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Editor's Introduction

Welcome to the May issue of *Young Precious Seed*. I hope that you are enjoying your daily Bible readings and are satisfied as you feed on the word of God. The scriptures are an amazing resource, please take advantage of them.

At *Precious Seed* we have lots of material that will help you in your study of the Bible. Our websites are well indexed, so if you want to research any particular passage or topic, you'll find them easy to use. If you have not looked at our websites yet (www.youngpreciousseed.org and www.preciousseed.org) can I encourage you to have a browse? They have recently been revamped and we'd like your feedback on what you think.

Yours through grace,

Stephen Baker

Edited by
STEPHEN BAKER

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Study Notes on the Book of Esther – Part 2

**The Five Main Characters
(in the order they appear).**

BY MALCOLM BEATTIE, BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND



Ahasuerus (means 'prince', or 'lion king')

Ahasuerus was accepted to have been the autocratic ruler of the vast Medo-Persian empire. He was infamous in secular history for his outbursts of senseless anger and outrageous, impossible demands. Like many despots, he probably claimed divine status and expected to be worshipped and

YOUNG PRECIOUS SEED

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feared. This may help explain Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman, 3. 2, and the fear Esther had of approaching the king uninvited, 4. 10, 11.

Queen Vashti (means 'beautiful')

Queen Vashti was renowned for her beauty, 1. 11. She lost her position as queen when she refused to present herself before Ahasuerus and his guests at the end of seven days of drunken banqueting, 1. 10-21.

Mordecai (means 'little man')

Described as '**a certain Jew**', Mordecai first appears in chapter 2 verses 5 to 7, as cousin and guardian of Esther, and in the context of Ahasuerus's command that a replacement be sought for Vashti. Mordecai's credentials as a Jew, linking him in his genealogy to Benjamin, are listed. And, like Daniel, Mordecai was carried away captive from Jerusalem; hence, the reason why he is found in Shushan.

We see that Mordecai is a man of deep principle, as he would not kneel and reverence Haman, 3. 2, who probably claimed directly, or by association with the king, divine status.

Mordecai is the leading character in the book, whose early joint actions with Esther prevented genocide of the Jews. His ultimate elevation to replace Haman, 8. 2, as second to the king is remarkable. It is testimony to his reputation and character, echoing both Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon.

Esther (means 'star')

Named both Hadassah (myrtle) and Esther, we encounter this Jewess first in chapter 2 verse 7, as an orphan under the care of her cousin Mordecai. Recorded as 'fair of form and good of countenance', 2. 7 NEWBERRY margin, she finds herself caught up in the unseemly quest for Vashti's replacement, and eventually is 'made . . . Queen instead of Vashti', 2. 8-18.

A remarkable heroine, she is motivated by the plain-speaking of her cousin Mordecai, 4. 14-16, to put her life on the line and go uninvited before Ahasuerus to plead for the lives of the Jews, see chapters 5, 7 and 8. Her bravery is also notable, for it involved isolating the cruel, wicked, and scheming Haman and exposing him before Ahasuerus, 7. 6.

In his challenge to her in chapter 4 verse 14, Mordecai asks Esther, 'who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?' Esther's subsequent actions and ultimately the survival of the Jews gives a clear answer to that question. There can be no doubt that Esther had become Queen under the sovereign direction of God.

Haman (means 'magnificent')

Haman appears in chapter 3 verse 1, as son of Hammedatha the Agagite, on his promotion by Ahasuerus 'above all the princes that were with him'. There is a possibility that Haman was descended from the Amalekite King Agag, 1 Sam. 15. The outcome of the conflict with King Saul, from whom Mordecai certainly was descended, may explain the origins of the deep hatred Haman had towards Mordecai.

Quickly, we see Haman's bruising ego and his towering arrogance, as he rages at Mordecai who 'would not kneel down or pay him honour', 3. 2 NIV. He is 'full of wrath', 3. 5, and later 'full of indignation against Mordecai', 5. 9. His wrath quickly escalates to plotting the slaughter of all the Jews in the kingdom, 3. 6, which he persuades Ahasuerus to order, resulting in the decree Haman crafted and then issued, 3. 8-14. Four times in the book he is named as 'the Jews' enemy' or adversary.

Haman's animosity towards Mordecai was not lessened by the decree to slaughter all Jews, and, on the advice of his wife and friends, 5. 14, he planned Mordecai's immediate execution on gallows he had specially prepared. It is likely this involved crucifixion rather than hanging, and the gallows was a pole on which the victim was impaled. Making them fifty cubits high, about 23 m (75 ft), was to ensure Mordecai's death would be a public spectacle, 5. 14.

