of God's sovereign protection, even for these compromising people.

Mordecai was a man who had a certain fear of God. He was a man who would not bow down to Haman when Haman passed by. And Haman was the man who was like the prime minister next to the king.

One day we read that Mordecai saved the life of the king. He told Queen Esther. Esther had become queen by then.

And Esther informed the king and the plot was investigated, chapter 2, verse 23. And those who were plotting against the king were hanged on the gallows. And after these things, chapter 3, verse 1, the king promoted Haman to be the leader.

And all the king's servants, chapter 3, verse 2, bowed down to Haman, but Mordecai would not bow down. And Haman tried to find out, why is this fellow not bowing down to me? And he discovered this fellow was a Jew. So, when we talk about these compromising believers who are not willing to serve God in difficult places, they won't bow down to idols.

No, no, no, no, no. They won't do such things. They've got certain principles.

They want a comfortable life. They've got no interest in Jerusalem. They want to live in Babylon, because Babylon is a more comfortable place to live in, in Medo-Persia.

But, they will not compromise their principles. So, Mordecai had some principles. He would not bow down to Haman.

And therefore, Haman got very angry with all the Jews. He said, this is a peculiar race. Let me wipe out the whole lot of them.

Because this man would not bow down to him. And so, very cleverly, he got the king to pass an order that on a certain day, all the Jews were to be wiped out from the land. Something like what we saw in the 20th century of Hitler.

Haman was the Hitler of the Old Testament, who wanted to wipe out all the Jews in the land. Catch them and wipe them out. But, you know, you can't do that.

Haman didn't succeed and Hitler didn't succeed. And nobody will succeed. What God has promised to Abraham 4000 years ago will be fulfilled.

Haman's will come and go and Hitler's will come and go. And God's purposes will still be fulfilled. And that's what we see here.

And we read here that Esther learned about this plot of Haman. And Mordecai told her, told her that you have come into the kingdom for this particular time. In Esther and chapter 4, Mordecai told her that if you don't imagine verse 13, that just because you're living in the king's palace, you can escape.

If you remain silent at this time, what will happen? Deliverance will come for the Jews from somewhere else. Here, God is giving you an option. You don't find the word God there.

Never in the book of Esther do you find the word God. You don't even find the word prayer. Even when Esther says to the Jews in verse 16, go and tell the Jews to fast for me, not to eat or drink for three days, night or day.

He doesn't tell them to pray, just fast. And Mordecai says, if you don't stand out for your people, deliverance will come from another source and who knows that you may have come into this position for this particular time. Verse 14.

So Esther went before the king and planned a banquet. And Haman was very proud because he'd been invited to that banquet and we read that he went home. Esther 5 verse 11 and he talked about how rich he was and he had 10 sons and he boasted about that and how the king had promoted him and how he was going for a banquet and Esther the queen has invited only him with the king.

Yet he says in verse 13, all of this doesn't satisfy me as long as I see this man Mordecai not bowing down to me. And so Zerush his wife and Haman planned to make a huge gallows. It says it was 70 feet high, 75 feet high.

You know 75 feet high is the height of a 7 story building. Huge gallows. Now you don't need a 75 foot gallows to hang a man.

You need only a 10 foot gallows to hang a man. Why did he make one 75 feet high? So that Mordecai can be humiliated before the whole city should be able to see him hanging there. And God was watching this.

The scheme to wipe out the Jews. And God did something. One of the wonderful things we see in Esther is the sovereignty of God.

That night, chapter 6, verse 1, the king could not sleep. Why was it the king couldn't sleep? Because God kept him awake. This is a great encouragement when we read in the book of Esther, when we see there are people plotting against us.

And God works on our behalf to protect us from these people who are plotting against us. That's what we see here. Mordecai was fast asleep.

He did not know that there had been a 75 foot gallows that was made that night. It was Haman and his wife who were awake that whole night. Mordecai was fast asleep.

And the king, he couldn't sleep that night. And the king gave an order to get the history books. He thought he'd get some sleep if he read some old history books.

And so they started reading the history books and he still couldn't get any sleep. And they went on and on and on and on reading right through the night till about 6 o'clock in the morning. They came to that place in the history book where it said that Mordecai had saved the king's life at some time.

And when the king heard that he said, what was done for that man? Verse 3, chapter 6, verse 3. What did we do for this man for saving my life? And they said, nothing has been done. So he said, well, we got to honor him. And at that very moment you see the timing of God.

At that very moment, Haman comes in to get permission from the king to destroy the Jews and to hang Mordecai. And the king is just planning to honor Mordecai. And he asked Haman, see, I want to honor somebody.

What do you think you should do? And Haman thought, well, of course, that must be me he wants to honor. So he says, you must make him ride on the king's horse and let a prince lead him down the street and say, this is the way God is going to honor, that the king is going to honor anyone who is faithful. And he says, go and do that to Mordecai right now.

It's wonderful to see how God turns the tables on Satan. And that was the beginning of that turning the tables on Satan where finally Esther exposed Haman and Haman was finally hanged on the gallows which he had made for Mordecai. Now this is written for our instruction that nobody can really touch us until God's time comes.

There were times when it says even about Jesus they could not arrest him because his time had not yet come. They could not chop off Paul's head until the time which God had determined had come. Because God works on behalf of his servants protecting them.

And if he could work on behalf of these people who were compromisers, who were seeking their own in this Medo-Persian situation and who had not gone out and out to Jerusalem like the others, how much more he will do today for those who want to live for him. That's the great encouragement that comes to us through the book of Esther. The sovereign working of God when you are asleep he works on your behalf to protect you from evil men who seek to destroy you.

See if we don't have that faith, we won't go out to serve God in difficult situations. We think there's a danger here, there's a danger there and we need to take care of ourselves and if the devil can put that type of fear in our hearts and make us act on that fear in other words we glorify the devil we say the devil is almighty and God cannot protect us, then of course we will never be able to serve God. A lot of believers live with that type of fear.

But a true servant of God will say God is almighty and everything in scripture shows me that God works on behalf of his people he's watching. The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to work on behalf of those whose hearts are his and the Lord who watches you will not slumber or sleep. He's the one who protects us and that is why we need never have any fear even if people scheme against us and it's wonderful when we have experiences like that.

I've had experiences like that too where people scheme and plan things against me and it doesn't work out the way they anticipate because there's a God in heaven watching the whole thing and he frustrates their plans and turns the tables on them and makes fools of them. This is the God we worship and serve. So let's be encouraged by this when we see finally how the Jews became triumphant there in the book of Esther and the enemy was defeated and that will be how it is in our life too.

Let's pray.

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