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Editor's Introduction

Hi, thanks once again for reading Young Precious Seed. I really do appreciate it.

We are starting this first issue of 2022 with four new series of articles. I hope that you find them thought provoking, interesting, educational, and challenging. That's the aim.

I have tried to cover a variety of topics that might interest you. So, we have a series on the importance of doctrine from Stephen Grant, and a series on how we can be equipped to evangelize (which is co-authored by David Williamson and Paul McCauley). In addition, Phil Raggett is writing a series on things the Christian should know, and Malcolm Beattie is giving us an overview of the book of Esther.

Jeremy Singer is completing his series on Bible priests, but he will be back with some more interesting articles in later issues.

Please enjoy the word of God and the presence of God as you read this magazine.

Kind regards
Stephen Baker

Edited by
STEPHEN BAKER

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Study Notes on the Book of Esther - Part 1

BY MALCOLM BEATTIE, BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND

It will take about twenty minutes to read through Esther, and repeated reading will allow you to immerse yourself in the story. These notes, which will be in three parts, are offered to help you in your personal study.

Introduction and purpose, and the biblical and historical settings

Esther, the seventeenth book of the Bible, records the attempted mass destruction of the Jews exiled in the vast Medo-Persian Empire (see map).¹ This was prevented by the actions of Mordecai, a Jew, and his cousin, Esther, who had become Queen. At great personal risk, Queen Esther successfully appealed to the despotic King Ahasuerus on behalf of the Jews.

YOUNG PRECIOUS SEED

is a supplement of *Precious Seed*, designed for those young in the faith. Its purpose is to restate timeless truths from the word of God for a new generation of Christians and to kindle a biblical approach to current issues in the world in which we live. YPS is published by *Precious Seed*, 34 Metcalfe Avenue, Killamarsh, Sheffield, S21 1HW, UK, and is available separately from the main magazine.



The inclusion of Esther in the Bible has often been questioned because there is no reference to God nor the worship of God in the book. That said, it records the faithfulness of God towards His people in their darkest days. While He is hidden from view and is apparently silent, His control of events is seen throughout. This alone warrants its inclusion in the Bible, and our study of it.

This underlying theme is set against the backdrop of a satanic plot to destroy God's chosen people, the Jews. It is through the nation that the promised Saviour will come. Satan is moving yet again through human agency to stop that, by orchestrating the annihilation of the Jews, Esther 3. 13.

However, we will see God's hand in events to halt this wicked plot. Esther teaches us that God is never taken by surprise. Rather, the opposite is true. We see that He moves in advance of events, as sovereign over His creation, to fulfil His own plans and purposes.

There are, of course, many examples of this in the Bible. Do you remember when Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, Gen. 45. 7, 8? He recognized that he had been placed in Egypt in advance of the famine, so that God's people would be preserved.

So, as you read, look out for, and think about, the following actions of God as He moves silently in advance of events, to protect His people.

- In chapter 1, note the refusal of Queen Vashti to come before the king, his courtiers and guests. This resulted in her removal from the throne. Interestingly, this seemingly isolated event paved the way for Esther to become queen.
- In chapter 2, Mordecai the Jew and Esther come into view when a replacement for Queen Vashti is being sought. Esther becomes that new queen.
- In chapter 2, Mordecai reports a plot against King Ahasuerus. This will become relevant later to the events of chapter 6.

- In chapter 4 verse 14, the question posed by Mordecai to Esther, 'who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?' wonderfully crystallizes the point. She certainly is there at the right time, and God has both Mordecai and Queen Esther in position to preserve His people from the evil scheme unfolded in chapter 3.
- In chapter 6, Haman, the enemy of the Jews, determines to hang Mordecai in a concerted plan to remove him. As Haman appears before Ahasuerus to ask permission to do so, he discovers that Ahasuerus has had a sleepless night and has determine to reward Mordecai for exposing the plot recorded in chapter 2! This stalls Haman's plan to have Mordecai hanged there and then. Again, we see God acting sovereignly to preserve Mordecai, who will play a major part in the preservation of the Jews.
- In chapter 8, note the ultimate and central role Queen Esther and Mordecai have in the issuing of the decree permitting the Jews to protect themselves.