Esther's intervention, however, results both in Haman being hanged on the same gallows, and in the failure of his scheme to destroy the Jews.

It is interesting to note the comparison between the meaning of Haman's name (magnificent), and that of Mordecai (little man), in the context of how things ended up for both of them.

In the third and final part of our study we will look at further key lessons from the book.

A to Z of Priests – Melchizedek

BY JEREMY SINGER, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND



If we read only the Genesis narrative, we might misclassify Melchizedek as a 'one page wonder', a biblical character who turns up for a single event, serves faithfully and then departs unobtrusively. Individuals like Jabez, Naaman's servant girl and Onesiphorus fit into this category. However, Melchizedek is entirely different since he features in the principal books of history, poetry, and doctrine.¹

Let's consider this unique priest in three ways: he is (1) majestic, (2) meaningful, and (3) merciful.

He is majestic

Monarchs in Genesis are rather like modern-day buses, you don't see one for a long time and then three arrive all at once. We observe no kings for the first thirteen chapters, then nine appear at once, Gen. 14. 1, 2. Melchizedek is the tenth to arrive; he is king of Salem, a city-state that eventually becomes Jerusalem. Salem means 'peace', which is apt since Melchizedek remains aloof from local politics, only emerging after the battle is over. This man comes on the scene calmly, in full control of the situation.

Melchizedek's name means 'king of righteousness', Heb. 7. 2. We might presume both the ruler and his people were characterized by righteousness. Righteousness and peace make a beautiful combination, Ps. 85. 10, describing a moral view of the work of Calvary. These twin outcomes should be witnessed in the lives of believers now, Rom. 5. 1, and will be seen in the coming kingdom, Isa. 32. 17.

Melchizedek is introduced as 'the priest of the most high God', Gen. 14. 18. King and priest roles are here combined in one person. We recall Saul and Uzziah, both kings who attempted to become priests but were judged for their sinful presumption. In contrast, Melchizedek was perfectly suited to both offices. This is a lovely reminder of the Lord Jesus, our King-Priest:

'Great are the offices He bears,
And bright His character appears,
Exalted on the throne'.²

He is meaningful

We have already considered the rich meaning behind Melchizedek's name and titles. We further learn from Hebrews that this 'great' man, Heb. 7. 4, is a powerful symbol representing the Lord Jesus Christ. Melchizedek's priesthood establishes a pattern – 'the order of Melchizedek', Ps. 110. 4, after which the Lord Jesus is appointed. Our Lord is so gracious that He condescends to conform to the pattern of a man, Phil. 2. 7, 8.

The letter to the Hebrews indicates that Melchizedek typically resembles the Lord Jesus. Although the formula 'x begat y ... and he died' is a recurring phrase in Genesis, Melchizedek is distinctive, Heb. 7. 3. In terms of biology and genetics, he was a perfectly normal human being, but his family history is conspicuously absent from scripture. The anonymous writer to the Hebrews foregrounds this omission to prove that Melchizedek is like the Lord Jesus. The letter demonstrates the superiority of Melchizedek's priesthood over Aaron's:

1. in terms of **precedence**: Melchizedek was a priest before Aaron was born, v. 10;
2. in terms of **permanence**: Melchizedek's priesthood is not curtailed by death, vv. 23, 24;
3. in terms of **purity**: Melchizedek's priesthood is not marked by sinful failure, v. 26.

All that **appears** to be true of Melchizedek from the Bible text is **actually** true of the Lord Jesus Christ in His priestly character. If I read Psalm 110 properly, the Lord Jesus was officially constituted a priest at His ascension; priesthood is an acquired glory resulting from the Lord's death and resurrection.

He is merciful

Abraham appreciated Melchizedek's intervention; it was urgently required. The king of Sodom lurked in the wings, Gen. 14. 17, waiting to negotiate an alliance with Abraham. Instead, the patriarch's

attention is directed to *El Elyon*, God most high. Abraham is strengthened physically with the welcome meal of bread and wine. He is fortified spiritually with a priestly blessing, including a fresh perspective on the character of God.

This is the first mention of the word **priest** in scripture, so we can identify enduring principles from the passage. These might include the blessings of spiritual refreshment, education about God, and acceptable sacrifices to God through priestly mediation.

Like our Great High Priest in heaven, Melchizedek provides 'grace to help in time of need', Heb. 4. 12. A merciful priest is ever conscious of his people's frailty and is ever powerful to meet their needs.

'It is a consoling thought that Christ is praying for us, even when we are negligent in our prayer life; that

he is presenting to the Father those spiritual needs which were not present to our minds and which we often neglect to include in our prayers; and that he prays for our protection against the dangers of which we are not even conscious, and against the enemies which threaten us though we notice it not'.³

Let's depend more fully on our heavenly Melchizedek, as we recognize His powerful intercession on our behalf.

¹ JIM FLANIGAN develops this point beautifully in *What the Bible Teaches: Hebrews*, John Ritchie, 1986.

² SAMUEL MEDLEY, *Come let us sing the matchless worth*, 1789.

³ WAYNE GRUDEM quotes LOUIS BERKHOF in *Systematic Theology*, Zondervan, 1994.

Equipped to Evangelize

Part 2 – The key to conviction

BY DAVID WILLIAMSON, BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND



We learned in our last article that, by asking questions, we can open and direct gospel conversations in an inoffensive way.

However, we want those conversations to be more than impersonal and intellectual discussions of ideas. We want to be able to present the Lord Jesus Christ to people as the answer to their greatest need.

To make people think on a spiritual and personal level we must expose the problem of sin and reveal the danger of judgement. We must aim at their conscience. Once a person's conscience is awakened, they begin to think and speak in spiritual terms and start to understand the gospel's relevance to them.

But how is a sinner's conscience stirred? The Holy Spirit gives us His **key** to convincing people of their guilt before God. Paul writes, 'by the law is the

knowledge of sin', Rom. 3. 20. God's law cannot justify or sanctify people, but it can surely terrify them.

The key to conviction – the Law

God's command to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden was, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die', Gen. 2. 16, 17 NKJV. What did they do – they disobeyed His command.

When God approached Adam and Eve after their disobedience He did not speak abstractly about sin, neither did He just pronounce Adam and Eve guilty. He reminded them of the command He had given and asked them if they had broken it. 'Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you

that you should not eat?' Gen. 3. 11 NKJV. God's method of reaching the conscience involved using His law to lead them to admit their guilt: **Remember the commandment I gave? Have you broken it?**

For people to accept that they have sinned they must know what is expected of them and how they have failed to achieve it. God's law is the straight edge against which our crooked actions are exposed. When used appropriately it also makes a logical bridge between someone's wrongdoing and their punishment. Using the law shows that sins are crimes against God, and people are aware that crimes deserve punishment. If we do the crime, we must do the time.

RAY COMFORT of *Living Waters* fame has championed a template approach to applying the law in gospel conversations. Much can be learned from this. However, we should remember that each person is an individual and the use of any template in evangelism can make us lose sight of that. We should listen carefully to each person and respond appropriately to them as individuals. I have found it beneficial to use the moral judgements people make in conversation and apply this back to them.

One man pointed out to me the need of the homeless and showed real moral outrage at the lack of love in society. 'People should all love one another and not be so selfish!' I agreed with him. A few minutes later, I reminded him of what he'd said, 'You mentioned there was a lack of love in society,

and you really seem to care a lot about that; am I right?' When he agreed, I said, 'Well, God cares a lot about it too. In fact, His law demands that we love our neighbour as we love ourselves. What do you think of that?' He thought it would be wonderful if everyone did that. So, I said, 'The problem is, I haven't met that standard. Have you?' He responded, 'Well, not all the time – no one's perfect!' I agreed with him but, rather than accepting that as a comfort, I said, 'That's the problem, isn't it? This is God's law, and we haven't kept it. If you were to stand before God and be judged by that commandment, would you be innocent or guilty?' 'I suppose I would be guilty'. I then applied the force of what he had said, 'If you are guilty', I said, 'that means you deserve to be punished. There's a penalty for breaking God's law. Does that not concern you?'

Many who are confronted by God's law in this way are truly challenged. Their attitude changes when they consider, perhaps for the first time, that they aren't right with God. When a person realizes that they do not deserve heaven, the news that God is kind to the undeserving becomes attractive. The gospel of God which declares that His Son has taken the punishment for sin upon Himself and paid for our salvation is the only message which offers genuine hope to guilty sinners. The law makes sin appear sinful and judgement appear just and, in doing so, it also makes the grace of God appear exceedingly glorious.