Biblical setting

The events in Esther take place during the times of the two preceding exilic books, Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra focuses on the rebuilding of the temple, and Nehemiah on the repair of the walls of Jerusalem. But in Esther the Jews apparently lack any ambition to return from exile. Instead, they seem to be far from God in heart, and unfaithful to Him. Even so, God does not change and remains faithful to them. He will act to preserve them from mortal danger.

Historical setting

The events occur in the Medo-Persian Empire when Ahasuerus III, also known as Xerxes I, was king (486 to 465 BC). This is the second world empire, following the Babylonian Empire, as represented by the silver breast and arms of the image seen by Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel chapter 2.

The first verse tells us that the empire stretched from India (the river Indus) to Ethiopia. Ethiopia was the name used by the Greeks for the border area between present-day Egypt and Sudan.

In Part 2 we will look at the principal characters in this fascinating book.

¹ From www.bible-history.com.

A to Z of Priests - Zacharias

BY JEREMY SINGER, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND



Between the two testaments, there were 'four hundred silent years' without a word from God.¹ How would heavenly communication be resumed? Who would hear the first fresh word from the Lord? The answer is that divine revelation came initially to a priest engaged in temple service; his name was Zacharias.

Throughout his writing, Luke focuses keenly on human interest. The character sketches in his narrative are literary masterpieces. Among the many notable individuals featured by Luke, Zacharias the priest is the first person we encounter. This priest's name means 'God will remember'. Luke highlights Zacharias' devotion, his doubt, and his declaration.

His devotion

This man was dedicated to his wife, who was also a member of the priestly family of Aaron. Together, Zacharias and Elisabeth lived a consistent life of faithful obedience to God, despite the disappointments of their childless marriage. We learn from Gabriel's message, Luke 1. 13, that the couple had committed their situation to the Lord in prayer.

The moment of divine revelation coincided with Zacharias' allocated shift of temple service. This was likely to have been part of an annual cycle of activity for his division of the priesthood, 1 Chr. 24. 19. BARCLAY speculates that it may have been a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Zacharias to light the lampstand and burn incense in the holy place.² Whether the occasion was unique or routine, Zacharias was diligently performing his duties.

His doubt

Devotion does not guarantee immediate acceptance of God's word, as the experience of Zacharias makes clear. When Gabriel appeared with a surprising message about a baby boy for Zacharias

and Elisabeth, the elderly priest responded with hesitation and doubt, Luke 1. 18. Unbelief is the most common 'sin which doth so easily beset' all of us, Heb. 12. 2. Although Zacharias was in the house of God, he initially rejected the divine message. His attitude contrasts sharply with Mary's later response to Gabriel, Luke 1. 34. Her questions were offered in a spirit of humility rather than incredulity.

The result of this angelic encounter in the temple was a speechless priest, v. 22. If Zacharias could not accept God's word, then he would be left with no words to say. The priest had no blessing to give to the people, Num. 6. 24-26, and no prayers to make on their behalf, 2 Chr. 30. 27. Using sign language and eventually resorting to writing, Zacharias improvised communication with the waiting crowds; presumably by similar means, he gave full details of the incident to his wife.

His declaration

Heaven had been silent for four centuries; now Zacharias was silent for nine months, the full term of Elisabeth's pregnancy. However, it is apparent that his early doubt was replaced by increasingly fervent faith. He claimed God's promise of a child, since we presume Elisabeth's conception was entirely conventional. Nevertheless, Zacharias remained without the power of speech until he ratified the antenatal, angel-given name for the baby, 'His name is John', Luke 1. 63. John means 'Jehovah is gracious', a fitting title for the herald of the 'dawn of redeeming grace'.

At last, Zacharias' mouth was opened! Immediately, he began to utter praise and prophecy. His allusions to the Psalms, Isaiah and Malachi indicate a deep familiarity with scripture. The key biblical themes of redemption and deliverance, central to Gabriel's original message, became the focus of Zacharias' interest. Perhaps the old priest had been meditating on these ideas for the previous nine months, and now his praise bursts out, Ps. 45. 1.

Conclusion

Zacharias had the privilege of receiving the earliest New Testament revelation. As we consider his experience, we face a double challenge:

1. When we hear **God's word**, how will we respond to it? Let's be like Zacharias in his ultimate response, which demonstrated genuine faith in God.
2. **Our words** are important. When we speak to others about our relationship with the Lord, what will we say? Zacharias' words are consistent with scripture and filled with praise.

1. H. A. IRNSIDE, *The Four Hundred Silent Years*, Loizeaux Brothers, 1914.
2. W. BARCLAY, *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke*, Saint Andrew Press, 1954.
3. 'With the dawn of redeeming grace', in my opinion, is the best line from *Silent Night* – one of my least-favourite Christmas carols since (apart from this line) it has minimal doctrinal content.

Equipped to Evangelize Part 1 – The key to conversation

BY DAVID WILLIAMSON, BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND



As a young Christian, I had a burning desire to make the gospel known to those who had never heard it. What held me back was an equally strong feeling of inadequacy. I was ill-equipped to converse with friends, neighbours, and strangers, about the gospel and I didn't want to make a fool of myself or let the Lord down.

Perhaps you are in a similar situation and, if so, I want to encourage you. Paul wrote to Timothy, 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God . . . that the man of God may be complete, **thoroughly equipped for every good work**', 2 Tim. 3. 17 NKJV. Is any work better than evangelism? Scripture has been given to equip us to evangelize wisely and winsomely.

In this short series of articles, we will consider a biblical approach to personal evangelism revealed by God in the Garden of Eden, practised by the Lord Jesus in the Gospels, and utilized by the early Christians in the book of Acts.

When Adam and Eve sinned against God, they became sinners. Thankfully, God did not just abandon them. They 'heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day'

and hid from Him in fear. 'Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" and Adam answered, acknowledging his nakedness. God spoke again, "Who told you that you were naked?" and followed it up with another question, "'Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?'" Gen. 3. 8-11 NKJV.

In the first evangelistic conversation that ever took place, we have the **key** to conversational evangelism. How did God draw the guilty and fearful Adam and Eve into conversation? He asked question after question. This was also the practice of the Lord Jesus and became the practice of His followers.

The key to conversation: questions

Years ago, when I handed someone a gospel tract, I told them what it was I was giving them and, when they said nothing, I walked away. However, when I began to ask questions, I discovered that people answered. As I gave out a gospel tract I would say, 'Would you be interested in this kind of thing?' Suddenly I found out that people had opinions

and could be drawn into conversation on spiritual subjects.

To evangelize well we must discover where a person is in their thinking and lead them from that point to an understanding of the gospel. Our conversation needs to make a connection (with the sinner) and have a direction (to the Saviour). But how can we discover where a person is in their thinking? We can ask them!

Two types of questions are of particular value in opening and directing conversation. They are modelled by the Lord God in the Garden of Eden. The first question He asked was, 'Where are you?' The second was, 'Who told you that you were naked?' The first question concerned Adam's location, the second concerned the logic behind, or reason for, Adam thinking as he did.

Location questions are some forms of 'What do you think?' They help us to discover where a person is in their spiritual understanding. So, if I ask, 'Do you believe in God?' or, 'What do you think of the Bible?' or, 'Do you think you'll be in heaven?' I am asking about spiritual location.

Logic questions follow and are some forms of 'Why do you think that?' These are used to gain insight

into why a person thinks as they do. If I ask, 'How did you come to that conclusion?' or, 'What makes you think that?' I am asking about the logic behind a person's thinking.

Yesterday, I had a conversation with a girl named Chloe. As she took a gospel tract from me, I asked, 'Would you be interested in that kind of thing?' She said, 'Not especially'. I asked, 'Well, do you believe in God?' She said, 'Yes, you have to believe in something'. I asked why she thought that, and she answered, 'When bad things happen you need to be able to turn to someone who has control'. I had learned that this girl was not an atheist, that she regarded God as someone to turn to in trouble, but that she had no immediate knowledge of her need of salvation. This formed the basis of the conversation that followed. I had used location and logic questions to make a connection to the sinner.

You can see from this simple illustration how questions work to inoffensively open and direct conversation. Asking questions (while listening carefully) demonstrates an interest in the person to whom you are speaking. It enables them to express their beliefs and buys you the opportunity to share the gospel with them.

The Importance of Doctrine

Introduction – thorn bushes and myrtle trees

BY STEPHEN GRANT, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND

Perhaps we are lazy or have become accustomed to bite-sized everything, from social media to a YouTube-style news cycle. Whatever the reason, Christian doctrine is sadly neglected.