The Importance of Doctrine Part 2 – *Morphe*

BY STEPHEN GRANT, BRIDGE OF WEIR, SCOTLAND



If you are a certain age, you will remember 'morph', the plasticine character of a children's television programme. He is making a comeback on Sky Kids. Staying true to the original format, the new series was shot using clay and traditional stop-frame animation without dialogue at Morph's original home, the Aardman studios in Bristol.

Morph was given his name as he could change his form or shape and the English word means 'to change form or character'.

The very similar looking Greek word *morphe* appears only twice in the original Greek language of the Bible, Mark 16. 12; Phil. 2. 6, 7. Although it seems hard to find an exact translation into English,

a fair definition seems to be 'the essential form which never alters'.

Sometimes, a contrast is helpful, and we have that with another Greek word *schema*, which also only appears twice in the Bible, 1 Cor. 7: 31; Phil. 2: 8. If *morphe* is the essential form which never alters, *schema* is the outward form which can.

'For instance, the morphe of any human being is humanity and this never changes; but his schema is continually changing. A baby, a child, a boy, a youth, a man of middle age, or an old man always has the morphe of humanity, but the outward schema changes all the time'.¹

Why mention these two Greek words?

As he writes to the Church at Philippi, the Apostle Paul presents the Lord Jesus as the ultimate example of humility in chapter 2. He instructs the Philippians to have the mind of Christ and then sets out what that means. His mind was characterized by unity, v. 2, humility, v. 3, and sensitivity, v.4. As the chapter continues, the idea of humility is developed by Paul. He explains the willingness of the Lord Jesus to come into His creation as the Saviour whom humanity required. It is the supreme demonstration of humility.

The basic idea is that if you are having trouble being humble, think about the Lord Jesus. He came from a higher position and yet went lower than any of us. In His essential being, He is greater and yet truly became a servant. His example is powerful and relevant to us. We are the beneficiaries of His humility.

This is where *morphe* comes into Paul's argument

'Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the **form [morphe]** of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God', Phil 2: 5, 6 NKJV.

When Paul states that Jesus existed in 'the form of God', 'form' refers to that which is intrinsic and essential to the being of God, that is, to God's attributes.²

The Lord Jesus is essentially God. 'Equality with God' was not a right He had to seize or acquire,

since it was already His. In the flow of argument, Paul is saying that if you think too much of yourself and cannot bring yourself to be humble in your relationships, remember the Lord Jesus. Instead of thinking of Himself more highly than He ought, He is as high as you can go. He is eternally God.

'but made Himself of no reputation, taking the **form [morphe]** of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men', Phil. 2: 7 NKJV.

The parallel of 'form of God' and 'form of a bondservant' is too striking to be accidental. In the same way that He is essentially God, in His incarnation the Lord Jesus became essentially a bondservant. Herein is humility.

The Son of God did not seize status or give away His deity. He surrendered the inevitable consequences of His deity and came to serve. To His deity, He added humanity, not the humanity of royalty, but of servitude. It was not one at the expense of the other, He was fully God and fully man in perfect, unexplainable harmony. The man who strode across waves would wash His disciples' feet.

Therefore, if you find it hard to go low in your relationships, remember the Lord Jesus. He was greater than us and became a bondservant. It was not that He masqueraded as a servant for a while; He is as much a servant as He is God. Paul goes on to describe the ultimate service the Lord Jesus rendered:

'And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross', Phil. 2: 8 NKJV.

Does doctrine matter?

Through doctrine we learn the extent of Christ's humility; the greatest becoming the lowest. Paul teaches that as Christians we should have this mind and be willing to go low in our relationships. We should not consider ourselves too high and mighty to serve each other with humility.

¹ W. BARCLAY, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians, The Daily Study Bible Series*, St. Andrew Press.

² J. B. LIGHTFOOT, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, Macmillan.

Things you should know – How to appreciate your Saviour – the character of Christ

BY PHILIP RAGGETT, PRESTWICH, MANCHESTER, ENGLAND

One of the most important things any young believer can do is to study passages of scripture concerning the character of Christ. There are many we could look at but the one that we want to consider, briefly in this article, is Philippians chapter 2 verses 1 to 11. A detailed study of these verses will be richly rewarding as we can only skim the surface within the constraints of this article.

The problem presented

Paul starts the section by highlighting four facts, v. 1, that will produce four fruits, v. 2, that will be a remedy to **counter the faults** that he highlights in verses 3 and 4. Paul's appeal is that instead of advancing self, they would have an appreciation of the saints, v. 3, and that instead of serving self, they should be serving the saints, v. 4. This is the exact opposite to how the world would have us act. The world achieves success by putting others down, 'strife', and by promoting themselves, 'vainglory', and by prioritizing their 'own things'. Indeed, social media is built around this idea of self-publicity that is the opposite of Christlikeness – my life, my family, my activities are put on display for the world to like and admire.

Let us **consider the facts** Paul presents in verse 1.

These are:

The consolation, or encouragement, that comes from being 'in Christ';

The comfort, or stimulation, that comes from His love for us;

The common interest we have through the indwelling Spirit; and

The compassion, or feelings of concern, that we have for other believers which is evidence of genuine conversion, 1 John 3. 14.

An appreciation of these things will result in **cultivation of the fruit** that is listed in verse 2.

Our attitude will be affected, as we seek to occupy our minds with Christ, as all believers should – we should be 'likeminded'. Our affections would be stirred for Him and for His people – we should have 'the same love'. Our actions will be different, as with 'one accord' we work together in the assembly, like an orchestra producing a delightful symphony. Our aims would be far greater, as with 'one mind' we put the interests of God and His assembly first rather than our personal interests, which so often cause us to pull in a different direction

The perfect pattern

Paul now brings before them the perfect example of One who put the interests of others above His own, vv. 5–8. Here we have a **Christ to follow**. This is a sublime portion of scripture that takes us from glory to glory. It begins with deity taking up humanity and ends with humanity in absolute sovereignty.

In these verses, we have presented to us first what Christ has done, vv. 6–8. We start with His essence and equality, v. 6, we then consider His humanity, v. 7, and end with His humility, v. 8.

'Who being', v. 6, carries the thought of something that is a permanent possession. The 'form of God' means the expression of what He is essentially. In other words, there was never a time when Christ did not possess every attribute of the Godhead. He is in His very essence eternally divine. He 'thought it not robbery to be equal with God'. He did not obtain it as a robber; it rightfully belonged to Him. He did not have to seek to attain it, for it was ever His. It was not something He had to hold on to

for no one could ever rob Him of it. Neither was it something He held on to for self-indulgence.

He made Himself 'of no reputation', v. 7. What a contrast to those who seek position and place or who always put their own interests first. This expression is sometimes translated as 'emptied Himself' ESV, but we need to appreciate that this does not mean that He emptied Himself of any divine attributes. Nor does it mean that in any way He became less than what He was before by setting anything aside. Both would be impossible, as we have seen in verse 6. In incarnation, He veiled the outward manifestation of the Godhead and willingly 'took upon him the form of a servant'. In bondservant character, He came that He might serve others as Mark chapter 10 verse 45 reminds us, 'the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister'. The final expression in this verse is that He 'was made in the likeness of men'. This clearly conveys the truth of His pre-existence as He became a man with a difference. The term 'was made' may be better translated 'taking his place in [the] likeness of men', JND. Yes, He was a real man, but He was impeccable and divine, as 1 Timothy chapter 3 verse 16 reminds us, 'God was manifest in the flesh'.

In verse 8, we have His humility emphasized. The One who 'was made in the likeness of men' took another step down in submission to the divine will as 'he humbled himself'. Here we have the purpose of His incarnation – that He might lay down His life, John 10. 15. He 'became obedient unto death' – not that He was subservient to death but rather

His obedience caused Him to give His life. He was never liable to death, John 10. 18, but He willingly laid down His life in death and what a death it was – 'the death of the cross'!

The proper place

Because of what Christ has done, we are now told, in verses 9 to 11, what God has done. The exaltation of God, v. 9, expectation of government, v. 10, and expression of greatness, v. 11. This all declares the pre-eminence of the One who thought 'on the things of others', v. 4. The 'name of Jesus' that is linked with His humanity and service will now be associated with His honour and subjugation of all things. This is the **consequence of faithfulness** as He is exalted to His rightful place and His authority is universally acknowledged. This will ultimately result in the 'glory of God the Father'.

The name that is so often on the lips of men as a profanity will then be on their lips in praise as His Lordship is acknowledged. The challenge for us now is whether our lives reflect what our lips profess? Do our lives reflect the fact that we have confessed Him as Lord? Or must it be said of us that 'all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's' v. 21? Let us be encouraged to follow His example and put the things of God first.