We seem to know very little about our God, our Saviour, and the gospel. We sing songs about people's experiences, aspirations, emotions and are stirred by the lyrics and music. We read books

about issues, evangelism, holiness, relationships and try to do better.

This is a mistake. A big mistake.

Let's rewind a bit.

Consider this – we all have a worldview, opinions, instincts, reactions, call it what you like. They come from what we have learned and experienced in life.

It is part of who we are and where we have come from: our history, our story, our education.

We don't act out of uniform animalistic instinct. We think, speak, and act based on the way we've thought about and interpreted what we're experiencing. That is why different people, experiencing the same things, respond in different ways or have different recollections. A variance in understanding will always lead to a variation in response.

Hold that thought and let it sink in for a few minutes.

Now let's get back to Christian doctrine.

God designed us to think, and He inspired the writers of the Bible to write His truths. His revealed truth shapes our thoughts, forms our character, and changes our actions. It was not given for the select academic few. All Christians should have access to these writings and learn the doctrines; they are living, and God-given tools of salvation, transformation, identity, and guidance for everyone and not the few.

What is doctrine?

Doctrine is a word that can have a negative effect upon people. If you are struggling with insomnia, you might think that this word is the answer. The English word comes from the Latin word *doctrina* and can be defined as, 'teaching or instruction'. Therefore, Christian doctrine is teaching which God has given in the Bible for us to learn.

Explanation

One of two significant purposes of Christian doctrine is to explain the events of redemptive history as recorded in the Bible.

We wouldn't be able to fully understand the implications of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, the calling of Abraham, the birth and life of the Lord Jesus, the cross, the empty tomb, the ascension, and so forth if it weren't for the doctrines in the Bible. By learning them we understand what God wants us to learn about the facts of history and His prophetic purpose, rather than learning from the ideas of the philosophers and sages of this world.

We are not saved merely by knowing doctrine. We don't worship doctrine. However, we understand

that learning God's answers to 'why, what, when, where, and how' is important for every Christian.

Transformation

The doctrines God has revealed have a greater purpose than to give you a big theological brain, and they're meant to provide more for you than just an identity among Christians as you position yourself with one doctrine or another. They were never meant to be used to define us as Calvinist, Old or Young Earth, Baptist, Brethren, or any number of such titles.

Doctrine is meant to be a means to an end, and the end is a transformed life.

Thorn bushes and myrtle trees

We may not be experts in botany or even in pulling up weeds or plants in the garden. However, there is a vivid word picture in Isaiah chapter 55 verses 10 to 13 that helps us understand what the doctrines of the Bible were intended to do. Isaiah equates the truths in the Bible to rain or snow that falls and waters the earth.

Read what Isaiah writes:

'For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater,

So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

For you shall go out with joy, and be led out with peace; The mountains and the hills shall break forth into singing before you, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off'.

The strange thing about these verses is that the Lord is saying that He will send rain and it will fall upon a thorn bush. Instead of producing a bigger thorn bush, a myrtle tree grows. It is the equivalent of saying rain will fall on a gorse bush and in its place an apple tree will grow.

What is this bizarre metaphor telling us about what

God intends the doctrines of the Bible to produce?

The main point is that plants that are being watered don't become bigger plants; they are replaced by different plants. They are transformed into something different and better.

The conclusion that the Lord is bringing us to is that the doctrines of the Bible are not just designed to increase information, but rather produce radical, organic transformation. We won't become better versions of ourselves, but entirely transformed and better people.

When we learn the doctrines contained in scripture, they'll transform our identity, reshape our relationships, and redirect our finances. We won't think about our past and our future in the same way we once did, and we'll look at the present with a changed perspective.

Doctrine is God's ecosystem of personal transformation for us as His children. They're not

a suffocating dogma, they impart freedom and stimulate spiritual growth.

Shall we learn some doctrine about the Lord Jesus? I hope that you want to, as I am going to write the next three doctrinal articles about Him.

Morphe (Philippians 2) – May 2022

Logos (John 1) – August 2022

Protokos (Colossians 1) – November 2022



Things You Should Know. How to handle material things – trusting God v covetousness

BY PHILIP RAGGETT, PRESTWICH, MANCHESTER, ENGLAND

The handling of material things is a challenge that every believer faces. We should not be lax in our responsibility to provide for ourselves and our families. The scriptures clearly teach the importance of working to meet our own needs, Eph. 4. 28, as well as taking care of those whom the Lord has entrusted to our care, 1 Tim. 5. 8. It may well be that God blesses a believer financially and they become 'rich in this world', 6. 17. However, material wealth does bring with it real dangers as well as tremendous responsibilities. We can so easily become covetous in relation to our wealth and possessions.

Danger of covetousness

Two of the dangers that can come with material wealth are an increased sense of self-worth – 'highminded', 6. 17 and a lack of dependence upon God. We begin to trust in the riches instead of in the living God, who provided them for us. Once we lose our sense of dependence upon God, we start to be taken up with ourselves and our possessions. We become occupied with the material things of life and the things of God begin to take second place. In a world that is never satisfied, the Bible instructs us to 'be content with such things as ye have', Heb. 13. 5. Our priority in life should not be getting a nicer car, a bigger house, or a better

job. Not that these things are sinful but, when they become the main priority in our lives, we risk becoming ensnared by our desires, 1 Tim. 6. 9, 10.

The scripture warns us against 'covetousness, which is idolatry', Col. 3. 5. Going in for the material things of life results in God being displaced from His rightful place in our lives. 1 Timothy chapter 6 verse 9 warns us about those whose lives are taken up with becoming rich and the dangers of this are spelled out in verse 10, 'they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows'.

Being taken up with material things is not only a danger for those who are wealthy. Those who have limited resources can also become so anxious and troubled about meeting their daily needs that they lose their trust in God. The passages in Matthew chapter 6 and Luke chapter 12 give us the Lord's teaching on the subject as He counsels the disciples to 'take no [anxious] thought for your life, what ye shall eat, neither for the body, what ye shall put on', Luke 12. 22. The word 'thought' has the idea of being 'troubled with cares', 'anxious' or even 'to promote one's interests', J. H. THAYER. The Lord was aware of what deep poverty meant. However, rather than allowing such things to consume our thoughts and make us anxious and self-reliant, He bids us cast ourselves upon Him.

Denouncing covetousness

In dealing with this subject, I want to draw a few lessons from the passage in Luke chapter 12. Notice in verses 13 to 15 we have covetousness denounced by the Saviour. He had been teaching, in the earlier verses, about faithful servants in a coming day who could be called to pay the ultimate price and give their lives for Him. In response to this teaching, 'one of the company', v. 13, asks the Lord to intervene in his personal circumstances so that he might gain financially. What a contrast! Men willing to give all for Christ and a man who wanted to gain something for himself. Little wonder the Saviour says 'take heed and beware of covetousness' v. 15.

Describing covetousness

In verses 22 to 30, we have covetousness described, with important lessons for our daily needs, vv. 22-24, the duration of life, vv. 25, 26, and our dress, vv. 27, 28. The God who provides for the

natural creation can be trusted to provide for our needs. There should be a distinction, vv. 29, 30, that separates us, as believers, from the world around us. The world seeks after and becomes consumed by the material and temporal, but we have a Father who knows our needs, v. 30. Our trust should be in Him to provide. Philippians chapter 4 verse 6 exhorts us to 'be careful [anxious or troubled] for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God'.

Defeating covetousness

The final section we want to look at is from verses 31 to 40 where we have covetousness defeated. How will we counter covetousness? Notice the question of our desires is dealt with in verse 31. Our priority should be the kingdom of God not the wealth of this world but to put God's interests first. In verse 32, we have the matter of our destiny. No matter how much or how little we have in this world, our place in His affection and our future in His kingdom is assured. Considering our future destiny, we are exhorted to make a secure deposit, v. 33, into the bank of heaven. Our possessions are to be traded and invested wisely in an eternal fund 'that faileth not'. This means a devotion, v. 34, for 'things above', Col. 3. 1. Our hearts will no longer be focused on things that are worldly and temporal but on that which is heavenly and lasting. Those whose hearts are fixed on heaven will be diligent, vv. 35-40, in their service, ready and waiting for the return of the Master.

What then are our priorities? Are we so taken up with our possessions that we have become self-reliant and have lost our dependence upon God? Are we so focused upon our interests that the things of God have been given second place? Are we investing in the banks of earth or the bank of heaven? Let us heed the exhortation of Matthew chapter 6 verses 19 to 21, 'lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also'.